

# Hifi Pig

**& GadgetyReviews**

SEPTEMBER 2017



**Hifi News  
Hifi Reviews  
Music Reviews  
Gadgety Reviews**



# 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**



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### Hifi News

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Pylon Diamond Loudspeakers  
Melodika BL40 MK2 Loudspeakers  
Townshend Allegri + Passive Preamp  
Gold Note PH10 Phono-Stage  
Tellurium Q Black II Speaker Cable  
Ecosse The Director SE Digital Coax

### Music Reviews

### GadgetyReviews

Acer Predator 17 Laptop  
Casio Edifice Smartwatch  
Mynt Tracker  
Sony Xperia X2 Phone  
Noble Trident IEMS  
Adam Vimteg Fencer IP Camera  
Acer Swift 3 Laptop  
I Frogz Impulse Duo Earbuds  
Speedlink Fortus Wireless Mouse  
Aukey PBB5 Solar Charger







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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## Onkyo, Pioneer And Amazon Alexa News

Onkyo have been pretty busy in the realm of home connectivity, streaming and voice control and have announced Smart Speaker P3 (VC-PX30), a “lifestyle concierge speaker” with Amazon Alexa Voice Service designed to “express voice and music with immersive hifi sound” while providing information, entertainment, and the ability to control selected smart devices by voice.

Smart Speaker P3 is also among the first smart speakers to add support for DTS Play-Fi technology via the free companion Onkyo Music Control App for iPad, iPhone, and Android phones/tablets. DTS Play-Fi allows high-quality music transmission from connected services such as Amazon Music, TIDAL, Deezer, and TuneIn, as well as connected media servers and the mobile device library, to any number of compatible products.

Smart Speaker P3 is designed by Onkyo engineers and features dual full-range drivers, dual passive bass radiators, and DSP switching amplification. An auxiliary input is included to enable media player, phone, and tablet connection to expand available sources of entertainment. A line output can add voice-controlled audio to the living space via a simple wired connection.

Price £tbc (available in October)

Onkyo and Pioneer have also announced that Onkyo and Pioneer DTS Play-Fi-enabled products, including AVRs, sound bars, and speakers, will soon support the Amazon Alexa Connected Speaker APIs. This will allow voice-enabled selection of music and control via an Alexa-enabled device, including the Amazon Echo, Echo Dot, Echo Show, Amazon Tap, Amazon Fire TV or any of the two new DTS Play-Fi wireless speakers featuring far-field Alexa Voice Service – such as the Onkyo Smart Speaker P3 and Pioneer Elite Smart Speaker F4. DTS Play-Fi technology allows one or more devices to be linked together for multi-room music playback of Alexa streaming content and interacts with other Alexa-enabled products to provide full group control of music playback.

Onkyo and Pioneer will roll out Alexa control through the Connected Speaker APIs to hundreds of current and new DTS Play-Fi-enabled products through firmware updates beginning in Q1 2018.

“With DTS Play-Fi’s support of Alexa and the Connected Speaker APIs,

consumers will be able to control a whole-home audio system built from the brands they crave and control it with the voice service they love,” said Dannie Lau, general manager of the DTS Play-Fi division at Xperi. “DTS Play-Fi technology provides consumers unprecedented choice in products ranging from AVRs to lifestyle systems to portable speakers and everything in between from some of the most prestigious brands in the Audio industry like Onkyo and Pioneer.”

“By integrating the Connected Speaker APIs and DTS Play-Fi, we are bringing Alexa control into hundreds of Onkyo and Pioneer DTS Play-Fi products,” said Nobuaki Okuda, director and CTO, Onkyo Corporation and president, Onkyo and Pioneer Technology Corporation. “Our customers will enjoy the benefits of the world’s largest voice control ecosystem connecting with the broadest, most comprehensive multi-room streaming technology available to deliver a seamless smart home experience.”

Earlier this month, Onkyo and Pioneer began releasing firmware updates on several products to add support for DTS Play-Fi multi-room audio technology with additional product updates in slated for distribution throughout Q3 and Q4 of 2017. More than 200 current and new Onkyo and Pioneer products will launch with DTS Play-Fi support via a software update.





# innuos



ZENith MkII



## ZEN MkII Music Servers

Powered by innuOS



"a celebration of what can be achieved right now"



"it's a very hard act to beat for anyone looking to push streaming quality to the max"



"tonally neutral, ultra resolved, rhythmically in the pocket and spatially dimensional"



"Extrem feiner, detailreicher Klang"



"Erleuchtet"



"It's solid, pretty job of real aficionados."



"very good case for using a dedicated audio server rather than a NAS drive"



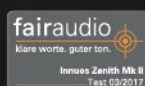
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"IFA-Highlight! 6 von 6 Punkten"



"textura, dinàmica e riqueza harmónica"

## New Partnerships For MQA Announced At IFA

Music technology company, MQA, announces a breadth of partnership news at the IFA consumer electronics show in Berlin.

MQA technology will now be embedded in LG's new V30 smartphone, the first globally available MQA-enabled handset. MQA music playback will also be available on the two latest portable devices from Sony's iconic Walkman brand, the WM-ZX300 and WM-A40 models. Both portable players are capable of playing back downloaded MQA music.

Said MQA CEO, Mike Jbara, of the latest news, "Our announcements at IFA illustrate the global presence and diverse footprint of MQA. We're inspired by the energy and enthusiasm of our partners to keep pushing the opportunities to access master quality audio."

### New MQA Streaming Partners

Korean-based hi-res streaming service, Groovers, has confirmed it is working on MQA mobile and desktop implementation for its platform, due to launch by the end of 2017. This follows recent news from b2b digital music solutions provider, 7digital, that it will be powering a forthcoming hi-res streaming service, HDmusicStream, using MQA technology to deliver studio quality audio.

Current live music download partner, nugs.net, offers thousands of on-demand concerts from artists including Metallica, Bruce Springsteen and Dead & Company. This autumn, thenugs.net HiFi tier will offer MQA streaming on iOS and desktop players.

### MQA Music Availability Grows

Universal Music Group, the world-leader in music-based entertainment, is working closely with MQA to encode its vast library of recordings in MQA's technology.

Further reinforcing MQA's mobile footprint expansion, Pioneer and Onkyo will be showcasing TIDAL Masters mobile streaming on their latest Digital Audio Players, the XDP-30R and DP-S1 models, at the IFA trade fair.

Sonic Studio's Amarra Luxe 4.1 media player, enabling all the benefits of the MQA experience for local playback and streaming of high resolution music, is scheduled for release in September 2017.



On the download front, Japan-based music store, e-onkyo music, has announced the expansion of their MQA music offering, with the addition of Warner Music Group's hi-res catalogue in MQA, which will be available for the first time in the region in the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, Onkyo Music store, which serves Germany, UK and the US, will also be offering MQA music, as it rolls out a redesigned store front throughout September. Existing download stores, including HIGHRESAUDIO, continue to add more MQA music as it becomes available

### Hi-Res Keynote Features MQA

MQA's CEO, Mike Jbara, will take part in a keynote discussion at IFA, organised by the Digital Entertainment Group (DEG) and hosted by Sony Electronics, on Friday 1 September at 14:00 [Hall 20 101]. "The Future of Hi-Res Audio" panel will also feature Morvan Boury (VP, Global Business Development, Sony Music Entertainment), Michael Drexler (VP, Digital Strategy at Warner Music), and Bill Gagnon (UMG's SVP Business Development) as fellow panelists.

MQA will be supporting partner demonstrations at this year's IFA, including new MQA hardware partner, iFi Audio, who will be showing their prototype micro iDSD Black Label DAC featuring MQA integration.

## AudioControl Introduces Maestro M5 Premium Home Theatre Processor

The Maestro M5 surround preamp/processor, giving authorised dealers a solution for premium home theatre projects. The M5 takes advantage of the latest surround formats and advanced room correction and can be paired with AudioControl's lineup of 7 and 5-channel Savoy G3 and Pantages G3 theatre amplifiers.

The Maestro M5 is based upon the audio and video platform utilised in AudioControl's line of home theatre receivers. The M5 offers Dolby Atmos and DTS-X immersive audio surround formats and Dirac Live room correction along with dual balanced XLR inputs and balanced XLR outputs for all channels. There are inputs for seven HDMI sources plus dual HDMI outputs (ARC compatible) as well as an ultra HD 4K video pass-through and upscaling capability that includes support for High Dynamic Range (HDR).

In addition to the balanced XLR outputs that include the height channels for immersive formats, The M5 features unbalanced RCA outputs on all channels as well. Each input can be named and re-named to match the source unit as desired by the user, and there is a USB input on the rear panel for connecting an external source and/or for firmware updates. The M5 comes equipped with a programmable remote control and has Ethernet plus RS232 jacks and software drivers available for compatibility with popular smart home platforms. The Maestro M5 is available in an Espresso Black finish and comes with AudioControl's 5-year warranty.

The Maestro M5 will be shipping September 1st, 2017. Suggested client price is \$5900 US.







# 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)

## Sennheiser Announces Three New Products At IFA 2017

Sennheiser got in touch with Hifi Pig to tell us about their new IEMS to be launched at IFA 2017.

The MOMENTUM Free is an all-new wireless model in the MOMENTUM headphone family. The MOMENTUM Free features ergonomically designed magnetic earpieces that link together when not in use. The new MOMENTUM Free expands Sennheiser's range of Bluetooth ear-canal headphones.

The MOMENTUM Free features Bluetooth 4.2 as well as Qualcomm® apt-X™ and AAC codec support. Qualcomm® apt-X™ Low Latency compatibility also "enhances the ability to enjoy gaming or video content by keeping audio transmission perfectly in sync with the visuals".

They have a six-hour battery life and come with a leather case.

A three-button remote and in-line microphone for making calls and controlling music are integrated into the cable between the earpieces. Multi-connection with up to two devices at once and 3-way calling support are also provided. An intuitive system of voice prompts provides notifications on the pairing status and battery life.

Ear adaptors provided in four different sizes ensure a personalised fit in the ear canals for comfort and attenuation of ambient noise. Sennheiser's MOMENTUM Free will be available from October.

Also announcing are the IE 80 S, earphones which offer "enhanced fit, and high-end style". Sennheiser say they have a unique sound function and additional customisation features such as an interchangeable cable and memory foam ear tips from Comply™.

The new IE 80 S builds on the original IE 80.

The IE 80 S will be available from September, pricing TBC.

Finally the new wireless CX 7.00BT ear-canal headphones offers a minimalist lightweight neckband design, bass-driven sound and wireless technology in an affordable pair of headphones.

NFC one-touch pairing makes it simple to immediately connect to smart devices, while the headphone's multi-connection capability enables simultaneous pairing with up to two devices such as a smartphone and a computer. It's just as easy to use as a headset for phone calls thanks to an integrated microphone, 3-way calling and helpful voice prompts to notify the user of incoming calls.

The CX 7.00BT is facilitated by its ten-hour battery life. The battery can be fully recharged via USB in only 1.5 hours. The CX 7.00BT also supports USB audio via its supplied cable for times when wired use is preferred.

The CX 7.00BT will be available worldwide from October, pricing TBC



## Technics Announce Reference Class SP-10R Turntable And Unveil Prototype At IFAa



Technics has announced the launch of the Reference Class SP-10R, its most premium analogue, direct drive turntable to date, which is anticipated to hit the market in early summer 2018. The news comes as Technics unveils a prototype of the new, cutting-edge turntable with, they claim, the world's top-level\* S/N (signal-to-noise) ratio and rotational stability, for the first time at this year's IFA Berlin.

Following the launch of the SL-1200GAE/G in 2016 and the SL-1200GR earlier this year, Technics set about creating its most premium turntable ever – the SP-10R. The new turntable combines Technics' most advanced digital and analogue technologies, boasting the best Sound to Noise (S/N)\* ratio, rotational stability and flutter, and wow ratio of any of its turntables.

SP-10R prototype features a new coreless direct drive motor and 7kg heavy platter. The coreless direct drive motor which, in addition to the two-sided rotor drive system that was used in the SL-1200G, boasts stator coils on both sides of the rotor. The heavy platter features a three-layer structure consisting of brass, aluminium die-cast and deadening rubber, just like the platter of the SL-1200G. By optimising the natural frequency of each layer, external vibrations are suppressed. The SP-10R also features a new ultra-low-noise switching power supply which is separate from the main turntable, preventing unwelcome noise from being transmitted to the turntable unit.

Technics is working diligently towards an anticipated early summer launch for the SP-10R, and the new turntable will be interchangeable with systems using the SP10MK2 (released in 1975) and the SP-10MK3 (1981) Technics also plans to market a complete turntable system based on SP-10R with a tonearm and other components.





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Introducing our latest receivers - the CALA CDR and CALA SR. Sharing the same ingenious fully digital design principle, both models deliver exceptional sound quality from both digital and analogue audio sources: Hi-Res music streaming from NAS servers, Internet radio and music services, Bluetooth, FM, FM-HD and DAB+ radio, phono and analogue input, digital inputs and outputs for external sources and - in the CALA CDR - a CD mechanism.

Created using only the finest materials with a sleek, button-less fascia, these latest CALA models offer true audiophile design philosophies combined with simple yet innovative control via either the T+A FM1000 remote control or the T+A Control App. The result is two systems that deliver exceptional performance and look amazing in any environment.

# T+A

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Hand built in Germany, the CALA® from T+A is available in the UK now.

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## Black Rhodium Launch Overture Stereo Interconnect Cables

Overture, from Derby based Black Rhodium, is made from 99.99% pure silver wire. The silver wires are insulated in PTFE and there is a layer of air separating the wire from the inner wall of the insulation along its length.

The pure silver conductors are covered in a braided screen to protect the inner cores from picking up radio frequency interference (RFI) which is further reduced by twisting the cores. Complementary filtering techniques are additionally applied to ensure that any interference that does penetrate the cable is neutralised.

Overture RCA cables use Graham Nalty GN-4 rhodium plated RCA connectors and the XLR cables use the Black Rhodium rhodium plated XLR connectors. The cables are hand built at the Black Rhodium factory in Derby.



### Specification:

99.99% pure silver conductor wires

Insulated in PTFE

Braided silver plated copper screen

All connectors rhodium plated

Supplied with either RCA or XLR connectors

Outer diameter 10mm

Capacitance of RCA terminated 1m cable  
44pF

Capacitance of XLR terminated 1m cable  
(Positive to Negative) 50 pF

Capacitance of XLR terminated 1m cable  
(Positive or Negative to ground 90pF)

Maximum cable length 2m

Retail price :

1m : £1200

1.5m : £1500

# Avantgarde Acoustic Trio Luxury Edition 26

The Trio speaker system from Avantgarde Acoustic is undoubtedly an iconic loudspeaker. It has been refined over the years and now the German horn manufacturer is releasing a special, limited edition of their flagship product, to celebrate their 26th anniversary.

"What if we ignore the past, and put simply everything to question again?" says Holger Fromme of the design approach for the Trio Luxury Edition 26. And as improbable as it seemed initially, through research on mechanical structures, materials, and crossover parts Avantgarde did find some room for improvements.

Combined at the same time with a "Luxury Edition" approach, Holger Fromme concluded: "There is so much to gain for our most discerning customers in performance, appearance and in a limited-to-26-pairs exclusivity, we simply have to do it!"

Avantgarde Acoustic's careful material selection led to the choice of German oak veneer and solid V2A stainless steel bars for the frame. The limited edition Trios will even get a bit of a "Midas touch" with the option of 24k gold plated V2A steel bars and for the flare of the Bass Horns. Not just a visual makeover though, there are new crossover capacitors hand made in Germany resulting

in weights of up to 700 grams per capacitor and a price of 1000€.

Avantgarde Acoustic have released the brochure, which is also available as a coffee-table book from selected dealers.

### Specification:

109 dB efficiency

27 Ohm drivers with Strontium ferrite magnets

180 mm spherical tweeter horn

570 mm spherical midrange horn

950 mm spherical low-midrange horn

100 V CPC crossover design

Subwoofers available as separate units

TRIO LUXURY EDITION 26 finish:

TRIO horns available in 10 standard colours

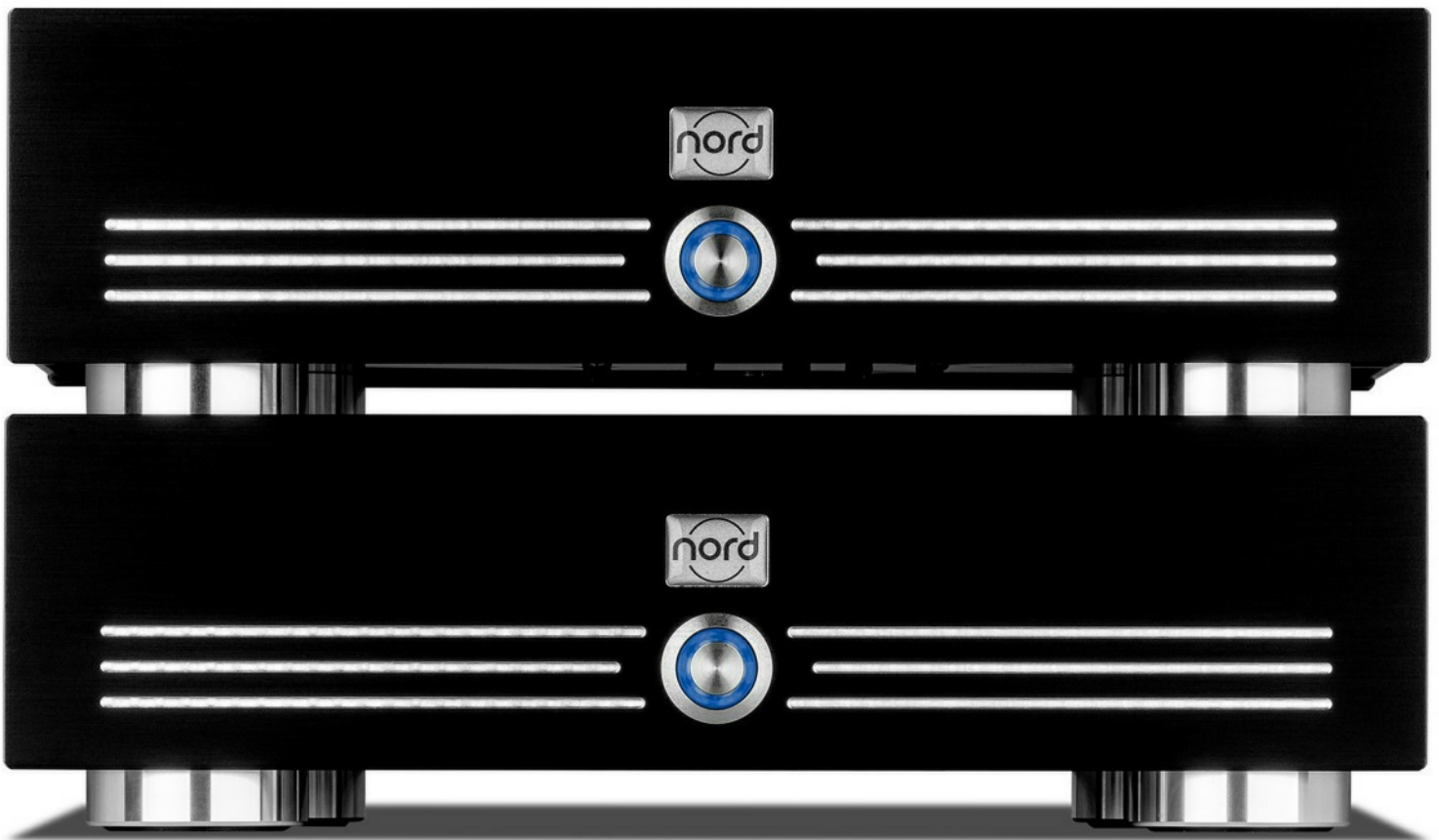
BASSHORN cabinet available in German smoked oak veneer

Gold option: 24K gold plated V2A steel parts & BASSHORN flare in brushed gold finish





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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!

We also have customers wanting a cooler running amp for the summer only to find an unexpected level of performance and naturalness compared to their Class A amps.

We Now have a Chassis to Match the World Class Sound in the SE Version.



**[Click here to visit out website](#)**



## New Full-Range Drivers From Cube Audio

New Polish company Cube Audio have introduced two new full-range drivers and associated loudspeakers.

"Complete customisation of the parts, hybrid magnetic motor, impregnated paper cone, ultra-linear suspension and many more advanced in-house developed technologies, result not only in very good frequency response and measurements, but most importantly make the sound quality unheard of when it comes to fullrange drivers", says the company's recent press release."

The company say you can expect fast but deep bass, second to none high frequencies, micro- and macro-dynamics, amazing but not exaggerated midrange, astonishing vocals, holography and the illusion of really being there when you listen to the music.

Both the Fa8 and the Fc8 are eight inch drivers.

Technical Parameters for the Fa8 are as follows

$F_s = 43 \text{ Hz}$

$R_e = 6 \text{ ohm}$

$L_e = 0.095 \text{ mH}$

$Q_t = 0.41$

$Q_{es} = 0.42$

$Q_{ms} = 14.2$

$C_{ms} = 0.758 \text{ mm/N}$

$V_{as} = 59 \text{ liters}$

$S_d = 230 \text{ cm}^2$

$BL = 8.5 \text{ T}\cdot\text{m}$

$X_{max} = \pm 2 \text{ mm}^*$

$X_{damage} = \pm 6 \text{ mm}$

Sensitivity = 92 dB

and for the Fc8 driver:

$F_s = 42 \text{ Hz}$

$R_e = 6 \text{ ohms}$

$L_e = 0.094 \text{ mH}$

$Q_t = 0.38$

$Q_{es} = 0.39$

$Q_{ms} = 14.3$

$C_{ms} = 0.81 \text{ mm/N}$

$V_{as} = 55 \text{ liters}$

$S_d = 230 \text{ cm}^2$

$BL = 8.6 \text{ T}\cdot\text{m}$

$X_{max} = \pm 3 \text{ mm}^*$

$X_{damage} = \pm 6 \text{ mm}$

Sensitivity = 92 dB

Prices:

The Drivers: Fa8 – 490 and Fc8 – 790 Euro per driver.

The Speakers: Bliss A – 4990 and Bliss C – 5990 Euro per pair (black or white piano finish).

The company's website also has plans for building the relevant cabinets for DIYers.



## Martins Hifi To Host dCS Open Day

There will be a dCS 'Open Day' at Martins Hifi in Norwich next month.

Visitors will be able to experience the dCS Vivaldi One, (pictured) their limited edition, 30th anniversary, single-box digital audio player and also trial the Network Bridge, a hi-res network streaming device.



Representatives from dCS, Absolute Sounds (the UK distributor of dCS products) and Martins Hifi will be present to answer questions.

29/09/2017, 10am to 4pm

Martins Hifi

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# Onkyo Release New Stereo Receivers



Onkyo have released their TX-8250 Network Stereo Receiver and TX-8220 Stereo Receiver, which they say are “are an excellent value proposition for music, film, and game lovers”.

The TX-8250 (Pictured) combines Wide Range Amplification Technology with universal network streaming and multi-room audio over 5GHz/2.4GHz Wi-Fi, along with Hi-Res Audio\*1 playback, digital inputs for TV/BD/CD, USB Audio, and an MM phono input. Digital connectivity is joined by six gold-plated line-level inputs, Zone 2 pre-line output, and Bluetooth wireless technology.

Network and multi-room audio support includes Chromecast built-in, FireConnect\*2 powered by Blackfire, and DTS Play-Fi\*3 technology; Spotify, TIDAL, Deezer, and TuneIn music streaming services\*4; and house-wide playback management via Onkyo Controller\*5 app for iOS and Android devices. Chromecast built-in allows users to stream any music. Playback is controlled with Chromecast-enabled apps from an iPhone, iPad, Android phone and tablet, Mac and Windows laptop, or Chromebook. TX-8250 also works with the Google Assistant. Multi-room capability goes further with FireConnect to mirror network and analogue sources connected to the receiver, such as vinyl records playing in the main listening space, on FireConnect-ready speakers in other rooms. DTS Play-Fi technology enables streaming from online services, media

server, or device library over Wi-Fi to any number of compatible products via Onkyo Music Control App\*6 for iPad, iPhone, and Android phone/tablet. DTS Play-Fi connects systems for synchronised music in every room, and can stream different music to different rooms from the same device. Users of iTunes and compatible apps can stream over AirPlay from Apple iOS devices, PC, and Mac, and there's more content available via the built-in FM/RDS tuners and DAB+. Up to 40 stations can be saved and named, with four of these instantly accessible via front-panel buttons.

The TX-8250 offers 135w + 135w (6 Ohms, 1 kHz, 1% THD, 1 channel driven, IEC) delivered via high-current low-impedance analogue amplification featuring discrete output transistors, non-phase-shift amp circuitry, and massive EI transformer with custom capacitors. Quality D/A processing from AKM supports 192kHz/24-bit Hi-Res Audio playback via LAN and USB, as well as Direct DSD 2.8/5.6 MHz playback. For those that don't require network capability, the TX-8220 Stereo Receiver generates 100w + 100w (6 Ohms, 1kHz, 1% THD, 1 channel driven) of wideband stereo power, and boasts two digital audio inputs, five line-level inputs, and subwoofer pre-out.

The receiver includes Bluetooth wireless audio streaming technology with Auto Connect for pre-configured devices. DAB+ transmissions are accessed via the supplied

USB UDB-1 DAB Adapter (also available separately). TX-8220 also opens the door to analogue amplification for vinyl with inclusion of an MM phono stage for turntable. It also adds a built-in FM/RDS and DAB+ tuner for digital radio. Speaker A+B and A/B drive capability lets radio, music or TV play through another pair of speakers in another room.

\*1 Hi-Res Audio playback is recommended for wired LAN and USB only. Performance with Wi-Fi cannot be guaranteed. \*2 Sharing external analogue audio is enabled with a future firmware update. Transmission rates of 44.1kHz and 48kHz are supported. \*3 Enabled with a firmware update. \*4 Availability of streaming services depends of region and may require a subscription. \*5 Please check device and OS requirements at App Store or Google Play before installing Onkyo Controller app. \*6 Please check device and OS requirements at App Store or Google Play before installing Onkyo Music Control App.

Prices (all models available in September, in either black or silver)

TX-8250 Network Stereo Receiver – £529.99

TX-8220 Stereo receiver – £249.99

UDB-1 DAB+ adapter – £39.99



# AUDIO

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## iFi iGalvanic3.0 Launching And On Show At IFA Berlin

British audio brand iFi has launched the iGalvanic3.0 which they claim is “the ultimate noise-busting, sound-enhancing device for USB-connected computer audio systems”.

USB connectivity has become a crucial part of high-performance audio, as computers replace traditional hifi devices as the main source component in many systems. However, there's a problem: computers and their USB interfaces are designed to support many functions and are not optimised for audio; USB connections are inherently 'noisy' and can introduce distortion to the audio signal, which affects sound quality.

iFi makes several devices to enhance audio signal quality via USB, each one purpose-built to tackle particular issues. Its latest such product – the iGalvanic3.0 – is also its most advanced, offering full galvanic isolation for both USB2.0 and USB3.0 connections, coupled to further proprietary circuits to optimise USB signal and power lines. iFi told us “This unique combination banishes all forms of electrical noise and digital jitter that plague USB connections when used for high-quality audio applications”.



### Price and availability

The iFi iGalvanic3.0 is available from September. RRP is £349 inc. VAT

iFi will be showing the iGalvanic3.0 at the IFA show in Berlin the 1st to 6th September 2017

iFi will be in Hall 1.2, Stand 126 and will also have the Ear Buddy: a low-cost plug-in headphone optimiser that attenuates the output signal to better suit headphones with high sensitivity (available early September). There will also be a preview of a fantastic new portable DAC/headphone amp (available Q4 2017) plus new strategic tie-ups – including the implementation of MQA in new product lines.

## Optoma Launch NuForce BE2 Bluetooth IEM

Optoma, the international projector and audio brand, has expanded its range of Bluetooth® wireless in-ear headphones with the new BE2. The new model is available in two colours (jet black or frost white) and offers battery life of up to ten hours. Designed for smartphones, the BE2 allows users to stay connected on the go.

“The new BE2 wireless in-ear headphones bring a new level of quality and performance to the everyday use category,” said Kishan Mistry, Senior Product Manager at Optoma EMEA. “Packed with features and equipped with premium technology such as a 10-hour battery life and AAC compatibility, the BE2 deliver quality audio that outperforms other products in this price range.”

Crafted from metal and polycarbonate, the BE2 are tough and lightweight making them suitable for any workout and daily commute. In addition, the magnetic earbuds stick together for tangle-free portability when not in use. Advanced Bluetooth technology and AAC compatibility enables cable free connection to smartphones including iPhone® connectivity. The BE2 feature an angled design and include a wrap-around neckband and multiple sets of ear tips. This includes patented SpinFit TwinBlade® ear tips designed for better stability and noise isolation. With a rating of IPX5, the BE2 in-ear headphones are weather resistant, ensuring protection from rain and sweat. The BE2 can be used throughout the day on a single charge with a ten-hour battery life.

The NuForce BE2 are available from the start of September, price £49.99.



## Conrad-Johnson Announces New Enhanced Triode Line- Stage Pre Amp



Conrad-Johnson Design has announced the release of their latest line-stage preamplifier, the ET7. The ET7 incorporates the advances in regulated power supply design debuted in their GAT Series 2 line stage while closely following the GAT audio circuit.

The ET7 features parts found in the GAT. CJD Teflon capacitors are used throughout the audio circuit and for the regulated plate voltage power supply filter and storage capacitors, but in the interests of bringing GAT-like performance to a more affordable price, the ET7 reduces the total capacitance in power supplies and output coupling.

Like the GAT Series 2, the ET7 uses all Vishay resistors in the audio circuit and in the associated power supplies.

Conrad-Johnson go on to say: “The ET7 features styling that distinguishes it as a new product yet clearly show its conrad-johnson heritage”.

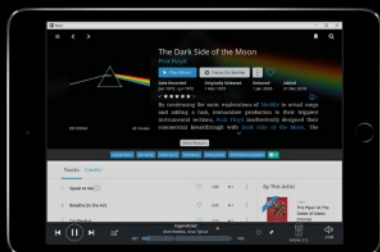
The ET7 replaces the discontinued ET5.

The US suggested retail price for the ET7 is \$9500. Deliveries have already begun.




Ultimate  
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## Bringing recording studio sound into your home with the Merging NADAC Player

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With over 25 years experience, based in Switzerland, Merging Technologies is the world's foremost manufacturer of high resolution digital audio recording systems. Their list of customers reads like a who's who in the recording industry and recordings made with their systems regularly receive the prestigious Grammy® Award, with no less than 27 nominations in 2017!

The Merging NADAC player brings music as it was recorded in the studio into your home, with the best music player available combined with the best-sounding DAC with Roon Core software built in. You can access your entire music library from a tablet with the Merging NADAC connected directly to your amplifier, active speakers, or via headphones for the purest sound ever.

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## New Floor-Standers, Subwoofer And Centre Speakers Complete Tangent 5.1 Package

Tangent Audio, of Denmark, has announced the addition of the new X6 floor-standing loudspeaker, XSW8 subwoofer and XC Centre speaker to their Spectrum Series.

Following on from the X4 and X5 bookshelf/stand-mount speakers, Tangent's new X6 speakers are a pair of 1 3-way bass reflex floor-standing loudspeakers.

Tangent told us: "Housed within the stylish and handsome cabinet enclosures, the performance is faithfully reproduced from two 130mm bespoke long-throw paper coned bass-midrange drivers together with a wide dispersion 25mm soft fabric dome tweeter... resulting in 200 watts of easy to drive power and a sensitivity rating of 88db. The XC Centre channel uses a 2-way closed cabinet enclosure housing two 110mm bass/mid drivers together with the generic wide-dispersion 25mm tweeter. This design provides the listener/viewer with a dialogue channel unequalled for accuracy, dynamics and punch. The wide bandwidth frequency response also helps to provide optimum depth and clarity from any speech or sound effects. The XSW-8 subwoofer is a compact front firing bass module designed to enhance bass performance and perfectly completes the Spectrum's 5.1 package system. Also using a sealed enclosure for ultimate low-end power, the XSW-8 features a 200 mm bass only driver and a 90watt integral amplifier to produce low-end frequencies down to 31Hz. The impressive features list also includes volume level, phase switching and variable crossover".

The compact enclosures have an inert construction to reduce cabinet colouration and resonance. All speakers are available in midnight black or polar white highly durable matt satin finishes with drive units protected with colour-matched, integrated mesh grilles. Contrasting walnut base plinths complete the speakers across the range.

Specifications: X6 floor-standing speakers

Speaker Units 2 x 5" woofer and midrange / 1" tweeter

System : 3-ways

Sensitivity : 88 dB

Frequency : 50Hz – 20 000Hz

Impedance : 6  $\Omega$

Power : Up to 200 watt

Weight : 12 / 13 kg

Product Dimensions : 166 x 923 x 268 mm

Specifications: XC Centre speaker

Speaker Units 2 x 4" woofer and midrange / 1" tweeter

System : 2-ways closed cabinet

Frequency : 55Hz – 20 000Hz

Impedance : 6  $\Omega$

Power : Up to 100 watt

Weight : 5.5 / 6.2 kg

Product Dimensions : 395 x 160 x 198 mm

Specifications: XSW Sub Woofer

Input : High Level Speaker Inputs , Analog RCA

Speaker Units 8" woofer

Frequency : 31Hz – 250Hz

Power : 90 watt RMS

Standby : <1W (EUP 2013)

Power : 220 Vac ~ 50/60 Hz (EU)

Weight : 10 / 12 kg

Product Dimensions : 270 x 280 x 275 mm

The new Spectrum 5.1 Package is available





# Wire on Wire

REDpurl™



Variable Geometry

UK patent pending GB1602578.5

EU Registered Design No. 002544171

## Experience680

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.

### Experience680

The Experience680 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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## Technics SL-1200GR Turntable Now Shipping

The long awaited new, 'affordable' Technics SL-1200GR direct-drive turntable is now shipping to dealers in the USA. Launched at CES 2017 and originally intended for release earlier this year, the SL-1200GR is now available on both sides of the Atlantic.

Technics say that: "The Grand Class SL-1200GR inherits the proven technology of the celebrated SL-1200G to provide a level of performance that clearly outperforms the usual standards of its class".

The technology inherited from the SL-1200G has been newly developed for the SL-1200GR. It includes:

The platter provides high rigidity and vibration damping with two-layer construction and deadening rubber applied to the entire rear surface of the aluminium die-cast to eliminate unnecessary resonance and produce clear sound.

### High Initial-Motion Sensitivity Tonearm

The inherited SL-1200GR tonearm is the static-balance universal S-shaped comprised of an aluminium pipe which is light weight and rigid. A high initial-motion sensitivity of 5 mg or less is the result of "exacting assembly and adjustment by Japanese artisans". The height-adjustable tonearm accommodates many different cartridges.



### Coreless Direct-Drive Motor

For the SL-1200G Technics developed a twin-rotor, surface-facing, coreless direct-drive motor with rotor magnets placed on both sides to eliminate "cogging," the rotation irregularity of the motor. That motor inspired the new single-rotor, surface-facing coreless direct-drive motor that eliminates "cogging" in the SL-1200GR.

### High-Precision Rotation Control

Rotation control uses the newest motor control technology used in Blu-ray disc devices. Starting torque achieves 2.2 kg x cm with only a single rotor. In the SL-1200GR, the startup time of 0.7 sec (at 33 1/3 rpm) same as the SL-1200G has been achieved.

### Platter Rigidity and Damping

## Audio Physic Avantera III Now Available In USA

Earlier this month we brought you the news that VANA Ltd, the US audio distributor, had introduced the Audio Physic Step plus and Tempo plus loudspeakers to the states, now they have added the Avantera III, full range floor standing loudspeaker, to their range of Audio Physic speakers.

The Audio Physic Avantera III has a new 1.75-inch HHCT III tweeter, a pair of 5.9-inch HHCM III midranges and four 7-inch woofers. The Avantera III also utilises a crossover network featuring Clarity Capacitors and other high end components.

The enclosure, which tilts rearward at an angle of 7° in order to deliver a time-aligned presentation, has internal bracing with ceramic foam elements in the woofer and

midrange chambers, reducing resonances. The Avantera III feature a mirror-image configuration of the four 7-inch bass drivers in each enclosure. Audio Physic engineers have used specially structured dampening panels developed specifically for the Avantera chassis to reduce the reflection of midrange energy within the cabinet. For the HHCT III tweeter, Audio Physic has developed a new type of silver connector at the interface between the crossover network and driver. Similar to other Audio Physic models, the Avantera III also features Active Cone Dampening (ACD), and VCT (Vibration Control Terminals), which are resonance-optimised WBT nextgen™ connectors which connect speaker cables via mechanically decoupled pure silver terminals.

"We are confident that the Avantera III is one of the most significant product introductions from this esteemed manufacturer—this is a loudspeaker that has superb musicality and refinement as well as the visual appeal to compete against far more costly speakers in the marketplace," said VANA Managing Director Nancy Weiner.

The Audio Physic Avantera III is available now. US MSRP is \$22,995 (pair) in Cherry and Walnut Wood Veneer finishes, and \$24,995 for Black or White High gloss or Ebony Wood Veneer.





# 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

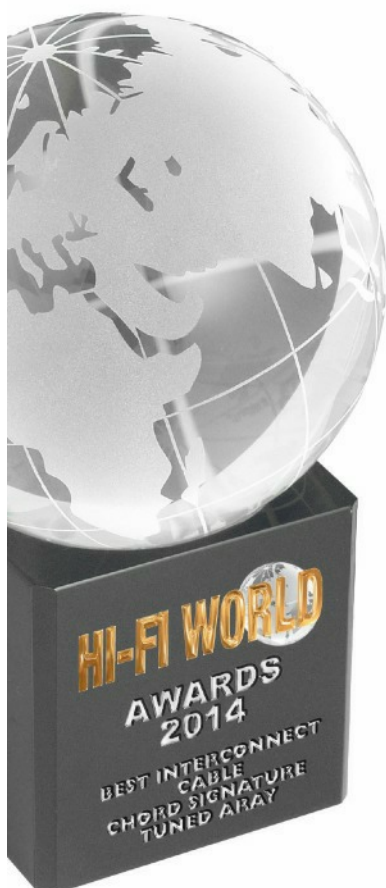


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## Meters Music Launch Cubed Speaker System

Meters Music, the British audio brand from Ashdown Engineering, has released Meters Cubed, a desktop wireless speaker system that combines a compact design with a "powerful sound performance that belies its small size". Cubed also features Meters Music's signature, fully-functioning VU Meter.

The first in their wireless range of loudspeakers, Meters Cubed consists of three, desktop-mounted (90mm) cubes: one amplifier unit and two stereo speakers containing 2.5in drivers and delivering 10 watts per channel. The illuminated VU shows the music playback level status.

Designed for streaming wirelessly from handheld devices, Meters Cubed features Bluetooth 4.0 technology, allowing you to stream your music from a smartphone, tablet, laptop, PC or Mac. Meters Cubed also features an auxiliary 3.5mm jack input for wired connection to non-Bluetooth devices. With a diameter of just 90mm (cubed) and rounded styling, the mains powered Meters Cubed takes up little desk space and uses mSound DSP Sound Enhancement Technology.



- Wireless Bluetooth Technology for wireless streaming from your MP3/mobile device
- mSound DSP Sound Enhancement Technology
- Trademark Ashdown VU Meter
- 2 x 2.5in High Power True RMS 10W+10W Stereo
- 3.5mm Jack Aux-In to connect and play from your MP3/mobile device, desktop or laptop computer
- Mains Power Supply
- Available in Black or White Finish

Available: Now Price: £199.99

## Audirvana Plus Launches Version 3.1 for MacOS

Audirvana Plus is a software player for the MacOS Platform that enables audiophiles to replace iTunes. The audiophile desktop music player has launched its new version, Audirvana Plus 3.1.

Audirvana Plus 3.1 was developed with the help and close collaboration of the Pioneer & Onkyo Group which actively participated in the development of this new version of the software, by providing extensive support including a wide range of representative models of network players (Pioneer N-70AE, Pioneer N-50AE, Pioneer N-30AE, Pioneer N-70A, Pioneer N-50A, Onkyo NS-6130) as well as the VSX-1131 Home Cinema Receiver.

With Audirvana Plus 3.1, audio files can now be sent to network players which will benefit from the sound quality of Audirvana Plus even when the Mac is not directly connected to the audio system. In order to easily identify the network players that have been tested and certified as compatible with Audirvana Plus 3.1, the company has created a new certification sticker called 'Works With Audirvana Plus'.

From a technical point of view, Audirvana Plus 3.1 configures the audio processing of the network player to optimise the sound quality:

- Any PCM format audio file is sent in an uncompressed WAV format thus, avoiding the network reader from performing decompression processing potentially harmful to the sound quality.

- Any DSD format audio file can be transmitted directly uncompressed (or converted to PCM if the network drive does not support DSD)

- MQA decoding is performed before being sent to the network drive, thus enabling the network reader to read the Hi-Res content of the MQA file.

- All audio filters (such as upsampling to PCM or DSD, AudioUnits plugins [e.g. for equalisation and digital room correction]) remain active.

This new 3.1 release expands upon the existing features and benefits of Audirvana Plus, offering an increase in sound quality during playback, a complete library manager, the decoding of all popular audio file formats (WAV, FLAC, Apple Lossless, MP3...), DSD formats (SACD ISO etc...) as well as the new MQA HiRes format and complete integration with Hifi streaming services such as TIDAL and Qobuz.

A free 15-day trial version of Audirvana Plus 3.1 is available.

Audirvana Plus 3.1 – Purchase Price:

- 64€ excl. VAT for new customers
- 34€ excl. VAT for any Audirvana Plus user of a previous version
- Free Upgrade for any customers who purchased Audirvana Plus 3





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by incorporating significant constructional  
changes which affected the sound

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## Unison Research Announce Unico 90 Amplifier

In 2015, Italian “valve specialists” Unison Research renovated their Unico range of hybrid hifi electronics with the introduction of a new flagship. Unison Research told us: “The Unico 150 integrated amplifier was born out of an extensive R&D process and utilised optimal electrical characteristics to achieve a true high-end sound performance. Now, the lessons learned in the development of the Unico 150 have resulted in the introduction of an alternative high-end offering”.

The Unico 90 amplifier employs as few active amplification stages as possible. Where the more powerful flagship, Unico 150, has three active stages, the Unico 90 boasts lower power specifications but only uses a two-stage circuit.

The Unico 90 is an integrated amplifier designed to accommodate a variety of sources via its three RCA and two XLR pair inputs. It's also designed to work in almost any application, with its fixed and variable RCA outputs as well as the bi-wirable speaker terminals. The large casework is built to the same exacting standards as previous Unico designs, but the Unico 90 borrows the same three-platefront fascia introduced with the Unico 150. Operation is via the large front-panel controls or the

supplied RC2 system remote. The whole pre-amplifier section of the Unico 90 is entirely passive. The ALPS volume dial is armoured at four points. The input switching control decouples inactive source inputs, reducing cross-talk, and also employs miniature mechanical relays.

The sonic ability of the Unico 90 comes from its gain stage, which is controlled by the amplifier's valve section. The valve complement is made up of ECC83 tubes in double-triode totem pole configuration and ECC81 in parallel totem pole. The result of the circuitry effectively delivers six triodes per-channel. Inside the output stage, three pairs of HEXFETs are used per-channel. The Unico 90 is a dual-mono amplifier, and three pairs of thermo-stable Class AB HEXFETs are used per-channel to provide 160W (4Ω) audio signal. Thanks to this design, the Unico 90 is able to work with a wide variety of modern loudspeakers.

The Unico 90 is available in the UK now.

It will be available in a Silver finish, or in Black for a £100.00 surcharge.

SRP £3,500.00



## Nordoff Robbins 'Get Loud' Awareness Day

Nordoff Robbins are a charity who use music therapy to help vulnerable people across the UK. Get Loud is Nordoff Robbins' national awareness day on 13 September 2017, when they use the power of music to raise awareness of their life-changing music therapy services.

Nordoff Robbins told us: “Every day our music therapists change the lives of vulnerable and isolated people across the UK. People like Ed, Eddie, Evie and Genesis, who are all featured in this year's campaign. Please visit [www.nordoff-robbins.org.uk/GetLoud](http://www.nordoff-robbins.org.uk/GetLoud) to see how music therapy has helped them through cancer, dementia and autism. Get Loud will enable us to reach more people in more places and provide more services to those who need our support”.



This year's campaign is supported by the fabulous Claudia Winkleman, who wants YOU to Get Loud for Nordoff Robbins on September 13th:

“I am so proud to be supporting Get Loud for Nordoff Robbins. It is an amazing charity that uses music to change the lives of so many people living each day with unimaginable challenges. There are lots of ways you can Get Loud for Nordoff Robbins this year, so join us and do what you can to help this brilliant charity reach more people who desperately need help.”

Campaign Ambassador Claudia Winkleman





MC Step-Up Transformers  
Phono Amplifiers  
Pre Amplifiers



## Onkyo Release New Compact Hifi Systems

Onkyo is continuing its tradition of compact hifi with the introduction of three new package systems comprising the flagship CS-N775D Multi-room Receiver System, CS-N575D Multi-room Hi-Fi CD System, and CS-375D CD Receiver System. Onkyo say that they “blend component-grade musicality with effortless operation for people of all ages, especially those less familiar with network audio”.

Two network models support Chromecast built-in, DTS Play-Fi\*1, proprietary multi-room distribution for network and analogue audio, with the CS-N775D adding the AirPlay wireless audio streaming platform. Spotify, TIDAL, Deezer, and Tuneln\*2 are integrated together with mobile music and audio on networked media server via the Onkyo Controller\*3 app for iPad, iPhone, and Android™ devices. The receivers showcase a new JOG dial and display technology that helps users find and play music easily. The CS-N775D and CS-N575D feature information-rich LCDs providing visual reference when navigating content. Onkyo told us: “All three systems encourage families to make music a part of everyday life”.

CS-N775D Multi-room Receiver System (pictured) – £469.99

Central to the CR-N775D concept was development of patented 3-state Bitstream switching amplification.

Where conventional switching amplifiers use only two digits (“on” or “off”) to reproduce the sound wave, 3-state Bitstream adds a third digit (or “neutral” position) to, say Onkyo, smoothly shape a waveform similar to that produced by an analogue amplifier. With 40W + 40W (4 Ohms, 1 kHz, 10%, 2-channels driven, IEC), the CR-N775D is paired with D-165 2-Way Bass Reflex Speakers, each fitted with Onkyo’s premium

130mm N-OMF woofer and 30mm ring-radiator tweeter in an MDF enclosure with thick baffle. Users can stream any music from Chromecast-enabled apps for iPhone, iPad, Android devices, Mac or Windows laptop, and Chromebook to the CS-N775D and any other supported speakers with Chromecast built-in. DTS Play-Fi technology, meanwhile, allows streaming from online services, media server, or device library over 5 GHz/2.4 GHz Wi-Fi to any number of compatible products via the Onkyo Music Control\*3 App for iPad, iPhone, and Android phone/tablet. DTS Play-Fi connects systems for synchronised music in every room, and can also stream different music to different rooms. Onkyo also includes proprietary multi-room network and analogue\*4 audio distribution baked into the Onkyo Controller app, which works with Onkyo NCP-302 speakers. Users can mirror audio from the CS-N775D in other rooms or configure speakers for grouped playback. AirPlay is also included to share audio from supported applications, such as iTunes, from mobile devices and PC over Wi-Fi, while Bluetooth technology offers a wireless connection to almost any device. In another first for Onkyo, portable HDDs\*5 can function as a music server for the CS-N775D when connected to a USB input. Listeners can download music to PC and copy the files to the HDD via the home network. File playback includes 192 kHz/24-bit FLAC, ALAC, and WAV as well as Direct DSD 11.2 MHz\*6, DSD 5.6/2.8 MHz\*7, and compressed audio formats. Other entertainment is served via FM/RDS and DAB+ tuners, front-loading CD player, 192 kHz/24-bit-capable co-axial and optical digital audio inputs, and line-level input. IR input/output and subwoofer pre-out join gold-plated speaker posts on the rear panel.

CS-N575D Multi-room Hi-Fi CD System – £399.99

The CR-N575D receiver generates 20W + 20W (6 Ohms, 1 kHz, 10%, 2-channels driven, IEC). Original switching amplification developed by Onkyo’s engineers features Optimum Audio Control DSP tuning, which integrates amp and loudspeaker characteristics. The efficient switching technology delivers high power for increased speaker sound-pressure. Each supplied D-075 2-Way Speaker includes a 130mm pressed pulp-fibre woofer and 25mm soft-dome tweeter in a thick MDF baffle. The receiver features Chromecast built-in, DTS Play-Fi, Onkyo multi-room audio distribution, and the same on-demand music services as the flagship model with support for Onkyo Controller, Bluetooth streaming, FM/DAB+ tuners, and LCD with JOG dial. The CS-N575D supports HDD playback via USB input and full support for Hi-Res Audio including Direct DSD 11.2 MHz. Connectivity includes USB inputs, 96 kHz/24-bit coaxial/optical digital inputs, line-level input/output, IR input, subwoofer pre-out, and headphone jack.

CS-375D CD Receiver System – £269.99

The CS-375D is an affordable component mini-system that carries the same premium switching amplification with Optimum Audio Control as the CR-N575D receiver. It again features JOG dial for easy operation, and includes coaxial digital and line-level inputs to route TV sound through the system or connect a media player for network audio. FM/RDS and DAB+ tuners are also added. Bluetooth technology has the system powering up when detecting an incoming stream from an audio application. It offers USB audio from flash-memory devices, and the CD player reads CD-R/CD-RW and well as MP3-encoded discs. The same D-075 speaker system as the CS-N575D completes a package that’s pitched at those seeking a compact system on a modest budget.

\*1 DTS Play-Fi enabled with a firmware update. \*2 Services may require a subscription and service availability is dependent on region. \*3 Please check minimum device and OS requirements at App Store or Google Play™. \*4 Analogue audio distribution is enabled with a future firmware update. Transmission rates of 44.1 kHz and 48 kHz supported. \*5 USB storage devices must be formatted to FAT32. \*6 Direct (non-PCM) playback only. \*7 Hi-Res Audio is supported over wired LAN or USB only.







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## McIntosh Announces MCT80 SACD/CD Transport

McIntosh has launched their new MCT80 SACD/CD Transport. They want you to "Enjoy your CDs all over again!"

The McIntosh MCT80 has been designed to match the size of their MXA80 Integrated Audio System, MHA150 Headphone Amplifier, MB50 Streaming Audio Player and MP100 Phono Preamplifier (each sold separately) to make a compact audio system.

The MCT80 includes 3 digital-only outputs in the form of 1 coax and 1 optical connector along with 1 of our proprietary MCT connectors. The MCT output offers a secure DSD connection for playback of the high definition audio on SACDs. To take advantage of the MCT80's SACD capabilities, it must be used with select McIntosh models that have an MCT input – which currently includes the aforementioned MXA80 and MHA150, plus the D1100, C52, C2600, C47 and D150 Preamplifiers as well as the MA9000 and MA8900 Integrated Amplifiers. The coax and optical outputs support CD audio formats up to 24-bit/192kHz. For listening to CDs, the MCT80 can be used with any product that contains a digital coax or optical input and a Digital to Analogue Converter (DAC).

The MCT80 features an improved transport with a die-cast aluminium tray in conjunction with an advanced digital servo for faster, quieter and accurate operation. All common disc types can be played including SACD, CD, CD-R, CD-RW (MP3 and WMA) and user generated DVD or CD Data Discs with music file formats including DSD (up to DSD128), WAV (up to 24-bit/192kHz), FLAC, MP3 and others. A disc's audio data is read at twice the normal rate for better disc tracking and error correction processing. A twin laser optical pickup assures optimal disc reading. Power control and data ports integrate the MCT80's operational state with other McIntosh system components. It features the classic McIntosh styling with a polished stainless steel chassis, black glass front panel, illuminated logo and aluminium end caps.

### Pricing and Availability

Orders for the MCT80 can now be placed with shipping expected to begin in September in the USA and October/November in the UK.

Suggested retail price (VAT, shipping and any customs duties related to current standards of individual countries are excluded): \$3,500 USD and £4,495 in the UK.



## TAGA Harmony Introduce More New Products

TAGA Harmony continue their introduction of new products with something both for indoors and out.

They have added a new Garden Speaker the TRS-5L is suitable for residential as well as commercial installations in places such as gardens, porches, terraces and other outdoor or even indoor areas.

### Key features:

Waterproof and UV resistant ABS cabinet covered with extremely durable protective paint;

Robust and corrosion resistant accessories and grill (aluminum grill and plastic / metal accessories);

Variety of installation options (all accessories included):

In-Ground with a supplied Ground Stake.

On ceilings and walls with a supplied Ceiling-Wall mount.

On horizontal and vertical surfaces like floors, decks or garden structures (Surface Mount supplied).

Vertical angle regulation to adjust the sound dispersion;

High 8 ohm impedance;



They have also launched a new speaker stand in the TSS series.

### Features and specifications:

Black matt heavy-duty painting

Speaker wire channel

Stable, oversized silver spikes

Rubber pads at the upper base

Max speaker weight: 15 kg /pcs.

Central aluminium tube diameter: 6 cm

Tempered glass top and bottom bases



# 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)

## Iota VRS Vinyl Record Stabiliser

Iota Audio Design, who we last saw at The North West Audio Show at Cranage Hall, have developed the Iota V-R-S vinyl record stabiliser, this is CNC machined from billet stainless steel, and is the correct size to fit onto the recessed label area of a vinyl LP record. For ease of use the top of the stabiliser has a turned "stadium" shaped handle faced with their logo. The underside of the stabiliser has a constrained layer of carbon fibre.

Iota told us: "The combination of the mass of the stainless steel and the damping effect of the constrained layer of carbon fibre act upon vibrations within the vinyl record, both from the action of the styli on the record surface as well as any structural noise derived from a turntable, the stabiliser also ensures the LP record has even contact with the platter".

"The Iota V-R-S stabiliser with a mass of 800 grams (1lb. 12oz) does not apply an excessive bearing load to any well engineered turntable. For example with any of our turntable designs our standard bearing uses a polished stainless steel shaft running in a bronze sleeve set in a substantial Acetal outer sleeve. The bearing shaft runs on a Grade 5, Silicon Nitride (Si3N4) ceramic ball, which in turn is in contact with a bottom thrust pad made from the ultra high performance PEEK polymer (Polyether ether ketone). The bearing assembly is also lubricated with a fully synthetic bearing oil that also ensures a long noise free bearing life".

If the Iota V-R-S stabiliser is to be used on other manufacturers turntables Iota advise confirming suitability prior to use, plus many suspended turntable designs may require adjustments to the suspension to account for the additional mass of the stabiliser.

Supplied with all Iota's current turntables, and also available separately for use on other suitable equipment. Price £75.00



## T+A Announce Launch Of New CALA Range



integrated amplifier with a large range of connection facilities and powerful 2 x 55 Watts output stages for an exceptional performance. Users can access a range of supported sources, such as Internet radio with Airable Internet Radio Service, FM, FM-HD and DAB+ radio, in addition to in-built streaming service clients Deezer, qobuz and TIDAL. HD Bluetooth streaming also allows users to stream seamlessly from mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets, whilst UPnP, network music servers and USB storage are also accessible. The CALA SR allows for reproduction of analogue sources including Phono MM and high output MC. The CALA SR has been handcrafted with the finest materials for an optimal performance. The main casing is milled from a solid billet of aluminium and is finished with a glass bead finish. The inner chassis is also made up of

T+A of Germany has announced the launch of its new CALA Receiver range – CALA SR and CALA CDR (with CD mechanism). An alternative to separates, the CALA range offers a range of features within a single receiver unit, including compatibility with streaming services (TIDAL, Deezer and qobuz), playback via UPnP network music servers and USB storage media, FM, FM-HD and DAB+ radio, SP/DIF and optical digital inputs, HD Bluetooth connectivity and analogue inputs (including a switchable aux/MM or high output MC turntable input).

The chassis of both models has been made from aluminium, whilst control is via the supplied T+A F100 remote control or the T+A Control app (available for Apple and Android devices). Both models also feature an LED strip light to create an ambient white, blue, green or red 'glow' on the underside of the chassis. The light intensity and colour can be chosen by the user or turned off completely.

T+A told us more "The CALA SR is a multi-functional streaming receiver that acts as a complete HiFi system. The model features an

aluminium for robust support whilst the aluminium top panel is hand-brushed to a refined surface before being anodised to a high-gloss finish. The front panel consists of lustrous black acrylic, and accommodates the large-format graphic screen. Control is actioned via the supplied T+A F100 system remote control or T+A's dedicated Control app, which can be downloaded for free from iTunes or the Android store".

The CALA SR is available now with a UK SRP of £2313

Of the CALA CDR they say "The CALA CDR is the all-encompassing music centre. With all of the fantastic features of the CALA SR, the CALA CDR features additional specifications for the ultimate hi-fi experience. Much like the SR, the model features an integrated amplifier but with a slightly higher 2 x 100 Watts output – for the most demanding performances. An integrated CD player also allows for greater versatility and optimal output".

The CALA CDR is available now with a UK SRP of £3242





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## Carbon Black Is Elipson's New Flagship Turntable

Following the launch of their premium Bluetooth turntable last year, Elipson has announced the introduction of its new flagship deck, The Omega Carbon Black. Based on the Omega 100, this new Carbon Black version features a number of enhancements.

The use of carbon-fibre has been extended from the tone arm to the sub-chassis to offer added rigidity and Elipson have added functional components finished in chrome or brushed metal.

The carbon-fibre tone arm has been equipped with an Ortofon 2M RED cartridge and a new aluminium cueing lever lift arm has been added. The combination of a carbon-fibre sub-chassis, a suspended motor to eliminate friction and the digital speed motor for playback of 33, 45 and 78 rpm records creates what Elipson say is "an extra-solid, high-inertia turntable with high levels of precision engineering".



They went on to say: "Due to the growth in vinyl from all age groups, demand for wireless connectivity and the subsequent convenience is also growing, so the Carbon can be easily connected to any Bluetooth speaker via its Aptx BT function. The carefully selected, state-of-the-art electronics also houses a premium phono stage/preamp, allowing the user to connect the turntable to any amplifier. The USB output allows the user to make digital copies of his or her favourite records, which may then be played anywhere".

Elipson's new Omega Black carbon turntable is available in two versions with or without pre-amp and Bluetooth. The Omega 100 RIAA BT Carbon Black will be in the UK from late August at £699 with the Omega 100 Carbon Black at £549 in September.

## Chris Tuck UK Business Development Role For Electrocomp-aniet



Electrocompaniet has appointed Chris Tuck to lead its UK Business Development. Chris brings with him a wealth of experience after senior positions with audio manufacturers such as KEF and Eclipse.

Chris said the following regarding his appointment: "Joining Electrocompaniet presents a unique opportunity to work with this renowned and globally respected brand. The company has a genuine historic pedigree that it is rightly proud of but also has its sights set firmly on the future. The new EC Living range and the installation variants will offer a new route to consumers for high quality reproduction in their home with the flexibility to expand to their specific needs."

Based in Tau, Norway Electrocompaniet has a 40 year-plus history in two-channel audio products and has recently launched EC Living range which, say the company, brings them "resolutely into the mainstream – and to a new audience – with its exceptional combination of design, performance and flexibility". The company continues to design and manufacture all products in Norway.

## Ea Is "A New Step In Kalista's Story"

Did you know that Métronome Technologie was once a loudspeaker maker? That was in 1987, precisely 30 years ago. This is why they decided to develop Ea, as a "celebration of their origins". They got in touch to tell us more about their new, Kalista brand, speakers which were first introduced to the public at the High End Munich show in May 2017

"Ea's name comes from the Mesopotamian mythology, in which Ea (AKA Aya or Enki) was the deity of crafts and creation. E.A. is also the acronym of "Enceinte Acoustique" which means "loudspeaker" in French".

"Ea was fully designed by Kalista designers, starting from the idea that the auditorium needs diffusers and complex shapes to reconstitute the music as close as possible to the original recording, giving the optimal emotion inside a listening room".

Ea is a 2 meters tall, 150 kg, 400W, 100dB sensitivity, passive loudspeaker. Made in France.





THEY DON'T FEEL  
WHAT YOU FEEL  
THEY DON'T SEE  
WHAT YOU SEE  
THEY DON'T HEAR  
WHAT YOU HEAR  
THEY DON'T HAVE  
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AND NOW, YOU CAN FIND US ON FACEBOOK 

## Metaxas Sirens Reference Monitor Speakers

With over 40 years of playback and 25 years of concert recording experience, Kostas Metaxas has never been known for being understated in his designs.

Once Metaxas perfected the art of CNC machining organic shapes with amplifiers, it opened up similar possibilities with speakers. CNC allows the sculpting of a shape with incredible rigidity, in a much smaller form factor than is possible with other materials. At the same time it minimises front baffle diffraction whilst maximising internal volume.

Kostas told us: "With more than a passing reference to Homer's Odyssey, the apt metaphor is testimony to the sheer musicality and realism that allows this potent 3-way system, CNC carved from a block of solid aluminium [or titanium] to engage and captivate it's audience with its sound and to invigorate the mind with it's extreme sculptural aesthetic.

"At home in the most demanding recording studios, concert hall monitoring booths or even the Museum of Modern Art, the Sirens are a radical departure from the original concept of a 3-way box speaker developed early last century".

"Using ideas borrowed from Neumann TLM 50 and M150 microphones, the Siren embeds the Accuton drivers into spheres mounted onto an organic "time-aligned" sculpture. Despite the unique and unusual shape, the design is a seriously engineered, no-compromise loudspeaker with emphasis on absolute sound quality. Accuton ultra-low colouration ceramic

drivers are used in some of the most expensive systems currently available, but it's only when you marry them to a curvaceous, stiff, inert massive machined "body" that you can really hear – and probably for the first time appreciate, their sheer neutrality and incredible 3-dimensional spatial rendition of a concert performance".

"The final version of the Siren is CNC machined in 14 pieces [pair]...almost 6 weeks of 24-hours-day per speaker of the most intricate, "organic" machining EVER done for a speaker – or for that matter, any piece of hi fi equipment. This is really "Art in the service of Music"

In a "bespoke" manner, the actual configuration of drivers can be chosen, Since there are different "levels" of Accuton ceramic drivers, up to and including their ultra-expensive "diamond" tweeter, the customer has a choice of which tweeter, midrange and 8" woofer they would prefer to use now, or in the future.



## New Products From Métronome Coming In September 2017

Métronome of France are launching a new range of products in September. With this new line they are focusing on "high-resolution and network playing".

Digital Sharing DSC1 (Pictured)

Métronome told us "This is a new range of high-end audio devices, with a completely new design. Digital Sharing stands for connected devices network player under DLNA protocol and AirPlay compatibility. This D/A converter DSC1 is the first device of this range, introducing the latest D/A conversion chips decoding DSD up to 512".



Le Player 2S

In addition to Le Player 2, the entry-level DAC & CD player, Le Player 2S integrates a new DSD D/A converter chip for high-resolution (up to 256). Its USB interface allows to plug either Windows or Apple computers, and streamers/servers can also be plugged in its S/P DIF input for signals up to 24 bits – 192 kHz.

Music Center 1 Evo

With MC1, the audiophiles could copy CDs, store their music and enjoy high-resolution. This MC1 Evo model also performs network playing under DLNA protocol.





# 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.

Sometimes of course, less can mean more.

Our new 'Transpose' modular connection system simplifies the plug assembly process, fewer steps allowing us to ensure not only higher performance and reliability but also maximum flexibility.

The same thought, research and attention to detail is applied to every Atlas product.

**ATLAS**<sup>®</sup>  
the performance connection

[atlas cables.com](http://atlas cables.com)

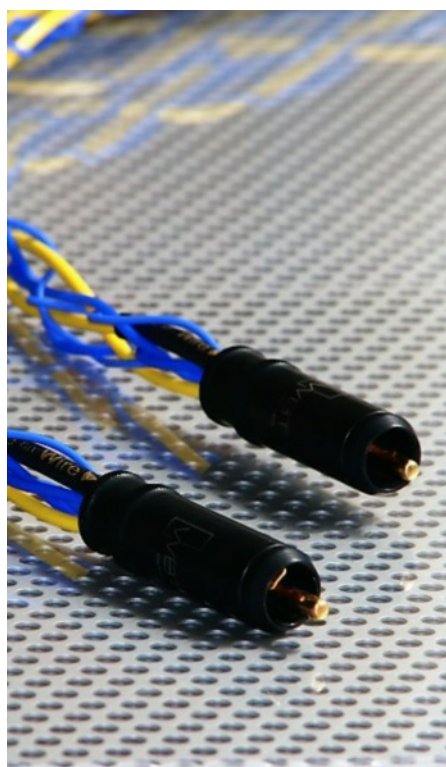


## Wire On Wire Launch The Tuneable Experience880

Wire On Wire's REDpurl™ adaptive asymmetric geometry is at the heart of its high end Experience range. Wire On Wire say that "Unlike other audio cables, with their fixed geometry, they can be tuned to access the full potential of your listening room and audio system. Why is it so different? Because it's tuneable you can access more than one high-end interconnect from a single cable".

Every element of the new Experience880, designed and hand-built by Wire On Wire in Britain. A new bespoke conductor is used within its REDpurl™ geometry.

Chris Bell, designer and owner at Wire On Wire, says "We will be demonstrating our new Experience880 tuneable interconnect and Experience660s speaker cable and how their adaptability brings out the best in a system. We look forward to meeting you in Room 6 on the third floor of the Audio London section at this year's Indulgence Show where you will find some great offers on our cables."



## Estelon Launches Super Luxury Rolls-Royce Inspired Speakers

Estelon are calling their new Estelon Extreme Legacy Edition loudspeakers "the world's most technologically advanced speakers" and they were unveiled at the Rolls-Royce Enthusiasts' Club's prestigious annual rally in June.

Speaking further about the process, designer, Alfred Vassilkov said: "As a great engineer once said, 'Take the best that exists and make it better'. That engineer was Sir Henry Royce and it is his unceasing pursuit of perfection that has inspired our new high-



The event was held in the grounds of Burghley House, a 16th-century stately home in rural Lincolnshire, England, and was attended by more than 1,000 Rolls-Royce and Bentleys.

Despite the many classic vehicles on display, however, one of the rally's biggest talking points was the introduction of the Estelon Extreme Legacy Edition speaker system, valued at £220,000. Estonian brand, Estelon, drew inspiration from Rolls-Royce's legacy of design excellence when creating the super-luxury sound system.

The Extreme Legacy Edition's cabinet is finished in light Tudor grey metallic paint, a colour more commonly associated with classic Rolls-Royce cars than high-end audio equipment. The speaker's modular brain, which features new Estelon Intelligent Audio (EIA) technology, ensures that the speakers are "entirely futureproof". Estelon went on to tell us: "EIA allows for the speaker's hardware, as well as its software components, to be updated with ease, resulting in industry-leading performance, as well as the knowledge that, whatever developments are round the corner, the Legacy Edition will always deliver cutting-edge quality".

performance speaker, the Estelon Extreme Legacy Edition. A pitch-perfect balance of innovative technology and sculptural grace, we like to think that Sir Henry would have approved." He added: "When people hear music through an Estelon speaker, they don't talk about the sound reproduction, they talk about the music itself."

Estelon Extreme Legacy Edition technical specifications:

- Type: Wireless Intelligent Speaker
- Woofer: 2 x 10" aluminium dome
- Mid-Woofer: 10" aluminium dome
- Midrange: 7" ceramic inverted dome
- Tweeter: 1.5" diamond inverted dome
- Frequency response: 20–40 000 Hz
- Height: 1780 mm – 2080 mm
- Width: 790 mm
- Depth: 820 mm
- Net weight: 285 kg per loudspeaker
- Connectivity: Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, DLNA and Ethernet cable



## VANA Ltd. Unveils The Audio Physic Step Plus And Tempo Plus Loudspeakers To US Market

VANA, Ltd. has announced the availability of the Audio Physic Step plus and Tempo plus loudspeakers in the US market through a network of audio retailers. The Step plus is a bookshelf speaker and the Tempo plus is a floor-standing speaker utilising the same midrange and tweeter technologies as the Step plus with low frequency drivers integrated within the enclosure. Both loudspeakers have been completely redesigned since the prior Step and Tempo models and benefit from many of the technological advances realised during the development of the company's flagship speaker, the Cardeas 30 LJE.

The Step plus and the Tempo plus (Pictured) share a brand new 1.75-inch tweeter (HHCT III) and 5.9-inch midrange (HHCM II) that have been engineered exclusively for Audio Physic. These unique ceramic coated aluminium drivers utilise proprietary hybrid cone construction that combine the dampening characteristics of modern polymers with the stability and stiffness of metal. Each driver's suspension system and basket chassis are mechanically decoupled from one another in a unique design that reduces unwanted resonances. Audio Physic refers to this technology as the Hyper-Holographic Cone chassis (HHC), which improves clarity and detail significantly verses conventional drivers. In addition to the elaborate HHC basket construction, the midrange driver is also equipped with a fixed metal phase plug designed to reduce heat. Each driver is housed within individual compartments in the cabinet. The entire inner cabinet has been updated to include extremely stiff open cell ceramic foam bracing elements that stabilise the enclosure.

The Tempo plus incorporates two high-performance 7-inch aluminium bass drivers situated across from one another in the side walls of the enclosure. The Push-Push configuration of the woofers creates a symmetrical distribution of force on the loudspeaker cabinet.

Both the Step plus and the Tempo plus feature newly engineered crossover networks. The interior wiring and the premium grade WBT™ binding posts, all mechanically decoupled from the cabinet, are also a critical part of these new designs.

The unique cabinet shape of both new models serves to reduce standing waves in the interior of the loudspeakers that can jeopardise crisp midrange reproduction. The gentle rearward tilt of the cabinets helps to balance out phase differences between the midrange and tweeter, which are mounted flush to the surface of the baffle. The enclosures have been updated to include open-cell ceramic foam bracing elements in a labyrinth-like array that reduce cabinet wall resonances. Any acoustic energy emitted into the cabinet interior gets absorbed by the pores to a level of inaudibility.

The Audio Physic Step plus and Tempo plus are both available now. US MSRP is \$2595 (pair) for the Step plus and \$5995 (pair) for the Tempo plus in standard Cherry and Walnut Wood Veneer finishes, and \$2795 and \$6495 respectively for Black or White High gloss or Ebony Wood Veneer.



## Amare Musica Tube Network Player

Amare Musica of Poland have released their new Tube Network Player which is a combination of Tube Dac DSD and a network server/player.



After connecting RJ45 (Ethernet) you are able to play PCM \ DSD music without using a computer, via OpenHome and uPnP. It is also Roon Ready.

Features and specifications:

Pure DSD without digital-analogue converter chip

Native DSD playback

Automatic standby mode with user-selectable interval

Analogue:

Using 2 pcs 6dj8 tubes for each channel

-Unbalanced 2V RMS @ 0dB -180 Ohms – RCA connectors

-Balanced 4V RMS @ 0dB – 360Ohms – XLR

Stabilised power supply for filament

Balanced and Single Ended output

Mundorf capacitors at output

Non-inductive resistors in signal path

Chassis is made from 10mm aluminium

Anti-Vibration Feet from Franc Audio Accessories

Ceramic Disc Tablette

CPU: Quad-core Cortex-A7

INPUTS Ethernet (RJ-45)

PCM 16-32bit / 44.1k / 48k / 88.2k / 96k / 176.4k / 192k / 352.8k / 384k

DSD×64 2.8224MHz/ DSD×128 5.6448MHz

Digital INPUTS SPDIF, PCM 44.1kHz-192kHz, 16-24bit

## Brook Audio – A New Hifi Shop For Yorkshire

## Feniks Essence Active Computer Sound System Now Shipping

In a world that is becoming ever more geared towards an online experience there are some people that are looking to take us back to a time when you could interact with real sales people and experience what you are looking to buy before actually handing over your hard earned. It's refreshing then to see that David Brook (Of MCRU fame) has seen the potential in adding a bricks and mortar presence to his portfolio in the shape of his new shop Brook Audio on Brook Street (a coincidence David tells us) in the Yorkshire town of Huddersfield. Asking David about the move he said that human interaction is still alive in the audiophile world and people of a certain age prefer the personal touch which a proper shop provides.



The shop is well presented from the outside and once inside there is a small sales area showing off some of the products David sells (and a good selection of vinyl), but it is down stairs most people will be interested in.

A flight of stairs takes you down to a very well proportioned demonstration room that is light and airy, despite being without windows. There's a large equipment rack on the far wall and speakers fire down the length of the room. David has managed to create a space that is convivial and homelike to provide customers with a room that they will instantly feel at home in.

Hifi Pig applauds this move and wishes David and his team all the best with this new venture

It seems that you can barely browse the internet these days without coming across another new Kickstarter audio product. Many of these get announced and then never see the light of day, so it's nice to hear from one that has actually made it into production.

Feniks Audio (based in Schaffhausen, Switzerland) has announced that the Essence active sound system, which they claim is "the world's best computer speaker system and world's smallest high-end monitor", is finally shipping. The Essence was offered directly to customers in April 2016 thanks to a crowdfunding campaign on Kickstarter, where the project successfully raised nearly CHF 100,000 from 110 backers on 6 different continents. A further 19 customers purchased the system during a pre-order campaign. Originally estimated to ship in the autumn of 2016, after the campaign completed it was decided to upgrade the internal DAC from the ESS ES9010 DAC chip to the superior ES9018, which necessitated a redesign of the board and rewriting the firmware. This also led to manufacturing delays. As unfortunate and frustrating as the delays were, the end result is, they say "a substantially better product than was originally promised and, we believe, worth the wait".

The first shipments are already being delivered to customers, with more being sent every week. Feniks have also recently relaunched their website with e-commerce functionality, where the Essence is available to ship worldwide for CHF 1600 (approximately USD 1650/EUR 1395/GBP 1260).

Ted and Robert Kwolek, the father and son team behind the project told us: "After the long journey to bring the Essence to life, it's incredibly rewarding to hear the positive comments from customers, which makes it all worth the effort. It has always been our intent to make quality high-end audio accessible to a larger audience, both in terms of price, design, and ease of use, and in that regard especially the Essence is a remarkable success. We're very proud of what has been accomplished against the odds on a limited budget. A huge thank you to our customers, investors, and fans, who believed in the product and have been remarkably patient during the duration of the production process. Without them, the Essence would not have been possible. In the weeks and months to come, we look forward to building more of our beautiful speakers to ship to the homes and offices of customers throughout the world and spread the enjoyment that high quality audio brings".





## Ortofon MC Windfeld Ti Cartridge Launched And On Tour

In 2008, Ortofon honoured Per Windfeld with the release of the MC Windfeld cartridge. Mr Windfeld worked with Ortofon for over thirty years, during his time as Chief Engineer becoming widely recognised in the industry as a true hifi visionary. Since his retirement, Ortofon has continued to grow as a company. So nearly ten years after the original release, the decision has now been taken to update the MC Windfeld with the very latest technologies.

The MC Windfeld Ti is a moving coil (MC) phono cartridge built into a new and improved cartridge body. Sharing obvious similarities with the high-end Cadenza Series, the central band of the MC Windfeld Ti body is made using a Selective Laser Melting (SLM) manufacturing technology, also used by Ortofon on the flagship MC Anna cartridge. The technology uses Titanium to increase the overall rigidity of the cartridge body, eliminating unwanted vibrations within the cartridge

Inside the MC Windfeld Ti, Ortofon employ a series of advanced technologies – many developed entirely in-house. Like the flagship MC Anna cartridge, the MC Windfeld Ti makes use of “the finest diamond in the world”. The Ortofon Replicant 100 boasts a thin and light profile, with long vertical contact surface making it as close as possible to an original record cutting stylus. By specially polishing the stylus and then mounting it onto a boron cantilever, the cartridge can offer “remarkable transparency, speed, and responsiveness beyond that of any other combination”.

The stylus and cantilever are connected into a compact, lightweight generator system based around a powerful neodymium magnet and Ortofon’s Aucurum 6NX oxygen-free copper coil wire. The specially designed armature used inside the system has low magnetic properties for uninhibited tracking of the cantilever’s movements. An additional Field-Stabilizing Element (FSE) is also placed inside the system to prevent the magnetic field from fluctuating.

The cantilever also passes through a suspension system aided by Ortofon’s Wide



Range Damping (WRD) system, in which a small, heavy platinum disc is sandwiched between two rubber absorbers with different properties. Installation is made easy thanks to the clear markings on the cartridge rear, and the body’s unique shape on the top panel creates a rigid, three-point contact with the tonearm for perfect mechanical integration. The optimized weight (11g) and moderate compliance (13µm) makes the MC Windfeld Ti compatible with a wide variety of high-end tonearms. Similarly, the low output impedance (7Ω) and moderate output voltage (0.2mV) makes the cartridge compatible with a wide variety of MC pre-amps and step-up transformers.

On top of the advanced mechanical design, the MC Windfeld Ti has also been engineered to look visually appealing. The matte-black housing sits either side of the titanium core, and is accented on one side with Per Windfeld’s characteristic initials, including a new “Ti” extension to signify the latest technical developments.

The MC Windfeld Ti is available in the UK now.

SRP £3,100.00

Ortofon are also heading off on tour, across the country, visiting some of the UK’s premier hi-fi retailers for a series of exclusive

events geared towards vinyl playback. The Cartridge Experience Tour will take visitors on a journey through the Ortofon range, starting with the 2M Red at £95.00 and climaxing with the new high-end MC Windfeld Ti at £3,100.00.

The Cartridge Experience Tour is open to all, but we recommend registering your interest with your preferred venue, to guarantee you don’t miss any of the presentation.

The Cartridge Experience Tour will visit:

Saturday, August 5th: Oxford Audio Consultants (Oxford)

Saturday, August 12th: Zouch Audio (Ashby-de-la-Zouch)

Thursday, August 31st: Ceritech Audio (Cinderford)

Friday, September 8th: Martins Hi-Fi (Norwich)

Saturday, September 23rd: Deco Audio (Aylesbury)

Saturday, September 30th: Fanthorpes HiFi (Hull)

Saturday, October 14th: Loud & Clear (Edinburgh)

## Monrio Launch Their Most Powerful Amplifier, The MC207 – MKII

**M**onrio's MC207 is the Italian company's largest and most powerful integrated amplifier. The Monrio MC series of integrated amplifiers is one of their core product ranges the model line-up so far consisted of the MC 202, MC200, MC 205 and MC207. With the MC 207- MKII, they are now introducing a further refined version of the MC 207, featuring the latest circuit topology and materials.

The circuitry of the MC 207- MKII remains essentially unchanged, relying now on a single large printed circuit board capable of receiving all the necessary updates in order to keep the amp up to date with current market demands.

The main board carries the output stage and the power supply whilst the sub-board carries the low-level audio stage. The power transistors used in the output stage are designed for audio application, with good dependence of  $f_T$  on current and good HF characteristic. By connecting these devices in a quasi-complementary (all transistors used are of NPN type) configuration, the MC 207-MKII delivers power output capabilities rated for 140 watts into 8 ohms. This arrangement of high-current power transistors allowing the amplifier to drive even very low impedance loads.

The MC 207-MKII features one 500 VA power transformer and four large electrolytic capacitors rated for 10.000  $\mu F$  each, it also offers four line high level inputs, a dedicated unity gain A / V Direct input for use with a processor in a home theatre system as a stereo amp for the front channels or surround channels and tape output. It features a pre-out that allows direct connection of a sub-woofer or the possibility of using a stereo amp for any additional bi-amp connections.



## New Custom Install Speakers From TAGA Harmony



**T**AGA Harmony has announced a new generation of its base stereo/mono in-ceiling speaker in the TCW series. Along with refinements the model name has been changed to TCW-300R SM to keep up with the latest TAGA Harmony's model-coding system.

TAGA Harmony say that their TCW series speakers provide "superior sound performance at amazing price levels. They utilise very stiff and strong injection-molded polymer chassis, which minimise distortion, vibrations or resonances and specialised mounting brackets that make installation very easy. All speakers are designed to be used both in music and home theatre systems in any area of your home or commercial applications".

Very slim chassis to allow installations even in shallow places;

TIMPC – TAGA Injection-Molded Polymer Chassis is very rigid and strong to minimise distortions, vibrations or resonances.;

TEI – TAGA Easy Install mounting brackets are easy and safe to install.

The ABS clamps are in a visible blue color to ease installation in dark places.;

Paintable grill to virtually disappear in the ceiling or wall.;

TEC – TAGA Easy Connection: all speakers use high quality push-in banana binding posts accepting raw speaker cables up to 10AWG and most popular types of connectors (banana or pin plugs).

High 8 ohm impedance.

TAGA have also released a new speaker in their TOS outdoor / indoor series: TOS-215.

It is the smallest speaker in the series. The construction is the result of an extensive research and development undertaken to provide accurate reproduction of music in residential as well as commercial installations in places such as gardens, porches, terraces and other outdoor or even indoor areas.

Waterproof and UV resistant ABS cabinet covered with extremely durable protective paint;

Metal rust-proof removable grill;

U type wall mounting brackets for vertical and horizontal installation;

TEC easy to use push-in banana binding posts;

Very high sensitivity;

High 8 ohm impedance.



## Bryston Launches BP-173 Preamplifier

Bryston has announced the introduction of the new BP-173 (Cubed Series) preamplifier, utilising patented technology that debuted on the Cubed Series amplifiers. The BP-173 also features a new expanded input/output configuration for enhanced system flexibility. Like all analogue components from Bryston, the BP-173 is covered by a 20 year warranty.

Bryston's say that their patented linear, low noise input buffer jointly developed by Bryston and the late Ph.D. engineer Dr. Ioan Alexandru Salomie "significantly reduces noise and distortion". The BP-173 also has improved RF and audio frequency noise filtering.



The BP-173 offers expanded input/output options, including two pairs of XLR outputs and two pairs of RCA outputs, making it possible to connect a wide variety of equipment and accommodate numerous system configurations. An RCA tape loop lets users connect a line-level processor or recording device and one of the XLR output pairs can be internally selected to have either variable (default) or fixed output enabling users to easily connect a Bryston BHA-1 or other balanced input headphone amplifier. The BP-173 also includes two pairs of balanced inputs and five pair RCA inputs, and can be ordered with a high-resolution internal DAC, a premium moving magnet phono stage, both DAC and phono modules or without either module installed. Users can select sources, adjust volume and more all

from the optional BR-2 remote control or via RS232 connection to virtually any control ecosystem. The BP-173 is available in either black or silver, 17-inch or 19-inch (wide) faceplates.

The BP-173 will begin shipping to authorised dealers in September, 2017 with a US MSRP of \$3995. The DAC and phono stage options have an MSRP of \$750 each. The BR-2 remote has an MSRP of \$375.

Pre-order special:

Customers that place a pre-order for the BP-173 by August 31st will qualify for one optional accessory at no additional cost: Choose from an internal phono stage, internal DAC or BR-2 remote control. Convert Technologies got in touch to tell us about their new Android app that allows you to record vinyl records straight to your mobile phone.

## Vinyl Recorder App From Convert Technologies

Covert told us: "The Vinyl Recorder app lets you enjoy your beautiful physical collection with all the simplicity and convenience of your digital collection. The app is built from the same software as our award-winning Plato range, software that has been built over the course of four years and is sold across the world".

The app is currently only available on Android though you can sign up on the Convert Technologies website for notification of when the iOS version will be available.

"So how does it work? The Convert team told us more: "Put the needle on your record, tap the red dot, and let the app take care of everything else. After a few seconds, our



integrated Gracenote look-up service will identify the song from an online database. Then, this information, including artist name, song title, album title, album artwork, and genre tags, will be added to the song's file. You don't need to worry about editing anything. Your music will be recorded as 16-bit 48k FLAC files. Once Vinyl Recorder has finished converting your music, you'll be able to listen back to it. The songs will be available in both the app's music library, and the library on your phone. You can take it with you wherever you go. You can listen to the digital version of your vinyl collection in your car, in the gym, or at work – all places you probably shouldn't be taking your turntable".

Vinyl Recorder is free to download from the Google Play store. You'll need a USB turntable to play your record on, and an adapter cable to connect the turntable to your phone. To check the sound quality, you get a 30 second clip of each song for free. Pay for your songs via in-app credits, from less than 12p per song. Convert say: "It's cheaper than buying a second copy of your music in a digital format".

# Merging Technologies Announce Distribution Changes

Merging Technologies, manufacturers of Merging+NADAC, Merging+PLAYER and the forthcoming Merging+POWER has announced that Edison Production Company will take over the distribution and support activities for these products in Germany.

The move from Digital Audio Service in Hamburg to Edison is entirely amicable and Thomas Römann from DAS expressed the explicit wish to again concentrate exclusively on Merging Technologies professional products. Edison Production Company BV in Holland has been Merging's high-end distributor in the Benelux since the introduction of the Merging+NADAC, has established a dealer network and has a reputation for technical and marketing support.

Edison's CEO, Bert van der Wolf, is a highly regarded tonmeister who was one of the main presenters in the 'Musik grenzenlos' demonstration room at the recent High End Munich show.

Ensuring that the handover is as smooth as possible, Digital Audio Service will continue as a dealer for the Merging+ product range, which will be very helpful during the initial period of Edison getting to know the market and the partners operating in the territory. Edison will be participating in two major events in the autumn. First will be at the X-fi show in Veldhoven (NL) on the weekend of September 30th where there will be 5.1 demonstrations in collaboration with daudio and their speaker systems. Then during the weekend of October 21st there will a repeat of the performance of the Munich High End presentation at the Deutsche Hifi Tage in Darmstadt, Germany. These will also be 5.1 demonstrations in collaboration with ME Geithain speakers, our partners in Munich.

Bert van der Wolf will be doing something else rather unique in early August. He will take a Merging+NADAC and the prototype Merging+POWER to a vinyl disc cutting session, where it will be used as the DXD master source directly into the Direct Metal Cutting machine at the record plant. The

recording was made on Merging's Pyramix Digital Audio Workstation and features Bach's Goldberg Variations in String trio arrangement played by Camerata RCO, players from the Concertgebouw Orchestra Amsterdam. This was recorded by Bert last year.

Commenting on the changes in German distribution, Merging's Sales and Marketing Manager, Chris Hollebone, offered this perspective; "Bert van der Wolf is uniquely capable of representing the Merging+ product range. He has tremendous experience in how to present premium products to discerning audiophiles, plus he has been making extremely high-quality recordings for many years. He has unparalleled experience in surround sound recording and reproduction and one of the best listening facilities in the world. He has been helping Merging to keep at the pinnacle of audio quality for many years and we are convinced that German dealers and customers will benefit from his knowledge and passion."





## Pioneer and Onkyo Roll Out DTS Play-Fi

Pioneer & Onkyo Europe GmbH activates DTS Play-Fi wireless multi-room audio technology on its MRX-5, and MRX-3 Wireless Speaker with a firmware update available now. An update for select 2017-model Pioneer products, as well as 2016-model components listed below, is due by the end of September.

DTS Play-Fi technology integrates with a variety of smartphones, and tablets, and allows listeners to wirelessly stream music over the home Wi-Fi network to an unlimited number of DTS Play-Fi-compatible speakers.

The Pioneer Music Control application features an interface for simple control of streaming music from an iPad, iPhone, iPod touch, Android device, and offers access to popular streaming services. DTS Play-Fi can also locate, display, and stream music stored on media server or selected cloud-based services, as well as music stored on the device. The Onkyo Music Control app featuring DTS Play-Fi allows listeners to wirelessly stream CD-quality music from a wide variety of smartphones, and tablets over Wi-Fi to any number of DTS Play-Fi-compatible speakers, amplifiers, and other products throughout the home.

DTS Play-Fi synchronises playback of a single source on multiple speakers in rooms around the home without need of a bridging device, and can stream different sources to different speakers simultaneously from the same mobile device. The technology also supports individual music streams to separate speakers from unique devices at the same time.

Firmware updates for network-enabled 2017-model Pioneer AVRs, entertainment systems, and audio components, together with SC-LX901, SC-LX801, SC-LX701, VSX-S520D, and VSX-S520 network AV receiver, SX-S30DAB network stereo receiver, NC-50DAB, and XC-HM86D network CD receiver, N-70AE, and N-50AE network audio player, FS-W50, and FS-W40 free style sound system, X-HM86D, X-HM76D, and X-HM76 network CD receiver system are due sequentially by end of September.

The DTS Play-Fi firmware update is available now for the Onkyo LS7200 Network

Surround Sound Bar System and Onkyo NCP-302 Wireless Network Speaker. Firmware updates for network-enabled 2017-model Onkyo A/V receivers, home entertainment systems, and hifi components, together with PR-RZ5100 Network A/V Controller, TX-RZ1100, and TX-RZ3100 Network A/V Receiver, are due serially by end of September.



## ATI Acquires Datasat Digital Entertainment

ATI, a designer and manufacturer of audio amplifiers and processing products, has announced the acquisition of Datasat Digital Entertainment (DDE). Now, Datasat high-end audio processing and audio amplification products will be added to ATI's lineup to provide consumers, professional cinemas, installers and audio designers with more products for today's advanced audio and cinema applications.

"Datasat Digital Entertainment (DDE) products are well known and considered by many to be one of the leading audio processing technologies in the world," states Morris Kessler, owner and chief designer at ATI. "The addition of Datasat and their renowned software engineering to our extensive hardware capability and existing lines including ATI, Theta Digital and BGW will provide consumers and professional exhibitors all over the world with the highest quality audio in feature-rich

and flexible configurations for any audio application."

"We are pleased to see Datasat joining the ATI family," says Robert McKinley, EVP of Operations at Datasat Digital Entertainment. "There's a great deal of synergy between the companies already but the combined sales, engineering and operations teams will now work hand in hand to provide continuity with our current product offering while simultaneously moving exciting new initiatives forward to better serve and support the marketplace. This is a great opportunity for anyone that values the highest quality, most reliable audio products available."

Datasat products will continue to be sold under the Datasat Digital Entertainment brand and manufactured by ATI in its plant in Montebello, California, USA as well as its existing manufacturer in Moorpark, California.

In September, ATI and Datasat will demonstrate the combined brands during demonstrations around the CEDIA 2017 show floor and in booths that will showcase each brand's offerings and the way technology professionals can integrate them into their client's systems. ATI, Theta, BGW and Datasat can be found in booth #3335. Datasat products will also be used to drive demonstrations by PMC at Sound Room 13, RBH at Sound Room 3 and at the Dynaudio suite.



## Experience The PMC Cor Integrated Amplifier At The Indulgence Show

The PMC room at Audio London, part of The Indulgence Show, will be the first venue in the UK where audiophiles can experience the "cor", the company's new consumer integrated amplifier.

We first encountered the cor at High End Munich 2017, where it made its debut. PMC told us "The cor integrated is an amplifier that brings PMC's holistic design philosophy to high-end electronics, for pure analogue music reproduction. It adds no sonic character of its own to the music, by following exactly the same design ethos for high resolution playback as used in the creation of all PMC loudspeakers, namely musicality, transparency and neutrality, where nothing is added and nothing is taken away".

Designed and built by PMC in the UK, the cor – the dictionary definition of which is: (anatomy) heart; (figuratively) soul, mind – is an integrated amplifier that works entirely in the analogue domain. Every element of a hand built cor has been developed "with purity of sound and musicality at the top of the criteria list and it is unashamedly an analogue amplifier for the purist".

All the components were specified after extensive listening tests, including the volume control, the tone and balance faders, which are all motorised using technology from professional mixing consoles, and are remote controllable. The cor also features a true audiophile Class A/B headphone amplifier.

Don't miss the cor integrated in room D2, "Mouton Cadet", on the second floor, at Audio London, part of The Indulgence Show, from 29th September – 1st October. Novotel London West, Hammersmith.



## Kii Audio At The Indulgence Show 2017



Chris Reichardt, CEO of German manufacturer of the Kii Three active loudspeakers, will be demonstrating them at The Indulgence Show in London (29th Sept – 1st Oct) in room D1 – St Julien on the second floor.

Each speaker has six 250 watt amplifiers, one for each loudspeaker driver. Four 6.5" woofers, a 5" midrange and a 1" tweeter all sit with the amplifiers and DACs in a compact enclosure which can be placed on a stand or bookshelf. Both analogue and digital inputs are available.

The speakers are available in graphite satin or gloss white as standard or in a range of custom RAL colours to your own individual choice priced from £10.495 pair. They will be demonstrated on specially designed Quadraspire speaker stands based on their X-Ref range.



## Pre-Season Sale Now On!



# Heed Presents Its Thesis On Music At The Indulgence

Heed Audio's thesis range of electronics will make its London debut at The Indulgence Show. The four-strong line up of aesthetically minimalist products continues the Heed tradition of "leaving the technical conformity behind and concentrating on the reproduction of music; to stir the emotions of listeners who are more interested in the performance than the specifications".

The thesis preamplifier, power supply, phono preamp and power amplifiers have been designed to be the "superclass" of Heed products, building on the company's Obelisk range. Heed told us: "The unconventional and almost heretical approach to circuit design taken by the engineers is far from the accepted norm, in the pursuit of a life-like sonic presentation to render the music's full complexity, atmosphere and tension".

"Thesis, for all its unconventional design, is no bare-bones purist creation in a home made box. It is a range of cutting edge 21st century products, using only the highest quality components and very carefully designed circuitry installed into precision engineered, "retro-futuristic", cases of a quality normally only found in far costlier high-end audio".

The range is centred around the thesis  $\alpha$  (alpha) preamplifier, (Pictured) which features two analogue and four digital inputs including S/PDIF, TOSLINK, BNC and USB. Building on the Heed DAC and USB 2.0 Audio modules used in the company's Obelisk DA digital to analogue converter, the digital section is modular in design to allow future upgrades. The twin capacitor-coupled output stage allows the use of long interconnect cables for connection to two sets of power amplifiers.

The thesis  $\phi$  (phi) is a phono preamplifier (Pictured) for use with turntables requiring very low noise characteristics, dynamic range, headroom and a smooth frequency response. The thesis  $\phi$  is a twin circuit design, independently catering for both MM and MC cartridges. Two turntables may be connected simultaneously and cartridge matching is user customisable.

The twin power supply thesis  $\pi$  (pi) can feed the thesis  $\alpha$  preamp and thesis  $\phi$  phono stage simultaneously. It features independent sections, each with dual regulated power supply rails and components custom made by Airlink and Mundorf to Heed's specifications.

The muscle comes from the thesis  $\omega$  (omega) monobloc power amplifier. This is an AC-coupled device that Heed say drives loudspeakers in a similar way to valve power amplifiers. Although its topology is similar in some ways to a valve design, the thesis  $\omega$  is firmly solid state. The power supply delivers up to 160W continuous power.

UK distributor, Connected Distribution will be demonstrating thesis in the Pouilly Suite, Mezzanine Floor, at the Novotel London West from 29th September – 1st October.



## Pre-Season Sale Now On!

## Monitor Audio 6th Generation Silver Series UK Debut At The Indulgence Showh

The Indulgence Show 2017 marks the UK debut of the Silver Series (6th Generation) from Monitor Audio in D15 Libourne on the 2nd floor.

Monitor told us: "Introducing ground-breaking design throughout, this new series has been developed to provide a wider appeal to audiophiles and home cinema enthusiasts, delivering a characteristic 'family sound' while elevating performance to a bigger, more dynamic new level as the range increases in size from Silver 50 to Silver 500".

Two new centre speakers enable a range of home theatre systems to be assembled, providing greater flexibility. The slim Silver 50 and Silver 200 are more compact models. They can be combined with the complementary compact Silver C150 centre speaker to form a compact multi-channel system. The larger Silver C350 centre now provides the ability to create a "no compromise home theatre system", based around the Silver 100, Silver 300 or Silver 500 models.

The trickle-down technology from Platinum and DCF filter (driver build-ring) improves the Silver Series' drivers high-frequency. The completely new drivers and tweeter are optimised to deliver lower distortion. The bass is better damped and this is particularly notable on the Silver 50 and Silver 200, which can be situated close to a wall.

Using the latest research from the National Physical Laboratory, Monitor Audio has used a scientific approach to deliver its cabinet-bracing design coupled with precision laser



measurement equipment to help identify resonance nodes in cabinets, allowing the manufacturer to position internal bracing precisely.

The higher impedance and optimised crossover networks deliver models that are all 8 ohms. The new 25mm C-CAM (Ceramic-Coated Aluminium/Magnesium) featuring vented Neo magnet system is optimised for lower distortion. Diaphragm rigidity and lower distortion are also achieved through the RST Cone profile, while the cast polymer driver chassis design improves the models' rigidity and damping characteristics. HiVe II port technology, located on the back of the cabinets to provide a clean look from the front, improves the transient response and gives smoother airflow. The crossovers use bespoke polypropylene film capacitors, air-core and low-loss laminated steel core inductors.

The new Silver Series (6th Generation) is available in selected wood veneers: Black Oak, Walnut, Rosenut and Natural Oak, and in high gloss Black lacquer and Satin White finishes.

## Aequo Audio Stilla Debut At Indulgence 2017

The new floorstanding Aequo Audio Stilla will be launched at The Indulgence Show in London later this month.

Surrey based UK distribution company, Ultimate Fidelity have been appointed as sole UK distributors for the Dutch loudspeaker brand Aequo Audio and will be showing them to the public for the first time at Indulgence.

Stilla is the not so baby brother of Aequo's Ensis reviewed which Hifi Pig reviewed earlier this year. Both speakers are available in range of exclusive and luxury finishes with active and hybrid technology.



## Pre-Season Sale Now On!



## Vertere And FM Acoustics £500,000 System At Indulgence 2017

British manufacturer of turntables, tonearms and cables, Vertere Acoustics, has recently been appointed distributor of Switzerland's FM Acoustics. We are very much looking forward to hearing the system put together by the like-minded leaders of these brands, Vertere's Touraj Moghaddam and FM Acoustic's Manuel Huber, at The Indulgence Show 2017.



The demonstrations are taking place in the Alsace Suite, Mezzanine Floor, of the Novotel London West. It's an opportunity to experience a £500,000 hifi from Vertere Acoustics and FM Acoustics, with a system that comprises, from Vertere: the RG-1 Reference Motor Drive turntable, in its new special finish to complement FM Acoustics products; the Vertere Reference tonearm; Pulse-HB Connecting Cable System and the all new HB Mains Distribution Block. And from FM Acoustics: for the first time in the UK, the FM Inspiration XS-III Loudspeakers; the FM 123 Phono Linearizer; FM Preamplifiers and FM 108 Mono Power Amplifiers.

Excited at the prospect of presenting this collaborative debut at The Indulgence Show, organiser Vernon Hamblin said, "FM Acoustics is one of those brands that true audiophiles aspire to, in the same way that a wine connoisseur would a Chateau Margaux 1787. For most it is largely unattainable, but when made available to be sampled it's an opportunity that few would pass up – like getting the chance to drive a Bugatti Veyron

at a track day. Or, for dedicated followers of fashion, getting a special outfit designed by Valentino Garavani".

"It's a similar story with the Vertere reference turntable, being extremely highly respected and revered, but beyond the reach of many hifi enthusiasts." He continued, "The marriage of these two brands at The Indulgence Show promises to be something very special. We are also particularly delighted that both Touraj Moghaddam and Manuel Huber, who hasn't visited a UK hifi event for over 20 years, will be in attendance throughout the weekend to present the ultimate in hifi systems to our visitors."

## Headroom At London Indulgence

## Show 2017 with headphones for all.

The UK's biggest headphone experience, headroom@Indulgence, returns to the capital this autumn showcasing the latest trends in portable audio technology plus the widest range of demonstrable headphones in the UK.

The world's leading portable audio tech companies, including Sony, Pioneer, Astell & Kern, Focal and Chord Electronics, are descending on the capital this autumn as headroom at Indulgence opens its doors from Friday the 29th of September to Sunday the 1st of October at London's Novotel London West, Hammersmith.

headroom@Indulgence will reveal 2017's best new audio tech in time for the festive season. From beginners to audiophiles and commuters to gamers, headroom@Indulgence is positioned to demonstrate that there's more to music with great headphones. Tickets cost just £15 and provide full access to the Indulgence Show and its wider exhibits.



## Pre-Season Sale Now On!

## PMC With Guitar Tutor Richard Deyn At Indulgence 2017

PMC has teamed up with renowned guitar tutor, Richard Deyn, to enable The Indulgence Show visitors, with no guitar playing experience, to learn how to confidently play a riff, record it and keep the results, giving them an insight into how to make music.

Located in the Chablis Suite on the ground floor of the show, PMC's Guitar Recording Studio, will feature the talents of Richard Deyn, the current education consultant to Gibson Guitars UK and founder of the Ipswich Guitar School.

Richard will be helping complete beginners, who have never picked up a guitar before, to learn a rock or blues riff that they can play to a backing track and record using the latest computer based recording software. Each visitor will be emailed a copy of the file after the event as a memento of their visit to The Indulgence Show. More experienced guitarists will also be able to visit Richard and receive professional advice to help them improve

their playing techniques.

Bringing this fun opportunity to the show, Keith Tonge, PMC's creative director says, "PMC loudspeakers are used at many of the world's leading recording studios, helping artists such as Richard gain a real insight into the music they are recording, underlining our role as the undisputed 'music makers' among hifi manufacturers." He continues, "And, by working with our many contacts in

the recording world, we regularly help music lovers learn how their favourite artist's work is produced. It is a pleasure therefore to be able to continue this by facilitating Richard's presence at the show, to promote music making and deliver such a great experience to the visitors"

PMC loudspeakers can be experienced in the Mouton Cadet Suite on the 2nd Floor of The Indulgence Show.



### Pre-Season Sale Now On!



# Pylon Diamond Monitor Loudspeakers

By Dominic Marsh

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Poland is getting a bit of a reputation in the Hifi world for producing products at great prices. Here Dominic Marsh checks out the Pylon Diamond Monitor loudspeakers costing €899.75 to €999.75.

# PYLON DIAMOND MONITOR LOUDSPEAKERS



Here is an interesting thought; I have now reviewed more speakers for Hifi Pig that have been sourced from Poland than from any other country, which shows just how active the hifi industry is in that particular neck of the woods. It would also be fair to say that they have all been very good value for money and surprisingly good performers too.

This leads me on to introducing the Diamond Monitor from Pylon Audio, once again company of Polish origin.

## Construction

The first impression you get of the Diamond Monitor is its unusual cabinet design. Sloping slightly backwards, they are

mounted on their matching, and unusually open stands. The purpose of this is two-fold; firstly it makes for a more rigid structure, secondly it reduces the amount of internal reflecting surfaces by a half and I am none too sure if there is a third purpose, which is for time aligning the tweeter to the bass driver. Doing the knuckle test on top of the cabinets yields a dead knock with no ringing or hollowness. The speakers are not fixed to the stands but simply perched on them and I used them for a while as thus supplied, until I brushed up against one of them and dislodged it slightly. A small pad of BluTak in each corner made them more secure. Enclosure volume is around 16 litres, reflex ported with rear exit exhaust port. Cabinet walls are 19mm thick, braced and strengthened at critical points, lined with

bituminous mats and real sheep wool fleece damping. The bass driver is a modified SEAS CA18RLY, while the tweeter is a selected Scanspeak D2010/851300 unit. Cabinet finishes are available in a decent range, from natural wood veneers, some of which are hand black waxed to enhance the grain figuration, plus a palette of over 100 solid RAL colours to choose from, which is then top coat lacquered.

The stands are available in any colour you like, provided it is black as standard, to which 6mm carpet spikes can be fitted if required and grilles with magnetic attachment are supplied, which have a reassuringly strong grip. The review sample finish was black waxed Oak with black stands.

Prices range from 899.75 Euros for black waxed veneer to 999.75 Euros for lacquered finish cabinets.

## Sound Quality

Immediately before receiving the Diamond Monitors I had 3 pairs of speakers submitted for review, all of which had polite, subtle and rather refined bass outputs, so it came as a pleasant surprise when these speakers were fired up there was ample and bountiful bass emanating from them. Bring it on. I was quite taken aback just how powerful they sounded and at long last I was listening to a pair of speakers that were forthright and direct in the way they played music, which is exactly my kind of speaker. I was instantly in love and that was even before they had any running hours on them, so the best was yet to come. Treble though had a slight steely edge to it, especially at high volumes and as time has moved on and after some running hours had elapsed that trait has vanished, although it is right on the tightrope boundary of being accurate and maybe just a tad uncouth at high volumes, depending on source material, as poor recordings are revealed for exactly what they are and not lightly tolerated. These speakers do merit the epithet "Monitor" for that reason.

They are very expressive, full of tonal colours, textures and fine details, pumped well out into the room, which of course may not suit every kind of listener. Bass had a wonderful taut solidity with no boom at all, plus a deep growl and thump to it, manifested well in kick drum beats which smacked you squarely in the solar plexus with the right kind of recording, the Pylon Diamond Monitors even showed up my big floor standing resident speakers somewhat with their bass output and fast dynamics. Of course there is far more to a speaker than just spectacular amounts of bass, so the



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remainder of the audible spectrum must be in perfect balance and the Pylon Diamond Monitor doesn't disappoint in that respect. Leaving aside for the moment that bad recordings and the Pylon tweeter don't gel well together (don't play them then is the answer!), when they are fed with a good clean signal the treble has immense clarity and sweetness, plus they have the ability to pick out presence and ambience cues that some other speakers can blur over and fog up to the point of being virtually inaudible by comparison. This also makes imaging and instrument placement three dimensional in nature and again this isn't feeble or vague either, with a defining solidity. They are not power hungry speakers either, as I had excellent results with a 25 watts per channel Clones Audio 25i amplifier and this pairing let me say was very sweet and highly musical, bass was not curtailed at all given the Clones amplifier's modest power rating.

Naturally, I had to play Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" album to see how the Pylon Diamond Monitors stacked up to my benchmark tests for overall sound quality. This album was recorded live in various venues around Europe during one of Fink's many tours and each track sounds slightly different as a result, both in venue ambience and in the way audiences react to the band's performances.

The audience was reproduced very accurately with no 'shooshing' sounds, each person was singled out as individuals and very realistic. The ambience of each venue was recreated accurately and full of fine details that required no effort at all to hear. Bass drum had a good solid thud with every beat and you could easily tell that a hard faced beater was being used, plus the cymbals had a true crisp metallic 'ting' so you were in no doubt whatsoever a wooden stick was hitting metal with differing energy... beautifully rendered. The track "Sort of Revolution" has a pounding kick drum, plus some powerful floor tom strikes that really do make my listening room vibrate and the bass guitar had a deep throaty growl which sent shivers down my spine. I love bass that powerful but it must and I mean MUST be under perfect control, which the Pylon Diamond Monitors managed with ease. The SEAS bass driver that Pylon are using is a real star for sure.

Another live album now in the shape of Fleetwood Mac's "The Dance" begins with Mick Fleetwood stomping his right foot down on the kick drum which sorts out the men from the boys when it comes to bass drivers and the Pylon Diamond Monitor didn't fall short here either. The entire album was a

delight to listen to and I had no concerns that the Pylons weren't delivering the sound I was expecting to hear. If you are a Fleetwood Mac fan then this is an essential album for your collection with 17 tracks of well recorded classic Fleetwood Mac to revel and immersed in.

I then moved on to my favourite torture tracks in the shape of Porcupine Tree's "Deadwing" album. The title track on this particular album either sounds raw and unvarnished, or it will sound smoothed out and rolled off, depending upon how revealing a system is, speakers in particular. With the Pylon speakers that rawness was not quite full on and unrelenting as it sometimes is, whereas lesser speakers are a lot more forgiving. Having said that, there is a bass guitar riff around 6 minutes 40 seconds into the track where I would expect to hear a long low bass note flowing outwards from the speakers rather than just emerge from the cabinet and the Pylons gave a superb deep flowing rendition of that bass note, growling, resonant and almost snaking it's way across the carpet towards you and in that respect the Pylon Diamond Monitor gave just about the best I have heard it performed from any stand mount speaker.

Over a period of some weeks I had almost gone through my entire CD collection and each one was a revelation at how much satisfying music is stored on those little silver discs. By now you might have gathered that these speakers had impressed me considerably and so my thoughts turned to a nomination for an Outstanding Product award. However, as much as they had impressed me personally when coupled up to my hifi system and of course in my own listening room too, how would they fare when another reviewer's critical ear is exposed to them, connected to another completely different system and a totally different listening room? So I took the Pylon speakers over to fellow reviewer Dan Worth for his verdict on them.

I knew beforehand of course that Dan has a completely different system to mine and a completely different listening room layout as well, so I expected there to be a different sound response with the Pylon speakers. My room is fairly small, very well furnished (as in full of clutter and hifi related odds and ends) with wooden walls and floor, thick carpets and plenty of furniture that breaks up standing waves. Dan's listening room is more sparsely furnished with a leather sofa, laminate flooring with a large rug and solid concrete block walls. So from the off, the Pylon speakers must work well in either listening room scenario to be even

# PYLON DIAMOND MONITOR LOUDSPEAKERS

nominated for Hifi Pig's Outstanding Product award.

I could tell immediately though that Dan was within moments listening to the Pylons and was directly comparing them to the ATC SCM 19's we both reviewed back in July 2015. Given that the ATC speakers are twice the price of the Pylons, that was indeed flattering and by the same token also an unfair contest. I could easily understand why Dan was so minded because of the basic qualities of the Pylons, with their dynamic presentation approaching that of the ATCs, albeit it with certain differences. For Dan it was the treble that just didn't have that extra tiny fraction more sophistication compared to the ATCs, yet we agreed the bass performance of the Pylons exceeded the ATCs by hitting the lower registers the ATCs didn't even go near. In an ideal world then the bass performance of the Pylons coupled with the treble of the ATCs would be a truly knockout speaker, so we came to the conclusion that the Pylons had most unfortunately only just fallen short of that coveted Hifi Pig Outstanding Product award. This actually set a precedent between Dan and myself in that we had different views on the same product and one of us has disagreed it was 'Outstanding', so it was a prime test of Hifi Pig's policy of having two independent reviews of a product from two different reviewers for the Outstanding Product award to be given.

## Conclusion

Irrespective of what Dan's verdict was regarding the Pylon Diamond Monitor, my own verdict is that for under a £1,000.00 they are a genuine hifi bargain, especially so when they gave the ATC SCM 19's which Dan and I compared them to, a run for their money at less than half the price. I would say that the tiny loss of refinement at the extreme treble that Dan pointed out, should not be a cause for concern for the average listener, as it didn't bother me at all during any of my listening sessions and Porcupine Tree's Deadwing album would have let me know for sure if there was any issues in that area.

So, to summarise then, this is an affordable awesomely good sounding speaker that I am more than positive will be putting as big a smile on many owner's faces as it has mine throughout my time with them. They fit in well with most room decors and the dedicated stand included in the price makes it even more of a hifi bargain.

I therefore give these speakers my wholehearted endorsement and my Highly (Very Highly) Recommended award without any hesitation.

## AT A GLANCE

**Build Quality:** Very well put together and the leaned back stance I found attractive.

**Sound Quality:** When direct and relevant comparisons are being made with a speaker more than twice the price and reputation, it says it all really.

**Value For Money:** I cannot think of anything that might suggest they were not good value for money.

### Pros:

Attractive shape, quality construction, dedicated stands and excellent sound. Price.

**Cons:** Cannot think of any cons at all. That's why I am buying a pair!

**Price:** €899.75 for black waxed veneer to €999.75 for lacquered finish cabinets.

Dominic Marsh





# Melodika BL40 Mk2 Loudspeakers

By Dominic Marsh

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629 Euros for a nicely finished three way floorstanding pair of loudspeakers seems a very attractive proposition. Dominic Marsh finds out if the Melodika BL40 Mk2 Loudspeakers from Poland can cut the mustard.

# MELODIKA BL40 MK2 LOUDSPEAKERS

This is yet another loudspeaker that originates from Poland and it is one in quite a long list of components that have been sourced from that country to be reviewed by Hifi Pig. I recall reviewing a set of Melodika Purple Rain speaker cables some time ago and they impressed me with their quality and pricing, so I was no stranger to their products. Watch out world, the Polish hifi industry are becoming a force to be reckoned with!

Introducing then the Melodika BL 40 Mark 2 loudspeaker.

## Construction

The review sample was cloaked in a beautiful high gloss black coat which was very pleasant to look at and not really expected as standard at this price point. Measuring 97cm high by 23.5cm wide by 34.6cm deep and weighing 19kg each they are not an imposing speaker by any means so should not dominate their surroundings in an average listening room.

They are a two and a half way reflex ported speaker with the port situated at the rear of the cabinet. Driver array consists of 1 x 25mm Black Diamond silk dome tweeter and 2 x 160mm woven fibreglass hybrid mid/bass units. Grilles are supplied which are affixed by plastic pegs and wooden plinths with carpet piercing spikes are also included in the package. Biwire speaker terminals with bridging plates are also fitted as standard.

## Sound Quality

These speakers were sent to me from another Hifi Pig reviewer who simply could not get them to sound right in their system and listening room. When they arrived with me, they definitely sounded "off song" and I quickly came to the realisation that all they needed was some running hours to loosen up. Bear in mind that I already had 2 pairs of speakers at the time that were in their running in periods and I really didn't have the time or resources to afford the

same luxury to the Melodika speakers, so I fast tracked them a bit with a good fistful of volume control and thick blankets over the speakers to hurry matters along. 12 hours later they came out from under the blankets like a freshly emerged butterfly and ready to take to the wing. Those 12 hours of that treatment paid real dividends in this instance and as any hifi reviewer will tell you it is a major drawbacks having to run in virtually everything that is sent to them before they can even begin any evaluations. I suppose we all have a cross to bear in one form or another.

The transformation was huge and what were uneven lumpy responses coming from the

Given that I was evaluating a pair of floorstanders costing a mere 629 Euros, what surprised me the most was I wasn't giving these speakers any latitude at all to reflect that price because I didn't need to.





# MELODIKA BL40 MK2 LOUDSPEAKERS

speakers now sounded a lot sweeter and far more coherent, so the listening tests began. Given that I was evaluating a pair of floorstanders costing a mere 629 Euros, what surprised me the most was I wasn't giving these speakers any latitude at all to reflect that price because I didn't need to.

The sound was very even from top treble to bottom bass and no part of the audible spectrum was either curtailed or emphasised. They apparently went down to a very respectable 39Hz and up to 20 KHz which is not as high as some speaker manufacturers claim, but none of us have ultrasonic hearing abilities anyway. On to some music now to hear what the Melodika BL40 Mk2's are made of.

First into the CD drawer was my good old stalwart in the shape of Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" album, which if you don't have it in your collection, you should do, even just to relate to what I type in my reviews. Fink's vocals are difficult to follow as his diction isn't the best you might hear, but having said that, the musicians in the band are pretty well captured, particularly so the drums, plus of course the ambience and audience are well recorded too. It's not until you have played this album a good few times that you 'get' what it is all about and why I use it for evaluations.

The first thing I listen for is the initial cymbal strikes the drummer makes during the intro bars. A crisp metallic "ting" from that cymbal is de rigueur and it must sound utterly realistic with no ringing except for the harmonics and decay of the cymbal itself. Kick drum follows shortly afterwards and it must be propulsive, have a good solid punch to it and be able to hear the beater striking the drum skin. Throughout the entire album you should notice the different ambiances of the various venues that are performed in during Fink's tour. My favourite track on the album is "Sort Of Revolution" in which Fink manages to get the audience to clap along and that really is infectious. When a system really has mastery and control over this track I cannot help myself and I also get enthusiastically clapping along too. Then the medication wears off . . .

I was truly surprised then when the Melodika speakers actually sailed through this entire album without stress or struggle and I heard what I expected to hear throughout. Good result.

Jeff Buckley's "Grace" album certainly has some obstacles to overcome with any system, with some well recorded bass and fine details, a good measure of brash

uncouthness thrown in, plus of course Jeff Buckley's voice which in itself is not easy to reproduce accurately without verging on some fragility in places. Play this album loud and its faults are brutally exposed and if you start to wince then something is amiss, be that the system, the room, or indeed an individual's hearing acuity. Or maybe it's just me it affects this way, because I do have a few moments where I reach for the volume control, I must confess. With regards to evaluating equipment it all works in reverse, because a system with a rolled off top end or congested midband doesn't really fully reveal the nasty elements in the recording. Some folks find that a blessing in disguise. The Melodika BL40's didn't break up or wilt during this album, so that tells me there is some smoothness in the overall design.

I played some orchestral, acoustic instrumentals, some electronica, solo female and male vocals, plus the whole of La Boheme which is very rare for me, but I wanted to discover how these speakers coped with different genres of music and I could find no criticisms in that respect. One tiny niggle I did have was the grilles which started to rattle on one of the speakers after being removed only a couple of times, because that seemed to affect the plastic holding pegs.

## Conclusion

For a loudspeaker that costs some 629.00 Euros, which comes supplied in a superb high gloss black finish as standard, has a plinth and substantial spikes also supplied and with 3 high quality drivers per cabinet, you would expect there to be some sort of catch or a set of compromises with the Melodika BL40 Mk2 speakers, wouldn't you? Not so, as this speaker sounds very good indeed and I suppose the question to be asked is would I buy and own a pair myself? Yes I would. It's performance outstrips virtually all of the competition that I am aware of in this price bracket so they truly are busting good value and although I'm sure AV fans will love them to bits in a surround system, they are just as much at home in a good quality stereo hifi system. In fact, the better the driving and

source components are, the better they sound.

I give the Melodika BL40 Mk 2 loudspeakers my Highly Recommended award without any hesitation.

## AT A GLANCE

**Build Quality:** High gloss black as standard? No kidding and it is a well designed and very well built speaker.

**Sound Quality:** They are not ruthlessly revealing but see that as part of their finer points. Surprisingly good bass, treble and midband should please many.

**Value For Money:** It is shocking how Melodika manage to make such a good speaker at such a low price. Form an orderly stampede people before Melodika change their minds!

### Pros:

Truly affordable and a great all round performer. Fit and finish is superb.

### Cons:

At 629.00 Euros a pair? What's not to like?

**Price:** 629.00 Euros

Dominic Marsh





# Townshend Allegri+ Passive Preamplifier

By Dan Worth & Dominic Marsh

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In this world exclusive review Dan Worth and Dominic Marsh take a listen to the new Allegri+ passive preamplifier using autoformers from Townshend Audio and costing £2400.



# TOWNSHEND ALLEGRI+ PASSIVE PREAMPLIFIER

Unless you have been living on the far side of the moon that rarely sees the light of day, then Max Townshend will be a name that you associate with quality and extremely well thought out products, which perform excellently and are solidly engineered.

Townshend's Allegri+ the successor to the popular Allegri has just been announced to be hitting the market and I've been lucky enough to get one of the very first units to leave the factory.

After the huge success of the Allegri Passive Autotransformer Preamplifier, the boffins at Townshend Audio Engineering, under the guidance of one of the industries true thinkers – Max Townshend, has created the latest and improved version of the Allegri Family. I'm sure many would agree with me that it was a real class act, offering a natural and dynamic presentation with infectious agility and speed. So what does the + version offer in terms of superior sound quality and build over it's lower priced predecessor?

## Fit and Finish

The Allegri+ comes in a very similar jacket to the Allegri, being only a centimetre or two larger all around and weighing in at a slightly heavier 2kgs against the previous units 1.5kgs, quite unnoticeable unless the two are side to side. The immediate visual difference being a 3.5mm stereo input on the front panel under the mute switch. Volume and input selector switches look the same along with the overall layout and dimensions. So not much going on visuals alone.

The Autotransformers are wound using Townshend's very own Fractal wire and coated in ultra thin Mu foil to maintain transparency and dynamics. Being a transformer design – as I have explained previously – will in short (when designed

correctly) ensure that the amplifier will be matched perfectly with the source component, leading to better dynamics, transparency and a practically silent noise floor.

I must admit, the Allegri+ doesn't leap out of the box and do a sexy dance for its new owner but it takes but a few mere moments for one to take a moment and appreciate the quality of the engineering. The Allegri+ is far from ugly and Max should be offended if anyone was to call it industrial looking. Personally I like the styling, I love the footprint and admire the precision in its build. Under the hood there are a few other tweaks, Max will only say that "inside are some critical upgrades to isolation, chassis and metallurgy, which in combination take the Allegri+ to a new level of musical performance."

## Installation

Installing the Allegri+ was an absolute breeze in comparison to many components due to its size and connectivity, usually I'm bending into all sorts of shapes tracking cables and running extra power leads etc, so being able to place the 1/3 sized component in between amps on my top shelf and easily connect the couple of Analogue cables without needing to empty shelves etc was a blessing, especially as it arrived one Friday morning while Dominic and I were having a little listening session before we went out for a bite and a beer.

## The Sound

We soon had the Allegri+ plumbed in for a quick listen before we went out the door and both sat there happily listening to a range of different music for over an hour before we went out a little later than expected. We chatted about our initial thoughts in the car. I

**The honesty of the Allegri+ is humbling, even for the R-T1. The R-T1 does many magnificent things and side by side the R-T1 is hard to beat, but the characteristics of the Allegri+ give fond memories of why I loved the Allegri so much**



# TOWNSHEND ALLEGRI+ PASSIVE PREAMPLIFIER

was very impressed with the bandwidth and dynamics but felt that midrange was a little forward and a touch hard during the early stages of its running in period and Dominic was pretty much in agreement, with us both being pretty stunned at how good the Allegri+ sounded fresh out of the box.

I'm running the Allegri+ from my DiDiT 212SE DAC which is fed files from the Melco N1/a2, into a Gamut d200 mk3 power amp, which is a great match for my modified Ayon Ceramics. The Gamut has been the best combination amp with the Ayons I have heard to date and the Audio Music R-T1 Preamplifier which added some real beauty to the powerhouse that is the Gamut. However installing the Allegri+ in place of the R-T1 did two things, firstly it increased the precision of the extension of the top-end and secondly sucked out the noise floor like a vacuum.

The R-T1 is a phenomenal piece of equipment and takes some serious beating, but where its beautiful valve line stage adds character/colouration to the signature of the system, the Townshend doesn't...at all. The honesty of the Allegri+ is humbling, even for the R-T1. The R-T1 does many magnificent things and side by side the R-T1 is hard to beat, but the characteristics of the Allegri+ give fond memories of why I loved the Allegri so much.

The Allegri+ is one of the most effortless and honest sounds you will ever hear, with a top end that is as crystal clear as fine cut diamonds and has a bandwidth that stretches on for days. Play any of your favourite music and try and work out where all the added bass comes from. The common statement "it's like having no preamp" is BS if you ask me, I prefer the term transparent. A preamp has an awful lot of work to do in refining the input signal and in most cases manipulating it which colours it inevitably, while matching output impedances etc. In the case of the Allegri+ you are fully aware when it hits the shelf; things change, for the better, well, it depends what preamp you have now and how coloured you enjoy your music, but if like me all you want is the truest, purest rendition of the music in the most natural and effortless way possible then read on.

Temptations arise so quickly to start digging out albums you haven't listened to for so long once the Allegri+ is run in (over about three weeks). Gone is any forwardness allowing bandwidth extensions at both ends to gain more definition and inner details throughout the hugely wide and tall soundstage. I spent many a day listening intently to the Allegri+, I could say that I prefer the way some details are handled on



the R-T1 and arguments could be made about its infectious midrange but the Allegri+ just has this, how can I say it... soul power. It's like falling in love with the cute girl next door and telling Claudia Schiffer to get her toothbrush and assortment of fancy frillies and go away! Because what has replaced her is a big hearted, kind souled human being that doesn't need all the bells and whistles to be special in my eyes, she's ambitious, honest and intelligent. Now that may sound a bit soppy but I don't care. Emotionally the Allegri+ takes me to places where music makes sense. I like to be surprised and to be honest I didn't really hold out too much hope for the Allegri+ being this much better than the standard version, which doesn't do the job quite as well as the + but also has a big heart.

During my review period with the Allegri+ it was my birthday and after a good day out celebrating, some friends and family came back to mine for a night cap or two. My cousin is a huge music fan and has a modest system, which he has sounding very good. He hasn't been over for a session for a while and in that time I've got into Fink a fair bit, mainly the Live album 'Wheels Turn Beneath My Feet', as I'm sure most of you will be bored of me mentioning, it is a staple for me now and it plays to my love for good acoustic music.

With the Allegri+ in place I enjoyed a night of music that I haven't fallen so deep into for some time, appreciating the Allegri+ for its fine qualities I previously mentioned. During 'Sort Of Revolution' the floor tom hit sounded far more dynamic with more emphasis on the initial hit of the snare than the previous version, something that Dominic quibbles at

when I have the valves in also. The Allegri+ gave more slam and attention drawn when the drummer played this beat. Silences throughout the album really emphasised the emotional character of the performance well and allowing for decays to disappear into the darkness after their timbered fore-note.

Now that the forwardness of the midrange had disappeared through burn in, I found vocals to be earthly and almost eerie at times, standing proud and poised of the depth of soundstage that the Allegri+ added through its lack of background noise. The height and breadth of the soundstage makes sense to me. The overall picture was as broad as the bandwidth and all notes, cues, decays, vocals and acoustics seemed to have been graciously given the correct space, making many other preamps at this price sound a little congested and restrained. The art of a great passive is simple to plan out, but extremely difficult to implement when it comes to employing the finer details of construction.

I've also heard many other passives that seem to fall short of what their technology stipulates is theoretically possible and only a handful in my time have been pretty good to great. That's why I have never really championed a passive in the past in my system. Of course I went over to the Audio Music R-T1 which is an active hybrid (TVC with active valve line stage) we could say and that is a dream to own but it's been the real first time that I have really fallen in love with a TVC.

What makes the new Townshend Allegri+ great is that it seems to clarify the signal,



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puts one arm on its shoulder and just says calm down, relax...now go! The speed in which drum rolls especially come rolling towards the listening position is almost startling. Transients swing up and down around and round. Play Rachelle Farrell's 'Can I Explain' and give it some volume and the dynamics of her vocals are mind blowing at times, but what a good preamp will offer is an almost as astonishing dynamic natural tone to the accompanying piano and yes you guessed it, the Townshend really excelled here. The special awareness of the performance was almost as strong as the R-T1 costing a fair bit more and bettering many pres I've heard in and around its price bracket.

The R-T1 and Allegri+ amps sound different and the Allegri+ does do some things which are maybe kind of, I think, possibly a little better at times...but its main attribute is it just makes you fall in love with the music and if it doesn't your listening too hard to the equipment and not the music, and if you're not wanting the music to emotionally connect with, you get a couple satellites and a subwoofer!

A few more days had gone by and the dizziness from my birthday celebrations had subsided enough that I felt I could listen to some music again without needing paracetamol. It was a nice sunny day and I had been pottering about the house a bit and thought I'd put some tunes on. The mood I was in set me to play some Old Skool dance music, not really considering even having a

proper listen I ended up coming back into the room many times and at one stage, thinking "I wasn't playing it that loud was I?" Of course I had been steadily turning up the volume over the course of the afternoon. The system sounded great, a lot of people state very often that dance and its associated sub genres aren't music. Stuart and I talk about this a lot, there's a hell of a lot of work that goes into producing dance music, with multiples of layers and vocals, with any good system with attributes of great speed, timing and low noise floor, ensuring strong dynamics will nail it and produce some of the most complex soundstages you will ever hear from your Hifi. I had been listening to the subtleties and beautiful natural tones of acoustic music it's the Allegri+ so far but now it was time for some real energy and enthusiasm.

Here is where the differences I didn't want to talk about in comparison to the R-T1 played its vicious little hand. The sheer scale of bandwidth alone once I paid some real attention to the music and parked myself in the listening seat was pretty damn insane. Bass notes felt like they were falling six feet down into my floor at times and cymbals has some of the cleanest and most controlled presence I have ever heard in this current setup with any preamp.

Taking a seat allowed me to appreciate what the mastering suite strived so hard to produce, which is often lost by its resale of albums in MP3 to the masses. It wasn't just the layering in front of me that I found

captivating but the encapsulation of the full global soundstage. I could hear full tonality in notes behind me, not just simple suggestions of out of phase trinkets which simply cue a certain manufactured effect. The sound was rhythmic and bouncy, fun and embracing, exactly what a good dance session should be.

I wanted to take the Allegri+ over to my mate Richard's for a listen, I wanted to compare it with his Sowter transformer based passive and couple of valve preamps, however as usual Dick had two of the preamps on the bench making modifications and amendments to tailor them more specifically to his system and room. Fortunately the only pre that wasn't being cannibalised was the Sowter based TVC. Fed into a Parasound Halo A21 there hasn't been any hesitation in its abilities to drive the large Trolls Graveson design speakers which Dick has further modified.

His tastes in music are very broad and he really appreciates a lot of West African and Indian influences. Sometimes his tastes are a little too eclectic for me, but he does find some material which I really enjoy and during my visit with the Allegri+ he was kind enough to play some music which I really did enjoy. Muslimgauze 'Mullah Said' was one of our first choices, with the Allegri+ replacing the Sowter TVC notes were far better defined and sound staging had far more air. The overall image was much cleaner and rhythms gained pace with far more expression of this massively expressive form of music which is



## With the Townshend Allegri+ installed there was considerably more power behind those drum strikes

constructed of many layered instruments and comes across as a real piece of art.

Amongst some of my more common listens we also spent a little time with Mari Boine a Norwegian Sami musician known for having added jazz and rock to the yolks of her native people. With a playful and sometimes sombre vocal Mari's accompanying musicians had as much attention to their contributions as she did in the front. There no denying the clean and open nature of the Allegri+ but what it has to rivals others in the same playground is the ability to stay absolutely natural regardless of volume.

### Conclusion

Choosing the correct preamp for any system requires lengthy amounts of ongoing research. Generally it's easier, although not to be brushed off as simpler to implement a power amp that has all the basic requirements for driving the loudspeakers. Valve, transistor, digital or passives such as TVC, AVC or simple attenuators have their pros and cons. A TVC is generally regarded as having an ease of installation between source and amplifier, due to its resulting impedance control, but in practice the topology isn't fool proof and although the design states that perfect matching between source and amp should be attained, practice has proven that often this is not the case. What Townshend Audio Engineering have managed is to do is create a set of transformers which will be compatible with the majority of amplifiers and to implement the topology in a way that sounds just sublime. Transparent to source and engagingly natural, the Allegri+ builds on the strengths of the previous Allegri.

Reducing the noise floor with tighter tolerance transformer windings using the companies Fractal wiring, with improvements in isolation and chassis damping, the new Allegri+ takes the natural and dynamic performance of the companies award winning preamp to the next level. Giving the Allegri+ an Outstanding Product Award is so easy and I urge anybody who has been considering a passive preamplifier to put the Allegri+ from Townshend at the top of their list.

### Dan Worth

Dan's nomination for the Townshend Allegri Plus pre-amplifier to be awarded an Outstanding Product gong has to be tested and verified by a second Hifi Pig reviewer, so we now hand over to Dominic Marsh for his verdict to vouch for the nomination.

I was at Dan's place when the courier delivered the Townshend Allegri + pre-amplifier during one of our regular get-togethers and rarely have I seen him in such a state of eager anticipation while waiting for the courier to ring on the doorbell. We were actually due to go out for some lunch and my stomach was grumbling long before that doorbell rang and was very keen to go out and be fed, but Dan insisted we connect up the Allegri+ first before we went out.

Whenever Dan uninstalls or installs anything in his rack there is Dan on his knees with an arm reaching around a lot doing plenty of fumbling around behind the rack and a sizeable portion of cussing for good measure while making the connections. Within a few minutes though, the Allegri was up and running with no accompanying profanities from Dan. That was a real shock, not about the amazing speed of installation, but the utter silence from the man. Note in diary was made.

I have a pre/power combo myself and to be honest I obsess a good deal less than Dan does over his system and I do like to stick to what I have, unless of course a component comes along that clearly and obviously is better than what I already have and I can warrant the outlay. Having said that, in nearly 3 years of knowing Dan and his evolving system which has gone from "nice" in those early days to almost "stunning" now (!), each one of his upgrades has been worthwhile with rarely any sideways and never any backwards steps. When the Audio Music R-T1 pre-amp was matched to the Gamut power amp and feeding his Ayon speakers there was nothing to fault with it according to my hearing. When the Townshend Allegri+ went in yet another perfect match was obtained and as Dan has said, the MUSIC took over the proceedings. The sound became totally effortless sounding and try as I might, I could not hear any grain in the music at all, the treble as sweet and crisp as you could wish for, bass was very expansive and well controlled too for good measure. I sometimes do wonder at the sound quality of streamed high resolution digital music that Dan has completely gone over to, when to me the silver disc at 44.1 kHz still has plenty of life left in it yet, but I was left in no doubt that digital files can impress with depth of timbres and tones, plus scouring out those tiny little inflections and nuances that only top flight systems can reveal.

Dan and I have a long standing debate over the drummer's floor tom whacks in Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" live album during the track 'Sort of Revolution'. I had yet to



# TOWNSHEND ALLEGRI+ PASSIVE PREAMPLIFIER



hear the power and energy of those drum strikes from Dan's system as I do from mine in my own listening room and Dan attributes this entirely to my room dimensions, whereas I say it's system dependent. With the Townshend Allegri+ installed there was considerably more power behind those drum strikes which did reverberate around the room far more than usual, so I say the score is one goal to nil in my favour. No doubt 'himself' will still disagree and we probably will still squabble over this for a long time to come.

Another plus trait I found with the Allegri+ is the way it maintains a good relationship between sound level and volume, as in when the volume control is incremented upwards the sound levels increase commensurately without any blare or perceived 'loudness' breaking through and muddying the music. There is nothing worse than when the volume is turned up the system starts 'shouting' or blaring at you and the way the Allegri+ did up the volume level and maintain the same linear amplitude levels was impressive and that shows excellent design and build.

To sum up then, I agree that the Townshend Allegri+ merits an Outstanding Product award and I endorse the nomination unreservedly.

Dominic Marsh

## AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Solid, sturdy and precise

Sound Quality: Natural, dynamic and expressively effortless

Value For Money: Show me a preamp that does more for the money and I'll show you a bacon sandwich with wings

**Pros**  
Exceptional transparency through to source  
Natural effortless dynamics  
Incredible bandwidth  
Creates a truly emotional connection with the music

**Cons**  
No remote

Price: £2400

**Giving the  
Allegri+ an  
Outstanding  
Product  
Award is so  
easy**





# Gold Note PH-10 Phono-Stage

By Janine Elliot

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The Gold Note PH-10 has a host of features including various equalisation curves, nine load impedances, facilities for MM and MC carts and a whole lot more to boot. Janine Elliot takes a listen to what on paper looks almost too good to be true for the £1315.20 asking price.



# GOLD NOTE PH-10 PHONO-STAGE

My love of vinyl goes back to the days of the crystal pickup on my Philips integrated system that I had saved up my pennies for back in the 70's. Since then I have collected a lot of Hifi, including equipment much older. Whilst my Philips assumed all my records would follow the standard RIAA EQ curve for all the records, my 1950's Leak Varislope preamplifier has provision for a selection of alternatives, including NARTB, 78OE, and 78NE (see Retrobyte column on Record Equalisation). Gold Note's PH-10 phonestage similarly allows you to play your Decca London or American CBS-Columbia records, should you have any.

Gold Note are a rapidly growing Italian Hifi company based in Montespertoli (Florence) Italy, that as well as being foremost a turntable, arm and cartridge manufacturer, is also now specialising in electronics and loudspeakers. Not one of their products seems to be a weak link, all being carefully and beautifully designed and engineered. Their PH-10 phono stage is no exception. This replacement to their PH-11 is available in Black, Silver (Gold or Red available as a limited edition) in non-magnetic anodised aluminium, produced from a solid piece of metal to guarantee (so the blurb goes) low frequency resonance, feedback vibrational control and low magnetic inertial field. The design comes from Maurizio Aterini (CEO and Founder) and Giovanni Rialti (Chief Engineer); both highly focused on analogue and with more than 20 years of experience in electronics, both pushing features and audio in a new direction to their previous model.

With 2 phono inputs this slab of aluminium also provides RCA and balanced XLR output, and four adjustments of output (-3dB, 0db, +3dB, +6dB) as well 9 choices of load impedance (10Ω, 22Ω, 47Ω, 100Ω, 220Ω, 470Ω, 1000Ω, 22kΩ, and 47kΩ) and

selecting of MM or MC. All is done via a single knob at the far right of the unit and all beautifully visible on a TFT screen. My only gripe is the positioning of that SKC (single knob control) knob. Whilst operating and selecting is all very easy (turn it to browse options, push to select, turn to change a setting), the front design with the gold icon on top left and button bottom right is perhaps the only afterthought in this unit; I must have OCD, but a larger button just to the right of the screen might have looked better, although having it so far from the screen prevents your hand getting in the way of the display! The shape of the box with the machined angled fins and a red light inside to bring it all to life. The internal red light might be an operational feature to confirm correct working of the electronics, but it does look good appearing from the fins of the red unit supplied to me for review! All in all the light and fins make this unit a really good looker, and my eyes just lit up opening the package. More importantly, the design and features of the machine truly brings phono-stages into the 21st century. What is such a relief is that there is no inconvenience of dip-switches or a "one fits all" mentality; this unit is very user friendly enabling correct setting up for your choice cartridge, with a clearly laid out 2.8" colour display. It is good to see a graph of the appropriate RIAA curve shown on the screen. As well as following closely the curves of three record standards the unit even allows you to select an "enhanced" curve following the Neumann 3.18us[50kHz] single pole filter, to give a more exciting sound by changing the EQ curve at the higher frequencies, though as a staunch purist I didn't use that function for most of my listening. The Neumann 3.18us[50kHz] single pole filter is a bit of a white elephant; Some believed it was there to stop higher frequencies gaining in amplitude as the logarithmic curve goes on to infinity, which

All of this  
way  
exceeded  
the price  
point of the  
PH-10.  
Adding to  
this the  
features  
and good  
looks this  
was one  
'darn hot'  
bargain.



# GOLD NOTE PH-10 PHONO-STAGE

could mean cutterhead-coils burning out. In reality sound and lathe engineers actually just make sure the frequencies are suitably attenuated at very high frequencies which knocks that idea on the (cutter)head. The curve was really to give extra headroom at higher frequencies, by changing the angle of roll-off of the RIAA curve above 20kHz. So if it wasn't ever used in the recording and you followed the reverse in playback then it would make for an extra top end boost as Tommaso confirmed;

"...the playback results a bit more exciting in the high frequencies since the "enhancement" provides a slightly slower slope while the recording follows the standard RIAA, which means gaining a few dB in the highest part and can result in a more airy and delicate reproduction." If the three selectable curves are not sufficient, there is also the possibility of other EQ curves through modular intervention (more on that below), should you ever need to play rare aged LPs. Indeed, there are over 200 different EQ curves out there for different types of 33, 45 and 78rpm recordings! What make the PH-10 so unique and unlimited in what it can do are all the features it has. A USB link allows software and firmware updates simply by insertion of an SD card and I hear that an optional Wi-Fi App is proposed, allowing you control all the setting from your phone or a tablet. Not only this, but with the GN port at the rear, this will allow easy connecting to external units, such as the Class A tube output stage. This modular philosophy is very important because it means external plugins can connect in different parts of the audio chain, allowing it to be placed at the input stage, in the middle of the circuit, or that output stage. So, for example, the Curve Enhancer module could be added to replace the EQ curves inside PH-10 and therefore to offer a wider selection of record types. Gold Note is also working on the dedicated external power supply, called the PSU-10, which will no-doubt improve sound still further. This phono-stage basically upgrades just as and when you want it to, and a worthy replacement, albeit a significantly different design, to their older and more imposing 3-box PH-11.

Not only is this machine highly versatile, but it is an exceptionally musical machine. As Tommaso Dolfi, Marketing Manager, told me; "The PH-10 is based on a hybrid resistor and capacitor design to get the best of two worlds since our goal was to deliver top performances at this price point while being also able to include many features on-board to make a really 'smart' phono".



Indeed, the design is not only very clever but it is also completely user-friendly and with no compromises on audio quality. At £1096.00 + VAT (£1315.20) I was immediately impressed at the sound per pound, and despite the technological prowess of the unit it still feels very analogue, not just in the sound, but also in the way the controls are handled on the UI. The PH-10 is 100% analogue and selected with MOS-FET's which act as super precise switches in the analogue circuit. The output stage is class AB. If that wasn't enough, the unit has two separate and independently set inputs, just to make the design even more of a technological mind-field for the manufacturer, but very user friendly for those lucky enough to have two turntables at their disposal. There is no need to change the settings dependant on which of the two turntables you decide to use!

## The Music

For the review I used a Townshend Rock7/Rega301/Ortofon Kontrapunkt b through my MFA/Leak Stereo 20 into Wilson Benesch Arc/Torus. Setting up the cartridge was very easy via the TFT screen with its Gold Note logo in the background, as well as it being etched in the top of the aluminium shell and on the gold logo next to the screen. Gold Note has every right to be proud to advertise their marque. With balanced output even when set to -3dB gave me a few dB more gain than from my Manley Steelhead. The Doors remastered "The Doors" album is a very powerful and 'in your face' production from 1967 that whilst very aged in its instrumentation, mixing and effects, still sounds impressive when put to work on the right kit. Whilst "Light my Fire" is the best known track in this album all the tracks are equally attractive in their own right. The recording will show any weakness in the stages from needle to speaker, each instrument clearly placed in their correct

space; the drums to the left and the guitar or Vox Continental combo organ to the right. Interestingly this band never had a bass player for their live gigs, so the keyboardist played a Fender Rhodes piano bass keyboard. 'Back Door Man' came across very forward, detailed and exciting, that my even-more-aged Leak Stereo 20 seemed to relish playing. "Take it as it Comes" was very precise and if I ever wanted more detail in the top end all I needed to do was switch to "Enhanced" mode. There is no facility for altering load capacitance, though this is really only effective on moving magnet cartridges. With a rise in moving magnet cartridges from major manufacturers including Gold Note themselves, perhaps such a feature should be included in the future, something Tommaso agreed with.

Turning to "A Tribute to Ella Fitzgerald" I was able to test out the enhanced setting on the excellently recorded cymbals and brass 'stabs' from the Syd Lawrence Orchestra with vocal soloist Clare Teal, which added life, and improved positioning of the various instruments. This feature is perhaps a good idea for some of those boring or unexciting records in your collection. To quote my article on Record EQ "...the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) curve has around -20dB taken off the signal at 20Hz and rising logarithmically to +20dB at 20,000Hz. That means in playback the EQ needs to amplify by 20dB at 20Hz and attenuate by 20dB at 20kHz". By attenuating at a lesser rate at the top frequencies in all the "Enhanced" settings means the top frequencies will be several dB brighter, giving that more exciting sound at the expense of a very slightly reduced S/N if the record is very quiet and very hissy. I remember recording cassettes with Dolby B and playing back with Dolby switched off to get a brighter sound, though that did make for another 10dB of hiss. GN's enhancement is not so acute, giving for a very useable

# GOLD NOTE PH-10 PHONO-STAGE

setting to liven up your music, if you need, with no worries about degradation of sound. "Night and Day" was clear and very precise whilst still allowing Clare's temperate vocals to contrast with the instrumentals. "Too Darn Hot" was just warm to the touch, the phono-stage giving great detail and precision, and that enhanced setting not affecting noise levels in my listening. What was notable, and with whichever setting I used, was the amount of detail, speed and musicality I could etch out of this recording. All of this way exceeded the price point of the PH-10. Adding to this the features and good looks this was one 'darn hot' bargain.

Mark Knopfler's "Get Lucky" is one of those albums you just have to stop what you are doing and relax and listen and move away from the speed and stress of city life and head back into the green rolling hills of the aged bluesy past. Well, the album actually came out in 2009, but who's counting. It is a regular feature of musicians that as they start to age they start producing records in older "styles" of music. George Michael's "Songs from the Last Century" and Sting's "Mercury Falling" (particularly the start of "I Was Brought to My Senses") are just two examples. Dave Brubeck even started writing large classical works. Mark Knopfler's "Get Lucky" comes supplied with accordion, flute, whistle, cittern and fiddle; an album that was well liked when it came out, but not quite as iconic as the Dire Straits albums before. However, it is very well recorded and gives me a chance to eke out the characteristics of cartridges and phono-stages. "You Can't Beat the House" starts just like the live studio

chatter at the start of John Lee Hooker's "Deep Blue Sea", and Mark Knopfler's distinctive voice and refined style of music came through as if he was personally sitting down in front of me. Detail of music and instruments was surprisingly fluid and passionate, showing that designers Maurizio Aterini (CEO and Founder) and Giovanni Rialti (Chief Engineer) could link musicality and electronics in a way I regularly see GN do so well. This machine was not only user friendly in terms of its operation and versatility, but also in how it portrayed that music. Everything seemed natural and precise, only slightly losing out to my choice phono-stage in terms of three-dimensionality. Turning to classical music, Schumann made pleasant symphonies with memorable tunes if not quite so unforgettable as Beethoven and, well, many others. Indeed his role model for symphonic writing was the Beethoven symphonies, and Schumann's third symphony that was now on my platter particularly suggests Beethoven's 'Pastorale' 6th symphony. No surprise then, perhaps, for me some of the best of the tunes are in this symphony, mostly happy and programmatic; full of countryside, peace and fun. He wrote this whilst he and wife Clara were on holiday in the Rhineland (hence why the symphony is often called the 'Rhenish' or 'Rheinische'), just as Beethoven's 6th symphony is about the countryside, with the famous second movement about a flowing brook.

Schumann's symphonies are like those of Brahms; full of complex inter-related ideas between instruments or sections of the orchestra, playing off against each other.

This makes it ideal to use for reviews. Where some phono-stages can make it all rather clouded and claustrophobic the PH-10 opened up the music, with the beautiful horn lines on the left to the wistful cello pastoral images on the right. The phono-stage gave clear definition and placement of all instruments in the living-room stage area, particularly the slow lines in the cello and powerful blasts on the brass. With the enhanced setting that placement would be slightly greater, though with very slight added top end hiss from the master tape that recorded the Wiener Philharmoniker under Zubin Mehta (Decca), but not that it spoils any listening. The PH-10 was particularly at home with classical music, making for a very entertaining and educational listening.

Turning to Genesis's track "Misunderstanding" and "In the Cage" from the album 'Three Times Live' the music came across powerful and fast, with the live atmosphere from Phil Collin's singing and the feisty guitar, keyboard and drum instrumentation, only relinquishing in my favourite "Afterglow". This performance is highly centre stage, and noticeably more so in the PH-10 than my choice phono amplifier, though that is considerably more expensive. If I had to express any weaknesses in this Gold Note product, it is that three-dimensionality I have heard in the Manley Steelhead or Tom Evans Mastergroove, but they are considerably more expensive. What this phono-stage does excel in, though, is the noise floor. This is an exceptionally quiet amplifier, allowing you to really take in the full dynamic range of your record without music





# GOLD NOTE PH-10 PHONO-STAGE

This machine is very highly recommended and I suggest you take a listen if you are in the process of purchasing a phono-stage, whatever the price.

being masked by noises other than the record itself or turntable motor. Coupled with impressive frequency response and a retrieval of information and musicality in playback this is an exceptionally good product, that way belies its price point.

## Conclusion

With 6 EQ patterns, 4 choices of gain and 9 impedance settings, this new baby from Gold Note is quite an amazing product even without any of the module upgrades, meaning for a very reasonable £1315.20 you can get serious vinyl speed, depth, detail and transparency, a sound that far belies its modest price.

This machine is very highly recommended and I suggest you take a listen if you are in the process of purchasing a phono-stage, whatever the price.

## AT A GLANCE

**Build Quality:** Excellent construction and use of quality components throughout. Add to this versatility of operation and design, this is great product.

**Sound Quality:** A detailed and honest portrayal of the music, far exceeding this price point.

**Value For Money:** At £1315.20 this is terrific value considering sound quality and features.

## Pros:

Well controlled sound and fast delivery  
Excellent noise floor and frequency range  
Transparency

## Cons:

Not quite such a front-to-back soundstage as I would hope, but well within expectations for any phono-stage south of £5000.  
Nothing more

Price: £1315.20

Janine Elliot



# Tellurium Q Black II Speaker Cable

By Ian Ringstead

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Tellurium Q's Black speaker cable instantly won fans around the world when it was launched, but now they've improved it. Ian Ringstead takes a listen to this £54 a metre loudspeaker cable.

# TELLURIUM Q BLACKII SPEAKER CABLE

I am a newcomer to Tellurium Q cables with regards to trying them out, but I have been aware of them for some time. I met Geoff Merrigan at the Bristol AV Show this year and had an educational few hours in his company. Geoff kindly offered me the chance to try some of his cables out and this is the result.

Tellurium Q Black was the first cable they produced and they were amazed by the results and the dealer and customer response. So why Black II? The Black won multiple awards, surprising owners with its performance and more people than ever chose to use it in their systems? But Geoff had been learning and developing, especially in the last few years and had come up with a way to make this great cable even better. Therefore, the new design has been launched. Switch Black for Black II and it is completely obvious which is which. Once you hear the difference, it is also completely obvious why you feel compelled to upgrade to Black II.

As I hadn't heard either before I was supplied Black and Black II to compare, and hence my comment above. I eagerly put the

Black in my system and straight away thought wow this is good. I use Van Damme concert series as a rule and like what it offers for the money, but the TQ Black upped the ante. The sound stage opened out and detailing improved. It was an immediate difference and obvious. I hate reviewing cables normally because often the differences can be subtle or indiscernible. Cables are a Pandora's box to most people and many scoff at hifi enthusiasts making us out to be geeks and audio nuts. Even professional sound engineers (my close friend included) says it's all a con and snake oil. Well if they feel that way fair enough, I certainly don't see any point in arguing and although I don't understand the reasons behind why there are differences (I don't think anyone really does) I can hear them and that's all that matters. What I feel is important is that you can hear a difference and are happy to pay the asking price. Certainly, some individuals are out to empty your pocket, making huge profits, just be aware and trust your own ears. The same goes for equipment of course.

I changed to the Black II after a few tracks and was so flabbergasted by the

improvement again that I didn't bother going back to the Black. It really was night and day. What struck me the most was how natural and clear the cable sounded with no nasties or obvious shortcomings. Now I know it can't be perfect, and Geoff told me wait till you hear our pricier cables (oh dear), but I can't remember hearing such a difference so easily, which makes my life a lot easier both as a reviewer and simply a listener. Isn't that what good kit should be about.

The Black II is a conduit to allow the listener to hear their system more naturally and realistically, so it makes equipment choice an easier task I reckon because the electronics and speakers will be heard at their best for a reasonable budget. Of course, the more expensive cables in Tellurium Q's range will outshine the black II, but for budget to mid-range systems the Black II is ideal. Top to bottom is seamless with no obvious drawbacks and every album I tried sounded good to excellent. As Geoff told me simply listen and see for yourself.

Stuart and Lin use Tellurium Q's Silver Diamond with their reference Avant Garde Duo speakers, and rightly so given the cost and quality of the system.

## Conclusion

I'll cut to the chase as I see no point in rambling on as to the qualities of this cable. It simply does a brilliant job of making your system sound far better for a reasonable outlay. Now £54 a metre may not seem a bargain to some enthusiasts and if you are like a true Yorkshireman with short arms and deep pockets who says, "How Much?" then either change your perceptions or miss out on a real treat for your ears. Once you try these cables you may well want to go further up the range. Warning !! They are addictive.

## AT A GLANCE

**Build Quality:** Excellent with a choice of good terminations to suit

**Sound Quality:** Superb, open and detailed

**Value For Money:** Brilliant

**Pros:** Fantastic upgrade from the original and for anyone wanting to transform their system if they feel it is lacking

**Cons:** They are addictive

**Price:** £54 per metre inc plugs or spades





# Ecosse The Director SE Digital Coax

By David Robson

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David Robson puts some zeros and ones through this Scottish company's £80 The Director SE digital coax cable.

# ECOSSE THE DIRECTOR SE DIGITAL COAX

Ecosse is a new brand to me. Arriving in the late 90's which, unfortunately was the start of my Hifi hiatus. Due to house moves and relationship changes my hobby was put on hold for quite a while.

Ecosse have their base in Scotland where they have a factory in which they handcraft their cables. This cable uses "Monocrystal" Pure Copper, and is manufactured to a very high standard. The Monocrystal they believe gives a superior conductor material and having no "Grain Boundary's". This taken from the company's website, an explanation of their theory. "a patented casting process (extrusion and annealing) is employed to produce a 'mono' or single crystal ultra-pure wire with significant advantages over other cables currently available. These other cables use ordinary copper or silver, which, no matter how few grains the manufacturer claims, have a grain barrier of oxygen and hydrogen. There are 9 perfect characteristics of this, by now,

Monocrystal™ copper:  
Unidirectional, Free of  
Impurity, Flexibility,  
Fatigue-Resistance,  
Corrosive-Resistance,  
Low Electric  
Resistance, Non-  
crystal Boundaries,  
Rapid Transmissibility,  
Perfect in Structure".

The Director Digital Coax (RCA) is a 75ohm cable and my sample here is 0.8m in length, you can customise your cable by adding lengths of 0.2m (20cm) for an extra charge, BNC connections are also available. The Director is manufactured with a multicore of pure microcrystal copper with polyethylene (PE) insulation and then a further foam PE coating; this separates the central core from the return braided copper which then has a very nice blue PVC outer sheathing. The cables are terminated with Ecosse's own design MACH2Ag RCA's. These are silver plated for best conduction of the signal. The outer PVC

coating is a nice metallic looking blue colour and is of medium stiffness.

Having had this cable on for a few weeks I'm sure it's well run in. Playing Van Morrison's "Back On Top" CD the opening track on the album "Going Down To Geneva" has a Jazzy/Blues bouncing style, the rhythmical drive from bass and drum jump out in true foot tapping style, the Ecosse certainly has a presence. The track lends itself to more of a late night closing track in a hot, boozy club, the Director Coax has just enough detail to carry this effect off. The following song is a much more relaxed and laid back affair. "Philosophers Stone" has the simple tick, tick, tick of a cymbal and nice deep tones of piano and those notes carry a good weight with them, Van Morrison's vocals strike up showing a little age and patina. Stereo imaging is good and has nice depth between the forward vocals and both the piano and electric organ sounds, these all easily

distinguished and separate from each other. The crispness of the high tones from the brass cymbals could be a little better, but nothing too glaring, Mr Morrison's harmonica does have great sound and voice though, peeping forward of the soundstage, the notes have a nice organic "live" feeling to them. Switching CD's to Supertramp's "Some Thing Never Change" CD, this a fabulously clean and clear recording has many layers and things going on, and is one of my all-time favourite "go to" albums. The Director by Ecosse easily transfers the digital signal from the CD drive to the DAC without losing to my ears anything in the way of clarity or quality. "You Win I Lose" starts out with a big reverberating bass drum, the "bounce" is very definitely heard and felt, the drum strikes have a hard edge and the cymbals have quite a crispness, maybe carrying a little too much "brittleness", although not straying into sharp acidity.

Popping in Dire Straits "Dire Straits" and the second track on the album The Water of Love. This older recording from the late 70's has had a great transfer onto the digital format. The Glockenspiel intro is clear as a bell (or a glockenspiel) in a stark darkness, there doesn't seem to be any digital noise in this Director cable, as the track gets itself going the rendition of drums and the twang of the steel guitar feel a little restrained with a touch of hazing, nothing unbalanced and on the whole an even tempered performance. Onward to Six Blade Knife, the laid back, moody tune of the album has real presence to it, the melodic bass guitar leading the track, is tight and well formed. Knopfler's vocals come hissing out, these have great texture with the Coax cable doing a fine job of conveying this to the listener. The slightly hard edge mentioned earlier becomes an asset with the lead guitar sounds as this fires out from the speakers with steely accuracy.



## AT A GLANCE

### Pros:

A well made cable, that's priced well. Having good detail at this price point and is a good step up from the budget cables.

### Cons.

Can have a slight hard edge to the sound, but does not become overbearing or fatiguing. Bright sounding equipment may not be this cables best friend.

Price: £80

David Robson

## Review: The Fall's 'New Facts Emerge'!

James Fleming on The Fall's new album. Read on believers...

"...There are people who don't like The Fall – they must be half-dead with beastliness. I spurn them with my toe." -John Peel

New Facts Emerge does not present any new facts. It does not provide any fresh insight into the inner workings of Mark E. Smith and The Fall. Rather, it serves to emphasise one decades-old fact: that The Fall are a totally unique proposition.

'That you alone are you,' as Shakespeare so eloquently put it. The Fall have merged such pop-culturally ostracised elements such as garage rock, science fiction, horror, comedy and the avant-garde into a thrilling whole. Much like Frank Zappa, their catalogue is immense. And like Zappa, every second of it is worthwhile.

That's only when it's at its worst. When The Fall are on form there's no touching them. And when they're not, they are still worth it.

New Facts Emerge, the 32nd album in The Fall's ever-expanding discography, contains all of those elements. You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll tear your hair out in confusion and you'll jump out of your skin in fright at Smith's venomous spitting. If one band can say they inspired even one of those reactions over the course of a career, they'd consider it a success. The Fall can do it in an album.

The music on New Facts Emerge veers wildly from snarling, barbed-wire garage rock to murky atmospheric and back again. In the case of Couples Vs Jobless Mid 30's, all in the space of eight and a half minutes.

Smith rants gloriously throughout like a man a third his age. Fol De Rol, Brillo De Facto and the title track in particular are masterclasses in sneering brilliance. This lineup of The Fall has been uncharacteristically together for eleven years and New Facts Emerge is all the better for it.

This is a shit-hot band. Well capable of laying down a solid foundation for the attitude that lies smouldering beneath all of The Fall's music. More than anything else, it's that attitude that led John Peel to infamously claim that The Fall are 'always different, always the same.' The music has undergone changes. But that attitude remains.

The backing vocals on the aforementioned Couples Vs Jobless Mid 30's are a shining example of audio hilarity, in stark contrast with the dark Birthday Party-esque groove of the song's intro/recurring motif. A tom-tom groove kicks in at the 6:30 minute mark and even if you found the first three quarters unlistenable, it was undoubtedly well worth it just to hear a beat that lets you know shit's about to go down.



New Facts Emerge could very well function as a 'greatest hits' of The Fall. Not because every track is on par with the dizzying heights of past glories, but because over the course of its running time it encapsulates every aspect of their sound.

From Perverted By Language's menacing grooves to the concise, punchy riffs of This Nation's Saving Grace. There are no more expectations with The Fall anymore. Curveballs are the aim of their game. But there's always the hope that their new record will jump the bar set by the highlights of their past. New Facts Emerge jumps that bar.

There will always be Fall doubters. There will always be that nagging suspicion that at this stage, Mark E. Smith is just taking the piss. And there will always be those who claim The Fall's best is well behind them. New Facts Emerge spurns these people. Spurns them with its toe.

## Tour Dates From Young States!

Young States are pleased to announce a number of mini tour dates after sharing their new single 'Over It By Now' recently on Upset. Taken from the forthcoming EP, 'Past Truths | Present Lies' – out 29th September.

Tour dates as follows:

Saturday 7th October: Manchester Aatma

Sunday 8th October: Bournemouth The Anvil

Monday 9th October: London Surya

Friday 13th October: Birmingham Cogs Bar

Hailing from Norwich, Young States are a four-piece band specialising in energetic and passionate punk rock.

Formed at the end of 2014, the band met at a music school in Norwich. Guitar and vocalist, Libby was on a sound engineering course, the others on music performance courses. Guitarist, Amy got Young States together as she was bored of seeing male band after male band, and wanted to form an all-female group. She approached the others in the corridors of college after seeing them carrying their instruments.

With a love of Brand New, Kids In Glass Houses, Defeater and Mallory Knox, Young States quickly wrote and recorded their debut EP 'Down to You' which saw them receive play from Scuzz TV, BBC Introducing and features in the pages of Kerrang!

New EP "Past Truths | Present Lies" is about personal growth and letting go of the things that have previously caused you pain.

Lead singer and bass player Georgia says:

"All the tracks on the EP have different meanings to some extent but the common thread between them all is that they're all about my own (not-entirely-happy) feelings I've experienced in the past. The idea for the EP name comes from saying that I experience these exact feelings at the moment wouldn't be true."

'Past Truths | Present Lies' was produced by Drew Lawson (Roam/Summerlin/Me Vs Hero) and mastered by Grant Berry (All Time Low/Roam/Boston Manor) who gave the EP it's Midas touch.

After finally perfecting their sound, Young States are ready to go places they've never been to before. Anthemic, dark and melodic in equal measure, this is their strongest statement yet.





## Chasing the Dragon Reel to Reel Revival “Big Band Spectacular” Syd Lawrence Orchestra

Janine Elliot takes a listen to Mike Valentine's Chasing the Dragon label's Reel to Reel Revival “Big Band Spectacular” by the Syd Lawrence Orchestra. Needless to say this is a reel to reel release.

The rebirth of vinyl is firmly playing on side B now, though unfortunately it is still only a small percentage of total music purchases. Overall physical recording media sales from all formats are still significantly lower now than they were in the 70's when I started my own record collection, due to playout systems that allow you to listen to music that perhaps you wouldn't actually have bought, and which artificially rates artists at “Number One” who perhaps wouldn't get that recognition had their music not been ideal for background listening. As vinyl met cassette tape head-on and survived, with the later competition of CD, MD, DCC and mp3, things were not quite so clear-cut and they have all lost out in the very end. Whilst the recording world might be considerably different to how I remember and loved it of old, it is perhaps more surprising now than before due to the resurgence of old ideas. Not only has the valve been reborn (see Rise and fall and Rise again of the Thermionic Tube ) and vinyl now representing around 3% of music sales (having reached its nadir in 2007 with only around 200,000 sales in the UK), but now reel to reel tapes are also making a notable comeback.

I did mention once in HifiPig that I hoped the cassette would return, and that, too, looks more than likely with UK cassette sales tripling in the last year alone and the launch of a retro 80's cassette ghetto-blasters from turntable manufacturer GPO. If only a retro Nakamichi Dragon would wade its way into my listening room. Whilst the Oxford dictionary removed the word “cassette player” back in 2011, they may soon need to add it back as sales grow again, just as it appears Fax's are similarly making a petite riposte as they are safer than using the internet, and a while back Kodak started making 8mm movie recorders again. Cassette's comeback might be due largely to nostalgia, there is much to be said about the format's analogue sound and realism, even when you ignore the hiss. Justin Bieber's latest release “Purpose” and Kanye West's “Yeezus” are just two present-day cassette tape releases. Whilst a Nakamichi cassette might get up to 20kHz, it is reel to reel that hold the limelight for sound quality and realism, even if again you excuse any hiss.

In the 70's when most had cassette recorders, it was the Sony Elcassette or reel to reel that the serious audiophile hankered after. With 15 machines in my home there might also be a certain amount of nostalgia there too, of course.

When I marvelled at the direct cut discs and binaural recordings emanating from Mike Valentine's label “Chasing The Dragon”, I did hope that he would one day release his albums on reel to reel. As an ex BBC colleague we both have a passion for things moving at 15ips (or even 30ips, as are his master recordings), and whenever he lectures at HiFi shows as part of his recording company he will inevitably play something on a ¼ inch tape. Nothing sounded quite so good, and my hope that the format would make a comeback from his enterprise one day finally came to fruition, albeit after a few hints from me. Having recorded albums using reel to reel tape, why not sell them on that medium as well? I can announce that Mike has now added this wonderful format to his music production, until something else takes his fancy (cassette perhaps? No, only joking). Sales are impressive, averaging over 50 a week and customers coming from Hong Kong, Thailand, Taiwan and America as well as the UK.

“The worst thing you can ever do” he told me “is to rest your laurels, and we have a reputation now all over the world, which is fantastic, but we have got to keep pushing the boundaries”.

After having an Ampex ATR 102 ½ inch reel-to-reel recorder running at 30ips as a back-up at his recording sessions and then buying a ½ inch 30ips Studer A820, both used in mastering at the London Air Studios or on location, he recently added a ¼ inch Studer A80 with butterfly heads so that he could then begin producing direct copies to be sold on his website. That has now been superseded by another Studer A820, this time a ¼ inch 15ips machine. Obviously playing back the master 30ips ½ inch tape and recording directly onto the other A820 would eventually wear out the master tape, so he has needed to make a master copy for each album; “We have to do what is called a ‘running master’, and copy the ½” master onto a ½” running master and then use that to do the ¼” copies”. Otherwise after 50 or so playbacks the plastic tape will start to shed its ferrite particles and produce drop outs,

whereby top frequencies or complete sections will reduce in level.

The process of producing tapes is an arduous and expensive one. A roll of empty tape is not cheap at around £70, and the music is copied direct from one machine to another in very time-consuming real time (or should I say reel time!) using exceptionally good gold Zensati Seraphim cables at £12,000 a go, and not passing through any digital processing. On top of this are the costs of the master ½” tapes and recording sessions. At a selling price of £360 per tape the price seems more understandable, and competes well with reel to reel tapes produced by the handful of other companies now. All recordings are provided and labelled “tail out” to minimise ‘print through’ of sound from one layer to the next. As recording tape is basically made from micro-magnets coated on plastic film any loud music might print through from one layer of the tape to the next, so if stored tail out that print through will appear after the commencement of the sound meaning it will be “hidden”. Without having the tape stored tail-out print through of loud sections of music would be heard in the silences prior to the music, unless – as in the days of editing in olden BBC days – you used yellow leader tape at the start and between tracks, and red/white leader at the end of the recording, which is a very time-consuming operation and consequently why no one does this anymore. Also, the sticky tape to join it all tends to lose its ‘stick’ in old age. Whilst it might be a pain having to rewind the tape at the start of your performance it does mean you don't need to do it at the end!

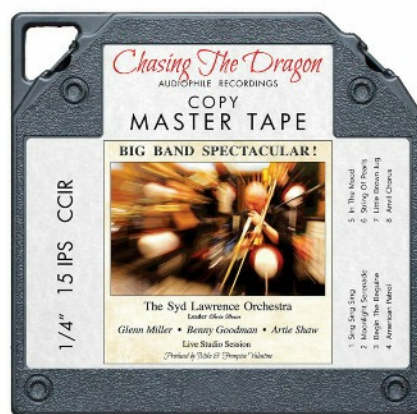
‘Chasing The Dragon’ use the latest ATR tape which comes in a professional heavy duty plastic box with a handle in the corner. For shorter performances “Standard Play” MasterTape (~33mins/10 ½” reel at 15ips) is used, and for the longer albums their new MDS36 “Long Play” tape is used (~48mins/10 ½” reel at 15ips), the “MDS” named after ATR's founder Michael D Spitz. Where in the past manufacturers of tapes included Agfa, Ampex, BASF, Maxell, Memorex, Philips, TDK and Zonal, to name just a few, today we are not so fortunate, with only two players, ATR and Pyral. The history of recording tape plays like an episode of Dynasty. Agfa was bought by BASF who turned into EMTEC who were taken over by RMGI who were then bought by Pyral who sold to Mulann Industries in 2015, and still producing tapes based on those from the Agfa and BASF stables, such as SM911, SM468 and LPR35. American giant Ampex (standing for Alexander M. Poniatoff Excellence) who made the excellent 456

tape was taken over by ATR, a company originally set up to restore, repair and upgrade professional Ampex recorder, the founder Mr Spitz having been an Ampex Technical Services representative. For me this is the better of the two companies now making tapes, though they are both excellent. Maxell and Philips, I am pleased to say, do still make cassettes. The machines for Chasing the Dragon are lined up using CCIR equalisation by Decca engineer Adam Pope, ensuring the best recording quality is attained. Indeed, this is an exceptionally well recorded and copied production, working well on my Revox PR99 and Sony TC-766-2 high-speed machines. The tape is the MDS36 LP tape meaning that the album easily fits on the spool. Mike didn't want to use the SP (standard Play) tapes as it would mean charging for two of them. Some manufacturers seem to fade out the last tracks to fit as much on the single SP tape, which I really don't like. Each tape is available at £360 plus postage and packing, and the library now includes six labels; "Vivaldi's Four Seasons", "Tribute to Ella Fitzgerald", "Espana", "Music by Candlelight", a "Pure Reference" compilation and the Syd Lawrence "Big Band Spectacular" up for review here. I wish any of the present day manufacturers would add a tone track (1kHz/0dB) on the tape at the very end so that you could align your machines. Maybe one day.

## The Music

I always loved the use of woodwind on the front line of USA trombonist Glen Miller's manuscripts, something that made his big band composing and performing so different to anyone else at the time, and ever since. The warmth from the clarinet, the emotion from the saxophone, and power, authority – and passion when needed – from the brass is shown to the full in these great works, and eloquently performed on this recording from Chasing the Dragon. The album features the famous Syd Lawrence Orchestra. Syd Lawrence set up his own orchestra in the UK to play works by Miller, Count Basie and others. Lawrence retired from touring in 1994 and died of an aneurysm in 1998. The band continues to this day, playing with just as much energy, emotion and subtlety. This recent album starts with "Sing Sing Sing" a Benny Goodman track that gently gets us in the mood for Glen Miller and Artie Shaw. A solid drum kit keeps us on firm footing until the brass livens it all up and saxophone, trumpet and pianoforte solos pre-empt foot-tapping that would please any fitness tracking gizmos you might have tied to your feet. "Moonlight Serenade" is appropriately slower in gusto and gives you a chance to

hear the individual melodies and rhythms that make this such a well known and loved track. Visions of an American airfield and pilots listening before jumping into their Mustang P51 bombers fill my mind as I listen. Sad that Miller himself didn't survive the war, losing his life in a plane somewhere over the English Channel on his way to entertain US troops in France. What a waste. Luckily his music lives on with much life and keeping me in the mood to listen to the rest of the album. The few minutes it took to rewind the tape and hope that it didn't chew up the tape on its travels (try telling that to the vendor when reviewing a tape) was well worth the wait and provided me with a timely performance. I only wonder if the first two tracks are just a little too easy listening to begin the album, and perhaps Glen Miller's "American Patrol" might have been a bit more suitable as an opener with its forceful



drum rhythm to get all the brass and the listener on board for an excellent showcase of sound. But whatever the order is it was an excellently musical and audiophile production. The ride cymbals as with the bass tom-tom drum rolls play with a zest and clarity that even vinyl can find hard to match. Of course, no Syd Lawrence album could be complete without "In the Mood" and this and indeed all 8 tracks are carried off with an understanding and vigour that makes the £360 outlay something that you will soon come to terms with. With the beautiful "Anvil Chorus" completing the line-up with Miller's distinctive woodwind 'leading' and brass 'accompanying' style that made him so unique and famous, this is a beautiful way to end the album. When the original double-LP came out one of the discs was a standard issue made from a 30ips stereo tape mix-down of the 24-track multitrack tape, with the second 'identical' record being a direct cut disc taken direct from the analogue Neve mixing desk and using Gefell, Schoeps, STC, Neumann, Flea and AEA microphones. The direct cut disc LP was for me by far the better of the two in terms of quality and realism, and indeed the reason for the two disc

collection. Perhaps a deluxe version with all four formats should be produced; LP, Direct Cut Disc, hi-res WAV and Reel to Reel so you can come to the same conclusion as I have that tape is by far the winning option. I might not yet have a Studer in my big collection, but my Revox PR99 and A77, and Ferrograph Logic 7 give a timely account. I recently swapped the Teac X1000M DBXii high-speed mastering machine that went everywhere with me in the 80's and 90's for a Sony TC-766-2 mastering machine. For me, this is the best machine; nothing over the top, just very honest and accurate, with superlative frequency response and excellent wow and flutter credentials. Not only this, but the Chasing the Dragon tape itself has an excellent noise floor; with peaks on my well lined up Sony and Revox at over+3dB but with no signs of distortion showing how good the ATR tape is, as well as the meticulous copying done by Mike and his team, and of course the machines. The brass is brash and boisterous, cymbals strong and sizzingly seductive, and woodwind warm and welcoming, all adding up to an experience worth hearing through my very long Slee Lautus interconnects; these cables might be thousands of pounds south of the Zensati Seraphims but they are surprisingly good for the money and long lengths have excellent RFI/EMI shielding. All in all, like other 'Chasing the Dragon' tapes I have had the fortune to listen to, this recording represents the very best in audio performance, with no distortion and no worries about not using a noise reduction circuitry such as Dolby A or DBX which would add their own signature to the sound. I have reviewed and listened to tapes from 4 major companies now, and can honestly say the quality from the Valentine stable is as good as it gets, not least due to the detail taken in producing it; no compression or limiting, choice of microphones, analogue mixing desk, excellent sound engineering from Jake Jackson, and the fact that the master is recorded on the same media. The highs are clear and there is a punchy, strong bass. This tape is well worth considering if you are new or well versed at reel to reel playback, unless of course you want to wait for the next format. But I doubt anything will ever beat reel to reel. Should cassettes truthfully make a comeback, then I don't hold my breath that Mike will ever release any. As he told me; "I can only operate my company by using the "I" word; "integrity"; and if I don't think it's good enough myself we don't do it".

Janine Elliot



## Review: Natterers' 'Toxic Care'!

As children, when we lost a toy, we were taught to 'retrace our steps'. To go back over the very recent past to find what we had lost. And Natterers are retracing hardcore punk's steps to recover what has been lost in recent years.

Toxic Care is six songs long. Only one of them over the two minute mark and even then by only a single second. Vocalist Emma is in possession of a furious deep-throated roar to put other 21st century hardcore bands, with their whiny screeching, to shame. Even the cartoon caricatures that crowd Toxic Care's cover are reminiscent of Raymond Pettibon's artwork for the mighty Black Flag.

Rollins-era Black Flag appear to be the guiding influence on the Natterers' sound. From the rattling bass to the Ginn inspired lead guitar lines and on to Emma's aforementioned roar. The Sabbath-influenced sludge-punk of My War is resurrected alongside the frenetic pacing that hardcore has become synonymous with.

It's this return to hardcore punk's origins and the refusal to succumb to the genre's supposed 'progressions' of the subsequent decades that make Toxic Care so reassuring. In a century where post-hardcore has mutated from Slint's original terrifying thrill into a screeching wreck, and the underwhelming splicing of hardcore and metal into metalcore blares through pre-teen headphones the world over, Natterers are the arse-kicking the genre needs.

Matter Over Mind justifies the My War comparison with its movie-monster destruction of the skyscrapers hardcore-lite has built for its owners. Numb takes a word that's been used and abused by countless bands over the course of the 21st century and fearlessly reclaims it as not just a theme, but the song's title. The rattling bass

intro of We Are Their Cattle comes complete with menacing, slithering feedback before Emma's raging roar makes its final performance of the record. Toxic Care is a surging reminder of what hardcore punk was.

But it's still a regression.

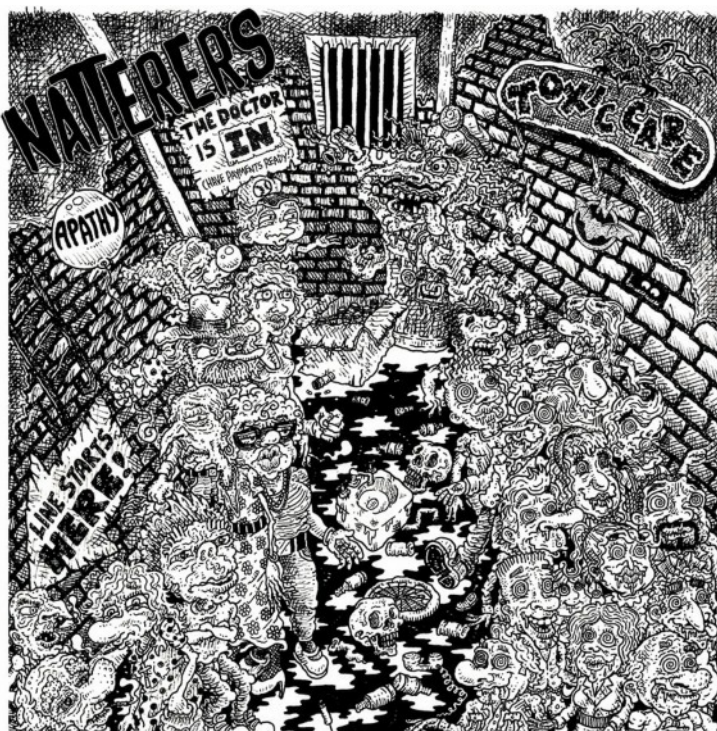
The power of the new cannot be underestimated. Natterers have not only made a damn fine hardcore punk record, they have made a record that remains true to the genre's original principles. But it's not anything new.

While hardcore has gone through an evolution, it has also gone through a dilution. Natterers have recovered the raw passion of the real deal, but not added a new dimension to it.

But this reclaiming of hardcore's power is certainly a step in the right direction. Natterers are armed with original material sharp and mean as razor wire, and in Emma they have a vocalist worthy of not just Rollins comparisons, but – if they discover a new twist on their well-worn brand of aggression – the hardcore howlers of the future may one day be compared to her.

Toxic Care is a clear-cut signpost towards the future of hardcore punk. But in order to soldier on, sometimes you have to retrace your steps.

by James Fleming



## Diet Cig Announce UK Tour Dates!

NY's Diet Cig today added Scottish indie-poppers The Spook School to their upcoming UK dates and also add a second London date at The Moth Club after the first sold out.

The band also recently shared the video for "Barf Day," a highlight of their much-loved debut album Swear I'm Good At This.

Diet Cig make it okay to be the hot mess that you are. The LP was produced, engineered and mixed by Christopher Daly at Salvation Recording Co. in New Paltz, NY with additional recording at Atomic Sound in New York City.



Oct 12 – Norwich, UK @ Norwich Arts Centre

Oct 13 – Nottingham, UK @ Rough Trade Nottingham ^

Oct 14 – Lancashire, UK @ Lancaster Library ^

Oct 16 – Manchester, UK @ Soup Kitchen ^

Oct 17 – Edinburgh, UK @ Sneaky Pete's ^

Oct 18 – Glasgow, UK @ Broadcast ^

Oct 19 – Leeds, UK @ Headrow House ^

Oct 21 – Bristol, UK @ Simple Things Festival

Oct 22 – Birmingham, UK @ Hare & Hounds (This Is Tmrw)

Oct 23 – Cambridge, UK @ Portland Arms ^

Oct 24 – London, UK @ Moth Club (New Date) ^

Oct 25 – London, UK @ Moth Club (Sold Out) ^

Oct 26 – Brighton, UK @ The Hope & Ruin ^

^ w/ The Spook School



## Tubular Brass/Mary Casio – St Cuthbert's Parish Church, Edinburgh

St Cuthbert's Parish Church has seen a few things in its time: infamous body snatchers Burke and Hare were regular visitors to its churchyard, the watchtower built to protect against them and other "resurrectionists" still stands; Sir Thomas De Quincy, author of *Diary Of An Opium Eater*, and John Napier, inventor of the logarithm, are just two of the notables interred in the churchyard; St Cuthbert's was also where Agatha Christie married her second husband. I'm willing to bet though, that in all of its considerable history, tonight is the first time it has witnessed a thirty three piece brass band and a young lady with an assemblage of synthesisers.

The brass band is Tubular Brass led by acclaimed band leader and arranger, Sandy Smith. The young lady is Hannah Peel, here tonight in the guise of her alter ego Mary Casio. Hannah is an Irish musician and composer, noted for her Rebox and Rebox 2 EPs of cover versions played on a musical box that she programmed with hand-punched paper tape, and for last year's electronic pop album *Awake But Always Dreaming*. Her latest composition, *Journey To Cassiopeia* is a seven part piece for brass band and keyboards that describes a journey taken into space by Mary Casio, an old lady who has decided to have one last adventure.

Beginning with Hannah/Mary's arpeggiated synths, the band add dramatic bursts of colour and depth as Mary says goodbye to earth and we journey with her past planets and nebulae towards Cassiopeia. Peel has played in brass bands herself as a trombonist and she makes good use of the textures and dynamics that the band have at their disposal. Appropriately enough, *Journey to Cassiopeia* reminds me in places of Oldfield band-mate and collaborator David Bedford's *Star's End*. The final section features a recording of Peel's grandfather from 1928 when he was a young chorister. It's a deeply moving finale to a very evocative piece of music and I'm looking forward to hearing the recorded version when it is released in September.

If someone was to draw a Venn diagram of tonight's audience I'm fairly certain that it would comprise of two sets: Mike Oldfield fans and brass band aficionados, with a fairly sizeable overlap between the two. Introducing the band's version of *Tubular Bells*, conductor and arranger Sandy Smith says the album was a favourite of his in the 1970s and it had always been his dream to arrange the music for brass band, long before he possessed the skills to actually do so. Sandy's career has led him to positions as principal horn with the Black Dyke Mills Band, Grimethorpe Colliery Band and

Professor of tenor horn at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. He also conducted the Brighthouse And Rastrick band on their excellent collaboration with *The Unthanks*, *Diversions Volume 2*. Now he has pulled together the cream of the country's brass players to produce a version of Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* that is primarily intended to work as a piece of brass band music rather than a note-by-note reproduction of the original.

The famous piano introduction is taken by the cornets before being developed by the rest of the band. The tones of cornets, euphoniums, tenor horns and trombones combine to bring a warmth to the piece, something that was somewhat lacking in David Bedford's orchestral version. There is both delicacy and power here with some sterling work from the basses, emulating Oldfield's agile bass guitar lines. Part one builds to the famous circular bass riff; Hannah Peel takes on Vivian Stanhall's role as The Announcer, introducing the instruments in turn, including "Two slightly distorted baritones" as the climax builds.

Part two's gentle opening provides a breather for the audience but not for the band. I'm not a brass player myself but even I can see that there is some tricky stuff being negotiated here. Before we know it we are full steam ahead into the "bagpipe" and "piltown man" sections with ample support from the band's percussion section. The main piece is brought to close by an improvised synthesiser solo by Hannah Peel over beautifully intertwining chordal and solo work from the band. The concluding *Sailor's Hornpipe* starts at a gallop and gets ridiculously faster with every repeat, bringing the evening to a triumphant conclusion, and the audience to its feet. I bet St Cuthbert loved it as well.

## London Astrobeat Orchestra – The Dissection Room, Summerhall, Edinburgh

In 1980, the weekly music paper *Melody Maker* declared Talking Heads' *Remain In Light* album to be its Album Of The Year, citing its innovative African rhythmic influences as a key part of the album's appeal. Two years later in the summer of 1982, rival paper *NME* was featuring four-page articles about African bands such as King Sunny Adé And His African Beats and Orchestra Makassy who were, quite rightly, causing a bit of a stir with their respective albums *Juju Music* and *Agwaya*. Now, some 37 years after the release of *Remain In Light*, London Astrobeat Orchestra have taken Talking Heads' back catalogue and mixed it up with the musical styles of West Africa to produce something really extraordinary.

At the risk of making a sweeping generalisation, I'd guess that the majority of

the audience have made their way here tonight because of the Talking Heads connection rather than any deep-seated love for soukous or chimurenga. The band have been billed as "performing Talking Heads' *Stop Making Sense*" and having purposely not watched any YouTube clips or read any reviews I don't know what to expect but on the basis of that publicity, I'm kind of expecting some sort of recreation of the *Stop Making Sense* film, from its stripped down Psycho Killer intro onwards. That, it is soon apparent, is not what these guys do.

Unlike any other tribute band I have seen, London Astrobeat Orchestra take Talking Heads' source material and use it as a launchpad to create something truly unique; a starting point for an incredible musical adventure. The band open with *Burning Down The House* and within 30 seconds I have a grin on my face that won't be going anywhere for the next two and half hours. Band leader and bassist Edd Bateman, a man for whom the phrase "the dusty end of the neck" could not be more inappropriate, lays down a bubbling ever-changing bassline. Drummer Badou Ndiaye and djembe player Modou Ndiaye Cissokho overlay skittering rhythms while guitarist King Fire and Mosi Conde on kora add dazzlingly complex embellishments. Lead singer and guitarist Julian Burdock provides some bluesy guitar that probably wouldn't be allowed within a million miles of an actual Talking Heads performance but fits right in here.

There is a moment in the *Stop Making Sense* film, about halfway through, when the band's performance reaches such a peak that I remember thinking the film would have to end because it couldn't possibly get any better. I had the same feeling about halfway through London Astrobeat Orchestra's first song. I honestly think if they had said "thank you and goodnight" I could have gone home happy. Fortunately, that was never going to happen and things just kept getting better. *Life During Wartime* and *Once In A Lifetime* and *Girlfriend Is Better* are similarly stunning, the songs stretching out into wildly inventive excursions. "I've got a girlfriend with bows in her hair" sings Julian, "and nothing is better than that". Right now, nothing is better than this.

The band take a break during which DJ Tom Caulker keeps us entertained with a wonderfully eclectic selection of songs. I'm left with a fear though, that the momentum built up during the first set will have evaporated and that the second half will fail to match it. Such fears are happily groundless. Things do start at a little bit of a more relaxed pace as Julian begins a solo version of *Psycho Killer*, using a loop pedal to build up a rhythm guitar and bass line that possibly tips a nod to Hugh Masakela's *Stimela*. The song is a fine opportunity for an audience sing along with Julian adding some more bluesy guitar and some electronic interjections from a kaos pad. The rest of the band join in towards the end of the song before moving into *This Must Be The Place*. By the time we get through *Slippery People* and into *Take Me To The River* I am back to being left stunned again by the sheer interplay and musical telepathy on display; if the Grateful Dead had been born in Congo, Guinea or Senegal then I imagine this is what they would have sounded like.

An ecstatic *Road To Nowhere* brings what is simply one of the best gigs I have ever seen to an end. If London Astrobeat Orchestra are playing within a hundred miles of you, just go. You can thank me later.

# The Lake Poets' UK Tour Dates!

The Lake Poets is Sunderland based singer-songwriter Marty Longstaff. Following an appearance at Cambridge Folk Festival this weekend he plays a number of dates in the North-East during August and September. A show in Times Square, Newcastle on 6th August at which he will be supporting Brian Wilson is followed by intimate sets at Fausto in Sunderland on 18th and 20th. He then performs at the NE Volume Festival on 9th



September at Stockton Arts Centre and plays a Laundrette Sessions event at the Gala Theatre in Durham on 23rd.

Anticipating his Cambridge Festival bow, Longstaff says that "I have wanted to play there ever since I first picked up a guitar and wanted to be Martin Carthy, Bob Dylan, Richard Thompson, John Martyn and Joni Mitchell all rolled into one. I can't wait to let my songs loose at such an important and special gathering of like-minded people and I know that I will enjoy every moment of being on stage and being at the festival itself."

As for the Newcastle show, he adds : "Sharing the stage with Brian Wilson is a dream come true. I can only hope that my

songs will mean as much to others as Brian's mean to me and millions of others around the world. Me and the band can't wait to play!"

The late summer will also see Longstaff begin recording his second album for release in early 2018. His autumn 2015 debut, 'The Lake Poets', achieved excellent reviews and spawned the singles 'Your Face' and 'Edinburgh'. Since first being aired on BBC 6 Music, the former has quietly gone about racking up over 7 million plays on Spotify, while the latter was playlisted by Radio X.

Recorded in Nashville's famed Blackbird Studio and produced by Dave Stewart (Eurythmics, etc), the eleven songs that comprised the album saw Longstaff's shimmering, pure voice sit atop intimate, sparsely beautiful arrangements. Autobiographical lyrical content that was rich in painting the big picture about love and mortality by way of a keen eye for the small details of life also incorporated a heavy dose of social realism, such as in 'Vane Tempest' and its story of how the Miners Strike affected his father. The decimation of the North East and family struggle was also writ large in 'Shipyards'.

## Fraser Anderson – The Voodoo Rooms, Edinburgh

It's not easy being a support act. You have thirty minutes to make an impression. On a good night, ninety five percent of the people in the room won't know who you are, will have never heard any of your songs and have probably only turned up early to secure a decent seat for the main act. Tonight, making an impression was something that Fraser Anderson only needed to worry about for around three minutes. From that point in, spines were tingled and hearts were touched.

Loss, and the things that come from loss. Sorrow, pain, and grief. Dignity, fealty and

catharsis. These are the threads that stitch Anderson's songs together. Fraser doesn't really do happy songs. A couple of times during his set he checks if we are okay; not beaten down by his downbeat material. He need have no concerns on that score. At the end of each song, the audience's applause is heartfelt. During the songs, if the proverbial pin were to be dropped it would ring out clear to hear.

Fraser opens with Feel from his latest album Under The Cover Of Lightness. Without the double bass and electric guitar accompaniment of the record, the responsibility of carrying the song lies solely, and rests soulfully, with Anderson's voice and acoustic guitar. Both Fraser's vocals and guitar playing are more than up to the task.

Anderson recounts how in a moment of alcohol-fuelled bravery he emailed a song to the great English bassist Danny Thompson (I nearly wrote the great British bassist but that sounds like a show even Channel 4 would balk at commissioning). Thompson is probably best known for his work with John Martyn, one of the finest singer/songwriters this country has ever produced. Thomson liked the song, Rag & Bones, so much he agreed to play on its recording. Hearing it tonight, I'm sure that Martyn would have loved it too.

After the beautiful The Wind And The Rain has held us all spellbound, Fraser lightens the mood a little by recalling that while on an Italian tour he thought it would be fitting to sing the final words of the song in Italian. Unfortunately, his somewhat basic grasp of the language rendered the line "and the wind, and the rain" as "and the wind, and the little motorcycle".

Songs from earlier albums, Little Glass Box and Coming Up For Air keep comfortable company with Beautiful Eyes and With You All from the new release and, all too soon, Anderson's time is up. A thirty minute support slot. Nine songs played in a room big enough for fifty people. Fraser Anderson deserves so much more and, sometime soon, I'm sure he will get it. Until then, he's out there touching hearts and tingling spines. One room at a time.



# Acer Predator 17 gaming laptop

It has been a while since I've owned a gaming laptop. Imagine my excitement then as an Acer Predator 17 landed on my desk.

I dare say that things have moved on since my gaming laptop was put in to retirement.

Let's face it, 2008 is ancient history in tech terms.

The Predator 17 looks really impressive on the spec sheet.

Is this Acer gamer all show and no go though?

## Acer Predator 17 design

There is no mistaking that the Predator 17 is a gaming laptop. All the clues are there.

Acer actually says that the Predator is "*inspired by intergalactic battlecruisers*". Hmmmokay...

Having not been up close and personal with any of said modes of transport, I will take their word for it.

What I can see is that, right from the red LED tramlines on the lid, RGB keyboard and red highlights, this isn't designed for subtlety.

I do love how the power button is an over-sized triangular item and is, of course illuminated.

The front edge is augmented with red speaker grilles.

Whilst the rear is lined with red fan vents. The hot surface warning is a nice touch and very intergalactic battlecruiser.

That's not the only bit of red-tinged cooling either – the media drive can be replaced by an extra fan. It's provided by Cooler Master, and is called the FrostCore.



The Predator weighs in at over 4kg and measures 40mm thick. An Ultrabook it is not.

With all that heft you should expect sturdy build quality, and the Predator is almost there.

There is a tiny bit of give in the wrist-wrest, and similar flex in the base. The screen also flexes a little, but none of this is horrific.

Connectivity options are plentiful. You get four USB 3 ports, a USB 3.1 Type-C, HDMI and DisplayPort outputs, an Ethernet port, a card reader and sockets for headphones and a mic.

## Acer Predator 17 performance

The Predator has the name and design to stand out, but we all know it's what's on the inside that counts.

Here we have an i7-6700HQ processor running at 2.60 GHz and an Nvidia GTX 1070 with 8GB for good measure. Additionally,

you get 16GB of RAM and G-Sync baked-in.

This all pushes things along at a pace. There is plenty enough to keep the 1080p Full HD screen filled with eye-pleasing vistas of exploding aliens and high-speed shenanigans.

### Screen

The 1920 x 1080 display is pretty good. Brightness and contrast are what you would hope from a laptop in this price and performance bracket.

Brightness and contrast are what you would hope from a laptop in this price and performance bracket.

Blacks are nicely deep and inky whilst colours are vibrant.

The panel is nice and bright and suffers minimally from glare.

Movies and games, this is an entertainment lappy after all, are presented well.



# Acer Predator 17 gaming laptop

Colour accuracy, however, is not necessarily the Predator's strongest card. It's good enough for some casual photo or video editing, but pros will probably better looking elsewhere.

I was, however, impressed by the uniformity of colour and brightness across the panel.

## Sound

The speakers are impressive. Something that isn't usually said about laptop audio. For a start, the Predator 17 is loud.

Right from the ominous boot-up jingle, in-game action, and through to playing choice tracks from Tidal.

OK, so it's not the most refined reproduction, especially if you favour acoustic, Jazz or orchestral pieces. But, should your tastes be biased towards more Drum and Bass or Industrial flavours, this will do the trick.

The bass end, helped by the metallic red sub on the 17's underside, offers depth aplenty. It is truly effective signalling that things are about to get intense in games such as Doom and Left 4 Dead.

The mid-range is meaty and forward. This works well for movie dialogue and game cut-away scenes. It gets a little harsh the high mids but still impressive nonetheless.

The higher frequencies occasionally get lost and the

Predator appears to rely on those high-mids to cut through.

I realise that this isn't sold as an audiophile device, and the audio is great for action films and games, but I can't help but feel a little more attention to tweeters would add the cherry on top.



## Keyboard

The Predator's controls are well equipped, to say the least.

Over on the left-hand side you get five macro keys and a profile button. This enables you to have three banks of five pre-programmed macros. Very handy if you're into MMORPGs or similarly macro-intensive games.

The main QWERTY is a multi-coloured backlit beauty. Naturally, the WASD and cursor clusters are emphasised in deep red alongside sensible layout choices: the Windows key on the right-hand side, for instance, and a double-height Return key.

Furthermore, the entire layout appears to have been carefully considered. For example, the Windows key on the right-hand

side, and the double-height Return key.

You also get a full-sized numberpad. No shortcuts or space-saving here. Everything feels just as comfortable as using my desktop battlestation.

Additionally, the whole board can be illuminated in four zones.

The keys are all of a good size and, once I had adjusted to the typically flat profile, no incorrect key hits or cramped game-play was experienced.

Reaction times are fast and everything feels solid.

It's equally comfortable for general typing.

The pad itself is good, but not a game changer, for want of a better phrase. I do like that you can deactivate it if you're using a mouse - very handy to avoid accidental nudges or clicks.

## Battery life

A gaming laptop is never going to give you all-day cordless power but I would hope to get an hour-or-so's worth of gaming.

Looking at the spec sheet and seeing a 6000 mAh battery installed, I wasn't too hopeful.

Acer says to expect a maximum of three hours of life and, writing reviews with some light music streaming, yeah. I can see that.

However, get to gaming and, as you would expect, battery life quickly heads south. Spinning up the new-and-improved Doom and

# Acer Predator 17 gaming laptop

ramping up the brightness, et al, 60 minutes is a generous guesstimate.

That said, whoever buys a gaming laptop for battery life? Most will be dragging them to LAN parties or on holiday for out-of-town gaming. At least you know that you *could* have a quick match on the train to somewhere.

## Cool running

Fan noise isn't as bad as I thought it would be. Yes, when they kick in, there is a slight whine but once those speakers are up all is well

The Predator 17 didn't run as hot as other portable gamers I've used. Don't forget that additional CoolerMaster fan.

Whipping out the DVD-writer and slipping in the extra fan, I was not aware of any extra cooling to be honest.

That doesn't mean that it wasn't helping though.



## Acer Predator 17 review conclusion

The Predator 17 is a beast. That is not open for debate.

It packs a full HD display, a GTX 1070 8GB graphics card as well as 16GB RAM. That is enough to play all titles available right now.

The Predator will also drive virtual reality headsets too

Build quality is impressive too, as is its connectivity options.

I like the more subtle design touches too – yes there are some. Just look at the textured hinge section above, for instance.

More importantly, it's fast.

If you're in the market for a 17-inch gaming laptop, you really ought to take the Acer Predator 17 for a spin. You won't be disappointed.

## Acer Predator 17 price and availability

You can add a Predator 17 to your arsenal right now from the Acer UK webstore. Prices start at £1,599.99 and if you want the same spec as reviewed, it will cost £2,099.99.





# Casio Edifice EQB-501XDB smartwatch

**What makes a smart watch smart? I have been living with the latest from Casio, the Edifice EQB-501XDB-1AER, to see if it makes the grade.**

Smart watches. We expect them to tell us how healthy we are (or not), pass on messages and even get us back on track when we are lost. But not all smart watches are so eager to want to impress with tricks.

The Casio Edifice EQB-501XDB 1AER (catchy name, huh?) may not be packing myriad of sensors but is it still smart?

## Casio Edifice EQB-501XDB design

Before we decide if this is a smart watch, I think that we can all agree it is a *smart* watch.

I might be a self-confessed tech addict but I do love my time-pieces analogue. The EQB-501 certainly ticks that box.

The sports chronograph styling of the EQB-501XDB looks good on the wrist whether paired with a crisp white shirt and cuff links or my tattooed forearm.

The watch weighs a fraction under 200g. It has a reassuring heft to it.

The case and bezel are made from stainless steel and the face is fronted by mineral glass.

The face has three sub-displays. They look complex but their gen-

eral duties are quite straightforward. Although, they do multitask. There are four buttons, one either side the screw-down crown and



another two over on the other side.

The one that gives away the Edifice's smarts is marked with the Bluetooth bind-rune.

It's not a small watch, the case measures 52 x 48.1 x 14.2 mm, but it isn't oversized. I have quite skinny wrists and it still looks fine on me.

The watch is completed by an equally chunky stainless steel bracelet and squeeze to release clasp.

A very smart watch indeed.

## Casio Edifice EQB-501XDB performance

Let's start with one thing. You will not need to wind this watch, nor will you need to replace a battery. This baby is powered by the sun!

It is also water resistant to 10 Bar / 100 meters. This means that the watch is also suitable for swimming or snorkelling

## Tough Solar

The Casio Tough Solar power system not only utilises the sun's rays but transforms even weak light from sources such as fluorescent lamps into go-juice. If you happen to work in a darkroom or sleep in a coffin, worry not. The Edifice's hands will actually go in to hibernation when it goes dark.

The watch will give you a low battery warning and you can always check

on charge via the Casio+ app. More on that later.

While we have the watch in the dark, it is a good time to mention its Neobrite-equipped hands and markers. These luminous additions really cut through in the night so you can tell the time.

## Modes and functions

### Time telling

It tells the time. I guess you assumed as much, right? Well, as well as telling the time where you are, the little sub-dial at the 9 o'clock position tells the time in another city of your choice. You have 300 choices, by-the-way.

I currently have it set for Calgary as that's my birthplace and where my brother and his family lives. I am also heading over there next month (much excitement!).



# Casio Edifice EQB-501XDB smartwatch

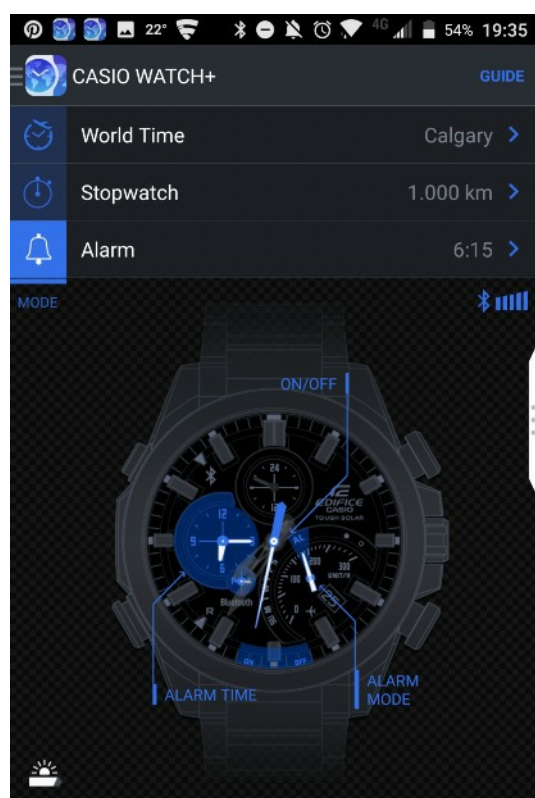
The Casio Edifice stays accurate by checking a time server four times a day via the mobile link. This not only prevents you from being late because your watch is wrong, but also means when you land in another country, your watch will always be correct. Of course, you can update your watch via the app at any point.

The top sub-dial gives you the 24 hour time helped by an even smaller dial that indicates PM and AM – just above where it says Bluetooth at the 7 o'clock position.

The days are pointed out in the right-hand side sub-dial. There is also a large date window to be found here. Beneath which is a little plane picture. If the pointer is pointing at it, that means your watch is in airplane mode.

## Smart functions

The smarter function, as with most smart watches, comes by way of a companion app.



The Casio+ app is really simple to use and pairing your watch with it is a breeze, once you know how.

To pair, open up the app and follow the wizard.

It's basically a matter of holding down the Bluetooth button on the watch. The second sweep hand will point to the blue R between 7 and 8 o'clock. This means that it is findable by your device and the app.

Once the watch has been discovered, the second hand will point to the Bluetooth symbol between 10 and 11 o'clock. Sorted.

From here you can start getting things set up.

## Casio+ app

The app packs a handy guide. This really helps, and this is coming from someone who generally only refers to instruction booklets when things go horribly wrong.

I think I like it because it's so clear and easy to take in. If you want more in-depth de-

tails, there's always the PDF manual.

In the app you can set your alarm. Actually, you can set four alarms if that's what you want/need.

You can also set the World•Time city. These are listed in a drop down pick list. Once selected just send the setting to the watch.

Also in the World Time section, you can swap your local time and the World Time by pressing an icon in the app. Hey presto! The hands move around until the main dial displays the overseas time, and the secondary one, home.

It wouldn't be a smart watch if it didn't pester you with notifications, now would it?

## Email notifications

Well, the Edifice EQB-501-XDB can link to your email accounts.

This a nice touch, but I am still unsure if I like it or not. If I include my work email account, I do manage five inboxes.

Being almost constantly notified would drive me bonkers. It's bad enough that my phone flashes at

# Casio Edifice EQB-501XDB smartwatch

me. Well, the Edifice is much more refined than that. Pressing the lower right button when connected will make the watch check to see if you've got any new mail. It will simply indicate a yes or no by pointing at one of the dots at the top of the day/date window.

You can also filter out spam from people who are not in your contacts list.

## Stop watch

Yes, a lot of watches can act as a stop watch. But, if you happen to be a sporty type, and utilise the Edifice's stop watch function you get more. You see, you can then send the data back to the app to be stored and reviewed later.

No need to jot things down on a pad.

## Comfort

Wearing the watch is really comfortable. Yes, it might feel like you could kill someone with it when you get it out of its box, but the

weight soon becomes unnoticeable.

The luminous markers and hands are really clear in low light, as well as absolute darkness.

The display is actually easy to read, even with all of the sub-dials.

I have received a number of positive comments about it. Most of my friends are familiar with my old Rado automatics but welcomed the Casio as dragging me in to the 21st century.

Some nearly fell off their chair when I added that it has smart features.

The bracelet is very secure thanks to the locking clasp and the EQB-501 just feels good and well made on my wrist.

## Edifice EQB-501XDB review conclusion

The EQB-501XDB is a smart watch in both senses of the word.

Not only will this time-piece be at home in the boardroom, it will

equally look right if you're wearing jeans and a t-shirt. That's the beauty of a well-designed chronograph.

True, the EQB-501 might lack some of the sporty smart features of other makes but, what it is packing, is actually useful.

This watch will not need plugging in or winding up. This watch will always be correct. Furthermore, it will always be correct no matter which country, or which city you are in.

It will even help you find your phone.

I am smitten. I think my collection of Rado watches dating between 1940-1980 may all be consigned to their boxes. Well, until I have to hand the Edifice back, anyhow.

## Edifice EQB-501XDB price and availability

You can buy the Edifice EQB 501XDB-1AER right now direct from Casio for £325.





# Mynt tracker

**Bluetooth tracking devices are handy, there is no doubt about that. I've been using a fresh one called Mynt. But it is more than just a tracker.**

I guess with the amount of trackers appearing, you have to do something to stand out from the crowd.

Some get famous designers involved. Others go to be crowned the smallest, thinnest or lightest.

Slightech decided to add, rather than remove, functions. Is this enough?

## Mynt tracker design

The Mynt Smart Tracker is compact, as these devices should be. Let's face it, their main job is to stay with your keys, wallet, purse or bag. Who needs extra bulk in those situations?

The tracker is finished in a rather nice brushed metal effect. This does add some premium style to it.

Mynt is 1-inch wide by 2.2-inches tall. It's quite a bit smaller than the original Tile. Mynt is only *waffer thin* too – measuring just 3.5mm.

There is a small hole to run your keyring or lanyard through.

Most important to note, however, is the button in the centre of the device. You need this in order to pair it to your phone, but also more than that.

The battery is replaceable, it comes with two. One already fitted and a spare.

## Mynt tracker performance

Download the free application on to your smartphone, and connect it to your Mynt. I had a few false starts as I did not realise that, in the wizard, you need to tap the moving Mynt icon. Once that was realised, all was smooth sailing.

Now you just have to attach the tracker to anything you're worried about losing. You can put it on your keyring, or slip it into a wallet, fasten it to your children. You get the idea.

The other thing about this Bluetooth standard is that it has about a 150 foot range. So, once it detects that the connection is broken, the app knows you've left something behind – or it has been removed without you knowing.

When this happens, you won't be able to use the sound location function. But, all is not lost.

If you need whatever you've hooked your Mynt to, but it's not currently in range, you'll be given the GPS coordinates of the last place it was seen.

So, if your keys are still at the pub you'll know.

But, what if someone's walked off

with your gear? Well, this is where Mynt's community comes in to action.

When you report lost items in the Mynt app, all your fellow users around the globe will help you find it.

Each phone with the Mynt



When you activate the app, Mynt will chirp so you can find your protected item.

## Tracking

Once you have the app installed, it is always running in the background of your smartphone.

Thanks to Mynt running on Bluetooth 4.0 LE, it shouldn't really sap your phone's battery.

installed can detect a Mynt device within 150 feet. This means that you will have the help of a network supported by hundreds of thousands people.

## Protection

This thing is going to be rattling around in your pockets or bag, so it needs to be tough. you'd expect, it's constructed completely from metal.



# Mynt tracker

Actually, it's metal construction and fully sealed joints has enabled it to receive an IP43 rating.

IP43 means that Mynt's guaranteed to withstand wet environments, and even the occasional splash. You might not want to take it swimming, but a quick dip in the sink shouldn't cause any concern.

## Battery life

As previously mentioned, the Mynt has a replaceable battery. Each one should last for around 6 months each.

So, with the spare, you should see a year's worth of protection.

## Bonus round

By pressing the Mynt's button the tracker can actually work in reverse. The app on your phone



will be activated, causing it to make the same chirping noises as the tracker itself. This only works if your phone is within the 150-foot range, so it's ideal for finding your phone if you lose it in the house.

Yeah, other trackers do that.

What separates the Mynt from the others is that the button can be programmed to do other things.

You could use it to advance slides in a PowerPoint presentation, control smart lights, work your camera shutter, control music players, or anything else that supports a Bluetooth remote.

It's not going to set the world alight, but it's a nifty addition. You have to agree with that.

## Mynt tracker review conclusion

Mynt is a decent tracker. It works as promised and looks good whilst doing it.

I like the replaceable battery so that you don't have to keep on replacing the device.

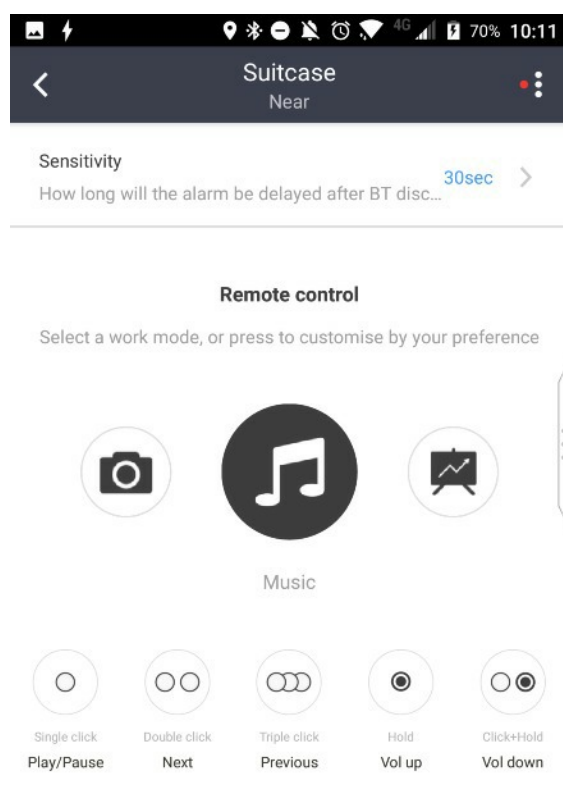
While the added remote control smarts are a nice touch, it isn't going to be the reason to buy it. Nor is the fact that it is a Red Dot Award winner.

I would buy this simply because its compact and does what it should.

## Mynt tracker price and availability

You can buy your own Mynt tracker right now for \$19.99 direct from Slighitech.

Alternatively, you can nab one from Amazon UK for £17 one or £60 for four (one of each colour).



# Sony Xperia XZ Premium phone

**We broke the news that the Sony Xperia XZ Premium was up for pre-order back in March. The release date was set for June. Well, it's now August and we've been living with one.**

It has been quite a while since I've played with a Sony phone. In fact, it was 5 years ago. Although, it was the same phone that James Bond had.

Things have moved on quite a bit since then. The XZ Premium boasts a 4K display, the latest high-end processor in the engine-room and all the cleverness that Sony's imaging heritage can muster, including super slow motion. It is also dust and water resistant.

On paper, it certainly looks like a premium phone. How does it handle in reality though?

## Sony Xperia XZ Premium design

Curvy is pervy! Well, that's what I'd like to think was the chant at the Sony Xperia design centre.

The XZ Premium (which I will shorten to XZP from time-to-time) is literally a slab. A very slender slab, but a slab nonetheless.

The front and rear of the XZP is covered in Gorilla Glass 5.

This should afford it some decent protection. It also means that this is a *very* shiny phone.

The top and bottom edges of the XZ Premium are metal.

The curved sides appear to be plastic. The unfortunate thing is that this is the bit your fingers touch most.

On one side you get the power button which also includes a fingerprint scanner. Nice.

Here you'll also find the volume rocker as well as dedicated camera



button.

Over on the other side, you get a SIM/microSD card slot with special powers! More about that later.

On the base of the handset there's a USB-C port while, on top, there's a headphone jack.

The front is mostly taken up by the 5.46-inch 4K display.

The XZ Premium measures 156 x 77 x 7.9mm, which means the screen could've been even larger. Instead, those somewhat oversized bezels are home to front firing stereo speakers.

I approve of the speaker placement but I still think there is still room for more screen / less bezel.

It certainly looks good, in any case.

## Xperia XZ Premium performance

As there's the latest Snapdragon 835 chip under the hood mated with 4GB of RAM, it is not lacking power.

In fact, that line-up matches the Samsung Galaxy S8 and LG G6 in a drag race.

### Benchmarks

I ran the Geekbench 4 app on the XZ Premium and it averaged a multi-core score of 6,438.

That's an excellent result and puts it close to the Samsung Galaxy S8 which averaged 6,630 and above the Huawei P10 which scored 5,888.

In the AnTuTu benchmarking app it shares the top 10 with some particularly high-end smartphones.

Yes, my testing may have resulted in it placing at number 10 but look at number 8, above the iPhone 7

Furthermore, my sample still actually wins some points against the Samsung Galaxy S8.

This is all very well, but what does it actually mean in real life though?

Well, Android runs very smoothly, and apps are open swiftly. The Xperia XZ Premium will happily run multiple apps at the same time. You can even jump between those



# Sony Xperia XZ Premium phone

open apps without stuttering or lag.

## Hardware

The power button on the right of the handset falls nicely under thumb when held in your right hand, or finger of your left.

I am digging the novel placement of the fingerprint scanner here too. No separate button or sensor. Also, no entering a pin, pattern, or password either. Pins and patterns are still options, however.

On the whole, unlocking the XZP using the button was fast and first time most of the time. As with all scanners, it might need a second pass every now and then.

The Xperia XZ Premium has been awarded an IP68 rating for dust and water resistance.

This means it'll survive a dip in the bath and heavy rain. The IP protection only affords the phone protection up to depths of 1 meter in fresh water. It should stay out of the pool.

One of the things that enables the XZP's IP68 rating is also something that I'm a bit in two minds

about. The SIM and microSD flap and tray.

The plastic insert feels a little fragile compared with the rest of the phone's build. This is where you slip in your microSD card. The separate SIM tray, which also resides beneath this protective flap, needs to be coaxed out with a fingernail.

Granted, there should be no real reason for you to be constantly opening this and fiddling with your SIM, but if you want to keep that water resistance, I'd recommend keeping this shut once SIM and microSD card are in place.

## Camera

The Sony Xperia XZ Premium has an excellent camera. It comes with a 19MP Sony-made rear sensor. No dual lens trickery here!

The single sensor and software still ticks all the boxes: HDR, face detection, EIS (electronic image stabilisation), predictive phase detection and laser autofocus.

OK, OIS (optical image stabilisation) would have been preferable as EIS can degrade the image. But this is still an impressive snapper.

This is all before we get to the XZ Premium's real party piece – super slow motion.

## Slow mo videos

This impressive offering can capture footage at a staggering 960fps. In comparison, the slow motion modes on the iPhone 7 (and 7 Plus) and Samsung Galaxy S8 (and S8 Plus) record at 240fps.

That means the XZ Premium gives you even slower footage. However, there is a definite knack in capturing those moments and it certainly helps to have great light.

There are three different slow motion modes to choose from.

The entry-level Slow Motion option records at just 120fps, but gives you the added benefit of applying the slow motion effect after recording your video.

This means you can pinpoint the exact moment you want to slow down after filming, without having get the timing just right when shooting live.

## Slow mo modes

The two super modes, Super Slow (one-shot) and Super Slow Motion, require you to capture your snippet of 960fps footage while recording. However, you can't edit the slow motion section of your video afterwards.

As you probably noticed in the clip above, when you go slo mo there's no audio.

- **Super Slow (one-shot)** makes things easier. All you have to do is tap the shutter key once and the XZ Premium will capture a five-second clip at 960fps. This does mean you don't get any normal-speed video either side of your





# Sony Xperia XZ Premium phone

clip, but you're likely to get a better slow motion result.

- **The Super Slow Motion mode** is the full package. Select it and hit record and you'll be filming at 720p, but an extra button appears on-screen. Tap it at any point while you're recording and the XZ Premium will grab a quick super-slow-motion clip before immediately resuming normal-speed recording. It can be difficult to get the timing right, but when you do you are rewarded with professional-looking Super Slow Motion footage.

What I found was that, as the slow-motion footage is recorded at 720p, clarity can suffer a little. This is especially so in some low light or indoors situations. This results in grainy footage. Get a good day outside or a well-lit indoor environment though, and the Xperia XZ Premium produces arguably the best slow-motion footage of any smartphone currently out there.

## Stills

Moving to the more day-to-day snaps, the XZP is a great performer.

Sony's default Intelligent Auto mode is handy and is able to adapt to the lighting environment you're in. Most shots are well-exposed, and with the laser autofocus you

generally get high detail with minimal blurring.

Moving objects are also handled with ease thanks to Sony's predictive phase detection, which can follow targets to ensure they're always in focus.

I do like that you get a dedicated physical camera button. Its two-stage operation allows you to focus your shot by pressing the button half way down, and then take the snap when fully pressed. Just like a DSLR.

Most days when I had the XZP were a bit overcast, hopefully these show what average shots look like.

You can always go manual though. This allows you to fine tune the focus, exposure, white balance and shutter speed.

The focus control is especially useful, and easy to use. Simply by adjusting the slider on the side of the display.

There is a selection of camera choices hidden away in the menu, this is where you will discover the option for capturing 4K video. Whilst here you will find panorama and the bonkers AR Effect.

The latter overlays volcanoes, dinosaurs, equips you with laser eyes, that kind of thing. Fun for the short term.

I have no doubt if you have time to spend your shots will look much better than my hasty snaps. Sony's post production skills produces nice and natural images. They might not pop as those from

the latest Samsungs do, but I prefer realism.

My one minor gripe is that it sometimes over sharpens images, especially if you go for shallow depth of field shots. In Bokeh, you don't really need the blurred background images sharpened, but the XZP really wants to. Check out the background of the rose, above.

## Display

If you're going to use the Xperia XZ Premium to capture 4K video, you should have a decent screen to watch it on. Fortunately, the XZP is loaded with a 5.46-inch 4K HDR display.

That equates to a resolution of 3840 x 2160. So, when stretched over 5.46-inches, this gives you a peeper-pleasing pixel per inch density of 807.

To put that in perspective, the Infinity Display on the Galaxy S8 manages 570ppi, while the LG G6 gives up 564ppi. It really does look good.

I challenge you to find a sharper non-OLED screen on another smartphone.

Watching 4K content on the Xperia XZ Premium is possibly one of the best visual experiences you can get from a smartphone. You might, however, spend more time tracking 4K content down than watching it though.

Sony will argue that the XZ Premium is future-proofed, as 4K content will only increase in availability – which *could be* true I guess.



# Sony Xperia XZ Premium phone

My only question is that, on a screen this size, would Quad HD be just as good? I would be interested in seeing this side-by-side with a Samsung S8.

## Audio

The front-facing stereo speakers hint at the XZP's audio skills.

The XZ Premium's speakers use S-Force:

S-Force Front Surround gives you the experience of a natural three-dimensional sound field – so you can enjoy virtual surround sound with your two front speakers.”

I think that might be pushing it slightly. Although, the speakers are capable of kicking out decent audio, albeit not at room-filling volume.

## Headphones

However, plug in a set of headphones and the XZ Premium treats your lugholes to some loving. This is thanks to audio-enhancing technology and Automatic Headphone Optimisation. The latter adjusts the sound output to suit the type of headphones you've plugged in.

You also get the Digital Sound Enhancement Engine HX (DESS HX). Sony says that even those compressed files in your playlist will sound better, as

DSEE HX lifts them up so they're closer to studio quality.”

Again, not totally convinced by this promise. But, music through my Oppo PM-3, some Noble Trident IEMs (review to follow) as well as some iFrogz Dual Driver Wireless earphones (also an upcoming review) sounded pretty great.

On-board is LDAC for when you go wireless. LDAC apparently transfers three times more audio



data than normal Bluetooth, so every note is crystal-clear. I didn't notice three-times more data coming through, but it does sound good.

## Interface

This was always a weak spot as far as me and Sony phones were concerned. I applaud the fact that it has tidied up its Android overlay.

Now what you get is not that far removed from vanilla Android, and it is so much better for it.

Under this new, slick Sony coating is Android 7 Nougat.

Sony still adds a number of its own apps alongside the expected suite of Android ones though.

Some are useful, such as the Livelog app and video-editing Movie Creator. However, the Email, Music, Album and Video ones basically duplicate the core functions of their Android counterparts.

Then there are Sony's What's New and Xperia Lounge apps. These push content, downloads, apps and games, as well as a competitions and news to you.

On the plus side, you can disable most of these apps if you decide you don't want them.

The user experience is pretty much exemplary. Flicking around, in and out of apps, and trying to confuse its screen rotation, hardly had the XZP missing a beat.

## Battery life

The Sony Xperia XZ Premium comes with a 3230mAh non-removable battery packed inside its 7.9mm-thick body.

It is by no way the largest cell out there, but it does beat phones such as the Galaxy S8 that's equipped with just a 3000mAh power pack.

As the saying goes though, it's not what you've got, it's how you use it. The XZ Premium saw me through a 'normal' day of use on a single charge. I am ignoring the days when I was benchmarking, taking and deleting video and photos, and all that kind of malarkey.

On a day with a couple of hours of music playback, some general social updates, calls, texts, browsing, and a couple of snaps, there would still be around 15% charge left as I placed it on my bedside table. My days are long, too.

Naturally, spanking it with hi res video is going to dramatically lower its stamina. Thankfully the XZ Premium has a few tricks up its sleeve to help you out.

## Emergencies

Firstly it supports Quick Charge 3.0. As the name suggests, it will replenish the battery faster than a standard charger. Actually four times faster. Handy if you're about to head out the door but notice your phone is lacking.

Unlike some brands, Sony does equip you with the necessary charging block in order for you to

# Sony Xperia XZ Premium phone

take advantage of the speedy top-up.

Of course, there's Stamina Mode too. This extends battery life by reducing background data and screen brightness, as well as disabling some functions. It's set to activate when your battery hits 15% by default, but you can manually override this.

If you're really struggling, however, you can call upon Ultra Stamina Mode. This basically turns your smartphone into a feature phone. Here you'll be restricted to nine core apps and a simplified interface. In return, you get long enough to call a taxi or finish off that killer response on Facebook.

## Xperia XZ Premium review conclusion

The Sony Xperia XZ Premium is an impressive handset. You get an excellent 4K display, as well as plenty of power to drive it. There is also a great camera and solid battery life. All these come together to make a suitably amazing top-level smartphone.

However, it also comes with a suitably top-level smartphone price tag too.

This puts it amongst some very tough competition. Samsung Galaxy S8, LG G6, HTC U11 and iPhone 7, kind of competition.

Its bezels, no matter how handy they are when playing games or taking photos, might knock it back a bit.

I do like how the XZP looks. But, this is down to personal taste at the end of the day.

The shiny finish loves your fingerprints so much it will hold on to them. Thanks to a

good oleophobic surface, they wipe off easily.

The 4K HDR screen is incredible – when you find some 4K content to play on it. Until then, at least it might still score you bragging points down the local.

The camera is a definite strong point, as is the super slow motion video capture – put in a little work and you should get some amazing results.

The XZ Premium delivers large on display, camera, power and battery

life. It is definitely the best Sony smartphone you can lay your hands on.

You do get plenty of bang for your buck if you're a Sony fan or dare not to follow the herd.

## Price and availability

You can buy the XZP outright direct from Sony for £649.

It comes in Deep Sea Black (a rather nice dark blue), Luminous Chrome (practically a mirror finish), and Bronze Pink.





# Noble Trident IEMs

**Noble Audio are renowned for both their universal and custom fit In Ear Monitors (IEMs). Many of these sit in the £1,000+ bracket. However, their Trident, is actually affordable.**

What I have learned since first peeking behind the audiophile curtain is that affordable is a relative term.

If I was to go back to 2010, let's say, and tell myself that in 2017 I would be suggesting that spending a few hundred quid is 'affordable', whilst keeping a straight face; I am sure that I would've nearly choked on my Red Stripe.

However, I haven't totally lost my grip on reality either. I still am painfully aware how much it takes to save up the coin to feed your hi-fi habit. Naturally, some have more money more readily available to spend than others. But, I know plenty of people like me that are patient. So, when that certain

component gets under your skin, it is then only a matter of time and sacrifices before it is yours.

So, the Trident IEMs then. Before I went off on one, I was stating how these are the most affordable member of Noble's current range.

Noble have managed this 'discount' by cutting down the number of drivers inside the units. Look at some of their four-figure IEMs and you'll see ten drivers per side, and the rest. Whereas, the Trident *only* has three armatures

per side. Each armature handles part of the frequency response. Hence the three-pronged name, no doubt.

How do they sound though?

## Noble Trident design

The Trident resembles other of the company's universal designs. You can, of course, opt for custom fitting of these, or any of the other IEMs in the range.

The buds have a speckled grey finish with branded aluminium end caps. They do look and feel like quality items. The diamond-cut caps sit proud of your ears a little. But, if you have short hair or wear it tied back, at least these

of the cable is designed to go over your ears.

The rest of the cable is of a decent thickness and is plaited. This not only helps prevent tangles but, word is, it makes it less susceptible to airborne electrical interference than a standard straight wire.

All-in-all, the fit and finish is typically Noble. There is no apparent cost cutting on this side of things.

## Noble Trident performance

From what I gather, the Trident has been tweaked for a 'pop friendly' presentation.

This has already set me off down a road of cynicism, unfortunately. You see, I am of a mind that good ear/headphones should be good no matter the genre of audio you listen to. Granted, mixes, production, etc.

have a lot to do with the end result. However, a lo-fi track should still sound as close to how the producer heard it, just as a lushly produced modern orchestral piece should.

Inside those resin ear-pieces are mounted 3 Knowles balanced armature drivers per side.

These hand-assembled IEMs have been designed to be sensitive enough for use with smartphones as well as portable amps and DAPs (Digital Audio Players).



earphones look good.

They come bundled in the now customary mini Peli 1010 case with a range of tips, cleaning tools, carry bag, and rubber bands. Receive these as a present, and you're certainly going to feel that the sender has gone the extra mile.

The removable cables terminate in the industry standard two-pin configuration (0.78 mm diameter). This allows for later upgrading or replacement, which is always a good thing. The rubber-coated part

# Noble Trident IEMs

## Sound quality

Kicking off with old favourite, 'Go Your Own Way' by Fleetwood Mac: Lindsey's jangly guitar work cuts through Mick's tubthumping. Bass is delivered smoothly and the vocals are neatly placed.

'Cigarette Girl' by Boris Blank is immersive and controlled. The detail of the various sounds layered in Blank's typical way can be thoroughly enjoyed. Moving on to his 'Big Beans' and the bass really makes its presence felt. But it is the fizzes of electronica that grabs my attention. The Trident really do emphasise what you are missing with lesser earphones.

The soundstage is decent for IEMs, but I kept getting drawn inwards by those details.

Shifting gear a little with '5 Morceaux de Fantaisie, Op. 3: No. 4, Polichinelle' from Alexandre Tharaud plays Rachmaninov, there are moments where the Tridents lack a little dynamism. Everything is clear and controlled, but perhaps a little too controlled.

Death Cab for Cutie and 'Black Sun' is atmospheric and spacious. Instruments all have room to breathe.

However, it is the more upbeat musings of His Royal Purpleness and that 'Raspberry Beret' he likes to sing about that shows the Trident's happy place.

These Nobles need energy and fun. Outkast's 'Hey Ya!' is a perfect platform for the Trident. Bass sits in the pocket and the track rolls along punctuated by hand claps. The acoustic guitar sparkles and the vocal harmonies swell with the synth weaving between them.

## Savanna and Trident

Having spent time with the Savanna, the next IEMs up on the Noble Classic ladder, I was interested in how these compared.



Selecting 'My Generation' by The Who with the Savannas in my ears and The Ox thundered along. Switching to the Trident and I instantly realised these were lighter on bass. However, the hi-hats and cymbals were brighter for having the bass slightly more recessed.

'Daffodils' (Mark Ronson Kevin Parker) comes through quite middy with the Tridents. There is definitely more weight in the low end with the Savanna.

Restorations' 'Tiny Prayers' dirty over-driven indie intro sounds full and almost saturated in the

Savannas. However, with the Trident, that claustrophobic start is wide and open. This makes the intro easier on the ear, yet the release is less dramatic.

## Noble Trident IEM review conclusion

The Trident are great earphones. Getting great isolation is easy thanks to the range of tips supplied by Noble. The different materials in the tips also lend slightly different acoustic properties, so it's worth testing them all.

Sound quality is excellent. The clarity and precision of the Trident will show up bad MP3 rips and low grade streaming. They partner smartphones well and pairing them with a decent headphone amp / DAC and quality

audio, be that FLAC or a service such as Tidal, you'll hear them at their best.

The Trident will eke out parts of songs that may have been hidden from you before. True, they could be a little more dynamic in some parts and hit heavier in others, but the Trident are easy to live with and pleasurable to use.

## Noble Trident IEM price and availability

You can get yourself a pair of Trident IEMs right now direct from Noble for £349.

# Adam Vimtag Fencer IP camera

**Once you start looking for an IP security camera, the choice can be overwhelming. I have been sent the Vimtag Fencer home security camera to take a look at. This not only can be moved remotely, but it boasts 960P resolution.**

Most, in fact all, the IP cameras I have been sent to review have been stationary. You find the optimal position (or best compromise) and then that's the view you get.

Vimtag, however, have a price-friendly alternative.

The Fencer IP camera allows you to operate the camera remotely. Simply by sweeping up or down, left or right, on your phone screen you will have the camera tracking whoever is in the room.

Is it all that it's cracked up to be though?

## Vimtag Fencer design

I thought Fencer was an odd name for a camera until I saw it. It obviously looks like someone wearing a fencing mask. You know, the épée/rapier type, not the wooden walls type.

Anyhoooo. It's not a bad looking thing at all.

Behind that black-tinted face-mask is a 960P camera with infrared LEDs either side of it. Those red lights do give the Fencer a slightly menacing look when they activate.

You can hook the Fencer up with a wire Ethernet connection or via Wi-Fi. You'll find the Ethernet port on the left-hand side of the camera's base.

Next to this is the hole for the microphone.

You control this remotely using the Vimtag mobile app.

This is quite a neat feature as it allows you to adjust the camera's position on the fly to keep who, or what, ever you're tracking in frame.

The pan and tilt is also handy as the Fencer has a comparatively narrow viewing angle of 70-degrees.

To be honest, in my London home, this is plenty to cover most of my main room.

Image Resolution is up to 960p, and night vision is supplied by two 940nm infrared lamps for a viewing distance of about 26 feet.

## Fencer set-up

You can connect the Fencer to your network via Wi-Fi or your hardwired LAN.

Anyone familiar with the camera's previous iteration, the

P1, will be aware that both power and Ethernet connections came by way of a clumsy dongle. Not any more with the Fencer.

Setting the Fencer up wireless wasn't as easy as I thought it would be; Mostly because, as always, I didn't really take notice of the instructions. The wizard does tell you to only use the 2.4GHz band but, me being me, was trying to hook it up to the 5GHz signal from the Sense router.

The app syncs the camera with your Wi-Fi using audio. This took



Over on the other side is a slot for an SD card. This enables you to save video and stills locally.

On the camera's domed upper are holes for the speaker.

At the rear of the base are the reset button and USB connector for power.

## Vimtag Fencer performance

The Fencer IP camera has pan and tilt functionality. This covers 350 degrees horizontally and 90 degrees up and down.



# Vimtag Fencer IP camera

me right back to the day's of dial-up and loading games on cassette tape.

The noise is annoying so best not to do this when your other half is engrossed in Big Brother.

Once I got over my little hurdle, setting up the camera is a doddle.

## Vimtag app

As with most IP cameras, the app is your hub.

The Vimtag app allows you to schedule when the camera is to be active, as well as fine-tuning its sensitivity.

Scheduling is a simple case of blocking out times on a weekly calendar.

It is all set out in 24hr clock across the top with the days down the side. Just drag your finger over the times to activate (green) or to deactivate (red). Job done.

You can also set the Fencer to activate or deactivate by simply using the app to switch to either Out Mode or Home Mode.

You also have access to a further range of settings that help you fine-tune the images.

Notifications will pop-up on your mobile device whenever the camera is triggered. Then you can either view the camera live or look in the archives to see what triggered it.

## Audio

You can listen in on what's going on by using the camera's microphone. It's not exactly the last word in home recording but it will be good enough to eavesdrop.

If you fancy letting someone know that they're being watched you can use your phone and the camera's speaker to chat with whoever's in the room. Or to freak out your girlfriend.

Be warned, using it for the latter may have the potential repercussion of you sleeping on the sofa.

they've not covered it) and clothes.

Video can be viewed in portrait or landscape. Even in portrait it is pretty good.

You also have the option to take a still direct from the live camera feed.

## Vimtag Fencer camera review conclusion

The camera does quite a lot for not much money.

Yes, there is a little lag between you swiping your phone to the camera moving, but that is kind of expected.

I still like the fact that it has this pan and tilt feature as none of the other cameras I've had to review have. All the others rely on having an almost fish-eye lens wide angle camera.

The Fencer also looks pretty neat. True, it doesn't really hide itself away, but it might do a good enough job as a deterrent should a would-be-thief spot it through the window.

Add on-board recording via SD card as well as two-way audio, and I

think the Fencer is a great option for those looking for a feature-packed security camera.

## Vimtag Fencer price and availability

You can buy the Fencer IP camera now from £90 on Amazon UK.



## Video quality

Video quality from the Fencer's camera is not bad. If you are using the pan and tilt control it takes a little for it to refocus but then all is well.

It is fairly sharp and clear enough to make out any intruder's face (if

# Acer Swift 3 laptop

**The Acer Swift 3 saw another revision this year. This latest version of Acer's 14-inch ultraportable laptop still packs a metal body and premium looks, but does it still deliver?**

The lightweight Swift range from Acer is touted at being perfect for those constantly on the go. Their slender bodies and MacBook good looks certainly talk the talk.

The latest iteration I have here comes packing Intel's Core i5 and a full HD screen.

Let's see if the rest of the Swift 3 can back up its boasts with action.

## Acer Swift 3 design

The Swift 3 is encased in lovely aluminium. The lid, keyboard surround and base are all made of the lightweight metal.

This not only makes it look really great, but it feels like you're handling a premium product.

The 14-inch 1080p Full HD screen is surrounded by quite chunky bezels.

This means it measures 338 x 234mm but only 18mm thin.

Although, the Swift 3 weighs in at just 3.3lbs (1.5kg).

Unlike a MacBook, you get plenty of connectivity options.

There is a full-size HDMI, USB Type-C, USB 3.0 ports on the left edge of the device.

You'll also find a couple of indicator lights here to show whether the laptop is on, off, sat in standby, or charging.

Over on the right-hand side, there's the SD card reader, headphone port and an additional USB 2.0 port.

Finally, there's a webcam to be found in the usual spot, just above the screen.

## Acer Swift 3 performance

Sat in front of the opened Swift is a pleasant place to be on the whole.

The Full HD (1920 x 1080) resolution screen with added 'ComfyView' is the main event, obviously.

Saying that, the expanse of silver aluminium around the monochrome, backlit keyboard is none-to-shabby either.

### Power

Under the hood of my review device is an Intel Core i5-6200U dual-core processor running at 2.30 GHz.

This is mated with Intel HD Graphics 520, 8 GB of DDR4 SDRAM and a 256 GB SSD for storage.

No gaming on ultimate here then. But that's not the Swift's remit. Where it does work well is multitasking.

Having a variety of applications, browsers and music going at the same time is all handled well. This means that a word doc, a couple of social networks open and a Skype call will be no hardship here.

### Keyboard

The keyboard will be the part you will most be interacting with – this is not a touchscreen machine.

The island-style keyboard sits nicely in its recessed area surrounded by chamfered aluminium.

As the Swift 3 measures a little more than some similarly-screen-sized lappys, this means there's more room for a good-sized keyboard.

There's still no room for a separate numpad, but what you do get is a spacious layout and full-sized keys to type on.

There's what at first appears to be a full-fat Enter key but it is sharing real estate with the ~/# key.

Along the top is a row of smaller function keys that ends with a slightly larger power button.

I found the keyboard reasonable for typing on the go. The feedback from the keys is pretty good and I found no real issue with banging out a couple of reviews using the Swift 3.

The key spacing is nice and the key presses not too spongy. Granted, I would not swap it for



# Acer Swift 3 laptop

my usual keyboard but, for a laptop, it does its job.

## Trackpad

The trackpad is an absolute joy, and definitely a jewel in the Swift's crown.

Its large, gliding surface works extremely well. It's not clunky at all. It takes light yet firm clicks and multi-touch gestures work seamlessly.

Over to the right of the trackpad is a fingerprint reader. This makes logging into Windows 10 an absolute breeze: no more the risk of someone watching you type in your password when working on the train.

## Display

The glass-fronted screen looks good and colours have great contrast.

Unfortunately, the glass also brings more reflections to the party than matte covered screens.

Its 1080p resolution is good enough for the majority of people, especially those that intend on using the Swift as designed – working on the go.

Viewing angles from the IPS LCD screen are also good.

Colour temperature is reasonably accurate but the 61.4% sRGB colour space coverage isn't going to win any photography friends.

As I said before though, this is more of an admin warrior than editing tool.

## Audio

Audio is handled by a pair of down-firing 'True Harmony' speakers on the underside of the laptop.



They do a decent-enough job as long as you don't cover the speakers with your thighs.

Sound quality isn't actually that bad for a skinny lappy. There's no separate woofer so don't be expecting any block rockin' beats though.

However, the speakers are clear and produce a good level of volume without distorting horribly.

## Other bits

The 720p resolution webcam can shoot at up to 30fps.

Not the most thrilling thing out there but it does pack automatic exposure and facial recognition in Windows Camera.

It's plenty good enough for Skype vid calls.

## Battery Life

Acer claims ten hours of battery life for the Swift 3 but I honestly could not replicate that whilst using it.

Employing it for drafting reviews with some background tunes, and social networking I saw 8 hours-ish. This is still decent, mind.

Slapping on a film over Plex saw it drop by around 12% from full. So, just using it for video watching could get it around the 9+ hour mark.

Not the most scientific tests, I know, but at least you get some idea.

## Acer Swift 3 review conclusion

The 2017 edition of the Acer Swift 3 2017 is a stylish, slim and superb workhorse.

You get around 8-9 hours of working battery life and good connectivity. Wi-Fi, and Bluetooth are both strong on the Swift 3 too.

It might not exactly be in super-bargain territory, but it is still in the more affordable bracket.

Furthermore, that metal outer, decent keyboard and excellent trackpad do help its case.

A classy business machine or one for style-conscious students.

## Acer Swift 3 price and availability

For the model exactly as reviewed, you can grab one for £670 from Amazon UK.



# iFrogz Impulse Duo Bluetooth earbuds

**Back in June we brought news of some new Bluetooth earphones from a company we've not come across before, iFrogz. So, we asked if we could take their fresh Impulse Duo earbuds for a spin.**

iFrogz is nothing to do with amphibious Apple products. This is a company who have made their name by producing inexpensive but good performing audio kit.

When I say inexpensive, the Impulse Duo is near the upper end of their range and yet still below £45. Now you can see why I just had to test these for myself.

## iFrogz Impulse Duo design

The Impulse Duo features dual 6mm drivers. This seems to have dictated their appearance, as well as their name.

I quite like how these earphones look.

They might not come bundled with a carry pouch or case, but you do get 3 sizes of tips.

The earphones are built around the company's signature wireless hub. This features a magnetic clasp and houses the battery, microphone, and the controls.

The clip serves a dual purpose too. Not only does it allow you to attach the remote to your shirt but you can use it for cable management when they're not in use.

I do like the unusual mix of materials and textures that have gone in to their design.

## iFrogz Impulse Duo performance

The ear pieces do look unusual but they are actually pretty comfortable to wear, despite their odd shape. Even the little nodule on the side didn't cause me any distress.

These haven't been touted as being sports earphones but they are IPX-2 sweat-resistant. This means, if you feel so inclined, you can use them at the gym or when jogging.

## Control unit

This slightly rectangular unit houses the battery, Bluetooth system, microphone for call handling as well as a trio of control buttons.

The two volume buttons double as track forward and back controls. The centre button activates the play/pause, call answer, power on/off and pairing functions depending on how long you hold it for and what it's doing at the time. Simple, yet effective.

I like how the buttons are quite big. There's nothing worse than fiddly controls that force you to look at them when you're walking about. They also need a decent amount of pressure to push them. For me this is a plus point in so much as accidental activation shouldn't be an issue.

The earphones are attached to the remote. This means that the magnetic clip has to be good, else the unit will yank the buds from your lugs. Thankfully, the magnet is plenty strong enough to remain attached through shirts and the like. However, I have not tested it through quality knitwear.



# iFrogz Impulse Duo Bluetooth earbuds



Saying that, more intricately mastered tracks from the likes of Boris Blank, Trent Reznor, or Fleetwood Mac for that matter, all came through more evenly handled. Yes,

If you're not wearing a top with buttons, such as a shirt, then the clip will have to slip over the neck hem of your t-shirt or, perhaps, the strap of your dress. At least this kind of clip won't pucker up the material of your top.

## Sound quality

Whilst look and comfort are important aspects, it's the sound from the iFrogz that's the greatest surprise for me.

At this price point I reckon I can be excused for my expectations of uninspiring audio. However, I need not to have worried.

Thanks to the selection of tips, getting a good fit with decent isolation should be easy for all.

The sound produced overall is well balanced, has a reasonable amount of bass and is pretty smooth in the treble and midrange.

Granted, don't dive in expecting a huge dynamic range but, for the price, they are an enjoyable listen.

The bass can be a bit uncontrolled if you have a penchant for already bass-heavy tracks.

The fuzzy tones of Mudhoney did get a lot messier before these bedded in. Even now though, the mids and highs are overwhelmed by the low end.

the bass is still forwards, but it doesn't muddy the sonic waters as much.

Partaking in some lunchtime video viewing I almost didn't realise that there was no perceivable lag. Now, I have had this issue with some other inexpensive Bluetooth head/earphones, but the iFrogz are remarkable for their lack of lag. Everything was in sync. Again, because I generally wear cabled cans I am just used to plugging in and not thinking about it.

## Battery life

The bumpf states 10 hours of battery life. This seems about right

to me. It got me part-way through the week of an hour in the morning, another hour at lunch and then an hour in the evening. So, I'd reckon that I got the low battery warnings at 9-ish hours.

## iFrogz Impulse Duo earphones review conclusion

What's not to like at this price?

They are lightweight and comfortable, have a good battery life and decent sound. iFrogz have shown that you can still get good Bluetooth earphones below the £45 mark.

## iFrogz Impulse Duo price and availability

You can treat yourself, or your friends and family, with a set of Impulse Duos now for the bargain price of £44.99 direct from Zagg.

They're even covered by the iFrogz **Earbud Tips for Life**: If your earbud tips become worn or damaged, IFROGZ will replace them.



# Speedlink Fortus wireless mouse

**Speedlink has sent us their new Fortus wireless gaming mouse. The price is definitely enticing as are the on-the-fly DPI controls and lighting.**

We've been following Speedlink and their range of PC peripherals for a while now. They impressed us with their Parthica Core gaming keyboard, will their Fortus wireless mouse do the same?

There is no mistaking that the Fortus has been designed with gamers in mind. The more aggressive styling and metallic red finish underline the fact.

Is it all show and no go, though?

## Speedlink Fortus design

The Fortus is of the right-handed ergonomic design camp. This means that its asymmetric design will be well suited for 90% of the population.

The Fortus is clothed in a brilliant red colour that has a metallic sheen to it. This is contrasted by black accents on the left and right sides, and in between the two primary buttons.

Combined with the LEDs embedded on the back and sides, you have a pretty distinctive look.

You can select one of the four "breathtaking" colours. This means that you can select an LED highlight to match your rig.

The left side has two thumb buttons, bound to back and forward in browsers by default.



You also get several grooves for extra grip.

The right side is buttonless but does have more grippy grooves. This includes a long channel for your ring finger, making the mouse perfect for those of you who prefer palm grip.

The front of the mouse has two generously sized primary buttons. There is the standard scroll wheel and DPI adjust button tucked in between.

The bottom of the mouse features the 2400 DPI (Dots Per Inch) optical sensor in the centre. There is also a tiny on/off switch and a compartment for the two AAA batteries. Speedlink kindly bundle a pair of cells in with the mouse.

In the battery compartment you'll also find the receiver dongle

stowed away. Great for when you take the mouse out and about.

## Speedlink Fortus performance

Many PC gamers refuse to trust wireless mice. Back in the day

they were hobbled by connectivity issues and reliability concerns. Things have changed but I for one still have a wired mouse plugged in to my main machine.

However, for my laptop and living-room media machine,

wireless makes a lot more sense.

The Fortus also packs its dongle away in its battery compartment. Handy when packing your laptop away you reduce the risk of the tiny USB connector going missing.

## Set up

Setting the Fortus gaming mouse up takes less than a minute.

Just open up the battery compartment and pop in the supplied batteries. Whilst here, flick out the tiny USB dongle.

Close the compartment back up and switch the mouse on using the tiny on/off switch.

With your computer already on, plug in the USB receiver and your PC will recognise the new device. Now you're golden.



# Speedlink Fortus wireless mouse

Pressing the button before the scrollwheel will cycle through LED colours as well as the dpi settings.

## Connectivity

I've used the mouse with my laptop mostly and I really didn't suffer any connectivity issues.

The Speedlink Fortus utilises 2.4GHz wireless technology that has a range of up to 6 meters. So, this not only makes it a good choice to pack with your laptop, but also for those of you with media centres that allows a mouse. Let's face it, having a wire trailing across your room is silly (I do remember my first toploading VHS recorder having a wired remote!).

Not only did the mouse keep its connection, I didn't detect any lag or interruptions.

## In use

The main thing to remember when using a wireless mouse is to remember to switch it off when not in use. The Fortus will 'hibernate' when it hasn't been used for a while. But it's best to save that charge. I would also recommend packing some spares. Rechargeable batteries are the way to go in my opinion.

Regarding those batteries: These might make the Fortus a little weighty for some.

This Speedlink 5-button mouse weighs 125 grams. Personally, I like a decent bit of bulk in my mouse. My chosen mouse at present, the Rival 700, tips the scales at 135 grams, so the Fortus feels light to me. However, I do



realise that a lot of you prefer something lighting to sling about.

The extra weight of the Fortus will become more noticeable if you have it set at the lower DPI settings. Basically, this will have you putting in a little more effort to get the mouse to cover the distance at speed. This in turn could lower your precision and increase your reaction time. This is where raising the sensor's DPI comes in, however.

I do like the slightly wide-bodied design. It's quite reminiscent of my Corsair M65 mouse.

The buttons don't feel as sure-footed as those on either of my current mice, but there's also quite a difference in price. With that in mind, the Fortus never let me down.

It is a shame that the buttons are not assignable to other handy things. Perhaps macros are too much of an ask at this price point too.

## Speedlink Fortus mouse review conclusion

The Fortus wireless gaming mouse is certainly a handy thing to have. Whether you want something a

little bit fancier to use with your media box, to use with your laptop or have as your main PC mouse, the Fortus has much to offer.

It is comfortable in use and the colour-coded DPI settings work well. On the subject of DPI, the sensor feels quite accurate and has been able to deal

with a range of surfaces.

If you are a low-DPI first person shooter, you might have to note the weight of the Fortus, but I really had no issue with this.

True, some more definite button feedback would be great but then there has to be a limit to expectations at this price point.

Overall though, this is an impressive mouse. The Amazon reviews also seem to bear this out too.

s, and it's a fair price too. The only users I wouldn't recommend trying the Fortus are low-DPI shooter players, as the weight of the mouse precludes it from accurate use. For everyone else, give it a go – you may be as pleasantly surprised by this little-known brand as I was.

## Speedlink Fortus price and availability

You can grab yourself a Speedlink Fortus wireless gaming mouse right now for £27.95 from Amazon.

For that price it's worth getting one just to keep in your laptop bag!

# Aukey PB-P5 solar charger

There are times where you will not be anywhere near a wall socket, or walls for that matter. Here we take a look at a phone and tablet charger from Aukey that harness the power of the sun.

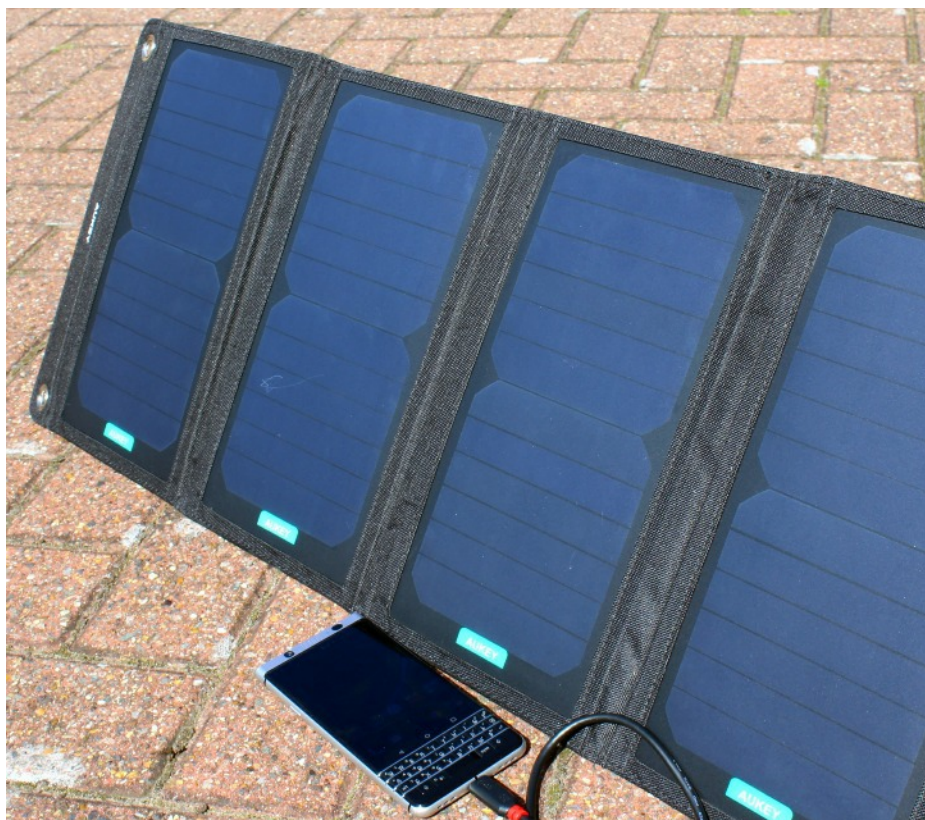
Camping essentials used to comprise of a tent, camping stove a sleeping bag and a bed roll. Now you have to keep in mind all the tech that has become essentials too – especially if camping at festivals!

That's not the only time where packing a solar charger is of use though; renewable energy is getting to be more and more important too. What better way than using the sun to charge your tech? It's free, clean and, thanks to the Aukey PB-P5, pretty efficient.

## Aukey PB-P5 solar charger design

Unpacking the Aukey portable solar charger it struck me how well built it seemed. It is also quite compact.

Folded up, it measures 31cm wide, by 18cm deep, by around 3.5cm high. It weighs just over a kilo.



Unfasten the sturdy Velcro and unfurl this pack and you get a four-panel charging device that measures 93 x 31 x 1.5 cm. That's four banks of solar panels. Each section actually appears to be comprised of two connected panels.

The PB-P5 comes bundled with a USB to microUSB cable and four

aluminium carabineers. The latter are so you can utilise the four metal grommets punched in to the heavyweight canvas of the charger and hang this thing up. I guess you could also attach it to your backpack for charging as you hike.

As this is designed to stand facing the sun it also has a pair of stands folded away. Just unfasten the nylon strips and refasten them to the base of the stands and point the panels towards the sun. Sorted.

Underneath the pocket, again more Velcro here, you will find the two USB outputs. This pocket is also handy for stashing your cables.

It's all very neat and feels rugged enough for a life outdoors, although one of the panels on my review device was scratched when I received it. However, this did not appear to effect its performance at all.





# Aukey PB-P5 solar charger



## Aukey PB-P5 charger performance

Fitted with four solar panels made of PET laminated high resistance PVC makes the product waterproof. Granted, the USB ports are not, but a plastic bag could prove a handy, yet inelegant solution to this.

Those four 7w panels add up to the ability to absorb 28w of solar energy. This converts to five amps of charging power split between the two USB ports, or about 2.4 amps per port.

Aukey says that the solar unit has a power conversion efficiency rate of 23.5% which is quite impressive.

### Plug and charge

To use the PB-P5 solar charger you need sun and to have your phone and/or tablet plugged in. The charger has no means of storing the power of Ra himself.

What I did realise, however, is that if I plugged in my powerbank to the charger, problem solved.

Other than that, you can plug in your phone and stow it away in that velcroed pocket whilst it charges.

## Charging speeds

Over the last few days in London we have been spoilt by blazing sunshine.

With the 2.4 amps output in good sunlight, my phone and tablet charged at the same rates as they would indoors hooked up to the grid.

I was really impressed by that. However, moving it in to more shaded areas, performance dropped – as you would expect.

I liked having the option to sit it up on its flip out feet or hanging it from branches using the carabineers. You can even fold it in to a pyramid-shape. I am not sure if that will impress Ra enough to send more sun your way though.

I also tested it by leaving it hanging from my car window with the charging port inside.

## Aukey PB-P5 solar charger review conclusion

If you regularly head out away from civilisation, enjoy music festivals, or just want a cleaner way of charging your gadgets,

then the Aukey solar charger will certainly suit you.

Yes, you do need sunshine, but I have been leaving it in the office window hooked up to a powerbank for free energy and it has worked fine.

I find that the Aukey PB-P5 does exactly as it promises and at a reasonable price. Add in that the panels are waterproof (great for the British weather and all) and it packs up small enough to fit in a backpack, then the PB-P5 solar charger should become another one of your festival/camping essentials.

## Aukey PB-P5 solar charger price and availability

If you still have some festival dates to cover, or planning a camping holiday, then grab an Aukey solar charger now from Amazon for just £36!



# Bestek 8 AC / 6 USB tower extension

**Trailing sockets, 4, 6, or 8 gang extensions whatever you call them, they're darned handy. We have been testing out the Bestek 8 Way Surge Protected Tower Extension Lead.**

OK, so it might not have the snappiest of names out there.

Saying that, Bestek actually have it dubbed as the 1500J.

As its long name suggests, this is a compact 8 AC outlet tower-styled extension.

It also features a bank of 6 USB ports for charging your mobile devices.

You can also add to all of this that the AC outlets are all surge protected.

Yes, I am trying to make this multi-outlet power extension appear exciting. Is it working?

Well, let's get in to the review as it is actually quite decent.

## Bestek 1500J 8 plug 6 USB tower extension design

I really like how compact this Bestek power strip is.

It is basically square measuring 4.8-inches both wide and deep. It stands just 5.7-inches tall.

This means that it is easily hidden behind things and also won't get in the way of stuff either.

It is much lighter than I was expecting at just 2.1 pounds. That's light enough to get packed with the rest of my band equipment.

The tower features a pair of AC outlets on each side positioned vertically.



There are two power buttons at the corner of the power strip. Pressing the top power button activates the AC Outlets on the top side, and pressing the bottom button activates the bottom AC Outlets on the bottom side.

Once you activate a portion of the AC Outlets there's green LED light that turns on below the button.

You can turn on both portions of the AC Outlets, so don't worry about being limited.

The great thing is that you can arrange the things that can be switched off on one row and those that require constant power on the other. That way there is no need to unplug those that need powering down individually.

At the bottom of the Surge

Protector there is a Reset button, as well as lights for indicating that the power strip is Protected and Grounded. Nice touches.

The power cord is 6 feet long so it should be long enough to place on your desk or run from the wall to where you need it.

## USB

There are 3 USB ports on opposite corners of the Power Strip. When you connect a device to a USB port its green activation light turns on at the top.

There are no power buttons for the USB ports.

Above both columns of the USB ports, there's a Photosensitive Sensor. This controls the USB light brightness for each of the ports.

So, if you're in a well-lit room then the USB lights for each port will be brighter. Alternatively, if you have device charging with the USB ports in a dark room, each of the lights will be dim. A great idea, especially if you charge your devices when you're sleeping –

# Bestek 8 AC / 6 USB tower extension

you don't need bright LEDs keeping you awake, do you?

## Bestek 1500J performance

To be honest, I wasn't expecting much in the way of build quality from the Bestek tower.

It's great (and a relief) to find that it's made of fireproof V0-grade PC and ABS material. This gives you a decently solid build, as well as handing it that light weight.

### In use

All of the components of this tower extension from Bestek feel top-notch.

The switches are sturdy and the connections taught. It really is handy having a bank of USB ports ready and waiting – especially if you have guests. This goes doubly if some of the guests are teens!

I really do like the way you can switch one bank of outlets on and off separately to the other. On the subject of the outlets, the spacing between them is perfect. As you can imagine, I have a range of plug types depending on the tech that they are attached to. Routers come with adapters mostly, the television has an oversized rubberised plug, my Echo Dot is basically a USB plug – oh! I could



just plug it directly in to the tower! Genius.

Those USB ports dish out 5V/2.4A and have the max output of 8A. That should cover everything from mobile phones, to tablets, to powerbanks and the rest.

## Bestek 1500J review conclusion

Power strips, towers, extensions aren't generally something to get excited about. I can't honestly say that the Bestek 1500J made me sweaty with anticipation, but it really does the job.

Having control over each bank of four outlets is

neat. The addition of having 6 USB ports is certainly handy. It also makes the 1500J ideal for the office.

Being surge protected is a definite bonus too – nobody wants to be on the wrong side of an electric surge.

Finally, it's worth mentioning the small form-factor of the tower, too.

All of this adds up to a good buy if you're in the market for a multi-outlet extension with the bonus of a 6 USB hub.

## Bestek 1500J AC / USB tower price and availability

You can get one now for just £36 from Amazon.

