

Hifi Pig

& GadgetyReviews

FEBRUARY 2018

Is Kostas Metaxas THE most creative force in Hifi today? Hifi Pig speaks to the main man at Metaxas and Sins

So you want to run your own record label? We get the lowdown from Serial Bowl Records

Avantgarde electronic musician Dale Jonathan Perkins review and Interview

22 Pages of Hifi News
Plus
Hifi Reviews
GadgetyReviews
& Much More...



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



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



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

- Jon Myles, **HiFi World 2015**

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

- Awards Edition, **HiFi World 2015**

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

- **Mono & Stereo, 2015**

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



Stereo Times
The Complete Audiophile Magazine

BEST PRODUCT 2015 High Fidelity.pl

HI-FI WORLD





WELCOME

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Welcome to the new look Hifi Pig and GadgetsReviews E-Magazine. We've taken comments about the look and feel of the magazine on board and have given it a whole new feel that we think is fresher, clearer and easier to read across a whole load of devices.

For this re-launch edition we had the immense pleasure of chatting to the creative force that is Kostas Metaxas of Metaxas and Sins and who you can see pictured on our front cover;

As well as the great news, reviews and interviews that readers have come to expect from Hifi Pig, we have also included more comment from regular contributors, and this month have a great in-depth review and interview with avant-garde electronic musician Dale Jonathan Perkins.

We like to keep it pretty relevant here at Hifi Pig and so there's also an interview with the brilliant punk label Serial Bowl Records that should give budding label owners a good place to start things collectively and on a shoestring budget.

On a lighter note we follow Rune Skov of Raidho about whilst he's at the CES event and there's even a bit of a quiz for you to test your music knowledge on.

We hope you enjoy the new look and feel of the magazine and hope you continue to love our output.

GADGETYNEWS

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CLICK AND GO! INDEX

NEWS: All the months Hifi News in a new easy to read format. **GO!**

INTERVIEW:



Kostas Metaxas: The creative powerhouse behind high-end brand Metaxas & Sins. As well as his wonderfully inventive “High-end audio sculptures”, he has an extensive collection of concert recordings from some of the top names in the music world. Not limiting his imagination to the audio world, Kostas also designs for some of the most well-known luxury brands in the world. **GO!**



HIFI REVIEWS

MUSICAL FIDELITY M6 ENCORE CONNECT

LINN KLIMAX DS STREAMER

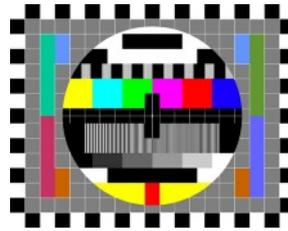
AVID HIFI REFERENCE FOUR LOUDSPEAKERS

ALBEDO MONOLITH REFERENCE SPEAKER AND INTERCONNECT CABLES

FLARE AUDIO PRO IN EAR MONITORS

ATC HDA-DP20

LIFE THROUGH A SCREEN. A MODERN DAY ADDICTION?



Our obsession with screens shows no signs of slowing down but what does this mean for the future of high quality music in the home and on the go? **GO!**

STU'S VIEWS: RANK AND FILE



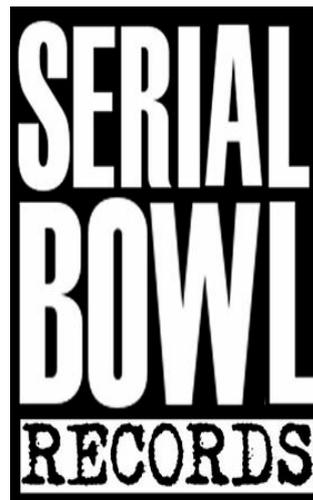
It's all well and good having a thousand and one records in your collection, but how do you go about organising them and making sure you can put your hands on specific recording you want to play? **GO!**

BIRD'S EYE VIEW: THE SIGNATURE OF STYLE



I was browsing through Facebook earlier, flicking through some of the Hifi and audio related groups that I am a member of, and something caught my eye. The cover photo for this one group was a close-up of a loudspeaker driver, instantly recognisable, without any branding or names visible, it was the KEF Uni-Q driver. **GO!**

SERIAL BOWL RECORDS

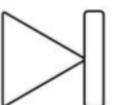


So You want to launch your own record label but don't have the funds, don't have the know-how and frankly haven't a clue where to start?

Hifi Pig has a chat with Serial Bowl Records, a label collective based in Sunderland in the North East of England to get the low down.

GO!

David Blumenstein takes a look at how 2018 is starting out musically. **GO!**



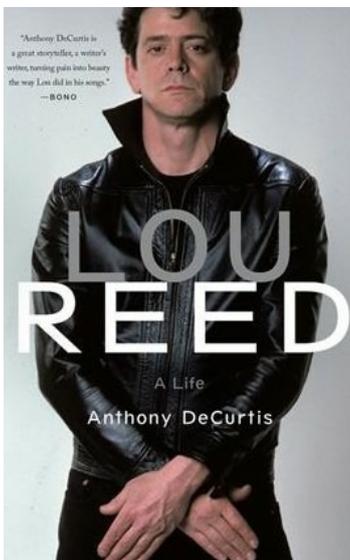
CLICK AND GO! INDEX

INTERVIEW



Dale Jonathan Perkins "Voice Without Words Parts 1-3 (Ishikawa) plus Interview with this innovative and somewhat avant-garde musician. [GO!](#)

LIVE MUSIC: Slalom D and The Damned by Fiona Duncan. [GO!](#)



BOOK REVIEW: Lou Reed: A Life by Anthony DeCurtis. [GO!](#)

THE HIFI PIG MUSIC QUIZ. [GO!](#)

LIVING THE HIFI LIFE:



A Behind the scenes glimpse of life on the road with Rune Skov of Raidho whilst he visits the US. [GO!](#)

GADGETY REVIEWS



[IFI NANO IDSD BLACK LABEL PORTABLE DAC/AMP](#)

[KZ ZS6 LOW COST HYBRID QUAD DRIVER EARPHONES](#)

[NINETY7 VAUX SPEAKER FOR ECHO DOT](#)

[HONOR 7X - FLAGSHIP LOOKS, MID-RANGE PRICE](#)

[BRAINWAVZ B200 DUAL BALANCED ARMATURE EARPHONES](#)

[WIZ SMART LIGHTS - VOICE CONTROLLED ILLUMINATION](#)

[FOOBOT SMART AIR QUALITY MONITOR](#)

[TIBAG COMPACT LAPTOP BAG](#)

[ROCCAT KHAN PRO GAMING HEADSET](#)



YOUR HIFI NEWS



SA LAB LILT AMPLIFIERS

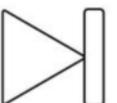
Moscow based S.A.Lab have launched their all new Lilt entry level range of amplifiers. The Lilt range uses the original output transformer technologies from their flagship Hercules and Samson projects.

Lilt Power has 2 x 12 W (4 Ohm). Tubes used are two input 12AX7 and four output 6v6 in push-pull mode. Due to having volume control, Lilt Power is able to operate as integrated amplifier. Activating of Direct mode converts the Lilt Power to a power amplifier. Power transformer is 250 W.

Alexey Syomin, who founded the company in 2002 told us more: "Lilt preamplifier contains two EL84 coupled with transformer. Power transformer is identical of that of Lilt Power. Volume control is based on relay switched high quality resistors. RC-correction was taken for Lilt Phono. The unit's tubes are 12AX7 and two 12AY7. We adopted kenotron power supplying for the Lilt Phono (5AY3 rectifier tube). Output transformer is of 100 W. There are two MM inputs. For MC-cartridges you can use S.A.Lab step-up transformer".

The face panels of the lilt range are made from polished Corian and are available in a large range of colours.

Dealer pricing for each unit is in the region of 800€



NEWS



METAXAS & SINS GQT PORTABLE RECORDING DEVICE No.1

Many Audiophiles argue that the absolute best “source” for reproduced music is analogue tape recorded on 10" reels at 15ips. The same analogue tape reel-to-reel recorders are also seen as the absolute best way to record and capture music [concert recording].

This high quality is what is driving the incredible resurgence in interest in Open Reel Analogue Tape Recorders. The High End Audio industry has embraced and acknowledged this over the past 10 years.

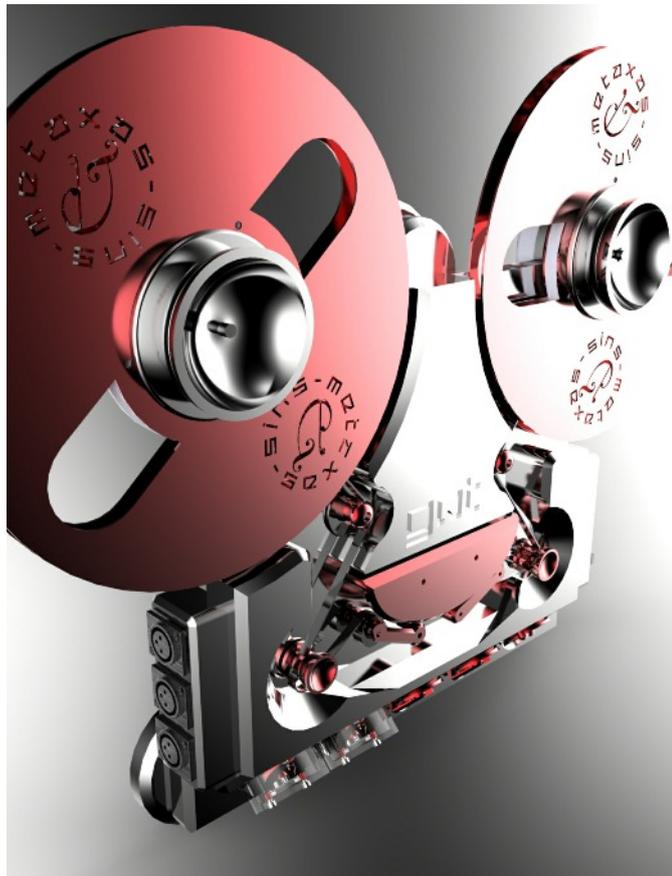
Artist and Recording Engineer Kostas Metaxas has not only been aware of this since the mid 1980s, but in fact been using two portable heavily modified Swiss “Stellavox” portable tape recorders, manufactured in the mid 1980s to record over 300 concerts on analogue tape]. He is one the most prolific recording engineer using analogue tape of the past 20 years.

“When I purchased my Stellavox SM8 and TD9 in 1986, they cost ~ \$50K – the price of a suburban house in Melbourne, Australia. The same house today is ~ \$1million. ”

Kostas' work with Stellavox including some of his recordings on a DVD have been featured in a book on Stellavox by German writer Roland Schellin. Fueled by this recent interest, Kostas has decided to produce an entirely new tape machine based heavily on the portable Stellavox SM8 recorder which has even received the blessing of Stellavox founder Georges Quellet.

The Metaxas & Sins “GQT” [Georges Quellet Tribute] is a portable analogue tape machine designed for ultimate location recording and playback duties. Biased for either 468 or 911 1/4" analogue tape, it will operate only at 15ips using a brushless DC motor in a pure mechanical operation. In other words, it will be built like a large Swiss mechanical watch mechanism – absolutely no logic/computer control hardware will be employed. The circuits will also be using 100% discrete transistors and parts similar to construction from the 1960's to early 1970's before all Tape recorders started using Logic controls and 5534 op-amps.

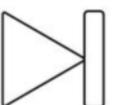
The prototype will be displayed at the Munich High End Show in May 2018 [Hall 1.0, Stand D01a] and a very limited edition production will commence later in the year in August/September.



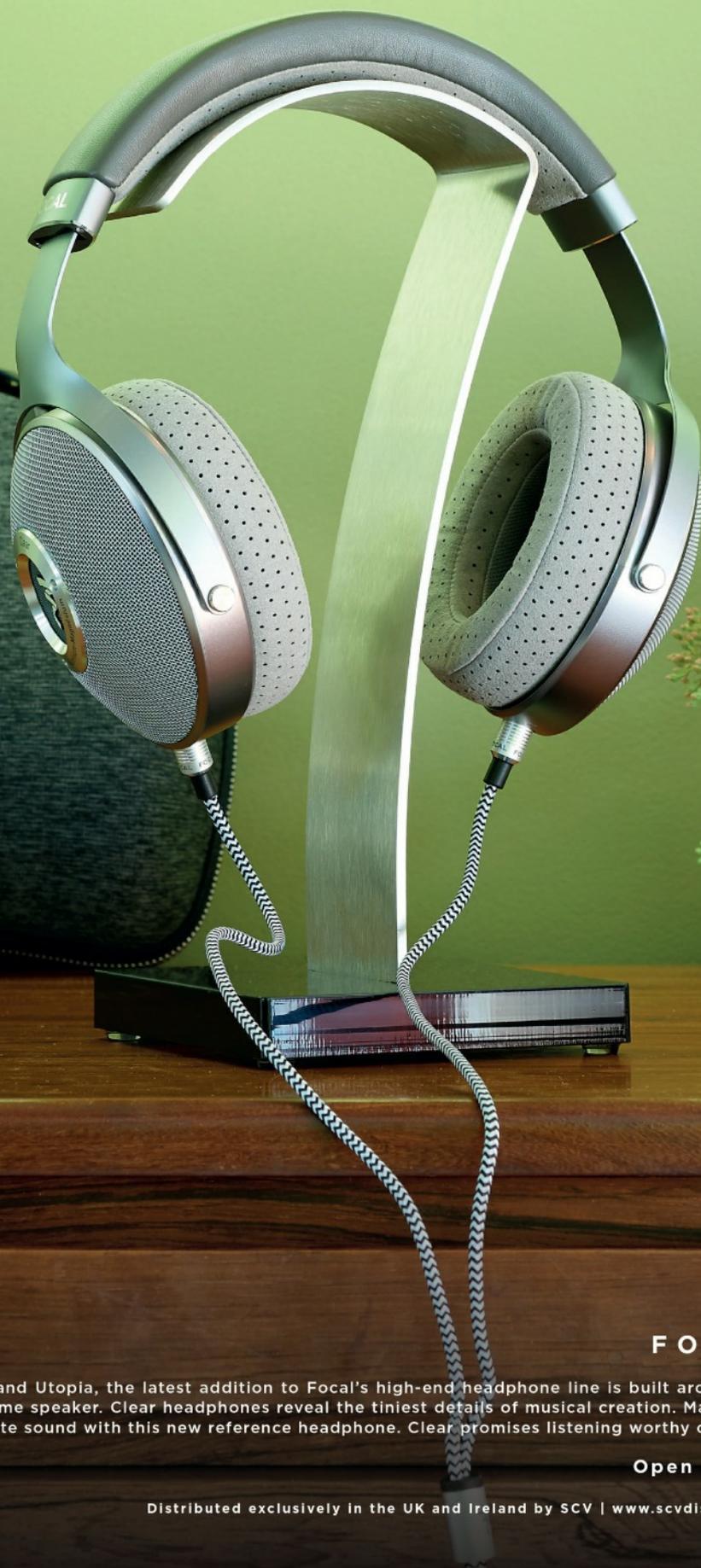
PIONEER XDP- 30R & ONKYO DP-S1 DAPs GET USB-OTG

The Pioneer XDP- 30R (pictured) And Onkyo DP-S1 Digital Audio Players (DAPs) which both offer TIDAL Masters (MQA) mobile streaming capability, have also now been given USB-OTG (on the go) functionality.

This allows them to also function as a Digital Playback Source/Transports when used with suitable external Digital To Analogue converters, amplifiers/speakers with suitable internal DACs etc.



 **FOCAL**[®]
LISTEN BEYOND[®]



FOCAL | CLEAR

A year after Elear and Utopia, the latest addition to Focal's high-end headphone line is built around a new generation of full-range 'M'-shape dome speaker. Clear headphones reveal the tiniest details of musical creation. Made in France, Focal continues its quest for absolute sound with this new reference headphone. Clear promises listening worthy of the best loudspeakers.

Open Reference headphones

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NEWS



SOUND CARRIER 807 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Croatian Hifi brand, Sound Carrier has added a new member to their integrated amps line-up. Their new 807 integrated amplifier uses 807 tubes in triode mode

They went on to say of the new amplifier: "Sound is quick, dynamic, opened and draws you into listening to music. Thanks to large transformers and high capacity power supply it can provide many details which would be expected from much more powerful amplifiers". Price 1,300€



NEW FROM SENNHEISER

Sennheiser introduced the closed-back HD 820 headphones at the recent CES event. Additionally, Sennheiser is expanding its range of wireless headphones with the launch of the new CX 6.00BT. The current AMBEO range will also be represented with the binaural AMBEO Smart Headset. (Pictured).

The HD 820 headphones have a glass transducer cover that minimises resonances, whilst the CX 6.00BT in-ear wireless model features ear-canal earbuds joined by a cable around the neck with wireless technology that includes Bluetooth 4.2 and Qualcomm apt-X.



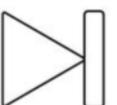
AVANTGARDE ACOUSTIC INTRODUCE ROOM SELECTOR

Avantgarde know that the appearance of their speakers can also be a springboard for the imagination and that they represent a distinct lifestyle 'powered by' horn loudspeakers.

Because of this they have created a Room Selector to allow clients to play around with rooms and speakers and find the perfect combination of colours and space for their new horns. Avantgarde Acoustic told us "It has long time been our desire to find a tool for illustrating this, and for giving examples that make people dream of a lifestyle that incorporates our horn loudspeakers, celebrating a symbiosis of great interior design and great sound".

In a process that lasted the last few months, a skilled CAD engineer created renderings of various high class interiors and Avantgarde's speaker models (including a multitude of finish options), which are freely combinable by simply clicking according buttons. Whatever your style taste you can have your perfect interior and horn combination in just a few clicks.

The Room Selector tool will be available soon on the official Avantgarde Acoustic Website, in each product menu under 'Room Selector'



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Let the Music Flow



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

roon TIDAL

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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AURALiC
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MERIDIAN

Quadraspire

T+A

Tellurium Q

NEWS



AURALIC INTRODUCE SPOTIFY CONNECT

There are many ways to stream music to all Auratic streamers: the company's own proprietary Lightning DS, Airplay, Bluetooth and Roon. Tidal and Qobuz are also embedded.

Spotify say that they are the worlds most popular streaming service with sixty million subscribers. This free of charge 5.3 update is available now.

You can read our review of the [Auratic Aries here](#)



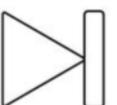
NEW TECHNICS TURNTABLES LAUNCHED AT CES

The Technics range has extended its Reference Class line-up of audio components with its newest direct drive turntable and turntable system, the SP10-R and SL-1000R. Designed and engineered for “ultimate analogue vinyl performance”, Technics say that “the legendary SP-10 Series of Direct Drive Turntables and their accompanying Direct Drive Turntable Systems have become synonymous with direct drive technology, and are fitting symbols of the Technics brand name that continues to inspire the admiration and loyalty of audiophiles worldwide. Building upon their impressive heritage, the SP10-R and SL-1000R continue to provide a new reference point for modern high-fidelity turntable technology and lead the market for a new age”.



The SP10-R includes a double coil twin rotor-type coreless direct-drive motor with coils on both sides for 12-pole, 18-coil drive, and high enough torque to drive the heavyweight-class platter. The result is a stable rotation of 0.015% wow & flutter or less, which is considered to be the measurement limit.

The turntable also features a turntable platter with a 10-mm-thick brass weight, enhanced with tungsten weights on the outer periphery. The brass weight is laminated onto the aluminium die-cast, giving the platter a total weight of approximately 7.9 kg and an inertial mass of approximately 1 ton cm. A deadening rubber for eliminating unwanted vibration is attached to the rear surface to form a three-layer construction to achieve an even higher rigidity and provide excellent vibration-damping characteristics. To achieve further noise reduction, the control unit is separated from the main unit and its switching power supply is equipped with unique technology that provides a voltage supply with minimal noise via a newly-developed ‘unwanted noise reduction circuit’. In addition, the communication between the main unit and the control unit are engineered to resist the effects of external noise whilst increasing reliability. The SP-10R has been developed to be completely interchangeable with previous SP-10 Series models, such as the SP-10MK2 and SP-10MK3. In order for users to continue using the turntable base and turntable of these previous systems, the shape and screw positions have been designed to allow for complete backward compatibility. The control unit is also the same shape and size as the SP-10MK2 power unit for trouble-free replacement.





CALA[®]

MULTI SOURCE RECEIVER

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.

For more information or to arrange a demonstration, please contact:

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Office: +44 (0)24 7722 0650
Email: info@kogaudio.com
Web: www.kogaudio.com

NEWS



VOXTOK & ELIPSON BRING VINYL TO YOUR TV

Voxtok, which recently joined the Netgem Group as its dedicated Sound Division for innovative musical entertainment in TV and audio sectors, and Elipson, a French manufacturer of high-end audio solutions, are collaborating to provide an “enhanced and enriched vinyl record listening experience”.

Voxtok is adding vinyl turntables as an additional music source for its integrated music service. This, say the company, allows them to “extend the user experience to TV sets and tablets like never before”.

“Vinyl is alive and well, offering an additional way to provide a rich, multi-dimensional, and consistent user experience. This expanded experience leverages the communication abilities provided by Elipson turntables, and the power of our music service platform for TVs and mobile terminals. Voxtok combines the charm of the analogue world with the richness of digital services to create a pleasing and enjoyable experience for users,” declares Joel Reboul, CEO of Voxtok.

When a record is played on the Elipson, turntable, Voxtok detects the album and displays information on the TV and/or mobile terminals, along with content related to the identified album and artist, such as videos, news, and other additional services to be added in 2018. This functionality has recently been included in the Voxtok Music service.



AUDEZE iSINE LX PLANAR IEMS AT \$199

Only available in the USA at the moment, Audeze have introduced a new look and low priced model for their iSine Planar IEM range, with the Audeze iSine LX.

Available at \$199 with the standard cable and \$259 with standard and Cipher Lightning cables.



NORDOST ANNOUNCE RED DAWN USB CABLE

Nordost has announced the introduction of the new, Red Dawn USB Cable. The Red Dawn USB Cable is the first of Nordost’s USB options to offer USB C plug compatibility.

The Red Dawn USB Cable uses silver-plated 99.9999%, OFC signal conductors. It also utilises Nordost’s proprietary FEP Micro Mono-Filament technology.

Suggested retail price for this product starts at \$274.99 for a 0.3 meter length.



NEWS



TITLE OF ARTICLE

The new Qutest is based on the latest proprietary Rob Watts' FPGA technology developed for the Hugo 2 DAC/headphone amp. Qutest uses an all-new precision-machined aluminium chassis and includes several new features, including fascia controls.

Qutest uses the same internal DAC architecture and proprietary software coding as the Hugo 2, giving it proven technical and sonic performance. Qutest also offers Hugo 2's unique user-selectable frequency-shaping filters and input selection controls, available via two fascia-mounted spheres, introducing useful flexibility. Qutest offers a significant cost saving over Hugo 2 at £1,195 (H2 £1,800), as it eschews the headphone amplifier, rechargeable Li-ion batteries and crossfeed functionality integral to the transportable device.

Qutest is the latest evolution of Chord Electronics' most affordable standalone DAC, the 2Qute, which it directly replaces. Qutest is uniquely equipped to bring the benefits of Chord Electronics' acclaimed proprietary hardware and software technology to a wide range of connected devices. It features a galvanically isolated USB-B, optical and dual coaxial digital inputs, giving an instant upgrade to everyday audio devices plus the ability to modernise ageing digital source components. It also features RCA analogue outputs for connection to integrated amplifiers, preamps and headphone amps, plus high-resolution 768kHz-capable dual-data digital inputs for connection to Chord Electronics' devices including the 705/768kHz-ready M-Scaler-technology BLU MKII digital/CD transport.

Qutest has been designed for static use within home audio and desktop hifi systems. The new design benefits from 5V Micro USB powering which offers improved flexibility over its predecessor. Qutest offers support for up to 32-bit/768kHz PCM and DSD512 via its galvanically isolated USB-B input, 24-bit/384kHz PCM and DSD128 via coaxial (BNC) and 24-bit/192kHz data on Optical TOSLink. DSD 64 to DSD 256 is supported via DoP and ASIO native DSD format is also supported up to 512. The device features a Class 2 USB input which, because of the Qutest's home-system orientation compared to Hugo 2's more mobile aspirations, has been galvanically isolated. This has been achieved using a novel technique which allows for very high data rates of up to 768kHz; the input is driverless on Apple and Android devices, with (ASIO included) drivers for Windows devices.

A further new feature is a user-selectable output voltage available in 1, 2 and 3V RMS outputs for flexible connectivity with partnering devices.

The latest FPGA and advanced WTA (Watts Transient Aligned) filters have been implemented in the Qutest, bringing a wide variety of performance improvements over the 2Qute in a number of areas. Performance gains have been made in timing accuracy, noise reduction and dynamic range and tap length, the technical indicator of how complex the interpolation filter is, has more than doubled compared to its predecessor, to 49,152. A four-function switch filter, operated by its own control sphere, offers a useful degree of user-selectable frequency-shaping, bringing warm and soft or transparent and incisive presentations, giving additional flexibility and user control.





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NEWS



AMARE MUSICA DIAMOND FIREFLY SPEAKERS

The first showing of the Amare Musica Diamond Firefly loudspeakers took place at the Audio Video Show 2017 in Warsaw, last November.

These Polish standmount speakers retail for 7,200€ and are available to order now.

Read Hifi Pig's [coverage of the show here](#).



LUZLI ROLLER EXHIBIT IN PARIS

Luzli Roller, the Swiss/British Brand that make a unique pair of high end headphones, the Roller, which was a stand-out product at Indulgence 2017, exhibited at Maison et Object in Paris, a trade fair for lifestyle fashions and trends, which ran from January 19th to 23rd 2018.

Luzli Roller featured a limited edition Black version of their headphones and a time lapse video of how they are assembled.



GOLD NOTE IS-1000 SUPER INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Back in November we brought you the news that Italian manufacturer, Gold Note, were releasing their 'all in one' Super Integrated IS-1000. Now, take a look inside.

The Gold Note IS-1000 is an advanced fully integrated that merges a Preamplifier, a Power Amplifier, a Phono Preamp, a DAC and a Streamer in an aluminium chassis to form a 'complete source'.

The refined technical innovations of IS-1000 come directly from the Gold Note flagship models, like the preamplifier P-1000 and the power amplifier PA-1175, which inspired them to create a new source that would integrate the analogue components of a high quality amplifier with the digital technologies of a Streamer and a DAC.



innuos



ZEN MkII Music Servers

Powered by innuOS



"possibly the finest digital source heard by this reviewer to date"



"a celebration of what can be achieved right now"



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



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



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



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



"Erleuchtet", ZEN
"Höhepunkt", ZENith



"Ein sehr empfehlenswertes Gerät!"



"Einfach Perfekt"



"Extrem feiner, detailreicher Klang"



"IFA-Highlight! 6 von 6 Punkten"



"Facettenreich"



"Innuos ZENmini Mk.II 擁有它，就成了「數位新貴」"



"Εξαιρετική διαχείριση των αρχείων"



"el más completo exponente de lo mucho que ha avanzado la reproducción digital"



"textura, dinámica e riqueza harmónica"

NEWS



TELLURIUM Q UNVEIL STATEMENT LEVEL CABLES

British cable manufacturer Tellurium Q have announced their new top level cable range, the Statement.

We will be having a chat with Tellurium Q about the new Statement series in the coming weeks, but for now they are saying "From what Tellurium Q have learnt, especially in the last few years, we are now able to launch the Statement cables. They are the Tellurium Q Statement of the performance that we think is currently possible".



GOOGLE CHROME ON LATEST EPSILON SPEAKERS

Following the recent launch of their Prestige Facet passive loudspeakers, Elipson's parent company AV Industry has teamed up with Google to announce two new powered wireless versions featuring Google's Chromecast Audio supplied free.

Simply plug the powered speaker into the mains, connect the other speaker with the loudspeaker cable supplied, then just pair with a Bluetooth enabled smartphone, tablet or laptop ... or connect the Chromecast dongle to receive the source over your Wi-Fi network. The APTX HD Bluetooth receiver can handle 48 KHz / 24 bit high resolution audio files whilst the Google Chromecast dongle can boost your signal and dynamic range still further to 96 KHz / 24 bit for audio reproduction without compression and an increased output level to 1.4V / 2V RMS. The Chromecast function also allows you to transform your system into a full multi-room solution (when using other compatible speakers) using the App. In addition to wireless connectivity, the speakers are also equipped for wired connections including RCA Line, RCA Phono and 3.5mm inputs, together with a digital Optical input and Sub Output.

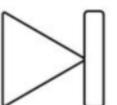
The Prestige Facet 6BT and Facet 14BT loudspeakers will receive their UK debut at the forthcoming Bristol Sound And Vision Show. They will be available in black, white and walnut vinyl cabinet finishes with black or white matching high gloss lacquered front baffles, at a UK SRP of £549.99 for the Facet 6BTs and £1,149.99 for the Facet 14BTs.



TRANSCRIPTORS TO CEASE PRODUCTION

Michael Gammon, son of David Gammon of Transcriptors, has released the sad news that they are to cease production of their turntables.

Michael released this quote on their Twitter account: "Unfortunately, we have come to the decision that our turntables are no longer financially viable in today's climate and therefore have decided to cease production with immediate effect" They will still provide replacement spares for all of their turntables produced between 1963 and 198, through their online shop. [More about Transcriptors.](#)



NEWS

KEF Q50A DOLBY ATMOS ENABLED SPEAKER



Designed to work with the KEF Q Series range as well as other AV speaker systems, the Q50a is a Dolby Atmos-enabled, upward-firing speaker designed to be placed on top of front and rear satellite speakers, to deliver the 'height' sound information provided by any Dolby Atmos-compatible amplifier.

KEF say: 'The Q50a's sound performance has been tuned by KEF acoustic engineers to bring an extraordinarily immersive, cinematic verticality of Dolby Atmos sound into your home without mounting overhead speakers, using precision ceiling reflection. Q50a can also be easily mounted on the wall using dedicated keyhole fixings, creating a high-fidelity home surround sound experience. The use of a Damped Tweeter Loading Tube – a rubber, chisel shaped damper – keeps high frequencies sounding detailed and natural. At the heart of Q50a is the latest Q-Series Uni-Q driver array. It features a lighter cone return, improved spider suspension, and a new generation of cone neck decoupler, to create excellent dynamics with a supremely accurate, fast, and clean sonic response. Designed as a vital part of the Q Series family, Q50a's visual design shares consistent elements with other Q Series speakers'.

Available now in satin black and stain white finishes

Price: £450 per pair (SRP)

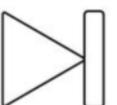


PMC AT ISE 2018

PMC will be at the forthcoming ISE (Integrated Systems Europe 2018) show, to present its premium lines for the world of high-end home theatre design and custom installation. PMC will be with Stewart Filmscreen, and will be displaying and demonstrating its premium lines appropriate to high end home theatre installations, in Hall 1, stand 1-F50, in Amsterdam from the 6th to 9th February 2018.

Demonstrating the "ultimate in audio transparency for home theatre", from behind Stewart Filmscreen's brand new acoustically transparent borderless screen, will be the wafer2™ series. PMC will also be showcasing the BB6 and QB1 (pictured). These large-scale speakers, with active DSP control, are used by many of the major Hollywood movie studios and film score composers during the creation of blockbuster films.

Commenting on the company's return to ISE, export sales director Miles Roberts says, "With ISE's status as the place to showcase premium quality products for the custom installation market, there's no better place for PMC to engage with the high-end home theatre installation sector." He continues, "We're delighted to be teaming up with the leading manufacturer of acoustically transparent screens, which will enable us to demonstrate the stunning sound quality of our wafer2 series speakers, when used behind a screen. We look forward to sharing the incredible experience with the many show visitors."



PMC[®]

003



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A quarter of a century of research, obsessive design and craft has produced the **twenty5** series – loudspeakers that deliver all the passion of the original performance, conveying every nuance. The range refines our **ATL** bass-loading concept with new drivers, new materials, and **Laminair**, a revolution in audio dynamics. With its natural musicality, vivid audio picture and rich, enveloping bass at all levels, the **twenty5** series lets you feel the music, not simply hear it.

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twenty5.21 - Hi-Fi Choice '17

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NEWS



BRYSTON FLAGSHIP ACTIVE LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEMS

Bryston has announced the introduction of their Active Loudspeaker lineup, featuring three speaker models of different sizes (Model T Active, Middle T Active (pictured) and Mini T Active) a DSP-enabled active crossover (BAX-1) and Cubed Series Bryston amplifiers.

Two new amplifier models, the 3-channel 21B3 and 6-channel 24B3 have been created especially for the Bryston Active systems. Each system has been optimised using an anechoic chamber, generating over 300 measurements that reside within the system's software.

At the heart of every Bryston Active system is the BAX-1 crossover. The Bryston BAX-1 is a digital crossover containing proprietary software for each active loudspeaker model. The BAX-1 receives a full-range analogue audio signal from the preamplifier and performs the three-way crossover functionality and driver correction for each channel, also applying any user-selected filters for tailoring the bass response of the loudspeakers. The signal is then sent to each amplifier channel. Like all Bryston digital components, the BAX-1 is backed by a 5-year warranty.

The Bryston Active solution utilises full-size, outboard amplifiers. The Bryston 21B3 3-channel amplifier was crafted to provide amplification for any of the three Active systems. Two 21B3 amplifiers are required to drive a pair of Bryston Active Loudspeakers. The Bryston 24B3 is a single chassis solution offering 6-channels of amplification. Delivering less total system power than two 21B3s but ample power for many listeners, the 24B3 is ideally suited for the Middle T Active and Mini T Active systems. Both amplifiers are easily connected using color-coded wiring, and both models are available with silver or black faceplate, 17-inch (without handles) or 19-inch (with handles). In addition to the 21B3 and 24B3, Bryston Active systems can be built around any combination of amplifiers from the Bryston lineup. All Bryston amplifiers are backed by a 20-year warranty.

All Bryston Active Loudspeakers are available in rich veneers such as Black Ash, Natural Cherry and Boston Cherry. Custom veneers are available with an upcharge. The Model T Active is a 52.5-inch tall floor-standing three-way loudspeaker featuring three high-excursion 8-inch woofers, two 5.25-inch midranges and two 1-inch tweeters. The Middle T Active is a 39.5-inch floor-standing three-way loudspeaker featuring two high-excursion 8-inch woofers, a 5.25-inch midrange and a 1-inch tweeter. The Mini T Active is a large 22.5-inch bookshelf speaker that also works wonderfully on a speaker stand. The Mini T Active features a high-excursion 8-inch woofer, a 5.25-inch midrange and a 1-inch tweeter. All Bryston loudspeakers are backed by a 20-year warranty.

The Bryston Model T Active system, comprised of the BAX-1, a pair of 21B3 amplifiers and a pair of Model T Active loudspeakers has an MSRP of \$33,770 US and will be available Q1, 2018. The Bryston Middle T Active system, including the BAX-1, a 24B3 amplifier and a pair of Middle T Active loudspeakers has an MSRP of \$20,230 US and will be available Q2, 2018. The Bryston Mini T Active system, featuring the BAX-1, a 24B3 amplifier and a pair of Mini T Active loudspeakers has an MSRP of \$17,690 and will also become available Q2, 2018.



NEWS



ELITE AUDIO TO DISTRIBUTE BURSON IN UK & IRELAND

Elite Audio have announced that they are now the Exclusive Suppliers of Burson Audio for the UK & Ireland. The Australian manufacturer becomes the 53rd brand to be offered by Elite Audio.

The Burson range has nine models available; including the Conductor Virtuoso V2+ pre amp/DAC/headphone amp (pictured here with the Timekeeper Virtuoso Power amp), all of which will be available from the Elite Audio website and showroom in Fife, Scotland.



AUDIO ANALOGUE AAcento INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

In 2016, Audio Analogue celebrated its twentieth birthday with two 'Anniversary' editions of the company's earlier integrated amplifiers, the Puccini and Maestro. Now, the Italian brand has launched its 'PureAA' line of products.

Hand-made in Italy, Audio Analogue say: "like the Maestro Anniversary amp it's a zero global feedback design - with no global feedback in both the preamp and the power amp stage". The AAcento's 480W toroidal transformer has been specifically designed for this amp and delivers 100W per channel. There's one balanced and three unbalanced line inputs, a built-in MM/MC phono stage with switchable subsonic filter and a class A, zero feedback headphone amplifier. All of the AAcento's internal functions are controlled by a microprocessor, using relays to select. The AAcento's remote control is a substantial-feeling unit and the volume control, while digital, uses no operational amplifiers in its circuitry. A direct mode bypasses the volume control allowing the AAcento to be incorporated into a multi-channel home theatre system. The amplifier's casework is resonance-damped and in keeping with the brand's classically simple design philosophy.

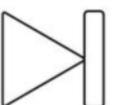
The AAcento will shortly be partnered by the second release in the PureAA line, the AAphono phono stage.



LONGDOG AUDIO ANNOUNCE PH1 MM PHONOSTAGE

Longdog Audio have released their wallet friendly PH1 Moving Magnet PhonoStage. The PH1 makes use of both isolated and regulated power supply technology combined with second stage inductive filtering and third stage active regulation.

There are no electrolytic capacitors in the unit, all filtering and smoothing is done using film capacitors. The unit has very low noise and distortion, and is housed in aluminium casework, for "vanishing levels of hum" and gold-plated RCA sockets are used. The PH1 is available now direct from Longdog Audio at £199.95 plus shipping.



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NEWS



NEW GENERATION PIEGA PREMIUM SERIES SPEAKERS

The new generation of PIEGA Premium loudspeakers from Switzerland feature the companies new LDR 3056 high-range ribbon tweeter in it's top of the range model.

Kurt Scheuch's team of developers at PIEGA have created a new slim, range featuring softly curving aluminium cabinets and ribbon tweeters.

The new Premium 701 (second picture), 501 and 301 (first picture) PIEGA speakers are the technical and visual continuation of one of the Swiss manufacturers most successful speaker concepts. To refine their appearance, designer Stephan Hürlemann has fitted the front covers flush into the C-shaped cabinet profile with a polished aluminium finish to the cabinets.

While the two smaller models use the PIEGA LDR 2642 MKII tweeters, the Premium 701 flagship range is the first model equipped with the new LDR 3056 ribbon tweeters. This tweeter system benefits from all important insights gained during the development of the PIEGA Line Source Driver and the second-generation PIEGA Coax System. Its thin membrane has a newly developed suspension and is controlled by mass-free damping. It also features an optimised magnet system, new foil layout and a massive aluminium front panel.

Its mid-range speakers have also undergone improvements. They are calibrated to the new cabinet and ribbon tweeters. The MDS cone drivers are designed for especially long-stroke motions. The aluminium cabinets have been improved further and play an important role in the bass rendition of the new Premium models. Compared to the previous speakers, they are 30 per cent more rigid. Their rounded shape prevents the occurrence of disturbing standing waves inside the cabinet. All models of the Premium series are available in three versions: silver anodised, white varnish with a silver cover, black anodised with a black cover.

Premium 701

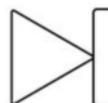
The Premium 701 is barely larger than its smaller sister model, the 501. It also uses a 2.5-way system. Two 140 mm MDS converters cater for the bass, one of the two also handles mid-tone emission. The newly developed LDR 3056 ribbon, used here for the very first time, produces the high tones.

Premium 501

This slim column loudspeaker, which is only 16 cm wide and about one metre tall features two long-stroke 120 mm MDS low mid-range drivers and LDR 2642 MKII ribbon.

Premium 301

The Premium 301 is a compact loudspeaker with a baffle about the size of an A4 sheet. Behind the removable fabric cover, a 140 mm MDS low mid-range driver and the LDR 2642 MKII ribbon tweeter ensure transmission of all frequencies from 39 to 50 kHz.



One More Time



Like the best recordings, Chord Company cables are made with care and attention to detail. Every part we use is crucial to the final performance. Non-essential components are removed, but if we find a way to improve things, we don't hesitate to give it a try. Our aim is to get closer to the artist's intended sound.

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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2017

Accessories
Best speaker cable
Chord Company Clearway



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2017

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Best analogue interconnect under £50
Chord Company C-line



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2017

Accessories
Best analogue interconnect £50+
Chord Company Clearway



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NEWS



BLACK RHODIUM SYMPHONY 18 ANNOUNCED

Symphony 18 is the new replacement for the popular Black Rhodium Symphony which has been discontinued.

Whilst searching for an alternative cable source to replace the Symphony cable, Black Rhodium engineers decided to test an alternative approach of using a similar cable with less advanced specification, but to apply some of the proprietary Black Rhodium 'Distortion Busting' technology that had been applied higher up the range. The chosen cable offered the additional advantage of 110 Ohm impedance for AE/EBU balanced digital cables.



ORTOFON CELEBRATE CENTENARY YEAR

In October 2018 Ortofon will celebrate 100 years of business in audio industry. Through the year they are releasing several Century products to celebrate.

The first release from the Ortofon Century range is the Stylus 2M Blue Anniversary Special Edition, which bears the Ortofon Anniversary logo and retails from 140€



EXPOSURE ADD HP HEADPHONE AMP TO XM SERIES

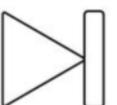
In 2017 Exposure Electronics launched the 'XM' series of hifi components, now, the XM3 phono stage, XM5 integrated amp, XM7 preamp and XM9 mono power amps are joined by the new XM HP headphone amplifier.

The XM series is the first of Exposure's ranges to pack a full quota of features into a narrow, half-width design.

The new XM HP headphone amp is a variation of the XM7 preamplifier but specifically honed for the headphone listener. Like the XM5 integrated amp and XM7 preamp, it includes a built-in moving magnet phono stage and DAC. The phono stage sports two line level inputs and the DAC, five digital inputs.

The XM HP features a linear power supply with a 60VA custom-made toroidal power transformer. High quality resistors and capacitors are used in the signal path. It also features enhanced headphone circuitry in which an all-discrete audio output stage delivers high drive capability for low impedance headphones. Its two pairs of 6.35mm jacks and of XLR sockets allow two sets of headphones to be used at once, and there's also a separate pre-amp output.

The Exposure XM HP headphone amplifier is available now with a black or titanium finish and 3 year warranty. Price £1,299 (incl. VAT).



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 or email Gilles.Milot@Acoustical-Beauty.com

NEWS



CYRUS ANNOUNCE ONELINEAR SPEAKER SYSTEM

Cyrus Audio has announced the imminent arrival of a new stereo loudspeaker system designed to partner with the Cyrus ONE amplifier.

Cyrus has a history of loudspeaker development which began with the CLS-50 in 2001. This development has now resulted in the ONElinear which is a compact bookshelf speaker using a KEVLAR bass driver and soft-dome tweeter.

Cyrus say that the Cyrus ONE amplifier and the ONElinear is a loudspeaker / amplifier combination that is ideally integrated as a system.

Simon Freethy, managing director, says, "We are delighted to be adding to our ONE range of products with the ONElinear. Traditionally we have demonstrated the Cyrus ONE with higher-end loudspeakers, able to suitably showcase the amplifier's true ability. Now, we believe, we have created a speaker which is both worthy and genuinely affordable". He concludes, "Selling these speakers along with a Cyrus ONE creates a system of immense value. This, we hope, will introduce a new generation of consumers to the value and performance that we, as a company, hold dear."

The speakers alone are £350, the bundle of Cyrus ONE amp and speakers is £1050.



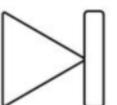
ATC LAUNCH CDA2 MK2 CD/DAC PREAMPLIFIER

ATC Loudspeaker Technology announce the arrival of the CDA 2 Mk2 CD/DAC preamp, which represents a re-engineering of its predecessor in all the key performance areas. Developed as partner for ATC's latest P2 power amplifier and active speaker designs, the Mk2 combines USB access to high-resolution music streaming with an upgraded CD transport and DAC board, dedicated headphone amplification, wider input selection and redesigned analogue circuits.

Joining rear panel coaxial and optical 192kHz inputs, the Mk2's new high resolution USB input is capable of handling PCM data up to 384kHz and also DSD64, DSD128 and DSD256 natively. Completing the Mk2's wider digital interface, a new TEAC-supplied CD transport delivers "faster play and seek times, much lower mechanical noise and improved error correction".

Both input and output gain stages have been improved by an arrangement of discrete op amps comprising six common gain blocks. The positive and negative drivers are arranged in parallel to ensure that the signal delays and phase shifts are identical on both sides. The output stages are configured as unity gain complementary compound (Sziklai) pairs, biased in class A.

Typical Retail Price (inc VAT): £2950





MC Step-Up Transformers
Phono Amplifiers
Pre Amplifiers



NEWS

MONITOR AUDIO LAUNCHES MONITOR SERIES SPEAKERS

The new Monitor Series is a new family of speakers from Monitor Audio. Monitor say: ' Their orange driver cones offer a contemporary focus to the sleek proportions and bring fun and functionality across the range'.

Utilising a Black C-CAM dome tweeter derived from Monitor Audio's Bronze series with a choice of bookshelf or floorstanding speakers, and a centre and subwoofer, the Monitor Series delivers, say Monitor, 'detailed audio resolution in both two-channel and multi-channel configurations'.

MONITOR 50

The Monitor 50 is a compact speaker designed for use in a bookshelf type environment. The usual rectangular cabinet profile has been replaced with a square cabinet which houses the single 5 1/2" MMP II driver and a 25 mm black C-CAM tweeter. The cabinet is rear ported,.

MONITOR 100

The larger Monitor 100 is a bookshelf/standmount speaker. To maintain the compact proportions, the cabinet is again rear ported. The driver size steps up to a 6 1/2" MMP II bass driver and is complemented by a 25 mm Black C-CAM tweeter.

MONITOR 200

The slender Monitor 200 is the smallest floor-stander in the range. Two 5 1/2" MMP II drivers are housed in separate cavities and each driver has different tuning to optimise the small cabinet air load . The twin drivers operate together at bass frequencies, whilst only the top driver is crossed over to the black C-CAM tweeter higher up in frequency.

MONITOR 300 (pictured)

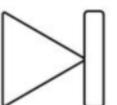
The Monitor 300 houses three 6 1/2" MMP II bass drivers: two dedicated to bass and one to mid-range frequencies. The increased driver and cabinet size are recommended for in medium to large rooms.

MONITOR C150

The compact Monitor C150 centre is ideal for cabinets and shelves. The sealed enclosure ensures it can be positioned right up to a wall without any detrimental effects ; It features twin 5 1/2" MMP II drivers.

MONITOR MRW-10

The powerful Monitor MRW-10 subwoofer houses a 10" long throw MMP II bass driver, capable of delivering bass down to below 30Hz. The rear ported enclosure provides optimal output from the powerful 100 W class D power amplifier. The amplifier has many features dedicated to a home theatre system. EQ settings provides a level of adjustment for room and tastes. All filters and features are controlled in the digital domain using an advanced DSP based architecture.



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immerse in it

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HIGHLY
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www.TagaHarmony.com

NEWS



JAMES LOUDSPEAKER SOUND BAR

James Loudspeaker, designers and manufacturers entertainment products for both residential and commercial applications, has introduced a series of 2.1 sound bars, producing left and right-channel audio as well as bass from a centre-mounted built-in subwoofer.

Each sound bar features aluminium cone woofers and either aluminium or beryllium dome quad. LR-S sound bars can be mounted directly to any TV or wall-mounted using available brackets.

MSRP pricing starts at \$3500.



BOWERS AND WILKINS IN McLAREN SENNA HYPERCAR

Described as “the ultimate track car for the road”, the Senna hails from McLaren’s Ultimate Series range and boasts an engine capable of producing 789bhp, which, say McLaren “in combination with the car’s 1198kg dry weight, delivers an unprecedented power-to-weight ratio that pushes the performance of a road-legal hypercar to entirely new levels”.

Bowers & Wilkins have collaborated once again with McLaren to create an in-car audio system for the Senna. All of the materials used in the McLaren Senna are designed, say B&W, to bring out the best in your music. High frequencies are created by Double-Dome aluminium tweeters, which are enhanced with Nautilus technology, and midrange is produced by the well known Bowers & Wilkins Kevlar™ cones.



The right to use the Senna name is part of an official collaboration between McLaren Automotive and the Senna family, in which a significant contribution will be donated to the Instituto Ayrton Senna (IAS), a non-profit organisation dedicated to providing good-quality education for more than 1.6 million unprivileged children and youngsters in Brazil. The IAS is presided over by Viviane Senna, sister of Ayrton and mother of racing driver and McLaren ambassador Bruno Senna.



KEF RELEASE BLACK EDITION LS50

Five years since the launch of the anniversary model LS50, KEF has just launched a special LS50 Black Edition.

Featuring the Uni-Q driver array in black set in a matt black cabinet coated with metallic powder, the LS50 Black Edition also has a special plaque featuring a unique serial number for each pair of speakers. The finished product in all black renews the celebratory context of the original LS50.



Generous Part Exchange available, please contact us for more information.

0% Finance Available

CYRUS



Cyrus Mono X 300 Signature (Pair)
RRP: £5,790

Cyrus' best power amplifier, the Mono X 300 Signature can provide an enormous 319 Watts of power to your speakers (through 6 Ohms). Their Zero Feedback technology means that the sound coming out of the amp is exactly the same as the one going in – just bigger.



Cyrus DAC XP Signature
RRP: £2,995

At the heart of the DAC XP Signature is an upsampling digital to analogue converter which transforms any music into the highest possible 32-bit resolution. The fullness, depth and quality of the sound this produces is really impressive.



Cyrus CD Xt Signature
RRP: £1,795

The CD Xt Signature is a dedicated CD transport which produces audiophile sound quality. It is manufactured with a range of performance enhancing techniques and components, including an evolved version of their Servo Evolution technology.



Cyrus Stream X Signature
RRP: £2,995

Stream X Signature is Cyrus' highest performance streamer source component; it uses Cyrus' state-of-the-art streaming engine and has been developed to provide the best sound resolution possible from a network audio library. It will fully exploit the highest quality 24-bit/192 kHz files.



Cyrus Phono Signature
RRP: £1,245

The Phono Signature is technically designed to exceed the expectations of serious vinyl audiophiles, particularly in areas such as dynamic performance, accurate cartridge matching, and flexibility of use.

Cyrus Awards

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2016

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2015

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014



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NEWS



WESTERN ELECTRIC 300B TO RE-ENTER PRODUCTION

Charles Whitener President of Western Electric, has announced that the WE 300B electron tube will re-enter production this year, in time for its 80th Anniversary. The last Western Electric 300-B was manufactured in 1988.

The famous triode was developed at Bell Labs in 1933 in the form of its predecessor, the 300A, which was modified, patented, and then produced at many historic works facilities beginning in 1938. The 300B has journeyed from the original New York tube shops, to the Hawthorne Works, Allentown Works, Kansas City Works, then the Huntsville Works.



The new valves that will roll off the line this September will be assembled in Rossville, Georgia at the new Western Electric electron tube works facility. Charles told us: "Furthering our commitment to manufacturing excellence, we are installing new hydrogen reduction ovens, automated cathode cleaning lines, new laser welding systems, a state-of-the-art water deionisation plant, and an updated testing system with improved accuracy. However, the 300B will still be manufactured from its original tooling and assembly specification standards. Although we've invested in a modernised production line, many of its aspects will of course remain true to tradition. For example, the core material, the so-called "secret sauce" embedded in each cathode is derived from an original Hawthorne Works 1963 melt. Our attention to each delicate detail and historic promise of quality place the WE 300B in a category of its own"

.In addition to announcing the availability of the 300B and continuing Western Electric's 80th anniversary celebration of the tube, they are unveiling a new single-ended amplifier called the 91E, as an homage to its predecessor the 91A, first introduced in 1936. The 91E embodies a new proprietary Class A2 parallel feed current source topology (patent pending), combined with toroidal output transformers, and microprocessor controlled automatic bias. It will achieve in excess of twenty watts per channel. There will be a limited edition monoblock set of this amp topology called the 91C Metropolis, of which only 500 will be available.

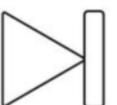
The 300B's will be priced at \$1299 per matched pair or \$599 for a single. They will also be available in quads and octets. Shipping is expected September 1st, 2018.



HEY MR DJ. ORTOFON CONCORDES GET AN UPDATE

Ortofon, has announced the second generation of its professional line of Concorde DJ cartridges. The New Concorde Generation consists of five models targeted to a variety of applications and DJ styles.

The New Concorde Generation series cartridges are shipping now as Single cartridges or in a Twin Pack with a premium aluminium flight case. Replacement styli are also available immediately. To support the range, replacement finger lifts, replacement stylus guards and a special series of DJ quality slipmats and T-shirts designed to complement each model are also available.



Wire on Wire

REDpurl™



Variable Geometry

UK patent pending GB1602578.5

EU Registered Design No. 002544171

Experience**680**

Reference Audio Cable

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

Experience**680**

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

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NEWS



NEW SUT FROM SA LABORATORY

Alexey Syomin, Head of SA Laboratory from Russia, got in touch to tell us more about the company's all new Step-Up Transformer. The new SA Lab SUT is compatible with low impedance cartridges of 2-8 Ohm.

Alexey told us: "This is our new SUT with unique design and great musicality. Among the new SUT's features are new ultra high quality core material and pure silver windings".

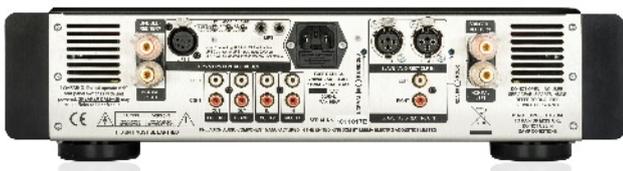


LEEMA ACOUSTICS HYDRA II ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Leema Acoustics has launched a special Anniversary Edition of its Hydra II power amplifier, celebrating 10 years since its classic amplifier made its debut.

The Hydra II Anniversary Edition is an intelligent, bridgeable stereo power amplifier incorporating many developments pioneered in Leema's legacy reference-grade monoblock, the Altair IV. Its dual-mono design uses two massive toroidal power transformers, one for each channel, together with a separate transformer for the control circuitry.

The output stage benefits from very low output impedance. This, coupled with a high current capability, ensures "vice-like grip and precise control" of loudspeakers, even at very high levels. Full LIPS® implementation (Leema's proprietary communication system) allows for flexible integration with other Leema Acoustics products.



Internally, the amplifier features upgraded printed circuit boards with twice the amount of copper to further reduce the resistance of PCB traces and improve power delivery. All relevant capacitors have been upgraded to Nichicon's high-quality audio-grade MUSE Series and the PCB-to-speaker-terminal wiring is Leema's Reference 2 cable which features 16 woven cores plus multi-strand high-purity copper with individual strand silver-plate.

All transistors are hand-selected and precision-matched in amplifier sets for optimal performance and the lowest distortion. The power amplifier transformers are Noratel 'xtra quiet' units, ensuring perfect power delivery without undesirable hum or excessive heat-generation.

In a further nod to the amplifier's Anniversary Edition status, Leema has included a number of additional documents. Each amplifier will be supplied with a passport-style system of documentation integrated into the manual, where three key stages of production are signed off by the engineer responsible along with the inclusion of the unit's measured results.

The Hydra II is available now priced at £4,795 and is offered in black/silver



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NEWS



GAMUT JOINS DANTAX

Danish companies Dantax A/S and Gamut Audio have confirmed that Gamut is now part of the Dantax group of companies, joining fellow Danish high-end audio brands Raidho and Scansonic.

Gamut's CEO and chief designer Benno Baun Meldgaard said, "This is excellent news for Gamut. To be an integral part of a wider 'family' of companies, all of which are wholeheartedly committed to high-end audio, gives Gamut a strong and stable foundation from which to move forward and build on our success to date."

For almost half a century, Dantax A/S has been actively engaged in the design, development, manufacturing and sales of audio products. Since 1984 the company has been listed on the Copenhagen Stock exchange. As well as being an established brand in its own right, Dantax is equally the parent company of a number of Danish audio brands. For ten years it owned ScanSpeak in the late 1970s it added Scansonic to its portfolio and then in 2009, Raidho.

As part of the move, Meldgaard has also been appointed as a member of Raidho's R&D team in the role of chief designer and will work particularly closely with Dantax chief technical officer John Peter Jensen and Raidho chief engineer Peter Larsen.

Meanwhile, Gamut's fans and customers can rest assured that Gamut will continue to operate as a distinct brand. Support and service to existing customers will remain fully in place as currently.



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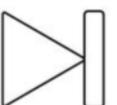
Gryphon Audio Designs of Denmark have never abandoned the LP format, maintaining, as they say, 'a consistent commitment to vinyl reproduction from the creation of the company in 1985, right up to the launch of the new Gryphon Sonett Phonostage'.

In the words of founder Flemming E. Rasmussen, "The LP holds a very special place in our hearts here at Gryphon, having been the inspiration for our very first product, the now legendary Gryphon Head Amp. For many people, the LP remains the finest high fidelity medium ever offered for home use with a catalogue of titles that will never be rivalled by the compact disc, let alone download music".

In an effort to bring the performance of the reference level Gryphon Legato Legacy phonostage to more affordable price points, Gryphon designed the Phonostage Module for straightforward installation in the Gryphon Diablo 300 and Diablo 120 integrated amplifiers. This phono module is improved with its own cabinet and dedicated dual mono power supply following demand for a stand-alone version of the phonostage.

Like every Gryphon product, Gryphon Sonett is designed by Gryphon founder Flemming E. Rasmussen and manufactured in Denmark.

Price: 5.990 Euros, plus all applicable local duties and taxes.





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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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NEWS



AXPONA 2018

AXPONA (Audio Expo North America) will open April 13-15 at the Renaissance Schaumburg Hotel & Convention Center offering attendees three jam-packed days of sounds, technology, presentations, design, and the very latest products in the industry. Now in its ninth year, AXPONA is, say organisers JD Events, the defining, high-end audio show in the United States, which caters to dealers, distributors and manufacturers, as well as music-loving consumers. AXPONA's new state-of-the-art venue will feature an expanded Exhibit Hall, and new Record Shop and Master Class Theatre. AXPONA will once again offer something for everyone – from the novice music lover to the seasoned audio expert looking to enhance their sound with the latest technology.

The 2018 event will be the largest show to date, meeting the increasing demand from attendees looking for the top brands in the music world under one roof, in a central location. The expanded Exhibit Hall, which is home to the Marketplace and Ear Gear Expo, is a whopping 30,000 square feet and will showcase a vast array of turntables, cables, accessories, racks and stands, tonearms, cartridges and the latest headphones and associated equipment in the growing world of mobile and high-end personal listening.

Sit, relax and surround yourself with the best in high-end audio equipment and gear by visiting AXPONA's 150+ Listening Rooms. Attendees are encouraged to experience listening rooms by listening and comparing the systems and components from some of the world's most prestigious manufacturers.

AXPONA 2018 will also feature live concerts: Saturday night's Blues Revue will be presented in partnership with Delmark Records and will be a celebration of the 65th Anniversary of the label.

"We are excited to welcome attendees to AXPONA's new home at the Schaumburg Renaissance Convention Center, and offer new and expanded features including a larger Exhibit Hall, new Record Shop for vinyl collectors, a Master Class Theater to host experts in the audio industry, and 150 Listening Rooms to experience the best sound from the world's biggest and best brands," said Liz Miller, VP, Event Director, AXPONA.



THE AUDIO COMPANY AT AXPONA

The Audio Company will show a high end system including products such as Von Schweikert Audio's ULTRA 11 loudspeakers, four of Valve Amplification Company's (VAC) Statement 450iQ monoblock power amplifiers, Statement Phono Stage and Statement Line Stage, a Kronos Pro turntable (with SCPS-1 power supply, Black Beauty tonearm and ZYX Audio's Ultimate 4D cartridge), Esoteric's Grandioso P1 (transport), D1 (monoblock DACs), G1 (master clock), N-01 (network audio player) and a Technics 1520 reel-to-reel tape deck custom-modified by J-Corder.





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NEWS



Kii THREE LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEM

Kii have described their new Kii Three loudspeaker system as a “Brilliant mix of cutting-edge amplification and DSP that delivers the full-frequency dynamics of a large high-end floor stander from a super-discreet active system”.

Kii say it is: “an innovative and coherent union of discreet DSP, D/A conversion and power amplification channels, individually calibrated for a total of six drivers firing to the front, side and rear, but working together to throw the sound in the forward direction only. In this way Kii Three system, having the physical dimension (WxHxD) of just 20x40x40cm, is able largely to eliminate the negative impact of the room on low to mid frequencies and reproduce the acoustical scale, timing and dynamics of a large audiophile floor-standing speaker system”.

The Kii Three system deploys proprietary Active Wave Focusing filters, which allow specially positioned drive units (a front-firing 1" wave-guided tweeter and 5" midrange, 2 x side-firing and 2 x rear-firing 6.5" woofers) to create a time-aligned wave front that is only emitted forward and behaves as though it came from the midrange driver. The DSP operates like a directional cardioid microphone in reverse, eliminating all backward radiation from the driver system. It is also responsible for keeping the drive units within their safe operating range by adjusting the AWF filters.

The amplification comprises 6 x 250W Ncore power amplifiers (one for each driver) arranged on twin three-channel boards installed in the side panels of the Kii Three. For this implementation Bruno Putzeys' Ncore class D technology has been enhanced with a combined voltage/current control loop. There is an XLR input (selectable analogue L/R or AES/EBU digital audio signals). All digital inputs are up-sampled and re-clocked using Kii's own jitter rejection algorithm. The connector panel also features twin KiiLink RJ45 input/outputs (CAT cable included) for connecting other Kii products or the 'Slave' Kii Three when the stereo digital AES/EBU is used.

A sixteen position (free / wall / corner) Boundary switch allows the Kii Three's DSP to compensate for room positioning and a 'Contour' control selects from fourteen preset EQ curves (+ flat-position). The Kii CONTROL preamp/USB Interface allows a Kii Three pair to perform as a complete playback system combining touch-control of input selection, lossless volume control, power, finer EQ calibration and preset memories with the facility for a further three digital inputs: Coax SPDIF, Optical TOSLINK and USB (up to PCM 24/384kHz and DSD64/DSD128 on USB). The Kii Control connects (and is powered) through a single CAT cable (included) and menu navigation is aided by an integrated OLED display. The main system functions such as volume, source and mute can be remote controlled via IR Remote (RC5 type or Apple Remote).

Kii THREE stereo system (2 x Kii Three active speakers with Kii CONTROL)

Standard colours: £12,480.00

Custom colours: £13,480.00





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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.

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NEWS



FISH ENDORSES PARASOUND HALO

Well-known rock star and platinum-selling artist, Fish, is endorsing the Parasound Halo integrated amplifier... expect to see a review of the Halo on Hifi pig soon).

Fish has chosen Parasound's Halo Integrated amplifier for the main audio system in his home and studio located close to Edinburgh.



MANGER ANNOUNCE LINN EXAKT PASSIVE FILTERS

Manger Audio is now offering two filter designs for the Linn Exaktbox for its p1 (pictured) and z1 passive loudspeakers. The two filter designs use either minimum phase or linear phase filters, of which the former was developed by Daniela Manger and the latter by Linn UK themselves.

The filters differ with regard to time response and phase response respectively, with Manger recommending the minimum design, as expected. With Linn's technology you can compare both filters and decide for yourself.

Daniela Manger told us: "With the use of the Linn Exaktbox for the active drive of your Manger speakers, the passive crossover must be bypassed by directly connecting the loudspeaker drivers to the speaker binding posts. This should preferably be done by your retailer".

As Linn's Exakt filter data can only be accessed through the speaker manufacturer, contact Manger Audio directly via the contact details on their website.

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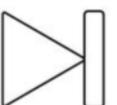
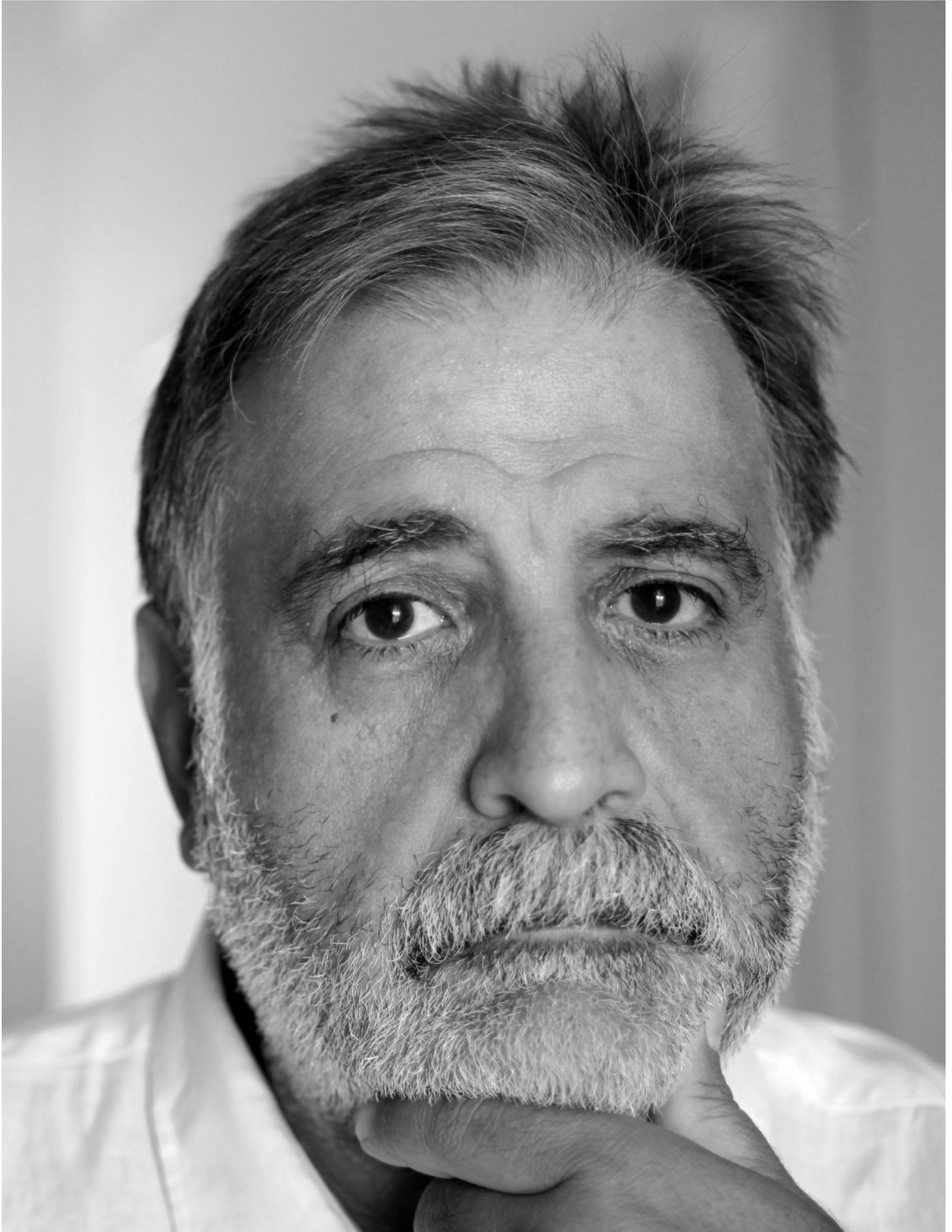
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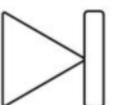


INTERVIEW

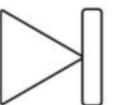
KOSTAS METAXAS

Kostas Metaxas is the creative powerhouse behind high-end brand Metaxas & Sins. As well as his wonderfully inventive “High-end audio sculptures”, he has an extensive collection of concert recordings from some of the top names in the music world.

Not limiting his imagination to the audio world, Kostas also designs for some of the most well-known luxury brands in the world.



INTERVIEW



INTERVIEW

HP. You haven't always been involved with the audio industry judging by some of the photographs we've seen and the stories that you recount, what did you do and where were you based?

KM. Actually, Audio was my first business once I left University. It started as my passion as a teenager in High School [~13 yrs old]. I studied at Melbourne University, and in the 3rd year of a Medical Sciences degree [BSc], I left to study in Heidelberg Germany. Whilst there, I met some like-minded audiophile students, one who introduced me to one of the bigger Hi Fi dealers in Mannheim. I had never heard the biggest, most expensive brands as a teenager [I couldn't afford them] so I was keen to hear how "bad" my preamplifier [that I had brought with me] was. After listening to a few tracks of one of his "Reference" LPs, the dealer was so gobsmacked that he asked me to make some for him. I decided to follow my dream and return to Melbourne, Australia to make them [to my parent's horror]. He subsequently submitted it to Klaus Renner's "DAS OHR", the equivalent of "Harry Pearson's The Absolute Sound" in Germany which praised it. It took quite some time for me to wrap my mind around the fact that I could create one of the best amplifiers in the world. Once that sunk in, it was my first epiphany. I would use the challenge to fuel me to try harder. The education system in Australia at the time, encouraged you to excel in sports, but little else.

HP. What was your first involvement in the industry and when was this?

KM. My first involvement in the industry as a "producer" was in 1981, but prior to that, even at the age of 13-14 yrs old, I was tinkering with "kits" reading the local and international Audio hobby magazines [The Audio Amateur, Wireless World, etc] and following the work of some of the luminaries of the time - John Curl, Peter Walker, Bob Carver, Nelson Pass, Matti Ojala, Leach, Cherry, Linsey Hood, Peter Baxandall, Doug Self...

My second epiphany was when I purchased a pair of Quad ESL 57's with modified treble panels. With many classical recordings that used them as monitors, they were like "looking through a window into the orchestra".

HP. There's a story you have that involves Ron Jeremy the porn star, care to share it with readers?

KM. It was in Las Vegas ~ 1991 when I was asked by someone if they could use the bathroom in my Audio Demo Room. I was busy fielding questions from some Distributors so I didn't think twice about it and replied "sure"...They [Ron Jeremy] took his girlfriend into the bathroom with him. It was only when I realised they'd been in there for 30 minutes, that I started to worry. One of the important Audio reviewers of the time - Ken Kessler, decided to visit my room at the exact moment that the bathroom door opened and the chap and his half-dressed beau ran out. Ken Kessler screamed out "That's Ron Jeremy" [a US Porn Star]! I didn't know who Ron Jeremy was and that's how I first met Ken Kessler...and learnt about Ron Jeremy [who left me some autographed photos in the bathroom].

HP. How did you first get into manufacturing audio equipment?

KM. The German Dealer was the catalyst for me going into business at the tender age of 20 yrs old [1981]. I learnt very quickly that I need some "other" income, so I studied "DAS OHR", "TAS" and started augmenting my income with some imported products, mostly from Europe. That helped to put my company on a firm financial footing [~1982/83].

HP. What was your breakthrough product?

KM. The PP1 Pre-preamp reviewed by Klaus Renner started it all. The following products HAD to be as good, if not better. Then the other German Press "STEREOPLAY", "AUDIO", "HI FI EXCLUSIV" etc, started praising the sound of my other products - preamplifiers, power amplifiers, electrostatic speakers and digital CD players/DACS and I was rated as "Absolute Spitzenklasse, REFERENCE". This, of course helped enormously. Germany was my first important market followed by Switzerland, France, Italy and then the UK. After Europe, we started selling well throughout Asia.

HP. Your more recent products blur the lines between art and technology and you call your pieces "High-End Audio Sculpture", does form follow function or are you looking to make a visual statement first and foremost?

KM. Both elements are equally important. Luckily, I'm both an artist and engineer and I can work in both intellectual planes at the same time. In my earlier designs, I was more BAUHAUS - form follows function, but these latest designs are very different. I remember a conversation with Christian Louboutin [shoes] who told me "Form Follows function can end up being boring and repetitive"...and I agree. This explains the "same-ness" of many audio products. In the case of my new collection, the design came from some ideas I was developing for an Italian furniture manufacturer. In particular, a Chaise Longue. I was also developing a "helix" pen for S.T. Dupont, which naturally became the "heatsink", so the combination of these elements led to the amplifier cases. The speakers, essentially follow similar organic, flowing lines but with a female form. It probably represents beauty in its purest sense. The power amplifiers deviate slightly and seem to combine a flowing organic form with a more "animal" masculinity - like a crouching tiger.

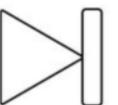
HP. Your design and manufacturing process is a little out of the ordinary when compared to many other manufacturers, tell readers about your design and manufacturing philosophy.

KM. I like to make objects that are simple, classic, distinctive and iconic. They must "get out of the way of the music", and allow an emotional connection with the music. I try to avoid using logic/software [no remotes] because I like to think that even in 100 years from now, they can be easily repaired and restored because they are purely mechanical with parts that can be updated or replaced by a technician or enthusiast [not surface mounted hi-tech]. They are modular so they can be updated and are future-proof. The cases MUST be sculptures to add more intrinsic value to the object. I truly try to marry art with technology and avoid one as a compromise of the other.

HP. Who is the Metaxes& Sins hifi customer?



INTERVIEW



INTERVIEW

KM. Someone who loves music and art...and "gets it". It has to resonate with them - visually and musically.

HP. Which other hifi brands do you admire and why?

KM. I admire brands like Stellavox. Georges Quellet is really the unattributed inspirer of High End Audio - Mark Levinson, like myself, was inspired by Stellavox. Apart from Stellavox, I'm not really inspired by Hi Fi brands - this is not to say that I'm not impressed by some exceptional products produced by my colleagues at Gryphon[Flemming], or Nelson Pass, Jurgen Reis [MBL], the late Charles Hansen...etc, but I'm more inspired by design and the fine art sculptures of Fernando Botero and his wife Sophia Vari [my fourth epiphany] ...I'm always looking to bring "more" to the object than just a functional piece of electronics. I like to think that this new collection will be testimony to these "times" and [with humility] hopefully be seen as real sculpture that can be exhibited in a Museum in 100 years from now.

HP. You don't just design audio equipment and have been commissioned by some very high-end brands, how did these commissions come about and which project so far has been your favourite?

KM. My "other" business is documentary profiles on the individuals involved in the cutting edge of design and art - fashion, architecture, design, art, gastronomy, jewellery, watches, cars, collectibles etc. so it has allowed me to meet and learn from many like-minded creative people. When there's a resonance in personalities, one thing leads to another which is how I've met with many of my clients. The most important ingredient for a collaboration, is they need to "like" my work, which thankfully they do. Most of my client love the fact that I come from "outside" of their industry, that I can revisit old ideas with new eyes. My favourite project is always the next project! I've had fun doing all sorts of objects. I regularly do work with S.T. Dupont in Paris, but also with Swiss SWIZA [L'Epee & Matthew Norman] clocks. Many companies I can't mention for contractual reasons.

HP. You are well known for having hundreds of tapes of live recordings you have made, what is your recording process and tell readers about a couple of your favourite recordings you've made, the story behind them and why they are your favourites.

KM. I've probably recorded over 500 concerts, mostly in the period 2004-2008 and at least 300 with my Stellavox machines. The first recordings were done with 2 x B&K [Bruel & Kjaer] 4133 [1/2" capsules] directly into the Microphone inputs of the Stellavox. Then I upgraded to the B&K 4135 [1/4" capsules] which were much faster, but noisier. Approx 10 metres apart and 2-3 metres from the performers, these were a real "window" into the reality of a concert. Finally, I started using a modified Stellavox AMI48 mixer and fed it with 4 x Neumann TLM 50 and 2 x Neumann M150 [valve] microphones using a maximum of 4 microphones per concert. Two in "AB" [10 metres apart] and two in "XY" in the centre [400mm apart] The M150's has the "bigger" sound with more "bloom", but is not as detailed as the TLM 50, which are the "transistor" equivalent [both microphones embed a 1/2" titanium omnidirectional capsule in a 40mm acrylic "ball"]. By doing a simple mod to the TLM50 - bypassing one capacitor in the signal path, I was able to extend low

the frequency response to give some of the positive attributes of the M150, but with more detail.

2006 [My third epiphany] for me was my "golden period" ...performers like Martin Breeze, Alison Wedding, Belinda Moody, Jex Saarelaht, Jamie Oehlers, Adam Simmons, Nick Tsiavos...and many many more. Samplers are available to download online. Audiophiles who have listened to just the 44.1kHz/16bit WAV versions with a good system are firstly gobsmacked with the sheer "huge" soundstage space and then beguiled by the realism. All my recordings are raw, unmastered, just dubbed to digital, but also are available as copies of the master tape. If you want to hear what a real voice should sound like, these are absolute reference.

To be able to record incredible musicians, pouring their heart and emotion through their instruments, to be there to listen, record it AND get lost in the music, apart from my creative work and the love of my family, these are the things that make life so incredibly special...to me.

I've also been blessed to cover Jazz & Classical festivals, Chamber Music competitions and Opera, so I've been lucky to record many famous performers too [Sir Neville Marriner, Nigel Kennedy, Paul Lewis, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Charles Dutoit, Dennis Neill, Chic Corea, Herbie Hancock, etc], but sadly, these recordings cannot be commercially released, they are just for my personal use.

HP. Putting aside your own recordings, what are your favourite three pieces of music and why?

KM.

1. Joni Mitchell "Travelogue" - 2 CD set. Joni's poetry, beautifully arranged and orchestrated.
2. Pat Metheny - I interviewed Gary Burton who taught and mentored Pat. Genius at combining modern "symphonic" jazz with world music. Great examples "SECRET STORY" and many of his other albums.
3. Puccini - "Mamma Mia"... too many arias to mention, that drill through my core and reduce me to a quivering primate.

HP. Your latest design is a reel to reel recorder that we have announced in this edition of Hifi Pig Magazine. The interest in reel to reel is growing in audiophile circles, tell us why you think this is and about the design and styling of your new reel to reel project.

KM. About 10 years ago, the Hi End press [Valin in TAS] started talking about Tape Recorders and discovered that the sound was considerably better than phono and digital playback. I've known this since the early 1980's when I owned one of the first Goldmund Reference tables, 5-6 incredible tonearms, Clearaudio, Koetsu, Kiseki, Ortofon SPU etc cartridges. My first recordings on the Stellavox - without any knowledge/experience in recording, were so incredibly "real" that this instantly became my reference. Since the machines were very simple and logical in construction, they were also easy to improve. So each recording became an opportunity to improve the "sound".

Improve is probably a harsh word. In most cases it was getting rid of the Broadcast/Radio/Studio bloat-hardware that each machine was



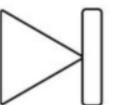
INTERVIEW



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INTERVIEW



INTERVIEW

saddled with, and bringing it back to what Quillet first developed on his kitchen table. Then tweaking it. It took me at least the first 50 concerts to get things to a level of mind-boggling transparency, after that, it just depended on the musician and his repertoire.

The GST machine I'm working on is simply the next logical step to the Stellavox - simpler, stiffer, dual mono, native 10.5" reels, taking advantage of 2018 technology of precision machining/CNC compared to what they could do in the 1960's.

As for the styling, I see it in a similar way to a mechanical watch. I'm hoping to create a real iconic piece of "Kinetic art" with the GQT. But also a serious piece of recording "kit".

HP. Your portfolio of products now includes amplifiers, preamp, headphone amplifier, loudspeakers and of course the reel to reel, what do you see as the next design project for you and Metaxas and Sins?

KM. When I launched this new collection 2 years ago [2016], I started with the amplifiers [IKARUS, SOLITAIRE and OPUS], 2017 introduced the MARQUIS Headphone amplifier and speakers - Macrophones & SIRENS, 2018 will launch the GQT Tape Machine, a DAC [and ADC]. In 2019 I have scheduled to produce a media server/player and perhaps even a smart-phone-watch. That's what the "Sins" - Andreas and Alessandros are particularly helping with.

Concurrently, I'm also launching other products, Fountain Pens, Clocks, Leather Goods, Furniture, so my object universe is always evolving.

What makes Metaxas & Sins a lot of fun for me is that at this particular moment in time, I can develop an object 100% in-house and have a prototype made in a cost-effective manner very quickly. I can literally have a real object in my hand within a few months of developing it. In the past, this took years.

HP. You are seen as one of the hifi brands that is putting the fun back into the industry (thank you!) Where do you see the industry going in the next 10 years?

KM. The Industry has to "smell the roses". It is a luxury product and needs to join the "luxury business" and not be seen as a club for a few grumpy old audiophiles. It needs to embrace young music lovers - initially through "personal audio" and introduce them to the pleasure and "world" of 3D hi end holographic sound. At the same time, it needs to support the creation of music and the purist recording of it. Otherwise, in the future, we will have expensive hardware with no software to play on it except for the same Johnny Lee Hooker LP in 100, 120, 140, 160, 180gms...

We need to keep it fun. Music is fun. It's my most blissful narcotic without any harmful side effects.

HP. Let's imagine you have a whole weekend free, no work, no hifi shows...where in the world would you go and what would you like to do?

KM. It's what I do every day when I'm fortunate to spend time at my holiday house on the Island of Evia in Greece. I enjoy a coffee in the morning with friends, and in the afternoon bumping into friends at the string of beaches I snorkel through.



REVIEW

MUSICAL FIDELITY M6 ENCORE CONNECT



Musical Fidelity's M6 Encore Connect is a ripper, streamer and preamplifier all in one handy, if substantial box. It costs £3629 and Lionel Payne hooked it up to his system to see if it came up to scratch.

LIONEL PAYNE

The Musical Fidelity M6 Encore Connect Multi Format Audio Streamer is quite a mouthful! From now on in this review I will simply call it the Encore Connect.

The Encore Connect is what is often referred to as an "All-In-One" although this particular model has preamplifier but not power amplifier facilities. However, Musical Fidelity also produce a variant with in-built amplification (using dual mono amplifier modules from the M6Si providing 225watts at 8 Ohms) called the Encore 225. Available in black or white, the review sample arrived in the black variant and proved to be no lightweight as it tips the scales at over 16 kilograms, this being a good indicator of the build quality of the unit which is particularly sturdy. To either flank are substantial heatsinks which I assume are only really required for the Encore 225 but as both variants wear the same clothes they remain on the Encore Connect.

The Encore Connect has a rather extensive feature list. It is an audio preamplifier/source component allowing you to keep all of your music in the one place. It can be connected to almost any source component whether analogue or digital and it is also compatible with many network speakers such as Sonos. There is official support for Tune-In Radio, Tidal, Qobuz and Spotify, the latter two having just been added within a major software update. These updates come at fairly regular intervals and prove that the Encore Connect is ever evolving and improving.

There are three available analogue inputs (via RCA), the Encore Connect provides fixed and variable outputs, and these remain completely analogue throughout. There are no less than four S/PDIF digital inputs (2 coaxial, 2 toslink) as well as four USB type A connections, one of which has high current capacity for charging

phones or tablets. There is also a USB type B connection but this is limited to use in future expansion. There is a slot-loading CD player and upgradable 1TB hard disk drive for storage which is enough for approximately 2500 CD's. A quarter inch socket for headphones is provided and this proved to be of high quality when tested. At the heart of the Encore Connect is a 64 bit Intel CPU with 2GB of RAM. This specification is far more than is required and as well as ensuring superb performance it allows for continual upgrading of its facilities and makes the Encore Connect virtually future proof.

It's not often that the manufacturer sends a representative to make sure its product is installed correctly for the review but this was the case with the Encore Connect – thank you Andrew, it was good meeting you. I was told that installation is quite complicated but I'm sure I could have handled it without any serious problems and any potential purchasers should not be deterred. The biggest problem Andrew and I had when installing the Encore Connect was discovering that my RJ45 network cable that travels from my ground floor router up to my second floor mancave must have been damaged when new carpet had been installed on hall, stairs and landings last summer. We overcame the problem by setting up downstairs directly to the router and then installing upstairs without it being hard-wired to the internet. The RJ45 network cable was then replaced a couple of days later and everything worked as it should. It should be noted that not hard-wiring the Encore Connect limits its functionality somewhat.

I have been contemplating the task of ripping my CD collection to FLAC for some time. The main reasons that I haven't so far are that it would be rather time-consuming as it is a rather large collection and I could never be 100% sure that a new format wouldn't be introduced to make

REVIEW

MUSICAL FIDELITY M6 ENCORE CONNECT



REVIEW

MUSICAL FIDELITY M6 ENCORE CONNECT

my FLAC files obsolete. Once the Encore Connect had arrived and I had ripped a few CD's to its' 1GB hard drive I saw the opportunity to tackle the task. I never quite imagined it being so easy! Using the Encore Connect for ripping couldn't be easier, simply load the CD and the ripping begins. In fact playing a CD is a little more complicated than ripping it as you have to access a sub-menu and select to play a CD before you put it into the slot-loader. At first I have to admit that this seemed counter-productive but once I had spent a little time with the Encore Connect it made absolutely perfect sense. The first thing to realise is that once you own an Encore Connect you will be very unlikely to want to simply play a CD with it. Much more likely is that you will wish to rip it to the hard-drive and use the FLAC file in all subsequent use. When I compared the playback of a CD against the playback of a ripped CD from the hard-drive I found a small but not insignificant improvement in the sound of the ripped CD. This can be explained by the fact that the ripped CD is virtually bit-perfect whereas playing the CD will incur error correction being involved during. Ripping a CD takes around 10-12 minutes and the Encore Connect will automatically search for the artwork and metadata to accompany the FLAC file. One or two of my less well-known CD's weren't recognised and I had to input the data manually but this was made very easy by the fact that the Encore Connect can be found through the use of Google Chrome on your laptop or PC. This allows you to manually input artist, album and track titles as well as drag and drop artwork to accompany the FLAC file. Using this Google Chrome interface also allows you to drag and drop large audio files directly to and from the Encore Connect. It also allows complete control of the Encore Connect and I personally found this fantastic and my much preferred alternative to using the multi-function remote control or the available free app (available for iOS and Android devices). The remote control works extremely well but I found it to be a little lightweight, being made of plastic, for a machine costing so much. The downloadable app also works very well and may well be the first choice for many users. However, I absolutely loved using the Encore Connect with the Google Chrome interface and there are several extra very useful features with this including Random Mix, Alarm Clock and Don't Stop The Music which allows you to set up so that you never have silence.

The sound quality of the Encore Connect is beyond reproach. When it first arrived my immediate thoughts were that it seemed bright but that was simply my own brain needing to become accustomed to the extra detail on offer. The Encore Connect is not bright but rather, it delivers wonderful sound quality throughout the whole sound spectrum with oodles of detail on tap. As a subscriber to Tidal (hifi quality) I was keen to listen to the same albums I had already ripped to the hard drive and determine whether there was any significant difference between the two. In most instances I found it difficult to determine which I was listening to in blind listening tests as both formats excelled. However, on a couple of occasions I found the Tidal offering far better than the CD rip and I can only assume that this was due to me having a poor quality recording on the CD in the first place.

Conclusion

I don't imagine that the Encore Connect is for everyone, but for those looking for an all-in-one such as this with top sound quality being the main objective, I cannot recommend it highly enough. It sat perfectly within my system hooked up to my Tri Vista 300 integrated amplifier, by the same manufacturer, and set as a source by using the line level

outputs so that the Tri Vista controlled the level of volume. The sound from my resident Monitor Audio PL300ii's or any of the loudspeakers I had in for review during the period never failed to satisfy or excite. In fact it became my "go to" source for most of the time it spent with me. I can also imagine it would be ideal at the heart of an audiophile's office or second system. It could simply be hooked up to a pair of active speakers or an amplifier and passive speakers to produce a remarkably engaging system. Heartily recommended!

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Built like a tank and should last for years.

Sound Quality: Up there with the very best with outstanding detail.

Value For Money: When you add up what is available within the one box and take into account the sound quality, perceived value is astonishing.

Pros: A very well thought out package which offers true audiophile quality.

Cons: A remote control with a more luxurious feel would be welcome and care should be taken with amplifier matching as the Encore Connect's detail may grate with a bright sounding amp and speakers.

Price £ 3629.00



REVIEW

LINN KLIMAX DS STREAMER



Linn's Klimax DS is a dedicated streamer with just an ethernet input to connect to your music library and yet it costs almost £16 000. Can Linn justify this high price with an equally stunning performance? Dan Worth finds out.

DAN WORTH

2007 saw the release of the very first Klimax DS from Scottish audio giants Linn. The first DS, much like future products, utilises first class audio components confined in their clam-shell chassis which is itself milled from a single billet of aluminium. Throughout the years Linn have pushed forward, advancing and refining their design on a hardware and software basis, continually striving to be a leader in digital audio playback with today's Klimax DS being the 4th incarnation.

The launch of Linn's 4th generation Katalyst DAC Architecture within the newest of Klimax DS dedicated streamers is notably more mature in its ability to take absolute control over critical elements that lie in the heart of the analogue signal's creation - offering what Linn state to be their most accurate reproduction ever from a digital source and "completely devoid of noise".

Completely independent isolated power supplies are employed for each process in the Klimax DS, ensuring that there is zero feedback from each of the processes to interfere with the next, making for a far greater reduction in overall noise distortion.

Linn have their own proprietary optimisation stage employed in the Klimax DS, detailed specifics are not available but Linn say that along with Master Clocking with independent power supply the "optimisation stage prepares the digital signal before any conversion takes place, which maximises error control and reproduction accuracy right at the start of the process."

Linn's newest ultra-low distortion Analogue Output Driver prepares the analogue signal before output. Much the same as Input Signal Optimisation completes its task, the Analogue Output Optimisation

removes any final noise distortion and dumps it before the pre-amplification stage in order to enhance signal purity and stability.

System Installation and Integration

Installation of the DS is simple, a somewhat more closed design is apparent over the companies DSM variant which has 7 digital inputs, DS being optimised purely for the on-board streamer via a single Ethernet input to link to local network libraries and streaming services. I was a little concerned to say the least about such a closed architecture until Linn pointed out that they were offering the use of their Katalyst DAC with any other digital source on their DSM module, all be it at a premium of £3,100 extra on top of the price of the DS at £15,800.

With fully balanced XLR outputs and single ended RCA the connectivity of the Klimax DS is pretty much complete apart from some further RJ45 Exakt Links.

Fit and Finish

Some may regard Linn's product line up as being a little understated in the looks department and may suggest you are not getting enough bling for your buck. I tend to disagree, not everybody wants huge shiny boxes dressed like a Christmas tree. It's modest styling is sleek and inoffensive in any decor. Looking at a piece of Linn's electronics in a photograph on the internet or in a brochure has no real bearing when confronted with the sleek lines of the physical product and when one handles one of their products an undeniable appreciation for precision build quality is immediately realised.

Set Up

REVIEW

LINN KLIMAX DS STREAMER



REVIEW

LINN KLIMAX DS STREAMER

Linn recommend using a NAS drive as the music source library to support the Klimax DS, offering me a Netgear Ready Nas for use during the review, I already have two of these for data backup for all my system, alongside a Melco N1a/2 which is my main music library for its benefits outlined in previous reviews. My pre-amplifier is the Audio Music RT-1 which is a great partner to my Gamut d200 mk3 power amplifier and Ayon Seagull Ceramic loudspeakers, all items have carefully selected modifications.

Ethernet in, Analogue RCA out and the flip of a power switch on the Linn and essentially everything is ready to go. Nice and simple!

Linn Kazoo Control App

Linn have upgraded many hardware and software aspects inside the new Klimax DS, as well as employing a new control app called Kazoo - over the older Kinsky app. Kazoo is available on Mac and Windows along with Android and iOS devices through their relative app stores or via the Linn website. Installation couldn't be easier and in use Kazoo is extremely informative. Users have the benefit of choosing the player/source and accompanying local library where the music is stored, alongside being able to enter their login credentials for Tidal or Qobuz.

Playing back music offers all relevant album information as well as displaying any associated artwork and the overall screen layout can be set as a list or tiles. Playlists can be built and songs can be queued for a relaxing and fuss free evening of music without needing to intervene with this already very simple way of enjoying ones favourite tunes. I especially like the black theme that Kazoo has from the outset, it prevents eye strain in darkened rooms and also looks sleek.

The Sound

Normally I'd begin this section with information based around the burning in of a product. Today I feel like that is an unnecessary topic to touch on - needless to say there is of course one, but when a Klimax DS is installed into a system the immediate impact it has is such a joy to behold that anything other than the music becomes irrelevant. Most notably for me on first listen was the amount of organic information displayed around the timbre of instruments. An acoustic guitar has a more meaningful description of each note's connection with the room and of course the instruments body. During Derrin Nuendorf's 'Ghost Train' tonality was reinforced by its incredibly detailed natural timbre, which uncannily didn't feel as if the music was slowing down as my brain adjusted to the plethora of information on offer. When masses of information is communicated to the human brain it naturally has a slowing down effect. Life changing experiences such as accidents are always reported by an individual to have happened almost in slow motion - of course, time hasn't slowed but the attention and analytical nature of the brain comes into play allowing for potentially better reactions and assessment of the situation.

Linn's Klimax DS easily puts the listener into the acoustic space and firmly into the heart of the performance from the outset. The evening I first installed the DS was with my girlfriend - she loves hearing new equipment and is very interested in their mechanics, but her true passion lies with the music and its reproduction - she has a very broad taste. We started to trawl through a range of music we both enjoy

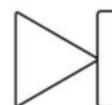
(which was mainly acoustic during the first evening) and I could quickly see how soon she wandered off into the presentation of the system.

Listening to the Damien Rice 'O' album my impressions of Rice's vocal in comparison with my usual reference of the Melco and the DiDiT DAC was an obvious cleaner approach, there was still great balance in tonality, with a fluidness that gave the lyrics meaningful expression. The cleaner tonality allowed for an added layer of realism, or in the room sense of presence of the music as a whole.

The following day whilst my partner was at work I had some more time listening to the Klimax DS at higher volumes than the previous night, curious to hear if I could trip the DS up whilst listening out for any sharp tones lurking in its sea of cleaner, well rendered rendition of notes. I threw a bunch of material at it, more acoustic, some jazz, a bunch of 80's rock music along with some electronica and pop.

I'd like to convey my admiration for the way the Linn deals with jazz; I'm not a huge fan at all of the newer funky jazz or any of its other derivatives, I'm more in favour of traditional jazz, Anker Bilk, Frank Sinatra, John Venturi, Earl Hines etc. I remember when my brother-in-law used to have a shop in London and he sold LP12's and the Klimax DS gave me fond memories of the Sondek setup, the undeniable musicality and bounciness it lent to jazz and the playfulness it conveys still to this day is pretty much unrivalled by any other deck. I don't know how Linn have managed it but I have searched and searched and I cannot find where inside the DS they have managed to hide the LP12 and it seems that Linn are being very tight lipped about this too! My speakers, being of an all ceramic array of drivers, conveyed this fun loving appeal very well, but undoubtedly paper cones would have been even more thrilling. It's a very fine balancing act to produce a piece of equipment which portrays great accuracy and extended amounts of detail, especially in bass registers, without delivering an incredibly tight bass that feels just too dry. The Klimax DS doesn't deliver as rich a tone as my current front-end setup, but then it is tailored to my system to create a terrific balance. However, the balancing act between exceptional tonality in timbre and extraction of detail on all levels of bass notes dignifies the company's prowess in being one of the leaders in digital music reproduction.

Music from the likes of Bon Jovi, Genesis, Meatloaf, Fleetwood Mac etc filled me with great joy also. I have always had a place in my heart for this kind of music, having grown up with these groups, listening to them in the evenings and weekends as my Mum prepared meals for us. You would often catch her dancing around the kitchen, having a good old sing song with pots and pans boiling away as if she was appearing on Stars In Their Eyes! At the time I always remember her red cylindrical AM/FM radio cassette player and every now and then it would beep and chatter when the portable phone was about to ring, I even used to be able to pick up police radios on it with careful tuning. My point is that that time of my life contained some of my greatest memories, I loved where we lived, music was always playing, no matter what it was played from and my life was just so adventurous and care free as a small child. The Klimax DS is one of a few pieces of equipment that had transported me back to my childhood and this is due I think to the undeniable signature it brings to the music and nothing to do with price. I found myself toe-tapping, singing along and inadvertently searching for the next song on a reminiscence basis rather than, "I bet this recording will sound good on it". And that's what



REVIEW

LINN KLIMAX DS STREAMER



REVIEW

LINN KLIMAX DS STREAMER

it's all about really, I don't care if something costs £50 or nearly £16k, any piece of equipment should be created ultimately to reproduce music and not just an array of over-embellished, over-detailed sounds. Each pricepoint as we climb the cost ladder needs to offer more insight and resolution, of course, but the fundamental factor in any music lovers system has to be the connection to the music and what it means to you personally. The Klimax DS achieves this - it has a heart!

My mid to late teens took me heavily into electronica and dance music, in fact it pretty much took me over for a while. I craved dynamic transients, huge punchy bass notes and synthesised sounds that enveloped me. My systems at the time moved from simple two channel receivers to multi-channel, multi-speaker arrangements that got me in trouble with my parents and neighbours alike. I moved out at a young age and when I got my first place I remember my Mum visiting to instruct on where things should be placed and what furniture I required. My reaction to this was simple, "I'll setup the system first, then we'll work out where everything else needs to go". This made absolutely no sense to her "it's a home not a nightclub" but for me music has always taken a priority. Again, this story isn't something I reminisce about often, but it's a story that was brought to the fore again by the Linn Klimax DS. I can imagine that within the four walls of their Scotland factory they have the technology and the know how to create pieces of equipment that can champion a whole range of attributes that would lend their abilities to very specific criteria; whether a vocal and acoustic masterpiece, a big band or orchestral masterclass or a dynamically astute enthralling wizard on the dance floor, how on earth can you get all of these specialties into one box though? Ask Linn, because they really have achieved it.

I already had a strong appreciation for the Klimax DS's way of naturally rendering transients and harmonically its decays can be playful or subtle, in this case, however, the inner child was reborn and the pressure levels in the room increased dramatically as did the volume.

Most likely untested by many, within the factory or out, the Klimax DS's sonic signature and effortless reproduction was absolutely on the money with this genre of music. It took on a new level of control with heaps of confidence - details were astonishing, kick drums were tight and fast and the midrange when vocals were included were simply exhilarating. The Klimax DS will have enthusiasts of all ages and tastes lost in their favourite genres. With the correct amp/speaker combination to tailor to one's room and tastes, Linn's Klimax DS will change the game for many, and in many respects it could be the last source that you will ever need (with the caveat, that if you don't require any further digital inputs). It's infinitely transparent, agile, textured, informative as well as being subtle and delicate in its approach to reproducing any music, but also ready to let its hair down and party.

Whether listening to Tidal, Qobuz or music from your own local library in standard or higher bit rates, the Linn Klimax DS will deliver. Newer, higher resolution formats from either of the above services shine through the intricately constructed and outstanding on-board Katalyst DAC, yet never left me wanting when listening to my large 16bit libraries. The Linn adds an authority to the music that is often overlooked and delivers a rarely surpassed performance with its associated features and app support making for a seamless integration into any system, and not just an all Linn arrangement. To be able to deliver this much charisma and character without influencing tonal

colour is an achievement in itself, but to be able to combine this without becoming stale and uninteresting is testament to what Linn have achieved here.

Conclusion

I've pretty much concluded this review above, so I will discuss the realities of owning a streamer which costs little under £16,000. First, the market for such a product is far smaller than that of the typical £2k to £7k high-end streamer, which in most cases carries more features.

The Linn Klimax DS has a very closed architecture and if one desires an array of digital inputs for other devices there is that £3k premium to add for the privilege of the DSM model. Personally, I feel that for this sort of money the DS should have at least one further digital input, with my preference being for optical. The addition of Bluetooth would have been a fantastic addition too.

What you do receive though is a dedicated and isolated streaming peripheral that at its heart has one of the most wonderfully implemented DACs on today's market, connecting directly to the renderer, with absolutely no eyes for anything else whatsoever.

In Hifi terms this approach tends to make the purists happy and others who want maximum flexibility and less boxes not so. I'd imagine that consumers in the market for a dedicated streamer such as the DS would indeed favour the dedicated version over the DSM and those who want more flexibility in this price bracket at least have the option of knowing that with Linn's "Input Signal Optimisation" and "Output Driver" technology they are in safe hands.

There are strong arguments all day long for and against both implementations and I don't believe that these will ever combine to one universal trail of thought, so for now we need to simply accept the reality of this product and its target market..

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Absolutely stunning!

Sound Quality: Heart felt, engaging and engrossing, very transparent and insightful.

Value For Money: I'll let you be the judge of that.

Pros: Bespoke parts throughout. Incredible attention to detail, physically and sound-wise. Exceptional DAC integration. Genre flexibility. Transparent and engaging. Most of all musical!

Cons: Expensive enough to be positioned at a specific sector of the market, but then Linn do offer more reasonably priced models. Should have had at least one digital input or perhaps even Bluetooth.

Price: £15,800



REVIEW

AVID HIFI REFERENCE FOUR LOUDSPEAKERS



The AVID Hifi Reference Four is a £15 000, British designed and manufactured standmount that weighs in at an impressive 40 Kg including dedicated stand. Janine Elliot takes a listen to this innovative design.

JANINE ELLIOT

AVID Hifi is a company that doesn't scrimp on metal or components to produce the very best in audio. Their turntables are heavy beasts and their amplifiers and speakers require significant muscle to move about the house.

At £15000 their Reference Four might well be the baby of the family but this heavyweight is still 40kg including the stands (25Kg speaker plus 15Kg stand). It also includes much of the technical developments from its bigger siblings. Made from 10-20mm machine tooled aluminium (and 30-40mm on Ref 1 and 2!), this is not small in weight, nor is it in sound or technological prowess.

CEO, Conrad Mas will not be new to readers who have previously read my reviews on their turntables and phono-stages. At my visit to the company a year ago I was fortunate enough to listen to their Ref 4 before it hit the road, and said then that I wanted to review it. It was well worth the wait. AVID Hifi started its life back in 1995, and from turntable manufacturing the company it has over the years extended its expertise into phono stages, loudspeakers, preamps, power-amps, cables, alignment equipment, racks – the list just goes on - and very soon three tonearms and cartridges. The AVID Hifi banner also extends to the design and manufacture for other companies within the audio, automotive, medical and military industries. Their manufacturing base in Kimbolton, near Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, is soon to extend to a second building for research and development, product training and of course that all-important listening. The site even had a coffee machine supplied with the building, which will be good news when I visit in the 2018! The facilities might be enlarging but the commitment to creating the best quality, whatever the cost, is something that sets

them apart from many companies economising on design and technology just to make big profits.

Conrad Mas has had a life of working in engineering and hifi, with his interest in hifi going back to his purchase of a Connoisseur BD1 with its Acos Lustre arm at the age of 16 and spending hours trying to improve it. This led eventually to him creating his first Acutus turntable in 1995. His varied career has included insurance and glazing, Musical Fidelity, and sales at Harrow Audio and Acoustic Arts in Watford; the successor to the KJ LeisureCentre shop I spent many hours drooling over the hifi on my way to piano lessons, and which gave me the bug to collect and then review audio.

Einstein, Sinks and Damping

There are two kinds of energy of interest to an audio engineer; one is good and the other is an unwanted by-product of things such as resonances and distortions. In moving coil loudspeakers only 0.1% (one thousandth) of the acoustic energy makes itself into the music. 99.9% goes up in heat and other bi-products. In horn loudspeakers efficiency is still less than 2%. What links all AVID Hifi products is that famous conservation of energy law I grew up learning in science lessons at school, that 'nothing can be created or destroyed only transferred or transformed'. Where I might turn my own spare energy into talking or making music, AVID Hifi turntables dissipate that unwanted energy away from the important playing area, and their loudspeakers similarly dissipate the energy created by all the vibrations, which would normally result in unwanted sound. Their Reference range of speakers "collect" all the unwanted vibrations and remove them before they have a chance to build up and affect the



REVIEW

AVID HIFI REFERENCE FOUR LOUDSPEAKERS



REVIEW

AVID HIFI REFERENCE FOUR LOUDSPEAKERS

music. Historically the standard method of reducing the effect of unwanted resonances is by adding some form of mechanical damping – by choosing some kind of ‘lossy’ material or by adding mass with the intention of shifting the resonances outside of the audible frequency range. However the energy is still building up inside, and needs to be transferred into something that won’t affect the sound. Simply changing the resonant frequency of a device or adding damping doesn’t get rid of the energy, it will still be trapped in the device and when it does “escape” you’re going to hear it, albeit possibly now reduced in size.

Conventional wooden cabinets vibrate, and no matter how well braced or glued will still leave some unwanted attributes. In the perfect world the only sound produced should be made directly by the movement of the cone, but in reality the same amount of energy into moving the cone will be put in to the chassis. In the case of a loudspeaker this means that the same amount of energy will be put in to the chassis and cabinet as into moving the cone itself. Many manufacturers use carbon fibre or metal to brace it all but that energy still needs to be released; often ending up back-firing into the drivers and colouring the sound if it can’t escape through heat or ports. The good thing is that energy will find its weakest point and escape through that point, and AVID has spent its years in the business looking at controlling that energy flow. What the company soon realised was that there are good and bad vibrations at source and that the bad energies should be given the path of least resistance to get to what it refers to as an “energy sink” from where it can quickly and harmlessly be converted to heat. In their turntables, AVID create a path of low resistance for the energy to travel from the record to the massive main chassis and away from the delicate record/cartridge interface, and in their speakers it is the ‘Tuned Mass Damping System’. What AVID want to do is get that energy and take it somewhere where it won’t affect the music, and they do that by adhering to yet another law of physics that states that everything will find its weakest link; if you create an easy path for that unwanted energy to exit then you will find it simpler to remove, a bit like a car having a crumple zone that takes all the energy on impact, whilst protecting the driver.

After much experimentation this took the form of a large mass added to the rear of each drive unit, the distinctive ‘Tuned Mass Damping System’. This metal damping plate is free to move (vibrate) inside the cabinet – energy, transferred to it via flexible couplings, including a pad between the driver and the plate and decoupling spacers between it and the front baffle. According to Conrad energy “Simply has no option other than to convert to heat within the cabinet”. As the damping system is decoupled from the driver, unwanted vibrations are allowed to dissipate and turn into heat freely without affecting the all-important audio chain.

The drivers themselves are sourced from Morel and consist of titanium 160mm woofer and 28mm tweeter. Instead of using the more conventional screws to hold the drive unit in place AVID Hifi use a clamping plate to compress and sandwich the driver all around its circumference to the front baffle. This with the more rigid than usual cabinet prevents the vibration from the driver entering the cabinet. It then passes back through the driver chassis and magnet into the Tuned Mass Damper, importantly keeping it away from the cone or cabinet. Each driver in the AVID design has the mass damper optimised to the specific driver – as is the damping material set between the driver and the damper. This ensures optimal performance throughout the full

frequency range covered by the loudspeaker. The mass damper also incorporates a tapered internal port which allow ensures smooth, unrestricted airflow from the rear of the driver, enhancing linearity and dynamic performance.

Of course, we can go further and discuss loss of energy and transmission of vibrations through floor or even from the floor up to the speaker - I regularly use a seismometer app on my phone to check that I am not influencing the sounds when I walk around or when the washing machine is busily spinning away! But, and this is a big but, the sound to your ears should be the defining reason for my liking or not a product, because sometimes we can get so carried away with technology, new ideas and specification that we don’t independently use our ears to decide if the product is actually good or bad. Luckily, I spent more time listening than reading and learning, and wasn’t disappointed by these loudspeakers.

The Morel drivers use very large diameter voice coils which surround the whole ring magnet assembly rather than just fitting inside the magnet’s inner circumference. This creates a larger surface area, and therefore the cooling area for the heat generated and also improves the ventilation, thereby reducing heat and air pressure. Less air pressure gives for more freedom of movement of the driver, creating more sound and less friction, and I noticed significant detail of sound including greater dynamics and no stress from whatever I played. I was lucky to use the very quick and accurate Music First Baby Reference passive preamplifier and their very new 100W mono-blocks, themselves designed specifically to allow a speedy and precise sound to match that of their preamplifier. My Krell KAV250a was used as alternative power for this review; that particular amplifier has a lot of grunt but not so tight a sound.

I was pleased to learn that the crossover was a relatively simple affair on these loudspeakers; a 2-way, 2nd Order design, largely because the two drivers work so well together. Having myself redesigned a few crossovers in the past, rather than using the complicated 3rd and 4th order OEM designs in some major bookshelf and floor-standers I have owned, I can vouch for simplicity where that is possible, and of course if it all works, a lot depending on accuracy and integration of the different drivers in the loudspeaker. Where complicated 18dB/24dB designs might give a very accurate frequency range for each driver, it invariably means less dynamics and speed; yet more wasted energy. The Tuned Mass Damper means that the drive units behave much more like their theoretical ideal, and this allows AVID Hifi to use a very simple (four high quality component) crossover design; two filters that blend the two drive units together in musical harmony. The result is an elegant crossover that has minimal impact on the audio signal.

The cabinet is equally well thought out being made from 10mm and 20mm aluminium throughout, with machined designs on the sides to match with those of the AVID Hifi amplifiers. Internally there are two baffles also acting as internal bracing and placed in such a way as to break up internal standing waves that a square box would create and so that they won’t head back to the driver and thus affecting the sound. The crossover is fitted to the rear of these two braces.

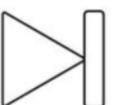
The Sound

First noted was the detail and speed of sound. This might be 15K for a relatively small box, but the sound (and weight) was by no means



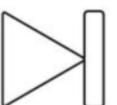
REVIEW

AVID HIFI REFERENCE FOUR LOUDSPEAKERS



REVIEW

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REVIEW

AVID HIFI REFERENCE FOUR LOUDSPEAKERS

lightweight. Playing Pink Floyd "Astronomy Domine" provided a strong atmosphere of guitar, drums vocals and musique concrète that filled my personal ozone with detail, precision and power. The early 1967 recording on this 4-disc vinyl remastered Echoes compilation covered all frequencies with equal depth of detail and soundstage. The helicopter opening of "Another One Bites the Dust" was particularly realistic (especially at loud levels) even waking my usually unflappable cat, Toby, who had been sleeping on the ground to look up at the ceiling. If only I had a camera to hand.

Only when turning to one of my favourite discs, 'Love Song' from the Christian band of the same name did I feel the bass was slightly less than I expected; it wasn't that anything was missing, just that the detail from the excellently mic'd drum kit seemed to transcend everything else being played, meaning bass guitar and piano lower notes were not as clear. Those cymbals are just so good, so fast and detailed. That said, the pulsating bassline in the first track of side four was faster than I had heard before. Just as the soundstage was notably vast front to back as well as side to side with Pink Floyd, here too in this live recording the vocalist could have been in the room, and each musician placed around and behind him.

Turning to Andre Previn, in Prokofiev's excellent and lesser known ballet 'Cinderella' (EMI, London Symphony Orchestra) was a chance to put a whole orchestra in my living room. The orchestra and orchestration is vast and the instruments were placed magnificently across the soundstage, particularly the strings and horns to left and tubas and the rest of the brass section at the very back and right. Similarly the drums had their position set, and although the volume of sound wasn't large, their positioning helped to give a detailed performance.

Whilst the Reference Four worked on all types of music I played, it was particularly large classical works that gave me the most enjoyment; that clarity, speed and ease of portrayal of the music was compelling, and it worked well at both low and high volume levels. Turning back to Pink Floyd "Echoes", that percussion from Nick Mason might not be forceful - it is played with a great deal of compassion - but it was so clear and detailed that my attention was placed on this rather than the organ and guitar lines. Only in the later instrumental part of the track did that percussion take over and show me just how quick and good the bass is from this diminutive Morel driver.

The Four has a downward firing reflex port with a 360 degree diffuser on the stand allowing bass to exit in all directions just several inches below the driver, itself creating a very focused sound from bass to highs, and those tight bass thuds from the kick drum were able to penetrate the room with aplomb. I have never liked rear facing ports as they restrict speaker positioning, and similarly front ports can be a pain. The AVID Hifi flared diffuser distributes the airflow, controlling maximum air velocity. This is achieved by spreading the moving air "over a wide area, with no constrictions". This resulted in a very precise, undistorted and unrestricted bass-end, at whatever levels I played. The percussion in the Pink Floyd tracks didn't get in the way nor sound muddy, resulting in much reduced noise normally caused by non-laminar airflow. Whilst the Reference Four is only available in black it does come in a choice of black, red or copper feet that sandwich it to the stand, leaving space for that bass port diffuser. Although I did find the best positioning of the speaker was 2 feet from a wall, this speaker

was less critical than many I have had the (mis)fortune to have to place in my living room.

Conclusion

I was very impressed with this loudspeaker. It might be a stand-mount but it had the frequency response and clarity that I normally hear in larger speakers.

The speed of delivery and accuracy of sound in all music, but particularly percussion and classical music, was very inspiring.

Sound was pure, and I guess that 'Tuned Mass Damping System' must be part of that. If you are serious about your music you should seriously consider the Reference Four.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Exceptionally good build quality and components.

Sound Quality: An exceptionally fast, detailed and honest portrayal of the music particularly lower bass and top end.

Value For Money: At £15,000 including VAT this is not a cheap unit but every penny is money well spent.

Pros: Fast and accurate portrayal of the music. Excellent at all frequencies; especially distortion free and quick at lower end, and detail at the top.

Cons: Colour options (any colour) come at a premium.



REVIEW

ALBEDO MONOLITH REFERENCE SPEAKER AND INTERCONNECT CABLES



Albedo are a Poland based company that go to great lengths (excuse the pun) with their cables' manufacture. This goes all the way back to smelting the metals and drawing their own conductors. Dominic Marsh listens to their Monolith Reference Speaker and Interconnect cables to see if is all worth their effort.

DOMINIC MARSH

Albedo have been making audiophile interconnects for over 20 years now and I say too few people have heard of the brand which I think is a great shame. That is partly due to being manufactured in Poland and distributed by a global dealer network.

There is very little that is radical in their designs with the exception of some unique conductor geometry, however they do use only the finest materials available and pay particular attention to construction. Albedo smelt all of their own metals, draw their own conductors through specialised dies and build everything in house, so they could never be accused of buying reels of generic wire and repackaging as their own.

Hifi Pig reviewed an earlier version of the Albedo Monolith cables back in 2012 and this set of cables reviewed here are evolved and updated models, plus I have owned a pair of Flat Gold interconnects in the past myself and as I recall I was very pleased indeed with their sound characteristics.

Construction

Both the interconnects and the speaker cables use very high purity soft annealed monocrystal silver in their conductors, in this case forged and fastidiously manufactured by Albedo themselves into very thin ribbons and separated by using air as a dielectric with antistatic materials added.

If you have the perception that "silver cables are bright sounding" then that couldn't be farther away from the truth. The only "silver" cables I have heard with a tendency towards brightness have been silver plated, poor quality silver wire (as in recycled), or hard annealed silver wire.

All the connectors are manufactured by Albedo themselves to their own specifications and are of very good quality, all fitting snugly into their respective sockets.

The notable difference between the Reference model over the previous incarnations is that they are now built as individual cables rather than being coupled pairs.

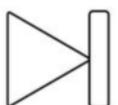
The outer sheath is an expandable nylon braid in a pale silver/grey colour, with plastic attachments named with "Albedo Reference".

Speaker cable priced at 2450 Euros for a 2 metre pair whilst the balanced XLR interconnects are priced at 1950 Euros for a 1 metre pair.

Sound Quality

I don't need to be told that the Albedo Reference cables are made from soft annealed pure silver wire, as their sound characteristics told me what they are made from – soft annealed high purity silver. Treble had a sweet delicacy about it without any fizz or harshness and the bass is as fulsome and insightful as you could wish for. Treble errs a tad on the side of warmth if we are to be honest about it, but nevertheless these cables are truly excellent at reproducing both macro and micro dynamics.

So, to translate these observed sonic snippets into some music some of you might be familiar with, I put Supertramp's Crisis, What Crisis? in the CD drawer and pressed play to hear my favourite track on the album, 'Lady'. This track has raw edges to it that comes straight at you in a direct way, which was not unexpected. The vocals sounded



REVIEW

ALBEDO MONOLITH REFERENCE SPEAKER AND INTERCONNECT CABLES



REVIEW

ALBEDO MONOLITH REFERENCE SPEAKER AND INTERCONNECT CABLES



REVIEW

ALBEDO MONOLITH REFERENCE SPEAKER AND INTERCONNECT CABLES

like they were recorded elsewhere like in a cavern, there is so much echo and reverberation added, but they still sounded yards deep throughout the entire track, while bass and drums are recorded to the foreground and form the underpinning of the track. Kick drum was solid and tangible almost, cymbals are represented by high hat beats which never vanished into the mix even when the band was playing at frenetic levels. The last one third of the track is comprised of the bass guitar in a 1 – 3 repetition, the high hat beat, clicking of fingers and simple vocals. Delightfully simple, but not exactly challenging either, so I suppose it is part of that track's charm. Track 8 is another favourite on this album called "Just a Normal Day". A slower pace perhaps, a touch on the melancholy side as well, but the track has piano, saxophone, violins and a haunting vocal that either touches your emotions or leaves you cold, depending on how well it all hangs together, which the Albedo cables mastered well.

This was also evidenced in Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" live album, where each venue during one of the band's many European tours has a unique atmosphere and acoustics at each location. The Albedo cables captured this phenomenon very well indeed with a notable lack of background noise for good measure. Bass had a powerful taut punch to it and especially so during the driving Floor Tom whacks the drummer inflicts on that instrument which fair made my listening room vibrate with the power delivered.

Imaging abilities are also noteworthy, no doubt due also to that lack of background noise, with top class width, height and depth, the audience on this album being extremely well reproduced so it sounded like you were sitting around five rows away from the stage.

Conclusion

I apologise now for this review not being an endless parade of superlatives to describe the Albedo Monolith Reference cables. Having said that, I could find no fault either and that makes a rather refreshing change for a seasoned reviewer of cable confections. Most of the cables I have reviewed for Hifi Pig have had areas of strengths and weaknesses with a general set of compromises incorporated into the design, which we either live with or we don't, arrived at under the guise of "synergy", as in matching to the system and of course our own listening preferences.

I would sum up their sonic characteristics as being neutral, that is there isn't one area of the audible spectrum that is either recessed or overblown, all of that audible spectrum is dare I say, almost ruler flat in response but you shouldn't interpret those words as these cables being boring or lacklustre, far from it in fact. On the contrary, they offer sparkle and dynamics, but in a rather grown up sophisticated kind of way, which I am sure will find many admirers, myself amongst them.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: The looks and build are above average, but that's not the reason you would buy these cables.

Sound Quality: I will give this rating in reverse: I couldn't fault them in sound terms.

Value For Money: Very good bang for the buck product and you wouldn't want to upgrade.

Pros: The best thing about these cables is they live at the back of the rack and simply do the job they were bought for, with no fuss or fireworks.

Cons: Sound, build, value, all good, but come resale time they are not fast sellers because of their unfamiliarity in the market – regrettably and hopefully this review addresses that in some small way.

Price: Speaker cable 2450 Euros for a 2 metre pair and Balanced XLR interconnects priced at 1950 Euros for a 1 metre pair.



REVIEW

FLARE AUDIO PRO IN EAR MONITORS



The Flare Audio Pro In Ear Monitors have a very interesting design, cost £349 and can be used wired, or using Bluetooth. Janine Elliot and Stuart Smith take a listen.

JANINE ELLIOT & STUART SMITH

As a school teacher in recent years, whenever I uttered the word “volume”, “balance” or hifi” to students I was looked at as if I was talking another language. Much of the younger generation are fast forgetting about the fun of integrating hifi components and perhaps not likely to spend considerable amounts on audio unless it is for their car, or perish the thought, monophonic wireless speakers. Luckily I am hoping that is all about to change at least for personal listening as younger listeners start to get unhappy with mp3 on their phones and hi-res FLACs become commonly playable on newer models. Better audio coding formats do, however, require better earphones and headphones, and in recent years there have been an increasing number of impressive models bending the audio boundaries even for older hifi bugs like me, and which just make reviewing such fun.

The first headphone, the R1, from Davies Roberts, CEO of Flare Audio, was a great idea but was never their best product. Creating a headphone without that ghetto-blasters bass pressure infecting the music was a great idea, only let down by the driver. What was clever was the spiraling vortex system around both sides of the 40mm dynamic headphone drivers designed to remove all Enclosed Residual Pressure Interference (ERPI). Then came their R2 IEM. Wow, this was a game changer, especially the R2PRO (£200 Kick-Starter price, then £400 after) with its Titanium body-shell. Whilst it was impossible to fit a vortex system either side of the driver in such a small space, in order that there was equal pressure both sides of the driver he created a spring effect system at the front to match that caused naturally on the rear of the driver. Whilst some might think there is no bass, it is just void of the sound pressure usually associated with bass frequencies in IEMs. This allowed much more of the detail and speed of sound at bass frequencies but relies on good fitting of the earfoams, and

extended and detailed top frequencies that were so clear you would think your ears had just been syringed. They were respected by professional musicians and producers alike, as is their new offering, a balanced IEM with wireless DAC, called the ‘FLARES PRO’, all for £349. This new top model is loved by Bowie, T-Rex and Iggy Pop producer Tony Visconti (“These are the best earphones ever”), and Gary Langon, engineer of Queen and Yes (“These earphones are absolute game changers”). But not to be influenced by these big names and able to form my own conclusions I decided to put it through its paces myself before coming to any kind of conclusion.

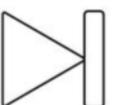
This new model is, however, significantly different from its predecessor. Where the closed-back R2 used 1 jet and had no acoustic lens, the FLARES PRO uses a dual jet, one at either end, and has a special acoustic lens that fires sound onto the ear drum. The driver is only 5.5mm, though ½ a millimetre bigger than the R2, and is made of Beryllium and also very sensitive, which allowed me to get more detail and information from the music that I played. The IEM case itself is made from aerospace Grade 5 Titanium, just like its predecessor, and slightly longer in length. However, this new model should be treated as a completely new product, just as is the difference between the R2 and R2Pro that I reviewed a few years back is huge. Having followed Flare over the past few years I am as excited about the developments in design and audio quality of each new product as Davies will be in presenting them to the public.

One of the key parts of this very reasonably priced package is the wireless module, complete with microphone. This means you can connect your music to your Bluetooth enabled DAP or phone, via Bluetooth® v4.1 with APT-X connectivity. As CEO Davies Roberts



REVIEW

FLARE AUDIO PRO IN EAR MONITORS



REVIEW

FLARE AUDIO PRO IN EAR MONITORS

informed me “The Wireless module has a balanced output which removes cross-talk interference”. The output from the dual DAC chips are direct, thus there is no component distortion or noise generated. This is only possible thanks to the linear impedance that the FLARES PRO has, thus as Davies told me “electronics are more stable and produce far less audible distortion”.

Presentation

The first thing I was aware of was the much improved build quality and presentation over previous incarnations. Where the previous model had a unique method of replacing the fragile cable if you were unfortunate enough to break it (or had a cat with sharp teeth, like I did), you needed to have nimble fingers and good eyesight to be able to do this operation. The new model instead has a much better and reinforced cable housing connecting to the body of the IEM, meaning the fragile connector of the predecessor is gone. Indeed, this model has far better cabling design, thicker and with a matt finish which doesn't make noises when moving around, like some cables still do. All the components are of superior quality as is the presentation box itself. Where it was often confusing which was left or right cable in the predecessor I am pleased to say there are colour-coded light/dark grey cables for right and left ear respectively. Only, perhaps, the manual might be too diminutive for those with failing eyesight. This model comes in a large square box cleverly disguised with noise cancelling foam regularly seen in recording studios. As well as the remote, the cleverly packaged box with its triple layers also includes 6 sets of earfoams, covering audiophile and everyday ‘fitting’, a carrying case for the IEMs and micro USB charging cable. The wireless unit has a 170mAh 2.4v rechargeable lithium-ion battery, with two hours charge time for the 12 hours playback and 150hours standby time. It is compatible with HFP HSP, A2DP, AVRCP and APT-X. It allows 48/96kHz 16 bit playback, though interestingly I could actually manage to play WAV files up to 24/192 from my Fiio with minimal dithering, but of course it wouldn't play FLACs or DSDs. Perhaps a model allowing aptX-HD will appear when the new format becomes popular. Both standard and aptX-HD do still have a compression ratio of 4:1, though, to reduce audio-coding delays and minimise latency issues, so you may or may not use this facility. For the review I used both wired and Bluetooth. Indeed, I was torn between both, which will become clearer later. What is clever, too, is the voice control for answering and ending phone calls, if your phone allows. You can control the playback and answer phone calls just as in most remotes, and therefore of course it has a microphone.

Jets, Lenses and Anti-Resonance

There are three major parts to this design that help to produce an IEM that simply concentrates of presenting the audio rather than dealing with conventional headaches of resonances imposed by the boxes and spaces therein. The titanium shell of the R2 PRO I reviewed back in 2015 was significantly better than the aluminium or steel R2. So, the material's strength and crystal structure impacts on the sound, and is why it is again chosen for this new model. But there is much more than just the material in the FLARES PRO. This IEM has been totally re-thought. Firstly there is the “Dual Jet” technology to control the movement of the driver, like a jet engine controlling intake of air. Basically there are two jets one at either end of the bullet size unit, each at carefully worked out sizes within tolerances of 10 microns to

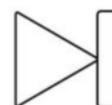
achieve the correct pressure at all frequencies. The aim is to reduce distortion, and hence colouration of the sound. The “acoustic lens” focuses and fires the sound into your eardrums. The tip of the unit is noticeably smaller than the width of the IEM, and smaller than the 5.5mm driver. Only the addition of the ‘earfoams’ makes the whole titanium shell look wider. Thirdly there is anti-resonance technology whereby a small space inside the unit ensures internal vibrations exit out of the rear rather than reflected back inside the unit to “infect” the sound, which would again create colourations and hence distortion. The idea of controlling unwanted sounds has always been central to Flare designs, and the resultant purity and efficiency of the music produced has been one of the reasons I have always liked their products.

The Sound

The initial listening was with the wired connection to my Fiio DAP. My first thoughts were that this is slightly longer than the original model though being so thin allowed the bullet to fit snugly into the ear, if you use the foams correctly (allow 15 seconds to expand before letting go). They can also be rested against the outer ear antitragus, that bit of cartilage on your lugholes, if you want that extra security that it won't fall out if you are sprinting around the local park, but because the unit is slightly longer you might not find that quite so comfortable, particularly if you like much larger IEMs that do not touch your outer ear. There are three types and two sizes of Earfoams supplied, though the easy-listening Everyday Earfoams are silicone based, and not memory foam, so not so good at staying in place, at least in my ears, and because it is important that there is no leak of sound between the driver and ear for that excellent bass detail, that option of foams will not be so good musically. A Universal version is more durable and shaped to fit the majority of ears, but not so good at isolating and creating that better bass end. I chose to use the Audiophile version, of course, for my serious listening, and though they are not quite so hardwearing they do create an excellent isolation.

The difference in detail of sound and involvement in the music over the previous incarnation was quite staggering. Even listening to my own music, I found I was hearing little details I hadn't experienced before. Turning to music I thought I knew so well was even more of an Aladdin's cave. The speed, detail and cleanliness of sound was quite astounding, no wonder record producers love these IEMs. Distorted spoken word in “I Wanna Rule the World” (from ‘Lazy Days’, 10cc) were very audible, though the intentional distorted guitars in “Iceberg”, track 5, whilst easier to hear. Indeed the musical phrases were much clearer and were therefore made much more interesting, indicating vividly how much the 1970's band enjoyed making this complicated theatre piece. There are over 4 idioms in this piece including the musique concrete opening and vocal phrases such as “die die” and “Really not a lot you can do” plus the Ken Sykora style guitar passages that combine to make this all such an enjoyable and enticing track. The amount of detail kept me spellbound in my listening.

Which brings me to Beethovens 7th symphony. When I performed it in a local symphony orchestra the second movement just made me very tearful, especially with the beautiful viola section melody at the start of the movement. It wasn't bad playing that made me cry, but the emotion of the melodic lines and repetitive death-march rhythm. Music does make me cry, but it has to be a mixture of both the music line as well as the performance itself. I didn't cry on this occasion, not just



REVIEW

FLARE AUDIO PRO IN EAR MONITORS



REVIEW

FLARE AUDIO PRO IN EAR MONITORS

because the performance from the Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra (Herbert Kegel) isn't the most exhilarating (it's not so high in my list as performances with conductors such as Sir Simon Rattle or Euan Jochum, for example), but because I was picking out all the instruments and engrossed in every nuance of detail as I would sitting in front of the mixing desk at the recording. Not that music was overtly critical, it was quite simply just accurately performing what was put in front of it. Such was the clarity and depth of information that even mp3 copy of David Gilmour "Rattle That Lock" came across so clear and extended that I forgot this was compressed music through compressed BT. This was seriously good listening!

What is so good about the Flares Pro is that due to separate left and right cables with click-on MMCX gold-plated professional connectors a true balanced audio playback can be utilised allowing a greater listening experience. Since conventional earphones use a 3-pin (tip, ring and sleeve) 3.5mm jack this means there is a shared or common earth between both channels, which will cause phase distortions since that part of the signal is being shared. Whilst not so noticed in loudspeaker listening there are papers discussing the greater effects on headphone listeners. I love my Stax Earspeakers as the sound travels balanced from source to ear. We are beginning to see balanced appearing in DAPs and hopefully more and more earphones soon. Flare Audio will be bringing out a balanced cable especially for this operation, and whilst I hope MMCX plugs will become popular in the portable DAP market, it is most likely the 4-pin 2.5mm jack will be the popular format since it is one plug and not two and less fragile. For wired listening the attractive cable plugs into a good quality y-adaptor though this means output at the 3.5mm jack is unbalanced. Whilst the clarity I heard at the start of my listening using the wired set up was on a new level, it was not balanced, and I did hear very slightly more distortion than in the balanced BT mode, though of course that mode did limit me in terms of not being able to play FLACs/DSD. It was hard to decide whether I preferred playing wired and BT, though luckily you have the choice.

Turning to 'wired' listening was such an improvement on the earlier R2Pro, and that model was very good. The precision and delivery of music from this new model made me sad to finish the review. OK, I am a sound engineer by trade, but also a musician playing 27 instruments (at the last count) and so my ears can pull out both detail and musicality. The limit is really the source of the music, as I soon found out listening to Mike Valentine's reel to reel recording of 'Big Band Spectacular', since digital, even at 24/192, doesn't really stand a chance against the best analogue source. Whether "Sing, Sing, Sing" or "In the Mood" the music not only induced finger tapping (the cable isn't long enough to permit foot-tapping from where the Revox PR99 or Sony TC-766-2 are sat!) but it kept me engrossed in all that was going on.

Back to digital, this time using line output from the Class-A Slee Voyager headphone amp; Dadawa "The Turning Scripture" (Sister Drum) turned new pages in my listening experience of this track, with bass and top frequencies having quicker attack time and more detail that I only expect on my Stax electrostatics. 03'47 starts off a Dadawa characteristic of a powerful pulsating bass accompanying the chorus of voices that I wondered if the minute drivers would actually cope let alone my ears, and which ends with unusual grunting vocal noises all across my head. I need not have worried; if this can cope with what

Visconti and Langon can throw at it then I shouldn't ever have a problem. No listening is complete without some Pink Floyd. "On the Run" from 'Dark Side of the Moon' (24/96khz) had impeccable clarity; noises of sequenced synthesiser pattern, repeated drum patterns, that allowed you to feel you were actually sitting in front of the snare drum, the aeroplane engine and deep musique concrete noises allowed me to get closer to the music than any IEM before. The iconic "Time" track again was such fun; from the detailed transients from the clocks ticking to the deep engine noises that begin the track. Impeccable timing. The E and F# chords combined with the tom toms and synths and guitars are full blooded, and the 'A major' chord that comes towards the end of this section (2'08") literally took my head off; it was if I had a 15" driver vibrating away in front of my; it wasn't the 5.5mm driving having problems but the music in a new level of clarity. This continued in the instrumental verse every 4 bars. Why didn't I hear this so clearly through the speakers? I decided to put that track on the speakers and whilst I could pick it out now after identifying it, I had never noticed the extent of this before today. I try not to turn my reviews into a record review or a list of all the music I have, but I needed to complete the listening with something I hadn't played for a while. The Four Sea Interludes by Benjamin Britten is a work with extremes of bass and treble instruments and detailed individual tunes and rhythms from different instruments including flutes, violins, cellos trumpets, with rhythmic statements from percussion including timpani and tubular bells, so a great piece to play to test both detail and musicality. There are four movements in this instrumental work that was written separately but related to the Opera Peter Grimes which has libretto adapted by Montagu Slater from the narrative poem, "Peter Grimes," in George Crabbe's book 'The Borough'. The work is set at a Suffolk sea town, as indeed was Britten born not far from my own late father in Lowestoft. This is a great work to get emotionally and technically involved in; particularly the third movement, and this version (Michael Stern/Kansas City Symphony orchestra 88.2/24bit) was no exception. The beautiful slow movement with its pulsating rhythm through the beautiful melodic phrases, sounding like a rolling tide at the seashore and was a great contrast from the beautiful desolate muted-trumpet melody. This was not only musically engaging but technically absorbing. I didn't want to stop the listening. The third movement with the canon-like violin and brass lines was similarly not only highly detailed and engaging but musical as well. There can be a link; detailed does not just mean technical. There are often 5 movements in this performance despite it saying "Four" in the title, though that is because the Passacaglia, Op33b, is often played alongside the Sea Interludes, which are Op 33a. Don't ever think there is no bass here, the bass drum and tuba spurts at 5'50" will move your eardrum quite easily. These IEMs do have a clearer and extended bass end to their predecessor, though that model was still excellent if you wore the earfoams correctly. If you want bass pressure and therefore miss a lot of the detail from the music, then there are plenty of options out there on Amazon or from Curry's but you may perhaps damage your ears if you play too loud. If you want sound quality, detail and involvement, then these could be your best choice, whatever the price, particularly when you consider the option of BT. The pin-sharp and extended frequency response could be too perfect for some, but just begin to take in what 'lesser' IEMs will miss in terms of music and your £349 will be more than well rewarded. Indeed, though my name isn't Visconti, I would want to use these IEMs to monitor all my heroes, too.



REVIEW

FLARE AUDIO PRO IN EAR MONITORS

Conclusion

This product ticks all boxes for me in terms of detail, extension, speed and accuracy of the music, particularly in BT mode though that is limited to not playing FLACs and DSDs. This product was also great fun simply just opening the box, all for a very impressive £349. Where you might throw away boxes that your hifi comes in, you won't want to throw these away.

Clarity of portrayal of the music does mean that what you hear is what you get; no veiling of the sound just to make it sound "nice". It copes with significant levels of sound with no stress from the small 5.5mm driver and the BT function working up to around 15m. With the rise again in personal listening over the last decade and more recently the desire for better audio quality, the days of using cheap and bad IEMs is gradually fading fast, with top-end products getting cheaper and cheap. Maybe, possibly, the ears of our future heirs will experience even better personal music than we do now. I just wonder what Flare Audio will produce next. Watch out for the next very exciting chapter.

Janine Elliot

Janine has suggested that the Flare Audio Pro IEMs are put forward for Hifi Pig's coveted Outstanding Product Award and so they will now be sent to a second reviewer to complete the process.

Let's first discuss the packaging for these Flare Pro IEMs. One word - exemplary. Funky and well thought out and more than a huge dollop of that Christmas morning feel. I know I bang on about this a lot but it really does count - you wouldn't turn up at an interview in your scruffs would you? First impressions matter and in a market as rammed as the IEM one it pays to stand out from the crowd from the get go. My only gripe with the packaging is the minuscule manual that I found a tad difficult to read.

Janine has gone into what you get in the box and all the technical information and so I'm not going to go over it again.

First up I needed to charge the little Bluetooth DAC doodad which took a couple of hours. Pairing with the phone is a doddle and even for an old duffer like me for whom Bluetooth represents some kind of strange witchcraft, I was up and running in a matter of a few seconds. I use the Onkyo player on my phone as it'll handle hi-rez files but the tune that had been playing and left halfway through was the excellent Hardfloor Podcast One, an MP3 file. The sound is clearly that of an MP3 but I'm surprised at the amount of detail the Flares are getting through to my lugholes. I'm using the audiophile tips and they are firmly planted in my ear canal where they should be and you can sort of tell that there's nothing getting in the way of the sound reaching your eardrum. Bass, which I thought was a bit lacking in the R2s, was very good indeed and not at all overblown and the out of head experience is pretty cool given these IEMs are embedded halfway into your skull. With regards to the Bluetooth range I'm able to pop up stairs to pick something off my desk with no dropouts.

So that's MP3 covered but I know most of the folk reading this aren't going to lower themselves to such a lowly format and so it's on with John Martyn's Solid Air on FLAC, but still transmitted to the Flare Pros by Bluetooth. What comes across here is a sense of balance and detail. The sound is as uncoloured as you could wish for, clean and pretty

stunning considering I'm wandering around unattached. The dynamics of Martyn's guitar playing comes through in spades and his vocal shines with brilliant clarity, highlighting the tone of his voice beautifully. Again, impressive stuff.

Firing up the brilliant Chord Poly/Mojo combo and streaming tunes from the home NAS drive and using the Flare Pros in wired mode is a step up in sonics for sure to my ears. It was impressive using Bluetooth but Fun Loving Criminals' 100% Columbian sounds sublime. I'm not a huge fan of "serious" playback on the go, i've always thought the hassle was too much for the results obtained, but the Chord/Flare partnership is pretty stunning. This record is really well produced and I'm again taken aback by the level of detail and nuances in the mix, particularly little spatial cues and effects. Little details like the vibrato on the guitar during the track Fisty Nuts are clearly audible and the sheer depth of detail is superb. This is a key characteristic of the Flare Pros - UNCOLOURED DETAIL!

I'm finding myself listening to tunes at a much lower level than I would usually on IEMs. I think sometimes with lesser IEMs there is a propensity to turn up the volume in the hope that it will bring more detail - of course it doesn't. With the Flare Pros it is all there at all but the most quiet volume levels. There is still the feeling that everything is there, if that makes sense.

I was expecting the Pros to be a little light on the bass front but they are not in anyway light. What they are is balanced throughout the frequency range and where some IEMs and other headphones are artificially boosted in the bass to give them an air of - well I don't know what but it's wrong - the Pros from Flare just seem natural and unforced.

I'm writing this paragraph after having done my official review period with the Flare Pros, but I have continued to listen to them with a wide range of material in the time since. They are nothing short of a revelation on the IEM front. In the manual there is a picture of legendary producer Tony Visconti with a quote saying he mixes on the Flare Pros. When I saw this frankly I thought what a load of crap, but you know what I can see...well hear... it actually happening. The detail and balance on the Pros is astonishing allowing you to delve into the mix and pic it apart.

Conclusion

If you've read all that you'll gather I'm a fan, though I really wasn't expecting to be. These are a very, very capable in ear monitor, and it is that word monitor that is all important. They are accurate, as uncoloured as you could wish for and make really, really beautiful music whatever the style of music.

The little Bluetooth clip on unit to which the IEMs attach when you want to be untethered is a useful feature and the sound quality is very good. Wire them up to a decent DAC/amp and you are given a rare insight into the recording and the stereo image with buckets full of detail.

A classy offering in a great package that for the money screams BUY ME!



REVIEW

FLARE AUDIO PRO IN EAR MONITORS

Some may not like the idea of pushing the buds right into their ears, I was one, but once in there the Pros are very comfortable indeed and you sort of forget you are wearing them.

I concur with Janine and have absolutely no hesitation in awarding the Flare Pros our Outstanding Product Award.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Excellent detail to build from the Titanium bullets to BT unit and packaging.

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

Value For Money: At £349 this is excellent value considering sound quality and added BT unit. These are cheaper than retail price for the R2Pro that preceded them.

Pros:

Transparency. Well-controlled, fast and detailed sound delivery. BlueTooth option included. Excellent frequency range. Much improved components and packaging.

Cons:

Excellent speed, detail and accuracy might be misconceived as 'less musicality'.



REVIEW

ATC HDA-DP20



The market for Digital Audio Players is fiercely competitive with new brands entering the fray constantly. As such a new product has to either offer excellent for money or sound cut above the competition. At £290 the ATC HDA-DP20 comes in at a mid-priced product which could be a good choice if the sound quality, build and ease of use are on a par with more expensive units. Janine Elliot takes a listen.

JANINE ELLIOT

When offered to review another DAP and one labelled as ATC I have to confess my eyes initially lit up thinking this was a product from the Stroud based and well renowned loudspeaker manufacturer. This is a different company but no less a disappointment for me from the moment I unpacked the unit.

ATC EnergyTech Corporation Limited is a Hong Kong based company set up in 1997 specialising in power packs and supplies with a small base in central London, a company with impressive credentials becoming an authorized manufacturer of Apple's accessories in 2010, including Apple's Lightning accessories.

The HDA-DP20 is the most expensive the company produce, though at £289.95 is still a small sum for a top model. The build and specification of this device is first class, and surprisingly good for a first generation of machines; just look at how primitive early generations of number of DAPs were and how much better they are now, as is the same with Kia and Hyundai cars! This is seriously well made audio and well worthy of review.

The Linux based HDA-DP20 is one of three DAPS made by the company, being designed in the UK and Hong Kong and built in China. The HDA-EL2 is their starting model with a small mono screen, but still playing all high definition audio formats including FLACs and DSDs. Their £199 HDA-DP10 is a well-endowed product with an In-jenic JZ4760B audio processor & AKM AK4490 DAC. The top model reviewed here is the HDA-DP20 and is only £90 more and comes complete this time with twin Wolfson WM8740 stereo DAC chipsets followed by AB8610 LPF (low pass filter) then feeding into twin Analog Devices AD8397 input amplifiers.

Having twin amplifiers and DACs provides a natural, detailed and engaging sound, with each channel working independently as one would expect from professional digital designs. Whilst magic words like Sabre are missing in the equation, the WM8740 is still an exceptionally able DAC, as used by Cambridge Audio DacMagic and some excellent DAPs including Astell&Kern AK120. What really is important to stress, though, is how all the components around that DAC chip work together. The correct combination is worth much more than the individual parts, and they certainly do work well in this unit. Topped off with a solid aluminium construction and protected volume control makes for a seriously good value product. All that is missing is Bluetooth, and having two microSD card sockets instead of one. Like many DAPs the unit has no internal storage, but what is really good to see is a good quality 32G microSD packaged with the unit. Very kind. Whilst 32Gigs could get you around 30 decent quality albums, the unit will accept up 200GB microSD cards to top up your collection. The hole to put in the card is very thin, so you will need a pen to push it through, but this is typical of today's portable units. I would rather it had a cover to protect the card but that would put up the cost, and is it really is not an issue. Battery life is average at around 9 hours with 4 hours to charge the unit. The unit plays FLACs up to 24/192 (*and not 32/384 as indicated in a review elsewhere*) and DSD64, meaning most of my music could be played on the unit during the evaluation. Only the absence of Bluetooth playback spoiled an otherwise excellent specification. Future models being planned by the company will include larger screens and DSD128 and 32bit FLACs, though there is no date for production as of writing this review. However, for £290 I am not disappointed. Far from it.



REVIEW

ATC HDA-DP20

The unit is solidly built, at 168g being relatively heavy for a model of this size (61 x 16 x 112mm). The finish is a matt black, and brick-like with almost straight corners and looks very stylish and not quite so outlandish as a few more expensive DAPs I could name. The off/on and forward/back buttons are at the side, with important buttons that you don't want to press unless you actually have to do so that on the front of the unit. These buttons are cleverly slightly recessed in shape meaning that you can't press them unless you actually need to do so, even with big fingers. These allow you to select your music and play or 'pause' plus niceties such as adding to favourites, shuffle play or creating a playlist. Here you can also delete individual tracks (*many DAPs don't have this facility so easily performed*) as well as to get to the system settings, plus you can change EQ and choose the second 3.5mm socket to play line output or coax digital play and other system niceties such as how long the screen displayed, screen brightness and firmware upgrade. The volume control is cleverly placed so you can alter it from the front or rear of the unit. The only irk is that the headphone socket (*which is next to the line/coax socket*) is at the other end of the unit rather than next to the volume control. The wheel on the front has a ridge to help operation, and being matt finish to match the rest of the unit was easy to operate, and not slipping. The wheel is not loose like many, and the action works well, unlike a few DAP I know well. The 42mm x 38mm screen resolution is excellent, being IPS (In-Plane Switching) as opposed to TFT.

The Music

Using my AT W1000 headphones there was a clear presentation of all the music, particularly in mid-frequencies, such as vocals and strings, only missing out slightly in the very deep bass. Initial tran-

sients were full, and the almost velvety presentation was very analogue in sound, with very few little digital spikes in the sound. This is a great attribute to have; music in so many DAPs today comes across as too "digital" and unreal. Pink Floyd 'The Wall' and the track "Comfortably Numb" was almost appropriate. Nothing stood out, the music comfortably playing, if perhaps slightly less excited as I would like, but not numb! Moving to the higher impedance Sennheiser HD650 the sound was fuller, but playing Pink Floyd 'The Wall' and the track "Hey You", there was not enough reserve to get a bountiful presentation. I just wish someone would put in an op amp with several Watts of oomph. The cheaper Meze 99 Classics gave a very full bass though these cans are not quite so good at the highest regions.

For my serious listening I chose to use three IEMs of different abilities, starting with the Flare Pro IEM. As this machine has no Bluetooth facility I used the PRO as a wired IEM, rather than using its BT module. This was no disappointment, as DSD and FLAC files could be listened to, which they cannot using basic aptX BT. When turning on the machine after closing it down mid track the previous occasion it can be set to continue from where it was left off, and even fades the music up as it starts. A lovely idea.

Thomas Sondergard Sibelius Symphony Number 2 (*BBC National Orchestra of Wales, 24/192*) was nicely presented with notable detail and musicality that allowed me to get close to the music. One slight criticism is the sound was a little bit too laid back for my liking.

The excellent screen shows a cassette tape playing music if your track does not come with its own jpg image. A cassette tape is appropriate; the clear but smooth and analogue performance could



REVIEW

ATC HDA-DP20



easily be coming from a Nakamichi Dragon, but nothing less than a Nak! The Eagles 1976 album 'Hotel California' (now on 21st Century 24/192 FLAC), recorded in the good old days of 2" 24-track analogue Studer multitrack recorders was similarly very analogue in its performance, recorded with detailed positioning of all instruments and with a very prominent bass end, only missing out in detail at the extreme bass end, sounding a tad loose. Track "Wasted Time" was certainly not the case, with clear and well-presented musical passages between the string and guitar. Johnny Cash 'American IV' (24/192FLAC) and the track "The Man Comes Around" is full of acoustic guitars and piano and the closely mic'd Mr Cash. The detail of the vocal and metal strung guitars is highly infectious. His spoken voice is so clear that he could well have been sitting in front of me. Vocals are prominent in the ATC. Playing other vocal music I know so well – including my own albums – that was a consistent observation. It is not that they are too loud, just that they are very clear and can sound slightly less "analogue" than other frequencies. The Kinks' Misfits is a good album to listen to vocals with Ray Davis's distinctive voice. Similarly Katie Melua 'In the Winter' and "Perfect World" gave me a chance to test the vocals and all those mid frequencies. Whilst the low bass drum thuds were not quite so prominent as on my reference DAP, vocals were clearer and brighter and the awful hiss heard at the start and end of many of the tracks was more noticeable than I had heard before.

René Aubry "Amnesia" has plethora of instruments and sounds, all positioned at extreme points from hard left to right including piano, different percussion instruments as well as the sound of a didgeridoo and clarinet. I love this track and the ATC allowed me to get engrossed in the sound. René is a French composer born in 1956, and like me a multi-instrumentalist known for blending classical harmonies with modern instruments and sound bites, who writes much for film. Playing on my reference DAP the sound was brighter and more detailed with a weightier performance, but the ATC sounded more musical, and I found that I preferred the ATC to any of my DAPs.



Paul Personne "Ou est l'Paradis" has a forward drum with tenor saxophone and guitars as well as vocal. This for me was the icing on the cake. A clarity and musicality in this live performance including a very close mic'd Hammond C3 organ coming from nowhere mid-way in the track. This was a sheer delight to play, showing that the unit had no problems in performing complex and demanding music.

Nils Lofgren "Keith Don't Go" is an acoustic guitar and vocal track performed live that had me toe tapping. Only the lower notes of the guitar and initial transients weren't quite so realistic and as fast as through my reference DAP player/Class A headphone amp combo. But I actually preferred to listen on the ATC. Funny that. Manufacturers have tried to replicate an analogue sound from a digital source for many years, for example Pioneer's "Legato Link" in their CD players. This player allows you that pleasure. Reverbs were allowed to end properly and the atmosphere in performance was clearly distinguishable. The ATC team not only work on traditional audio concepts and technologies, but they also have tuned ears with experience of the live sound and music in different venues such concert halls, stadiums and night clubs, and this helps them to recreate the sound more musically. The company motto is "Living in Music" and their aim is to turn the acoustic technology into real, living music. They certainly are succeeding.

Conclusion

I have to admit this unknown-to-me brand exceeded all expectations. Not only did it look upmarket but it performed in a way that exceeded its price point. If you want to hear musical detail and engagement but perhaps sacrifice a modicum of detail in the lowest bass then this should definitely be on your shopping list. The machine performed with feeling, creating a warmth and velvety performance that was highly engrossing and analogue. Definitely worth a listen.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Exceptionally good build quality with a matt finish. Well-hidden screws and a design you will either love (as I did) or otherwise think it is too square.

Sound Quality: Analogue feel to the sound, with only slightly less detail in the lowest frequencies.

Value For Money: At a few pennies short of £290 this is an excellent DAP for those who don't need Bluetooth but want to enjoy all their music.

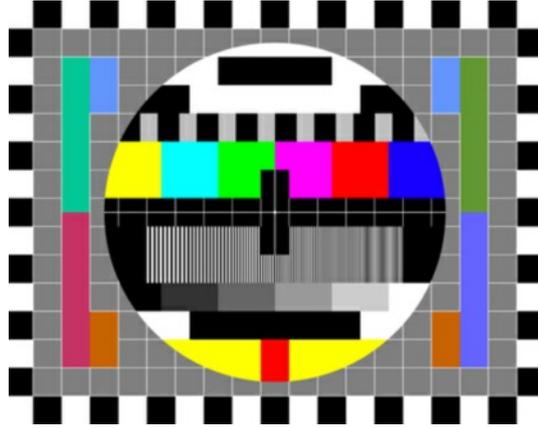
Pros: Analogue presentation. Excellent build quality. Comes with 32Gig microSD card. Recessed volume control

Cons: Some might not like the shape. Some might miss their BT IEMs

Price: £290



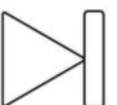
COMMENT



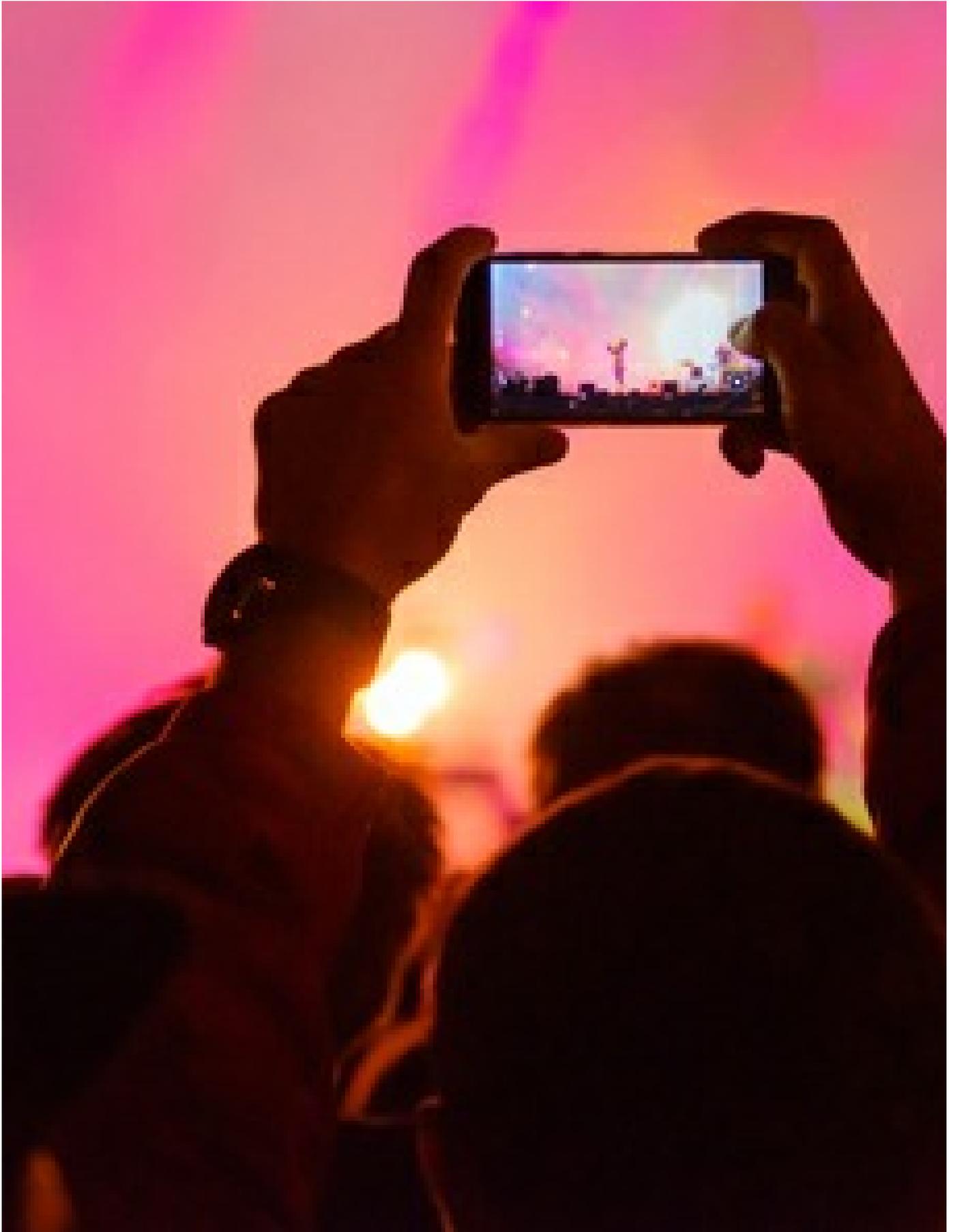
LIFE THROUGH A SCREEN. A MODERN DAY ADDICTION?

Screen - a flat panel or area on an electronic device such as a television, computer, or smartphone, on which images and data are displayed.

Our obsession with screens shows no signs of slowing down but what does this mean for the future of high quality music in the home and on the go?



COMMENT



COMMENT

Although not the first movie or the first public screening, the first paid for showing of ten short films by the Lumière brothers, in Paris on 28 December 1895, can be seen, for the sake of argument, as when the public began their love affair with the screen. The first permanent cinema opened its doors in 1905 with news reels soon becoming the chief way in which the masses received their information about national and world affairs. As David Bowie sings in *Life On Mars* we were becoming "...hooked to the silver screen."

From then we have been glued to our screens in one way or another and our fixation shows no signs of abating, indeed we seem to be becoming more and more dependent to our screens for every detail of daily life.

In 1926 John Logie Baird made what is regarded as being the first demonstration of television, but the "Tragic Lantern" (*Mark E. Smith*) didn't really infiltrate the wider population's living rooms until the forties and fifties, despite the BBC being founded in 1922. Indeed, in the UK there are apocryphal stories where people talk of visiting the only people in the area with a (*black and white*) television to sit and watch the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II – this was 1953, a rather short 64 years ago.

Despite the relative rarity of televisions in the homes of the masses a huge 20 million people are estimated to have watched the crowning of the current monarch. As of January 1st 2017, 26.74 Million households have televisions. We're screen junkies, there is no getting away from the fact, and the drugs just keep on getting stronger.

The Rise of The Smartphones

In the 90s, no Yuppie's power dressing outfit would have been complete without a personal digital assistant (PDA), but it wasn't until '96 that Hewlett-Packard released the OmniGo 700LX, a palmtop PC with a phone piggybacked and, importantly but somewhat limitingly, with a very basic screen. Jump forward to the present day and pretty much everyone has a smartphone that they don't seem to be able to tear themselves away from. We are constantly connected and we are constantly staring at our screens. Walk through any busy city centre, or hop on any form of public transport anywhere in the world and you will see hordes of people gawping at their screens with scant regard for those around them. There is no escape and we are slaves to the screen...perhaps that's putting it a bit harshly but you get my drift.

This pocket sized computer/communication device is now how many get their news, entertainment and, in many cases, their human interaction.

There's no escape either; if you go to a concert to watch a band then seventy percent of the audience will have their phones above their heads and will be recording and watching the show through their phones...madness! If you don't believe this then just take a look at the recent Roger Waters Live in Pompeii video.

But Why?

There's no getting away from it, there's no getting away from our screens. Even myself, a dyed in the wool luddite now has a tablet, a phone a laptop and a desktop computer. That's four screens just for myself...and then there's the television. And there's not just me in the house...I wonder when the cats will have their own screen driven devices?

Psychologists at California State University did some research and deduced that 51 percent of people born in the 80s and 90s had feelings of moderate to high levels of anxiety if stopped from interacting with their smartphones for more than fifteen minutes. The figure drops to 42 percent for those born between 1965 and 1979 but that's still a whole lot of dependence on our smartphones. I was born 1967 (*yes, I'm fifty*) and despite being a very late adopter of a smartphone, I do find myself checking it constantly – I'm not sure I would say I experience anxiety being away from my phone, but there is clearly some kind of addictive behaviour going on here.

How could we not become addicted? We take photographs, we share them and we get emotional gratification when people comment – we feel part of the greater community. We feel special. This emotional gratification triggers an internal chemical process and, despite my somewhat flippant use of the word "addicted", we are as addicted to these chemicals, and as a result the smartphone that gives us our fix, as a heroin addict is addicted to the needle and their opiates.

What About The Music, Man?

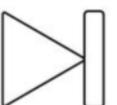
Not only are many people accessing the internet, social media and all the rest of it on their smartphones, they are also using their phones to play music, whether that is via streaming sites or music ripped from home-based media or downloaded (*often illegally*) from the internet. Of course, the main interaction for accessing this content is a screen.

But the screen has progressed and I have a theory about this! Back in the early days of cinema people would pay their entry and go and watch a movie. At this time there was no speaking on the film and as such the only sense coming into play was the sense of sight. Then come the talkies and we have both sight and hearing being stimulated. With television we still had just sight and hearing senses being poked, but we also had the community feeling of sitting around with friends and family – yep, more of the feel-good drugs gushing into our brains. With today's technology we have touchscreens which bring into play the sense of touch... I understand and have it on good authority that this is how they got their name. We are engaging more senses and as such feel (*excuse the pun*) more connection to our device. Add to this the increased feeling of community and belonging provided by social media and our constant connectedness and we may as well be mainlining this stuff.

Oh yes, the music, man. As mentioned before I got distracted, many people access music through their phones, be this on the go or in the home. Even many an intransigent audiophile will have ripped his or her CD collection to their NAS drive...and how do we access this? Yep, through a phone or tablet connected to the home network. Internet streaming is becoming ever more popular in audiophile circles and again, we access this content through our screens in the main.



COMMENT



COMMENT

So What?

I'm constantly having the conversation with distributors, manufacturers and pretty much anyone with a passing interest in the Hifi trade about how we can better engage younger people and the wider public at large, and I think we have no option other than to accept that we need to embrace, for better or worse, the screen. Yes, vinyl is having a resurgence and is becoming hip again - for many it never really went away – but the market is still small when compared to downloads and streaming. Young people don't want to carry about extra amps, extra DACs and what not, they want to be able to have it all and have it all accessible through their smartphone and its touchscreen. Personally, for music on the go, I love the chord Mojo and Poly combo controlled (*you guessed it*) by my smartphone, but the company that can produce a smartphone, at a reasonable price, with a great onboard DAC and good quality headphone amp, great user interface and the requisite celebrity endorsement will, in my opinion clean up.

In the home, the buzz word seems to be “home integration”, that is everything connected – the “connected home”. And this makes sense to me, even if I am not likely to be one of those that jumps on the integration bandwagon. Imagine having all your music and films, not to mention control of your heating, lights and who knows whatever else at the prod of the touchscreen of your phone. It makes sense and if we can bring good quality audio into the equation, and get the younger generations to appreciate good quality playback using good quality files and media, then we stand a chance of them coming on board. If we fail to address this and continue to think that it is good enough to pop a few headphones on a handful of tables at Hifi shows in a vain attempt to draw in that younger audience then I'm afraid we will inevitably find ourselves falling short of what they expect and demand.

Of course, there is always going to be the relatively small group of dedicated “audiophiles” who strive for absolute perfection in their audio playback systems (*I count myself amongst this group*), but we must realise we are in a minority and embrace the change that is inevitable, or face losing a generation. Should we compromise fidelity? Absolutely not! What is needed is a sea change in the way we present ourselves, how we market products and how we interact with this new generation of potential audiophiles. Even that word, audiophiles, has an air of pretentiousness and is sure to alienate many a younger music lover. I do think the screen, and accessing music through the screen is here to stay and we really must strive to find innovative ways in which we can integrate high quality (*note I don't use the term high-end*) audio and the tools people already have at their fingertips and in their pockets.

I don't profess to have all the answers and perhaps this article brings up many more questions than it provides answers and that, to a great extent, is deliberate.

What are your thoughts? [Join the discussion on our Facebook Page.](#)





RANK AND FILE

STUART SMITH

It's all well and good having a thousand and one records in your collection, but how do you go about organising them and making sure you can put your hands on specific recording you want to play?

In recent weeks this very subject has been to the fore of Stuart's thoughts given his burgeoning record collection and here he shares some possible solutions to deal with this perennial problem.

"I've not heard a better preamp, and I've been looking for more than 30 years" Sam Tellig - *stereophile*, October 2012

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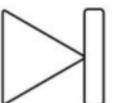


STU'S VIEWS



"I've not heard a better preamp, and I've been looking for more than 30 years" Sam Tellig - *stereophile*, October 2012

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Hifi Pig
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STU'S VIEWS

In the rush towards the new-fangled format of CD I, many moons ago, sold all my vinyl. At that time I owned a record shop and was DJing on the radio, at clubs and at parties pretty much fulltime and as such I was getting promotional records sent almost every day. As a result of this we had a room that was dedicated to my turntables and of course my records. There was a good few thousand and they were stacked in long rows against the wall with no particular filing system at all. Once I decided to move on from DJing and sold the record shop the logical thing to do, or so I thought at the time, was to sell all the records. Top tip, kids...DON'T DO IT!! As soon as I'd got the cheque I realised I'd done a very stupid thing and years later I would look on Hard To Find Records and more recently Discogs only to find any of the promos and 12" records I owned were now worth a small fortune – we're talking being able to pop out and splurge on a relatively luxurious car, but I digress.

As I say I had a pretty haphazard filing system for my records, but do you know what; I still knew how to pluck the record I wanted from the correct row in no time. Fast forward twenty odd years and my record collection is growing again. It's still a shadow of its former self but I'm managing to get hold of some of the classics I lost and I'm enjoying exploring new music too. I'm fortunate enough to have a wall in the listening room that is filled with shelves that just happen to be exactly twelve inches deep; we live in a converted restaurant and the shelves formed what was the glass and wine storage space behind the bar. In my older years I've become more organised and I have even invested in some fancy wooden dividers that each have a letter of the alphabet on them and all my albums are now stored in alphabetical order...roughly. When I say alphabetically this doesn't mean strictly alphabetically. All the As are in the A section and all the Zs are in the Z section – you get the idea.

Well actually not they're not quite that organised if truth be known. I have a sizeable collection of classical records and they are filed in their own space. Likewise my smaller collection of jazz records; well the Jazz actually sits within the J section. House and techno compilations also have their own shelf space. Ok, it's a bit haphazard but you would think putting my hands on what I want would be pretty simple, but it isn't. If I want to play Hawkwind's "Quark Strangeness And Charm" life is simple, I find the H section, flick through that and there it is...only today it isn't. I took it out of its safe keeping place a week or so, played it and then popped it in a "safe" pile where records that I want to clean or want to listen again to soon get popped. I found it eventually but then I had to clean it before popping it on the record player and by this time I'd popped the Melco on, opened up the tablet and played something from the fantastically, and automatically, filed collection of thousands of albums.

There Has To Be A Better Way

I'm sure most people reading this will have seen the film High-Fidelity, based on the Nick Hornby book. If not here's a brief synopsis; The main character, Rob Gordon (*played by John Cusack*) who owns a record shop (*Championship Records*) in Chicago (*yes it deviates a few thousand miles from the book*) and is aided and abetted by the "Musical Moron Twins" (*Jack Black and Todd Louiso*). The trio are musical fanatics and mock the tastes of the shop's

clientele, but their musical knowledge is comprehensive to say the least...yes, they are music snobs.

Rob is at home having another female related existential crisis when Dick (Todd Louiso's character) pops by. There are records all over the apartment and Rob announces he is re-filing his collection – but how and what system? Chronological, alphabetically perhaps? Nope, "autobiographical" announcing "If I want to find the song Landslide by Fleetwood Mac I have to remember that I bought it for someone in the fall of 1983 pile...but didn't give it to them for personal reasons". So, should I consider an autobiographical filing system for my collection? I don't think so; it would be far too complicated, I'd never find anything I was looking for and I'm fifty years old with far too many things to have remembered with regards where, when or why I bought a particular record.

So, my haphazard version of alphabetically doesn't work particularly well for me, autobiographical would be beyond my elderly brain's capacity, and so what, dear reader, would be a suitable system for organising my collection? There's always, as hinted at by Rob, a chronological system. Sorted! Ah, but do I file them in the order that I bought the records or by the date they were published...and what about reissues and the like, where would they go? Nope, chronological is clearly just not going to work!

Embrace The Tech'

I had a play with an automatic filing system a while go. It's simple; take your record from the shelf, scan the barcode with your phone's camera and a free barcode recognition app, the program finds your record and adds it to a virtual shelf and then you replace it back on your actual shelf alphabetically. It works, it really does, but to be absolutely honest do I have the patience or time to sit for hour upon hour scanning records, lots don't have barcodes by the way, and then look the record I want to play up on my tablet? I find this goes against the vinyl grain and I got about twenty-five records catalogued before I finally lost the will to scan. I've thousands of CDs to rip, not a dissimilar process to the one I've just described for sorting records out, and, to be frank, I don't want to have my vinyl records sorted like this.

So What Then?

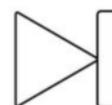
There's geographic filing where I could file the records by the place I bought them, or should that be where they were recorded, or perhaps where the band came from... No, that's not going to work!

Ah, I know what about filing my records by subject matter. Albums about dragons, Hobbits and other mythological creatures could be filed together; perhaps I could call this section "Prog". Records that speak of political themes could go in one section, but then there's need to be an "Anarcho" subsection, a "Neo-marxist" subsection and a "Could be a bit right-wing" subsection, I do after all own a Spandau Ballet record somewhere and I understand Tony Hadley was looking to run for a Conservative seat at some point in time (*The Guardian, Oct 2007*) - and I'd be all week trying to pigeon hole Eric Clapton and his records, but thankfully Ted Nugent isn't going to be an issue as his records were exiled many, many moons ago.

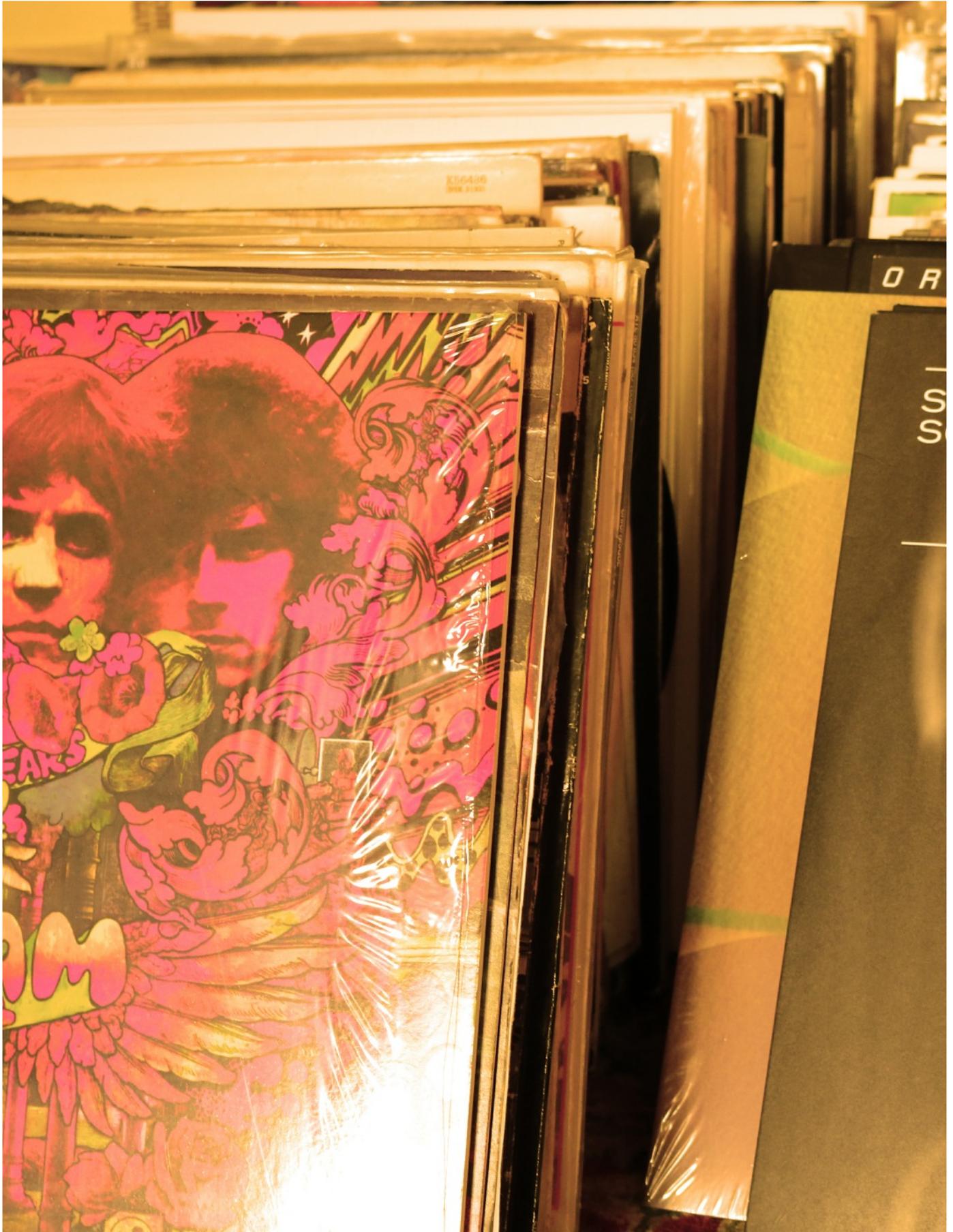
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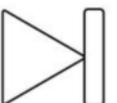


STU'S VIEWS



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STU'S VIEWS

Genre, that's it! What could be simpler? Have all my records subdivided according to the musical genre they fit into, after all I sort of do this to an extent now. So, that's decided, a filing system based on genre. Simple! Oh, hang on a minute that's not going to work either. Motorhead, rock or metal? Or is metal a subdivision of Rock? The Eagles? East Coast (*ah, that's geographical, Stu*) Rock, another subdivision of Rock or Country-Rock, a subdivision of Country? I haven't a clue what would happen to Neil Young!

There's always the option, and when I was thinking about this article it sort of made the most sense, of taking the shelves down and just having the collection placed randomly on the floor, in rows stacked against the wall. This way I could just flick through the records until something popped out and screamed "Play me!". But the shelves are a perfect size and the room would look more than a bit messy with rows of records all over the place in a student flat kind of style. The latter "no filing system" approach sort of appeals but would need to be on the shelves which brings up another problem – all but the newest of records have spines that are all but illegible and that's without mentioning those that are in protective sleeves.

I could rank the records and give each one a score out of a hundred and file them accordingly with a little sticker that proudly displays their 99/100 score or whatever. But then what's going to happen to the poor old thirty percenters, do they get pushed to the nether regions of the system never to surface again? Would I be severely restricting the scope of my listening?

You know what, this is probably a case of *better the devil you know* I reckon I'm just as well muddling along with the haphazard quasi-alphabetical/genre/no organisation whatsoever system that I currently "enjoy".

What filing system do you employ? [Join the conversation over at our Facebook page.](#)

"I've not heard a better preamp, and I've been looking for more than 30 years" Sam Tellig - *stereophile*, October 2012

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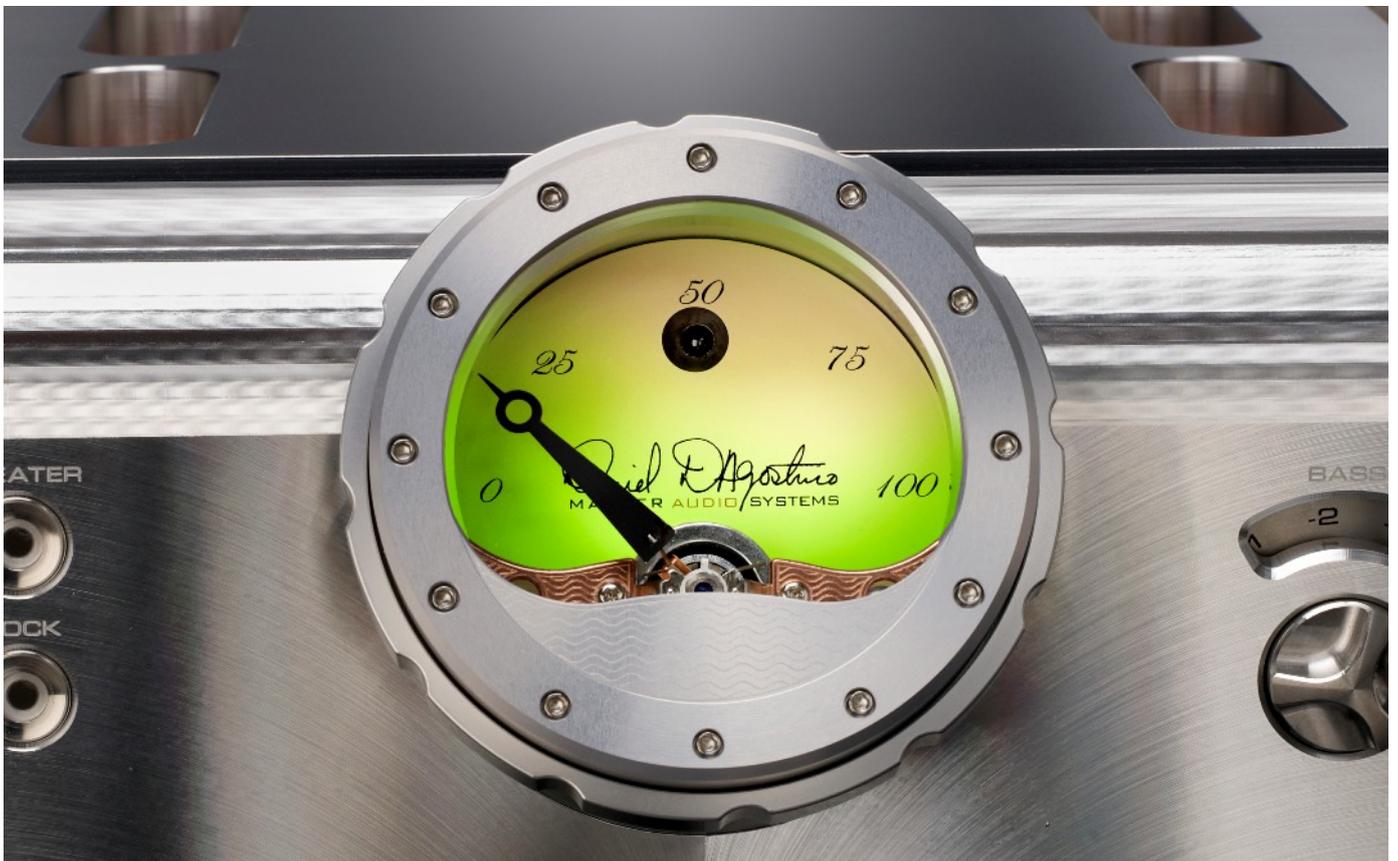
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BIRD'S EYE VIEW

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BIRD'S EYE VIEW

This got me thinking again about how Hifi looks and how those looks come about and about how the signature look of a Hifi brand is as much a part of its identity as its sound. Of course, the sound that you achieve from your system is the most important thing but, for me and many others, how it looks is also important. Even when your Hifi is not playing it's still there, making its visual statement. But I'm not talking about camouflage here, with hifi made to look 'pretty' or 'funky' just for the sake of it. I suppose we are going back to the age old 'form follows function' approach. We don't want our Hifi to be full of irrelevant frippery that has nothing to do with how it sounds, we want to know that it looks the way it does because of how the sound is achieved.

The work that goes into making what every Hifi manufacturer in the world is hoping to achieve, the best sound possible, can take many different routes and paths so we end up with everything from small compact Hifi systems to huge horns and valve amps. Great design goes hand in hand with great sound, and as a design is honed and refined it's the subtle differences in the path taken to achieve perfection of sound that give us the distinctive signature look of a certain brand, that becomes as important and instantly recognisable as their signature sound.

Take that KEF Uni-Q again. Over twenty years of research and continuing development have given KEF a driver that is so distinctive. It was a quest to develop a single point source driver which became possible with the availability of Neodymium-Iron-Boron, a magnetic material that allowed magnets to be made much smaller than before. This allowed KEF to fit their high-sensitivity treble unit inside the voice coil of the bass unit, and achieve that single point source coaxial speaker that is completely time-aligned. At the same time though, this also gave them a driver that was as unique to KEF as a fingerprint. The Uni-Q has become their signature style both sonically and visually.

Of course it's not just KEF that have nailed this, take a look at Cabasse, particularly their flagship speaker, La Sphère. Again, they were wanting to achieve a single point source, which they did (if you've heard them then I am sure you will agree) beautifully with La Sphère. The 4-way coaxial speaker technology that they have developed over sixty years has resulted in one of the most easily recognised loudspeaker designs in the world, and that technology and signature look has trickled down into the more accessible ranges of their speakers.

Manger Audio have given us another, instantly recognisable driver. Their Manger Sound Transducer was over 40 years in its conception and Josef W. Manger relied on the principle of bending waves, that start from the centre of a plate-like diaphragm and then travel to the outside. This new approach to driver design resulted in an elegant, flat, star shaped design, with its look born from the way it functions, and then slipped into equally elegant cabinets.

You can see that there is a theme developing here, none of these concepts are a 'flash in the pan', no 'jump on the bandwagon' copy-cat design...there are years and years of research and development, the quest for a different way to make things better, and I imagine a fair few redesigns and 'back to the drawing board' moments along the way.

There are so many other loudspeakers that I could mention; MBL with their iconic Radialstrahler, Avantgarde Acoustic whose signature horns in a rainbow of colours are instantly recognisable and, of course, the Bowers & Wilkins Nautilus, one of the enduring 'poster boys' of high end audio. I do realise I've picked out loudspeaker brands as examples here, I'm not ashamed to admit they are my most favourite part of a system, in all their wide and varied glory...but of course other brands follow the same path and give us amplifiers and CD transports, DACs and turntables that we can recognise even without their name badge.

While speakers can be seen as the flamboyant mouthpiece of the system, the other pieces can be just as stylish and recognisable. It's not enough to take some electronic components (however high quality they are) and put them inside a cool looking box. The 'box' is part of the design, it has a function... solidity and rigidity are there to help performance and why try to hide those great big heatsinks when they can become a beautiful and integral part of the design? Whether you are drawn to the more 'in your face' designs like McIntosh or Chord Electronics with their distinctive features and colourful glow, or a more pared back look like the Laboratory Chic of Audio Research or the understated Germanic elegance of AVM, there is something there that you keep coming back to, that ticks all the boxes of your dream system, sonically and visually.

When a brand has found its signature style then it will be recognisable even from the other side of the room or in a blurry social media photograph. The identity that they have created stands out and proudly says who it is. True an amplifier is an amplifier is an amplifier and a car is a car is a car... but just as a Porsche is distinctly a Porsche and a Ferrari a Ferrari, likewise no one who is into Hifi could confuse a D'Agostino with a Kondo.

Perhaps the relationship between the style and sound signature of hifi can be described better than 'form follows function'. In great Hifi, where audio perfection has been achieved, the two are completely intertwined, the look follows the sound...follows the look.

Is Hifi actually the ultimate expression of Architect Frank Lloyd Wright's take on it? 'Form and function are one'.

What are your views on the signature style of different Hifi brands? [Join the conversation and post your thoughts on our social media pages!](#)



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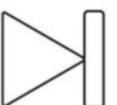


MUSIC



So you want to launch your own record label but don't have the funds, don't have the know-how and frankly haven't a clue where to start?

Hifi Pig has a chat with Serial Bowl Records, a label collective based in Sunderland in the North East of England to get the low down.



MUSIC

HP. You describe Serial Bowl Records as a “Collective” what is a collective and why did you choose this particular model?

SBR. A collective is an organization that is managed without hierarchy. This means that every member has equal decision-making power. Some decisions may be delegated to individual members, but all decisions are made collectively.

A lot of the collective have been involved in various projects, have been or are currently in bands and have differing knowledge/know how on how a collective should be run. We organised a meeting, put ideas forward and took it on from there. We think that it's important that everyone's views and ideas should be shared

HP. How is the label financed?

SBR. We currently have 16 members in the collective and to get the label up and running all have contributed financially, so everything we do is self-financed. It's a “not for profit” organisation and any monies made goes straight back into Serial Bowl. We raise funds via both record and merchandise sales, and via gigs which we promote at The Museum Vaults pub in Sunderland. (*Great pub - Ed*)

HP. How do you find new bands?

SBR. Via the radio, social media, word of mouth and going to gigs. We also get the odd demo sent too. If someone in the collective likes something we will have a listen and discuss. Our budget isn't massive so we have to be a little careful as to what we release. If money was no object, we would release loads of records, but as with most things finance dictates.

HP. How is the recording financed and how are any profits split?

SBR. The recordings so far have been financed by the bands themselves. But that's not to say that we wouldn't pay for a bands recording costs in the future. I think bands realise that a lot of labels haven't got a lot of money (*neither have many bands to be fair*) and don't mind paying for their own recording costs. Gone are the days when bands used to sell thousands of units and most labels press small runs of 100-1000 and if they manage to sell them all they have done well. We initially pressed up 350 Natters E.Ps which sold out so had more pressed up. After pressing costs etc. any profit is split 50/50 with the bands or we may give them a percentage of the records to sell themselves, they would then keep the money from sales as payment.

HP. Do you give artists full artistic freedom to record what they like or does the collective have an input?

SBR. Yes we give all bands full artistic freedom; that will include what tracks are to be released, design of artwork and what colour

vinyl the records are pressed in. It's important that the label and bands work together and not have a “us and them” relationship.

HP. Who owns the recordings?

SBR. The bands own the recordings (*unless we were to pay for a recording*). Publishing would be down to the bands to sort out; we may look at setting up a publishing company further down the line

HP. You press up physical records rather than just digital downloads, why is this and how many of each record do you have pressed?

SBR. We press up 300-350 for each release. If a band becomes more popular then obviously we would press more (*which was the case with the Natters last E.P. Toxic Care*). We are not opposed to digital downloads, people can download some of the releases via our Bandcamp page, our upcoming compilation album will also be available digitally.

HP. How are the records distributed?

SBR. At the moment we sell via mail order only, the reason behind this is a label makes very little profit on a release so selling via mail order cuts out distribution and shop costs. We have however discussed distribution and going forward we'll be looking to get records into shops (*you still can't beat going into a record shop and physically buying a record*). So if it means losing a little bit of money on certain releases then so be it.

HP. How do you fix the price of each record?

SBR. We look at overall costs i.e. recording (*if any*), pressing, publicity and take it from there. We try to keep costs as low as possible (*don't know how Crass Records sold their releases as cheap as they did all those years ago*). Some labels will take the piss and sell albums for £20, of course we try and make a little profit but we think it has to be a fair price

HP. Do you have a specific style of music on Serial Bowl Records?

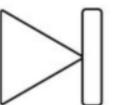
SBR. We all have diverse musical tastes, but all love punk/post-punk and hardcore so our releases have/will be predominantly “punk”.

HP. Sunderland, where you are based, has a healthy punk scene and heritage. How important is this and are there any particular venues that are intrinsic to your operation?

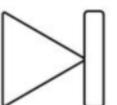
SBR. Good question. Sunderland has had a strong punk heritage going right back to 1977 and it's evolved over the years to where it's at right now. Some of the people who were around in 1977/78 are still in bands now and still come to gigs and support the younger



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bands. That's what is great about punk, anyone can do it and it was never about "us and them". To most people, myself included it's important to work collectively and be part of a community and that's what we have in Sunderland. It's only a small scene but everyone knows each other and on the whole get along fine. We have always had venues in Sunderland and I was involved in running a venue called The Bunker, which is still going strong now, not as a gig venue, but as music collective, they oversee some great projects for young people from across the city. Sunderland has a few venues but the two main ones are Pop Recs and Serial Bowls very own The Museum Vaults. We have had bands play there from as far a field as New York, Chicago, Milan, Paris and Gothenburg. We are very lucky as we have a very loyal crowd who fully support what we do.

HP. where do you see Serial Bowl Records in five years' time?

SBR. Hopefully still going!! It would be great to run the label full time, maybe in 5 years who knows.

HP. If an individual or group of people reading this are inspired by your story to explore launching their own record label, what advice would you give them ?

SBR. Go for it, yes it can be hard work and sometimes frustrating, but if you are passionate about something, and you have the right mind-set then why not. Look its not about making money, believe me that is very unlikely to happen, its about doing something you enjoy



HP. You have a collection of merchandise that fans can buy, how important is this in raising funds for future projects.

SBR. Yes we have t-shirts and hoodies (*all realistically priced*) which helps fund the release of records; we have a very distinctive logo, which we promote on our merch'. Labels like Dischord who also have a distinctive logo and have sold thousands, we live in hope.

HP. What bands do you currently have signed to Serial Bowl?

SBR. We haven't got bands "signed " as such, we base things around trust. If we release something and both ourselves and a band are happy then we will work together again. We have releases planned for Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaind, Pre-Birds, Ballpeen, Jaded Eyes and Modern Enemy with other stuff in the pipeline.

and believe in. If you are working as a collective utilise each others strengths, we have people in Serial Bowl who are great at design, can print t-shirts can do sound at our gigs, who are good at organising, give everyone role and let everyone have a voice.

[Facebook Page](#)

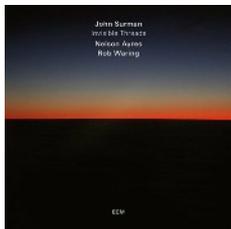
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MUSIC

David Blumenstein takes a look at how 2018 is starting out musically.



Black Rebel Motorcycle Club's *Wrong Creatures* is the band's 8th album and with being on the scene for just about 20 years no mean feat. I own all of their previous albums and will continue to acquire whatever comes next. There's a place in this world for an unapologetic band that brings it with each successive album, staying true to who they are. Am not looking for expansive themes, nor should you. BRMC does what they do for as long as they have because they do it so well. Don't go changing to try and please me....(h/t to Billy Joel). Just wish more bands would heed the A lot of bands would have reached their creative limit by now and would give the impression that they're punching the clock. None of that here, just a straight on, in your face music. Would not have it any other way

Moon Taxi's *Let The Record Play* is the band's first album under the auspices of a major label: RCA. The indie-rock band hails from Nashville and plays a fair amount of festivals. The five piece band finds a way to be indie, while at the same time write songs that are stadium ready with a sprinkling of pop hooks. It is bound to happen when signing with the big boys that the search for a formula commences, let's hope they don't find it. There's a lot of potential here, and them getting back to their roots, will only help in their realization.

Riccardo Muti and the Wiener Philharmoniker's *New Years Concert* was/is a great way to start the year. Muti feels at home with them and the repertoire so festive, befitting the celebration of the Neu Jahr. 2018 marked the 77th time the Vienna Philharmonic welcome in the New Year offering "a musical greeting to the world that is offered in a spirit of hope, of friendship and of peace."

John Surman, Nelson Ayres and Rob Waring's *Invisible Threads* on ECM label took me by surprise. Surman, an Englishman born in Devon, is known throughout the world as a multi-instrumentalist. Ever since his soprano saxophone work with John McLaughlin in the late 60's, he has been making a name for himself, consistency in demand for this saxophone and keyboard prowess. His collaborations with the drummer Jack DeJohnette and guitarist John Abercrombie cemented Surman's standing and led to this *Invisible Threads* where he is accompanied by the Brazilian keyboardist Nelson Ayres and accomplished Percussionist and Vibraphonist Rob Waring. The tracks are consistently complex and airy. The lightness and almost ethereal quality of the music belies their complexity and sophistication.

Sarah Lancman's *A Contretemps*...i don't know where to start. I can kick myself for not knowing about her sooner. The minute I started listening, I just could not stop. What an auspicious way to launch a new label: *Jazz 11 (Eleven)*. Enough cannot be said about her voice or the assemblage of musicians on this album, especially Giovanni Mirabassi, a solid pianist with ALL the credentials to namecheck each and every day of the year. If you're in to original jazz vocals this album was MADE for YOU.

If this is what 2018 has to offer, am all ears.



MUSIC

Dale Jonathan Perkins "Voice Without Words Parts 1-3 (Ishikawa)

The sleeve notes of this limited edition (250 copies) white vinyl record say that Voice Without Words "explores the paralinguistic qualities of the human voice, since no lexical indications are given, therefore avoiding established syntactical languages (eg. English, French or German)". That is, if I understand correctly, an examination of the things we say in speech that are not actually spoken words. I found this an interesting concept and you do find that despite no words being spoken, you are able to pick out emotions and concepts conveyed. In everyday conversation we express so much more than the words we use, be this this in the body language we use or the way we express the words with regards volume, pitch and the inflection we may or may not use on a word. And then there's the harrumphs, sharp intake of breath etc that can add so much to what we are expressing. In short, the meaning of language is much more complex than just the actual words that are spoken.

Maria Jardardottir provides the improvised "vocal" input and these are then cut up, treated in the studio and then pasted back together to "provoke empathetic responses as they develop and unfold over the three movements".

Voice Without Words is clearly avant-garde electronica and as such challenges the traditional concepts of structure, and indeed what music is, though there are snippets of recognisable tunes in there.

Is this an easy listen? Of course it's not, and it's not meant to be. The content is at times soothing and relaxing, whilst at the next turn it is unsettling and jarring. This is not a bad thing; music, like any artform, does not always have to conform to the normal conventions and nor does it always have to be easy on the ear for it to merit your attention.

One thing I gleaned from the three movements was something to the vocals that was all at once alien and yet vaguely familiar. I suppose

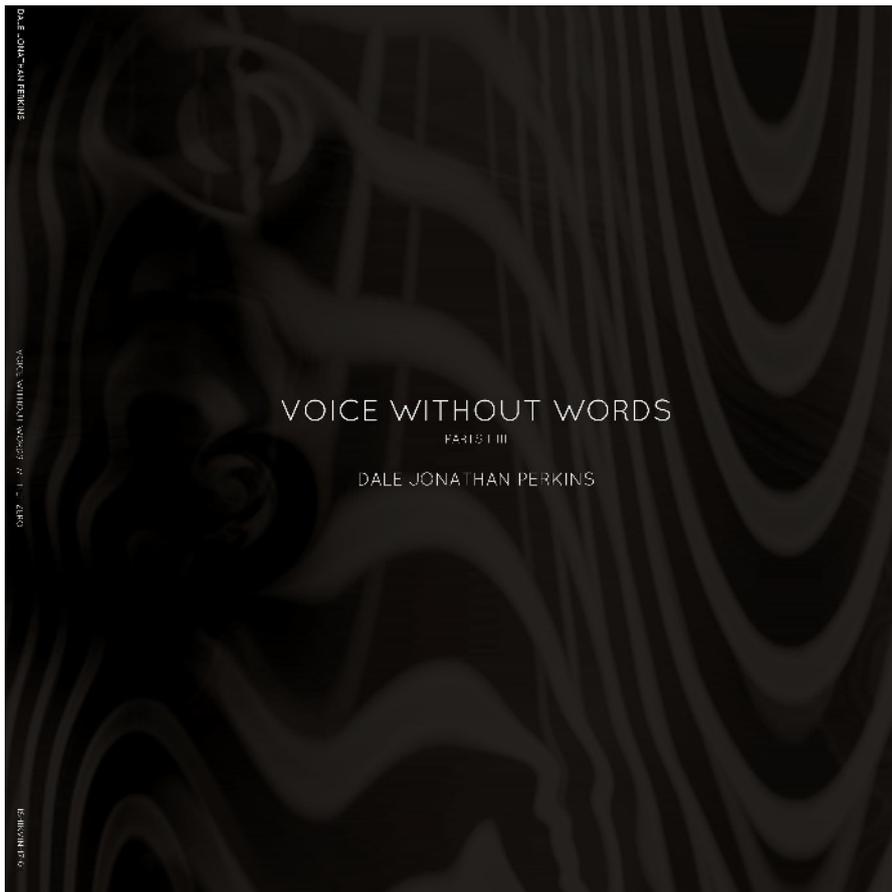
this is the point Perkins is perhaps trying to convey; we can say so much without saying anything recognisable as language. Perkins is not trying to create a record that comforts, but the electronics do at times create, particularly during the second and third movements (*Cockcooborough* and *Dark Bird*), a bedrock on which the other elements of the music can build coherently. At times there are stuttered electronic sequences that come through the loudspeakers like an extra-terrestrial transmission, but *Dark Bird*, the most accessible of the three movements and the piece most likely to be recognised as a conventional music, draws the listener into a dark and cavernous electronic space where the voice (*that is weeping and wailing*) feels lost and without hope - it's dark stuff and whilst

this is indeed the most accessible of the pieces, it is akin to being privy to a desolate and uncomfortable, nightmarish experience someone is going through before the music lifts and an electronic pad heralds the light of day and a lift in mood.

The last piece on the record is *Tilt Zero* that came out of a collaboration with composer and percussionist Damien Harron. Harron is recorded playing rototom, Kalimba and vibraphone which make up the raw materials that Perkins transforms to the work we have here. It is again clever stuff, and oddly fascinatingly enjoyable.

Throughout the whole of this record and throughout each piece I was reminded of listening to Japanese people speaking and of Oriental percussion; whilst I may not understand the words they are using, or the meaning of different percussive elements, I can often pick up on emotional cues of anger, sadness, disappointment and happiness.

So, how does one go about pigeonholing a record like this? The short answer is you don't. This is not music to tap along to, though it has its moments, this is music that is thought provoking, clever and intellectually rewarding. Look, not everyone is going to get some aspects of the arts, look at abstract art and the way it is derided by many, and for some this record is going to provoke the same reaction. Personally, I loved - sort of Scandinavian Noir cut to vinyl.



MUSIC



MUSIC

Dale Jonathan Perkins is the composer of *Voice Without Words*. He believes in a holistic approach that embraces a range musical influences to create new listening experiences.

Academics and composers have described Perkins' work as a deliberate approach to hybridity embracing both popular and traditional electroacoustic music. His commitment to 'New Music' led him to become founder and director of the International Festival for Innovations in Music Production and Composition (FIMPaC) - an annual metropolitan New Music festival that was held at Leeds College of Music and nightclubs across Leeds City Centre for a number of years; festival artists have included Trevor Wishart, David Toop, Leigh Landy, Bill Drummond, Jazzie B, Michel Chion, Juice Vocal Ensemble and David Vorhaus (*White Noise*), Scanner, and Gabriel Prokofiev showing his commitment to different musical approaches. In 2017 iFIMPaC became part of the Sounds like THIS festival.

Perkins' suite *Voice Without Words* was selected at the Bourges International Electroacoustic Music Competition in 2009 (Electronic Arts Category). Movements from the suite have had a number of national and international performances through multichannel speaker installations.

HP: How would you describe your music?

DJP: It's been quite a journey for me, but music that I have written within the last twenty years is largely a hybridised form of music; experimental but always has the listener in mind.

HP: Who and what have been your influences in coming to the sound and style that you have ended up with?

DJP: I got a taste for more experimental approaches in my late twenties and became interested in composers such as John Cage and Morton Feldman (due to their approaches to chance and indeterminacy along with Minimalist composers such as Philip Glass and Steve Reich (due to how they could create extended music from variations on simple repetitions). This coupled with my love for technology and electronic music (e.g. John Foxx & *Early Ultravox!*, *Throbbing Gristle*, *David Sylvian*) somehow led me to discover musique concrete and electroacoustic composers such as Pierre Schaeffer, Michel Chion and Denis Smalley, but a massive influence on my approach was discovering Sonic Artist, Trevor Wishart. It is Wishart's software that I generally use to create the complex rhythmical and transformational aspects of my music so in terms of morphology it is Trevor Wishart, but in terms of form 'popular music' has a big part to play; popular music in the broadest sense that is. In short, I wanted to create challenging music without losing popular music references (hence the piece *Axe* and *Dark Bird* (3rd movement from *Voice without Words*). I've also created some unusual re-workings of pieces by other composers. One of my favourites is a reworking of *Deaf John's Dark House from the House of Bedlam* album for the NONCLASSICAL Label. Here I take an experimental piece and bring in popular form to create an edgy electronic piece of music.

HP: The recording process is quite clearly a little different from the norm with you recording in a more conventional sense and then manipulating the recordings thereafter. Where did these ideas originate and what do you want to communicate to the listener?

DJP: As mention above, I discovered Trevor Wishart as an artist and was intrigued as to how he created such wonderful sonic transforma-

tions etc. I contacted Trevor and realised he wrote his own software to realise his imagination and that all his software was available. It was very cryptic in the sense it was command led in the Microsoft DOS environment, but I soon got used to creating 'batch files' to run contiguous routines on source materials; this was a far cry from the MIDI sequencing and multitrack environment I was used to. My earlier electroacoustic pieces such as *Submarine* were composed entirely this way; sounds and resulting phrases were time sequenced using a text editor which was run through a DOS based mixing programme. It makes me realise how driven I was back then to create something different. The album *Voice Without Words* is a much later endeavour and uses a mixture of **Trevor Wishart's software** (which now used an unconventional graphic front end) and a more traditional multitrack desktop environment (*Digital Performer*); this speeds the process up when I'm composing and allows me to handle the more traditional popular music approaches much easier. It also allows me to try out different arrangements much quicker.

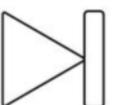
With *Voice without Words* I wanted to convey a real sense of emotion in what I would describe its raw form. I realised that the previous pieces I had collaborated on, were in my opinion, more successful than those created with sounds generated from inanimate objects (earlier pieces such as *Submarine*; *Sax?*; *Rubicon Drift* had a sense of engagement with the real world; a human quality. With *Voice Without Words* it was human utterance I was interested in, but without a language syntax; I wanted it to communicate to people from many cultures with one human voice. The process was to identify the voice, direct for the materials and then take the materials away to see what could be composed with them. In this case a Norwegian vocal improviser was approached. I produced a chart of utterances, words phrases and descriptions that I wished the improviser to use as a stimulus (from utterances such as 't(u)', 'p(a) k(u)' to words such as 'misery', 'sex', 'anger'). This had to be achieved without using any syntactical language (such as English and French etc.). This generated many gigabytes of material and not all was used, but there were some incredibly touching and moving results. One notable area is the 'crying' in *Dark Bird* that immediately invokes an empathetic response. Whatever the case, *Voice Without Words* takes the listener on an empathetic journey through a world of joy, happiness, anger, lethargy and misery. It took around three years to complete due to its complexity, but also I found working with the materials emotionally draining.

The end piece on the album is *Tilt Zero*. This was a similar process but I worked with a Percussionist from the Decibel Ensemble (Damen Harron). We really just wanted to collaborate after hearing each other's work. Once I had collected the improvisations from the vibraphone, Rototoms and Bass Kalimba it was very straight forward as I knew I wanted to create something fairly glacial moving that had long transformations with a slow gravitation pull. There is also further piece called *Axe* (comes with the download code) that was a collaboration with another composer David Lawrie (in this case his guitar playing); here I really wanted to create a hybridised piece of music that moved from an ambient beginning to an electronic dance style to something akin to Rammstein. This was a lot of fun to make. It is an extension of the morphological ideas in the piece remains consistent, but hits a range of reference points.

All pieces were originally conceived in 5.1 and have been performed/diffused in concert halls over mutli-channel loud speaker



MUSIC



MUSIC

installations using high end speakers such as the Genelec 8050 and associated LFEs.

HP: Run us through your studio equipment and the processes you have gone through when recording and manipulating your album *Voice Without Words*.

DJP: I am fairly minimalist and the kit list is:

Pre-Composition & Production

For capture I use the best microphones I can get my hands on (I'm fortunate to have a good source at Leeds College of Music which has outstanding production facilities) and a two channel Zoom recorder using the balanced inputs (This saves to a memory card that I can transfer to my mac).

Composition & Production work

Mac computer running Motu Digital Performer and the Composers' Desktop Software (mainly written and maintained by Trevor Wishart);

Genelec 1029a speakers x 5;

Genelec 1091a sub x 1;

Tascam US2400 24 channel/fader control surface;

Focusrite Saffire LE audio interface often feeding a 5.1 set-up in my front room.

Post Production and Mastering

I proof my work in high end studios environments, but still use Digital Performer as the mastering tool.

Diffusion & Performance

High end multichannel systems in concert situations. I designed one of these which is used in the *Sounds Like THIS* festival which is made up of Mac Pro, Digital Desk, 11 x Genelec 8050; 2 x Genelec 7050B; House Stereo PA speakers for height.

HP: Your music has one foot in the digital world and one foot in the analogue world, what kind of problems, or opportunities does this throw up?

DJP: The key challenge for me is retaining recognition of the sources in the right places, but also creating, what appear to be unrelated materials (the drums and perc on *Voice Without Words* are all from the same sources. This is really a compositional problem; you have to imagine what you want and then work out the best way to process the materials to make it happen, but you get some disasters and happy accidents on the way.

By far the biggest issue for me was releasing it on vinyl due to two reasons; The noise floor on vinyl and the fact it is a two-channel medium given that the pieces (except *Tilt Zero*) were all conceived in 5.1. With careful placements, the two-channel issue was overcome, but the mastering was very difficult and I had someone I could trust do it as I needed to just hear results without pre-conceptions. The first attempts killed the dynamic range of the pieces, but as all things there was a compromise which was to reduce the dynamic range slightly and go for a flat cut for the vinyl. The piece is designed to be played fairly quietly so I think the balance is about right, but as with any vinyl release the louder it is the louder the noise floor.

The reason I went for vinyl is that I generally listen to music on this format (unless driving in the car), but I was hoping to reach a different audience; I don't think this would have worked with a CD which appears to have been given a lower status in terms of value and ownership. I personally like the ritual with vinyl and the large packaging.

HP: Do you see your music as there to entertain or do you see your music as a more high-brow artistic endeavour?

DJP: I think it can be either, but for me I don't want to lose sight of the 'audience'. For me, no receiver, means self-consumption/no audience. There's nothing wrong with self-consumption, but it wouldn't motivate me to write music. I also have the highest respect for 'high-brow' artistic endeavours. I mentioned John Cage earlier who was a massive inspiration to me. I also appreciate a range of modernist composers such as Boulez, and Stockhausen whose research helped change our perceptions of what music could/can be. I'm happy to write challenging music, but in the end when I have completed a work, I switch off the lights to make sure every element moves me in some way. Most current experimental composers I know tend to take a postmodern approach.

HP: Moving away from your own music for a moment, what music do you choose to listen to at home?

DJP: I will listen to many things as I love different listening experiences. At the moment, I'm listening to:

Mammoth Weed Wizard Bastard, Earthless, Causa Sui, Die Antwood, the last Alan Vega album, This Is The Kit, The Velvet Underground, The Alabama Shakes and some wonderful compositions by a fellow composer Robert Bentall who has managed to capture, play and transform the beautiful sound of the nyckelharpa (a traditional Swedish musical instrument). Also revisiting a range of ambient music including the vinyl reissue of *Cathedral Oceans*. Habbits change from month-to month.

HP: What do you have in the pipeline with regards new projects and new compositions?

DJP: I play the banjo (claw hammer style) and I'm looking how I can create a project with this instrument at its core as I'd like to create an experimental piece in collaboration with other composers (for example Robert Bentall and the nyckelharpa. One things for sure, it won't be your traditional fair, but I'm hoping it will come out with a degree of beauty and humour.

Bandcamp Link

Website



LIVE MUSIC



Slalom D The Black Bull, Gateshead by Fiona Duncan Line-up

Panda Lasagne
Slalom D
Cheery & Peesh
Spitfire Bullets

So it takes a lot to impress me when it comes to new music. As an old punk I'm constantly demanding a sound that is new and fresh but with just enough Hansel and Gretel breadcrumb markers that take me back to the heyday of punk and comforting familiarity.

Tough crowd hey?

Well Slalom D perfected it tonight. Come on, a band that takes to the stage with 3/4's of them wearing their coats already has my attention. Were they going to be that bad that they were prepared to leave at any moment?

My first thought was "not staying lads?".

The lead singer doesn't so much prowl the stage but lurk about like a belligerent shoplifter who's realised he's run out of pockets. Sorry Craig but the huge coat only adds to the overall effect.

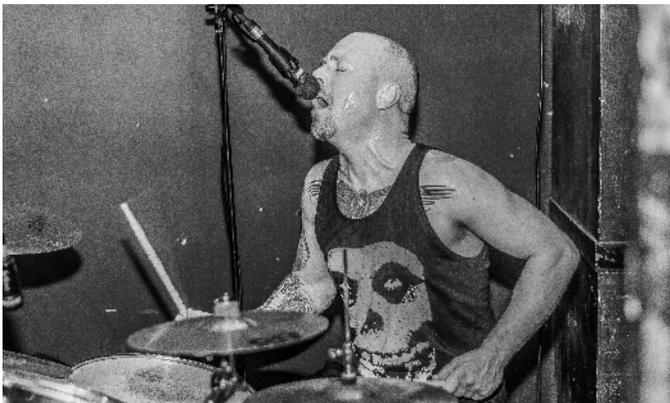
The energy from the drummer has to be seen to be believed and obviously he has every faith in the band as he's only in a vest and so prepared to see it through for the long haul.

Both guitarist and bassist seem to be in their own little blissful worlds, I've rarely seen 2 musicians look so content and at ease with what they were doing.

By the end of the set the shoplifter and the lads have cranked up the energy so much that it's impossible to look away even when you know you're missing out on the raging spice girls twitter debate. So the phone remains in the pocket as I witness Craig conjure up passion and vitrol by the tonne against the criminals who caused the Grenfell tower tragedy.

It's rare that punk is so moving (*like jaw droppingly moving*) and the shoplifter is transformed into a black draped anti-pope, spitting and screaming from a pulpit fashioned from flammable cladding. It gets that dark and that intense I expect lines of satanists carrying their kids to the front of the stage for Craig to unbless at future gigs.

I have a new favourite band, that very rarely happens. If you see them advertised, go, take ear plugs if you're of a nervous disposition and be one of the first to able to say, yeah I was there, in the early days. Absolutely bloody marvellous!



All photos courtesy of and copyright Will Binks Photography



LIVE MUSIC



LIVE MUSIC

The Damned O2 Arena Newcastle by Fiona Duncan

The Damned are off again, new tour, new album, sort of new line-up. I'm presuming there's no need to rack over the last 40 years? Most people know the trials and tribulations of one of the longest serving punk bands still doing the rounds, despite them missing out on a lot of the adoration heaped on their peers.

Whether they're just unlucky or masters of their own misfortune, it's not really important at this stage of the game, they're good, they know they're good and all else is dissolving in to mythology. Talking amongst mates it's obvious they attract almost manic devotion or utter derision. Personally I'm the former so you can stop reading now if you want an unbiased, sensible review. This time round there is dissent in the fan ranks due to inflated ticket prices and reduced price groupon offers. Times are most definitely a-changing, you'd never get a half-price option 35 years ago.

Once we'd all compared ticket prices and those of us who paid full price had stopped sulking, the evening's entertainment commenced with a shortish set from Slim Jim Phantom who in his own words is the third best singer from the Stray Cats. Couldn't fault the man, it was canny mix of Stray Cats greatest hits and songs from Now That's What I Call Rock 'N' Roll, maybe? Paired down and played well enough to a full house so a top support all in all.

As a Damned disciple, I'm already pretty sure of what I'm going to get. A tight set with a hefty dose of nostalgia, some new takes on some old favourites and the odd obscure album track just to make sure we're paying attention. And that's roughly what we do get. Yeah they throw in a few new tracks which actually sit in the set relatively well considered they are surrounded by utter classics, but for the most part it's business as usual.

That's no way implying it was boring, mind! The Damned have some of the best intro's on the planet and no matter how many times I hear New Rose, when those drums start up my stomach does a flip and the pit beckons. Which brings me to my only gripe I have of Damned gigs, well all "punk" gigs in the new century to be honest.

I know, I know, punk is about Anarchy and freedom and what ever else you personally want to pin on it and we could debate it ad nauseum, but we need to address the elephant in the pit, the big, sweaty, de-shirted, pissed elephant in the pit. Maybe it's my age (hurtling towards 50) or maybe I'm more worried about breaking a hip rather than a tooth these days. Just for the record I've "donated" several teeth to the Damned over the last 35 years thanks to the odd stray elbow or bottle but that's a whole different review. Anyway pits have always been sort of self-explanatory to me, don't expect to reserve a spot, don't expect to hold on to your very expensive drink and don't expect people to not bump into you. All pretty easy really, if you don't mind catching a few stray ones and being knocked on your arse once in a while then dump the drink and let's go for it. If you don't then stand back a bit and enjoy the show, on stage and off. If you find it all a bit much, just take a side step or move further back. It's all getting a bit confusing now though and I'm caught between the "Don't you dare look at my lass, she's very fragile" brigade who shove back and seem utterly disgusted there's a pit at all and the



50+ shirtless brigade that throw punches like they are trying to win a giant minion at the fair on one of them weird punchbag machines. And yes I fully understand the complete irony of an old punk asking for clarification on pit etiquette and yes I can honestly feel the weight of a thousand pairs of rolling eyeballs rolling, but it just seemed simpler years ago... in my head.

So back to the gig, The lads sound good, I mean really good. Notably Paul Gray is back on bass replacing long-time member Stu (*one of the nicest blokes ever!*) and he certainly seems to be enjoying every minute of it. The set list was full of The Black Album's best songs, it's always great to hear Lively Arts live along with Silly Kids Games, Wait for the Blackout (*personal favourite*) and Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde. They even revisit Phantasmagoria a couple of times with Street of Dreams and Shadow of Love.

Have to mention Seagulls in the encore, a master stroke that really separated the fans from the FANS. While we were all staring at each other with wide-eyed disbelief at hearing an album track none of us had heard played live before the pit becomes a mill pond of confused bald blokes wondering if it was the intro to Smash It Up. Oh how we music snobs laughed! What? I've watched them play enough pants shows and donated enough casualty time to warrant being a bit smug, honesty Guv!

Mr Vanian's vocals are like gravy on chips; silky, rich and utterly satisfying. You can't take your eyes of keyboard play Monty Oxymoron and the Captain proves he can play a canny guitar when he puts his mind to it. Pinch holds it altogether, part drummer, part lion tamer, you just know he's the driving force behind all this and trying his "damndest" to put pay to the curse of the Damned.

Nice to see Gun Fury (*Riot Forces*) raise it's head although we prefer our version of Gun Fury (*White Horses*), don't judge it was years before we looked the lyrics up. And those new songs, well I'm not dismissing them, think I need a few more listens but Standing on the Edge of Tomorrow feels like a Damned classic in the making although for some reason it makes me think of Jules Vernon? We await the the new album Evil Spirits with optimism which seems fitting after all the years of madness they've put us through.

The Evil Spirits tour is now in full effect, go see them, throw yourself about and bit and watch that hip!



BOOKS

Lou Reed: A Life by Anthony DeCurtis

See the words New York, Drugs and Andy Warhol and you're likely to come up with just one name, Lou Reed.

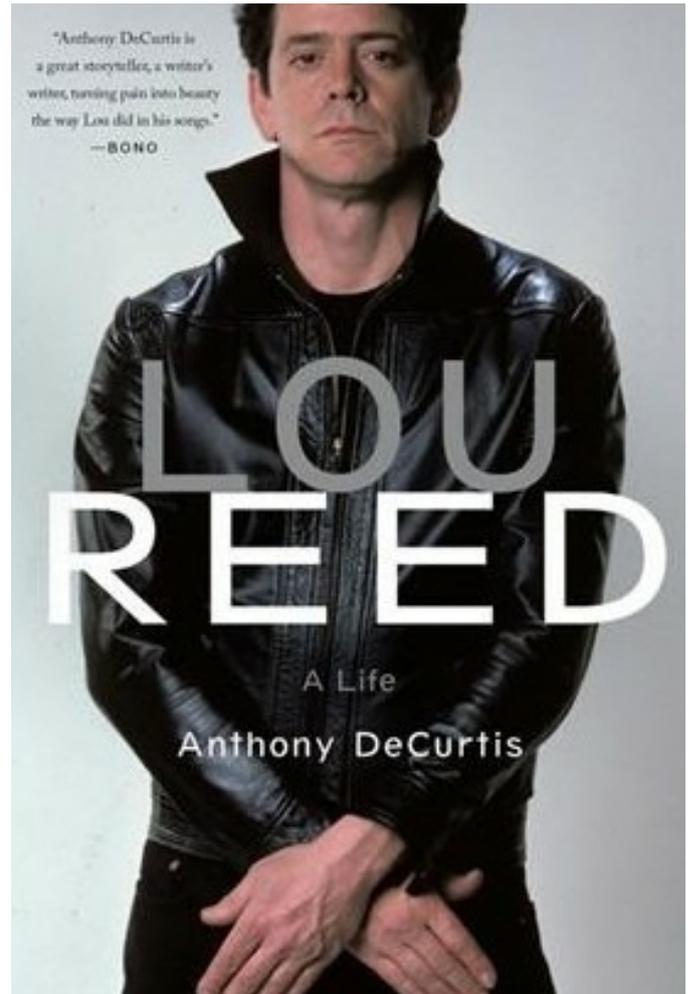
DeCurtis is well placed to document the life of Lewis Allan Reed; he's a contributing editor to Rolling Stone and has written for the publication for the best part of forty years. DeCurtis is thorough in his writing, speaks to many people close to Reed and manages to bring out positive elements of Reed's character without glossing over the already well documented and more troublesome side to Reed.

The biography starts off at the very beginning of Reed's life in Brooklyn before he and his middle class Jewish family moved over to New Jersey. The book chronicles Reed's early years and portrays him as a clever, if somewhat removed character. Reed's parents sent teenager Reed for electroshock therapy after a breakdown and this is a huge factor in the way Reed portrays his family and in particular his Father. This subject is a recurring theme throughout the book and DeCurtis does a great job of obsessing about it just the right amount so the reader feels Reed's own obsession.

DeCurtis takes us through Reed's college years where he played in DooWop bands, through the Factory and Velvet Underground years and portrays Reed as a manipulative character, focused on achieving what he wanted to achieve and using people to get to that point. This is highlighted throughout the book in the way that Reed manages people out of bands and relationships. At the heart of much of Reed's behaviour, not taking into account the effects of a drug and drink problem of gargantuan proportions, we see a control freak who actually wants to be seen as an important literary figure working in the medium of rock and roll.

Of course, there are the drugs, the sex and the years that Reed was in a self-destructive spiral, but what shines through is that Reed was a troubled soul looking to defend himself from being undermined or hurt in any way. He was notoriously difficult in interviews, looking to deflect questions that would expose his personal life or inner feelings and DeCurtis manages to convey this in a way that you do feel for Reed's plight. The people DeCurtis talks to, both from the personal/family side and from the music industry/band side tend to speak candidly and openly.

The chronology of the book, and the titles of the chapters, move us through the titles of Reed's albums and DeCurtis does talk about the content of each album in detail, but he always manages to tie in the lyrical and musical content of each album to the then current situation in Reed's life. This makes you connect with the subject and become emotionally attached whilst reading. It would have been an easier task, and perhaps a more throwaway read, to highlight the seedier side to Reed's life and sensationalise the sex, drug taking and aggressive side of Reed's life, but *A Life* would not be the book it is if that had been DeCurtis' focus. We see Reed depicted as a musician who, whilst being very difficult to work with, was highly focused on the technical side of his



craft and looking to elevate rock and roll to a recognised and respectable art-form.

Reed's self-destructive behaviour didn't extend only to his personal well-being and health, he was also equally self-destructive with regards his recording career, with a pretty much constant run of a great record followed by an album that would garner neither radio play nor significant sales. Much of this cycle was exacerbated by Reed's reluctance to promote his records in any meaningful way. This cycle continued throughout his career, right up until the end.

Perhaps the most moving chapters of *Lou Reed: A Life* are the very last. Reed is clean of drugs, almost clean of alcohol and is in a stable relationship with fellow New Yorker, Laurie Anderson. The couple share the limelight of the New York alt art scene and Reed finally appears to be happy with himself. His health does deteriorate of course, but we see a more spiritual and caring side to Reed's personality come to the fore and you can't help but to be hoping that he will pull through... which, I don't think I'm spoiling the ending for anyone, he of course doesn't.

Lou Reed: A Life is compulsive reading and I for one couldn't put it down. It's pretty hard hitting, informative, moving and shocking in equal proportion and I recommend it highly.



QUICK QUIZ

- Lou Reed's 1976 album Coney Island Baby includes a track originally recorded by the Velvet Underground in 1969 but not released until 1985. What was its title?**
 - Never Get Emotionally Involved with a Man, Woman, Beast or Child
 - Sweet Rock and Roll
 - She's My Best Friend
 - I'm Set Free
- Johnny Cash's 2002 album, American IV: The Man Comes Around includes a track originally released by Sting on his album 1996 album Mercury Falling. What was its title?**
 - I Hung My Head
 - The Man comes Around
 - Big Iron
 - Tear Stained Letter
- What Year was Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture written?**
 - 1827
 - 1812
 - 1892
 - 1880
- Which studio album by Space Rock band Hawkwind has legendary Cream drummer Ginger Baker behind the drum set?**
 - Church Of Hawkwind
 - Levitation
 - Quark Strangeness And Charm
 - Alien 4
- Before they became New Order what were New Order called?**
 - Sarajevo
 - Sofia
 - Warsaw
 - Belgrade
- What year were Pink Floyd inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame?**
 - 1988
 - 1989
 - 1997
 - 1996
- Bob Marley's middle name was?**
 - Kimona
 - Nesta
 - Gerain
 - Aldane
- What was The Dead Kennedys first album?**
 - Bedtime For Democracy
 - Fresh Fruit For Rotting Vegetables
 - Frankenchrist
 - Plastic Surgery Disasters
- Which Rolling Stones studio album does the track Angie appear on?**
 - Their Satanic Majesties Request
 - Emotional Rescue
 - It's Only Rock 'n Roll
 - Goats Head Soup
- Techno band Model 500 are fronted by which legendary Detroit producer?**
 - Kevin Saunderson
 - Jeff Mills
 - Derrick May
 - Juan Atkins

Bonus Question:

Colin Blunstone fronted which 1960s group?

Name That Tune:

"The boys are on the wagon, The girls are on the shelf, Their common problem is that they're not someone else, The dirt blows out, The dust blows in, You can't keep it neat, It's a fully furnished dustbin..."

Answers:

1.C, 2.A, 3.D, 4.B, 5.C, 6.D, 7.B, 8.B, 9.D, 10.D

Bonus: The Zombies

Name That Tune: John Cooper Clarke "Beasley Street"

LIVING THE HiFi LIFE



Rune Skov is Sales Director for Danish brands Raidho and Scansonic, he recently visited the US to attend CES in Las Vegas, before jetting off to San Fransisco and finally New York.

In Living The HiFi Life we will give readers an insight into what goes on behind the scenes in the Hifi industry, following a different personality each month.

Perhaps it will inspire you to take that step and join this crazy world of audio!



LIVING THE HiFi LIFE



January 6th 2018.
Almost time to go travelling again. Prepping the hair for CES. Even an old timer has to look sharp



January 7th 2018.
Here we go again... time to fly... Boy oh boy, how exciting...hmmmm



CES2018... Viva Las Vegas. You better treat me with kindness!



January 8th 2018.
Walking the corridors of the Venetian hotel. Time to pick up the badge for CES. Can't wait to stand in a line for an hour with 100's of equally impatient attendees... What's fun about that?



Boom! Setup done...whoop, whoop!



My home for the next 7 days. A very "relaxing" place to spend a whole week.



January 9th 2018
Good morning folks. Absolutely destroyed with jet lag. Got to do something to that face otherwise people will run away in fear.



Improving, but still not running on all cylinders.



Now we are talking business. Caught on cam by my everlasting shadow Mr. Robert Wang (Chard Electronics)



LIVING THE HiFi LIFE



The room is glowing. Love those big futuristic apps. They will definitely look great in my living room...what do you think of that my dear?



January 10th
Still in Vegas... wondering which tie I shall wear. Pick one ... pleaseeeeeee



Cool view from my hotel room. Life's not that bad after all.



Go green... it is the only solution!



Caught again by my buddy Robert Wong... or should I say CHORD again!



January 11th
Suit and shirt of the day. Only a few shirts left before I have to continue my US road trip wearing nothing under the suit...well it might be the beginning of a new fashion trend.



YOLO... hanging with The Dudes (Colin Pratt and Robert Wong).



January 12th
Big and shine 400 old tigger. Final day at CES before heading to San Francisco. This town sucks out the energy (and money). Feeling a bit drained this morning.



Raidho did us all proud... phenomenal sounding system.



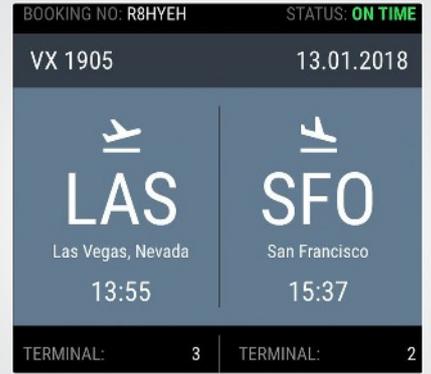
LIVING THE HiFi LIFE



It's a wrap. Another CRJ has come to an end... guess it is almost beer o' clock time!



January 13th 2018
Watch of the day! Better be right on time. Don't want to miss my flight to San Francisco.



Here we go again... of to SF to see my "brothers" from Audio Vision. Gonna be a blast. Let's get airborne.



...and I don't care. When you got to go, you got to go. Embrace people and diversity.



January 14th 2018
In SF, doing some heavy clubbing. Love it!



The DJ is definitely on a roll. Wish I could play equally loud at home... damn physical. DJ throw me some bass.



January 14th 2018
And now Dallas!
An incredible burger. Had to throw some courtesy to the chef. In SF they do know how to make a proper burger.



Explicating the latest driver technology to Antonio Long when walking the streets of SF. Impressive finish.



In Dallas visiting my mate Tim Jerome from Renaissance AV. And why not pay the local brewery a visit. Awesome beers.



LIVING THE HiFi LIFE



After 10 days of travelling it really starts to show some signs of ageing. Last selfie of the day!



Who's the king!



Good night Dallas... Next stop NYC.



January 17th. Another day... another flight. On my way to NYC.



Hello beautiful NYC... Here I come.



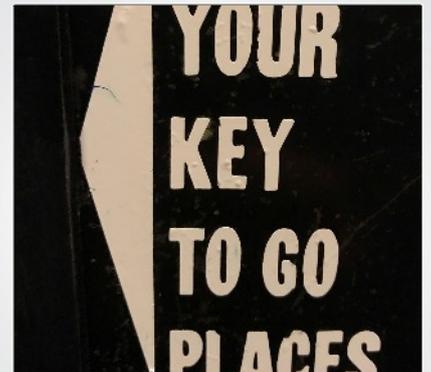
My very first Cortado in 10 days... and yes it is a very nice Cortado... oodah! Yeah.



The story of my life.



My home for the next 2 days, Ace Hotel NYC. Freaking awesome hotel. I'll be back!



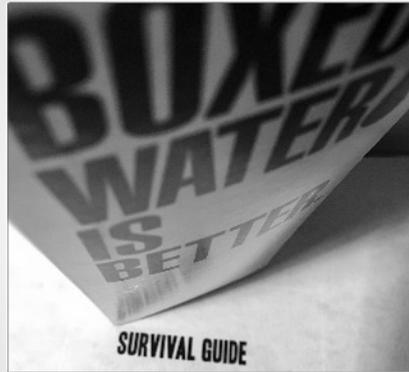
Take me to new places that I haven't experienced... thank you.



LIVING THE HiFi LIFE



Chasing business in NYC.



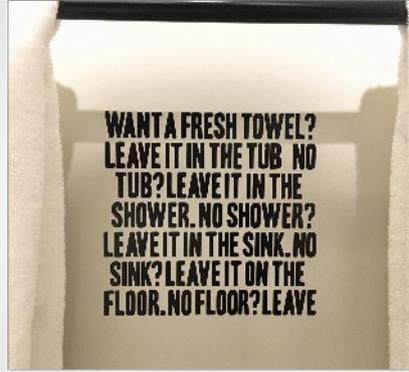
I totally agree. Keep the water in the box.



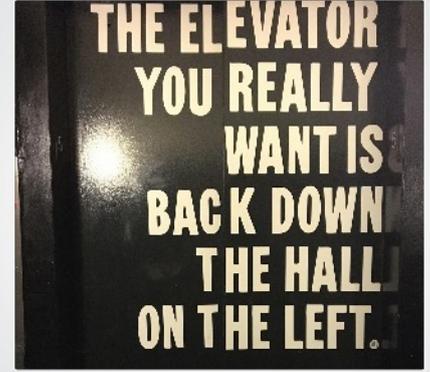
How kind of you Mr. TV!



Tonight's watch... time to see the nightlife of NYC.



Lucky me. I do still have two towels left... I can stay a little bit longer... wheeee.



Why is always me?



January 18th 2018
Time to do business. Feeling ready and the sun is shining. So pleased to be working in this industry. Great people and great places to experience.



Best fries ever... by a distance!!!
Tix Ergain Bar for prouling me with this little treat before heading home to my beloved family.



Done! On my way home to my loved ones in Denmark RR.
Stay tuned... soon I will be airborne again.
The End!

Rune Skov
Sales Director



REVIEW

iFi NANO iDSD BLACK LABEL PORTABLE DAC/AMP



There are many companies looking to improve your audio on the go. As with most Hi-Fi, there's also quite a range of price points; this ranges from the easily affordable to the "how much?!" levels.

The latest portable offering from iFi comes in the reasonably priced arena. It's a neat looking device with plenty of features crammed in.

Let's take a look at how it performs.

JAY GARRETT

There are many companies looking to improve your audio on the go. As with most Hi-Fi, there's also quite a range of price points; this ranges from the easily affordable to the "how much?!" levels.

The latest portable offering from iFi comes in the reasonably priced arena. It's a neat looking device with plenty of features crammed in.

Let's take a look at how it performs.

iFi nano iDSD BL design

I do like the stealthy matte black angular design of the nano iDSD BL. The orange lettering and LED are the only visible highlights. Even the iFi logo is black.

As you would expect from something called nano, this portable head amp and DAC easily fits in your pocket. Measuring just 96(l) x 64(w) x 25.5(h)mm and tipping the scales at a nicely weighted 139g, it feels sturdy.

It will take the knocks but, thanks to the bundled pouch with cable slot, it shouldn't be any worse for wear being kept in a bag.

Under the nano iDSD BL's hood is a Burr-Brown True Native DAC. This has the chops to deal with PCM files all the way up to 32bit/384kHz. Additionally audio skills include DXD and DSD256 formats. It also supports MQA, so physical MQA files and Tidal Masters are also accepted.

The amplifier is a Dual Mono 2 x 285mW Direct Drive, coupling capacitor free circuit for highest fidelity. iFi states that the iDSD packs "...maximum output power (32R) around 10 times that of iPhone 6 (285mW vs. 27mW)" and can drive most headphones on the market.

Alongside a 'Direct' 3.5mm headphone output, the 'iEMatch' output attempts to compensate for the extra sensitivity of in-ears.

Next to the headphone ports is a chunky volume control dial that uses an analogue potentiometer for best sound quality.

Flip it around and you get a 3.5mm line-level output for connecting to an amplifier or pair of active speakers.

Also around the rear is a USB type-A port. This makes it easy to connect to smartphones, laptops and tablets. This also doubles up as a charger when the 10-hour Lithium Polymer battery life runs dry.

Between the line-out and USB port is a switch that offers a choice of two DAC filter options: 'Listen' (a minimum-phase Bessel filter that iFi suggests sounds better) and 'Measure' (a linear-phase Transient Aligned filter, said to perform better in measurement tests).

The iDSD nano Black Label is compact and feels like a quality device.

iFi nano iDSD BL performance

Using the nano iDSD BL with my Nvidia Shield tablet I was immediately taken by its smooth and neutral presentation.

The built-in iEMatch circuit ensures that even extremely sensitive headphones and IEMs are 'hiss free' throughout the volume range. The nano also includes the S-Balanced wiring system for the headphone outputs. This hands it the full benefit of balanced outputs when used with headphones and IEMs (fitted with balanced wiring) with low-noise and lower distortion. Even single-ended headphones benefit, as S-Balanced cuts crosstalk in half.



REVIEW

iFi NANO iDSD BLACK LABEL PORTABLE DAC/AMP

Having a rechargeable battery also means 10 hours+ of audio enjoyment unfettered by power lead.

Sound quality

Plugging it in to my phone for the commute with my Oppo PM-3 headphones the iDSD BL cleanly boosts the volume. Furthermore, there's plenty of clarity and detail. However, this wasn't the kind of clinical clarity that can easily wear you down though. There's an ease and openness that leads to extended listening sessions.

Orchestral tracks retain their weight as well as a lighter touch with string solos. Instrumentation has plenty of room to breathe too.

Flicking between Tidal Masters (MQA), Spotify as well as 24bit Qobuz files you can hear the difference, especially between Spotify



and the rest.

That transparency continues through FLAC and DSD files. The one downside to this is poorly ripped MP3s are left practically unlistenable.

Openness

My usual choice for portable DAC/Amp in this price range is still the Oppo HA-2. It is still a remarkable device but the nano iDSD BL is more adept at unravelling more taxing tunes. Tracks such as 'Slander' by Trash Talk, 'Run to Your Mama' by Goat, or even The Distillers' 'City of Angels' can get messy, yet the iFi unit still pushes the walls to give these bands some space.

However, dynamics and subtlety are sometimes exchanged for the nano's clarity and space.

The high-hat crash that punctuates Bowie's 'Space Oddity' seems to be disconnected from the strum of the acoustic guitar.

As I was about to wrap up this review, 'Love Like Blood' by Killing Joke started up and stopped me in my tracks (literally). Raven's bass has such weight; the drums are tight and clear. But, it's when Jaz starts singing that I got tingles. The piano stabs are also well defined.

Well played iFi, well played.



Quality shows

Playing my NAS-stored audio on random through my laptop it was fun to try and guess the format.

You can tell what you are playing thanks to the device's front LED. If you're playing DSD256, for instance, the light glows blue. Put some DSD 64/128 through it and it goes cyan. MQA files will give you a magenta light.

iFi nano iDSD BL review conclusion

There is plenty to like about the iFi nano iDSD Black Label. Its on-board battery has decent stamina and it's a nice looking device.

I may have been spoiled by the Chord Mojo (twice the cost of the nano) but I do feel that the nano could be more dynamic. However, that's not to say that it isn't enjoyable. I have used the nano with my tablet at every lunch break at the day job. In fact, that has now become my work system.

The nano iDSD Black Label certainly performs well and presents excellent value. If you're looking for a versatile and talented portable head amp and DAC, you owe yourself to at least audition the nano.

iFi nano iDSD BL price and availability

You can buy the iFi nano iDSD Black Label right now for £199.



REVIEW

KZ ZS6 LOW COST HYBRID QUAD DRIVER EARPHONES



Knowledge Zenith, or KZ, seem to be able to produce earphones at ridiculous prices. I was so intrigued that I have taken delivery of their ZS6 quad-driver earphones. Surely they can't be real? Being of Yorkshire lineage, I still believe you can buy bargains. Now, when a website claims that they have quad-driver earphones available for less than 4 pints (in London), I just had to hear them.

JAY GARRETT

I have had quite a range of earphones and headphones to review. Some prove to be amazing value. Others, however, fall short of the mark.

The KZ ZS6 earphones, on paper at least, look almost too good to be true. Let us investigate.

KZ ZS6 design

The housings of the KZ ZS6 are made of aluminium and have a metal grid on the outer side of them which suggests an open-back design.

Their angular casements house 8 drivers in total (4 drivers in each earpiece).

This is meted out in a hybrid configuration of 2 balanced armatures and 2 dynamic drivers per side.

The dynamic drivers have a diameter of 10mm and 6mm.

This complex quad driver configuration is something usually expected in very expensive, premium in ear monitors.

Also usually the reserve of higher-end earphones, the KZ ZS6 sports a two-pin connector for the cables. The detachable cables are handy so that you can either replace or upgrade them at a later date.

The pair of earphones, without cables, weighs just less than 13 grams. You will know you're wearing them but not uncomfortably so. Part of the reason for that is the supplied cable has memory wire at the connection end. This can be formed to fit and go over your ear so you are not solely relying on the tip holding the earphones in.

Regarding those tips, you get three pairs of differing sizes in the little bundle.

The cable features an inline "HD" microphone and single button remote control as well as a chunky 3.5mm jack on the end.

KZ ZS6 performance

These earphones are certainly packing plenty of kit for the money. However, the fit and finish appears to be where costs have been cut.

The ZS6 has a lot of jagged corners on them. These have not caused me any issue but, should you have tiny ears, then they might cause discomfort.

I have been pleasantly surprised by the amount of isolation provided by them. Especially when taking those open vents in to consideration.

Sound Quality

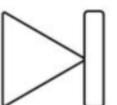
To start off with these struck me as very bright and harsh-sounding earphones.

However, this was also combined with how impressive they managed to sound. It was basically a matter of avoiding tracks with plenty of cymbal crashes and the like. Not ideal, but I stuck with them with regular breaks as they did prove to be a tad fatiguing at times.

The mids of the KZ ZS6 possess a nice warmth. This produces very clear vocals despite a slight mid-bass bleed into lower mids.

Higher mids are neither rolled off nor harsh at all.

Treble eventually smoothed out a little although it is still pronounced. This is partly due to the hybrid configuration of the KZ ZS6 and the lack of finesse in tuning.



REVIEW

KZ ZS6 LOW COST HYBRID QUAD DRIVER EARPHONES



Those bright highs produced by the armature drivers pack stacks of detail. However, sibilance can arise in sibilant-prone songs. I do not use any EQ device but I am sure you might be able to dial in/out something more palatable, should it be required.

The bass is pushed up just a touch. Occasionally, there can be a lack of detail or texture in more intricate compositions you do get a solid amount of quantity oomph for electronic music. There's no issue with bass response speed.

The low-end produced by the KZ ZS6 makes them a fun and energetic listen. Moreover, I couldn't say that the KZ ZS6 ever under-delivered bass during my testing. Additionally, it never got boom-y, out of hand or muddled.

KZ ZS6 review conclusion

These are excellent value at the price. No, they are not giant killers and they do lack some finesse.

However, for around £20, they perform great and pack the kind of driver technology I have only seen in much more expensive earphones.

Also, at this price point, getting some better cables might actually hand you something very impressive whilst staying under £50.

Apparently, Yinyoo have some worth checking out, for instance.

KZ ZS6 price and availability

Currently Gearbest has them at £21.93.

Great news though – use **coupon code: zs6lm** and they're yours for **£18.15!**



REVIEW

NINETY7 VAUX SPEAKER FOR ECHO DOT



The Amazon Echo Dot is a nifty little device. But, sometimes, I wish I could take it upstairs with me. How cool would it be to have it in the kitchen and play music at a decent volume?

Well, Ninety7 feels your pain. They offer you the Vaux.

JAY GARRETT

If, like me, you opted to get an Amazon Echo Dot there will be occasions where it is found slightly lacking.

I have mine plugged in to my Hi-Fi amp, so volume is not issue. However, I would love to be able to have one in each room, or at least make it more portable.

Just think, being able to take it from the living room and in to the kitchen so you can listen to some tunes whilst cooking and control your music by voice. You could have Alexa wake you up in the morning and then take the Dot downstairs to read you the news during breakfast.

The Vaux not only equips the Dot with more volume, but also gives it legs. Kinda.

Ninety7 Vaux design

The Vaux is a battery-powered wireless speaker with a built-in cradle for the second-generation Echo Dot.

It is a chunky, slightly flattened cylinder with a fabric-like surround. This makes it look like it's a 360-degree speaker, more on that later.

It comes in both white and black designs to match both types of Echo Dots.

The speaker stands at 163mm tall with a diameter of 106mm. So, it's shorter than a regular Echo and a little bit more squat.

In the Dot dock area you'll find a captive microUSB cable and 3.5mm audio jack.

There is a flap at the rear that allows you to fiddle with the cable when attaching or detaching the Dot.

Below this is a power button that also acts as a status indicator.

Finally, aside from the microUSB port for charging, there is a 3.5mm input jack allowing you to plug in your phone or other audio device.

Ninety7 Vaux performance

The Vaux looks nice enough sat on a shelf but, on closer inspection, it might be found lacking when compared to more expensive alternatives.

Set-up

Getting the Vaux up-and-running could not be easier.

The speaker is charged using the microUSB port. Naturally, you can still use it when it is plugged in.

The Vaux doesn't come with a USB cable or wall plug. However, I am guessing Ninety7 are assuming you already have the ones that come with the Dot.

Drop the Dot in to the top of the Vaux and attach the cables to your Amazon puck. Press the power button on the Vaux and you are good to go.

The power button also acts a status indicator. It shows orange when charging, blue when it's on and then it will flash blue when the battery is running low.

In use

The first point I should make, which is obvious but still worth saying, is that you need decent Wi-Fi coverage.



REVIEW

NINETY7 VAUX SPEAKER FOR ECHO DOT

I have a good router downstairs as well as extenders in the furthest corners of upstairs. This is important as the Echo Dot doesn't automatically switch between Wi-Fi networks as you move around.

Also, that 3.5mm input port. When you plug something else in to the speaker it overrides the cable plugged in to your Dot. This means you will no longer be able to hear Alexa when you have other devices plugged in.

Finally, the Vaux, like the Echo Dot, isn't weather-proof. In this case, best to keep an eye on the weather if you plan to go alfresco with Alexa.

Audio quality

I was pleasantly surprised by the Vaux's sound quality.

Audio is clear without any interference noises such as humming or buzzing.

Treble is good and the mid-range is nice and direct.

The low-end is also well presented. Some bass hunters may want more, but I find the Vaux's projection great for an all-round speaker. We have to take in to consideration that dialogue will make up a large proportion of this speaker's duties.

I feel that the EQ is pretty spot on for everything from party tunes to talk radio and podcasts.

However, push your Dot beyond 50% volume and things get a bit distorted. Saying that though, this speaker is loud. So, anything beyond half volume is more than you would normally need.

Whilst on the subject of volume, remember to turn your Dot down after listening to music. I forgot and upon walking in to the living room and saying "Alexa, good morning", I am certain the whole street heard her response. Also, Vaux doesn't really do whisper quiet.

Compared to the full-fat Amazon Echo, the Vaux is a little less refined although it does seem to be louder with more bass.

Additionally, the big Echo has a much wider soundstage thanks to 360-degree coverage. The Vaux, however, has a definite sweet spot front and centre. You still get OK sound if you're behind the Vaux, it's just not as evenly presented as the Echo.

Stamina

At 25% volume the Vaux easily surpasses its claimed six-hour battery life when streaming from Spotify.

This is great if you're getting on with your chores or chilling out in the garden (as long as it's not looking like rain).

Don't get caught out though. As Vaux is also powering the Echo's processing and Wi-Fi connectivity, you can't just leave it unplugged for days at a time. In fact, playing some tunes and then leaving it unplugged overnight meant I was faced with a slumbering Dot.

Ninety7 Vaux review conclusion

For £50, the Vaux is a great addition to your Dot. It might not deliver audiophile-like sound quality; it does make your Dot mobile, portable and much louder.

Battery life is good, and I am sure that being able to gather around your Dot to play with the Echo Buttons will prove fun.



Granted, the Vaux is the same price as another Echo Dot. However, I reckon the Vaux is a great way to make your Echo Dot even smarter.

Ninety7 Vaux price and availability

You can buy the Vaux speaker dock for the Amazon Echo Dot in black or white right now for £49.99.



REVIEW

HONOR 7X - FLAGSHIP LOOKS, MID-RANGE PRICE



I was at the launch of the Honor 7X and View 10 mobile phones on December 5th. There, I picked up the competitively-priced near bezel-less Honor 7X.

Since then, I have used it as my daily driver. Here's what I think about it.

JAY GARRETT

In many respects, and I've said this before, the mid-range is often where the most interesting things happen. Let's face it; it's easier to come up with something that wows everyone if money is no object.

However, in the mid-range arena, this is where companies, as well as consumers, have to weigh up their priorities. They have a strict budget to stick to and yet still want something that impresses.

Has Honor honoured this? Let's have a look and check out the Honor 7X smartphone.

Honor 7X design

Being practically bezel-less, let's start with that screen.

What we have here is a 5.93-inch, 18:9 aspect, 2160x1080 resolution IPS panel.

The only other thing on the face of the phone is an 8MP front-firing camera and a speaker.

Flip it over and you'll find the fingerprint scanner.

You'll also find a pair of camera lenses at the top with an LED flash.

I quite like the slightly glossier antennae lines across the phone's rear. They actually add a bit of interest to what would've been an otherwise featureless expanse of matte-finish aluminium.

The bottom edge reveals a standard headphone jack, microphone and mono speaker.

You will also notice the odd choice of using a microUSB port. The main upside to this is that you've probably already got a drawer full of microUSB cables. Still, USB-C would have been the better choice as we're now in 2018.

The top edge of the 7X features nothing other than a pinhole for a microphone.

On the left-hand side is the SIM tray which can house a pair of nano SIMs. Alternatively, if you want extra storage you can insert a micro-SD card instead of a second SIM.

Over on the right-hand side is the volume rocker and power/lock button.

Honor 7X performance

The Honor 7X does seem to tick most boxes. It might not have an OLED screen but, at least from the outside, it still looks like a good phone.

There is no waterproofing here. However, Honor says that it has strengthened all four corners of the 7X so it can better withstand drops. This is not something that I have tested, but I'd still suggest buying a case.

Display

Honor is toting the 7X's display as a major upgrade, and it's certainly impressive that the company has managed to squeeze an almost 6-inch display into a body that would traditionally accommodate a 5.5-inch screen.

It is Full HD+ 2160 x 1080 resolution and Honor are packing in 408 pixels per inch.

The screen is bright and vibrant with wide viewing angles.

Obviously it doesn't have the option of an always-on clock with



REVIEW

HONOR 7X - FLAGSHIP LOOKS, MID-RANGE PRICE



notifications, but it still looks impressive with tiny size bezels and much smaller top and bottom borders than other phones at this level.

One minor annoyance is the “do you want to go full screen” notification prompt whenever you open an app. I’d rather it did that automatically – why else would you want a phone with this ratio?

Power

Internally, the Kirin 659 processor is partnered with 4GB of RAM and 64GB of storage.

The latter two figures are generous but overall performance wholly midrange. This doesn’t score as a flagship-rivalling device, and it isn’t meant to.

Benchmark results show that it’s far from being blistering fast. That said, in real-world use it’s perfectly quick enough.

Apps may take a second longer to launch, but they run smoothly and you can run most games (such as Asphalt 8) without issue.

On the subject of gaming, Honor is working with certain developers, including Gameloft, to optimise games for the 18:9 screen so you see more of a scene.

With most games, forcing them to use the entire screen just crops them so you actually see less (as is the case with all 18:9 screens at the moment).

Battery life

Living with this phone I can confirm that the 3340mAh battery can make it through a whole day with normal use. Yeah, it drains quickly if you’re playing games but you’d expect that, right?

There’s no fast charging, so you’ll probably end up connecting the charger each night when you go to bed. That’s what I do and all is hunky dory.

Cameras

The main camera has a 16Mp sensor and uses PDAF for focusing in a claimed 0.18 seconds.

The second camera has a 2Mp sensor and is simply used for depth sensing rather than capturing photos or video.

All that means is that you get the same portrait and wide-aperture modes that you’ll find on the Huawei Mate 10 Pro and View 10. This is no real surprise as the stock camera app is essentially the same as that of the 10 Pro – minus a couple of features. Oh, and the Leica branding.



REVIEW

HONOR 7X - FLAGSHIP LOOKS, MID-RANGE PRICE

The app is simple, logical, and packed full of features. Slide to the left to show the options list, and slide to the right for different camera modes. Icons for special features are shown along the top of the screen.

One of those missing features is video stabilisation. It's limited to recording at 1080p at 30 frames per second with no 60fps option. But, remember we are in midrange country here folks.

Out front is an 8MP selfie cam on which you can enable depth effect for blurry backgrounds.

You also get that nifty gesture support so you can wave and get a countdown for group shots.

In selfie mode there's the expected beauty mode, but you can also apply fun masks and effects.

Photo quality is, surprise, best in good light. In these conditions photos look sharp and have good detail levels. Unfortunately, this is the deep mid-winter so I don't get to see much daylight thanks to my myriad jobs.

HDR is there as an option and is amongst the list of modes.

The portrait mode works well, though, and you can switch to the wide-aperture mode when taking a photo of something that isn't a person. You also have lots of other modes, including light painting, time lapse and slo-mo to play with.

Video defaults to 720p, so make sure you choose 1080p to get the best possible quality. The lack of stabilisation means you need to keep the phone as still as possible, but video and audio quality is reasonably good.

In low light, including indoors at night with artificial lighting, you can easily notice the drop in quality: photos lack detail and sharpness. This may be due to clever noise reduction stuff happening behind the scenes.

You also need to make sure your subject stays still. Be prepared for blurry shots. It's therefore best to fire off a few with the intention of finding a good one.

But, great shots can be captured. You just have to have a little more patience and a bit more luck.

Software

The 7X doesn't have Oreo just yet. Out of the box you get Android 7.0 Nougat with EMUI 5.1.

I do like EMUI and, if you've used iOS then you'll be used to the idea of placing all your apps on the home screens.

You do get some nifty features such as double-tapping the screen to wake it, and double-pressing the volume-down button to launch the camera app.

However, you do have to enable these though.

There's one-key split-screen so you can carry on watching a video (on Netflix, say) while you flick through Twitter.

You'll also find the App Twin menu option. This enables you to sign into two Facebook accounts. Sorry, no option for Whatsapp or Messenger here.



You get warnings when apps are using a lot of power in the background. This could be helpful but I'm usually pretty good at closing hungry apps down.

Audio

Huawei's Histen allows you to play with the EQ or enable a '3D sound' mode where you can adjust a slider from Near to Front to Wide.

You can also adjust the audio depending on what headset type you're using – in-ear, over-ear, etc.

I didn't really find much use for these options, to be honest. Still, they're nice to have.

Honor 7X review conclusion

You know what? Honor has done pretty much everything right with the 7X. Without comparing it to more expensive handsets or ones not available in this country, I am hard pushed to think of a smartphone that can seriously challenge it on all counts.

Firstly, it looks like a much more expensive phone than it is. Secondly, it has a full-fat headphone jack. Thirdly, it even offers a choice of dual-SIM or expandable memory.

The 18:9 screen is great to use, and most apps work ok when forced to fill it. Battery life is good and cameras are... well, they're alright.

Flicking through apps is smoothly done and unless you are going out of your way to stress it, the engine-room will handle most day-to-day tasks without coughing and spluttering.

The Honor 7X looks like a flagship for far less than flagship prices.

Honor 7X price and availability

You can buy an Honor 7X right now in black or blue right now for £269 from Amazon.co.uk or direct from Honor's online store.

Oooo... the black Honor 7X is actually £259 on Amazon at the moment! Bargain!



REVIEW

BRAINWAVZ B200 DUAL BALANCED ARMATURE EARPHONES



Dual balanced armature earphones are generally the reserve of three-figure price tags. I was sent the Brainwavz B200 to see if they can convince me otherwise.

JAY GARRETT

Brainwavz may not be the first name that comes to mind for great earphones. In fact, I had never heard of them before. Ever.

However, the official Brainwavz website displays over 30 pairs of earphones and headphones. So, they appear to have a decent range. There's enough choice to prove that they mean business, anyhow.

There is also the ubiquitous claim of enabling you to *"hear your music as the artist intended."*

So, are these all chat and no action? Let's have a looksee, shall we?

Brainwavz B200 design

The Brainwavz B200 earphones use an over-ear hook design.

They have a small rubber coated section on the cable to keep them in place. Thankfully, this section is designed to follow the contours of your ear.

The earpieces are both small and light. The earpieces have a faceted design that I've attempted to capture. They are also marked L and R, which I always find helpful.

These are some of the most comfortable earphones I've worn in a very long time.

Attached to the earpieces is what feels to be a decent quality, rubber-jacketed, 1.3-metre cable. It terminates in an angled gold jack plug thus taking some of the strain.

However, there's no in-line microphone or controller on the cable.

You do get a hard-shell carry case, shirt clip, Velcro cable tidy, six pairs of silicone ear tips and a pair of Comply foam tips.

The latter are the ones I went for straight away. Not only are they the most comfortable but they also provide the most isolated fit.

Brainwavz B200 performance

I have already mentioned this but I shall mention it again. These are really comfortable to wear for long listening periods.

I also like that you get a case and a decent bundle of tips and stuff. This is all very well but it all means nothing if they don't sound any good.

Sound quality

Inside each of the B200 earpieces is a dual balanced armature driver. These combine a tweeter and a woofer.

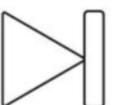
Brainwavz says this has been tuned to deliver a balanced and accurate sound. Well, let's not jump the gun just yet.

One thing is certain though. These 30 Ohm dual armature in-ear monitors can easily be driven by any portable source. I wouldn't tax them with anything larger though.

They are nicely neutral and their mids are outstanding. The low mids in particular are clear and well presented. If you are a fan of acoustic and singer/songwriter style genres then these really put the vocals front and centre.

There is a slight roll off towards either extremities but this doesn't mean that they are particularly lacking anything.

The treble is sweet without the sibilance endured with the much cheaper ZS6s we had the other week. Brainwavz have done well in tuning these that way. Yes, the payoff is the slightly rolled off high



REVIEW

BRAINWAVZ B200 DUAL BALANCED ARMATURE EARPHONES



end which equates to cymbal crashes and high-hats losing a bit of shimmer, but they also lack the harshness that can sometimes accompany that.

Bass is punchy but lovers of sub-heavy tunes may find them a little light on thump. I do like the timbre and life that the low-end has. But driving them with bass-laden tracks I can see how some listeners could feel like they're missing out. However, with the slight roll-off at either end, these earphones are not fatiguing at all. For me, that's a good thing.

The soundstage is what I'd class as intimate. It's not confined at all, and I am glad that Brainwavz have resisted trying to artificially widen the scape.

The B200 are so easy to drive that I found myself having to ramp up the volume when trying the other earphones I have here to test. They just appear to be louder than pretty much everything I have in my office right now.

Brainwavz B200 review conclusion

I really do like the B200's sound profile. It might not be the most exciting listen, but it is truly enjoyable. I could literally wear these all

day. That's not just because of the audio though. It's also due to them being really comfortable to have in my lugs.

Furthermore, they come bundled with Comply T-100 tips as well as everything else. That pair of tips costs \$15 by themselves, by the way.

All this combined was impressive with the £150+ price tag they were RRP'd at when I first wrote about them. Now, with over £60 slashed off the price, they're even more remarkable.

Brainwavz B200 price and availability

You can grab these now, if you're quick, for £90 from Amazon.

It does look there's a V2 model coming with detachable cable, etc so either grab a complete bargain or get the newer version. I am sure you'll be happy with either.



REVIEW

WiZ SMART LIGHTS - VOICE CONTROLLED ILLUMINATION



Smart lights and bulbs. There's plenty to choose from so why I have decided to review these items from WiZ? Well, for a start, these clever light-bringers don't need a hub.

JAY GARRETT

Home automation, Internet of Things (IoT), smart home, call it what you will. I think that we can all agree on the fact that this tech is supposed to make your life a little easier. With the more kit I acquire the more little boxes appear.

This has been one of the main stumbling blocks I have had when looking at smart lighting. I really don't want to add another hub shoved in to my router.

Well, nudge me sideways and call me Brenda if I didn't get an email from WiZ telling me of their range of Wi-Fi connected lamps and bulbs.

Yup, these connect directly to your Wi-Fi network, doing away with the need for any additional hardware.

WiZ smart lights design

WiZ has built the smarts into the bulbs themselves.

Integrated Wi-Fi means WiZ's bulbs may be a little larger than traditional bulbs but you'll have no problems installing them.

WiZ light bulbs need to be turned on to engage their smart features. I have heard that dimmer switches won't play nice with them because of this. I have regular on/off wall switches and had no issues. Besides, these bulbs dim without the need for a dimmer dial.

WiZ's range of bulbs consist of light bulbs, with options to change temperature (WiZ Whites), plus colour and temperature bulbs (WiZ Colors) too. Temperature changes give you a choice of 2,700K (cold white) to 6500K (warm white); you can pick from 16 million colours. Options include bayonet, E27, E14 and GU10 bulb fittings.

also has a range of standalone downlights and plug-in lights, such as the Wiz Colors Hero reviewed below. There is also a 50s-looking lamp designed to project your chosen colour onto a wall called Colors Quest (above).

Features, app and control

Being Wi-Fi enabled you have to connect them to your home network.

Like plenty of smart home kit I've had to review, WiZ lights support only 2.4GHz networking. So, ensure that the device you have the WiZ app on is connected to the 2.4GHz network when you're setting the lights up.

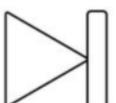
If you have one of those swish routers that combines the 5GHz and 2.4GHz bands under one network name this could prove tricky. I have my routers display the bands separately so this was an easy thing for me.

Set up

Now, just follow the app's clear instructions. Once you have your room set up it's time to add the lights.

Tap the plus symbol and then you'll need to flick the lights on and off until they pulse blue.

Once hooked up to your network, the bulbs are controlled via the intuitively laid-out app. Lights can be organised into rooms, making specific units easier to find.



REVIEW

WiZ SMART LIGHTS - VOICE CONTROLLED ILLUMINATION

The straightforward controls allow you to toggle a light on or off, or adjust its brightness. To change colour or temperature, you can select from the pre-set modes or create your own custom setting.

The bulbs actually respond quickly to any tweaks I made. Furthermore, the light quality is great too.

Features

WiZ also has a natty range of party pieces. Firstly, they offer Dynamic modes.

Dynamic modes adjust the colour of the bulbs on the fly to create an effect. For example, the mood-enhancing fireplace mode gives the effect of flickering flames.

Secondly, it's all about control. All the lights we've had through Gadgety HQ have been app-controlled. These are not so constrained.

First there's the WiZ Mote. This is an IR remote control that lets you turn a light on or off, change its brightness or select from four favourite colour modes. Those favourites are set via the app but once in they're easily recalled by the remote.

The only downside of the WiZ Mote is that you need clear line of sight. Additionally, if you have a number of lights in close proximity with each other, you could find yourself unintentionally controlling different light(s).

WiZ Click is a secondary control option. This is activated in the app too.

Where this differs is that it uses your main light switch, or the on/off switch on the lamps.

What this does is allow you to activate two of your favourite modes through flicking the light switch.

Simply, toggle the switch on once to activate favourite mode one, twice for favourite mode two.

It is a neat idea but it does get you in the habit of using the wall switch. Why is this such a bad thing?

Well, this leads me on nicely to the next section. How's that for a segway?

WiZ, Alexa and Google Home

Alexa is supported through the WiZ skill.

This enables you to turn lights on or off and set the brightness level.

Apparently I should be able to pick a colour or scene name, but I've not quite managed that yet. For these options I have simply been relying on the app. I might have to resort to reading instructions. The horror!

A similar skill exists for Google Home, but there's no Apple Homekit support at the moment.

Alexa works brilliantly and swiftly.

It is so fool proof that even my girlfriend has swapped to using voice.

We have both found this more handy than you'd think. Bringing in luggage after Christmas visiting, dragging in the shopping after the 'big shop', or simply dimming the lights when watching a movie. All done hands-free.

WiZ also has an IFTTT channel for its connected lights. There are no triggers (you can't make other things happen when your lights turn on or off), but there are plenty of actions.

For example, you can have your lights turn on automatically when you get home. Awesome, huh?

WiZ Colors Hero

As well as the ceiling bulbs I have had the Colors Hero lamp.

This has a wood-style base and looks pretty classy. The lamp is much lighter than I was expecting but that is simply due to its plastic construction.

This does not detract from its looks.

The Colors Hero has the same range of abilities as the WiZ Colors bulbs.

Set-up and functionality is basically the same too.

I had it sat in the living room, same as with the bulbs, and the Alexa commands controlled everything together.

If you want individual lights to be set at different brightness, then just use the app.

WiZ Connected Lights review conclusion

If you are looking to get smart with your lighting but are baulking at the thought of hubs and whatnot, then WiZ is for you.

Furthermore, the range of lighting available from WiZ is great too.

I am really taken by them and am seriously thinking of purchasing some for myself.

WiZ Connected Lights price and availability

The lights are all available right now from Amazon.

Prices start at £22.95 for a WiZ Whites to fit a halogen spot.

The 2-pack WiZ Colors bulbs and WiZ Mote comes in at £69.95

The WiZ Colors Hero lamp is £95.94 in the wood finish.



REVIEW

FOOBOT SMART AIR QUALITY MONITOR



The new year generally sees a sudden push to hit the gyms, sales of Lycra increase and chats about being “*Beach Ready*” are had around the office coffee machine. However, nobody seems to equate air quality as part of a healthier lifestyle. The Foobot is a smart networked device that makes it easy to monitor what’s going in your lungs.

JAY GARRETT

It is like most things. You tend to take care of the things you see, the noticeable things. For some reason it is only recently that we’ve started to take an active interest in the quality of the air we breathe.

There were a few air monitoring systems on show at CES 2018 and, with the trend going upwards and air pollution not going away any-time soon, GadgetyNews has been living with Foobot Air Quality Monitor.

Foobot review

You may think that air quality monitoring is only for those like myself who live in the city. However, even those of you who live out in the sticks will benefit from taking interest in your air quality.

The most common things to look out for are dust and pollen for those with allergies, or pollution from nearby traffic. The thing is, new furniture, cheap candles or damp conditions causing mold spores. Also, there’s levels of CO2 that will increase by simply having people in the room. So, having an early warning system can be darned handy.

Foobot design

The Foobot device stands approximately 17cm tall. To me, it kind of looks like a swish air freshener.

The cylindrical design is broken up by fins and gentle LEDs. Those lights change from blue to orange to red depending on the air quality.

There is just a single, captive, power cable running from the device. Apart from the logo, there is not much else to say.

Foobot should be sat centrally in order for it to cover your entire home. The thing is, although it is not ugly, it is hardly the last word in interior design.

I like it in its utilitarianism, others might not.

They have taken great care over the packaging.

There are also hints of a good sense of humour on that, as well as the app.

Foobot performance

Set up

Setting up Foobot takes just a few minutes. This is, of course, taken care of via a smartphone app.

Once you’ve downloaded the app, you have to be connected to your WiFi network with Foobot within 5 feet of your router (just for setup).

You then turn the Foobot upside down, wait for the blue LED light, place the Foobot down and enter your WiFi credentials in the Foobot App. The LED will blink five times and setup is complete.

You can then register and sign in to the Foobot app.

Once you have hooked Foobot up to your WiFi network, the app will display the indoor air quality, as well as that in your neighbourhood. Furthermore, monitor displays the current status of your home using the LED that surrounds the front.



REVIEW

FOOBOT SMART AIR QUALITY MONITOR

The app also gives you control over the monitor's light intensity.

Moreover, you can set which hours the lights come on. Yeah, I called it Sniffer. Well, what would you call yours?

It takes around 6 days for the Foobot Monitor to fully calibrate itself to your surroundings.

Monitoring



I am happy to report that the little Foobot sits there quite happily in my living room gently aglow with blue light. However, from time to time, the blue hue changes from strong blue to less blue to orange. This means that I should take note as there are hazardous particles in the air in the room.

Whenever you want to check on how your air quality is, just tap the app. I generally will wait until Foobot turns orange and see what category the pollutant belongs to.

Foobot is designed to measure four main areas:

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)

These are toxic chemicals of the like that you might find in cleaning sprays; but, they can be present in old furniture.

Particulate Matter (PM)

What you have here are little particles that are not filtered by your body. These include dust, aerosols and fumes. These can cause cancer, and trigger asthma amongst other things. Foobot can detect PM with a size of between 0.003 to 2.5 micrograms.

Humidity

As you are probably already aware, this is the amount of moisture in the air: a room that's too humid can develop mold and bacteria; too dry, and it can lead to sinus problems, dry skin and itchy eyes.

Temperature

Foobot keeps an eye on how hot your home is, but can be useful for other correlations. For example, VOC readings tend to increase in higher temperatures.

CO2

Finally, CO2 is measured, with high levels indicating that the air needs to be refreshed.

You can set Foobot to notify you depending on what you are more concerned about.

Here I have it set to let me know when there's a Pollution Event, Volatile Compounds detected, and a spike in Humidity.

Your little Foobot will also send you emails, just so you can keep a tab on things.

This is a great way of getting an overview of your room's air quality.

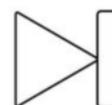
Digging deeper

The LED indicator is a great way to see the status at a glance but you can't tell what the cause is. Instead of a handy little display you have turn to your smart device.

Thankfully, the app is easy to use and set out in an intuitive manner.

The clear home screen gives you a score (lower is better) and a descriptive word for the level of air quality: Great, Good, Fair or Poor.

As well as the exact readings for each of the main measurements you can access more details. For instance, tapping the PM reading a measure of between 0 and 12 is Great, and above 37 is Poor.



REVIEW

FOOBOT SMART AIR QUALITY MONITOR

Furthermore, for each reading, the app gives you tips on what to do. It does seem to favour opening a window to refresh air but it will also suggest you being careful of cleaning products that contain VOCs.

These tips could be a little bit more detailed, to be honest. Also, the app could make it easier to scroll through multiple bits of information.

A double tap on the top of the Foobot triggers the app to send a notification to your phone, showing the current readings, too.

Spikes

It's not always easy to track what has caused a spike, but Foobot aims to help by prompting you to tag those spikes.

So, if there was a spike while you were cleaning, tag that. This way you can see if this is always the case and perhaps reconsider your cleaning products.

Perhaps, the spikes only occur when you're cooking. This might point to using an extractor hood or opening a window when you do-so next time.Automation

Alexa

The Alexa Skill enables you to ask Foobot what the air quality is like.

This saves you having to open the app.

IFTTT

You have a few options for connecting the Foobot to your home. You can use IFTTT (If This Then That) to perform a variety of air quality related actions.

The applets are ready made and set up. However, If you're feeling creative, why not build your own IFTTT applet?

Other smart home integration

You can also hook Foobot up to communicate with Nest and Honeywell products direct from the app.

Unfortunately, I do not have any of this kit and so couldn't play with it.

Foobot review conclusion

To be honest, I didn't really give the air quality in my home a second thought. True, if it gets stuffy I'd open a window but that would be about it.

However, knowing what's going on in your home is surprisingly useful, and it can certainly help you make changes to improve things. This is even more pertinent to those who suffer from allergies or who have small children. Being able to accurately monitor and mark off events that cause spikes could well make life easier.

The App is easy to use, setup is a breeze. The calibration time may frustrate some but we are dealing with what is, assumingly, some delicate monitoring kit.

This has opened my eyes to other air monitors available. Foobot does seem to be a very good option thanks to its range of measurements, IFTTT and Alexa integration.

Foobot is a great way to monitor indoor air quality and should become a part of everyone's smart home system.

Foobot price and availability

You can start monitoring your home's air quality and make improvements right now. You can buy Foobot from Amazon for £179 – down from £254.95.



REVIEW

TiBAG COMPACT LAPTOP BAG



When I was asked to review a teabag, I was a tad confused. I review tech and gadget accessories, after all. Then I realised, this is TiBag, a satchel-sized laptop bag. It all became clear.

JAY GARRETT

The TiBag is a shoulder bag made of durable Polyester. Even though it isn't as large as some laptop bags we've reviewed here at GadgetyNews, it still manages to pack storage space aplenty.

I've lived with the bag for a number of weeks using it to lug my kit to work and press events.

So, how has it worked out?

TiBag design

The TiBag is a vertically oriented shoulder bag. It is available in any colour you want, as long as it is black. However, there are teal highlights.

The bag measures a compact 11 x 15 x 5-inches and enclosed by a single, large flap.

This flap features a large zippered pocket that can easily swallow magazines, tablets and the like. Pretty handy for those things you need easiest access to.

The only branding on the bag is the TiBag logo on the flap. This has prompted certain questions like "Does that make you a TiBagger then?" Ah, the humour is non-stop here.

Anyhow, the flap is held closed with a large strip of Velcro. This is very sturdy and Velcro-y. It does take some force to open it.

When opened, you'll find a small zippered pocket with 3 pen slots next to it, also an open-topped pocket behind that. Working further back is a larger zippered pocket and then an open-topped pocket.

Finally, there is the cavernous main compartment. So, quite a few pockets then.

TiBag performance

Having multiple pockets means that you can stow away plenty of kit.

Even though the 'smaller' open pocket has been designed to protect your laptop, I have placed my 13-inch Yoga 2 Pro in the main compartment. This is just to give you an idea of just how spacious these areas are.

The actual laptop slot can take a computer that measures 14-inches wide by 10-inches tall, and 1-inch thick. Gamers rejoice!

The larger zippered area could easily take another, smaller laptop. However, this is only padded at the rear thanks to being neighbour to the laptop slot.

The little zippered pocket next to the pen organiser is handy for thumb drives, plectrums, or a card wallet as shown. The pen slots could do with being a little deeper, if I am to be critical. Well, that is my job here I suppose.

Here you see my NVIDIA Shield tablet in the large zippered front pocket. It is quite deep and easily take care of books and magazines.

The main open compartment is padded on the back, sides, and bottom, and is very roomy. There's plenty more room than my 13-inch Yoga 2 Pro needs. If you do choose to use this compartment for your laptop instead of the TiBag's built-in sleeve, you will probably want to put the laptop in another protective case. To be honest, I've been using it for folders, large note books and a small camera tripod.

I was amazed at just how much you can fill the TiBag with. If you intend to stuff it to the max, it will expand to become around 5-inches deep.



REVIEW

TiBAG COMPACT LAPTOP BAG



The only downside with this is, like courier-style laptop bags, all that weight will be sent to a single shoulder. The strap on the TiBag is strong and fitted with a non-slip shoulder pad.

It is comfortable to wear, just be aware of over-loading yourself.

The rear padded area is also comfortable to have against you. It is also somewhat breathable thanks to the mesh material.

I have confidence that the chunky zips, strong Velcro and D-ring/carabiner strap connectors will withstand heavy wear.

TiBag laptop bag review conclusion

There isn't much to fault with the TiBag.

It's made well, has a simple design and enough pockets to carry all your gear. I do like this orientation too, especially when commuting. Also, keeping with the commuting vibe, a top grab handle would've been a great addition.

Whilst I am being picky, some extra padding and, perhaps, some soft liner in the laptop slot would be awesome.

I really was expecting the TiBag to cost more than it does, it certainly seems to warrant it.

Price and availability

You can order the TiBag direct from their website for \$34.95. It is also available on Amazon.com.



REVIEW

ROCCAT KHAN PRO GAMING HEADSET



We have been sent our first gaming headset from Roccat. The Khan Pro headphones are well priced and look to cover all the bases.

The Khan Pro sits right in the middle of gaming headset pricing, perhaps the most challenging arena.

JAY GARRETT

The Roccat Khan Pro gaming headset has a wide range of competition. Even in this little corner of the interweblogosphere we've covered the likes of HyperX, SteelSeries, and Astro.

So, it's time to put on our game face and dance the Khan cans. (sorry)

Ahem, without further ado...

Roccat Khan Pro design

The Khan Pro is not the most daring of designs. Perhaps I was expecting more angles, highlights, more red, perhaps LEDs. For an item aimed at gamers, this headset is quite restrained in design.

I have the black headset and, save for the grey Roccat logo on one earcup and a lion symbol on the other one, it follows Henry Ford's colour pallet.

The Khan Pro connects with two braided cables terminating in 3.5 mm jacks: one for audio, and one for the mic.

You do get a bundled adapter should you want to plug the headset in to an amp with a single connector.

While these are wired headphones they hand you some controls on can. On the left ear cup you'll find a volume-wheel. Also, you can mute the microphone by folding it up.

Oh, that microphone almost looks like an after-thought, which is shame. You will realise why I say that later on.

You cannot remove the mic, which I don't see as a deal-breaker as I look for a different sound profile from my gaming headphones com-

pared to the cans I use for music. However, that mic is not pretty. The one thing it does have on its side is that it's wonderfully bendy.

The thin headband has a fair amount of padding, while the foam ear-cups are both large and plush.

The headset feels light and a little insubstantial when compared to my long-time favourites, the Astro A40 TR. These headsets weigh in at 230g and Roccat is proud that these are "*by far the lightest amongst gaming headsets.*" I certainly can believe that.

So, the Khan Pro doesn't particularly look special. Maybe it's a sleeper and hides wolf-like performance under its woolly cardigan.

Roccat Khan Pro performance

The Khan Pros are fitted with 50mm drivers rated at 25 ohms. Roccat claims a frequency response of 10 – 40000Hz. These headphones are said to possess high resolution sound.

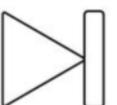
Let's strap them on then, shall we?

Comfort

The Khan Pro may not look like much but, egad, it is comfortable.

Additional to their featherweight lightness, the over-the-ear cups are nicely padded with memory foam. Also, the padded headband is nice and supportive.

Since you can expand the headband and the earcups swivel through 90-degrees, you can easily find the perfect fit.



REVIEW

ROCCAT KHAN PRO GAMING HEADSET



I also found that the headset comfy to wear for hours at a time. Additionally, having to wear glasses, I can confirm that the Khan Pros are also good to wear if you're a four-eyes like me.

Sound Quality

Rightly, according to Roccat, the Khan Pro is the first gaming headset compatible with hi-res audio. This is mostly just a marketing term — and one that's notoriously hard to pin down, at that — but it does indeed sound great. Music, sound effects and voice acting in games come through loud and clear, whether you need party chat for esports or immersion for single-player epics.

Gaming

In terms of audio performance, the Khan Pro certainly delivered. In-game, music, sound effects and dialogue all sounded distinct and balanced.

Directional effects, footsteps and the like were placed in the soundstage perfectly. So, whether it was the cry of a witch in Left 4 Dead or terrorists padding around in Counter Strike, I always had a good idea where the baddies were.

Chatting in-game was also clear although I have been spoilt with my Astro MixAmp where I can



REVIEW

ROCCAT KHAN PRO GAMING HEADSET



tweak the balance between chat and game audio. The dial on the Khan Pros works everything together. This just means you'll have to delve in to your machine's audio settings. It's not a big deal but, there you have it.

Mic

Earlier I alluded to the mic's 'I've been stuck on here because someone forgot to design me' looks were a shame. Well, personally, I think it deserves so much more care and attention as it is excellent.

This is one of the best microphones I've encountered on a gaming headset.

The mic produces clear sound and manages to isolate the user's voice from almost all background noise. There wasn't any undue sibilance or any nasty distortion when I got too carried away. Neither were there any other nasty audio artefacts.

Music

Moving from gaming to listening to music, the Khan Pro showed itself to be equally adept. I was actually expecting them to be heavy handed in the low-end with music. Instead, they proved to be surprisingly balanced. It is almost a pity, then, that the mic is not removable. At least my A40 TR has that

option, although the design of the Astros is **very** gamer.

Roccat Khan Pro review conclusion

I so wanted to title this bit 'Pros and Khans' but I resisted. See, I am better than that.

The aesthetics and materials might lack the wow factor; however the Khan Pro delivers where it counts.

These headphones deliver accurate and involving audio at a great price. Furthermore, they remain comfortable even on the longest gaming marathon.

Roccat Khan Pro price and availability

You can buy the Khan Pro headset right now from Amazon for £69.99. Bargain!

