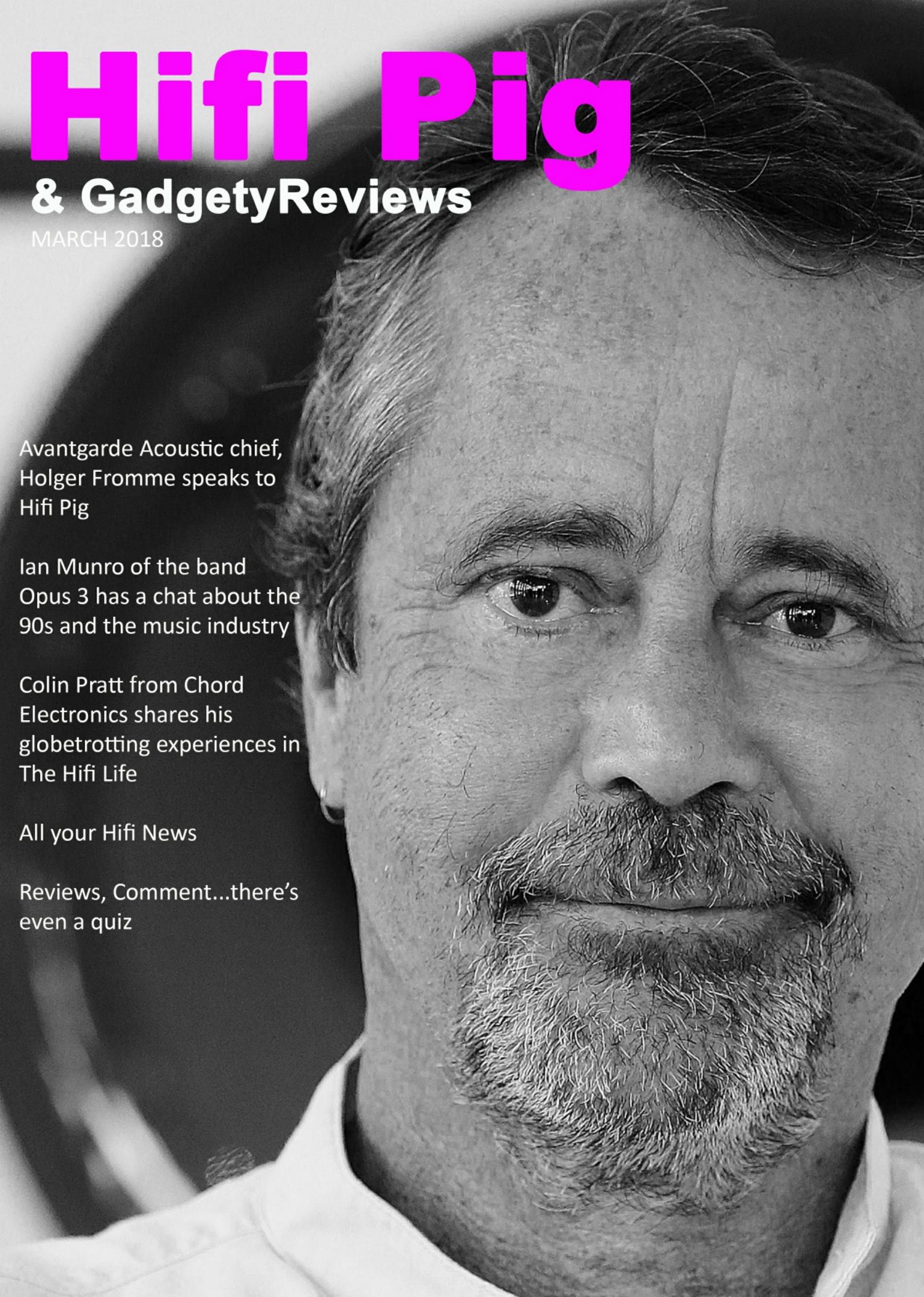


Hifi Pig



& GadgetyReviews

MARCH 2018

Avantgarde Acoustic chief,
Holger Fromme speaks to
Hifi Pig

Ian Munro of the band
Opus 3 has a chat about the
90s and the music industry

Colin Pratt from Chord
Electronics shares his
globetrotting experiences in
The Hifi Life

All your Hifi News

Reviews, Comment...there's
even a quiz

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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**

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The Complete Audiophile Magazine

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HI-FI WORLD





WELCOME

Welcome to this month's edition of Hifi Pig Magazine and what a hectic month it's been. Shortly before the Bristol Show I stupidly tried to lift a 40Kg amplifier out of it's packing crate. Snap and lots of writhing around on the floor ensued and I'm now sporting a rather attractive support girdle.

We've kept the reviews light this month as there is all the show coverage for readers but we have loads to come for March.

This month we have a brilliant interview with the head of Avantgarde Acoustics Holger Fromme and an interview with Ian Munro of the band Opus 3 who many will know from their massive hit Fine Day. Ian's interview contains some never before published photographs of the band.

The feedback we've had about this new look magazine has been brilliant and we thank you all for your continued support.

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CLICK AND GO! INDEX

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

INTERVIEW:



Holger Fromme is the man behind the German horn loudspeaker manufacturer Avantgarde Acoustic. Here he talks to Hifi Pig about what drove him to build these speakers and where he sees the role of innovation in loudspeaker design going forward. **GO!**



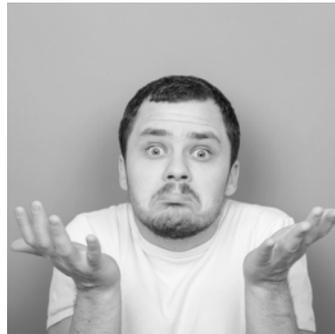
A TIDAL STORM IS UPON US

There really is a tidal storm of music out there! A never-ending, algorithmically-curated musical selection that is spat out ad-nauseam especially for you, your gender, your socio-economic grouping. Perhaps I should just let it wash over me, or perhaps I should just have nice cup of tea, turn on the wireless and calm down a bit. Perhaps not. **GO!**



REAL MEN LIKE WHITE SPEAKERS

Never afraid to bring, as she has been accused, of fetching the itchy blanket of gender politics to the audio table, Linette this month looks at why we should all embrace better looking Hifi. **GO!**



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE WORD HIFI?

Hifi means many things to many people. Some prefer valves and some prefer solid state. Some prefer horns and some prefer conventional speakers. But what does Hifi really mean? Or is that a question that is impossible to answer? **GO!**



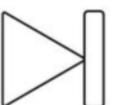
FROM WORDS, INTO WORDS

Regular Hifi Pig contributor, James Fleming looks at the work of The Fall and especially the recently deceased Mark E. Smith. **GO!**

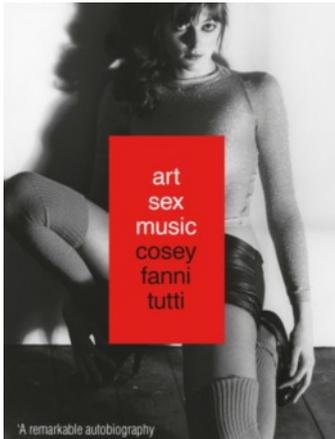


INTERVIEW:

Ian Munro was one quarter of the UK electronic band Opus 3 that had a major hit with the tune Fine Day which was an absolute monster of a tune and seemed to be everywhere in the year it was released. Other members of the band were Kirsty Hawkshaw, Kevin Dodds and Nigel Walton and in addition to Fine Day, that charted in the UK at number 5 (U.S. Hot Dance Club Play number 1) they released two albums, Mind Fruit (1992) and Guru Mother (1994). **GO!**



CLICK AND GO! INDEX



BOOK REVIEW:

Cosey Fanni Tutti – Art Sex Music

My life is my art, my life is my art is a statement that few can say they have lived by so wholeheartedly as Cosey Fanni Tutti and Art Sex Music documents her life as art using her diary entries as the starting point.

GO!

QUICK QUIZ:

Try your hand at a couple of handfuls of music related quizzery. **GO!**

HIFI REVIEWS:

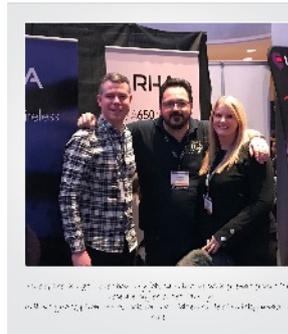
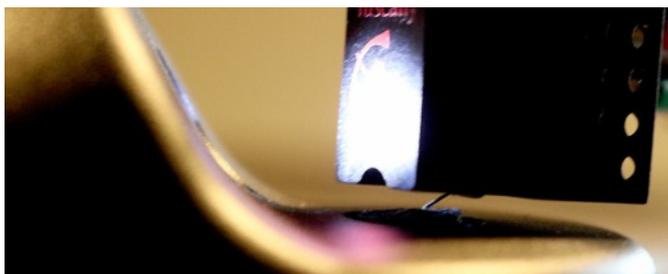
AURALIC POLARIS ALL IN ONE STREAMER AMPLIFIER GO!



REL T9i SUBWOOFER GO!



FLUX HIFI SONIC STYLUS CLEANER GO!



LIVING THE HiFi LIFE:

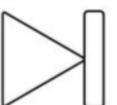
Colin Pratt is the sales director for Chord Electronics. This trip to New York was the third trip out after CES and Germany, back home for day then straight in to his home market show of Bristol. Then off again, Prague, Montreal, LA and Chicago in quick succession! He still loves Living the HiFi Life though !

GADGETY REVIEWS GO!



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GO!



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Let the Music Flow



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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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YOUR HIFI NEWS



FELIKS AUDIO DESKTOP VALVE AMP

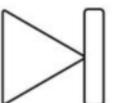
Feliks Audio, a Polish based manufacturer of hand crafted tube amplifiers, has released a prototype of their new desktop amplifier that can power both speakers and headphones.

Built around EL84 and EE88CC tubes and enclosed in a piano gloss finished American walnut wood casing, Lukasz Feliks claims that "it not only sounds good but is a real piece of modern art on your desk"

- Class A tube amplifier in Single Ended setup
- Output power 3W stereo
- Frequency response 25Hz - 35KHz +/-3dB
- THD 0,5 % at 0,5W
- power tube EL84
- driver tube E88CC/6922
- Headphones output 32 - 300 ohm, 6.3mm jack

Pre-orders taken now with first units shipping around April/May

Pre-order price 1099 Euro (incl. VAT)



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NEWS



QUAD EXPANDS ARTERA LINE WITH SOLUS

Quad, the British audio brand, has kicked off its 83rd year by adding a one-box hi-fi system to the Artera Series, Quad's primary solid-state component range. The Artera Solus combines a CD transport, DAC, preamplifier and power amplifier in a single compact chassis, with connectivity options including Bluetooth wireless streaming.

Despite its simplicity, the Artera Solus sports "cutting-edge sophistication" beneath the skin. At its heart is the ES9018 Sabre32 Reference. External sources benefit from this DAC's quality via a range of digital inputs, handling PCM data up to 32-bit/384kHz as well as DSD64/128/256.

For CD replay, a slot-loading mechanism buffers data from the disc before feeding it to the asynchronous DAC section. Four digital filter options enable users to tailor the sound from both CDs and external digital sources. The Artera Solus's preamp and power amp sections ensure short, direct signal paths. Volume is digitally controlled in the analogue domain, outputting directly to the dual-mono Class AB power amp section. This delivers 2x75W into eight ohms, with a maximum current delivery of 15 Amps into difficult loads. To minimise distortion, the power supplies for the left and right channels are isolated from each other as well as from the rest of the system.

The discrete power amp circuits' output stage uses a CFB (Complementary Feedback) topology in combination with conventional emitter follower circuitry. The CFB stage offers superior linearity and ensures excellent thermal stability, as the idle current is kept independent of the temperature of the output transistors. Using an emitter follower in combination with the CFB stage is an efficient way of increasing the current ability of the amplifier without compromising the advantages of the CFB circuit.

Cable connectivity options are plentiful. Five digital inputs – two coaxial, two optical and one USB Type B – cater for external digital sources (there's also a USB Type A socket for software updates) while a pair of RCA phono inputs handle analogue sources. Analogue outputs are supplied in both single ended RCA and balanced XLR varieties, with the four-channel volume control preserving the balanced signal path from the DAC to the XLR output. A pair of high-quality speaker binding posts, optical and coaxial digital outputs, a 12V trigger output and a front-mounted jack coupled to a dedicated headphone amp circuit complete a comprehensive connectivity array.

All Artera Series components share the same compact 32x32cm footprint, with a clean aesthetic that both evokes Quad's past and looks forward to the future. The housing provides a rigid structure with a textured aluminium front panel, thick glass top and CNC-routed heat sinks on either side.

The new Artera Solus is available from February 2018, with a choice of black or silver front panels and an RRP of £1,499.95. The Bluetooth-equipped model will be joined this autumn by a premium version, adding app-controlled Wi-Fi network streaming facilities to the Solus's specification





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Introducing our latest receivers - the CALA CDR and CALA SR. Sharing the same ingenious fully digital design principle, both models deliver exceptional sound quality from both digital and analogue audio sources: Hi-Res music streaming from NAS servers, Internet radio and music services, Bluetooth, FM, FM-HD and DAB+ radio, phono and analogue input, digital inputs and outputs for external sources and - in the CALA CDR - a CD mechanism. Created using only the finest materials with a sleek, button-less fascia, these latest CALA models offer true audiophile design philosophies combined with simple yet innovative control via either the T+A FM1000 remote control or the T+A Control App. The result is two systems that deliver exceptional performance and look amazing in any environment.

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Email: info@kogaudio.com
Web: www.kogaudio.com

NEWS



BRYSTON AND STORM ANNOUNCE COLLABORATION

Bryston has announced that they will be working in collaboration with StormAudio, an audio hardware manufacturer based in France, enabling both companies to, they day, "leverage their respective design and manufacturing expertise in an array of new product offerings". As a byproduct of the cooperative effort, Bryston will be unveiling an SP4 surround processor and StormAudio will be leveraging Bryston's award-winning Cubed Series amplifier technology. Bryston has demonstrated past success partnering with respected AV brands such as Harman, PMC, Axiom and others.

Bryston SP4 (pictured)

The SP4 will be a 16.2-channel processor with an option to add four channels to achieve 20-channel mode. The SP4 will support all popular immersive surround formats, such as Dolby Atmos®, Auro-3D® and DTS:X™ as well as conventional formats. The SP4 will also feature Dirac® Live room correction, giving home theater dealers and enthusiasts access to the latest technologies within a Bryston home theater. Most critically, the SP4 will be built on a 3U modular platform, enabling Bryston engineers to integrate advanced technologies and make upgrades available to consumers, extending the life of the product. The SP4 will also be compatible with popular control system platforms, including Savant, RTI, Control4 and Crestron. The Bryston SP4 is expected to become available Q2, 2018.



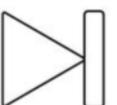
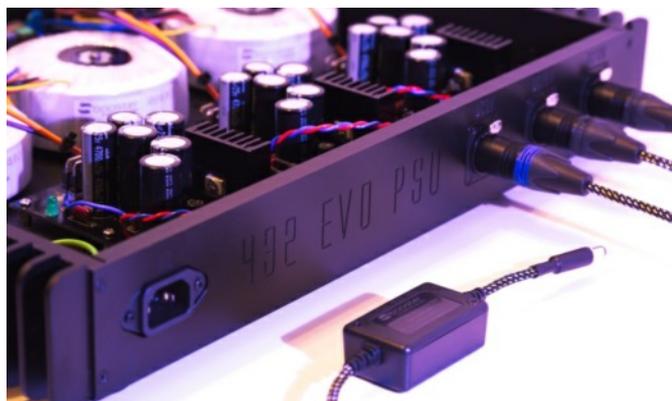
432EVO MASTER MUSIC SERVER RELEASED

We first came across the Belgian **432EVO Master Music** server at High End Munich 2017, it is now available to buy.

There has been a long process involved in refining the 432EVO Master Music server, hence the delay between launch and availability. The final 'part of the puzzle' was the new power supply.

The 432 EVO features: built-in 4 TB hard disk drive, possibility to connect an external NAS or via Sonos, TEAC-drive for ripping of CD's, server can be left on 24/7 without risk of overheating, fan-less cooling leading to a silent operation, remote access for product support and updates, streaming via Tidal or Qobuz or iTunes, Roon-ready, Logitech Media Server and Squeezelite interfaces supported, plays files to a maximum resolution of 24/768 or DSD, UPnP-dlna compatible, control via tablet, laptop or smartphone.

Price: 10,000 EUR (21% VAT included)





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NEWS



BRITISH GROVE STUDIOS USES PRISM DACS

Prism Sound, manufacturer of the Callia hifi DAC, pre-amplifier and headphone amp, has seen a significant investment in its pro products by Mark Knopfler's British Grove Studios, buying enough PT-HDX compatible interface cards to ensure that every one of its Prism Sound ADA-8XR multichannel converters can now connect to its six Pro Tools® HDX™ systems.

British Grove Studios bought its first ADA-8XR units in 2006 and has been regularly adding to its collection. The converters have been used on numerous projects for Mark Knopfler, as well as other high profile artists such as Eric Clapton, The Rolling Stones, The Who Led Zeppelin and Razorlight. They have also been used on film projects such as Beauty and The Beast, Mary Poppins Returns, Gravity and Mission Impossible 5, to name but a few.



The two-studio complex in London now has 24 ADA-8XR converters – more than any other studio in the world. With this number of units, British Grove can offer its customers a total of 192 channels of Prism Sound conversion.

Studio manager David Stewart (pictured) says: "We originally chose Prism Sound's flagship ADA-8XR converters because they sound great, which is an important consideration for Mark and our commercial clients. They also operate at sampling rates of up to 192kHz, giving us even greater analogue performance than their ADA-8 predecessors."

"In recent months we've been upgrading all our Pro Tools rigs to HDX and we wanted to ensure that the Prism Sound units continued to work flawlessly with these new systems. The cards connect directly with Pro Tools|HDX interface cards and emulate the behaviour of the Avid HD I/O interfaces. By future-proofing our facility in this way we can ensure that our clients have the best of both worlds – the workflow benefits of Pro Tools HDX and the exceptional audio quality of Prism Sound."

Prism Sound sales and marketing director Graham Boswell says: "All of us at Prism Sound are very proud of our association with British Grove – an award-winning studio that is renowned for the incredible attention it pays to every tiny detail, whether technical or aesthetic. The fact that David and his team have invested in more than 20 HDX interface cards shows that Prism Sound conversion is important to them and will continue to be part of this facility's long-term future."

The company's first hifi product, the Callia DAC, uses the same DAC circuits as those found in the company's professional Lyra 2 recording interface, allowing home listeners to hear their music as it sounded in the studio. Headphone users are also catered for with a headphone amplifier with its own separate volume control potentiometer.

[You can read the Hifi Pig review of the Callia DAC here.](#)



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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"



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"textura, dinámica e riqueza harmónica"

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NEWS



SOULUTIONS INTRODUCES LEEDH PROCESSING TO DACS

Solution is the first high end electronics manufacturer in the world to license “Leedh Processing” for its D/A converters 560 and 760.

“Leedh Processing” is an algorithm for increasing or decreasing the volume level of a digital music signal.

Solution told us: “The patented “Leedh Processing” algorithm does this without adding any artefacts to the digital music signal. No information will be lost while adjusting the volume. This results in revealing even thinnest details and a tremendous richness of micro dynamics otherwise unavailable from digital music playback and usually associated with analog/vinyl music reproduction. Existing units of 760 and 560 can be upgraded for the new “Leedh Processing” volume control feature”.

“Leedh Processing” has been invented by Gilles Millot of Acoustical Beauty, a French niche manufacturer of high end loudspeaker systems who already holds several patents for his innovative designs and technologies. The creator says that the algorithm is not limited to applications in high end audio. It will also have uses in more mass market products or even in applications outside audio.

[You can read the Hifi Pig review of the Leedh E2 Loudspeakers here.](#)



NEW BUILT IN SPEAKERS FROM FOCAL

2018 sees the launch of two new built-in speaker ranges from Focal, with the introduction of the all new entry-level 100 Series and additional products added to the mid-priced 300 Series.

Besides the launch of the entry-level 100 Series and the mid-range 300 Series, Electra is keeping its flagship range position. Other additional products (outdoor, subwoofer and amplifier) will be added to this line in the coming months.



BRAINWAVZ B400 IN-EARS

The Brainwavz B400 feature a 4 driver setup with separate drivers. The majority of the components that make up the B400 are produced in USA or Europe including Knowles drivers, high purity OFC silver plated cabling and the T100 tips.

B400 earphones are accompanied by two detachable MMCX cables, including a 2.5mm balanced cable, numerous silicone tips and a carrying case. They are available in eight different colours. Price is £144.43



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NEWS



UPDATED XEO RANGE & CUSTOM INSTALLS FROM DYNAUDIO

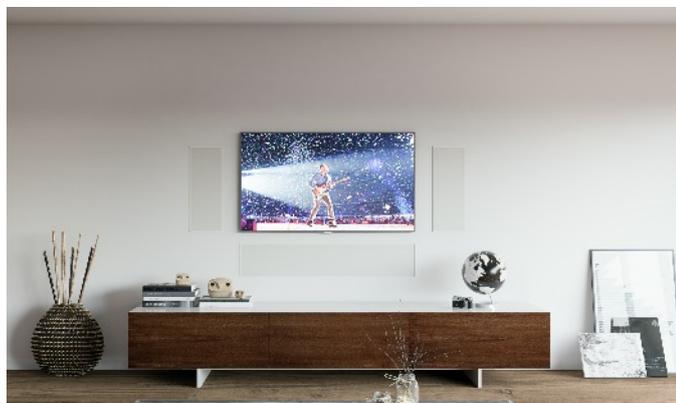
Danish loudspeaker manufacturer Dynaudio has rebooted its Xeo active wireless hi-fi speaker family. The new Xeo 20 and Xeo 30 speakers replace the Xeo 4 and 6, and join the Xeo 2 in the company's range.

As well as getting a new look, the Xeo 20 and Xeo 30 (pictured) now have updated tunings plus direct inputs for analogue and digital sources, upgraded DSP (digital signal processing) capabilities, full 24-bit/96kHz hi-res support and built-in aptX Bluetooth. The tunings are derived from Dynaudio's LYD 5 professional studio monitors. The whole Xeo range now gets direct Toslink (digital optical), analogue RCA and analogue stereo minijack inputs on each master speaker. The signal is transmitted to the slave speaker in high-resolution 24-bit/96kHz form. All Xeo speakers now support full 24-bit/96kHz hi-res audio via the optical digital input, and also wirelessly from the optional Dynaudio Connect transmitter box. The Xeo 20 and Xeo 30 both have a new IR remote control that works both with their direct inputs and the optional Dynaudio Connect box.

"We made the Xeo 20 and Xeo 30 simpler and more elegant without needing a ground-up re-design. The colour scheme is simplified too, as on the new Focus XD. We're really proud of how it turned out," says Dynaudio Design Director Malte Köhn.

Xeo 20 (€2199 / £1999 per pair)

Xeo 30 (€3599 / £3199 per pair)



Dynaudio have also been busy working on their Custom Studio range LCR (left/centre/right) system and dual voice-coil in-ceiling speakers, which will ship in March. The S4-LCR65 system lets users create bespoke vertically or horizontally oriented left, centre and right three-way speaker channels. It's a discreet, system who's modular design makes it very flexible. The S4LCRMT mid/tweeter and S4-LCR65W woofer modules fit around standard 16in studs and the individual modules are easily connected using speaker wire. Their frames can be attached and installed in a single cut-out, or spaced out to create a customised single channel.



TRAFOMATIC PRIMAVERA HEADPHONE AMP

Trafomatic Audio of Serbia have launched a new Headphone Amplifier, the Primavera.

Sasa Cokic of Trafomatic told us: "This is single ended DHT amplifier for Headphones using Svetlana 811-10 output tubes and the triode driving tube is the 6S45P. Output impedances 25 , 50 , 100 , 300 and 600 ohms .Rated output 10W/50ohms . Price will be announced soon".





Performance connections.

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

Sometimes of course, less can mean more.

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

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

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the performance connection

atlas cables.com



NEWS



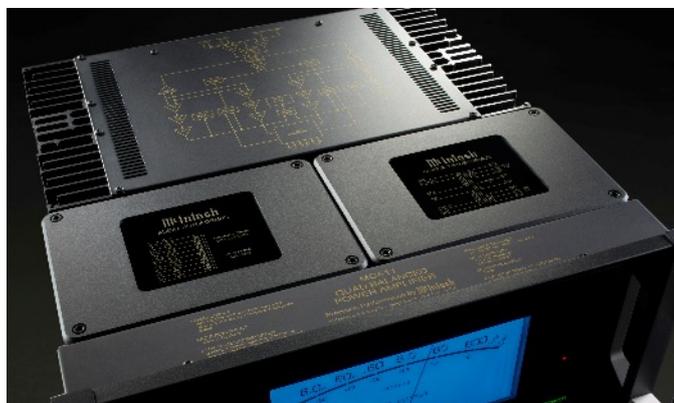
MCINTOSH ANNOUNCE MC611 BALANCED POWER MONOS

McIntosh has announced the MC611 Quad Balanced Power Amplifier. The monoblock MC611 Quad Balanced Power Amplifier produces 600 Watts of power. A pair of MC611s can drive a hifi, or add additional units to power each speaker of a home theatre.

Utilising McIntosh's output Autoformer™ technology, the full 600 Watts will be delivered to the speaker regardless if it has 2, 4 or 8 Ohm impedance. The MC611 has received numerous updates and improvements compared to the previous MC601 model. Chief among them is that filter capacity has been doubled which has resulted in a 55% increase in dynamic headroom from 1.8dB to 2.8dB.



The front panel features new direct LED backlighting for improved appearance and colour accuracy. On top, the audio Autoformer and power transformer are now contained in new glass topped enclosures. Behind them are 2 McIntosh Monogrammed Heatsinks™ which connect to high current output transistors. On the back, there continues to be 3 sets of our Solid Cinch™ speaker binding posts (1 set for each speaker impedance), but space has been added between each set to allow for easier speaker cable connectivity. Other enhancements include heavier gauge internal wiring, upgraded circuit components and the addition of an eco-friendly power management system. In addition to all these improvements, the MC611 remains full of other McIntosh technologies including Power Guard®, Sentry Monitor™, a Quad Balanced design and Power Control. Both a balanced and unbalanced output are included to make bi-amping or tri-amping speakers easier; they can also be used to send the audio signal to a secondary system or to connect a powered subwoofer.



The MC611 sits on a polished stainless steel chassis and features the McIntosh aesthetic of a black glass front panel, illuminated logo, control knobs, aluminium handles and a large 8" (20.3 cm) fast responding blue Watt meter.

Pricing and Availability

Suggested retail price (VAT, shipping and any customs duties related to current standards of individual countries are excluded): \$7,500 USD each or in the UK £19,995 for the pair. Shipping expected this month for the USA and March/April for the UK.



ORTOFON CELEBRATE 100 YEARS

2018 marks Ortofon's 100th anniversary. The Stylus 2M Blue 100 is a special edition production run of the Stylus 2M Blue. Featuring the same technical specifications as the original 2M Blue, the model has been released to promote stylus upgrades for existing Ortofon customers. Though it boasts all the same features as the standard 2M Blue, including the Nude Elliptical diamond, proprietary suspension system and broad frequency range, the Stylus 2M Blue 100 will be launched at a special price of only £100.00 (UK SRP)





sound **kaos**

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NEWS



Sotm sCLK-OCX10 MASTERCLOCK NOW AVAILABLE

The SotM sCLK-OCX10 Master Clock Generator is now available for order. The sCLK-OCX10 is a master clock generator that produces a high purity 10 MHz clock signal.

SotM (Soul Of the Music) told us: "Normally a clock signal is an angled square digital signal, but the sCLK-OCX10 is different. It produces a pure analogue sine wave of 10 MHz, and this sinusoidal clock signal is the method applied for the best signal reproduction. This is because of reduced noise compared of the analogue sine wave compared to the angled square digital clock signal. To make this possible, the sCLK-OCX10 consists of only analogue circuitry which contains 10 years of know-how from SotM".

Details:

10.000MHz sine wave clock output

All Isolated clock output

50Ω(optional75Ω) BNC connector x 4

Tech spec:

Output clock signal: Frequency : 10.000MHz sine wave

Output level : 13dBm(2.825Vp-p@50Ω), ±2dBm

All isolated clock output

Output connector

50Ω BNC connector x 4

Optional 75Ω BNC connector available

Available in the UK from Elite Audio Price: £3,099.

The first 100 units of the sCLK-OCX10 ordered (worldwide) will come with a free sPS-500 Power Supply valued at £550.



LIVING VOICE GERMAN EVENT

Living Voice, the British High End loudspeaker brand, will be at an event from the 13th of March hosted by HiFiLinzbach presenting a specially commissioned pair of Vox Palladian & Palladian Basso. (The pictured pair are from High End Munich 2017).

A custom made pair will be used, that is finished in, say Living Voice, "a scrumptious and unusual American Walnut that grew in the New Forest in the UK". Kevin Scott will be co-hosting a 5 day event at the HiFiLinzbach premises in Bonn, Germany over a series of one hour sessions planned at hourly intervals throughout the day. [MORE](#)





Pro-Ject
AUDIO SYSTEMS

The Classic



August 2016



Best Turntable 2016-2017

An Instant Classic

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

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

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

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

Available Now for £799.00 (UK SRP)



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NEWS



AUDIOSOLUTIONS

Owned, and founded in 2011, by engineer Gediminas Gaidelis, AudioSolutions design and manufacture loudspeakers in Vilnius, Lithuania. Gediminas got in touch with Hifi Pig to tell us more about the European manufacturer's new line of loudspeakers, Figaro.

AudioSolutions' Figaro loudspeaker range builds on their previous Rhapsody range, which they have developed over the last six years. The range features AudioSolutions' Self-Locking cabinet technique, mini-horn tweeters and other unique features used in their speakers including their flagship Vantage anniversary. They feel that the result is a quality and finish that is high end, but at a much more affordable price. Figaro maintains the same style accents as the Overture and Vantage series but fits better into the modern home and lifestyle.

The Figaro series features new custom SB Acoustics drivers with ER (extra rigid) cones. The Self-Locking cabinet technique ensures very rigid enclosure joints to help achieve bass control and deep bass extension even in the smallest Figaro S model. Figaro cabinet thickness varies from 18mm up to 50mm in different areas, and starting from the middle to the back of the speaker is made from a sandwich of materials. "To fight tweeter sharpness at higher volumes we introduced a mini-horn which is used in all our speaker systems and on top of that waveguide which helps to shape sound-front a little bit. We also chose a smaller tweeter than usual to have faster response in very top end".

"All of the Figaro speakers except the bookshelf and centre are three way. Why three? Well there is two main opinions where one states that two way is better because speaker is closer to point source and there is only one crossover point meaning more homogeneous sound, another opinion is that three ways is better because engineer can pick crossover points not to meet critical area where human ear during centuries of evolution became most sensitive (800-2000Hz). I myself was for two ways at first, because design is much simpler yet cheaper, however now almost all our products shares three ways (even bookshelf Vantage) because not having crossover point in critical to ear area really does the job. All products which were designed following this fashion received best impressions usually like "highly detailed and clear midrange". I am not saying that two ways is much worse, we have some bookshelf designs with two ways but we are forced to use more complicated drivers and raise the crossover point as high as possible to step away from critical crossover area".

The Figaro speakers feature an improved version of the "Stealth Grilles" used on the AudioSolutions Overture speakers, and, like all of their speakers, WBT connecting posts. They are available in 17 different finishes like 3D textured high gloss finishes, or three different colour linen in high gloss. They aim for them to be "an accent of the living room or part of the interior decoration, rather than trying to make speakers as invisible as possible".

The AudioSolutions Figaro series of loudspeakers start at 1300€ up to 7500€ per pair (VAT excluded)



Wire on Wire

REDpurl™



Variable Geometry

UK patent pending GB1602578.5

EU Registered Design No. 002544171

Experience**680**

Reference Audio Cable

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

Experience**680**

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

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

Conductors: Silver plated copper

Insulation: PTFE

Capacitance: 69pF/m variable

Connectors: WBT 0114 phono plugs

Geometry: REDpurl™

For further information contact:

Wire on Wire 01372 800605

info@wireonwire.com

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NEWS



MAGICO ANNOUNCES A3 LOUDSPEAKER

After their UK launch in London last week, Magico sent us further information about their new, more affordable loudspeaker, the A3.

Magico told us: "Machined into the metal of every Magico loudspeaker is a subtle, yet permanent, "M". Our symbol is a simple reminder to the owner of a Magico product that they have purchased a product born of an uncompromised, unapologetic pursuit of performance excellence. The standards we have set for a product bearing our M logo are not without consequence. The push forward into the development of new, exotic, costly technologies and materials has meant that these products are accessible only to a fortunate few. While we have long wanted to bring a more affordable product to the market, and despite constant experimentation and testing of various methods for reducing costs to achieve this goal, the results have always fallen short of earning the Magico M engraving".

The Magico A series, launched with the A3 makes a Magico loudspeaker "obtainable for a wider audience". The A3 features a fully braced and anodized aluminium enclosure, beryllium tweeter, carbon Nanographene cones, neodymium based motor systems and the Magico elliptical crossover.

The newly designed Magico pure beryllium-diaphragm tweeter has an optimised 28-mm dome surface based on the design platform and geometry of the M-Project tweeter. The customised neodymium motor system is encased in an improved back chamber with Magico's latest generation damping materials.

The newly developed 6-inch midrange employs a Multi-Wall carbon fibre cone with a layer of XG Nanographene. Overhung neodymium based motor systems incorporate extra-large magnets to ensure a stabilised magnetic field in the 75-mm pure titanium voice coils of both the midrange and bass drivers.

Dual 7-inch woofers feature a version of the new Gen 8 Magico Nano-Tec cone.. A new overhung neodymium (N48) based motor system anchors the low frequency reproducers to accomplish a stabilised magnetic field. Pure Titanium, 75mm voice coils are used and our consistent with the technology utilised through the midrange.

All four drivers in the A3 are acoustically integrated using Magico's proprietary Elliptical Symmetry Crossover topology that uses components from Mundorf of Germany. The 3-way network features a 24db per octave Linkwitz-Riley filter.

The A3's sealed-enclosure is made entirely from 6061 T6 aircraft grade aluminium, identical material to the enclosure developed for the Q Series. This braced, complex internal structure is finished externally with a brushed anodized "skin". The A3 enclosure is a simplified Q Series design, with the same materials and craftsmanship.

The Magico A3 has a UK RRP of £11,998 inc. VAT per pair. Orders are now being taken for delivery this spring, distributed in the UK by Absolute Sounds.



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NEWS



SVS SERIES 4000 SUBS TO ARRIVE IN UK

The SVS 4000 Series subwoofers will shortly be available for UK AV enthusiasts. The SB-4000 sealed, PB-4000 ported and PC-4000 cylinder designs sit between the 13-Ultra and 16-Ultra models in the SVS range, offering 200W more RMS power and 600W more dynamic power than the 13s, under the command of IR remote control and smartphone app.

4000 Series' Sledge STA-1200D amplifiers, which are rated at 1,200 watts RMS / 4,000+ watts peak, use an efficient high-current Class D design combined with a fully discrete MOSFET output stage.

The 4000 Series' 13.5-inch drivers have dual-ferrite magnet motor assemblies in conjunction with edge-wound aluminium voice coils and lightweight, rigid composite cones, 50MHz High Resolution Analog Devices DSP and room Gain. The 4000 series' smartphone app for iOS® and Android® controls all DSP functions including: volume, low pass filter, phase, polarity, room gain, port tuning, three custom presets and system settings. An integrated 3-band parametric EQ allows for frequency and Q factor adjustments down to the single Hz level with four different slopes. Two-way feedback shows updates in real time on both the app and subwoofer interface. The App connects over Bluetooth, even when the subwoofer is out of sight.

SB-4000: £1,799.00, PB-4000: £2,249.00, PC-4000: £1,999.00.



ISOTEK EVO3 NOVA ONE

IsoTek, manufacturer of power conditioning solutions for hifi and home cinema systems, has launched the EVO3 Nova One from their Mosaic Series. The Nova One is an evolution on from the original GII Nova released over a decade ago but features a "modified and improved clean power network".

While generically similar to the Titan One circuit, the Nova One is positioned specifically for source components that use less power. Within the filter network, greater emphasis has been placed upon high-frequency filtering. A nine section circuit consisting of both series and parallel filters removes both Common Mode and Differential Mode power line noise from the incoming mains supply.

The middle sections of the filter featuring IsoTek's unique adaptive gating circuit which auto- sense the requirements of the connected plus an earth filtering circuit.

Nova One includes an IsoTek Premier power cable. Priced at £1,495.00.

Available with UK, EU, US, Australian, Swiss and South African outlets.



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NEWS



NEW UPGRADES FOR LP12 FROM WTP

WTP audio is launching the Serene project, six upgrades designed and manufactured in Britain for the LP12.

Theo Stack of WTP told us more: "The goal was to rid the LP12 of any remaining vibrations and colorations whilst still retaining the core organic sound of the Linn Sondek. Thus, the start of this bordering on, unhealthy obsession, which was dubbed "The Serene Project". It was no easy feat and took two years of intensive R&D and countless revised prototypes to develop components that compete at the highest standard"

The Serene Project comprises of 6 components all of which has been designed to "improve the performance of the part it replaces while maintaining a perfect compatibility with the original components".

The arm board and sub-chassis play a fundamental part in the musical performance of the Linn Sondek. The Serene Sub-chassis and arm boards can be used together or with their standard Linn counterpart.

The upgrades are made in the UK from a material called Solid Surface. This material is composed of acrylic polymer and aluminium among other minerals, and it makes it very inert. The arm boards use metal threaded inserts, to ensure a solid connection with the sub-chassis, that won't loosen or deteriorate over time.

The serene base board is machined from 12mm thick solid surface and has three adjustable sorbothane feet. Together they provide a stable platform dissipating external and internal vibrations. Holes have been cut out to allow for easy access to the springs and arm board

The Serene cross brace is an inert platform, WTP use rubber studs to mount the circuit board to eradicate any remaining vibrations entering or exiting the power supply. The cross brace itself is simple to install.

Again Solid Surface being the material of choice for the plinth, WTP say: "It took over a year and 12 prototypes to come up with the ultimate plinth to improve upon the original wood plinth".

More than a day is spent machining, assembling and hand polishing each plinth, which weighs in at over 5Kg. The plinths are available, in Black or White as standard, alternatively you can choose from an over 80 colour options. Fluted plinths are also an option All the holes have threaded brass inserts and comes with the Solid surface baseboard and cross brace as standard.

The standard top plate is made from 1.5mm thick stainless steel which over time can warp WTP top plates incorporate an advanced vibration dissipation layer. There are two versions available:

The 1st layer is made from 1.5mm high-grade stainless steel or aluminium. This layer fits perfectly flush with the top of the plinth. The second layer is a 2mm of stainless steel that adds an extra level of thickness to help prevent warping, sandwiched between the two is our advanced vibration dampening layer





MC Step-Up Transformers
Phono Amplifiers
Pre Amplifiers



NEWS



NEW SUBS FROM TRIANGLE

French loudspeaker brand Triangle has introduced two new subwoofers, expanding its Thetis and Tales ranges.

Triangle told us: "The goal was to keep the musicality and the speed of the original subwoofers, while increasing their dynamics with bigger drivers and a higher amplification. The aesthetic quality remains unchanged: an elegant high-gloss cube with aluminium details for the Thetis, and a clean mat finish for the Tales". Triangle took the opportunity to optimise the amplifiers on all models by focusing on the power handling of the driver at high volume as well as the dynamic range. Tales series now also include an LFE input, enabling crossover control through a home-theatre amplifier.

The Thetis 380 subwoofer (pictured) is Triangle's most powerful model, the engineering team developed a new 12-inch (30cm) driver for it. The driver uses a composite DFR (Deep Frequency Response) membrane made of cellulose and carbon. Its motor is equipped with a double-coil system. The development went further than just the drivers. The class-D amplifier has been designed from the ground up and now offers an output of 350 watts RMS (500 W peak). The Thetis subwoofers feature various inputs and settings. They include an LFE input enabling parameters to be set directly from the home theatre amplifier, and standard RCA inputs for hi-fi amplifiers. They also feature high-level inputs to connect amplifiers that have no subwoofer output. You can manually adjust the volume, the phase and the frequency roll-off. Benefiting from the research carried out from Thetis 380, Tales has a new 12-inch (30cm) bass driver. The amplifiers of the Tales series have also been Tales 400 offers an output of 300watts RMS (400W peak) and now includes an LFE input, adding to the standard line input found on previous models. It also features an automatic standby, a frequency roll-off, volume and phase control for an optimal fit of the subwoofer in relation to its placement in the room and the main speakers used.

Triangle loudspeakers and subwoofers are available from Elite Audio in the UK.



FREY 2 FROM NORDOST

Nordost has introduced the new Frey 2 USB Cable and Frey 2 USB C Adapter. The Frey 2 USB Cable is the first of Nordost's USB offerings to provide both USB C and 3.0 compatibility. The Frey 2 USB C Adapter pairs with cables using Standard-A USB connectors (both 2.0 and 3.0 compatible), allowing them to be used with components that require a USB C termination. Suggested retail price for the Frey 2 USB Cable starts at \$599.99 and is set at \$274.99 for the Adapter. Nordost cables are designed, manufactured, and hand-terminated in the USA.



One More Time



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NEWS



NEW LOWER PRICE FOR AUDEZE LCD2

Audeze has updated its LCD2 headphones with a fresh specification and a new entry-level suggested retail price of £599.

The new LCD2 Classic headphones are an over-ear, open-back design with planar-magnetic technology, a lightweight suspension headband, special crystal-infused nylon rings, and redesigned audio jacks. The original LCD2 headphones came with a travel case; that is now available as an optional extra for the LCD2 Classic, reducing core costs.



APURNA LAUNCH DIFFUSION RANGE OF AMPS

Last year, Hifi Pig visited Apurna, a French High end amplifier manufacturer based in Valence.

They had created a very high end amplifier, with bespoke finishing that was hand-crafted in the same workshops that work for the likes of Cartier and Hermès. The price of the model we heard was 200 000€

Now, they have expanded their offering with three lines of amplifier, Apogee, Evidence and Soprano.

Pricing for one mono amplifier from each collection starts as follows

SOPRANO – 29800€

EVIDENCE – 45000€

APOGEE (Pictured) – 69000€

[You can read about Hifi Pig's visit to Apurna here.](#)



XOX BANANA TO SPADE ADAPTERS

Under their connector sub-brand "XOX", Black Cat Cable has released two levels of Banana-to-Spade adapters in order to convert banana-terminated loudspeaker cables for use with a variety of binding posts that do not otherwise allow for use with banana terminations.

The XOX Reference Precision Adapter is machined from pure copper, high-polished, and Rhodium plated. A set of four pieces retails for \$224.95



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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.

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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.



TITLE OF ARTICLE

McIntosh has announced the MCT500 SACD/CD Transport. The MCT500 is a digital only unit and features 4 digital outputs: industry standard balanced, coax and optical outputs plus the MCT connector. It can be paired with any product that has standard digital inputs and a DAC.

For SACD playback, the MCT500's proprietary MCT output needs to be connected (via the included cable) to a McIntosh product with an MCT input. When an MCT connection is made, a secure digital connection is created, allowing for the playback of the high definition audio found on SACDs. Regular CDs can also be played over the MCT connection.



All common disc types can be played on the MCT500, including SACD, CD, CD-R/RW and DVD-R. A USB input is located on the front panel. In addition popular file formats such as AAC, AIFF, ALAC, DSD (up to DSD128), FLAC, MP3, WAV (up to 24-bit/192kHz) and WMA can be played from user generated CD or DVD Data Discs and USB flash drives. The disc transport has a die-cast aluminium tray operated by a digital servo and the disc's audio data is read at twice the normal. Integration with other McIntosh system components is achieved via the Power Control and data ports.

Suggested retail price (VAT, shipping and any customs duties related to current standards of individual countries are excluded): \$4,500 USD and £5995 in the UK.

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Dates For 2018

North West Audio Show News

[The North West Audio Show will still be at the amazing Cranage Hall \(De Vere Cranage Estate\) in Cheshire, will again be over two days and 2018 promises to be bigger and even better than this year's ... if that is even possible. Dates are now confirmed as Saturday and Sunday 23-24 June 2018. Doors will be open on the Saturday 10am - 6pm and Sunday 10am - 5pm.](#)

[Don't miss what promises to be a fantastic show in brilliant surroundings.](#)

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Dates For Your Diary
Cranage Hall (De Vere Cranage Estate), Cheshire. 23rd Saturday 10am - 6pm 24th Sunday 10am - 5pm JUNE

TITLE OF ARTICLE

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NEWS



CLARITY ALLIANCE NEW BOARD ANNOUNCED

The Clarity Alliance, the UK hifi industry's trade body, held its AGM and Conference at which it announced the appointments to its board of directors and the audience enjoyed informative presentations from a number of guest speakers. It was held once again in Dolby's European HQ in London.

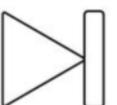
During the morning, members of The Clarity Alliance gathered for the Annual General Meeting, at which the results of the ballot for the board directors were revealed. Taking their place on the board for 2018 are: Tom Barron (PMC); Andy Clough (Haymarket); Geoff Coleman (Acoustica); Elizabeth Gould (Martins Hi-Fi); Phil Hansen (Red Sheep Communications); Adam Lee (Bowers & Wilkins); Geoff Mathews (Soundcraft Hi-Fi) and Simon Talbot (Bartletts HiFi). The past chairman, Laurence Armstrong (Henley Audio), remains on the board in an ex-officio capacity and Tom Barron remains as chairman for 2018. The board will be announcing additional co-opted directors over the coming weeks. Richard Trotter (Arcam) has retired from the board and thanks were expressed for his hard work and contributions to the running of Clarity over the past few years.

Following a demonstration of Dolby Cinema, presented by Matt Desborough of Dolby, the conference commenced with the first appearance at the event of Gennaro Castaldo and Chris Green from the BPI (British Phonographic Industry). The pair presented an overview of the changing trends in music consumption in the UK.

Highlighting this correlation was the annual state of industry presentation from Nick Simon of GfK. Total sales of audio equipment have shifted over the past few years away from traditional separates, home theatre systems and loudspeakers, which accounted for over 50% of the market in 2012, to soundbars, Bluetooth speakers and network audio systems (62% in 2017). However, within their niche categories, sales of traditional audio separates have remained resilient, with the turntable revival still showing strong performance, albeit slightly down on last year – referred to as a 'market correction' by GfK. Looking to the future, both the BPI and GfK predict strong growth in the sales of smart speakers as consumers switch to voice assistant equipped convenience solutions.

The conference welcomed back Peter Aylett, with his thought provoking and popular CES Technology Trends presentation. Artificial Intelligence and smart products were the focus of much of the new technology unveiled at CES and Peter helped the audience put into perspective what AI is, how the smart city and smart products may evolve and the benefits that they may bring over the coming years to consumers.

The final guest speaker of the day was Clarity member David Shevyn, from leading acoustic treatment company, GIK Acoustics. David's talk focused on the importance of getting the correct acoustic treatment installed in retailers' and manufacturers' demonstration facilities. He explained that, "Enabling the equipment to perform as it was designed, without undue influence of the room", is key to helping consumers make the right purchasing decision.



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NEWS



KLIPSCH FORTE III ARRIVES IN UK

The Forte III, as a member of the Klipsch Heritage line, is handcrafted in the USA. The original Forte was first introduced in 1985, but until now it has been out of production since 1996. The new generation Forte III has been updated over its predecessor both cosmetically and in its acoustic ability.

The Forte III is a three-way design, employing a 12" woofer and horn-loaded midrange and tweeter. It features K-100-T1 1" and K-70 1.75" titanium compression drivers and the newly designed K703-M midrange horn which incorporates a modified Tractrix® design with patented Mumps technology, plus a rear-mounted 15" passive radiator. The large 15" sub-bass woofer on the rear of the cabinet operates on acoustic pressure generated by the main woofer

Inside the cabinet, the Forte III has a new, steep filter passive crossover network which operates at 650Hz and 5.2kHz. Externally, the input panel has been redesigned with heavy-duty bi-wire capable input terminals. Each pair of Forte III loudspeakers is grain-matched using wood veneer panels that are harvested from the same timber.

SRP £4,000.00

Available in American Walnut, Natural Cherry, Black Ash and Distressed Oak finish.



PROJECT DEBUT III S AUDIOPHILE

The Debut turntable from Pro-Ject was introduced in the late 1990s, the latest model in the series' is the Debut III S Audiophile, and with it Pro-Ject Audio Systems have introduced some features to enhance the look and performance in new ways.

The Debut III S Audiophile features the new S-shape tonearm, making this model the first widely available Debut design to not include a straight tonearm. The tonearm is supplied with an Ortofon cartridge pre-installed. Performance is improved to new levels thanks to the specially developed aluminium/TPE isolation feet. Inspired by more expensive designs in the Pro-Ject range, the new feet effectively decouple the playback platform from unwanted vibrations. Pro-Ject Audio Systems have also unveiled their new ultra-modern facility in Mistelbach – a small town to the north of Vienna. The new offices house all of the company's staff, including marketing, design, technical, service and assembly personnel. The opening of their headquarters also coincided with the expansion of the company's turntable factory in the Czech Republic, increasing the production capabilities of this world-leading analogue company. To mark the occasion, Pro-Ject Audio Systems have rebranded themselves with a new company logo – and the Debut III S Audiophile is the first to include this new brand identity in its design.

SRP £325.00





ELITE AUDIO TO DISTRIBUTE BURSON IN UK & IRELAND

Harbeth Audio Ltd. have launched an exclusive music video series entitled Harbeth Live. Produced by Kent-based audio and video production company, Duet Media Technologies, the series will include three videos released throughout 2018 featuring British music artists, the first of which stars pianist, David Rees-Williams.

Recorded in his own home music room, the video features a multi-track piece with not one but two pianos played by David...at the same time. Famed for his improvisation, David says this is a "key element to keeping the excitement" in his music and is a "challenging but worthwhile way of playing." When it came to the recording, the aim was to make the reproduction of the sound as faithful to the original live performance as possible, with the audio then mastered in Duet's editing suite on Harbeth's flagship M40.2 model.

Alan Shaw, Designer and Managing Director, says - "The idea behind this series came out of a discussion that hi-fi is all about enjoying great sounding music in one's home. With Paul Barton Hodges of Duet Media, we decided it would be ideal to record British music acts in their musical 'home'. At the same time we wanted to show Paul's side of the process which is the final audio mixing stage using our flagship model, the M40.2."



CHORD COMPANY INTRODUCE CHORDOHMIC SILVER PLUGS

The introduction of the ChordOhmic plugs follows the implementation of silver-plated connectors in the company's flagship loudspeaker cables. For 2018, the technology has trickled down from ChordMusic and Sarum T into a more affordable plug. The ChordOhmic plug body is constructed from high-quality ABS. The plugs themselves are machined from a high-quality brass alloy sourced from Germany. The metal contact pin (4mm banana) is machined in the UK on precision lathes. The silver-plated spade connectors are constructed from pure copper bar which is heavily plated with silver.

The Wiltshire manufacturer has long been an advocate of silver, using the highly conductive material to plate its copper conductors and connectors. Now silver as a plating finish has extended into the company's entire speaker cable range. Although gold is generally perceived to be the best plating material for high-quality connectors, its only major advantage is its total resistance to corrosion (which is not normally a domestic issue). Gold is, however, the third most conductive metal available. It is outperformed by both copper (+140% better) and silver (+148% better). Better conductivity means lower resistance and, therefore, less signal loss. Less signal loss means increased performance, as expressed by Ohm's law, hence the name of The Chord Company's new speaker plugs.

ChordOhmic speaker plugs are available now priced at £8 each/£64 for eight.



NEWS



NEW PRODUCTS FROM TAGA HARMONY

Taga Harmony have been pretty busy with a trio of new products announced.

These include the third version of its high-resolution digital-to-analogue converter DA-300 v.3 It features 3 digital inputs (USB, Optical and Coaxial) and a built-in reference high-resolution 32bit / 384kHz PCM, DSD USB-DAC (ESS Sabre32 Reference ES9018K2M with patented Time Domain Jitter Eliminator and SA9227 chip).

The second is TTP-300, a miniature phono amplifier, which accepts turntables equipped with both MM and MC cartridges. Specifications as follows:

Third is the new on-wall speaker in the Audio-Video series –TAV OW-60 LCRS. (Pictured) The TAV OW-60 LCRS is designed to work in front (left and right), center or surround channels in multi-channel theatre systems. The speaker is ready for on-wall installations in both vertical and horizontal orientation or can be discreetly placed into custom-built cabinetry. The TAV OW-60 LCRS design is based on the TAV-616F technology with updates required by its specific construction.

ATOLL SIGNATURE RANGE

Atoll Electronics, based in Normandy, France, has announced their Signature range. The all new designs include 2 integrated amplifiers IN200 (pictured) & IN300 with an optional integral DSD DAC with Bluetooth and optional phono stage.



Both amplifiers are true Dual Mono with dual transformers, fast rectifiers and dual channel capacitors, all of which are Mundorf or Vishay. The IN200 produces 120W / Ch whereas the IN300 produces 155W / Ch and is supplied with the DSD DAC as standard. Both amplifiers are based on MOS-FET. In addition to the standard 5 line inputs the HT Bypass allows the unit to function as a power amp and the two pre-outs allow bi-amping or the use of a powered sub. There is also a Class A headphone amplifier.

IN200/300 Prices start from £1595 with optional DSD-DAC an extra £200.

Also included in the range are the CD200 Signature and matching AM200 Power Amp which is based on the IN200. In the CD Player, the TEAC mechanism is an audio only device designed with specific anti-vibration materials. There are 7 regulated supplies with one specific supply for the BURR-BROWN PCM1792 converter with 24bits/192 kHz, 8x oversampling, 129 dB dynamic & 129 dB signal/noise ratio. The CD200 Signature can be equipped with an optional board including 3 further digital inputs.

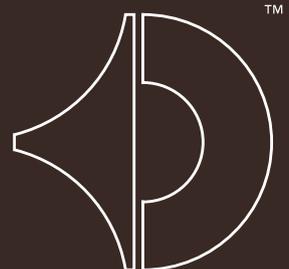




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German Design Council



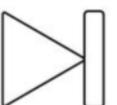
WE ARE THE
GERMAN HIGH-END
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avantgarde
ACOUSTIC

INTERVIEW

Holger Fromme is the man behind the German horn loudspeaker manufacturer Avantgarde Acoustic. Here he talks to Hifi Pig about what drove him to build these speakers and where he sees the role of innovation in loudspeaker design going forward.



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HP: When did you conceive of the idea for Avantgarde Acoustic and what was your main motivation?

HF: Before my interest in hi-fi, my interest was in live music. While young people today play video games, my friends and I went to concerts. We were living in the countryside with not too much going on. But there were approximately 20 concert locations in the bigger cities 100 km nearby. So we went out as often as we could. We (a group of friends) rented busses to travel to the concerts of Pink Floyd, Genesis, Zappa etc. and most of the legendary Open Air Festivals of that time. Music was simply our thing!

We all were used to "big" sounding music from these live concert experiences. So obviously we wanted to have the same "big" sound at home. Different to the young people today - who are raised with compressed sound played through miniature speakers - we wanted the "real" thing.

Around 1970 was as well the beginning of High-End in audio. There were no computers, no video games, no mobile phones and no internet. But instead people were interested in good equipment to reproduce music. So I grew up in the golden age of High-End. From the first money I earned as a worker in an icecream factory (at minus 20 degrees Celsius!), I purchased a Rotel receiver and then slowly but steadily I added a Teac open reel tape deck, a Thorens turntable and some big Infinity speakers. This was my first Hifi system.

My first encounter with horn speakers was at live rock concerts. At that time the bands normally used big horns systems. I especially remember a concert of Andreas Vollenweider the Rosengarten in Mannheim. He was playing his electrically amplified harp through two big white Electrovoice midrange horns, which were hanging above the stage. The sound was so incredibly clear and dynamic. Just two horns to fill a big concert hall with music. It was just fantastic!

Then, sometime later I visited a Hifi shop in Mannheim. There were two strange looking speakers standing in the corner of the room. They had a big wooden front panel and a relatively small speaker grill on the top. I had never seen these speakers before and asked the shop owner. He explained that these are "Klipschhorns", which use the corner of the room as part of their horn curve. I got curious and he played the Klipschhorns for me: "Money" from the "Dark Side of the Moon" LP of Pink Floyd. He cranked up the volume and I heard this song like I have never heard before from a hifi system! I was simply totally blown away. It was incredible and so real, like being at the concert.

HP: The ideas of horns for musical reproduction in the home is not a new one, and by some is perhaps seen as an outdated technology, how would you counter this argument and how do you perceive horns as being a better way of getting listeners closer to the music?

HF: Our horn speakers are based on the physics of mother nature. They embrace the same principles that govern the functions of the human ear. The funnel shaped opening of the horn amplifies even the most minuscule deviations in sound pressure.

To better understand, one has to closer look at the basic function of a speaker. A speaker has to convert an electrical music signal into acoustical sound waves. Regardless whether it is a dynamic, an electrostatic, a magnetostatic or a horn speaker design, in every speaker a membrane has to move backwards and forwards with the pulse of the music. The more heavy the membrane, the more the

inertia of this moving mass will oppose the movement. Or in other words: the more heavy the membrane, the more the details in music will be lost!

So every speaker designer in the world tries to minimize the moving mass of the driver. A logical trick would be to just make the driver/membrane smaller. This way the moving mass could be easily reduced. But unfortunately, by decreasing the size of the driver, the output would decrease as well. So, the smaller driver would have to make bigger excursions to reproduce the same impulse, e.g. make longer strokes. And as the membrane has to travel longer distances, it needs a longer time to do so. Or in other words: the longer the excursion the membrane has to stroke, the more time passes and the more the details in music will be lost!

For the speaker designer this is like spinning in circles. Either the membranes are too big and heavy, or they are too small and thus too slow! A horn is the unique solution to overcome this supposed irresolvable situation. With a horn you can increase the acoustical output, reduce the size and decrease the required excursions of any membrane to an absolute minimum. All at the same time, just by simply installing a horn in front of the membrane!

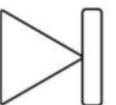
The magnitude of this functionality of a horn can be easily shown in the laboratory with an impulse response measurement. Just take any driver and measure its impulse step response at 1 Watt. At this power an average driver will have around 86 dB sound pressure level and the oscilloscope will show how the driver will move forward with lag and slowly comes back to a deferred stop. Now take a horn, install it in front of the very same driver and repeat the measurement at 1 watt. Unexpectedly the oscilloscope will show more or less the same curve as before. Even with a horn, the driver will move forward with lag and slowly come back to a deferred stop. So what is the advantage of using a horn?!?!? The difference is in the acoustical output of the horn loaded driver. With a horn, the driver will have an acoustical output of approx. 100 dB. This is practically the same output, as 25 drivers without a horn! So it is obvious that the measurement of the impulse step response at a given power of 1 Watt does not make any sense. It is like comparing apples and oranges. Correctly the measurement has to be done at a given acoustical output. So, if you now repeat the measurement with the horn loaded driver at 0,04 Watt, you will get exactly the same 86 dB as the driver without a horn at 1 Watt. And now take a look at the oscilloscope! At 0,04 Watt the driver is hardly doing any excursion! So on the time axis it reproduces the peak more accurately with significantly less lag. And as the excursion is so much reduced, the driver comes back to standstill much faster. The performance of the driver loaded with a horn is worlds apart.

A horn is the most natural and powerful way to amplify sound waves. At a given output, speakers with horns have an up to 95% lighter membrane. Driver over excursion and the resulting distortion is avoided. In addition, for a given driver size, they have an up to 25-times higher acoustical output. As a result, the audio signature is livelier, as the membrane only has to execute a fraction of the movement. A horn is the most sophisticated form of any loudspeaker: minimal mass and motion - maximum power - increased fidelity – reduced distortion.

HP: You have not been afraid of embracing new technology and the introduction of your Zero Series of loudspeakers created a lot of interest when they were launched. Please explain to readers what the new technologies were.



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HF: Life is getting faster, more stressful and more complex. Is it not time to settle down a bit? Back to the essential, the original and the real?

These are exactly the questions we asked ourselves when designing the ZERO 1. How can one reduce, in a nutshell, a multi-component audiophile audio system? How can you simplify the installation and the user interface? How can we integrate the system into state-of-the-art wireless players with the help of state-of-the-art digital technology? How do we manage, based on the acoustic parameters of the horn technology, to design a product that can easily be integrated into the living space? And last-but-not-least: how can we further improve the sound by integrating and intelligently linking all components?

We have found answers to these questions. Answers that are unusual. Answers that are elaborate. And always answers that we think are correct. The result was the ZERO 1. An extremely complex and high-tech product for us developers. But at the same time for you, the listener, a powerful plug & play audiophile system, as it has never been before in this condensed a format.

We believe that truly innovative products can provide answers to the needs of tomorrow's people today. And we believe that high-quality music playback can make an important contribution to this. Just let go, enjoy the moment and let yourself be carried away to another world. Is not that what we all want here and there on the way to a return to the essential, the original and the real?

Connectivity is one of the keywords at the last couple of years. i.e. Modern devices must integrate seamlessly into our digital world. And we have rigorously transferred these basic principles and launched the first fully digital wireless horn system after 5 years of development. Connect to mains, connect to Wi-Fi and press PLAY in your smartphone. That's all!

Compared to normal wireless speakers, the Zero 1 has three key advantages: First, a powerful 250 Hz spherical horn is installed, which reacts much more precisely to music signals. Second, a super-fast 66-bit FPGA processor calculates a smooth, flat frequency response with perfect phase response. And of course, there are six amplifiers with a total of 1,000 watts integrated, which are among the best there is today.

HP: How you feel new technologies helped bring high-end audio to a wider, and perhaps less audiophile market

HF: As I mentioned above, people want to simplify their lives and not make it more complicated. High-End from the old days is very complicated. To get new customers interested we need products like the ZERO 1. This will help our industry to bring high quality sound to a wider market.

HP:How you have implemented what you learned with the Zero series into other loudspeakers you produce.

HF:The big thing we learned with the ZERO1 is its programmability. In our labs R&D can perfectly fine tune all parameters of our speakers to optimise the interaction of every component and to get the sound people expect from us. But there is one variable we simply cannot determine up front – it's the acoustics of the room the speaker will be operated in. If it's a regular room – which acoustically behaves like the norm – everything may be fine. Our speakers are not designed for an anechoic

chamber but are already configured in the factory to the acoustical parameters of a "typical" listening room.

But what happens, if the room has unfavourable dimensions and/or is furnished in an unusual way? If you are lucky, it is ok. But maybe not. The acoustic of a room has a significant influence on the sound. Low frequencies have big wavelengths – for example at 70 Hz the sound wave has a length of nearly 5 meter (16 feet). These long wave fronts are being reflected by the walls. They bounce back, in some areas overlay with each other, in other zones negatively interfere and obliterate. As a result, in some areas certain frequencies are being reproduced too loud, in others too soft. During the past years we have meticulously investigated on how to solve this problem. We are proud that we can now offer with the XD series of products a holistic concept to optimise the interaction of the speaker in the customer's room.

At first we needed to create the technical prerequisites, to be able to manipulate the bass response of our speakers. To do this we incorporated complex digital processing power in all subwoofer systems of our new XD Series of speakers. Its 10 parametric equalizers allow us to set more than 100 million different frequency curves. Or to put it in simple words: everything is possible.

HP: Your most recent addition to the Avantgarde Acoustic family of loudspeakers is the XD range which includes active DSP in their design. How has this technology been received by "purist" audiophiles, many of whom see any kind of digital manipulation of the audio signal, despite it being used extensively in professional studios, as being incorrect in some way. How would you counter this more "traditional" thinking?

HF: Yes, in the old days the disadvantages of DSP technologies might have been a limiting factor. Today this is different. The DSPs available today are incredibly powerful. That's why we believe that DSP technology is perfectly suited to align any speaker to the customers room. This is not so important for mid & high frequencies, but definitely is essential for low frequency integration. I am convinced that in some years to come, all speakers playing in our league will have digital processing incorporated in the bass frequencies.

HP: Do you perceive your loudspeakers as works of acoustic art or does form much follow function in a Bauhaus sense in your designs?

HF: Our design philosophy is very much a concept of "functional design". So yes, I believe it has some sense of Bauhaus design.

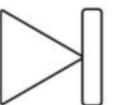
HP: Your designs have won many awards outside the audio and high-fidelity arena, including awards The German Design Council. How important is it for you personally to receive such recognition for your work and your products?

HF: Yes, for sure for all of us these awards are a fantastic recognition of our work. But it is also our mission to bring the quest for high quality music reproduction to a wider range of people. And here the awards help a lot.

HP: We've experienced the Avantgarde Acoustic effect at many shows around the world and it is clear that you are not afraid of



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giving attendees something out of the ordinary. At Munich High-End 2017 you had the Trios and a full complement of six Bass Horns, which as well as playing more conventional recorded music also provided the sound system for renowned, and very energetic, drummer Olad Kafri. Where did you get this idea from and how do you think it was received?

HF: In actual fact I meet Oded Kafri performing in the streets of Berlin. He played on analogue drums and it was so amazing. So dynamic. That was when the idea was born. I bought a digital drum set and invited Oded.

The reaction was incredible.

[Watch the video](#)

HP: Whilst on the subject of Hifi shows, it's not uncommon for the audience at an Avantgarde Acoustic presentation to applaud at the end of the demonstration, something rarely experienced. There is a clear and palpable feeling that people have really connected with the music being played and the experience as a whole. How important is it that people connect on an emotional level with the music and how do you feel your loudspeakers facilitate this kind of spontaneous response?

HF: We believe in people who celebrate and share the small moments in life. Who live conscious and take good time when they do something. People who treat other people with respect. Who care about sustainability and intrinsic values. And who like art & culture. And last but not least: who simply love music.

And there are many many people in the world who share this!!!! And apparently these people like the kind of uncompressed, direct and explosive sound of the Avantgarde's. Avantgarde is an emotional sound. It's fun.

HP: The market for your speakers could be seen as a little different from the ordinary given the size, design and price. You have also had press coverage in high-end architectural and lifestyle publications. Do you see the market for your kind of products as being something more than the audiophile market and do you see this as a vital move for the industry as a whole?

HF: We do not believe in a small isolated audiophile society who care about products only. We believe in high quality music. So yes, I believe this is a vital move of our industry.

HP: When relaxing at home what speakers, we're assuming Avantgarde, do you use and what music do you enjoy?

HF. I am a lucky guy. I have a Trio system with 6 basshorns at home. So yes, I am a little bit spoiled :-)

My father is a big Jazz enthusiast and my mother an Opera lover. So when I was young I grew up at home with Classical Jazz music of the 1950-60s and with Italian Opera music. But Jazz music never really was my favourite kind of music. As I was born in 1956, my music "career" started with the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Who, Led Zeppelin, Frank Zappa etc. Since then my personal preferences have changed very much during the past years. Currently I very much enjoy Industrial Rock, Crossover, Trance and House music.

And beside these more contemporary music styles, there is simply nothing more relaxing and beautiful than listening to Classical music or Opera concert after work at home!

HP: Music in the home is changing with more and more people using smaller systems (Sonos etc) and streaming services. Where do you see high-end in the next ten years time?

HF: Bigger, nicely designed "horn" systems with streaming devices :-)



REVIEW

AURALIC POLARIS ALL IN ONE STREAMER AMPLIFIER



Based around Auralic's Lightning DS Streaming Platform, which is one of the most intuitive and responsive software systems around for devices of this type, Polaris incorporates a wired/wireless streamer, a music server - via additional HDD/SSD, a DAC, a moving magnet phonostage, a preamplifier and a stereo power amplifier. Dan Worth tries out this £2875 box of tricks.

DAN WORTH

Polaris utilises AURALiC Flexible Filters and Femto Master Clock, supports quad-rate DSD and PCM up to 32 bit/384kHz. The powerful internal stereo amplifier module can deliver a continuous 120 watts per channel into 8 ohms or 180 watts per channel from its on-board, high power, high efficiency Class D modules.

The diminutive 33cm x 26cm x 6.5cm Polaris is packed with enough connectivity to make even most separate systems feel vulnerable in the flexibility stakes. Boasting a vast range of digital inputs including AES/EBU, Coaxial, Toslink, USB device to computer, 2 x USB host to storage and DAC, RJ45 Gigabit Ethernet and 802.11b/g/n/ac Tri-Band WiFi along with two pairs of analogue inputs and one pair of analogue outputs.

Streaming options aren't overlooked by Auralic either - as well as having the option for an on-board HDD/SSD storage, USB drives can be added and support for Tidal, Qobuz, Roon, Network Shared Folders on PC/Mac/Linux or a Network Attached Storage Device (NAS), AirPlay, Bluetooth, Songcast and Internet Radio are all supported. There is no support for Spotify but by now most of you will indeed have migrated to Tidal or Qobuz I'd imagine, and remember that if you don't already use an iOS device then you will require one for Lightning DS to control any Auralic product and all of its features.

FIT AND FINISH

Being dinky, very well constructed and having a little bit of weight to it makes the Polaris feel substantial and its cosmetics are great too in either of the two finishes - black or silver. I remember having a little jab or two at the Aries for its looks, calling it the "Hunchback of Auralic" but the guys have really made up for it with the Polaris with it's all

aluminium chassis which falls in line with the Altair Streaming DAC and Vega DAC - exuding quality and putting it into a more lifestyle category of products but with a Hifi pedigree to boot. I really like the design a lot.

SETTING UP

Auralic's product setup is a cinch! I hooked up to my Ayon loudspeakers, a power cable and an Ethernet cable to complete the oh so tricky task of physical setup and as long as you have an iOS device on hand the initial software setup takes 5 minutes or so, with each consecutive use from there on taking a mere few seconds to enter you into the Lightning DS portal of features. It's incredibly easy to flick between streaming options, local radio and onboard or off board storage, leaving you stress free and eager to listen to some music.

THE SOUND

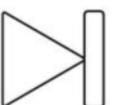
With any Auralic product, the sound quality for the cost is quite generous - along with its feature packed design. Using the onboard amplifier offers a clean, distortion free sound that even at higher volume levels remains very stable and engaging.

The unit gives a good impression of transparency and resolution as my first pieces of music proved. I generally start by playing some acoustic and vocals and both female and male vocals to gauge a balance of the sound and these were dealt with very well indeed, giving me a strong projected vocal that sat slightly forward of the accompanying band members. A very powerful female vocal may at



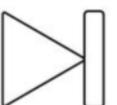
REVIEW

AURALiC POLARIS ALL IN ONE STREAMER AMPLIFIER



REVIEW

AURALIC POLARIS ALL IN ONE STREAMER AMPLIFIER



REVIEW

AURALIC POLARIS ALL IN ONE STREAMER AMPLIFIER

times suffer from a lack of absolute body, offering a more detailed texture over colour tonality in the lower end of the midrange but this is not a criticism, rather an observation of the sonic implementation of the class d amplifier and if you have ever spent a great deal of time with class d you will understand this this is a sonic signature of the technology. Upper midrange which can make or break a lot of designs in my experience was very well controlled, allowing soaring vocals to stay away from any harshness or grain whether I was streaming locally or via the Internet.

Nils Lofgren's playful guitar work conveyed great precision and leading edge sharpness from the strings was very accurate and polished, with decays well rendered into the acoustic space. When things speed up the Polaris keeps up, it can do intricate and complicated passages justice and with the correct speaker will flesh out accordingly making for a very pleasing listen.

Having everything at your finger tips with the Polaris is a joy - apart from vinyl playback, which is what it is and something that I don't use so I cannot comment on the onboard phonostage.

I did however use the radio feature a fair bit and although the sonics are dependent on the station listened too. I find that when we accept that there are going to be limitations on certain aspects of sound we stop criticising them so much. In turn I did find myself enjoying radio playback as more of a background thing and often turned the volume up more when a song I liked came on and admittedly had the odd little bob or two listening to a few stations I like.

120 watts per channel from this small box of tricks has the ability to push out beat driven music from most speakers very well, with a soundstage that has good strong width and a very good front to back presentation. I played a substantial amount of electronica through the Polaris that gave great energy and weight to the sound, punchy and detailed in the bottom end that had me turning up the dial more than usual as the in-built amp is just so clean and distortion free.

I've heard many class d amplifiers to date now and always champion them in subwoofers and although I enjoy them very much in their own rights I still prefer a good A/B for myself, in a main system - especially with my current speakers which are clean in presentation themselves. What Auralic have to offer from the Polaris is the ability to tonally match the amplifier to a better degree as the unit is an all in one, taking away the user's own trial and error matching equipment and in my case primarily being a streamer of local and internet based files is the perfect match.

I actually ended up keeping the Polaris for longer than I normally would a piece of equipment due to this and used it fairly often. For me this was key to adjusting and appreciating the unit more. Oh so often we can fall into the trap of hearing something and passing judgement too quickly on its sound, whether it's an initial wow and then a subsequent let down over time or a rash decision based on different imparting an impression of not being correct. I liked the Polaris from the outset but I must admit it really did grow on me further the more I used it. A smoother speaker cable and some good paper cones will exploit the abilities of the Polaris to a greater degree, retaining all of its detail and transparent poise but allow for a little bit more of a warmer tone - if that's something you want from your sound.

CONCLUSION

The Polaris is an agile sounding and rich feature packed piece of equipment from Auralic - who over the past couple of years have really stamped their own mark on the market. Combining their Lightning DS app with carefully implemented electronics and almost a fail safe, ready to use every time switch on and go unit, it just makes you feel that Auralic have cared for you in every aspect of simply enjoying your music without any faffing about.

The sound of the Polaris is very informative and detailed - class d may not be to everybody's tastes but Auralic do their implementation of the technology well and just like any other piece of equipment synergy is key to getting the best out of a product. I'd say as far as all in one diminutive designs go the Polaris is a terrific piece of kit that should be considered as one of your list's leaders when looking for a unit of good pedigree, overall design, features and ease of use.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Very well made, with a lovely laid out rear panel and small easy to integrate size

Sound Quality : Expectantly clean, informative and distortion free

Value For Money: Really quite generous, offering a plethora of features for the price

Pros : Good clean sound, agile, detailed with a great amount of features and of course the great Lightning DS app

Cons: Requires a little care for ultimately matching speakers if you outdo like a richer warmer tone

Price: £2875



REVIEW

REL T9i SUBWOOFER



Integrating a subwoofer into a 2-Channel Hifi system is often far more difficult than adding one in a Home Cinema setup. Both require fine tuning in order to convey a cohesive response and unilateral load of the room, but in order to achieve the speed, poise and polish needed for convincing musical playback, the task of joining the lower frequencies of a subwoofer to the main speakers can be extremely frustrating, yet ultimately rewarding. Dan Worth integrates the £1000 REL T9i Subwoofer into his system.

DAN WORTH

Over the past 20 years or so I have had numerous subwoofers in both AV and Hifi sound systems, some can be fantastic for speed and punch and others great for huge impact and pressurised room interaction - or high spls. Cone size, cone material, cabinet structure, amplification type and strength, feet type, platform material and overall positioning all play a part in overall performance.

Technologically, subwoofers have come on a bundle since the earlier incarnations of bolting a high wattage A/B plate amplifier to a carpeted box or slapping a huge driver into a coffin sized enclosure. These days performance is obtained from notably smaller and stiffer enclosures, stronger drive units and more rigid baskets, along with, and in the majority of cases, Class D amplification, requiring lower output power supplies - which in turn generate less heat, ultimately making them more efficient and also offering the end user greater flexibility in placement.

In comparison to the larger coffee table sized subwoofers of yesteryear REL have dedicated their abilities to all of the above and the result is a new-look line up, designed for maximum performance from as small a footprint as feasibly possible.

I remember owning a few of REL's older behemoths, including the Stadium - an isobaric loaded twin 10" Volt driver monster which could in theory strip the artex of ceilings in neighbouring streets, not just adjoining homes. A Strata III - a single 10" long-throw, downward firing unit utilising REL's ABC filtering circuitry and 100W DC-coupled MOSFET amplifier, which was a step up from previous versions in speed and ultimate control - and a Storm - I can't remember which model it was but I think was a 10" driver, 100W and weighed around

30kgs or so. I've had many other subwoofers in my time, some dedicated for just one format and others which crossed over into both music and cinema systems - some better than others.

FIT AND FINISH

The fit and finish of the latest range of REL subwoofers is stunning, if not somewhat limited in colour choice. My first comments to the U.K. Sales Manager was "just black or white gloss?" and I literally answered my own question as he began to speak. It quickly dawned on me that specific wood veneers would be hard to match with main speakers and it's better to have a contrasting sub than one that's kind of close. He elaborated by saying "Yes, your speakers are a light cheery, now the English light cherry is significantly different to say a Scandinavian or American light cherry, it's better to have something pretty in its own right, making its own statement, rather than trying, yet failing to match the main speakers correctly". I'll give REL 10/10 for common sense here, I completely agree with the approach.

There are companies that vinyl wrap items, you can take them a sample piece or a photo of something you wish to match (much like buying paint) and they can in high-definition repeat the colour, or perceived texture and wrap your subwoofer for a very reasonable price, which in turn protects the original finish for further system changes or resale as these vinyl wraps go on as easy as they come off, leaving nothing but REL's twelve pass multi-direction deep lacquer finish. Just as it was when it came out of the box.

All knobs/dials along with the rear heat sink are finished in a matching satin, slightly darker than neutral anodisation, which adds to the overall high quality finish and attention to detail, with matching engraved alloy



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square feet which have a sorbothane pad at the bottom, rated to weight. REL do not favour spikes as they can concentrate vibrations rather than eliminate room interaction on a structural level and I agree with their choice. For me, I would still pursue further isolation with possible granite, bamboo or mica type platforms - possibly on sorbothane, especially for those with floorboards in order to add some further reinforcement to low level extremes.

What is interesting about the feet on their subwoofers is that they are all of differing sizes and heights dependent on model and frequency tested for best integration of the downward facing passive bass radiators.

The badge on the top of each subwoofer has varying sizes, as this is not just a simple panel mounted badge, it's actually a structural asset. The badge is a plug, a metal shaft that proceeds into the cabinet walls and acts as a 'null point', curbing and eradicating structural borne vibrations in order to keep the chassis more inert.

BASIC INSTALLATION

This can always be tricky but extremely rewarding with some patience and a good array of music.

The first step is to ascertain an initial preferable position for the subwoofer to live and I advise a little flexibility on its specific placement but I'm lucky enough to be able to work my room around a system and remodel if necessary.

Connecting the REL subwoofer is a breeze. Ensure that you use the high-level input and not RCA, especially for 2-Channel. Refer to the manual for the colour coded wire identifications of left and right channels pertaining to the 'high level input' cables provided - these connect directly to the output speaker terminals on the main amplifier and have bare wire ends. I'd advise to attach spades or bananas to these, which would be the opposite to what you already have your main speakers terminated with. If your main speakers already have bananas, then add spades, unscrew your binding posts a little and insert the spades, ensuring that once screwed back down tightly you double check the bananas are pushed fully back in. Likewise for main speakers that already have spade terminated loudspeaker cables.

Note: REL do not provide a left and right phono input jack on their current range of subwoofers.

If the main speakers are actives and if the preamplifier or DAC/pre has a second set of outputs then a Y-Splitter Cable can be used to send both channels of information to the line level input on the subwoofer, or I'm instructed that a single phono cable, preferably from the right channel output will suffice - I actually tried a single cable during the review with a line level from just the right channel and I must say, the presence and drama of the sub was fantastic in this configuration, although the high level connections to both stereo channels superseded any of the aforementioned alternatives. REL include a 10m stereo cable for this purpose which has a 'speakon' plug at the sub end - a locking socket used in PA gear. Other aftermarket variants and lengths are available and making your own if you are a bit of a tweaker like myself is a very simple task.

A very standard, what I and many call a 'throw away' power cable is included in the package; I'd like to see something a little more heavy duty and nicer for the more expensive subwoofers, but then I could say that about every manufacturer of high end gear - the included cable is certified and more than fit for the job electrically.

Note: give some forethought to possible subwoofer placement and how long you may require the power cable to be, there's nothing worse than sitting there with you nice new shiny subwoofer and nowhere to plug it in.

TUNING

On the rear of the T9i are inputs for line level, LFE (dedicated subwoofer output) and the high level, which would be fed by the left and right outputs from the speaker binding posts on the amplifier - which is how I have the subwoofer setup.

Controls for gain, crossover frequency and phase will tune the T9i into any setup. This is where patience, positioning and lots and lots of listening comes into play.

Note : Don't get frustrated if you have dedicated a good amount of time to trying to dial in the sub and aren't getting great results, because sometimes it's only when you place the sub where you would either least expect it to work or wasn't planning on aesthetically having it that all of a sudden everything makes sense.

Put on a piece of music that you know very well to begin, preferably a piece with a good bass response and turn the gain on the subwoofer to just over half way.

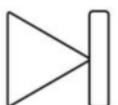
Toggle the phase control switch from 0 - 180 degrees finding the loudest of the two settings, in most cases this will be 0 degrees. Leave the switch here.

Begin to play some music and have a walk around the room to identify any bass nodes (accumulated areas of too much bass).

Some people like to then dial the gain on the sub back to what they believe is a reasonable level and others like to start at zero gain and work their way up. There's no right or wrong way here, but the idea is to have the gain set to a level where you cannot hear the sub as a defined speaker, you simply want to have it merged ever so gently in that you do not notice it's there until you switch it off altogether.

Continue to play the same piece of music, adjusting the gain level until you can just hear the sub as a more localised point and then turn the gain back a notch.

Adjusting the crossover next - this will allow you to have the sub integrate its first point of integration to where your own loudspeakers trail off. REL I think have been extremely clever here in not marking the frequencies around the dial. Most people have a preconceived idea of where a sub's crossover point should be due to the spec sheet of their speakers. However, in the real world and with roll-off and room acoustics, the same speakers will respond differently depending on environment and placement.



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Note: ensuring that your loudspeakers are positioned correctly first of all and your sweet spot is even to the listening position. This is extremely important for linear bass response. You will be surprised at how many rooms require one speaker slightly more forward than the other and how effective a non-symmetrical toe in can be, so again, take your time and explore this thoroughly.

Leaving the numbers off the crossover frequency dial takes away any preconceived ideas about where the dial should be set, again I'd suggest setting it initially to half way and work your way back a click or two at a time.

What your listening out for here is a moment where you feel that all of a sudden an overlapping, over pronounced bottom end, or hump disappears into a more linear and cohesive extension of what your main speakers already achieve in the bass regions.

Once at this point turn the sub off and on again, repeating the same music over and over, as you get to the lower end of your crossover adjustments - you may find that you now need to add a click or two upwards on the gain to compensate for the lower bass notes which do not sound as loud now.

When you get to this stage the ultimate fine tuning comes into play and the fun for me really begins.

FINE TUNING

The following couple of sections will explain a little more of the fine tuning of the subwoofer into your room.

Any audiophile who is truly committed to having the most linear response from his or her setup will love the really nitty-gritty of ultimate fine tuning. This is where the smallest adjustments in positioning and dialing in the crossover and gain gives the biggest rewards.

It's a wise decision to have some musical material that isn't your normal listening fodder too, this can help to throw a spanner in the works and bring you back down to Earth when you find yourself so heavily invested in getting one genre correct, to only find the next time you come to listen and play something else that you're not beating yourself around the head and thinking that you need to start all over again.

Remember - your tuning a bass speaker to your loudspeakers and room, not to a particular type of music.

Your previous efforts should have now found a good dB level and fairly accurate crossover point to compliment a wide range of music as the sub will now be fairly well tuned to the speakers. One of the most exciting aspects of this new-found synergy is that as well as obtaining extended bass from the main speakers a richer midrange and vocal will be heard. Also, the top-end will be under-pinned with more perceived body and richer undertones, fleshing out the entire frequency range is the key ability of a well-made sub.

CONSIDERING ROOM NODES

It's time to walk around your listening space again. With your newly configured settings the hope is that you will not find any points where bass is gathering and giving a boomy effect.

If you find any large over-bearing areas of boom, the solution is to slightly move the subwoofer's angle, on axis firstly and then secondly off axis to a new location. Try initially by pivoting the subwoofer's toe-in angle, spinning it slightly and keeping one back foot stationary and re-checking the node(s).

In most situations this will increase or decrease the size of the node(s).

Angle the sub to remain where the node(s) are at their lowest and begin moving the subwoofer a few inches left, right, backwards or forwards and re-check your node(s). Very often they will be cured with very small amounts of adjustments to positioning.

I myself had two large nodes in my room, toeing and small movements of the T9i increased and decreased them to such a degree that the feedback I was given warranted me to actually move the unit around a foot and a half in total with an extra 30% toeing to my initial setup position, although my gain and crossover levels remained very consistent.

Ensure that you listen to your room and what feedback it is giving you, rely on the settings installed to the subwoofer from the and don't allow any frustration to doubt your initial intently setup parameters.

Once you have lowered the room node(s) to a non-obtrusive level, you can again very fine tune a notch at a time the gain and/or crossover as the room will respond more linearly, these adjustments will be super fine and usually just to preference after following the initial setup steps.

Some may prefer a little more bass than others do, but I stress again, for the most natural reproduction any subwoofer should simply disappear, should not be able to be localised and for any 2-Channel system is simply to extend and enhance frequency response, not overall thump levels so to speak. If you can only tell that a subwoofer was present in the system once switched off then you have integrated it correctly.

THE SOUND

REL's T9i sits at the top of the Ti range and alike 99% of REL's subwoofers is an infinite baffle design or closed non-ported box, making the unit very fast and expressive. Once configured correctly my Ayon's became very well fleshed out and richer in tonality through their entire frequency range.

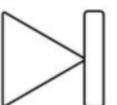
I played London Grammar's 'Hey Now' as one of my first pieces of music, simply to hear what the T9i offered to the clarity of the rubber ball used to strike the skin of each of the five consecutive bass notes. I was pleased that the leading edges of these notes remained defined and without any blunting due to the woofers integration - something that would no doubt happen when integrating a subwoofer with a ported enclosure or simply setting the crossover incorrectly. Each decay made way for the next leading edge and Hannah Reid's vocal had the usual amounts of tonal accuracy, with the T9i adding an extra portion of texture to her sultry tone.

I played one of my usual test tracks - Rachele Farell's 'I Can't Explain'. Now I have refrained from talking about this track of late but it was very important for clarification of the T9i's abilities in a stereo system. As previously mentioned Rachele has a world record for her vocal range



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and with the subwoofer in place it felt as if I was, for the very time so much closer to hearing her live. My Ayons would always reproduce her beautiful vocal with incredible range and articulation but now with the T9i in place I had the pleasure of greater tonal accuracy and a good sprinkle more emotion. Another pertinent point to mention on this piece of music was the "colour" of the piano. I would say that previous to having a decent subwoofer with the Ayons, the piano sounded a little more heavy in overtones, whereas now it was underpinned with a new found room acoustic that made the musician feel so much more alive and real in his ability to manage attention on his instrument and not just being overshadowed for five and half minutes whilst Rachelle wails into the microphone.

I had enjoyed my system very much since integrating the T9i - initially before getting the pairing correct there was a clear lack of synergy and I'd say within about an hour/hour and a half of careful listening, tweaking of levels and placement of the modestly sized sub the results were really paying off.

I switched the REL off again after some time of recreational listening, where I had put the iPad I use to write on to one side whilst getting lost in the music to be somewhat understandably disappointed with the lack of body and tonal richness I was left with just listening to the main speakers alone, which are reported to go down to a respectable 35hz and never have conveyed any lack of body - previous to pairing with a sub, which I had only ever done twice before with these speakers, which was a complete let down if I'm honest - one the same cost as the T9i and another three times the cost.

It's been a long time since I used a REL subwoofer and from memory I'd say that the performance of today's offerings really are in another class if the T9i is anything to go by. Tighter, more expressive and more controlled at their frequency's lowest extremes. One concern that kept poking at me was that I was using a thousand pounds worth of subwoofer with speakers that cost a hell of a lot more, even before their £3500 crossover upgrades. With the inspiring level of performance I was hearing, my thoughts immediately wondered to thinking about how the companies 'S' range of subwoofers would sound and how much more intricate the details of the lowest abilities of an 'S' range sub would factor in.

I will indeed convey my thoughts later this year once I start to explore more from the latest range of REL subwoofers, but for now let's curb my wandering imagination and get back to the product in hand.

With the notable speed and accuracy of the T9i sub I played a range of Pop and Electronica. Impressive could be considered an understatement. I've always been a kid at heart and I've always had that little adrenaline rush come over me when I go back to some of the heavy dance and trance music of my late teens. I'll say thanks to REL here as I was certainly transported back to my happy place where nothing else mattered but the music and the nights were long.

Pressure levels in my room were to the point where the room seemed to have its own pulsating heartbeat and transients were fast and impactful - especially when following quite passages, but the most impressive aspect of the whole system was the timing, the undeniable accuracy and speed of the sub that kept up so well with my all ceramic array of drive units. There has only been a handful of nightclubs I ever remember having really good sound systems, with most being overly

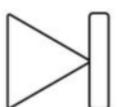
bright, grainy and so poorly timed, with bass notes aplenty. The T9i was just what the Ayons needed to flex their muscles and portray a captivating experience that brought some real fun to this review and really proved that with a little patience, the careful setup period undertook to bring the REL into the system so cohesively had certainly paid off.

Talking about fun - one of the most important factors of building a system for me and integrating a subwoofer is achieving good bounce from the bass. Good bounce keeps the music flowing, it's essentially the primary factor in what makes us toe-tap and makes us want to sing and dance along to the music. This is where the high-end can often fail to impress a lot of us. Often equipment can be too detailed, over accurate and just lose any real flow, stopping us from enjoying the music. I've owned many cheaper systems and also heard many cheaper systems that, in comparison to a lot of the more expensive setups I've heard, lack the overall resolution, focus and dynamics but absolutely excel on music, fun, bounciness and emotion.

Having a review system is an extremely tricky setup to put together - for one it has to be transparent and effective enough to outline any product inserted anywhere in the chain and two it still has to reach you personally. Now many will say "it must sound good he's a reviewer" but believe me, we have a harder job of keeping consistency in our systems than anybody else. There is the constant upheaval of products coming in and out. Opinions from manufacturers and industry professionals, as well as friends and our biggest critics - ourselves! The only tip I can give anybody is sheer perseverance and the ability to walk away and come back another day if things aren't sounding right. I have had some hideous times with my system in the past through a number of factors or bad influences, but in time we all learn how to setup correctly and trust our own ears, that's why it's a hobby. So, my advice is just have fun with it and take your time.

When the U.K. Sales Manager for REL - Rob Hunt arrived with a T9i in hand, of course the sensible thing to do was to have him sit down for a good period of time and understand what my system does before we integrate the sub. I must admit I was very flattered when he said "this has to be one of the best review systems I've ever heard" adding "even though it would warrant one of our better subs realistically, I think that you will be amazed at what the T9i is going to add once we configure it". Once added and with a huge smile I remember saying to Rob, "I don't know about the best system you have heard Rob, but I'd defiantly say that this is the best I've heard this current setup - when can I try the 'S' range?", we both smiled and had a little laugh before we just sat there quietly going through various tracks from different genres.

And that's my point you see, it doesn't matter how much something costs, it's the way it connects the music to you and how lost you can get in the emotional qualities of a performance - whether it's JS Bach or Bastille, the reward is in the time you take to find equipment that focuses on the performance and how well you can integrate all the component parts. For me, I was very happy with my system and adding the T9i from REL with an open mind gave me another layer of tonal colour, richness, undertones and musicality that was first noticeable in added bass extension but was just as quickly apparent in fleshing out every part of the frequency range in such a natural and impactful



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way, that it actually took me a while after taking the T9i out of my system to adjust back to my normal presentation.

CONCLUSION

I'll be the first to admit that I didn't hold out much hope in being able to integrate a subwoofer so easily into my current setup. Primarily due to not accounting for one over recent years and placing more and more furniture into the space, which in turn decreased the ability of positioning for such an addition.

But I have to give great credit to the guys at REL Acoustics for creating a subwoofer which A. has the perfect range of controls to seamlessly take on the remaining last couple notes in the bottom end so well as well as fleshing out the midrange and treble very naturally and B. has such a fast and agile responsiveness that it kept up with the speed of my ceramic drivers.

Once the careful tuning and positioning was achieved, a whole new layer of tonality brings music more to life. Every detail from top to bottom gained a more organic feel and the overall presence of vocals, whether female or male took on a more life-like appeal. I urge anybody considering a subwoofer in their system to take a look at what is affordable to them within the vast range at REL and even though a final fit and finish sub for me to compliment my main speakers would be somewhere a little further up the line, I could honestly say that the T9i was an act I would visit again without hesitation. As stated above careful integration is key, with the results being incredibly rewarding.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Excellent finish, right down to the knobs and feet

Sound Quality: Once integrated well the T9i will surpass expectations

Value For Money: great!

Pros: Attractive and well finished, with a sound quality that matches, impactful, delicate and cohesive

Cons: As with all subwoofers, integration is dependant on room configuration and can take some patience to evolve the speaker into a strong cohesive match

Price :£1000

Finishes: Gloss Black, Gloss White



REVIEW

FLUX HIFI SONIC STYLUS CLEANER



Vibrating stylus cleaners are not a new concept, but the Flux Hifi Sonic stylus operates at a lower frequency to older types, which, say the company, makes it perfectly safe to use on your precious cartridge.

STUART SMITH

I got this funky little unit passed to me at Munich last year but if truth be known it has sat on the side of the Hifi rack up until a couple of months ago when I finally plucked up the courage to give it a whirl on the Gold Note Tuscany Red cartridge. Why the hesitation? Well, liquids that have big Achtung/Caution stickers on their bottle and five grand cartridges make for a worrying combination. Add into the mix a small vibrating pad that I envisaged shaking the cantilever lose and you can see why I might be a tad worried. The Flux Hifi Sonic is not a new concept, there have been vibrating stylus cleaners around for years, but the manufacturers say that it operated at a lower frequency to the older models and as such said to be much safer and more effective.

The Flux Hifi Sonic is a battery operated (2 AAAs included) teardrop shaped affair that has an on off button, a little pad (the vibrating part) and a light so you can see your stylus getting the treatment. Whilst it's not going to win any front covers the little unit looks nice enough and is well made – in Germany no less. Underneath you have a couple of knobby pads to stop it moving about and other than the aforementioned bottle of liquid, that is your lot.

The instructions tell you to place a drop of liquid on the pad (which is made of PE fibres and moves in a 3D motion) and carefully lower your stylus into the drop ensuring your platter doesn't move about. Press the button, let it do its stuff for fifteen seconds and that's it.

Between records I'd been using a DustBuster which gets most of the visible gunk off the stylus, but after a fifteen second clean with this the stylus was visibly cleaner, even to the naked eye. Sound-wise there is less surface noise and a feeling you are getting more information out of the grooves with a slightly more dynamic sound to when the stylus

had been cleaned using my previous go-to method. That said, many will prefer the quicker, simpler and relatively effective DustBuster.

Given that it comes with a three-year guarantee and is from a reputable company, I have not worried about my cantilever or stylus dropping off since taking the leap of faith - there'd be harsh words if it ever did.

The unit costs £115 with extra fluid coming in at £29, though you get a lot of drops in the little bottle provided.

Overall this is a good, effective and speedy stylus cleaning method that does go a little deeper than the DustBuster and is less hassle than using brushes and less worrying than the magic eraser method. On the downside it is a considerable investment, but one that I think is worth it.





A TIDAL STORM IS UPON US

STUART SMITH

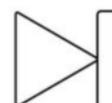
There really is a tidal storm of music out there! A never-ending, algorithmically-curated musical selection that is spat out ad-nauseam especially for you, your gender, your socio-economic grouping. Perhaps I should just let it wash over me, or perhaps I should just have nice cup of tea, turn on the wireless and calm down a bit. Perhaps not.

"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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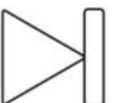


STU'S VIEWS



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STU'S VIEWS

I have a problem, but it's not one of those problems that there's a twelve-point program to help you get through. It's much worse and it's something that I think goes so deep into my make-up and psyche and is something that no matter how many bouts of group discussions, submitting to a higher-being or admitting that I am powerless to do anything about it will have any effect on.

It's a serious problem in today's world and I'm beginning to feel isolated and alone and that there is no one else with the same issues.

I think my problem may stem from my childhood and I'm sure if I was to lie down on a suitably well qualified head-shrink's couch and pour out my inner-most feelings of woe and angst to them, then they could probably write a book on the subject and become wealthy beyond their wildest dreams. The real problem is that there are myriad adverts on whatever media telling me my condition is wrong and that there is help out there if only I embrace THEIR brand of cure.

I say my problem started in my formative years and if I cast my mind back and look into my mind's eye I can see myself late at night cowering under the covers of my bed and pulling the pillows around my head to drown out the loud music, the shouts and the squeals that were coming from downstairs and seeping up through the floorboards into my darkened room.

So, before you all get a bit worried for my mental wellbeing and start calling whatever helpline now exists, let me say now that I grew up in various very busy pubs in the UK where licensing laws were at the time very lax and after-hours drinking was the norm, if not encouraged given the number of off duty cops that used to be present in these bacchanalian festivities. The covers and pillows were not enough to quash the racket and so I also had a little portable radio and a flesh coloured hearing-aid type headphone – yes, just the one at that time. So, one ear would be pressed to the pillow whilst the other would delight to the sounds of Radio Luxembourg or BBC Radio One and the mighty, mighty National Treasure that was John Peel. My folks loved music, but being surrounded by it in their place of work they rarely played music in the flat, though there was always a music centre in the living room. Out in the car there would always be the radio on and it would invariably be tuned to BBC 1 and, Sunday afternoon being the only time my parents really had off, it would usually be playing oldies with, the now known predatory paedophile, Jimmy Savile at the helm.

So, what's your problem then, I hear you ask. Well, I once again succumbed and signed up for one of the online music streaming services. Peer pressure was high, the advertising was convincing and who in their right mind could resist having access to a gazillion-and-a-half albums at the swipe of a finger on a touch sensitive screen? I'm weak, I admit it, and wilfully capitulated to the multiverse of digital audio that was out there waiting to be discovered. And that, in a nutshell, is the crux of my problem.

Yes, there has always been lots of music out there to choose from and yes, there has always been more than you could ever hope to listen to in one lifetime, but back in the day we had DJs who chose what to play and we were guided by their tastes. Now we have

carefully "curated" (*I hate the use of that word in this context*) playlists tied to algorithms that will look at what you have listened to before and select the music that you should listen to now and no doubt take into account what your age is, what your income is, what your sexual preferences are and perhaps what you had for breakfast. And I don't like it one bit. Not at all. Not a smidge. There's just too much to choose from and before you have had a chance to consume the latest offering from your virtual DJ there's a million and one other records that you really must hear.

For a start there are just not enough hours in the day to consume the volume of new music these services are thrusting down your ear canal and for every good record I've so far come across there has been a dozen or more suggestions following in its wake that have been derivative and, for want of a better word, shit (*perhaps "not to my taste would have been a better use of words"*). I don't want my music to be chosen, or even suggested by a clever program that has analysed my listening habits and come up with an exquisitely curated (*grrrrr*) selection for me to choose from.

I'm very happily married, but I have heard the youth talk of dating apps where they swipe away a potential partner for the evening without first having got to know a little more about them. Eventually you may well come up with the astutely curated (*double grrrr*) soul mate you had been yearning for all your life, but chances are you are going to end up with a blister on your finger (*and not in a good way*) and a yearning for someone a little more meaningful to happen your way. The algorithm may well think it has you sussed and knows your preferences, but life is not based on a strict set of pre-determined likes and dislikes and, like it or not, to my old-fashioned way of thinking at least, this is not the way to fall in love. And nor is an algorithm an ideal way for your music to be chosen for you.

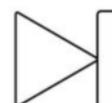
Getting back to John Peel (*I promise not to mention Savile ever again in my writings*) and his choice of tunes. Yes, there was some dross and yes there were some that had you the option you would have swiped away, but you knew his basic taste and you knew that he searched out and listened to plethora of new music and new bands without the requirement of trying to cater to your tastes. (*I'm also sure a lot of the music on these streaming services is listened to by machines trying to pick up similarities in style etc*). Note this well because I think this is pretty important: the algorithms pander to your predetermined and digitally determined tastes, whereas John Peel played what he wanted, sometimes good, sometimes "meh" and sometimes brilliant, but in the end you had to lie there in your unlit room with your single earphone and listen to it all. Some tunes would be growers and you'd get to hear them again and go out and buy the single or the album, some you just couldn't live without after that first taste and it would be in your collection as soon as you'd saved the requisite pennies and some would fall by the wayside...a lot like old fashioned dating only without the financial transaction.

Reading this you may think that I don't get on with the online streaming services, and you would be right. They are too clinical and don't have soul. They have too much choice and too much plagiaristic copycat music. John Peel and DJs like him were matchmakers in the truest sense of the word. You found your matchmaker of choice and they showed you a small selection of what was available. Some of their matches would work and some

"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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would not, but they thought about what they put in front of their audience and they cared, in a human sense, about the music they were offering up and were passionate about you embracing their choices – I just don't get that with the current slew of streaming services. There is a Dead Kennedys' record called Give Me convenience Or Give Me Death and I think that title is pretty apt in this discussion – yes, we have the convenience to swipe and yes we have a huge amount of music at our fingertips, but that convenience breeds contempt and a disrespect for the music and it devalues it to a one off aural fling...at best.

So, my problem persists and it seems that modern solutions are not helping in any way. Perhaps I'm past it and just don't have the mental dexterity to juggle the never-ending onslaught of new music that is being shoved my way, and perhaps I'm being a tad luddite in my harking back to a time when DJs and not machines suggested and directed my musical tastes. Perhaps I ought to start exploring real radio and the DJs that follow in the footsteps of the likes of John Peel (*I hear BBC Radio 6 is rather good and free*) and liberate myself from this endless blitzkrieg of stuff I really should like but in the real world simply don't.

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BIRD'S EYE VIEW



REAL MEN LIKE WHITE SPEAKERS

LINETTE SMITH

Never afraid to bring, as she has been accused, of fetching the itchy blanket of gender politics to the audio table, Linette this month looks at why we should all embrace better looking Hifi.

BIRD'S EYE VIEW

Hifi is one of those subjects where enthusiasts can always find points to disagree on. There are so many variables in our wonderful hobby that the debate can be endless. Vinyl or CD? Class A or Class D amplifiers? Do cables make a difference or not? Black speakers or white?

Long ago in days of yore, OK the 70s and 80's, loudspeakers were mainly what we could politely refer to as 'boxy'. Generally big, wooden or black rectangular lumps, frequently advertised to the public with a smattering of accompanying underdressed female model (*just to accentuate the sound qualities of course*). That is, of course, utter codswallop. That woman in a bikini/underwear/nothing didn't actually have anything to do with the sound quality (*don't look so surprised!*). Hifi was seen as a macho, manly hobby back then. It was about (*as in many areas*) having the biggest, the loudest, the most knobs (!) and how do you make your brand, whatever it is, appeal more to men? You drape a scantily clad young lady over it.

Back to the present day and most ranges of loudspeakers will offer a white finish and the advertising has caught up quite a bit too. Over the last few years it has seemed like there are white speakers everywhere...they have just taken over, but why? The common misconception is that white speakers are more 'girly' and that if you want to have a reasonably large pair of speakers in your home the best colour to go for is white, because 'the wife will like it'. I grind my teeth a bit when Hifi sales people say, 'it's a white pair of speakers, it's got great WAF'. The whole Wife Acceptance Factor is totally outdated...and it does seem to be used less and less. Which is a good thing, the world is waking up to casual sexism. Even in such 'male dominated' sports such as Darts or F1, walk-out girls and grid girls are being replaced...there is just no excuse for a female's only role to be as eye candy, when there are plenty of women working in sport, just like in the Hifi Industry, thankfully those outdated Hifi adverts have fallen by the wayside too.

But I digress, back to the white speakers. The fact that they are everywhere points to something other than 'sneaking them past the wife' driving their popularity. The truth is they look really great in a home setting. More elegant and seem to take up less room than the same size of black speakers, they look less harsh in their environment. More and more people listen to Hifi in the main living room of their home and people like a lighter, brighter more modern look to their living space. And that's not just women. Contrary to what went on in the Dark Ages, gender lines and what is seen as 'masculine' or 'feminine' are becoming much more blurred. There is no shame in a guy taking an interest in how his Hifi looks as well as how it sounds, caring about the aesthetics of a system isn't 'unmanly', it shows you can appreciate the beauty it can hold. There are plenty of Hifi products now that cleverly disappear into the home setting, rather than dominating the room, Hifi has become a lot more discreet to fit in with our modern lives. I would say that an active pair of white speakers, that you can stream to, are probably one of the most lifestyle friendly Hifi products out there.

Choosing a great looking system should be an option for anybody, guys shouldn't feel the need to have some humongous black coffins of loudspeakers in their living room to make them seem macho, of course that may be your thing and they may sound great, but what is important is that we have choices when it comes to Hifi and those

choices are not driven by gender. There is a lot of talk about getting the younger generation into buying Hifi. They don't want the traditional, several box system that won't fit into their small flat, they want high quality but compact. Many Millennials have not been exposed to high quality audio, but when they are it is something that interests them, and they are not afraid to spend money. But, of course it is important that the Hifi on offer looks great and fits with their lifestyle and the lighter, brighter look of a white speaker has just as much appeal to both young men and women.

From the many press releases we get sent, it looks like white speakers are firmly here to stay, more and more brands include them in their ranges and go to any Hifi show and you will see loads of them of many shapes and sizes. Choose your speakers and the rest of your Hifi with confidence and go for what you really fancy, it doesn't matter if you are a man or a woman, if you fancy white then go for it!

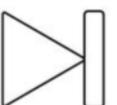


COMMENT



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE WORD HIFI?

Hifi means many things to many people. Some prefer valves and some prefer solid state. Some prefer horns and some prefer conventional speakers. But what does Hifi really mean? Or is that a question that is impossible to answer?



COMMENT

First of all, let's address the fact that here at Hifi Pig we always spell Hi-Fi incorrectly. We always have and it was a deliberate ploy to set us apart from the crowd. But what does Hifi mean and what are the origins of the term.

I don't think we are breaking any news to readers but, for the sake of completeness let's start at the beginning and give it its "proper" definition here provided by Wiki:

"High fidelity (often shortened to hi-fi or hifi) reproduction is a term used by home stereo listeners, audiophiles and home audio enthusiasts to refer to high-quality reproduction of sound to distinguish it from the lower quality sound produced by inexpensive audio equipment, or the inferior quality of sound reproduction that can be heard in recordings made until the late 1940s.

Ideally, high-fidelity equipment has inaudible noise and distortion, and a flat (neutral, uncoloured) frequency response within the intended frequency range."

Now personally I think there's a few things in there that need to be challenged somewhat – and before the audiophiles on a budget mob come around calling for my head:

First of all, there is, in this definition of what Hifi is, the implied assertion that audio equipment that is inexpensive has, de facto, an inferior sound quality. I'm very much in the "you get what you pay for" camp and I do believe that, in the main, a more expensive Hifi is more likely to have a superior sound. However, I am also of the thought that there are some true sonic bargains to be had out there.

Secondly there is the statement that true Hifi must be devoid of colouration or distortion. Now to keep the tube-heads happy we must acknowledge that valve amplifiers are certainly not without their own characteristics that affect the sound and, as such, blur the definition somewhat. Turning to Wiki again they say *"Certainly these audible differences are due to distortion types: harmonic, distribution, level and other factors"*. So are we saying that any system that uses valves is by definition not Hifi? Are we saying that the people at Kon-do have got it all wrong and their lottery winning priced systems are second rate and fall short of being able to be called Hifi?

Thirdly we have the statement that a system should ideally have a flat frequency response. Whilst this is true to an extent a flat frequency response is not the panacea some may think. I'll turn to Dave Cawley of Timestep for a clever little statement he has used in the past *"if it measures well and sounds good, then it is good": "if it measures badly and sounds bad then it is bad": "if it measures badly and sounds good, then it could be improved": "if it measures well but sounds bad then it is bad"*. The final statement is the one I like best and implies that even if a piece of equipment passes all the bench tests and makes all the right shapes on the lab's oscilloscopes there is no guarantee that it will sound good. It's much more complicated than that or we'd all be listening to the same amps, same DACs and same speakers.

So, we seem to have a bit of a problem in defining what exactly Hifi is from the very outset.

If we accept, by definition and implied by the two words used, High-fidelity audio should produce as near perfect lab results, whatever those tests may be, time after time, and let's face it the ideals were met years ago in many cases. Look at Technics and other Japanese manufacturers and their Quartz Locked Looped turntables that spun

at perfect speed and with little to no wow and flutter, and yet we still find that many audiophiles prefer systems using belt drives. Do these audiophiles not know they can have the perfectly timed vinyl spinner, or is it, and I think this is more likely the case, that they actually prefer these slight imperfections that add character and "difference" to the sound. Do some people actually prefer to hear colouration and harmonic distortion in their amplifiers. What about loudspeakers and specifically single-driver wideband speakers that try to reproduce a full spectrum of audible frequencies from just one cone? They shouldn't work and they should sound awful, but I've had some very enjoyable hours in-front of wide-banders having owned a pair of Lowther Fidelios for several years. Now, what I find interesting about full-range, single driver loudspeakers is if you have spent any time previously listening to good "conventional" speakers, they take a few minutes to actually start to make any aural sense. Your brain seems to attune itself to their quirks and foibles and, in the case of some very good wide-banders you really can become drawn into their sound...add into the equation a flea-powered SET amp often preferred by wide-band aficionados and its associated "problems" and sound fidelity in absolute terms must be well out of the window and have the folk sat in front of their oscilloscopes crying into their tea.

So, and I've written about this before, what often comes to the fore is not fidelity in absolute terms but a sonic presentation that is pleasing....and some would say beguiling. But does it matter if one person feels emotionally connected to their favourite artist or piece of music by something that someone else may deem technologically inferior. And on the flip-side, does it matter if another feels the same level of connection to their music, safe in the knowledge that their preferred playback system is "accurate" beyond reproach. I've had this very experience very recently with DACs and I declare a bit of fence-sitting on this particular subject. On the one hand I have a valve based DAC that sounds absolutely wonderful and natural sounding, but I know there is not a hope in hell that were I to take it to a test bench and hook it up to test kit would it offer up results that were anywhere near acceptable to the chaps that make the second DAC I have on my shelves, which also sound absolutely wonderful, gets more information from the recording and is more transparent and less coloured. I love both, but given that my role dictates I must not only gain massive amounts of pleasure from my system but it must also be a tool for reviewing other kit I am erring on the side of the more High-Fidelity offering. I'm really wanting to have my cake and eat it and keep two but that's not financially an option and my internal conflict rages on.

The debates on Facebook groups are endless and the battle lines are drawn pretty early on, and much in the same way cable debates go, neither side will give an inch and accept that, in the final analysis, when push comes to shove, when the fat lady sings and all the chickens have come home to roost, all that really matters is that you are happy with your choices and you are loving the way your system sounds.



COMMENT



JAMES FLEMING



FROM WORDS, INTO WORDS

Regular Hifi Pig contributor, James Fleming looks at the work of The Fall and especially the recently deceased Mark E. Smith.



JAMES FLEMING

The Fall were an intersection where a dirt track met a 20-lane highway. Where the hardboiled and the highfalutin crossed: Can and Raymond Chandler, The Stooges and Lovecraft, the library and the garage. Their music transcended the intellectualism pit to a nirvana of emotive intelligence. A many-limbed beast that will continue to turn the amplifier dials of the piss-and-vinegar garage bands of the future. A future that will sadly be void of The Fall.

Void of their venom, attitude, groove, piss-pulling and eloquence. For as the man said: "If it's me and yer granny on bongos, it's the Fall." And the man has gone. The man is dead.

Mark E. Smith was The Fall's face. He was their words and language, their ego and id, their mastermind and their boss. His eloquent slurring was The Fall's defining trait. It was what set them apart from the Beefheart-copyists and the Stooges ripoffs. Smith's voice sneered with all the rage of his Sex Pistols-inspired origins and all the detachment of his beloved Can's Damo Suzuki. His vocalising was high-incomprehensible. But it all made bizarre, inscrutable sense.

Like America or the platypus: all the pieces are there, but how they came together to make *that* is a mystery. The cosmic alignment of time and space, of the chemicals and literature and LPs produced The Fall. Put that book in Mark E. Smith's hands and sent him to that infamous, fabled Pistols gig in Manchester's Free Trade Hall. A gig that inspired many a band's formation. Bands that would eclipse The Fall's success and popularity. But never their quality.

It's sad and strange to think that after 32 studio albums 2018 won't have a new Fall record to call its own. That Mark E. Smith lies silent and still. He wasn't just The Fall's sole constant. He was a constant thorn in the side of complacency and lethargy. A fire under our collective fat arse.

He had sand. A purpose where others have lard. Smith was mean and ruthless. A pair of double-edged swords. But those same qualities made The Fall's music so compelling. And kept them safely away from multi-platinum poisoning.

Their music was determined. Hellbent on its course and fuck the begrudgers who said "nay!" As Fall champion John Peel said "they are always different; they are always the same." An ever-evolving constant. The music altered in gradual, minimal shifts. The attitude never budged nor swayed. A richter-scale 10 wouldn't have shaken that foundation. Nor would have an H-bomb.

The Fall were solid as a bassline and steady as a gunslinger's hand. They were reliable. A Fall record comes worth guaranteed. There is always something worthwhile in the grooves. And more often, it would set the bar very high for the follow-up.

2017's *New Facts Emerge* was one of their finest. The bar moved up yet another few feet to scrape the stratosphere. But The Fall would have beaten even that towering best. Now though, they won't have the chance.

The Fall charged. Charged ever onwards full steam ahead and charged their records with energy. Not potential energy. But storming kinetic energy. Enough of it to make it almost tangible or to topple

empires. Mark E. Smith slapped the world in the face and challenged us all to a duel. A challenge we have yet to meet.

We've got the multi-platinum poisoning. We're drooling over shallow wants and wallowing in malnourishing lard. Monetary success and planetary adoration are the glittering carrots in front of we seven billion asses. And we chase them blindly on until we come to The Fall's intersection, their crossroads. And a crossroads is a choice.

A "two roads diverged in a yellow wood" moment. We can move on, stay put or go back. Revert back to our primordial instincts: Fear, suspicion, hate, greed, selfishness. Become once again Kubrick and Clarke's apes awaiting the evolution-enhancing monolith from the universe's depths. But then, The Fall and Mark E. Smith would only have written venomous songs about us. And no matter how thrilling those songs would be, we don't want them to be written.

So it's sally forth or stagnate. And stagnation is for cesspools.

Under all the anger in Smith's music there is a thin seam of hope. No one would make such uncompromising music unless they cared. If they didn't care they'd join a boy band, hoard their billions selfishly away and retire bloated to their private island. Instead, Smith and his revolving-door cast of bandmates made 32 albums of worth and excellence. Enriching LPs of vitality and danger.

Overlords the world over sighed with relief at Smith's passing. He was a threat to global security. An insurgent of immeasurable influence that threatened to radicalise our youth with intelligence and sense. They put us through 14 years of schooling to beat the sense and smarts out of us. And The Fall threatened to instil us once again with those very qualities. Vitality and danger indeed...

Smith's exquisite, cryptic lyrics are unlike any others in rock music's canon. High and low-brow met in The Fall's garage avant-rock. Indeed, *Dog Is Life/Jerusalem* from 1988's *I Am Kurious Oranj* is credited to Mark E. Smith and William Blake. The eccentric, ostracised English poet who gained his due recognition after his death. Smith was recognised for his talent during his lifetime. But by far too few.

He remained a cult figure throughout his career. Preaching in his enigmatic words his single-minded vision. You were either on board or on your ass. And Smith didn't care either way.

Like the prophet Bill Hicks, Smith was himself and himself only: critical, harsh, earthbound, troubled. And also like Hicks, you could agree or disagree with him. But you had to listen. Even if just to take pleasure in their humour and wit and eloquence.

Ignorance, either of Smith himself or in general, was not tolerated. Even the band's name was illuminating, directing many a mind to the work of Albert Camus. It was from words that The Fall - the title of one of Camus' books - were born. From the original lineup's humble beginnings drug-taking and reading their writing to each other. And now, 43 years later, it is into words they return.

The words of fans and journalists, friends, family and critics. But mostly Mark E. Smith's own words. For The Fall were a language.



JAMES FLEMING



Photograph By Cernunnos XPP Yaun (Own work) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons



JAMES FLEMING

They were an alternative rock vernacular oft-quoted but never bested. And it was Smith and his vision that brought all the elements together to create that language. Pulling parts from sci-fi, rock music, the avant-garde, politics and newspapers and his own kindred spirit. We may never know exactly what he was on about. But we can make a choice at their crossroads to pave your own way as The Fall did. Pave it with words, ideas and attitude. Whether anyone else understands our individual paths is irrelevant. So long as you know what you're on about. Just as Mark E. Smith did.

In memory of Mark E. Smith and The Fall.

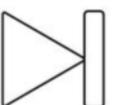


MUSIC INTERVIEW



IAN MUNRO FROM OPUS 3

Ian Munro was one quarter of the UK electronic band Opus 3 that had a major hit with the tune Fine Day which was an absolute monster of a tune and seemed to be everywhere in the year it was released. Other members of the band were Kirsty Hawkshaw, Kevin Dodds and Nigel Walton and in addition to Fine Day, that charted in the UK at number 5 (U.S. Hot Dance Club Play number 1) they released two albums, Mind Fruit (1992) and Guru Mother (1994).



MUSIC INTERVIEW



MUSIC INTERVIEW

HP: Pretty much everyone was either a DJ or in a band in the late 80's and early 90's, how did you get in to the scene and what was the sequence of events that led to Opus 3 being formed?

IM: In 1984 I joined a 6 piece band from Sunderland .We wanted desperately to be the Talking Heads and had percussion, a Roland Juno 60 and my brand new Yamaha DX 9. Unfortunately the group fractured in half and I joined with Kevin and Nigel, also members of Opus 3. We decided to make electronic music at home and after Kev and I were played early house music by some London girls in Portugal 1986 we bought a portastudio, Esq 1 synth with sequencer, a small mixing desk, a Roland TR 505 AND WE HAD OUR OWN STUDIO !

We got a deal with Capitol EMI and moved London. A single was released but we were dropped and returned back to Sunderland. However, we met a young woman called Kirsty Hawkshaw and now owned an Akai s900 sampler and an Atari 1020 with Notator.

Next came a production deal with MCA and an upgraded studio. One Sunday evening 1991 I remembered an ACCAPELLE called It's a fine day by Jane, we sampled the vocals, added some beats , keyboards and samples. It took about 3 hours! We needed the vocal re-sung and Kirsty's voice was perfect.

HP: You mentioned in conversation in the past that you loved the sea change in what constituted music in the nineties. What do you mean by this and how did that help bands such as Opus 3.

IM: With sampling it meant that people without musical training could make tunes and anything could be put together. For Opus 3 this meant we could build up a sample filled groove then add the played parts and vocals later.

HP: You were based in the North East of England, how hard was it to break into a scene that, to the outside observer, seemed to be very much London based?

IM: In 1988 we were quite early converts to house music so getting a deal seemed quite easy, but as I said previously, we moved to London and the label and management were also located there so things were easier...

HP: You signed for Pete waterman's label PWL, do you have any stories you can share about Mr waterman or any of the superstars that you must have had some contact with...I'm thinking Kylie, of course!

IM: Kylie later had a hit with Confide in Me and it is a direct rip off of It's A Fine Day which was *proven in court*. Pete Waterman had a throne, a large jar of pickled eggs and a disarmed missile in the TV. Room.

HP: I remember speaking to you guys when Fine Day was huge in the UK and you had a gig at The Ministry Of Sound in London but the bouncers refused to believe who you were and initially

refused you entry, did this happen often or was it just a case of overzealous door staff on this occasion?

IM: Kirsty was briefly famous we were never in videos so quite anonymous.

HP: How soon after recording fine Day did you know it was going to be huge?

IM: Instantly, and then in the car driving home listening to a rough mix on tape.

HP: Your second single off Mind Fruit (I Talk To The Wind) is a King Crimson based tune, this seems a pretty odd inspiration, where did it come from and who else has inspired your music?

IM: We were under a lot of pressure to follow up Fine Day and the choice of I talk To The Wind was the wrong one, but I admit mine... I have always had eclectic taste so my inspirations are many and varied...But we bought a Mac and things surely could only get better?

HP: Not counting your own, what other ten tunes of that early nineties era would you consider essential listening for anyone looking to explore it for the first time...or indeed revisit old musical friends?

IM:
Not Over Yet by Grace
Strings of Life by Rhythim is Rhythm
Children by Robert Miles
Feel What You Want by Kristine W,
Hold That Sucker Down by OT Quartet
Smokebelch by Sabres Of Paradise
Higher State Of Consciousness by Josh Wink
Make You Whole by Andronicus
Insomnia by Faithless
Little Fluffy Clouds by The Orb

HP: You disbanded after your second album, why was this?

IM: We got dropped. However, after remixing Hand in Hand from our Guru Mother album, Paul Oakenfold then covered the song as Grace and got in the Top 30...so we were in no way one hit wonders.

HP: What happened next?

IM: We moved back to London where I made tunes, Kevin managed a studio and Nigel got into digital editing.

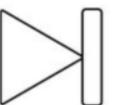
HP: Pick out a few highlights of your career to date for readers.

IM: Playing a lakeside mid-summer night festival in a Finnish forest where the sun never set. Standing on top of the World Trade Centre trying to see the tiny club from last night's gig. Kirsty on Top of the Pops. Hearing Fine Day debuting at No. 10 in the UK charts. Mount Fuji at dawn, the list goes on.

HP: What are other members of Opus 3 doing these days?



MUSIC INTERVIEW



MUSIC INTERVIEW

IM: Kirtsy has a family, Nigel is still editing and Kevin tour manages bands.

HP: The music industry has changed massively in the last twenty-five years. What changes have you seen and do you think things have changed and are changing for the better or worse?

IM: Because royalties from streaming and downloading are so miniscule in comparison to recorded media it is impossible for an aspiring musician to make a living. Also through mergers there are only 3 major label consortia who produce mostly bland safe product by committee.

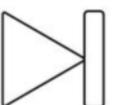
HP: Do you have any predictions for the way the industry is likely to go in the next decade?

IM: Downhill for record companies. Lucrative for established Live Performers.

HP: Five top tips for aspiring musicians...

IM: Don't try to move London. Keep your publishing. Persist as it may take many years. Trust your instincts and each other...people in the music business are not your friends.

The previous and following photographs courtesy of Ian have never previously been published anywhere.



MUSIC INTERVIEW



BOOKS

Cosey Fanni Tutti – Art Sex Music

My life is my art, my life is my art is a statement that few can say they have lived by so wholeheartedly as Cosey Fanni Tutti and *Art Sex Music* documents her life as art using her diary entries as the starting point.

The autobiography chronicles the life of the then Christine Newby and her birth and early life in Hull (UK) where particular attention is paid to her relationship with her domineering and emotionally aloof Father before her leaving school (her father wouldn't allow her to attend art-school or university despite her good grades). Hull is an interesting place, I know it well, and it had a reputation in the late sixties as being the most violent city in England and Christine got caught up in the usual things that late teens will always get caught up in given half the chance...all this whilst holding down mundane jobs that were the antithesis of her later work. "I was out six nights a week...we consumed the cheap wine Merrydown (*I always thought it was cider – Ed*) known to us as Get-em-Down and dropped Randy Mandies (Mandrax)". In late 1969 she met Genesis (Later Genesis P. Orridge) where he demanded her presence and renamed her Cosmosis. On 5th January 1970 she became unemployed and this resulted in her being thrown out of the family home and her finally moving into the commune known as the Ho Ho Funhouse and renting a room opposite Genesis, referred throughout the book as Gen.

This period is an interesting part of the book and Gen does not come off the page as anything but an egomaniac with a very destructive and manipulative character. This cult of personality and almost self-proclaimed guru status of Genesis continues throughout the book and to say he comes out of it badly is an understatement. Interestingly, there is probably more mentions of Genesis in this autobiography than any other single person and one can't help but think his influence throughout Cosey's life has been somewhat out of proportion and from the casual observer's perspective, constantly a destructive force.

Her work with COUM and their often very provocative "art actions" is widely covered and the group gained a decent level of popularity, blurring as they did the lines between musical band, performance artists and mail artists. Mid '72 Cosey's interest in using nude photography and pornography as part of her "my life is my art, my life is my art" began to surface as well her work as a stripper. This period is interesting and for the reader a little jarring. Personally I find it difficult to separate my thoughts of an exploitative industry being itself exploited towards Cosey's own ends. A move from Hull, its police hassles and increasing untenable position leads inevitably to London and in particular Hackney, another place I know well having lived in a squat there in my youth. COUM actions and modelling work followed, as did the meeting of John Lacey and his friend Chris Carter, not to mention meeting Peter Christopherson (Sleazy) at "The COUMing of Age" action at The Oval House Theatre in London.

Slowly Throbbing Gristle came together as an entity, as did Cosey and Chris. July '76 was the first live performance of Throbbing Gristle and the apparent demise of the COUM project, though COUM did

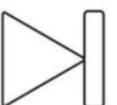


run in parallel for some-time and included the infamous exhibition at the Institute For Contemporary Art which resulted in tabloid headlines outing Cosey as a "blue film" performer as well as questions being asked in the Houses Of Parliament, and the death of COUM.

From the outset TG was much more than just a band and more of a conceptual art project with the band being the creative forces behind everything associated with their performances and merchandise.

However, it's not long before issues start to raise their heads in the band-camp and the band seemed to be forever on the verge of a catastrophic collapse. However, the band prospers, despite what appears to be some members' best efforts and Industrial Records is born, along with the industrial genre. Throbbing Gristle disbanded in 1982, Chris & Cosey was born as was the couples' son Nick. A new label, an expanding fanbase and all was looking peachy and Cosey was doing more stripping.

And then illness rears its head but despite this the music and art side of things are doing well and this is a common theme in this book; a constant cycle of things going great only to disintegrate and then the rebirth of new ideas and projects.



BOOKS

The halfway point in this book seems to mark a change both in attitude and in the way the book is written. There is a good deal more success and recognition for Cosey's work, but there are Gristle hassles, Gen Hassles, illness hassles and I can't help thinking that there is a change in attitudes and tone. There is a more business-like approach and a feeling that Cosey is now part of the art-establishment - and she is, she even has a collection at theTate- but there's also a feeling she is more at one with herself and her art and she even gets an Open University degree to her name.

A Throbbing Gristle reformation seems inevitable but throughout there is the ever present spectre of one Genesis P-Orridge doing his damndest to put a spanner in the works at every given opportunity - not fulfilling commitments, allegedly putting out TG bootlegs and generally being a pain in the arse. Despite a short US tour in the Spring of 2009 it was not to be and legal wranglings with P-Orridge continued - how no-one in the band throttled him I don't know.

There are joyous parts to this book and there are sad and heart-wrenching moments too with the reader feeling like they have been on a roller coaster of emotion with Cosey. I think this intimate feeling of really connecting with the author comes from the fact that she has used diary entries and then expanded on them from memory. It is written in a down to earth and honest style that really draws the reader into Cosey's uncompromising world.

Since I bought this book a couple of weeks ago I've seen a lot more Throbbing Gristle albums in the newly arrived section at the record shop and so can only assume that this book and the reviews it is generating is also rekindling interest in Cosey and her many projects.

One for the fans, of course, but also an interesting read for those less familiar with Cosey's work.



QUICK QUIZ

1. What year was Nirvana's "Nevermind" released?

- 1. 1990
- B. 1991
- C. 1992
- D: 1993

2. Before E.L.P Keith Emerson was in which band?

- A. The Sweet
- B. The Nice
- C. King Crimson
- D. UK

3. What was The Buzzcocks second studio album called?

- A. Love Bites
- B. Another Music In A Different Kitchen
- C. All Set
- D. A Different Kind Of Tension

4. American punk band Fugazi come from which city?

- A. New York
- B. San Francisco
- C. Boston
- D. Washington DC

5. What was the first album by Michael Moorcock & The Deep Fix?

- A. Chronicles Of The Black Sword
- B. Elric Of Melniboné
- C. New Worlds Fair
- D. The Entropy Tango

6. Creams third album was called?

- A. Goodbye
- B. Disraeli Gears
- C. Fresh Cream
- D. Wheels Of Fire

7. Who performed the theme song to the film Grease

- A. Barry Gibb
- B. The Bee Gees
- C. Frankie Valli
- D. Andy Gibb

8. Who sang backing vocals on The Jams hit Beat Surrender?

- A. Tracie Young
- B. Jennie Matthias

C. Tracy Chapman

D. Tracey Thorn

9. Paul Simonon of The Clash went on to form which band?

- A. Big Audio Dynamite
- B. Havana 3am
- C. The Cortinas
- D. The Mescaleros

10. German band TRIO had a huge hit with which single?

- A. LA LA LA
- B. DA DA DA
- C. ME ME ME
- D. FA FA FA

Bonus Question: What song are these lyrics taken from?

Stop me now before I kill myself,

Stop me before I kill somebody else!

Answers: B B A D C D C A B B
Bonus: Motorhead "On Parole"

LIVING THE HiFi LIFE



Colin Pratt is the sales director for Chord Electronics. This trip to New York was the third trip out after CES and Germany, back home for day then straight in to his home market show of Bristol. Then off again, Prague, Montreal, LA and Chicago in quick succession!

He still loves Living the Hifi Life though !



LIVING THE HiFi LIFE



The ready-to-go clothes, shoes, Mojo in Poly, shoes, headphones, laptop, passport, etc. all used to get excited at the prospect of a weekend break.



HiFi Pig, even at work! (It has more excitement in work today to see his M)



Setting the tone for the day. (The only thing I watch from work, it's all about the music!)



New Market concourse looking up, it's all the way from the 2nd floor, now off to the first, something you can't see from the ground.



But through the night, it's all the way from the 2nd floor, now off to the first, something you can't see from the ground.



Equipment, it's all the way from the 2nd floor, now off to the first, something you can't see from the ground.



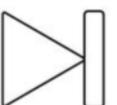
Get the show, it's all the way from the 2nd floor, now off to the first, something you can't see from the ground.



Trade show, it's all the way from the 2nd floor, now off to the first, something you can't see from the ground.



One of the guys I've been about, it's all the way from the 2nd floor, now off to the first, something you can't see from the ground.



LIVING THE HiFi LIFE



One of the things I love about my job is getting to visit different trade shows. Here at my favorite (so far!) trade show, I met some of the most interesting people in the audio industry.



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SCOTCH WHISKY	
ABERLOUR 12YR	17
ARDREG 10YR	17
AUCHENTOSHAN THREE WOOD	21
BALVENIE 12YR DOUBLE WOOD	18
BALVENIE 21YR "DRI WOOD"	30
BALVENIE 30YR	150
BOWMORE 12YR	17
BOWMORE 18YR	33
BRUICHLADDICH "OCTOMORE 6.3"	20
CHIVAS REGAL 18YR	20
COMPASS BOX "HEDONISM"	25
COMPASS BOX "PEAT MONSTER"	18
COMPASS BOX "SPICE TREE"	15
COMPASS BOX "THE LOST BLEND"	45
DALMORE 15YR	21
DALMORE 18YR	51
DALMORE 25YR	180
DALMORE 35YR	700
DALMORE 40YR	1525

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More New York



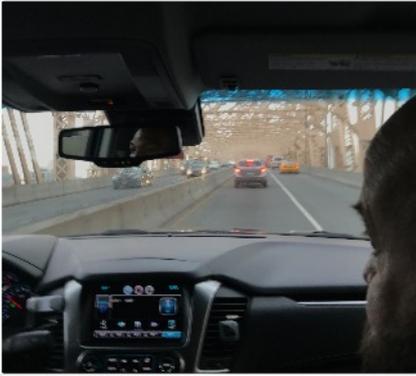
Even More New York



The old and new of Times Square Station



LIVING THE HiFi LIFE



Off to the shops... isn't this engine fantastic?



Monday over time... setting up for my weekend journey. HiFi Pig and BMW is the way!



Relax and unwind... the beautiful views from the plane window.



Home... enjoying the pleasures of the drive... all the way to the store... all over again... but... it's worth it... it's worth it... it's worth it...



REVIEW

AOSM 68 STEREO PAIR BLUETOOTH SPEAKERS



We are no strangers to Bluetooth speakers here at GadgetyNews. But, ones that offer a wide soundstage thanks to a stereo pair of loudspeakers? Not so much. It was with much joy then that we were offered a look at the AOSM 68 speakers.

JAY GARRETT

Look at any Hi-Fi system and, where price and components may differ, one thing remains. They will all feature at least two loudspeakers. This is not only to produce stereo sound, but also to create a more realistic soundstage. Many will tell you that the positioning of a stereo pair of speakers can make or break their performance. So, where most Bluetooth speakers are great on portability, few allow you to alter their position in a stereo field.

However, this is not true for the AOSM 68. The reason for this is that you actually get a pair of speakers that can act in concert.

AOSM 68 speakers design

The AOSM 68 speakers have a ruggedised appearance thanks to their reinforced corners. These protect the “high quality *diaphragm*” found at either end. Also, this is perhaps a nod to their IPX5 rating. That means they are able to survive splashed water and protection from dust.

The speakers are covered in wire mesh and have the brand ensconced on the front.

The back of the speakers hold most of their features. On the left, there's a water-resistant panel that conceals the Micro USB and 3.5mm headphone ports.

Over on the right side you get four buttons: power, play/pause, volume down and volume up.

Additionally, there's also a leatherette carry strap. Handy.

Each speaker measures 6.2 x 2.2 x 2.2-inches and weighs 12.5oz. Compact but not really feather light. You will notice two in your bag.

They are not the most striking speakers we've ever seen. However, they are also not ugly. To be honest, I quite like their utilitarian vibe.

AOSM 68 speakers performance

The speakers are rated at 2 x 6 Watts. According to the literature, the battery life should be around 8 hours but I have eeked out more. This will probably change as with most batteries though. Recharging takes in the region of 3 hours.

As I alluded to earlier, Bluetooth speakers are generally single units. This aids portability as well as convenience.

What you will discover with the AOSM 68 is that you will have to double up. Two speakers means two cables. Two cables could then mean a pair of plug adapters and wall sockets, unless you have a USB hub handy.

Those reinforced corners do allow the speakers to shrug off rough use though. Furthermore, that water and dust resistance should allow for some non-lethal encounters with environmental hazards. These are all bonuses for anyone planning to take the speakers out and about.

The speakers can be set horizontally or vertically. As the strap is situated on the same face as the controls, this does not get in the way of having them in either orientation.

Set up

To pair a single speaker with your mobile device, it is the standard routine. Turn on the speaker, find it on your phone or tablet, pair. Sorted.



REVIEW

AOSM 68 STEREO PAIR BLUETOOTH SPEAKERS



To get the ASOM 68 running in stereo pair mode you will need to turn them both on at the same time. Wait for the signal stating that they they're powered up. Now, just tap the power key again to get them to pair with each other.

Once that's done, you'll see that one speaker has a solid blue LED light and the other has a flashing blue LED. It's then just a matter of grabbing your phone and connecting up.

Now you have stereo sound and can place the speakers wide apart to get the full stereo experience.

Sound quality

So, are two speakers better than one? Yes. Stereo was developed for a reason — having two speakers gives a much better sense of presence, and allows music makers to be more creative in their recordings.

The AOSM 68 packs Bluetooth TWS. Thanks to True Wireless Stereo technology, you can pair two speakers via bluetooth to form a wireless left and right channel system.

Did I notice a huge difference in musical enjoyment from carrying two speakers and all they need around? Well, the sound quality certainly rivals that of a single speaker at their price point.

As I sat in my office setting these speakers up I had them stacked upon each other. This provided the usual Bluetooth speaker dynamic. However, placing one on each of the chair arms opposite me, this did make an incredible difference to their presentation.

The panned instruments in Fleetwood Mac's 'Chain' were given more space. The vocals were also better placed.

A quick blast of some Yello did show the speakers' weak spot though. The low-end is a little lacking. It's there, when the volume is pushed but then you are sacrificing some of the mid-range's clarity as that starts to get a bit overdriven.

Orchestral pieces and singer/songwriter compositions are clear and balanced. If you do prefer the less pastoral classics, again, you may notice the slightly light-handling of the lower ranges. But then, look at the size of the woofers. Can we really expect earth-shattering sub from these, especially at this price?

Whether paired or used as a single unit, the AOSM 68 boasts a decent, balanced sound with reasonable mid and high-end performance. There is even some good bass presence once you crank the volume up a bit. As I've said, however, higher volumes can make the treble a tad harsh and muddy the mids.

AOSM 68 speakers review conclusion

Twice the speakers, twice the fun? Well, you do also get twice the weight to carry and twice the cables needed. But with 8hrs play time, you won't need the cables everywhere you use these.

The upside is that you do get proper stereo. The output is decent and the speakers will take the odd knock and splash. This lends them to being handy for festivals and the like.

I also like the fact that two of you can use a speaker each independently and then, when you want, you can join forces again using the AOSM 68s as a stereo pair.

However, I think their prime use would be out in the garden together. I can see these pumping out tunes during a BBQ, and the like.

Price and availability

You can buy the AOSM 68 speakers for £49.99 as a pair from Amazon right now.



REVIEW

BAKKER ELKHUZHEN SRM VERTICAL MOUSE



Bakker Elkhuzhen has asked GadgetyNews to take their SRM vertical mouse for a test spin. Is it more comfortable to use than a regular one? Will it help prevent RSI? Who knows? Well, hopefully, we all will by the end of this.

JAY GARRETT

Most of you who visit this little corner of the interweblogosphere will spend hours at your computer. We are all, or at least should be, aware of the risks of repetitive strain injury, RSI. Wrist rests, ergonomic keyboards, good, adjustable seating, and adjustable monitors are all obvious areas for focus. However, what about the humble mouse?

When you add up the amount of time you spend dragging your mouse around, the side-to-side action of your wrist has the potential to cause you discomfort, or worse.

The way that this mouse alleviates such a scenario is by putting your grip in a more natural 'handshake' position.

I spend a full working day sat at a computer, I go home and then, after some food, go up to my home office and spend around another 4 hours at my desk. Both PCs are hooked up to a 'regular' mouse, albeit my home one is a gaming spec device.

It sounds convincing, but does it work?

So, for a week, I have swapped the mouse at my day job for the SRM vertical jobby.

SRM mouse design

The SRM Mouse is a cabled mouse with a vertical grip. It does look quite ungainly but, once used for a while, it starts to make sense.

Ignoring its orientation for a moment, everything else is pretty standard.

Firstly, you get three buttons and a scroll wheel. The SRM Mouse is designed for small and medium-sized hands (hand widths up to 7.5

cm, excluding the thumb). Although I have quite long digits (bass player) I still found the SRM comfortable to use.

If you have spade-like hands, the Evoluent mouse is probably better for you.

Secondly, the SRM Mouse has a powerful laser sensor and the option to choose between 400/1600/3200 DPI.

Styling is the familiar workwear black and silver colourway. The mouse itself measures 68 x 70 x 120 mm (WxHxD) and weighs 147 g.

Finally, the cable is 165cm long.

SRM mouse performance

The Bakker Elkhuzhen SRM vertical mouse is an odd-looking critter.

Once I had plugged it in to my work machine and waited the few seconds for Win 10 to sort its drivers out, I just stared at it.

I had read the reasoning for the design I was gawping at, but that didn't make me any more enthusiastic about using it.

The first few moments of using the mouse was unusual. Naturally, whenever I stuck my hand out to grab the mouse it was already in my normal 'claw grip'. Some adjustment had to be made here.

I also found me using my index finger to flick the scroll wheel for quite a while. This eventually passed and I was back to using my middle finger for this task.

After a day-or-so, using the SRM mouse had become second-nature. Obviously, change-over periods will vary down to how quickly you adopt new things and how much you use a mouse.



REVIEW

BAKKER ELKHUZIEN SRM VERTICAL MOUSE



Thanks to the “*handshake*” position when using a vertical mouse the wrist doesn’t bend sideways too much and the lower arm needs less inward rotation (Schmid et al., 2015). Furthermore, there is less muscle activity in the lower arm than when using a standard mouse (Quemelo & Vieira, 2013).

I’ve not really felt any wrist fatigue at work. However, it occasionally occurs on an evening. Which makes sense after a day’s work at a PC and then a further 4-or-so hours at home.

Since using the SRM mouse at my day job, changing position to the more usual grip on an evening will no doubt help.

SRM mouse review conclusion

I have been using the Bakker Elkhuzien SRM vertical mouse for a week now.

It does take a little time to get used to its orientation but it really is comfortable to use. Having the vertical mouse in use at work and my SteelSeries Rival 700 at home should take the strain off my wrist.

Anything that lessens the chance of getting RSI has to be worth trying. If you do spend long hours at your computer, especially with mouse-heavy duties such as design or gaming, I would recommend you check out the Bakker Elkhuzien SRM vertical mouse.

SRM mouse price and availability

You can buy the Bakker Elkhuzien SRM vertical mouse right now for around £52.



REVIEW

MAGICO A3 LOUDSPEAKERS FIRST IMPRESSIONS



I was honoured to be one of the first people outside of Magico to see and hear the new Magico A3 loudspeakers. The event took place at high-end hi-fi emporium, KJ West One in Marylebone.

Here is a run-down of what to expect from Magico's latest, and my initial thoughts.

JAY GARRETT

The Magico A3 are the company's newest, and most attainable full-range loudspeaker. Please keep in mind that, should you want to upgrade from the A3 at some point, you'd best be ready to part with £30,000. I'm just putting that out there right now.

The reason for that last statement is that, even though the A3 represents the entry-level for Magico speakers, the price tag is still £12,000.

Now that has hopefully sunk in, their world debut took place on Thursday at KJ West One. They were introduced to a small gathering by Magico CEO Alon Wolf.

Magico A3

As you would expect at this price point, they sounded great.

What is also outstanding is that the A3s still manage to sound like Magico speakers.

So, what does it take to build speakers that Magico are still proud of, but cost a third less than their next full-range loudspeakers?

Construction at a price

The fantastic thing about the Magico A3 is that, what would normally have cost someone around £30-£40K, is now more attainable.

The encasement is constructed by a full CNC rig that machines the 0.5-inch thick 6068 T6 aircraft-grade aluminium plates. Materially, this is the same as used in the Q-series. However, the new CNC process is part of what enables Magico to be able to produce the A3 at a keener price than the rest of the line.

This braced, complex internal structure is completed with an elegant brushed anodized finish. Each speaker weighs in at about 110lbs.

What's inside?

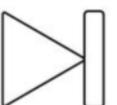
The A3 sports a three-way driver design capable of going as low as 22Hz and extending itself to just about 50 kHz. The A3 brings together a bevy of technologies unheard-of at its price point. A fully braced and anodized aluminium enclosure, beryllium tweeter, carbon Nanographene cones, neodymium based motor systems and the company's renowned elliptical crossover.

Drivers

Firstly, up top is a 28 mm dome tweeter that sports a pure beryllium diaphragm. A custom neodymium motor system is encased in an improved back chamber. Thanks to their latest gen damping materials you get ultra-low distortion. Furthermore, there's higher power handling, massive dynamic capabilities and extended linear voice coil movement.

Next is the midrange driver which is equipped with a carbon fiber cone coated with XG Nanographene. Additionally, overhung neodymium based motor systems incorporate extra-large magnets to ensure a stabilised magnetic field in the 75-mm pure titanium voice coils of both the midrange and bass drivers.

Lastly, the low end is handled by two 7-inch woofers making use of Magico's Nano-Tec cones.



REVIEW

MAGICO A3 LOUDSPEAKERS FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Compromises

much of the design and tech know-how owes a great to their Magico stablemates, the S3, M3 and Q3. It is really great to see a company such as this allowing their premium range to trickle-down lessons learned and have them reinterpreted at a more accessible price point.

Naturally, you're not getting everything found in those higher-end speakers. For instance, the Beryllium tweeter might be based on the 28mm dome created for the M project but the A-series lacks the special diamond deposit covering.

Again, Graphene is used in the A3 but not to the extent that it is used on the M and the S series.

Finally, the finish of these aluminium cabinets. Where the Q series are bead blasted with hard anodizing, etc the same finish could not be achieved for the A series target price. In fact, the finish on the Q range is probably more expensive than A3s actually cost to manufacture in total. However, the A3 still get the same metal, it's anodized, but brushed not bead blasted. The end result is still an attractive speaker.

Crossover

All four drivers in the A3 are acoustically integrated using Magico's proprietary Elliptical Symmetry Crossover topology. This utilises state-of-the-art components from Mundorf of Germany. The 3-way network features a 24db per octave Linkwitz-Riley filter that maximises frequency bandwidth while preserving phase linearity and minimising intermodulation distortion.

Magico A3 first impressions

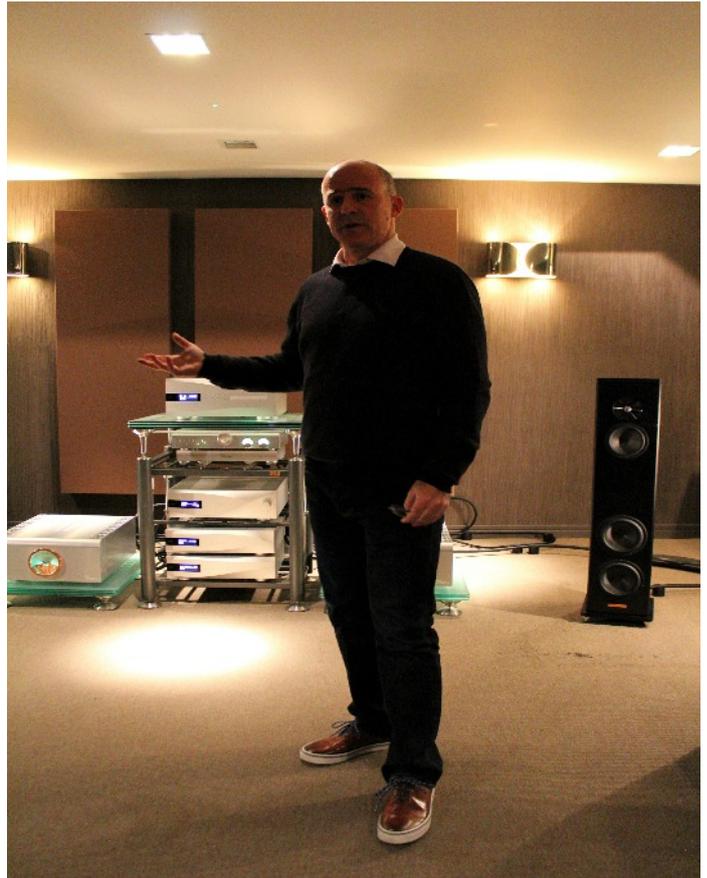
I was truly impressed by their unveiled audio production. It was as if I was only hearing the drivers, as there was no colouration coming from the hand-bolted aluminium cabinets.

This is, of course, what Magico aims for. Alon stated that, as a loudspeaker is not a musical instrument, then it should be built as rigid as possible. As the loudspeaker's job is to convert electrical energy to mechanical energy, any loss at this point needs to be minimal. The only thing that should move in a loudspeaker are the driver cones. Nothing else should move. This means the frames of the cones have to be attached to an apparatus that is completely still, i.e. extremely stiff. Additionally, they need to be damped, so there are no extraneous vibrations. Aluminium ticks all the boxes as it's an extremely stiff material that is very easily damped. Apparently, Alon's perfect material would be titanium, but the prices would be eye-wateringly high.

The attack and decay of the notes were presented naturally. It was a rendition of part of Igor Stravinsky's 'The Rite of Spring' (I didn't get which performance) that really made me sit up and listen.

The orchestration had room to breathe. On the subject of breathing, the wood, reed and brass sections really came through naturally. As they layered with percussion and strings it was jaw-droppingly gorgeous to hear.

Are they the prettiest, most eye-catching speakers available? Nope. Unless you knew the brand and construction, I very much doubt that anyone could guess the price. But this is more the point. All the technical know-how and years of R&D has created a 21st century loudspeaker for the 21st century.



Magico A3 tech spec

Driver Complement

- 1-inch MB7 Beryllium Dome (X1)
- 6-inch Midrange Graphene Nano Tec (X1)
- 7-inch Bass Graphene Nano Tec (X2)

Specifications

- Sensitivity: 88dB
- Impedance: 4 Ohms
- Frequency Response: 22 Hz – 50 KHz
- Minimum Recommended Power: 50 Watts RMS Maximum Recommended Power: 300
- Watts RMS
- Dimensions (HxDxW) : 44-inch x 11-inch x 9.25-inch (112cm x 27cm x 23cm)
- Weight: 110 lbs. (50Kg)

Price and availability

I was told at the event that the UK RRP is £11,998 per pair.

The speakers follow Henry Ford's colour options, black or black. However, that is in a brushed finish.

You can get yours from March.



REVIEW

STIHL HSA 45 CORDLESS HEDGE-TRIMMER



We have been impressed by Stihl's battery-powered gardening equipment before. So, when we got word of the HSA 45 cordless hedge-trimmer, it was time to drop the long-handled shears.

JAY GARRETT

Stihl is well known for its reliable, well-designed garden tools for professional gardeners. However, this is the first cordless hedge trimmer aimed at those with smaller gardens.

The HSA 45 uses a different battery-powered system to the other Stihl tools we have tested. Where the BGA 56 and FSA 56 are powered by removable rechargeable cells that can be used in other tools in the range, the HSA 45 has an in-built unit.

Another interesting fact is that the HSA 45 costs half the price of Stihl's next cordless trimmer.

So, is this hedge-trimmer the bargain it appears to be?

Stihl HSA 45 trimmer design

Firstly, the HSA 45 is dressed in Stihl's familiar orange and pale grey livery.

It is equipped with a double-sided, 50 cm (20-inch) cutting blade with single-edged teeth spaced at 24 mm.

This enables it to tackle branches up to 8 mm in diameter, perfect for trimming annual growth.

Thanks to the integrated 18 V Lithium-Ion battery you can expect up to 40 minutes of runtime. A full charge from empty takes 210 minutes.

On the left side is a clear battery level indicator.

The tip protector includes a helpful hole that allows you to mount it easily on the wall.

Over on the right you'll find two small holes. These are for the safety key. Without the key in-situ the trimmer will not fire up. Further safety

is brought by the combination of grips needed to engage the tool. Additionally, the trimmer ships with a plastic blade cover. Yeah, it's orange of course.

The HSA 45 weighs just 2.3 kg so is easy on your arms.

Stihl HSA 45 performance

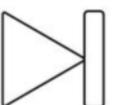
Taking the trimmer out of its box for the first time I was relieved to see that the same Stihl quality was still in evidence. Remember, this is quite a lot cheaper than the next cordless trimmer from the company (HSA 56).

It would be easy for them to skimp on materials and such, but that would so go against what the German firm has stood for since it started.

The HSA 45 possesses excellent balance in use. Even though my garden is quite small (I live in London so happy to get any private outdoor space!) I was able to whiz through the border greenery without a break. This is not quite the same story when I use my shears.

The cordless trimmer was able to get through the sycamore tree branches coming over from the nearby railway embankment, as well as the old laurel hedging. Entwined amongst the woody branches are ivy, honeysuckle, as well as the joys brought by hedge bindweed.

Apart from earlier, older branches, the HSA 45 was able to dispatch everything in its path.



REVIEW

STIHL HSA 45 CORDLESS HEDGE-TRIMMER

The 40 minutes charge is more-than-enough for my estate. However, if you have many metres of tall hedgerows to maintain, then the HSA 56 with its replaceable packs may be more to your needs. Personally, I think the 45 will be trimmer enough for more urban gardens.

Additionally, the low noise and vibration is another advantage of this particular trimmer. Moreover, the low maintenance and easy starting/stopping offered by this tool when compared to petrol machinery goes without saying. Furthermore, you get all the benefits over corded, mains-electric machines, as the HSA 45 can be used anywhere, without restrictions.

My shears are looking at retirement brochures.

Stihl HSA 45 trimmer review conclusion

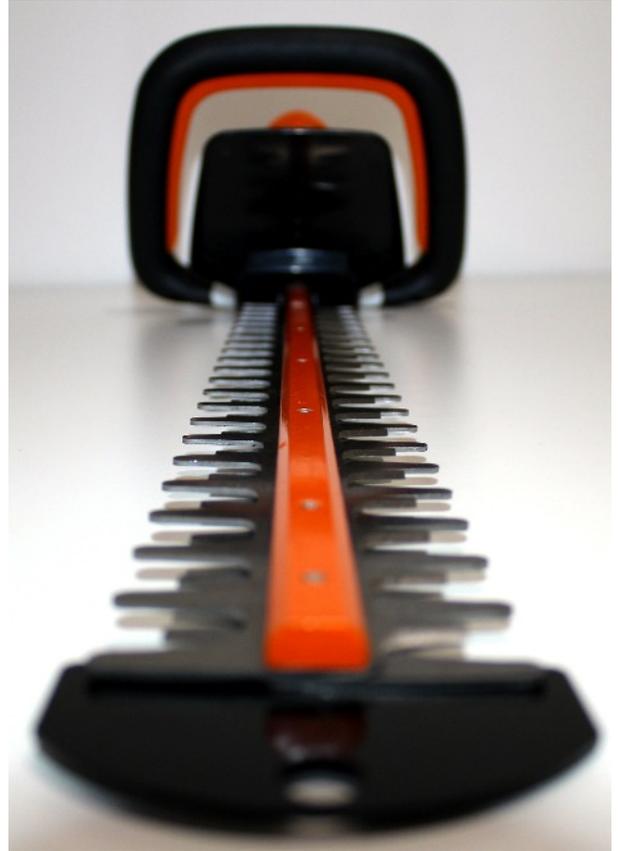
What's not to love about Stihl quality at a pocket-friendly price point? Additionally, cordless tools enable you to get to the furthest corners of your boundary without the risk of trailing cables.

The battery life is enough for most gardens and an 80% charge is achieved in 145 minutes.

As with all Stihl equipment, you will have to collect from an authorised dealer. Here you will receive a detailed handover of the product to ensure you get the most from your new machine.

Stihl HSA 45 price and availability

You can buy the Stihl HSA 45 hedge-trimmer right now for £99.



REVIEW

ROCCAT KONE AIMO RGB GAMING MOUSE



Gamers love RGB. That seems to be the given fact. Roccat certainly knows this and has brought LED-embazoned peripherals to the next level.

So, welcome to the Roccat Kone AIMO gaming mouse.

JAY GARRETT

I do enjoy learning things though this site. Things like, Roccat actually being responsible for the introduction of RGB lighting to peripherals 10 years ago. Coincidentally enough, this happened when it launched the original Kone mouse.

The Kone mouse has since secured its place in the company's lineup. Naturally, we have seen it evolve over the years.

This latest iteration features AIMO. This is the name of Roccat's new RGB lighting ecosystem that's designed to automatically configure itself and adapt to your behaviour over time.

Roccat Kone AIMO design

The Kone range, tweaks aside, have kept the family looks. They are right-handed wired pointers with four buttons and a wheel on top, plus two more side-mounted thumb buttons.

However, the newcomer adds in a third button on the side. This is, by default, dedicated to the Easy-Shift function. More on that later.

If you met last year's Kone EMP, the Kone AIMO will feel familiar to you.

Switches

Up top you'll find your two main clickers. These have mild contours to keep your fingers in place and sit atop Omron switches rated to 50 million clicks. This is a fairly standard inclusion for mice in this price bracket, they feel crisp and precise.

Between them is a rather nifty Titan scroll wheel. Roccat describes this as being 4D. I was excited to test out its time travelling abilities but, sadly, this is not the 4th dimension they meant. However, the

wheel does move in four directions (five technically, but let's not get picky). As well as the usual scroll up/down and click functions, you can tilt it left and right as well.

The two buttons behind the mouse wheel are set up to control the DPI settings of the mouse by default. You can configure and toggle through up to five DPI settings per profile.

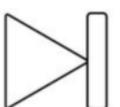
Over on the left side of the mouse we have the usual forward and back buttons above a thumb divot. Down on the bottom of the thumb divot, the one dedicated to Roccat's Easy-Shift.

You may have noticed that there aren't any rubberised grip areas on this mouse. Some might miss these but after owning a white Corsair M65, I now how grubby and worn these can get.

Sensor

Roccat's Owl-Eye is based on PixArt 3361. This is a world leading optical mouse sensor. However, this one is modified to higher and exacting standards that are expected from the company in their product. This Owl-Eye sensor features staggering 12,000 DPI that can translate your movements on monitor screen with the accuracy level of 1:1.

Under the hood is a DCU, or distance control unit, and 512 kb of on board memory allowing 5 separate profiles to be save. Additionally, there's an ARM Cortex-M0 MCU enabling rapid executions and storage.



REVIEW

ROCCAT KONE AIMO RGBA GAMING MOUSE

Lights

As you'd expect from a product being marketed mainly on the strength of its lighting, the RGB LED illumination on the Kone Aimo is bright and vibrant. Moreover, it's totally tune-able.

Roccat Kone AIMO performance

The Roccat Kone AIMO is first in the series of products by the company that's been designed with intuitive RGB lighting. This system learns as well as adapts naturally to your interaction.

This is all very well, pretty lights and all, but gamers need performance. Also, the ability to switch through different DPI on the fly. Well, this mouse does it swiftly thanks to the quick DPI switching button close to scroll wheel. When tested this gaming mouse on different games from MMO to FPS it never let me down.

The company is using the tagline of "speed of light" for this mouse, which seems fitting. The reasoning is, thanks to Easy Shift and the Owl Eye sensor techy, everything you need is easily and quickly to hand.

Feel

The mouse has been constructed using high quality plastic and the engineering design appears to be very durable.

Although it is slightly bigger than the Rival 700 it does remind me of the Corasir mouse in size. It is very comfortable and the 130g weight didn't hinder hours of gaming.

The pair of mouse buttons have an extremely short throw. This makes every selection feel very sharp and responsive. as good mouse buttons should. The third mouse button (the mouse wheel click) also feels crisp.

The scroll wheel is equally precise. I was worried about the side-clicking wheel but actually found it to be very intuitive. My worry of scrolling whilst side-clicking was unnecessary. I was able to tilt the wheel in either direction easily without incurring accidental scrolls or clicks. This, then, becomes a really handy addition whether gaming or even productivity – depending what actions you connect the side clicks to.

The wheel itself is rubberised for grip and has high resistance and very obvious notches for each step. I like it.

Also, the thumb buttons are comfortably placed. Like all the other buttons, they feel fantastic. The Easy Shift button is a downward press rather than sideways. This makes it very easy to hold while using the other buttons, and that's a good thing given its intended purpose. I guess now is a good time to talk about Easy Shift.

Easy Shift

Roccat's Easy-Shift+ function essentially makes that lower button act like the Shift or FN key on your keyboard. That means every other key gets a secondary function while the Easy Shift button is depressed. For example, the scroll up and down functions will change system volume instead of scrolling a page when it's held. It's a powerful feature.

Snappy

The exclusive switches by Roccat gives you up to 50 million clicks of life span. Not only should that reassure you of the device's longevity, it also should calm your fear of the double click problems that seem to occur with every mouse after a while.

The Kone AIMO uses customised Cherry MX switches which are the best in the market. The click feel is very similar to my SteelSeries daily driver.

The buttons can obviously be customised using Roccat Swarm. You can also tweak the lights too.

Lights

There are five RGB lighting zones altogether: the scroll wheel, two thick outer strips, and a further two thin inner strips which run from the middle to the back of the body. These are multi-LED.

The AIMO lighting system is described by Roccat as one that "reacts fluidly and organically, and grows based on your gaming behaviour and compatible connected devices".

Basically, this means you are able to implement a cross-device spectrum effect that changes colour and speed based on your inputs. All achieved without the need for any fiddly manual configuration.

Regardless of what lighting you have, all lights change to a cool blue whenever Easy-Shift+ is activated. Sadly, there's no way of indicating DPI by colour, although audio notifications are available.

In terms of lighting quality, it's bright and vivid in all zones. Although, to my eyes, the scroll wheel's white appeared to take on a pinkish hue.

Software

Roccat's Swarm software is really nice to use.

Mine needed a little update but navigation remains simple and intuitive. Thanks to onboard memory, the Kone AIMO supports five onboard profiles, and these are always easily accessible at the bottom of the window. The profile manager is used to swap profiles in and out of memory and set auto-switch options. This allows you to have an FPS profile configured that's automatically switched on whenever you launch one of your installed and assigned FPS titles. Awesome!

Settings

The Settings tab controls Windows mouse settings and DPI levels. You can enable or disable up to five individual steps easily.

Button Assignment

Guess what the Button Assignment tab does? This was also exceedingly simple to use. Roccat actually offers a few preset setups, but all are easily customisable.

Two menus provide settings for normal use and Easy-Shift+ use. Then, each button has a dropdown menu with masses of options including shortcuts to programs, media controls, and much more.

Each menu highlights the button or command you're changing on the button map. Additionally, with the multidirectional scroll wheel, you have 12 options per menu or a maximum total of 20 possible custom functions (23 minus the obligatory click, right click, and Easy-Shift+)



REVIEW

ROCCAT KONE AIMO RGBA GAMING MOUSE

functions (23 minus the obligatory click, right click, and Easy-Shift+activation).

Also, remember, this is all per-profile as well, so you can actually have five times this number if you really go to town. Mind thoroughly boggled.

Advanced Settings

Polling rate, angle snapping, and lift-off distance can be found in the Advanced Settings tab. Regarding the former, 125Hz, 250Hz, 500Hz, and 1,000Hz are all offered on a per-profile basis.

Illumination

The Illumination tab is a bit of fun amongst all those serious adjustments.

As well as AIMO, where control is handed over to Roccat, there are five simple effects to choose from.

The two longer lighting strips, being multi-LED, can be set to gradients rather than just single colours. Now, I might be doing something wrong, but I kept on losing my custom settings. I'd be happily playing around with one of the effects and then set a new one. However, when I go back to the one I had, it had disappeared. It might just be me and I might just need to spend more time with it.

Gaming

Whilst spending a good amount of time touring the mouse and software, it's actual game play that matters, right?

I am happy to report that, once my hand had reacquainted itself with the grip that this style of mouse requires, I was back on form. Lift off sensing was swift, and would shut off the sensor at less than the depth of a CD. I know, real technical measurement there.

I really loved this mouse in first person shooters. When I had more time, I used to play quite a lot of CS:GO with my old Corsair mouse and the Kone AIMO brought all of that back. Having the Easy Shift option enables more actions to be taken care of on-mouse rather than having to bring extra keystrokes in to play which could slow you down.

It is also a very comfortable mouse to use.



Roccat Kone AIMO review conclusion

The Kone mouse already has plenty of fans and I can see why. The feature that gives this latest iteration its name is an interesting idea.

I have seen similar on other brands and this is something that will only come in to its own once you have multiple peripherals. Luckily for me, I have just received the Khan AIMO headset too.

The comfort and sensor are extremely difficult to find fault with. I have got used to the Easy Shift function and the tilt-y scroll wheel much faster than I thought I would.

Swarm is also an impressive bit of software that's also so easy to use. I have to admit, that the Kone's size and weight means it won't be for everyone, but that goes for most mice. However, if you favour a fuller figure and a bit more weight under their palm, the Kone AIMO is a quality bit of kit.

Roccat Kone AIMO price and availability

You can buy the Kone AIMO RGB mouse right now for £70.

It is available in black, white or grey.



REVIEW

BENQ W2000 FULL HD REC.79 PROJECTOR



Projectors are generally designed to perform well and yet be hidden away. The BenQ W2000 has been designed for living rooms. It also boasts being able to perfectly render the Rec 709 global HDTV colour standard. GadgetyNews takes a front-row seat.

JAY GARRETT

The W2000 is a Full HD single-chip DLP projector. It features BenQ's CinematicColour technology, which aims to deliver the full Rec.709 colour standard for HD images. This should mean more accurate colours straight out of the box.

BenQ W2000 design

The W2000 brings the bling thanks to its champagne gold coloured fascia. This might not be to everyone's taste, but it does make it distinctive. This is also BenQ showing that the W2000 is designed to look good in a living room.

It is compact and lightweight projector and neatly designed with gently curved edges and a mostly white plastic body, save for that golden flourish.

There are some top-mounted controls for when you don't have the included backlit remote to hand. There is also a little sliding door beneath which are the focus and lens shift wheels.

The rear panel houses all the connectivity options. Here you'll find a pair of HDMI inputs, one each of composite and component video, RCA audio ins, a D-Sub PC port and an RS-232 port for control.

The HDMI's can handle the MHL protocols for playing content from your mobile phone.

Additionally, there's a 12V trigger output (handy for those with a motorised screen), a 3.5mm audio loopthrough, and both standard and mini USB ports. You also can buy an optional Wireless Full HD Kit (WDP01).

Those USB ports are for powering the wireless kit and for updates. They're not there for playing multimedia off thumb drives. Bit of a shame that.

BenQ W2000 performance

BenQ claims the DLP (Digital Light Processing) engine delivers a maximum brightness of 2000 ANSI Lumens and a promising contrast ratio of 15,000:1.

As is normally the case with single-chip DLP projectors, colour is delivered via a six-segment (RGBRGB), six-speed wheel. This has been specially coated and angled to help achieve that Rec.709 standard.

You may shrug your shoulders as everyone seems to be all about HDR these days. However, Rec.709 is still the standard for Blu-ray. Also, I for one am not grumbling about it boasting its Rec.709 credentials, especially at this price.

The use of an all-glass, low-dispersion coated lens (not something commonly found in the sub-£1000 projectors) and the fact DLP systems tend to suffer less of a reduction in colour accuracy over their lifetime than rival projection platforms only adds to the projector's value.

Set up

Set-up is relatively straightforward, with twist-to-extend feet at the back and a pop out foot at the front to help you to position the picture correctly.

It's a relatively short-throw projector, allowing for a picture of up to 100-inches from 2.5m away.



REVIEW

BENQ W2000 FULL HD REC.79 PROJECTOR



However, with just a 1.3x zoom on board, you'll want it a little closer to get a decently-sized picture.

Side projection and settings

I really like the W2000's ability to project from the side. Not all homes can allow for a projector sitting front and centre. Thanks to the Side Projection with 2D Keystone, the trapezoid effect is eliminated when the projector is placed at an indirect angle. So, you can set up the projector in a corner or on a side table to free up valuable space.

There's a handy built-in test pattern that certainly helps get things right. A little tweaking using the manual focus, zoom and vertical image shifting controls tucked away under a sliding panel on the top and all is golden.

I used the Cinema Rec.709 picture mode from the settings. This, as expected, is pretty much spot on from what I can tell.

If you wish, the W2000 is also ISF (Imaging Science Foundation) certified for pro calibration.

The ISF presets are available for day and night, alongside 'bright', 'vivid' and a handful of others. I still preferred 'cinema' and found it to be the most natural and accurate.

I ran the lamp at 'normal' – you can also opt for 'eco' or 'smart eco' (a sort of dynamic contrast setting that will adjust itself based on the content on screen). My opinion is to stick with normal.

At 2000 ANSI lumens max brightness, there are brighter. That said, the W2000 goes for colour accuracy above all else. Moreover, it does this very well. Besides, having to draw the curtains is hardly a chore

Viewing

The W2000's picture quality is outstanding. You would be hard pushed to guess the price of this projector when you see the image presented.

Colour

Its particularly good at handling colour. Straight out of the box using the Cinema preset with no manual adjustments made, the tones look wonderfully natural and nuanced.

The sense of balance in the colour palette is outstanding too. At no point is one of the six main colour elements attempting to dominate over any of the others.

Skin tones look believable under even the most difficult of film lighting conditions, with no blocking or striping.

There's easily enough colour tone subtlety to ensure people's faces always look natural rather than doll-like.

Nothing is ever overblown or overdone. Lesser projectors in this price bracket may be tempted to push colour saturation up so the image pops, but you tend to lose natural tones. However, the W2000 remains superbly balanced.

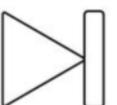
It handles depth really nicely too. Images appear layered. By this I mean buildings appear to stand in front of one another and textures have a great sense of realism. It makes for a wholly immersive picture that is complemented by its superb handling of colour.

OK, go for something more expensive and you will get more detail and sharpness. Yes, there is a touch of softness here and there. You might lose a little of the finer details in faces and clothing, but it still does really well.

Contrast

Contrast is reasonably strong, especially if you use the Smart Eco mode, thanks to the punchy look the W2000 delivers with bright colours and whites, even during dark scenes.

You do get a smattering of DLP's rainbow effect in exceptionally bright areas, but I have seen much worse.



REVIEW

BENQ W2000 FULL HD REC.79 PROJECTOR



Black levels

My favourite film is Blade Runner; I also quite enjoyed Blade Runner 2049. Both favour plenty of dark scenes and this is where the W2000 shows its weakness. Black levels just don't go deep enough for this kind of behaviour.

On occasions, it left things looking a little washed out, this in turn affects shadow detail too.

Additionally, I must add that this issue really only stands out in very dark scenes, and won't affect that much of your overall viewing time. The black level shortcomings are far less of an issue in rooms where there's a touch of ambient light around than they are in completely blacked out rooms too.

Motion handling

Motion, on the whole is pretty darned good.

Content hardly suffers from judder. I say hardly, as I did notice a few moments where edges of buildings in extremely clear shots were affected. But, I was paying particular attention to them. I very much doubt that such things would be caught in the average viewer's peripheral vision.

Sound quality

There has never been a point in a projector review where I have stated that the in-built speakers are your best option. There's a reason for that. The BenQ W2000 does not break this rule.



However, the W2000 does take its audio duties remarkably seriously. It combines 20W of audio output with a resonant sound chamber design. Also, there's 'MaxxAudio' processing and algorithms apparently used by Hollywood studios to boost the perceived bass and treble range.

It possibly is the best sounding projector I've tested. If you have the projector in front of you the audio is almost good enough for you to be convinced that it's emanating from at least somewhere in the vicinity of the pictures on the screen. Almost.

The mid-range is clear and open and there is plenty of treble detailing.

Bass presence is reasonable but it is the treble that seems to get the extra helpings here.

Other observations

The W2000 has not been put over as a gaming projector. Input lag isn't really that noticeable to my casual gaming prowess, however, I have read figures of between 30ms and 60ms of input lag (the amount of time it takes to render its pictures). Again, anyone looking for a professional grade gaming projector may feel this.



What is impressive is just how quietly the W2000 runs. The fan is working but the large chassis certainly must aid airflow as I wasn't distracted by any cooling noises.

BenQ W2000 review conclusion

The BenQ W2000 certainly boasts bang for buck.

It produces a natural colour palette and wholly immersive picture that's way above its pay grade.

BenQ have really worked hard to enable the W2000 with the skills to deliver Rec.709 remarkably well right out of the box. Unfortunately, this prowess with colour highlights its weakness with black level response.

Home cinema fans will love its range of connectivity as well as that excellent Rec.709 preset.

To round up, the BenQ W2000 looks decent, has amazing colour skills and connection options. It might not be as strong with its black levels but it's still worth checking out at this price.

BenQ W2000 projector price and availability

You can buy the W2000 right now for under £800.



REVIEW

ECLIPSE TD510MK2 LOUDSPEAKERS



Eclipse is renowned for its strikingly egg-shaped speakers. The clever folk at Eclipse wring out the very best and the most they can from a single full-range driver per cabinet. Recently, the TD510Mk2 has been entertaining us at GadgetyNews HQ.

JAY GARRETT

We have slowly been working our way up the Eclipse food-chain. Now we find ourselves at the TD510Mk2, just below the astounding, top-of-the-range TD712zMk2.

As you may have guessed, the TD510Mk2 are larger than the TD508Mk3 we reviewed most recently. Those we found lost a little oomph in the lower regions at some points. Will their larger sibling do better in our modestly-sized room?

Eclipse TD510 Mk2 design

The TD510 Mk2 very much follow the same design concept and aesthetic as their other speakers.

So, without labouring the point, each cabinet is made from two synthetic parts joined around the middle.

The TD510 are equipped with the 10cm fibre-glass drivers seated in the front section of the 'egg'.

Around the rear is where you'll find the speaker posts and a bass port.

The TD510Mk2 didn't come with grilles so this means I felt like I was being watched. All. The. Time.

It took a while for my girlfriend to get used to their never-blinking stare. Granted, I didn't help matters by playing Jeff Wayne's 'War of the Worlds' through them. However, she now loves how they look.

The adjustable desk stands of the TD510Mk2 suits the aesthetics of the speakers. The bundled Allen keys allow you to alter the angles of the speakers. You can even mount the speakers on a wall, or even on a ceiling. Please make sure your walls/ceiling can take the

weight. These tip the scales at 9.5Kg each. Also, they measure 255×391×381mm (WxHxD).

Eclipse TD510Mk2 performance

For the purpose of this review I had to balance the TD510Mk2 on my usual stands. Not ideal. I did ask if there was any chance of borrowing the Eclipse stands. The response was that the stands I have seen are integral to the practically identical, yet taller, twins the TD510z. I have also seen the pricing of the floorstanding Z model.

The speakers are quoted as having a frequency response of 42Hz-22kHz (-10dB). Being rear ported I took some time in getting them a decent distance from the wall. Also, with my previous Eclipse experience, I ensured that they were toed-in a little more severely than I would my usual speakers.

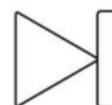
Taking the time to get the positioning right is really rewarding. I think this goes especially with these speakers as they are quite focused.

Sound quality

Eclipse really work on the pace and timing of their speakers. I am pleased to say that the TD510Mk2 is no exception.

Naturally, with a single driver of this size, the treble and upper mid-range are amazingly agile and sweet. Thankfully, the bass is also instantly more present than it was from the 8cm drivers of the smaller versions.

Firstly, dropping the needle on Robin Trower's 'Bridge of Sighs' LP brought both warmth and clarity. The band all had their own area and vocals had both presence and expression.



REVIEW

ECLIPSE TD510MK2 LOUDSPEAKERS

A Perfect Circle's 'Package' on CD is one of my favourites for its opening bass salvo. It rumbles through tautly but without annoying the guitars.

Back to black plastic and Leftfield's recent re-release of 'Leftism'. Bass is still potent but there is only so much even the clever folk at Eclipse can manage.

Yes, it is swift, direct and clear; however, you are never going to be able to achieve earth-moving sub bass from a 10cm driver that is covering everything.

It is still a very enjoyable listen and not really being a bass hunter, they are pretty good for me. That said, I can't help but feel I am still missing something from some tracks.

I guess this is why Eclipse offers a sub-woofer unit too. I would suggest that you look at adding that as well if your room is of a decent size. For my little London living room, the TD510Mk2 just about do the trick.

Eclipse TD510Mk2 review conclusion

The Eclipse TD510Mk2 possesses a lot of the enjoyable traits the smaller egg speakers have. They have amazing timing and an entertaining clarity. I really do have a soft spot for Eclipse units.

For most music, no matter the source, the TD510Mk2 prove to be adaptable. Yes, they do need a shove from the amp. Also, as well as loving to be driven, the speakers are quite directional. That said, with

a little time spent at getting them positioned, they will not fail to impress.

If you are looking for something other than another boring box but still value timing, accuracy and clarity, I urge you to take the TD510Mk2 for a test drive. Also, see if they'll throw in the TD520SW sub for good measure.

Eclipse TD510Mk2 price and availability

You can buy the Eclipse TD510Mk2 now in white, black or silver.

Prices are as follows: TD510Mk2 (with the short desktop stands as reviewed) £1,920.

For the taller floorstanding TD510ZMK2, you will need £3,840



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