

Hifi Pig

APRIL 2018

THE WOMEN IN HIFI EDITION

Interview with Sally
Gibb of The Chord
Company

Women In Hifi
Female Audiophiles

PLUS Hifi News,
Reviews, Live Music
& Much More...





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WELCOME

Welcome to the latest edition of Hifi Pig Magazine. One of the constant topics of conversation amongst those with an interest in Hifi is “where are all the women?”. This month we have decided to address the issue with a very female-orientated edition...and no, this is not a gimmick, we thought that it was high time that ‘Women In Hifi’ had their voices heard.

We have an interview with Sally Gibb, owner and CEO of British cable manufacturer, The Chord Company, which I am sure you will find incredibly interesting.

Founding Partner and CEO of the Estonian High-End loudspeaker brand, Estelon, Alissa Vassilkova, gives us an insight into her day in our ‘Living The Hifi Life’ feature.

Women who work in the global Hifi Industry tell us exactly what it is like to be a ‘Woman in Hifi’ in 2018 and three female audiophiles talk about how they got into the hobby and their love of music and Hifi.

Plus, I give the ‘Itchy Blanket of Gender Politics’ a good shake and delve into gender equality and how we get more women into Hifi as an industry and a hobby. ‘Stu’s Views’ discusses why men using the term WAF really should wake up to the fact that it’s 2018, and James Fleming’s ‘Rants, Raves and Rock ‘n’ Roll’ focuses on the truly iconic Nina Simone.

Of course, we have plenty of news, reviews and all our other features for you too. I hope that you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together for you...and do please tell us what you think over on the [Hifi Pig Facebook page](#)!

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Stuart Smith'.

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

- Jon Myles, *HiFi World* 2015

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

- Awards Edition, *HiFi World* 2015

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

- Mono & Stereo, 2015

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



Stereo Times
The Complete Audiophile Magazine

BEST PRODUCT 2015 High Fidelity.pl

HI-FI WORLD



CLICK AND GO! INDEX

SPECIAL FEATURE

WOMEN IN HIFI

INTERVIEW

Sally Gibb is responsible for creating one of the UK's best known Hifi brands, cable manufacturer The Chord Company. Hifi Pig talks to Sally about, among other things, how she got into the Hifi Industry, how she runs a successful and harmonious company and the role of women in the Hifi Industry.

GO!



WOMEN IN HIFI



Meet twelve of the many amazing women that work in the Hifi Industry. Here they tell you, in their own words, what it is like to be female in what is often a male dominated industry. They tell it like it is, the good, the bad and the ugly. You will find some shared experiences from women across the globe, some cultural similarities and some differences. Find out what they think about how the industry is progressing for women, if it is it a good industry for a woman to work in and have they encountered sexism or discrimination?

GO!



THE FEMALE AUDIOPHILES

Hifi Pig Talks To Three Female Readers Who Are Very Much Audiophiles **GO!**

BIRD'S EYE VIEW

We Are All In This Together

Linette Smith takes a look gender imbalance in the Hifi Industry and Audiophile Community and how to attract more women into Hifi, both as an industry and a hobby. **GO!**

STU'S VIEWS

Apparently Women have the vote and everything. Stu Smith connects tongue firmly with cheek and discusses the dreaded Wife Acceptance Factor! **GO!**



A BESPOKE SONG

NINA SIMONE RECORDED MORE THAN FORTY ALBUMS AND FUSED MANY GENRES. JAMES FLEMING TAKES A LOOK AT

THIS AMAZING AND INSPIRATIONAL WOMAN. **GO!**



LIVING THE HiFi LIFE

Alissa Vassilkova is a Founding Partner and the CEO of the Estonian High-End loudspeaker brand, Estelon. She gives us an insight into her busy life filled with work, snow, High-End Hifi and...cats! **GO!**



CLICK AND GO! INDEX

YOUR HIFI NEWS GO!

HIFI REVIEWS

LEEMA TUCANA
ANNIVERSARY EDITION
INTEGRATED AMP **GO!**



PARASOUND HALO 2.1
INTEGRATED AMP
WITH DAC **GO!**



LONGDOG AUDIO PH 1
MOVING MAGNET
PHONO STAGE **GO!**



AUDIOVECTOR SR3
AVANTGARDE
LOUDSPEAKERS **GO!**



BURSON CONDUCTOR
VIRTUOSO V2+
HEADPHONE AMP/DAC
GO!



iFi NANO iDSD BLACK
LABEL HEADPHONE
AMP/DAC **GO!**



WIRE ON WIRE 660
SPEAKER CABLES **GO!**



NOMADIC AUDIO
SPEAKASE **GO!**



LIVE MUSIC

The Men That Will Not Be
Blamed For Nothing -
Newcastle **GO!**



Paul Draper – The Caves,
Edinburgh **GO!**



BOOK REVIEW

Sebastian Bach – 18 And Life On Skid Row
GO!





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ACOUSTIC

WHEELCHAIR FOR RICKY UPDATE



In 2016 Hifi Pig launched a campaign to help raise enough money to buy a new wheelchair for one of our young readers Ricky Sterling. Much has happened since then but here is a very happy update. We'd like to thank everyone who helped make this possible

You may remember that back in 2016 we started a fundraiser to help to buy a new wheelchair for young audiophile and Hifi Pig reader, Ricky Sterling. The crowdfunding raffle was supported amazingly by both the Hifi industry who donated many prizes, and you, our wonderful readers. The made-to-measure wheelchair was delivered to Ricky in the USA....but many asked, why no follow up story, well until now that is...read on!

Ricky has been a paraplegic nearly his whole life after falling from a 6th floor window when he was just 2 years old. Since 2009, Ricky's insurance company in the USA were only able to supply him with a very non-maneuvrable, hospital type wheelchair that was not suited to his needs, this made his life uncomfortable and difficult to say the least. Add to that the fact that the tyres were coming off his chair and you can understand how this impacted on Ricky. (See the first picture)

After the generosity of prize donations from many in the Hifi industry we were able to raise enough money, through the kind contributions of Hifi Pig's readers, to commission a brand new, bespoke Colours 'N' Motion wheelchair for Ricky. (Seen here in production).

So why no update until now? Shortly after Ricky got the new wheelchair he found out that he had cancer. This resulted in him having his leg amputated and then going through the long process of healing and recovery. We are really happy to say that Ricky is now doing well. Ricky wanted to thank all of the Audiophile Community, Hifi Pig readers and Hifi industry people that made it possible for him to get his new chair which he says has "been working out for me beautifully".

Ricky sent us this picture of him, now thankfully in better health, in his new wheelchair, alongside the old one, we hope you will join us in

wishing him the best for the future! Thank you once again Hifi Pig readers for making this happen!



The master of the art.



Superior craftsmanship equals devastating performance

Unlike many other audio equipment manufacturers, Melco does not simply repackage a PC computer board into Hi-fi casework and power supply, to create a Hi-Res digital music source component. Each unit is designed from the ground up, solely to provide the ultimate High Resolution audio performance. Melco is the world's first audiophile grade source component to access, store and deliver Hi-Res Digital Music without the compromise of computer hardware and peripherals. Melco is the de-facto standard, regularly used by leading audio manufacturers to showcase their devices.

Melco is award-winning Japanese craftsmanship.

N1ZS20/2A (2TB SSD with Melco SSD Data Management Hardware) – N1ZH60 (6TB SFF HDD) are both a development of the original N1Z series to further advance sound quality, especially for USB-DAC users. A dedicated Neutrik USB2.0 port connects to older USB DACs for optimum sound quality, leaving the faster USB3.0 ports for fast, Easy Music Import and Easy CD Import. Internally, there is further fine-tuning to further reduce internal noise and data jitter, including new screening materials, new advanced components, and a new capacitor bank to isolate the two internal Medical Grade power supplies, which now connect to the mains with a higher current, 3 pole IEC connector with true grounding and inline EMC filtering.

Whether SSD or SFF HDD, there is a new massive, non-magnetic vibration and isolation system with the HDDs contained within an isolated compartment in the N1Z. The unique Melco Dedicated Player Ethernet Port, in addition to LAN port is, of course, maintained so that users of Ethernet Streamers can enjoy all the Melco sound quality benefits.

Recently added functionality includes Direct Hi-Res downloading from HighResAudio.com which avoids possible file errors. Also TIDAL and Qobuz Sublime+ Hi-Res streaming and simplified Internet Radio. Plus USB 3.0 ports on the rear make for Easy Backup, Easy Expansion, Easy Music Import and Easy CD Import.



www.melco-audio-masters.com



YOUR HIFI NEWS



KEF LAUNCH NEW IN-WALL SPEAKERS

KEF has announced a new in-wall architectural loudspeaker, the Ci5160REF-THX.

The Ci5160REF-THX is part of KEF's Reference family of speakers and, like all of the range, the Ci5160REF comes with the Reference Build Certificate signed by the craftsman who built it. The new speaker also meets KEF's 'Extreme Theatre' standard, as well as having THX Ultra certification.

At the heart of the Ci5160REF-THX is the 11th generation of the KEF's signature Uni-Q point source driver array. With a 25mm vented aluminium dome tweeter situated at the exact acoustic centre of a 125mm midrange driver. The Ci5160REF-THX also utilises a bespoke Reference 160mm bass driver, optimised for use in-wall. KEF's engineers computer-modeled the ideal crossover networks before auditioning every component to select those with the lowest distortion and the smoothest response. In addition, the high-frequency and low frequency crossovers are mounted on separate boards to minimise crosstalk.

Taken together, KEF say these innovations offer a "completely new level of freedom and flexibility for systems installers seeking top-of-the-line architectural speaker solutions capable of delivering the best possible sound quality".

Suggested Retail Price: £7,500



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NEWS

NEW ENTRY LEVEL TURNTABLE FROM MCINTOSH

McIntosh who have been designing and building audio for over 65 years, has announced a new turntable The MT2 Precision.

The new McIntosh 'entry-level' MT2 Precision Turntable plays both 33-1/3 and 45 rpm records and is ready to use straight from the box, with all presets taken care of at the New York factory.

The MT2 comes with a pre-installed moving coil- (MC) type cartridge with an output high enough to enable compatibility with moving magnet (MM) inputs on partnering equipment. The MT2's unique cartridge has a high impedance and high output voltage. This cartridge features an alloy cantilever and an elliptical diamond stylus. Its lightweight yet rigid tonearm is constructed from aluminium with special damping materials. The vertical bearings feature two precision-ceramic surfaces with damping fluid; the horizontal bearing is a gimballed sapphire design.

The belt-driven solid black outer platter is made from a special dynamically balanced polyoxymethylene (POM) and is over 1" (25.4mm) thick. The inner platter is made of CNC-precision milled aluminium. The platters rotate on a polished and tempered steel shaft in a sintered bronze bushing. The DC motor is driven by an external voltage-stabilised power supply and is completely decoupled from the chassis.

The MT2's plinth has a resonance-optimised and highly compressed wood base with a black lacquer finish, while the top and middle acrylic plates help absorb unwanted vibrations. A subtle green glow emanates from under the platter and the outside edges of the plinth for a touch maintaining the McIntosh design aesthetic. A clear, contoured dust cover is included.

Orders can be placed now with authorised McIntosh dealers with shipping expected to begin in May (UK) £4,995. In the USA they will ship in April and cost \$4000.



BLACK CAT LUPINO CABLE

Black Cat Cable has launched their Lupino cable, a word which means "Little Wolf" in Italian, as a trickled-down version of their "Lupo" interconnect.

Lupo is made from 2 x 99.999% pure, annealed silver conductors in a 0.25" diameter air-teflon tube, and is terminated with Lovecraft Reference RCAs whereas Lupino is a single 99.999% pure, annealed silver conductor in a 0.15" diameter air-teflon tube, and is terminated with Lovecraft Mini RCAs. A 1 metre pair of Lupino retails for \$399.95 (and is also available in 0.5m sets for \$274.95/set).



The world's most advanced transportable DAC/headphone amp

Hugo has been remastered for a musical experience like no other. With new sonic and convenience features, plus next-generation sound quality, we've created the new reference standard for transportable digital conversion and headphone playback.

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Chord Electronics Ltd.

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ONKYO TX-NR686 7.2 CHANNEL AV RECIEVER

Onkyo has combined Dynamic Audio Amplification with wireless multi-room audio technologies, 4K video support, and 3D audio in a 165 W/Ch (6 ohms, 1 kHz, THD 1%, 1-channel driven) THX-certified Select A/V receiver, the TX-NR686 costing £649.99

As well as playing DTS:X and Dolby Atmos soundtracks, which place sounds in space where they occur naturally, the receiver carries DTS Neural:X and Dolby Surround upmixing solutions. Each is cross-compatible with legacy sound formats encoded on Blu-ray Disc and DVD, such as Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio. AccuEQ Room Acoustic Calibration, which sets essential speaker conditions for optimal performance tailored to the listening space, is enhanced by AccuReflex technology. AccuReflex assures cohesive sound at the listening position by phase-matching directional and non-directional sound for soundtracks played through Dolby Atmos-enabled speaker systems.

Digital audio sources, particularly Hi-Res Audio in 5.6 MHz DSD*1 or 192 kHz/24-bit in FLAC*2, WAV (RIFF)*2, AIFF*2, and ALAC*2 over network or USB input, benefit from VLSC (Vector Linear Shaping Circuitry) on the Front L/R channels.

Amazon Music, TIDAL, TuneIn, Deezer, and Spotify are built into the receiver*3 to make selection easy from remote control or Onkyo Controller*4 app for iPad, iPhone, and Android devices. All network streaming and control functions, including AirPlay, operate over 5 GHz/2.4 GHz Wi-Fi for stability in areas with household network congestion. Music streaming capabilities are further bolstered with built-in Bluetooth wireless technology. A discrete low-noise phono pre-amp is also included and you can connect a turntable featuring an MM.

TX-NR686 features DTS Play-Fi technology. The platform enables streaming services to be synchronised across single or grouped rooms using Onkyo Music Control App*4. Multi-room audio support over Wi-Fi extends to Chromecast built-in, enabling users to stream music from smartphones, tablets, laptops, and PCs from popular apps with a tap or click. Voice control with the Google Assistant*5 is available through Android phones, iPhone, Google Home, or other compatible devices.

Users can re-purpose a set of stereo speakers in the kitchen, garage, or other interior space by powering them via ZONE 2 speaker outputs, with no extra amps or players required, while retaining a 5.2-ch home cinema set-up in the main room. As well as analogue sources including phono and tuner, powered ZONE 2 employs a DAC to distribute digital input sources (network, USB, and S/PDIF) for simultaneous playback of the same or different sources in either or both rooms. Zone 2 line-output is ideal for sharing content to a hi-fi system featuring a line-level input, with multi-room playback management courtesy of the Onkyo Controller app. Six rear HDCP 2.2-compatible HDMI inputs, Main Out, and Sub Out*7 pass 4K/60p video as well as BT.2020 colour standard, 4:4:4 colour sub-sampling, and High Dynamic Range in HDR10, HLG, and Dolby Vision formats to a compatible TV display or projector. A front HDMI input*8 is ideal for temporary device connections, such as a video recorder or game console.





FOCAL | CLEAR

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

Open Reference headphones

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CYRUS



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

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



Cyrus DAC XP Signature
RRP: £2,995

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



Cyrus CD Xt Signature
RRP: £1,795

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



Cyrus Stream X Signature
RRP: £2,995

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



Cyrus Phono Signature
RRP: £1,245

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

Cyrus Awards

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2016

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2015

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014



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NEWS



TAGA HARMONY TTA-500 VALVE AMP ANNOUNCED

TAGA Harmony have released their second vacuum tube amplifier, the TTA-500.

The TTA-500 is a 2 x 35W Class AB valve integrated amplifier using four EL34 tubes in the output stage and a 12AX7 tube preamp section, composed of two 6SN7 tubes as drivers, and a Triode / Pentode mode selector switch.

The valve amp uses Wima coupling capacitors, for input and connecting the driver tubes with the output amp, and Rubycon capacitors in the power filtering. Other components include an EI broadband sound output transformer, ALPS volume potentiometer and gold-plated speaker terminals. Up to 3 stereo devices can be connected via machined brass RCA sockets. The front and side walls of the housing are made of thick 6 mm aluminium and the vacuum tube decorative panel is finished in a brushed aluminium colour.



AUDEZE RELEASE GAMING HEADSET

OK, not strictly Hifi but...Audeze, the American headphone manufacturer, are best known for their audiophile, planar magnetic headphones and in-ear monitors. However, now they have moved into the gaming world with their new, crowd-funded Mobius headphones.

The Audeze Mobius features, of course, their planar magnetic technology coupled with full 3D emulation with support for surround sound modes, and an integrated 3D head-tracking system, room emulation technology and anatomy calibration. Audeze say that "Mobius is truly optimised for the way your brain processes sound in a manner consistent with real-world listening". They are also equipped with Bluetooth for wireless gaming. The over-ear, closed-back headphones are a lightweight (350g), ergonomic design with fully replaceable, contoured memory foam ear pads and an adjustable, memory-foam padded, headband.

The headphones will be shipping in the summer and available in copper or blue. Audeze are currently running the project on crowd funding site Indiegogo where the Mobius are available from \$249 USD plus shipping charges.



One More Time



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

Chord Company cables feature our unique ARAY conductor technology and advanced shielding materials, backed-up with over 30 years of innovation and experience.

Demonstration cables are available from all good Chord Company retailers. Find your nearest at: www.chord.co.uk



**WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2017**

Accessories
Best speaker cable
Chord Company Clearway



**WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2017**

Accessories
Best analogue interconnect under £50
Chord Company C-line



**WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2017**

Accessories
Best analogue interconnect £50+
Chord Company Clearway



Award-winning, cost-effective, high-performance interconnects and speaker cables. Designed and built in England by music lovers since 1985. Enjoyed by music lovers all over the world.



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NEW HYBRID INTEGRATED FROM TAGA HARMONY

TAGA Harmony HTA-800 is a 50W / 8ohm hybrid integrated amplifier utilising two 6N3 tubes in the preamp section and four Toshiba transistors at the output. High-performance tubes and a high-power shielded toroidal 200W transformer provides stable power.

There are audiophile grade ALPS volume potentiometer, WIMA capacitors and gold-plated speaker terminals. Analog inputs with solid machined brass RCA sockets can accommodate up to 4 stereo devices including a turntable (MM cartridge). You can connect a range of digital devices via optical or coaxial inputs and there is a built-in 24bit / 192kHz DAC, it also has a headphone preamplifier. A Preamplifier output is dedicated for an optional external power amplifier or powered subwoofer and speakers.

Power Output: 2 x 60W RMS / 4ohm

Vacuum Tubes: 2 x 6N3

Analogue: RCA Stereo: CD, Line, AUX, Phono (MM)

Digital: Optical, Coaxial

Built-in DAC: 24bit / 192kHz

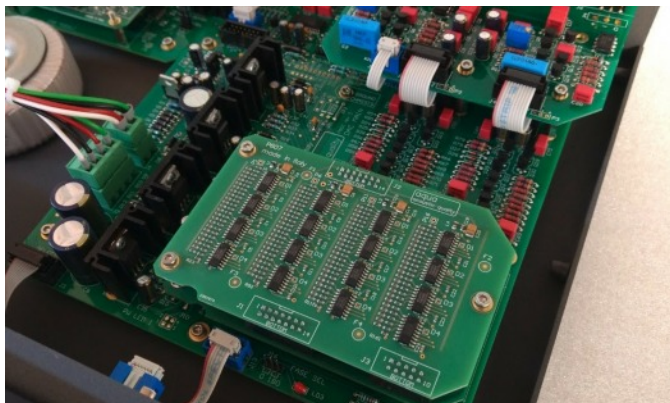


BRAINWAVZ S0 IEM NOISE ISOLATING EARPHONES

Brainwavz has released its S0 IEM noise isolating earphones. The S0 IEM are the latest in the Brainwavz range of over 25 earphones and headphones.

The Brainwavz S0 earphones are all metal housing and flat, tangle free cabling. The Clearwavz mic and remote use a high precision MEMS (Micro-Electrical-Mechanical System) silicon microphone with a three-button control. This enables users to make audio calls as well as audio.

They are priced at £35.73 / \$49.50.



AQUA LA VOCE S3 DAC UPGRADE

new D/A conversion module for La Voce S3 with Discrete R2R Ladder DAC architecture.

Owners of original La Voce can upgrade to La Voce S3 Discrete DAC. The update for the La Voce units of existing owners consists of the following hardware / firmware modifications: FPGA / decoding board code. P608, high-resolution up to 384kHz PCM and DSD128.. R2R Ladder resistors board cod. P607 USB board cod. P901 with new firmware; Hardware modification of main board P601. Hardware modification of I2S / USB board P603





MC Step-Up Transformers
Phono Amplifiers
Pre Amplifiers





DENON RELEASE AVC-X8500H 13 CHANNEL AV AMPLIFIER

Denon is introducing a pure AV-Amplifier after a long absence from the AV market. This will be the first AV-Amplifier Denon have released since their AVC-A1HDA back in 2009. The AVC-X8500H is a 13.2 channel AV Amplifier and features Dolby Atmos, DTS:X and Auro 3D surround decoding, with 13 channels of built-in amplification.

“Denon is deeply immersed in the industry and investing in future technology to deliver best-in-class, first-of-its-kind innovations for installers and consumers. As more home theatre enthusiasts integrate object-oriented audio into their builds, we identified a missing need and designed the industry’s first true 13-channel AV Amplifier with plenty of muscle on tap to power formats like Dolby Atmos, DTS:X and Auro 3D,” said Richard Velazquez, global head of brand management at Denon. “In addition to our monolithic amplifier design with our custom-made transistors and compatibility with nearly every advanced AV format, the AVC-X8500H is incredibly easy to setup. Owners can use voice commands with Alexa’s Smart Home Skill to control the unit and leverage whole-home audio integration to experience the future of home theatre.”

Hand-assembled in small batches in Japan, the Amplifier will work at the centre of a whole-home wireless music network, with wireless connectivity via Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, streaming capabilities with Apple AirPlay, and wireless multi-room audio technology. Users can play music in every room from a variety of sources, including DSD (2.8 and 5.6 MHz), FLAC, ALAC and WAV files. It also features Amazon’s Alexa Smart Home Skill for Entertainment Devices.

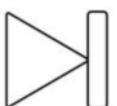
The AVC-X8500H features IP control capability for integration with third-party control devices and Control4™ SDDP (Simple Device Detection Protocol) certification. An RS-232C serial port is available to directly connect to external home automation and control equipment, and an IR remote control input on the rear panel enables remote control compatibility with other components in the home theatre system. The Denon AVC-X8500H also is fully compatible with the latest HDMI connectivity and HDCP 2.2 specifications on all eight HDMI inputs and triple HDMI outputs. The amplifier supports 4K Ultra HD 60Hz video, 4:4:4 Pure Colour sub-sampling, High Dynamic Range (HDR), 21:9 video, 3D and BT.2020 pass-through support. The Denon AVC-X8500H is available now for € 3,699 / £3,299 in black or silver.



FELIKS AUDIO ECHO HEADPHONE AMP

Felix Audio has just launched a new entry level headphone amplifier called Echo, a "back to basics" headphone amp which can drive mid to high impedance headphones. It also has a fully protected pre-amp functionality.

Echo features two 6N6P power valves, two 6N1P driver valves and has an RCA audio input and RCA audio output (pre-amp). Frequency response is 15 Hz - 45 KHz +/- 3 dB. Power output is 350mW. THD: 0.4 % (300 ohm, 20 mW). Optimal headphones impedance is 100 - 600 ohm but will drive also 32ohm plus. Launch price is 369 Euros.





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

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

T+A

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

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

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GOEBEL HIGH END RELEASE EPOQUE AEON LOUDSPEAKERS

Goebel have been producing their Epoque loudspeaker series since its launch around 6 years ago. They have been working on a new version, soon to be unveiled, the Epoque Aeon.

Oliver Gobel told us more: "As we are always looking for the best, we were and are always challenging ourselves and don't rest on our laurels. We left no stone un-turned and questioned and reworked every single part of our Epoque loudspeaker series. We spend a fortune of expenses and development time in investigating new materials, technologies, technics and quality controls in order to enhance our Epoque loudspeaker series to the maximum. Our philosophy is, that we don't unveil update versions until we are 100% happy with the results in all fields!"

They are Epoque Aeon Reference, Epoque Aeon Fine, Epoque Aeon Wall, and the Epoque Aeon Baforce. The Epoque Aeon Fine will be unveiled at AXPONA 2018 in April and then the new Epoque Aeon Reference will debut at the Munich High End show 2018 in May.

Oliver says that they have improved the bending wave driver, bass drivers and alignment, improved and adjusted the crossover, introduced new materials for the foot and new ceramic ball feet and added a new German piano lacquer finish. There is currently only a 'teaser' image available, expect to see more when we meet them in the flesh at High End Munich 2018.



NEW CLEARAUDIO TRACER TONEARM

German turntable brand, Clearaudio, has announced the Tracer radial tonearm, taking the company's family of radial and tangential arms ten.

The new Tracer tonearm slots between the existing Magnify and Clarify models, which positions it just three steps down from Clearaudio's flagship Universal arm. The Tracer is a minimalist design that places emphasis on the stable positioning of the phono cartridge above the record's surface.

In creating the Tracer tonearm, Clearaudio's design team drew on a number of engineering 'tricks' typically associated with high-end watchmaking. Its design features a low-friction jeweled bearing which is made using a combination of tungsten and sapphire. The tonearm tube is carbon.

The Tracer's anti-skating force is adjustable by way of a simple dial, while the aluminum headshell allows the azimuth to be fine-tuned. The counter-weight is under-slung to allow easy adjustment of the tracking force. The Tracer is available with a choice of black carbon or silver carbon armtube, with matching aluminium parts and is priced at £1,810 (including VAT).



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NEWS



SCHIIT LYR 3 MODULAR HYBRID HEADAMP/PREAMP

Schiit Audio EU have announced the introduction of its third-generation Lyr headphone amp/preamp. Using Schiit's new Coherence™ hybrid single-tube/solid state architecture, new Continuity™ constant-transconductance output stage, the same modular design as Jotunheim, Lyr 3 is a dramatic advance in technology, versatility, and convenience say the company. Lyr 3 is available now from Schiit EU starting at £530 with a Tung-Sol Tube.

"This is a clean-sheet design," said Jason Stoddard, Schiit's Co-Founder. "Modularity means you can use the same modules as Jotunheim to create a single-box amp/DAC or amp/phono that's very desktop friendly. But it's a whole lot more than that. We developed a new tube/bipolar hybrid topology that we're calling Coherence™, for the seamless way the tube and transistor work together. We also developed a constanttransconductance output stage, which we're calling Continuity™, to address the most fundamental issue with a Class AB amplifier—and bring it closer to Class A performance."

In addition to being a technology showcase, Lyr 3 is a versatile, powerful, and convenient solution for desktop listening via headphones and powered monitors.

Lyr 3 can be configured with a Multibit DAC, a AK4490 DAC, a phono preamp module, or with no module at all, so it can be tailored to the customers' specific needs. In addition, Lyr 3 can be converted from a hybrid design to an all-solid-state amp by using Schiit's Octal LISST (a solid-state tube product.) . Lyr 3 delivers its full 6W RMS of power at 32 ohms via the single-ended headphone jack, so there's no need for balanced connections for high power. Lyr 3 uses only a single tube, which means lower tube costs and no need for matched tube pairs.

The Lyr 3, the Multibit DAC, the 4490 DAC, and the phono preamp module are all available shortly at Schiit.EU, together with tube and solid state gain options.



TUTTI STUDIO - A MODERN DAY BOOMBOX

Tutti Studio, an audio entertainment company who say that they are "focused around the social party scene", have announced their new wireless baby speaker, the Matti which aims to serve as the modern day boombox.

Using a single Matti speaker, users can enable "Stereo Mode" for a traditional sound experience, hearing both left and right channels from a single speaker. Adding a second speaker allows users to assign one as the left speaker and one as the right. Yu can connect up to eight all playing the same track.



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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:

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SOUNDCAST COMES TO UK MARKET

Connected Distribution today announced it has partnered with market innovator in wireless audio systems, Soundcast, to bring the company's Bluetooth and wireless weather-resistant portable audio products to UK consumers.

San Diego based Soundcast has been in existence since the early 2000s, when the founders of one of the USA's largest and oldest loudspeaker manufacturers launched the brand. Its products are wireless audio speakers for use indoors or out.

With five loudspeaker products in the VGX series and a Bluetooth transmitter in the range, there is a product for every application, from a pocket sized portable and fully waterproof speaker to the flagship outdoor portable. The £149 (MSPR inc. VAT) VG1 is diminutively proportioned at just 173mm in length and comes with dual aluminium drivers and a weighted bass radiator. Two VG1 speakers can be synced together for dedicated left and right stereo playback over Bluetooth with Qualcomm TrueWireless Stereo (TWS) technology.



RUSS ANDREWS THE SUPPLIER AC PSU

Russ Andrews has added to its line of power supply upgrades with an AC version of The Supplier, which the company say bring significant performance benefits to a range of audio components that are fitted with low voltage AC power supplies

+àThe Supplier AC is available in three different voltages: 12, 16 and 24V, to suit the requirements of many different products, from external DACs to turntables and streamers. The 12V version is suitable for use with products including Musical Fidelity's X series and the Cambridge Audio DacMagic (2008/09). Compatible 16V products include Project's Debut III turntables, RPM and Xpression/Xperience models, plus the Phono Box products among many others. Products requiring a 24V AC supply, such as the Rega RP3, RP6, RP8 and Fono stages are accommodated with The Supplier 24V version.

In addition to the high-quality transformer, The Supplier also includes the Russ Andrews Silencer mains filtration on the input and is wired internally with Kimber Kable. Connection to the user's equipment is via a 1m link cable, manufactured using Kimber Kable, and fitted with a robust XLR connector at the power supply end and the correct jack for the specified equipment at the other. £397 inc. VAT from Russ Andrews.





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The Classic



August 2016



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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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NEW LAUNCHES FOR LINN'S KATALYST DAC ARCHITECTURE

Linn has launched their new Akurate range with the addition of Catalyst DAC Architecture to the Akurate DS, Akurate DSM and Akurate Exaktbox.

Catalyst is Linn's 4th generation digital-to-analogue conversion technology and is already available in the Klimax range, of which we recently reviewed the Klimax DS, and in Akubarik and Akudorik speakers. It is now available as an upgrade for existing owners and also as standard for all new Akurate units.

Five key aspects have been improved with the Catalyst DAC design including noise isolation, independent, isolated power supplies, Linn-designed data optimisation stage, a single high precision clock and a new low distortion analogue output driver.

Akurate DS is a dedicated network music player priced at £6,300 with the upgrade at £1,800. Akurate DSM has additional inputs for external sources and is priced at £7,500 for the new unit and £1,800 for the upgrade. Akurate Exaktbox has an on-board Exakt digital crossover for your speakers and is available for owners of Linn loudspeakers and selected speakers from other manufacturers (including B&W 802 Diamond, KEF Reference 3 & 5, PMC twenty.26). Pricing for the Akurate Exaktbox 6-channel is £4,950 or £1,200 for the upgrade and for the Akurate Exaktbox 10-channel prices are £6,550 and £1,600 for the upgrade.



SCANSONIC MK-5 MINI MONITOR

Danish Scansonic are the sister company of Danish brand Raidho. Scansonic's new MK-5 is a compact two-way mini-monitor, featuring the same sealed ribbon planar magnetic tweeter found in the brand's Raidho-inspired M-series.

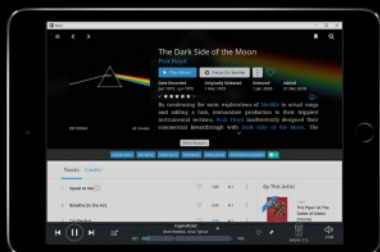
The tweeter's membrane is formed by a kapton-aluminum sandwich just 20µm thick which has an extremely low mass, approximately 50 times less than any conventional textile, ceramic, beryllium or diamond dome.

The tweeter is partnered with a brand new 4.5-inch Kevlar coned mid/bass driver (hence the 'K' in 'MK-5') with underhung magnet system. Kevlar is a lightweight, durable and extraordinarily strong material that was first used commercially in the early 1970s as a replacement for steel in racing tyres. Styling-wise the MK-5 bears a strong resemblance to Scansonic's Raidho-inspired and MB-series, and is available in a choice of black-piano or white-piano finish priced at £749 including VAT and without stands.



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

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NEWS



C SEED GIANT SCREENS AND RETRACTABLE SPEAKERS

We don't usually bring you news about massive TV screens but the new range from C SEED caught our eye.

They are designed for more space-restricted outdoor settings and use unfolding LED columns, with five columns making up the 144 inch set. The outdoor TVs can be installed in existing poolside or terrace spaces. After activation by the remote control, the cover slides open to raise the black monolith in only 15 seconds to reach its full height. In a "butterfly-like movement", five LED panels unfold with a diagonal of 144" (3.65 meters).

In case you need entertainment on your yacht as well as poolside, C SEED have produced the Supermarine range. The TV has a unique hydraulic drive system, a combination of vertical and horizontal drives retracts the whole 201/144 inch screen into a shallow compartment of only 78cm (31 inch) depth, saving space on and below decks. The speakers are built into one-piece metal casings, machined out of massive blocks of aluminium and are also fully retractable.



AUDIO HUNGARY QUALITON APX 200 TUBE POWER AMP

Audio-Hungary have released their new, upgraded Qualiton APX 200 vacuum tube stereo power amplifier, with new features that were added after customer feedback. Only minor changes to the vents were made on the outside for optimised cooling and to keep the classic design. Most changes were made inside.

The cover of the amplifier is now easily removable and the tubes visible in the redesigned polished stainless steel interior. The device has been upgraded with Auto BIAS, and a balanced input. It is now possible to bypass the volume control with a switch at the back. The output valve set with EL 519 (6P45S) valves was kept with two 6N23P and two 12AX7 valves.

The new APX 200 will also be at Munich High End show at the Audio-Hungary stand in Halle 1 A10/B13





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NEWS

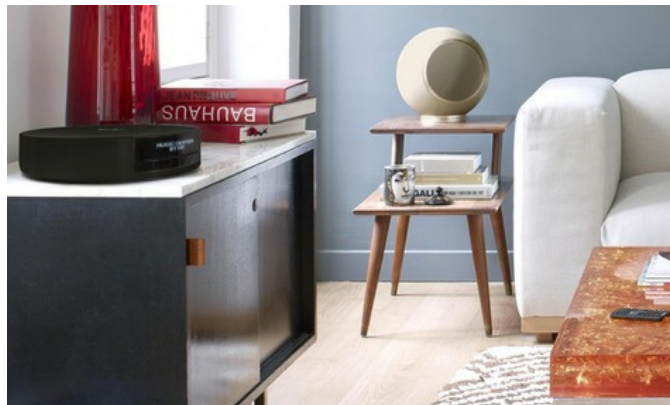


DS AUDIO STYLUS CLEANER ST-50

The cleaning gel pad that it uses is made from Urethane Resin which was developed for Clean Room micro dust cleaning applications.

The gel is washable and re-usable. Rather than applying force to the stylus, it cleans at the pre-set needle pressure of your tonearm, just drop the stylus into the gel. The casing is cut from an Aluminium block which is highly polished and nickel plated.

On the back is a leather cushion. It weighs 28g and retails for around \$80 USD and £75.



ELIPSON MUSIC CENTRE BLACK EDITION

Elipson has announced the launch of the Music Centre Black edition featuring Bluetooth HD wireless and Google's Chromecast Audio. Design by Jean-Yves Le Porcher, this new version of their Music Centre has a black satin finish chassis for the circular case, and a touch sensitive user interface under the CD slot.

The circular case hides 2 x 120W class-D amplifier modules using ICE Power technology. A range of connections is specified, including RCA inputs, an optical input, a USB port, a pre-out RCA, 3.5mm mini jack, front facing headphone jack and a SUB output featuring an adjustable filter to cover frequencies between 50 and 200 Hz. As well as the MP3 compliant CD player function, an RDS DAB+ FM tuner is also included.

For wireless connection, this new Music Centre HD Black is also compatible with the latest aptX Bluetooth HD protocol, enabling playback of high-resolution files up to 48 KHz / 24-bit. It works in smart home installation, thanks to the included Chromecast Audio dongle. This allows the user to connect to the receiver via Wi-Fi directly from a smartphone, tablet, or computer. The Chromecast function also allows you to transform your system into a full multi-room solution when using compatible speakers via the Chromecast App. It is available in the UK now at an SRP of £899.



HIFI PIG IS GROWING

Hifi Pig is delighted to announce that we have taken on three new members of the review team to help us expand our content and reach, as well as giving readers more of the reviews we know you love so much.

The new member are Grant Birch, Adam Billingham, Alan McIntosh and Chris Kelly. Welcome to the Hifi Pig Family, guys.



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DIGIBIT INTRODUCES ARIA PICCOLLO + MUSIC SERVER

DigiBit has introduced the aria piccolo+, the third generation of their aria piccolo+ music server series. Digibit launched the first generation of aria piccolo in 2015, they say the new version is 'very much enhanced'.

The aria piccolo+ music server series has been designed to be easy to use and allow users to manage all functionality from their iPad or Android devices without the need for a PC or any network skills. It supports extended metadata fields for any music genre. This facility allows users to sort and view their music collection in multiple ways such as: albums from the romantic (Period) for piano (Instrument), played by Maurizio Pollini (Soloist). The aria piccolo+ has 18 predefined fields automatically matching the tagging structure of their proprietary classical music database, SonataDB. For any other music genre, all fields can be manually created and tagged.

The aria piccolo+ software features include, fully automatic (insert & rip) error-free CD Ripper, metadata retrieval results from five databases, Bit Perfect playback, multizone support, multichannel PCM and DSD support, remote access to your music over the internet and Airplay and DLNA support allows you to enjoy your preferred streaming services providers and internet radio. Some of the improvements to the first generation of aria piccolo are a 43cms (17") 6mm thick precision machined aluminium chassis, a 3TB HDD disk is standard but a 1TB or 2TB SSD is optionally available, a new all-in-one board, also used in the flagship aria2 and aria piccolo+ ships standard with internal DAC and has digital USB and SPDIF outputs (RCA Coax and AES/EBU). The internal DAC comes with balanced and unbalanced analogue audio outputs and supports up to 32Bit/384KHz and DoP and DSD256 native support. PCM and DSD multichannel output can be obtained via the HDMI output or via USB with an ASIO driver. Prices start at 2.090€ + VAT (where applicable).



NILE RODGERS APPOINTED ROLE AT ABBEY ROAD

Symbolic of a new era at London's Abbey Road Studios, multiple Grammy Award winning producer, guitarist, arranger, composer and Hifi Pig favourite Nile Rodgers (of The CHIC Organization) has been appointed to the specially created role of Chief Creative Advisor at the Studios.

Rodgers will establish Abbey Road as his primary UK creative base and serve as the Studios' global artist ambassador.



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CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CELEBRATE FIFTY YEARS WITH EDGE

The Edge series, from UK hifi brand Cambridge Audio, represents the culmination of 50 years of audio engineering and a completely new design, that has taken over three years for the nine-person in-house engineering team to complete. Cambridge Audio wanted to keep the signal path short across the series. Only 14 components feature in the signal path of the Edge W power amplifier, with capacitors removed altogether.

Edge features Class XA amplification technology, that shifts the crossover point out of audible range, offering the sound quality of Class A but with a more efficient performance. An opposing symmetry twin toroidal transformer design cancels out stray electromagnetic interference. Cambridge's proprietary streaming platform, StreamMagic, has been updated to offer improved compatibility, meaning customers will be able to stream audio from many sources, including over AirPlay, Spotify Connect and Chromecast built-in, which allows streaming from many apps, including TIDAL. Additionally, Edge supports Bluetooth aptX HD.

The new series is named after Professor Gordon Edge, one of Cambridge Audio's founders and inventor of the company's first product, the P40 integrated amplifier. The Edge series will be available from June and will consist of three units: Edge A (ERP: £4,500), the integrated amplifier; Edge NQ (ERP: £3,500), the preamplifier and network player; and Edge W (ERP: £2,500), the power amplifier.

"Edge has been a project of passion for Cambridge Audio. With our 50th anniversary approaching we saw an opportunity to push the boundaries of our abilities to create something truly unique, something truly inspirational. We removed all limitations during development of Edge – anything goes so long as it's in pursuit of the best system we've ever made. The results speak for themselves. Edge is sublime." Stuart George, Managing Director, Cambridge Audio.

DENON HEOS HS2 WIRELESS SOUNDBAR

Denon have announced the new HEOS HomeCinema HS2 wireless soundbar and subwoofer system,.



The new HEOS HomeCinema HS2 system builds upon their first version with added 4K UHD capabilities, high-resolution audio, a new design and AirPlay/Bluetooth connectivity. Hands-free music is available to stream via Amazon Alexa voice control, and the HEOS HomeCinema HS2 features biamplified mid-woofers and tweeters with DSP processing, plus the package includes a wireless subwoofer. Price is £699.





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CHORD COMPANY SHAWLINE POWER CABLES

The Chord Company has expanded its ARAY-technology Shawline range with the introduction of a high-quality power cable to complement its signal-carrying cables: Shawline Power cable (1m: £200)

The Chord Company's new Shawline Power cable is a mains product that complements the Shawline range's digital and analogue signal-carrying cables, whilst drawing on the company's 30+ years' experience in producing A/V cables. Shawline Power has evolved from its predecessor, the Power Chord, and now features a number of significant design and construction improvements.

"The upgrades have been introduced to improve the overall resolving power and dynamics of connected A/V components, and have simultaneously introduced a worthwhile update of a time-proven Chord Company favourite. Chord's legendary build standards mean the same principles, methodology and know-how applied to the signal-carrying cables are also implemented in the power products." say the company

The new cable benefits from design cues and construction techniques developed for the company's flagship power cables, whilst retaining real-world affordability. Shawline Power features a greatly improved conductor which benefits from a noticeably thicker stranded core. It uses 3 x 14 AWG high-purity multi-strand copper conductors in a parallel layout, with a dual-layer floating shield.

Its dual-layer high-frequency-effective braid and foil combination outer shielding system gives the cable additional protection from the RF interference generated by many of today's household devices. Shawline Power also benefits from internal and external PVC insulation with a high mechanical damping factor. The cable is finished with a high-density vibration-damping outer jacket.

The cable is available fitted with high-quality 10- or 16-amp IEC plugs, precision-engineered by a specialist company to The Chord Company's specification. Euro/Schuko, Australian and USA mains plugs are available to order. Standard lengths include 1m, 1.5m and 2m. Custom lengths and terminations are also available.

*Shawline Power is offered with a (non-transferable) lifetime warranty which includes defective materials and workmanship but excludes normal wear and tear, failure to follow instructions and/or any unauthorised repairs or modifications.

Price and availability

Shawline Power is available now: 1m £200; 1.5m £250; 2m £300.





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NEWS



ROON LAUNCH NUCLEUS AND NUCLEUS + SERVERS

Since its introduction in 2015, Roon has, they say, 'transformed the experience of browsing music'. Artist photos, credits, bios, reviews, lyrics, tour dates and composers are located automatically within the software and then interconnected by links to build a searchable digital magazine for your music collection. Roon finds all the same links between your personal files and the tracks available on TIDAL, so you can start with the music you know, then explore and discover new music.

In addition to music browsing, Roon is also a multi-room, multi-user networked audio platform. It offers features like bit-perfect playback, DSD and PCM upsampling, multi-channel playback and signal path display. Roon plays to a number of different types of devices on your home network and can be controlled from a dedicated control app.

Roon Labs have seen a need to enter the hardware market to produce the server for their software; the Nucleus (SRP £1,500.00) and Nucleus+ (£2,500.00). Both models look and function in the same way, with the only difference being the feature abilities of the Intel® Core™ i3 (Nucleus) and i7 (Nucleus+) processors employed. Just plug Nucleus or Nucleus+ into your network, connect your hard drives, download the Roon remote app (available for iOS, Android, macOS or Windows) and you'll be ready to play music using a wide variety of audio devices. Both the Nucleus and Nucleus+ are distributed in the UK by Henley Audio.

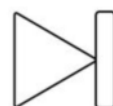


FOCAL LISTEN WIRELESS CHIC HEADPHONES

Focal has introduced Blue, Olive and Purple designs to their Listen Wireless Line to provide "Chic options". The French headphone and speaker manufacturer who debuted Rose Gold and Cobalt Blue in 2017, for wired and wireless earphone designs Spark and Sphear S, has chosen early spring as the season to launch the Blue, Olive and Purple flowery compositions on Listen Wireless Chic.

As the brightly coloured version of Listen Wireless, Chic offers all the same technical characteristics and sound quality of the original Listen Wireless, with a little more French 'Je ne sais quoi', that will be available from May for \$299

Listen Wireless Chic is a Focal closed-back wireless headphone, and is Bluetooth® 4.1 aptX compatible. It uses 40mm Titanium / Mylar drivers, and has thermosensitive memory foam on the ear pads. Listen Wireless Chic also offers a dual 'Clear Voice Capture' microphone system, with 20 hours of autonomous playtime. "When searching for colours for inspiration, we wanted to follow current trends," says Romain Vet, Product and Marketing Manager at Focal. "Listen Wireless Chic not only stands out for the Focal sound quality, but now with freshly inspired colours for spring! Pair the Olive Listen Wireless Chic effortlessly with black and white for an original touch of sophistication, or pair the Purple set with rich, dark greys for a cool city look. Blue remains a classic and sophisticated choice, while staying young and trendy".



NEWS

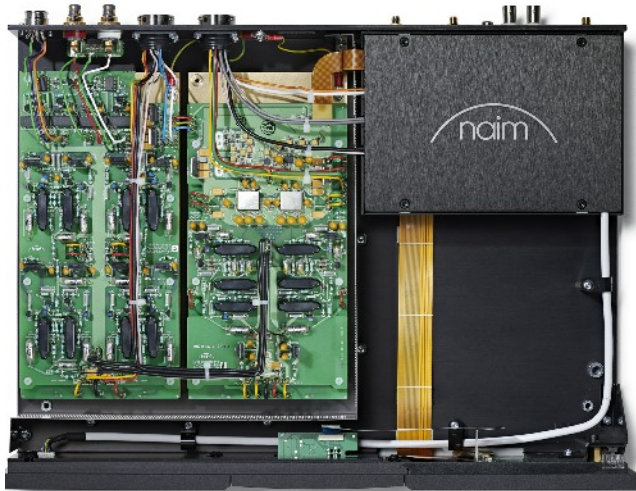
NAIM INTRODUCE THREE NEW NETWORK PLAYERS

Naim has revealed details of its new ND 555 (£12,999) Network Player alongside the new NDX 2 (£4999) and a ND 5 XS 2 (£1999). So why a new 500 Series product now? The answer is quite simple; until now Naim hasn't considered the performance of its Network Players to reach that of the CD555 CD Player.



The heart of Naim's new network players is their 'new platform' board and software that started development over four years ago. New Platform, as it is known internally, was first revealed in Naim's Uniti products launched last year. The launch of the Uniti products, together with a worldwide shortage of some key parts has delayed the launch of these new Network Players until now. Naim expects to ship the ND 555, NDX 2 and ND XS 2 in Summer 2018.

Digital connectivity from the NP800 Streaming board to the DAC board is I2S over LVDS. I2S has the benefit of a separate clock signal, in contrast to S/PDIF which doesn't. The NDS Network Player had a Faraday cage to help eliminate noise leakage from one part of the player to another but in the ND 555 the new Faraday cage system is now physically isolated from its environs and it is radio opaque to a much higher frequency. Naim's new exclusive NP800 streaming board is unique. When used in UPnP or streaming mode the streaming clock is totally under the control of the ClockMaster situated near the PCM1704K DACs.



ND 555 features a powerful new 4th Generation 40-bit SHARC DSP processor, the ADSP 21489 capable of 2700 MFLOPS running at 450Mhz. The SHARC processor implements Naim's RAM buffer (first used in the DAC and NDS and called zero S/PDIF). The SHARC processor also performs 16 times oversampling and digital filtering. ND 555 uses two PCM1704U-K DACs in their own Faraday Cages. Naim's 500 Series of products are known for their floating PCB isolation system. The ND 555's SpringBoard system uses a system of circuit boards hard mounted to massive floating brass plates mounted on springs. The ND 555 includes 13 Naim DR voltage regulators. The DACs, the clocks and the output stages all have their own individual DR voltage regulators. User features include Chromecast Built-in (up to 24Bit 192kHz), integrated TIDAL, Spotify Connect, AirPlay, UPnP (Universal Plug 'n' Play), Bluetooth, Internet Radio, USB, Digital Input (TOSlink and Coax), Multiroom and it's Roon Ready.



INTERVIEW

Sally Gibb is responsible for creating one of the UK's best known Hifi brands, cable manufacturer The Chord Company. Hifi Pig talks to Sally about, among other things, how she got into the Hifi Industry, how she runs a successful and harmonious company and the role of women in the Hifi Industry.



INTERVIEW

HP: You are one of the trailblazers for women in the Hifi Industry, what is your background before Hifi and how did you come to work in the industry?

SG: I've had a life-long interest in music; I love making things and I love manufacturing. I also knew that there was an opportunity to improve sound through cables.

I worked for Radford Hifi (and being the ex-wife of Naim Audio's first-ever salesman) I got to know some great Hifi people all over the world including the UK. This is when I knew that there was an opportunity to improve sound through cables. Prior to that I came from Hull and at age 11, I was (unfortunately) in that experimental year they started comprehensive education. Therefore, I 'unofficially' left school at 14, though I turned up for registration! I could not see the point of hanging around wasting time at school.

I had a job waiting for me in the city centre, working for a fantastic chain of hair and beauty salons. I had never seen the likes of the women who came through those doors. It was entertaining, educational and I had a future with them. To top it all, I was able to earn more money than *any* of my contemporaries! I wasn't actually interested in the hairdressing but saw an opportunity to travel, as the company had salons in remote and far-flung places like the Seychelles, Mauritius and New Zealand (this was the early '70s!). It turned out they loved me because I worked hard, was a high achiever and earned them a lot of money.

I moved on by the age of 19 to travel with my then partner (whom I married). We travelled overland to North Africa and to India (yes, we went through Iran and Afghanistan as it was relatively safe to do so), not to mention hitch-hiking across Algeria and Tunisia. On our return, we decided to live in Bristol; we had no money and owned nothing. I walked straight into a job in a large hairdressing company and my partner got a job at Radford Hifi that was where it all started. We loved it, considering ourselves to be very rock and roll (well, we had travelled to India!) and coming from Hull, we had seen many of the top bands and all our friends were musicians or budding rock and roll stars. Life was like that, then. Bristol was great because many of the pubs had live music and evenings would often be spent listening to great musicians. Jazz seemed to me to be the soul of Bristol then.

So, selling Hifi was the next best thing. I ended up working at Radfords, too, because they opened up a second shop in Windsor which we ran (initially at least) until I was offered a job opening a hair and beauty salon in Fenwicks. It was too good an opportunity to miss as I was only 21. The Queen opened Fenwicks and as a lass from Hull, you can imagine the importance: I had hit the big time! I had some fabulous clients, many of them were TV personalities and for me, this was huge at the time. However, this was the early '80s and my husband sought greater things. I was working really hard having made that salon the most profitable new salon they had ever had (it was an American chain).

We chose to take a job my husband was offered in the country down in Salisbury. I had never lived in the country before and it sounded idyllic, but that was not the reality: I was bored and there was nothing for me to do. I could not improve my hairdressing career and I was sick of hair, anyway! But I *did* enjoy Hifi. I enjoyed the customers, the

overseas visits and I enjoyed the Hifi: the music, the equipment. In a way, the rest is history. I needed something to do (I was unable to have children sadly) so I went to college and furthered my education. I did a few exams and thought about going to university but my husband wasn't keen as it would have meant leaving him for the best part of the degree years, which was not what we both wanted at the time. So I started The Chord Company instead.

HP: The Chord Company is one of the UK's long established brands, when did you realise that the company would be a significant player on the Hifi scene?

SG: When I started it in 1984. I wanted (and expected) it to be the best. Remember, I was a high achiever so only the best would do. However, my goal was to earn a living whilst doing something that could be enjoyable. I started logically, by analysing all of the competition we had at the time. I didn't have any money and no means of getting any, so everything I did at The Chord Company was by negotiation and research. I had dreams of what I could do. I also knew practically everyone in the UK Hifi Industry then because, of course, all the companies were British-owned. I also knew a lot of the shop owners, so I think I started from a place with some sort of knowledge and (I hope) respect.

HP: You have a policy that you will only produce a more expensive cable range if it sounds better, where do you think the limits are with cable design and technology or are there no limits?

SG: I am only interested in selling things that are well-built and work and compared to other brands on the market, represent good value for money, but yes there are limitations.

HP: The Chord Company comes across as a company that is good to work for and the staff seem very happy, how important is the 'people' side of the business to you and how do you achieve harmony in the workplace and motivate your staff?

SG: It's everything. I started with some great part-time out-workers whom I paid a top rate for because that is what I needed. I also liked them. Why would I want to spend my working days with people unless I liked them? The great thing about being in charge of your own business is being able to choose. I started building the business with people I liked and who had abilities I did not have. If there was someone looking for a job who I liked, I tried to find a role for them if I could afford it. It didn't always work and, of course, as the company grew, I had to be a little more stringent. I have always approached employees fairly and given them regular reviews and one-to-ones so that they can speak up about their own views, goals and desires. To me, if you provide a workplace with a quality product that staff can feel proud to belong to, plus a decent salary, a good atmosphere and reasonable hours, then it's a win-win.

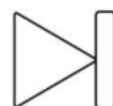
I wanted and needed my staff to feel part of something and feel that they owned a bit of The Chord Company just by being there. Plus, I have always maintained the fact that it's the customers paying our wages. We deserve to spend our working life with some pleasure and enjoyment attached to it. We have a laugh at work, we have struggles, too, but we are all aiming for a good result.



INTERVIEW



INTERVIEW



INTERVIEW

HP: Cable is often a controversial area in Hifi, what do you say to the people that think cables don't make a difference?

SG: Come here and listen to them or go to one of the many wonderful retail outlets throughout the world and hear them on a good system. I have known that cables make a difference since I worked at Radford Hifi (and we listened to them) so I have nothing to prove. Doubters can either come and listen with an open mind or continue in ignorance. The choice is theirs!

HP: It is a milestone birthday for you this year, thinking about the future, how do you see The Chord Company developing over the next few decades? Wireless technology is on the up for home entertainment, how will this impact on cable manufacturers like yourselves?

SG: With any business, if it is sustainable, it must adapt and change. The Chord Company sticks to its core brand values. Since I started the company, everyone has said: "How will we have a Hifi industry?", that was over 30 years ago now! So, I am happily leaving that all with the current staff with whom I have every confidence they can continue the company into the next few decades.

HP: You obviously have a very busy life, how do you relax?

SG: Obviously, I listen to music. I like being with friends and having a laugh and share stories that are funny. I dance, walk the dog, (not at the same time!) and I make things: clothes and soft furnishings. I knit, I crochet and I like plans: I enjoy writing them out or designing things on paper. I take great pleasure in writing a list. Plus, I watch films.

But, my finest escapism is by sitting indulgently at my gorgeous Bluthner baby grand (thank you Uncle Bill) and practising and playing my beloved Beethoven, in the hope that by playing, I hold a little of him within me.

HP: How important is music in your life?

SG: It has been the rhythm of my life since I can remember. We grew up played 78s with my Dad dancing or playing his guitar with only four strings and my mother singing and I liked to dance around from an early age pretending to be a prima ballerina; I started playing the piano at 10. I wish I had been able to take that gift straight into the Royal School of Music, but that was not an opportunity afforded to me. I soon moved into the rock and roll era of the '70s and being from Hull, we had gigs galore, live music and great clubs. I was going to clubs to dance and listen to Northern Soul from the age of 14. Since then, of course, I have always had a great Hifi to listen to.

How amazing is it that aged 60+, I can join others my age and still dance to either the original artists gigging (Butlin's music weekenders are brilliant) or the tribute bands? I just did an '80s weekend, in fact: Lionel Ritchie, Annie Lennox and Boy George tributes in Lowestoft.

HP: What tracks, albums or pieces of music have been the most influential to you throughout your life?

SG: My party playlist kicks off with Maggie May and ends up with The Cure! Then there's Tamla Motown, Northern Soul, Pink Floyd, Bob Dylan, Santana and Ravi Shankar. Not forgetting Van Morrison, Pulp, Beethoven, Chopin, Mendelsohn and Maria Callas. Also, Louis Armstrong, Annie Lennox, Etta James, Norah Jones, Pearl Jam, The Waterboys, Roxy Music, Fleetwood Mac, Brian Eno and Chick Corea. It's an endless list really.

HP: What is your home Hifi system and which range of your cables feature in it? Currently?

SG: KEF Blades (internally wired with Chord Co Sarum speaker cable), Bonnac Timpano pre amp, 2 Bonnac Alto power amps, a separate low noise mains power supply, Bonnac Evo CD player, Linn Sondek LP12 with Keel and Radical motor supply, Custom built MC cartridge, Linn Ekos SE tone arm (rebuilt by Origami), BooPlinth, Andante Largo Titanium racks, Titanium Silent Mounts (under the racks) Chord Music cabling throughout, Innuos SE and Melko N1 Music storage, Linn Klimax DS streamer, Audio Access 5 Zone multi room, Ronco Based cinema system, Focal and Elac and B & W ceiling speakers throughout the house, Pear Analogue Kid Thomas Blu turntable with Dynavector 10x2 and its own power supply.

HP: The Hifi Industry has an image of being male-dominated, what are your experiences of it being 'a man's world' and how has it changed over the time you have worked in it?

SG: My experience is that being a woman has never stopped me from doing most things I felt inclined to try, so to be honest, I never really considered it an issue, having been surrounded by women during my early career, it was a nice change to be surrounded by men. I could probably write a book on it but on the whole, I found it simple and straightforward and I found that the men I dealt with appreciated my approach to being direct, straight-talking and honest. Most of those that have known me always say: "Well, Sal tells it like it is."

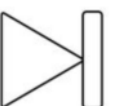
However, it had its moments: early on when I was only 26, I felt intimidated by the older, experienced, knowledgeable, clever men that I came across at the BFA and BADA as it was then. But in the end, I found that they enjoyed my "daft" questions and enjoyed my interest and my openness; I was never treated with anything other than respect and courtesy. It hasn't really changed; there has always been a smattering of good ladies that I could count on one hand and it seems I can count them on two hands now!

HP: Would you recommend working in the Hifi Industry to other women and why?

SG: Yes, it's a great industry to be in and I have considered it that during my career in Hifi. I have been surrounded by the loveliest of gentlemen. I have met and known some fantastic people, I have had more laughs than I thought possible and, on the whole, I have really enjoyed myself. It is a bit of a shame, though, that women have not been inclined to join our industry over the years because they may have brought that little something that is sometimes missing.



INTERVIEW



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HP: What has been your favourite experience or experiences that working in the Hifi industry has brought you?

SG: The shows! The parties at the shows; the funny times we have had and taking my staff to the shows. Plus, all our retailers who are such a diverse and interesting group and then there are our export customers: I love them.

How fortunate am I that I have been able to mix and entertain with people from all over the globe? To share their culture, their stories and their Hifi businesses; in meeting all the great people over the years, many of whom may now have passed on; owners of British manufacturing companies and learning so much from them; some of the dinners we used to have with the British Federation of Audio; having so many laughs; it's such an entertaining industry to be in.

I feel privileged that I ended up in this industry for so many years and to have known so many wonderful people. Because we have all known one another, we share a common interest; we have shared things between our companies. I am sorry that we no longer have many of the old British-owned companies but as I said earlier, a business has to adapt and change and we need to embrace those changes if we are to survive.



REVIEW

LEEMA TUCANA ANNIVERSARY EDITION INTEGRATED AMP



Leema Acoustics, based in Wales have launched an Anniversary edition of their well received Tucana II integrated amplifier. Hifi Pig takes a listen.

DM and JOHN SCOTT

I recall having evaluated some Leema products before for Hifi Pig, namely their Elements integrated amplifier and Libra DAC, then more recently the Tucana Mark II integrated amplifier. I was pretty impressed with the Tucana II, so while the memory of that amplifier's performance was still fresh in my recollection Leema sent me over their "Anniversary Edition" for review. It is a statement product to celebrate 10 years of being in business and my word the company has moved on in leaps and bounds during that relatively short period and their passion is clearly evidenced in their products, particularly so this product.

CONSTRUCTION

Like all other Leema electronics, the Tucana Anniversary Edition amplifier is built like the proverbial out-house and there is nothing at all flimsy or cheap in it's build quality. Ergonomically too it is an absolute peach to operate, with all controls and indicators working flawlessly and reliably too for good measure. I particularly loved the volume control with it's circle of LEDs to indicate the exact setting. Not the approximate setting mind, but the EXACT setting, which I will explain in due course, but I will say it is just about the best I have found on a modern amplifier with a digital volume control, as I hate with a passion any volume control that needs the skilled hands of an open heart surgeon to get an accurate volume setting. Very well done, Leema.

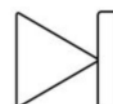
Outwardly, the new Tucana amplifier looks no different to either of it's two predecessor (Tucana Mark 1 and 2), but the Anniversary Edition moves up a big notch over the "Tucana II" model, with a shiny badge denoting that it is the Anniversary Edition and bright silvered Leema

logo on the faceplate, which easily sets it apart from the Tucana II which has neither of these adornments.

Taking a tour around the outward physical aspects then, the volume control knob is surrounded by 2 small coloured LED's marked HEAT and PROTECT which are self explanatory and the PROTECT LED flashes 3 times during power up to show the circuitry is working, then the 32 small blue LED's which flash 8 times during the power up sequence. It is interesting to note that the volume control is quite a complex circuit consisting of a 32 bit microprocessor plus an expensive high resolution encoder and some complex mathematics to arrive at 0.5dB increments on the volume control, which in use is utterly seamless.

To the left of the volume control we find two 3.5mm sockets for headphones connection and MP3 signal input, then to the right of the volume control we find the infra red remote control window, then to the centre of the front panel we find a series of four illuminated push switches labelled "GAIN", "BAL", "MUTE" and "TAPE". To the right we have a set of seven illuminated push buttons for source selection, labelled "BALANCED", "CD", "TUNER", "AUX", "MULTI 1", "MULTI 2 / MP3" and "AV DIRECT". Finally, we find the mains power/standby button which has a blue LED which illuminates in standby mode, which thankfully isn't too bright in ambient light although it throws quite a pencil beam across the room as I discovered one night when I went into my darkened listening room for a pair of glasses and didn't switch any lights on.

To the rear we find reading from left to right, a pair of loudspeaker binding posts for the right hand speaker, then two LIPS sockets which



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connects to other Leema products with the same connections for system control, then a mains IEC inlet socket, then a pair of balanced XLR input sockets, then below these connections we find a row of single ended RCA sockets labelled "TAPE" (input and output), "AV", "MULTI 2" and "MULTI 1", "AUX", "TUNER" "CD" and "PRE OUT". All of the inputs have individual gain settings. Finally there is another pair of loudspeaker binding posts for the left hand speaker.

On the subject of speaker binding posts, I found some clear plastic shrouds fitted to the posts which prevented me using my main speaker cables with spade connectors fitted and the handbook/instruction manual clearly states that banana plugs are to be used for speaker connections to the amplifier. I can only presume that some jobsworth safety "experts" have deemed that using spade connectors to an amplifier now poses a serious health and safety risk in some way so they have been banned. It was more than annoying when they decided to put plastic plugs into speaker binding posts to stop the use of banana plugs, but if they have now added spade connectors to that banned list or so it appears, then how the heck are we supposed to connect loudspeaker cables???? I despair at the so-called nanny state, I really do. Because the amplifier produces 35 volts with immense current delivery at the speaker terminals, so US and EU rules dictate these shrouds must be fitted, so if I ever became fortunate enough to own one of these amplifiers I would remove them immediately and Leema can supply instructions for safely doing so. That of course is the owner's decision and at their own risk, but Leema are simply complying with these statutory directives.

A silvered logo and a shiny badge doesn't exactly justify a £1,000+ price hike over the price of a standard Tucana II model, so that begs the question what have Leema done to the product to differentiate it from it's cheaper sibling?

The components are not rolled on the thighs of dusky maidens dressed in coconut shells and grass skirts during production, if that's what you are thinking. No sir. Under the hood there is a list of worthwhile enhancements going on, like extra thick gold plated copper tracks on the PCB's for increased conductivity, all capacitors within the signal paths are upgraded to Nichicon Muse, mains transformers are much bigger Noratel Xtraquiet types wound for low mechanical and electrical noise and Leema's own 16 core Reference 2 cables are used as hook up wire to connect PCB's to external connectors. I am told they are not the easiest cables to strip and solder, with no less than 64 cable ends to prepare, so the production build team deserve a medal for their patience and fortitude.

Included with the amplifier is Leema's new Focus remote control handset and this too has Leema's fastidious attention to detail written all over it. It took me a while to familiarise myself with the button layout, as the volume adjustment buttons are spang in the middle amongst other buttons and I had to look before pressing to make sure. Not one microgram of plastic here folks, it is a heavy lump of alloy casting supported on four small rubber feet, with buttons that work positively and a nice touch for me was the LEDs which light up on the function selected. It is rather heavy and has it's own microclimate surrounding it as well, as even in a warm room it is still cold to the touch. The weight is impressive too and I amply demonstrated that when my dog tried to steal my digestive biscuit, but a light tap on the cranium with the remote control meant he desisted immediately and slunk off, sans biscuit and

didn't risk another attempt at cookie larceny. No animals were permanently harmed during the writing of this review.

I was inspecting the underside of it and noted the lack of a battery compartment cover and any visible screws to change the batteries which are 2 x AAA type. Checked the owner's manual and no mention is made of battery replacement, but the secret is to unscrew the 4 rubber feet and voila, the rear panel comes off complete. Leema will hopefully now include that information in the owner's manual, as it has already perplexed some owners apparently. The remote is built from scratch in house, using miniature push switches rated for 10,000,000 presses and let me assure you all I didn't put that claim to the test. The case is machined for Leema by a company in Oxfordshire and the text is laser etched in Hampshire. Bead blasting and anodising is carried out in Buckinghamshire. Boy, is this thing engineered and well travelled too for good measure it seems.

I found the external appearance of the amplifier very refreshing in not being the same boring flat sided rectangular box with knobs on the front, as it was running out of the mainstream herd's appearance and instantly recognizable as a Leema product. Sort of reminds me of the Monty Python sketch "How to recognize a Larch tree from a distance", so all I had to do was swap the word Larch for Leema. Not a Python fan? Please yourselves.

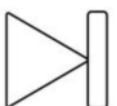
SOUND QUALITY

Press the standby button on the front panel and the amplifier begins it's powering up routine. The Protect LED flashes 3 times, then the 32 blue LEDs surrounding the volume control flash 8 times and the volume resets to a preset low level.

With a specification rating capable of delivering 150 watts per channel in to 8 ohms and 290 watts into 4 ohms and can also muster 520 watts into 2 ohms no less, it would suggest a very powerful amplifier and so it proved to be during the listening sessions. Lee Taylor (The LEE of LEEMA) tells me that the amplifier is impervious to load impedance vagaries and will easily drive those "difficult" speakers whose impedance curve drops below 1.5 ohms, in fact he says it will drag music out of a rusty nail if needs be. I will take his word on that, but I get his meaning, if not in the strictest literal sense of course.

In one word I would describe it as "muscular", but not in a brutish way at all and you could liken that level of power with a champion bodybuilder, in that you wouldn't start a fight with him as you know you would lose before you began and him knowing his own strength so he doesn't have to prove it to anyone, least of all you. Just measure his biceps and be very nice to the man.

That solid power of course manifests itself in bass output, whereby a drum sounds like a drum at close range, losing none of the heft and power that's there, including the harmonics generated by the drum's shell. My resident power amp is rated at 200 watts per channel, but it easily lost to the Leema unit in the way the power was delivered, with a firm depth of solidity that was perceived as just slightly lacking in my own amplifier. Both amps could deliver the "punch in the guts" power from a kick drum beat, but the Leema took that one stage further by allowing you to hear what the drum skin and shell was doing, very clearly and very concisely, plus whether a hard or soft beater was being used. All the while the amplifier is dealing with delivering high power



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for bass energy, it still does not lose the plot in nuances and fine details and as such it is pretty much unruffled whatever genre of music you throw at it and that is in essence why the Leema Tucana Anniversary Edition has so few rivals.

With the arrival of a pair of Audiovector SR3 Avantgardes for review, this was a pairing that just HAD to happen. I had a brief hearing of these speakers at the 2017 Bristol Hifi Show being driven by a compact Exposure system. During this particular visit to the show I had lurking in my prized Hifi Pig pink shoulder bag some of my own CDs in the hope some exhibitors could tear themselves away from their library of specially selected plinky plonk music and give my offerings a whirl. Of course, I had in my bag Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" album which I was itching to be played and the results I heard at Bristol were nothing like what I was used to at home with the exception of one room, the Exposure room using the Audiovectors. That began my quest to review a pair of these speakers and happy to say Audiovector were more than happy to oblige, so look out for the full review of these speakers soon in Hifi Pig Magazine.

The Leema amplifier and the Audiovector SR3s were a very sweet listen indeed. Notice I use the word "sweet" here and they were a joy to listen to. Smooth flowing, very powerful and yet highly controlled, bass in particular was a solid as a brick wall, completely unshakeable in fact. I never once found the sound lacklustre or laid back either let me add, this pair didn't fatigue either and I could listen for many hours and be completely absorbed by the sound. The very top end treble didn't have the clarity and dynamics for my own personal listening preferences, but I do know many of our readers intensely dislike sharp defined treble registers, so if you belong to this group of people, then be heartened in the knowledge this pairing would please you tremendously. As an add-on to this although not entirely relevant to this review, I recently bought a Lyngdorf power amp with 200 watts on tap and the bass sounded decidedly off with the Audiovector Avantgarde SR3s and worse still, I couldn't fathom out why. This hifi caper has it's inexplicable quirks at times.

Another pair of speakers in for review was a pair of hORNS Aria 1 speakers, so it would be rude not to harness them to the Leema amplifier as well while they were here. In my resident system, the hORNS had a rather subdued bass offering, with sublime treble and midrange which more than compensated for that. Paired to the Leema amplifier though, the bass registers certainly perked up, producing a better balanced sound from top to bottom ends of the spectrum. Synergy at play here methinks and I would say that the bass softness of the Arias were better matched to the strong power delivery traits of the Leema amplifier.

I also have a pair of Roksan TR5 speakers here and they too were connected to the Leema amplifier. I was amazed that out of the 4 pairs of speakers connected to the Leema, these were the best tonally balanced out of the 4. Neither bass nor treble dominated proceedings and they managed to walk that fine line between exciting and dynamic and overblown and overpowering. This meant you could enjoy an extended listening session without becoming jaded or fatigued.

Then we move on to my current resident speakers, the Pylon Diamond Monitors I reviewed earlier this year for Hifi Pig and had to have after hearing them in action. These speakers deserve the epithet "Monitors"

and really do live up to their name. They are fast, dynamic, insightful and tuneful, with a bass output that you wouldn't expect from a box of their relatively small size and they easily ousted my then floor standing speakers with ease. The best thing about these speakers is they are a great reviewing tool as well, because what you feed into them is very clearly heard, warts and all. When plumbed up to the Leema amplifier, the character of the Leema changed completely. What perked up the hORNS speakers and was "sweet" with the Audiovector SR3 Avantgardes was no more, instead I got a lively and punchy amplifier with a tremendous amount of accuracy and refinement in the midband and treble region, with micro dynamics portrayed excellently. I love these speakers because of their in your face, bite your shins kind of presentation and they pull no punches which I personally adore, but may not be to other's tastes and I am very comfortable with that. As with the hORNS Aria 1 speakers the Leema amplifier addressed and married well with the speakers, whereas with the Pylon speakers it was the other way around in my perception with the Leema amplifier then was a prime case of ripping of the sheep's clothing and finding the wolf hiding underneath.

Needless to say, the Leema comfortably passed every benchmark recording I fed into it and when it came to Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" album, I kid you not I played that album five times in a row just for the sheer pleasure of it and the thought of using the album as a "test" soon disappeared.

CONCLUSION

My recollection of the Tucana Mark II amplifier was that it was just a tad finicky about what speakers it was paired with to give of it's best. The Tucana Anniversary Edition was happy with whatever speakers it was paired with and the best part for me was being able to crank up the volume control with not the slightest trace of blare, no matter how high the sound level increased, in fact my hearing was at it's topmost level of tolerance, yet the amplifier sounded like it wasn't even breaking into a sweat. I cannot recall any amplifier being able to do that, although some have come close.

The sound is truly effortless in every respect and I really do admire it's ability to untangle really complex music and keep it all firmly in it's place without getting knotted up in the slightest.

I personally gave the Leema Tucana II a highly, highly, highly recommended nomination, as it justly deserved it, but this amplifier is far more than that, therefore has to be handed over to a second reviewer for their analysis before we start thinking about an Outstanding Product award from Hifi Pig.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: In the price band the Tucana occupies, it is a class leading amplifier.

Sound Quality: Peerless.

Value For Money: I can easily see this as a long term keeper amplifier, so will save money during it's lifetime by not "upgrading". The build is worth every penny on it's own.



REVIEW

LEEMA TUCANA ANNIVERSARY EDITION INTEGRATED AMP

Pros: Superb build and sonic attributes make this a must audition product.

Cons: Not cheap by any means, but true quality never is. Refine your busking skills or sell a kidney if you are a true audiophile.

Our first reviewer was impressed enough by the Leema Acoustics Tucana II Anniversary Edition to put it forward for a Hifi Pig Outstanding Product award. To qualify, the amp had to be reviewed by a second Hifi Pig reviewer and so the Tucana II Anniversary Edition was passed to John Scott for his thoughts.

The first reviewer has already done a sterling job in describing the background to the Tucana II Anniversary Edition, its features and operation so there is no point in me repeating any of that, although I will provide a few impressions of the amp's appearance and set up.

UNBOXING AND SET UP

I wasn't at home when the Tucana II was delivered and apparently the delivery man was none too happy at having to lug it up the garden path. When my better half answered the door, he asked her to sign for receipt and then clearly intended to leave it on the doorstep. When Mrs S explained that she wouldn't be able to move it from there, he grudgingly carried it the extra 2 feet into the hallway where I found it awaiting my arrival when I got home.

There's no denying that in its sturdy cardboard packing case the Tucana II is a bit of a handful but I manhandled it into the living room without too much difficulty and proceeded to unbox it. The amp comes cosseted in a drawstring bag which is useful if you need to store it temporarily for any reason.

As has mentioned, the amp is solid in every respect and the build quality is first class. It has the look of something that would be at home in a recording studio but its understated elegance also fits in perfectly to a domestic environment. Set up was as straightforward as you would expect an integrated amplifier to be and I had it up and running in a matter of minutes. I knew that as it had been tested extensively by the first reviewer that it would not require any run in time but I gave it a couple of hours just to warm up anyway.

SOUND QUALITY

Our first review has explained above about the 32 blue LEDs that surround the volume control. I should explain that these LEDs start at roughly the 7 o'clock position, at which the volume is zero, round to roughly 5 o'clock, at which maximum volume is produced. I have a pretty big listening room by modern standards but at no time during the weeks I spent with this amp was I able to get it past the 9 o'clock position – The Tucana II is capable of some serious volume!

Volume aside, the Tucana II's defining characteristic is detail. It is, in fact, the most forensically detailed amp I have encountered; this was particularly notable in the way in which it revealed reverberation tails and details of room acoustics that had been previously hidden. This aspect of its performance proved initially to be slightly disconcerting; I'd settle down to enjoy an album I knew well and find that it sounded different to how I remembered it – sometimes not necessarily better

and sometimes not necessarily worse, but decidedly different and it took a few listening sessions before I got used to this.

I found myself being drawn more to the electronic music in my collection as the Tucana II revealed new tones and textures in the synthesised instruments; The Ballet Of The Chicks In Their Shells from Isao Tomita's version of Mussorgsky's Pictures At An Exhibition fairly burst from my Audio GE Sinceros 80 floorstanders and danced around in front of me in a way I hadn't experienced before. Every second of the ride on Kraftwerk's Autobahn, from ignition to journey's end was a thrill.

Christy Moore's version of The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face has some deep bass which can, in the wrong system, swamp the playback entirely and render it, boomy, muddy and generally unlistenable. The Tucana II kept tight control, delivering the bottom end in its entirety but never at the expense of Moore's and Declan Sinnott's guitars and vocals.

The Tucana II makes "spot the mistake" a fun game to play; the join between two different recordings at 1:24 in John Lennon's Working Class Hero from the Plastic Ono Band album is more clear to hear than ever. Similarly, in Steve Winwood's While You See A Chance from his Arc Of A Diver album, there's a dodgy overdub at 3:54 that stands out like the proverbial sore thumb.

CONCLUSION

Leema Acoustics' Tucana II Anniversary Edition amplifier delivers an audio performance that is as solid as its build quality. It will bring out the best, and the worst, of whatever other bits of kit you partner it with and with the recordings you play through it. For that reason I'm just slightly more guarded in my enthusiasm for the Tucana II than the first reviewer is as I believe that correct system matching will be critical to how it performs in your listening room. That said, the amp's honesty and transparency means that it will be a component that will happily deliver great performance now and will maximise the benefits of any upgrades you may make in the future. On this basis, I am more than happy to support its nomination as a Hifi Pig Outstanding Product.

Build Quality: As solid and well-finished as they come at this price point.

Sound Quality: Effortlessly revealing, this amp just tells it like is.

Value for Money: Not cheap but if you like what it does, it's a keeper.

Pros: That honesty and transparency thing.

Cons: That honesty and transparency thing; it doesn't suffer fools gladly and it won't be to everyone's taste.



REVIEW

PARASOUND HALO 2.1 INTEGRATED AMP WITH DAC



The Parasound Halo 2.1 Integrated Amplifier with DAC is a fully featured integrated amplifier with an on-board DAC and much more. David Robson takes a listen to this £2999 well specified amp.

DAVID ROBSON

Parasound are a brand I've known of for many years mainly for their Pre and Power amplifier combinations, but never experienced first hand. This American brand was the brainchild of Richard Schram whose first amplifiers appeared in 1981 and were mostly sourced and built in Japan. Richard Graduated from the University of California in 1968 and spent his time in his first job in a record and Hifi shop assembling turntables and speakers. Later on Richard was accompanied by expert amplifier designer John Curl. One of Mr Curl's claims to fame include designing master recorders for Wilson Audio and Mobile Fidelity, and the mixing consoles used in live concerts by The Grateful Dead and at the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland. So the chance to review Parasounds very first integrated amplifier was something I jumped at!

CONSTRUCTION AND FEATURES

The Halo has quite a comprehensive list of components and technology fettled inside its simple, handsome outer shell. John Curl designed the topology of the power amp section of this integrated amp which also includes a DAC, Sub woofer input and crossover controls, tone controls and both MM (moving magnet, 47ohm) and MC (moving coil, 100 + 47 ohm) phono stages and five line level inputs...among others.

For those interested in the numbers, the Halo has a Class A/AB configuration with 160 watts per channel (320w total), into 8ohm, and 240wpc into 4ohm with 45amps peak current output, thus making this amp able to drive virtually any speakers out there without a fuss. It runs 4-5 watts in pure class A and the remaining 155 watts in class A/B. Inside this Parasound there is also a 1kVA fully shielded Torodial transformer with independent secondary winding for each channel.

There are three digital inputs, USB, Coax and Optical - the DAC is the well received ESS Sabre 9018kzm chip, allowing the USB input to operate at 384khz/32bit, both the Optical and Digital Coax to run 192khz/24bit, and DSD256, there is no MQA support provided on this model. The drivers for computers can be downloaded online from the Parasound website and are a doddle to install.

Unboxing the amp reveals a double box with plenty of well thought out padding etc which is a good thing as the amplifier itself is a seriously weighty bit of kit, coming in at just under 20kg, it looks and feels like it means business from the off. Also provided are both US and UK power supply cables, a USB (A-B) cable, assorted 5mm cables for power trigger switch, a remote control (RC5) and a set of easily read instructions. My review sample is provided in matt black but silver is also an available option.

Out the box, fit and finish are great and what you would expect at this price point. The buttons and volume control have a tight quality feel. The smaller knobs "feel" plasticky, and are a little small.

On firing the Halo integrated up, the relays click in with a secure authority. The blue LED on the volume control (red on mute button) and on input selection isn't thankfully too bright, and doesn't glare. Other functions on the front panel, include an On/Off button, Mute button, Volume control, Input selector, Tone on/off button with the associated Bass/Treble control, a Balance control (which cannot be bypassed) and a Subwoofer level control. There also are two 5mm jacks one for headphones and an Aux input for the likes of a Phone or portable music player. (Personally I would prefer a 6.35mm jack for headphones as most quality headphones come with this as standard).



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The one thing I think that has been omitted from the design of the amp is a display showing what signals the DAC is receiving. As a newbie to the whole streaming game I like to know what I'm getting or playing via my digital sources. This isn't a huge problem and not a deal breaker by any means, but would be a useful addition. On the rear panel, there are comprehensive subwoofer and crossover connections with various options available. This Parasound Halo is sold as a 2.1 amplifier that can be integrated into a home cinema system and can be adjusted and connected for that purpose but this review will concentrate on its job solely as a HiFi amplifier.

The remote control supplied with the Amp is a chunky and simple affair, the basic switching between inputs is on there, volume and mute, and there is a handy button which lights up the rubberised buttons for use in low light. You do have to point the remote control quite accurately towards the front of the amp for it to connect and work though.

SOUND

So how does this amplifier sound? Over the last few weeks I've played music via the digital inputs from Chromecast (optical) and Laptop via USB. I've connected my CD player via RCA's and Digital Coax. The sound from the Halo from the off was lively and involving, this sound has led me to the first album up, Michael Jackson's "Thriller". The upbeat nature of "You Gotta Be Starting something" fits the amp perfectly, the 320w gripping the drivers and pumping out the bass lines without any blur or woolyness. The rest of the party comes in as crisp and detailed, and the volume can be increased to good listening levels and the sound stays balanced and intact. "Billy Jean" has similar effects, the punch from the speakers comes with a serious kick, detail remains good with the echo-like vocals giving atmosphere and ambiance to the track. There is a very slight hardening to the upper treble on some sound effects at high volume, but this doesn't become acidic, doesn't seem to alter the nature of the vocals and doesn't fatigue. As for levels of detail that this amp can reproduce, on the track "Human Nature" there is a xylophone sound that follows the verse sung by Michael that I've never really noticed before. Once heard it became an ear worm and the track had to be played over and over. This style of bouncy pop suits the Parasound really well. One observation is that sound stage doesn't really escape too wide from between the speakers, instruments are accurate and where I'm expecting them to be, but within the confines of the room. Although my narrow listening space limits this effect somewhat.

Moving onto something a little more laid back and soulful. Corrine Bailey Rae's self titled album, is awash with smooth vocals and rolling bass. "Like A Star" initiates with simple vocals and an acoustic guitar, the vocals spill out of the speakers with a honey coated stream of emotion, the creak of the guitar strings quite evident, showing the capabilities of the Halo. The song picks up pace with a thunder-like bass that rolls out as the music picks up to a full rounded presentation. The separation from the vocals, bass, acoustic guitar and the ticking of the drums and percussion is excellent and one not seeming to influence the other. "Till it Happens To You" has my pet hate to start, fake vinyl crackle! Although this is a pain worth bearing, as the song is sublime and the Parasound lets the music flow whilst keeping all the emotion of the track intact. There is a part in the song where Corrine's voice gets relayed as if through an old radiogram, this sound becomes completely detached and withdraws around the soundstage, but it

perfectly isolates and gives a great depth to the musical vista. The Parasound Halo can add bluesy soul to its tick list too!!

I need to try and find something to see if I can trip up this great performing amplifier! Slipping in an old classic I opt for Dire Straits "Love Over Gold". skipping directly to "Industrial Disease" a veritable selection of slamming drums, organs and sound effects. The amount of detail that the amplifier conveys to the speakers has enough to not only give depth, but again atmosphere too with the hissing sounds come from left in a realistic fashion and sitting out wide from the main stereo image. The bass drum has weight and texture, the main vocal just sits a little further back than I would like, although its clear and precise. "It never Rains" follows two tracks on - sweet and clean, the Parasound seems to take everything in its stride and takes on all comers. Only when pushed hard do vocals and high tones harden a little, we are not talking biting into lemons here, and only at obscene levels. Its composure and grip tends to stay even and enjoyable throughout.

During my travels through the listening tests I've swapped between feeding the Halo from my CD via RCA, digital coax and via USB of the same albums ripped to .WAV to see how the internal DAC works and sounds. I've also used a streaming service via optical. My findings have all been positive, the ESS Sabre sound I'm familiar with as it is the same as in my CD player. Of all the digital connections I favoured the USB fed from the Laptop, this closely matched the sound produced by the RCA.

I have also had a little play with the tone controls - I found that when the tone controls were switched into circuit that the amp immediately lost some upper level of realism, it just stopped sounding as special as it had to my ears. I'm not an anti tone control guy by any means as I thought the ones used on the older Audiolab amplifiers of years back worked well. When you start to adjust and mess with the bass and treble it just unbalances the whole demeanor of what is a great standard of sound and the controls unfortunately don't really have a positive impact on sound. Thankfully once turned off the amp falls back into what it does best and gets on with producing, "great music".

CONCLUSION

This is a great sounding amplifier! It has plenty of versatility, and many strings to its bow. The DAC section works well. The fact you can use this amplifier as part of an A/V system, and add on a Subwoofer or just use it as a stereo lynch-pin says a lot about just how much Parasound have got right with their first integrated. I feel I would swap out those tone controls for an extra digital coax and optical input for today's needs and some sort of wireless connectivity option would be a bonus also. These are minor personal design gripes for what is a fantastic sounding and entertaining piece of kit.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: A solid and well put together Amplifier with a handsome presence. Well laid out fascia and easy to use remote.

Sound Quality: The Parasound does great music making everything sound effortless, it has a dynamic and powerful presentation that will work well with virtually any genre



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PARASOUND HALO 2.1 INTEGRATED AMP WITH DAC



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PARASOUND HALO 2.1 INTEGRATED AMP WITH DAC

Value For Money: A well specified and feature laden amplifier. Which in turn can be the keystone and heart of a great sounding system making this a good value purchase

Pros: Great sound, good bass grip and sweet informative treble, tons of musicality. Lots of connectivity and options to play with

Cons: Unnecessary tone controls, too few digital inputs, and a larger headphone input would be nice. I'd also like to see some sort of display for digital input frequencies on the front panel

Price: £2999



REVIEW

AUDIOVECTOR SR3 AVANTGARDE LOUDSPEAKERS



Hifi Pig review of the Audiovector SR3 Avantgarde loudspeakers costing £6500.

DM

Danish folks don't just produce butter, they also produce some very fine hifi components and Audiovector loudspeakers are no exception to that. I have long felt that Audiovector are very much underrated as a brand and they should be more actively banging their own drum to tell the world that their speakers are imbued with both technical excellence, attention to details and fuelled by their ceaseless passion to build very fine loudspeakers.

I reviewed Audiovector's diminutive QR1 speakers for Hifi Pig in early 2017 and was enamoured by both their sound quality and appearance, so much so they became my benchmark speakers in the £700.00 bracket.

One of Audiovector's many features is an upgrade path within any one of the same family range of speakers, so for example if you purchased the "base" level Super SR3 speakers, you can easily be upgraded to Signature, Avantgarde and Avantgarde Arreté as an affordable upgrade path without having to buy new speakers each time, as all these speakers share the same cabinet carcass. There is also an active variant available. I hear tell there has also been a limited edition variant with an outer concrete liner, but the 100 built by Audiovector have all found owners.

CONSTRUCTION

If ever there was a good looking and truly handsome speaker, then the SR3 is it. The craftsmanship and build quality is stunning with the review pair finished in beautiful real Cherry veneer with a deep gloss finish.

The carcass is a side radiused design tapering rearwards, the rear panel is a full length wooden affair with two ports near the top which vent unwanted frequencies from the tweeter, while at the bottom is a large recessed plate housing three pairs of high quality connection terminals for tri-wiring, with all three sets linked by two metal strips for single wired use. The terminals will accept bare wire, 4mm banana plugs or spade connectors. The base of the speaker is also wooden which cleverly hides the bottom facing bass reflex port and will accept M6 threaded spikes. Audiovector supply a complete set of spikes which are reversible to a small ball foot for those owners who do not have the requirement for carpet piercing spikes.

The front baffle plate (another plastic moulding) houses three drive units, the topmost being an Air Motion Transformer folded ribbon tweeter measuring circa 45mm which is of Audiovector's own design, followed by two carbon composite sandwich 165mm bass/mid drivers in a two and a half way configuration. These drivers have a Magnesium chassis, Titanium voice coil former components with a rigid three point screw fixing system, the mid driver also has a metal phase plug while the bass driver has a regular slightly inverted dust cap.

SOUND QUALITY

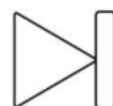
If I could sum up these speaker's performance, it would be the word "lithe". Not lightweight if that's what you have deciphered that word as being, let me be quite clear on that.

Given that there is only 2 x 165mm bass/mid drivers, there is no shortage of good solid and powerful bass output, more than I would have expected them to be able to shift a large volume of air considering



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their modest dimensions, but a full bass output down to an impressive 27Hz, with some real heft behind it.

That liveness continues up the frequency spectrum into the mids and treble too, with the composite mid driver crossing over seamlessly to the tweeter taking the treble range right the way up to a maximum of 52kHz according to the specifications. Needless to say, I didn't put this claim to the test during the evaluation.

This speaker revels in having the volume turned up and doesn't seem to suffer from cone break up at these higher volumes, but there is a flip side to that because when you turn the volume down low, these speakers seem to lose their magical charm in that the punch and definition seems to roll off slightly, not that you would intentionally listen that quietly anyway.

On to some real music to put the SR3s through their paces and of course I began with my long term favourite 'reference' recording of Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" live album. This album for me contains a whole raft of benchmarks that whatever component I review has to meet and hopefully exceed. Bass kick drum is adequately represented in this album, along with the rest of the drum ensemble including snare, toms and floor tom drums, high hat, ride and crash cymbals all have signatures that to me are a true yardstick of performance. In addition to that we have the warm tones of Fink's voice but his diction leaves a lot to be desired, although you should be able to hear the soft rasp his voice has. Then of course there is the wonderful venue ambiances within each track, each recorded at different locations during one of the band's many European tours, so has different "flavours", some recreating the drummer's snare rim shots so clearly echoing around the venue. If I put my mind to it I could probably find equally good recordings to use as tests, but I know this album intimately and I know that some readers have also bought this same album to follow my results.

The album begins with hearing the audience clapping and cheering when the band begins to play and that sound is very revealing of a speaker's performance. If it sounds like bacon sizzling in a frying pan then I don't usually hold out much hope for the rest of the album. Glad to say the Audiovector SR3s gave a very life-like rendition here so let's press on. Next, the drummer plays a short series of cymbal strikes as the intro, shortly followed by an acoustic guitar then some more cymbal strikes, all of which flowed seamlessly and effortlessly from the speakers. I won't go into a complete breakdown of the entire album, but I will move on to track 12 which is "Sort of Revolution" and that is my favourite track on the entire album, which also contains most of the bass benchmarks any component needs to meet and exceed.

Track 12 commences with the audience clapping in time and cheering, with a few whoops and whistles thrown in, then a solo bass guitar riff where I carefully listen to the way that instrument is being played. The gruffness of the bass notes has to be present and if I can hear the guitarist's fingering of the frets then so much the better. The drummer's contribution is a very powerful and solid floor tom strike as his opening gambit and that really has to be felt every bit as much as heard with the ears, while my listening room vibrates beautifully too. Top stuff. The whole track has a delightful propulsiveness about it and the venue's ambiance adds to the pleasure of the performance, especially so when Fink's voice and the drummer's rim shots echoes clearly

around the venue. Way into the background you hear intermittent whistles and cat calls from the audience too. Full of energy and excitement, I cannot think of another track that has so many clearly defined parameters that not only sounds good to me, but also has so many sonic benchmarks as an added bonus.

As ever though, I will play a whole raft of music of different genres to ensure that I am not just dealing with a one trick pony that sounds great with my reference recording but may fall by the wayside with anything else, so none of my reviews are based upon one single album but many different types with good and bad recordings thrown in there as well (even some classical!), even though I may not explicitly mention this in the reviews themselves.

In my LP collection is a disc by Duncan Browne called "Streets of Fire" which I won't part with even though I don't currently have a vinyl spinner to play it on. I transferred it to a recordable CD some years ago but it never sounds the same as the original disc. The official CD release is being sold at ludicrous prices so that wasn't an option. I recently found the same tracks on another CD compilation by the same artist much to my surprise called "Planet Earth" so at least I can play it when the mood takes me. The quality is not far off my own efforts so it has been relegated to the poor-ish recording quality category although it does shine on one or two tracks so all is not lost. My favourite track is called "Nina Morena" and the bass and percussion is a delight even though it lacks polish and refinement, but the Audiovector SR3s didn't do anything untoward with the sound quality.

A soupcon of electronica now with Zero One's "Ozone" CD which glad to say doesn't suffer from musical phrases containing endless repetition as most other electronica albums seem to do and also blends in some real instruments to hold the listener's attention. There is nothing worse than an endless drawl of the same music over and over again which to me smacks of "filler" to pad an album out, rather than any kind of artistic innovation and performance. Track 6, called "Glitch" is my favourite with plenty of deep bass and some perky tom tom playing and a real hook to the sound. This album was very competently handled by the Audiovector SR3s, in fact that was the very point I fell in love with these speakers for the crisp clean refreshing way this album was reproduced.

I am no fan at all of classical music, in point of fact I have only one CD in the entire music collection of this particular genre. My best use for playing it during an evaluation is it is a very reliable way of assessing imaging, instrument separation, width and depth of the sound-stage.

Pleased to say that the Audiovector SR3s were excellent in all those attributes. I really am positive that classical (and no doubt Opera) fans will appreciate this level of performance.

Now I thank you for your patience in reading this review thus far, but I am just about to add a twist that still defies any logic with and completely flies in the face of established thinking about speaker performance. Intrigued? Then read on

As I mentioned earlier, the speakers are supplied with M6 floor spikes and they were used throughout the evaluation to penetrate a thick carpet and underlay in my listening room. While the Audiovector speakers were incumbent, I was sent a set of Solidair Audio magnetic suspension bridges for review and of course I tried them under the Audiovectors. Well it would be rude not to I say.



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AUDIOVECTOR SR3 AVANTGARDE LOUDSPEAKERS



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I'm going to save some typing here by copying my comments from the Solidair Audio review:

"Using no rationale at all behind the choice, I decided to fit the speaker bridge units first under my own resident floor standing speakers and marvelled at the way they swayed about like a Weeble without toppling over. Don't know what a Weeble is? It was a toy brought out many years ago that had a spherical base with a weight inside which made the character roll about back and forth, side to side. Not connecting with that? Try visualising an intoxicated person unsteady on their feet while standing still then, with just a bit more tilting in any direction. Have we got there?

. So what effect overall did the supports make to the sound? It really was a classic case of bass tightening, yet losing none of the power. The floor tom whacks in the track "Sort of Revolution" on Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" album had real weight and body behind them, the best I have heard them yet, to be truthful. Treble and midrange seemed to leave the speaker cabinets entirely and just hung freely in space, so imaging was three dimensional and almost walk around realistic. However, a pair of Audiovector SR3 Avantgardes was soon wobbling about nicely on the bridges when they arrived for review and the already excellent SR3's sound quality moved up a notch or two."

Now that really did shake me, as I was almost brainwashed into believing that speakers should be rigidly mounted on floor spikes to make the speakers more steady, especially on a carpeted floor and restrict cabinet movement during speaker cone excursions – like the recoil from firing a gun.

The sound certainly moved up a notch or two and then some. I was so impressed I will order a set of those magnetic speaker bridges one day from Solidair Audio when I can afford it.

CONCLUSION

Leaving aside the sonic improvements derived from the Solidair bridges, I will summarise my findings with the Audiovector SR3's in their own right.

They are indeed a very speaker and there wasn't one single aspect of their performance that was a disappointment and they clearly passed all of my benchmark tests with consummate ease.

They are quite a large imposing speaker for sure and it is the way they are built and finished to a very high standard that makes you quickly forget they are indeed a large speaker and will fit into many home decors without being overly intrusive because of that.

My review notes now remind me that they are not comfortable at low level listening and in all honesty you wouldn't run them at that low a level just to appease your neighbours – I know I wouldn't.

I am also going to say that it is an immense shame that the name "Audiovector" doesn't receive the recognition they rightly deserve and am hoping this Hifi Pig review will go some way towards remedying that.

All in all then a well built great sounding speaker that deserves an audition. I highly recommend them.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Have seen none better

Sound Quality: Accurate but not etched and analytical, very easy to listen to for long periods.

Value For Money: Not a cheap bargain for sure, but definitely a long term "keeper".

Pros: Plonk them on a set of magnetic bridges and they astound.

Cons: Low level listening isn't the best way to hear these speakers perform.

Price: £6500

Submitted by email for editing and publication 19th February 2018.



REVIEW

BURSON CONDUCTOR VIRTUOSO V2+ HEADPHONE AMP/DAC



Australian manufacturer Burson's Conductor Virtuoso V2+ comes with a DAC, a headphone amp and doubles the output of the original version to 8W into 16 Ohms. Janine Elliot dons her cans and takes this £1590 unit for a test drive.

JANINE ELLIOT

Burson and I have two things in common. The first one is that we both don't like op-amps. Op amps might be great for pc's and equipment short of space but there are many drawbacks having individual "components" printed on a miniscule composite the size of a grain of rice using a process of photolithography. The technology might be breath-taking almost following the Moore's law in that the number of components in the space seems to get more and more every year, but this does mean that because they get smaller and closer together there is more likelihood of EMI noise and less tolerance to heat, let alone reduced specification. An op-amp could easily have as many as 50 inferior components squeezed onto it. Burson Audio do manufacture 8-pin op-amps such as the V6 Classic and Vivid, and whilst they still fit into conventional 8-pin DIP sockets what makes them different is that they contain discrete full-size components meaning that the 'box' they are in is significantly bigger in size.

Burson also share a dislike for Class-D amplification, though my preference for Class A is diminishing as the recent Class of 2017 and 18 have graduated. Burson is quite emphatic about how they feel;

"..class-D and class-T chips were created for the car audio industry and subsequently for mobile phones where power efficiency, size and budget are the driving design parameters so audio performance is secondary if that".

They believe Class-D circuitry is overly complex and reduces the purity of the music. I have listened to both Class-D and A headphone amps, and my favourite is class A and presently use a Class-A/b portable headphone amp for my serious portable listening. That said I have

recently reviewed some highly recommended Class-D products from around the globe.

Today's headphone amplifiers are becoming available more and more with option for a built in DAC as we become more and more digitally minded. Even the latest top of the range Stax Energiser, the SRM-8000, comes with a blanked-off plate on the rear suggesting, perhaps, that a DAC card might one day find its way inside that unit. Similarly, the Conductor V2+ is more than just a headphone amp. This is a three-in-one headphone amp, DAC and pre amp. It comes as a refined replacement to the original V1 headphone pre-amplifier, and in the "+" model denoting the addition of a DAC. This is the third generation of Conductor, maintaining the looks of the original but with improved electronics. It keeps with Burson's philosophy of being fully discrete and uses their excellent V5 SS op-amp. As Alex from Burson proudly told me;

"The entire Conductor V2+ is pure Class A which means it is running at full capacity all the time. To us, using fully discrete, pure Class-A circuitry is the ideal design for audio amplification."

Powered by two large 70W high density (lots of windings) transformers, twice the size of the original model, tuned to operate in pure Class A using Field Effect Transistors, the V2 doubles the output of the original model attaining no less than 8W in 16 ohm per channel to more than satisfy even the most inefficient planar cans. Do remember that for thirsty 300 ohm Sennheiser HD650's that does reduce it all to 500mW, though that is still more than adequate. All this power does mean that it creates a lot of heat, and therefore the cabinet is carefully sculptured on 6mm thick aluminium around its body so that heat is dissipated



REVIEW

BURSON CONDUCTOR VIRTUOSO V2+ HEADPHONE AMP/DAC



REVIEW

BURSON CONDUCTOR VIRTUOSO V2+ HEADPHONE AMP/DAC

uniformly around the whole casing. The case is effectively a giant heat sink.

Of course no ground-breaking DAC for 2018 could appear without the iconic ESS Sabre DAC, in this case the ESS9018S chip, though it is important to stress that the whole of any DAC is greater than the sum of its individual parts. The housekeeping around the DAC is equally as important. I have reviewed some lesser DACs that actually sound mightily impressive due to how the whole decoding, filtering and amplification stages work in tandem. This should also include the power supply connected to it. As Alex from Burson informed me;

"The Digital section of the Conductor V2+ is powered by its own separate transformer and fully discrete power supply network".

The V2+ 9018 DAC board - one of several boards all beautifully laid out inside the unit - pushes the SABRE32 to its limits and employs 20 carefully-selected and matched components. The V2+ also employs the PGA2310 flagship 100 step volume control chip offered by Texas Instruments. Allowing a fine control of 0.5dB steps and dynamic range of 120dB and 0.0004% THD, this is a welcome addition to the circuitry. Whilst the trained human ear can pick up changes in volume as little as 0.5dB, this is generally only seen in the pro audio environment. Burson cleverly set the PGA2310's op-amp output stage to unity gain so it essentially acts as a purely resistive volume control. When running digital audio the ESS Sabre DAC handles all of the volume itself, meaning it does not need to go through a separate analogue volume control. The Sabre controls the volume level for the DAC output sockets at the rear, meaning that the digital output is variable rather than fixed, as can usually be the case. Therefore the listener has the choice of how the volume levels are set; pre-out stage uses the Texas Instruments 120dB volume control, whereas the DAC output uses the volume control through the DSP in the DAC chip. I tried both, interestingly preferring latter, but there is the choice so you can decide your own favourite.

The unit has a classy yet sparse front panel with distinctive rotary control centre point and a button to toggle between two analogue (via RCA sockets) and three digital sources including S/PDif, Toslink and USB connectors. The volume control levels magically appear in blue dots behind the satin black or silver front panel left of the control. No need to look for pin holes on that front unit as there aren't any. On/off toggle switch is from the rear of the unit. The unit has analogue and digital outputs meaning it can be used as a variety of applications, and as a basic preamplifier worked surprisingly competently during my review. The unit comes with a cute aluminium remote to match the Conductor, and equally minimalist.

SUPPORT

The V2+ supports all major formats with coax/Toslink inputs up to 24bit 192kHz. Via the Win, Mac, IOS and Android compatible USB socket deploying the excellent XMOS 6-core chip it supports PCM up to 386kHz 16/24/32 bit, native DSD 64/128/256, and DSD over PCM (DoP) 64/128/256.

THE COMPANY

Burson Audio was founded by a small team of audio engineers founded in 1996, based in Melbourne, Australia, creating building blocks such

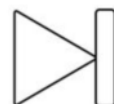
as hybrid Op-Amps as well as complete audio products including a Class A power-amp mono-block, headphone amps, DACs and cables. Their philosophy is simple; have components that don't interfere with the audio signal. Their philosophy is that if the equipment is designed well and transparent enough then the pace, rhythm, timing, dynamics and tonality will become a natural expression of the music, and they feel this cannot be achieved with standard circuit building blocks like IC chip op-amps, IC regulators, or standard transformers. Instead they research and develop their own discrete circuits so that every component in the signal path can perform at its peak.

MUSIC

The Queen Symphony from 1962 London born Tolga Kashif is not only a beautiful work based on Freddy Mercury's iconic songs, but it is also extremely well recorded and performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra with vocal intervention from London Voices and London Oratory Boys' choir. Kashif spent two years composing the Queen Symphony. He conducted the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at its debut concert on Wednesday 6 November 2002 at the Royal Festival Hall, attended by Freddie's mother Jer Bulsara, drummer Roger Taylor and guitarist Brian May, who all apparently found it very moving. After this it was recorded at Abbey Road Studios later in the year. This is indeed a very moving performance, though the complexity of the melodic lines and continuing pushing of famous idioms in the busy soundstage can make for a tiring listening. It necessitates playback through equipment with wide dynamic range, speed and clarity for it not to get saturated. The Burson succeeds on all these fronts. Where Queen's musical style relied on a certain amount of outrageousness, Tolga continues this in his orchestration, something that takes decent decoding and amplification as well as excellent headphones to pull off successfully. Sennheiser's new HD660S headphones replace the HD650 which has been around for many years and were my reference cans for many years, the new version having lower impedance making them more useable with lower-powered amplifiers, though that is not an issue here. I love these well priced cans because they can pick out individual phrases with engagement and detail that make listening through headphone such fun, and the new version pulls it off to a whole new level with a fullness and detail that justifies their use in broadcasting and recording studios around the world.

Shostakovich Piano Concerto no. 1 starts with a very decisive intro before the fun begins on the piano, trumpet and strings (Martha Argerich & Guy Touvron & Württembergisches Kammerorchester, Deutsche Grammophon). This work is as emotional and similarly stuffed full with beautiful idioms as is the Queen, though they are not quite so tonally measured. Occasionally a simple tonal melody, such as on the muted trumpet, does allow you to breathe again and take in the scenery before heading off into another direction. The Burson seems to understand the music and its clarity, force and musicality to show there is indeed harmony between the individual musical components, just as there is between the components in the circuitry. This is a great performance from the orchestra, soloists and electronics.

Neil Young Crazy Horse 'Live Rust' album and the track "My My, Hey Hey" is an excellently recorded live album and the Conductor handled both the mid-range voice and the acoustic guitars with panache and sensitivity. If I had to criticise the DAC at all it would be the tight and detailed top-end can sound a little too bright at times. The close mic'ing



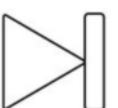
REVIEW

BURSON CONDUCTOR VIRTUOSO V2+ HEADPHONE AMP/DAC



REVIEW

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REVIEW

BURSON CONDUCTOR VIRTUOSO V2+ HEADPHONE AMP/DAC

of the bass is particularly vibrant, and the reverb from the almost 'Supertramp-esque' solo mouth organ is allowed to decay with no sense of digital noise. My home choice Class-A headphone amplifier, whilst losing some of that detail, is slightly easier on the ears. My AT W1000 closed back cans were able to offer a more refined performance with a greater sound-stage that was hard to put down.

The Modern Jazz Quartet 'Blues on Bach' is a brilliantly performed album, with a very open and detailed soundstage that tests headphones, DACs and amplifiers in one simple go, especially with the over-modulated audio in certain places. This is the same album I used in reviewing the Wyred 4 Sound DAC; a Class D headphone-amp-come-DAC. That unit similarly has an ESS Sabre DAC, though in that case the ES9028PRO chip is employed configured in quad differential mode so that with four D-A converters per channel they could achieve improved S/N ratio and output drive. The Burson however has chosen to use the ESS9018S chip and this time only using two channels of the 8, which with the other components on the board provides for them the best sound.

The bell "ding-dings" at the start of the track "Blues in A-Minor", sounding like the London No9 Routemaster bus being sent on its way to the Royal Albert Hall, have weight and detail providing a surprisingly powerful bass for such a small sundry instrument. Add to that the vibraphone played by Milt Jackson travelling between the ears combined with piano and double bass and percussion, this is a memorable performance captured with finesse, power and detail. The V2+ at level 42 out of its 99 range is more than adequate for my ears on the HD650's. Lower harmonies from harpsichord in "Don't Stop this Train" combined with the vibraphone and bass melodic lines all work in harmony with control and weight and resolution. Only that the sound could be slightly too brash for the ultimate in Class-A sound, left me slightly wanting, though the shimmer and decay from cymbals was highly infectious. But at £1590 for such a well built and good looking product, this is still a worthy contender for your hi-fi rack. Even the analogue input is impressively musical and fast. This could easily be the basis for a complete hi-fi outfit, just requiring a power-amp and speakers.

Audeze's LCD-X is a very efficient planar design which worked extremely well in the V2+. The slightly bass forward design allowed the punchy 'Learning to Fly' (Pink Floyd Momentary lapse of Reason) to take off and sound authoritative with clear ride cymbal strokes, and with the vox-pop under the guitar riffs equally clear and meaningful.

The wafer thin diaphragms and double-sided magnet array ensures a near zero distortion and uniform sound across the entire diaphragm, an ideal partner for this 3-in-one Melbourne-made kit, and this enabled a tight, and detailed sound. Unfortunately I had to give back the headphones so continued with the closed-back AT W1000's I know so well. These are very efficient cans, and the most comfortable ones I have, but I have to admit the best sound I heard was from the less comfortable Sennheiser and Audeze.

CONCLUSION

This is a very detailed, powerful and quick sounding unit covering all frequencies and all types of music play with musicality and sensitivity. For a three-in-one box the V2+ is a very able and well thought-out product that also looks A+. That magical display and overall build well

belies its price point, and the choice and design of components make it highly desirable. The amount of detail and power available per pound should make it highly desirable, particularly for inefficient planar headphones. Its sensitivity towards inefficient planar headphones is perhaps only slightly let down by the lack of sensitivity in some of the music I played, sounding a tad too clinical in the higher regions, but at this price I really won't be complaining.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Excellent bullet-proof build with that magical display of volume level through the silver or black facia. Internally well-presented using top end components, including ESS Sabre DAC.

Sound Quality: Impeccable resolution with an open yet tight and detailed presentation. Sound might be a little too bright for some.

Value For Money: At £1590 for a DAC, preamplifier and headphone amplifier this is a very competitively priced unit.

Pros: Very detailed and tight performance at all frequencies, particularly bass

Will easily drive the most inefficient Planar designs

Excellent build

Three units in one

Love the magical volume display

Cons: Top end can be a little brittle at high frequencies with some music

Price: £1590



REVIEW

iFi NANO iDSD BLACK LABEL HEADPHONE AMP/DAC



David Blumestein take a listen to the iFi Nano iDSD Black Label Headphone Amp/DAC costing £199.

DAVID BLUMENSTEIN

Rarely, if ever, have I classified a piece of gear, in this case a transportable rechargeable battery powered headphone amp/DAC as a no-brainer. Sure, the unit has some flaws, nobody's perfect, but at the price £199 you cannot fault it for what it is able to do in such a small package. I'm well aware of the gravity of that opening statement, but I stand by it.

DSD256, PCM 384, MQA, DXD, headphone amp and 3.5mm output capable of running on a battery charge for 10 hours which is impressive and should suffice for most days out and about. The headphone amp has TRRS balanced wiring and claims to offer all the advantages of balanced wiring, despite the actual amp being single-ended. It does everything it claims, and when was the last time a piece of gear delivered on so many promises.

The nano iDSD Black Label lets you choose between the 'Listen' (Minimum Phase Bessel Filter) and 'Measure' (Linear Phase Transient Aligned Filter) options and is switchable from the rear of the unit. The large front mounted analogue pot felt solid accurate. On the front you get a direct output and a iEMatch output. The latter is designed to reduce background noise, improve dynamic range and improve the control of volume on sensitive headphones.

Did I mention that it built like a brick outhouse and over the last week the unit, I am here to testify I hit it hard, slammed it into my satchel on the bus, on the train, in the underground, in the wet, in the cold, in the snow, (as much as that's possible in London) and it took the abuse without complaint or missing a beat.

For the review period I had at my disposal a choice of six DAPs which I dutifully connected and disconnected from the iFi nano iDSD Black

Label. I could not get the device to hiccup. It functioned like a trooper. All of these players were connected via a generic OTG (On The Go) to Micro USB cable. The cables are easily available online and come at no great cost. In the scenarios in which tested the unit on the go, the generic cable performed admirably. I proceeded to connect my Samsung Android phone and eventually my Apple iPhone 6+ with Apple's proprietary and more expensive cable. Same results, no better no worse in comparison, especially out and about.

Besides my travel Koss Port-a-Pro headphones, I tested with pairs of Audioquest Nighthawk and Meze Classic/Neo headphones. As much I enjoyed listening with the bigger, more expensive headphones, I felt the Koss provided a more realistic scenario for my testing purposes. The nano iDSD BL will output 20mW at 600 Ohms, 285mW at 30 and 200mW at 15.

I feel very confident in the iFi nano iDSD Black Label as a transportable workhorse DAC/headphone amplifier solution, but let's not stop there.

I could envision a situation where I would be visiting a friend where I'd be the one bringing high resolution files and having to supply the DAC. Not being sufficiently motivated, taking my system down is NOT an option. I would want to find the path of least resistance: Enter the iFi nano iDSD Black Label. I set the device up in people's home connected to their main systems, their computers, their powered speakers with myself and my partners in these endeavours being pleasantly shocked by the outcome. Listening to a full system where the DAC was transportable and battery powered did not seem to phase the systems or us. Am I ready to give up my full size traditionally powered DACs in favor of this transportable one? No, but, those without the benefit of



REVIEW

iFi NANO iDSD BLACK LABEL HEADPHONE AMP/DAC



REVIEW

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REVIEW

iFi NANO iDSD BLACK LABEL HEADPHONE AMP/DAC

such systems were really enjoying the sound, the spaciousness of it all and I was left wondering if many would be more than satisfied without investing more in their music playback system in the home?

I was not expecting the unit to be more than advertised, and as a headphone amp it did the business. The sound was appropriately loud and full, carrying its weight while simultaneously punching above it.

My DAPs sport just about every genre of music: Classical, Jazz, Funk, Acid Jazz, Pop, Ambient, Percussion, World Music and that dreaded Miscellaneous folder for all that defies description. Without the Black Label I was happy, with the Black Label I was getting lost not only in the music, but space and time. I missed stops on the train. I was late to appointments. Almost did without my favourite pizza in London.

Across the spectrum of the music, I was being treated to more of a show. This year, this month alone has been for new album releases and music. As I've been anklung about these past two weeks in London, the following have been in HEAVY rotation:

Django Django - Marble Skies,

Beth Hart & Joe Bonamassa - Black Coffee

Jamison Ross - All For One

Nils Frahm - All Melody

Black Rebel Motorcycle Club - Wrong Creatures

Venetian Snares (Aaron Funk) - She Began To Cry Tears of-Blood
Which Became Little Brick Houses When They Hit The Ground

First Aid Kit - Ruins

Bahamas - Earthtones

Listening to these new releases with and without the iFi Nano iDSD Black Label how much deeper the sound. The highs and lows were so much more defined. I was expecting this with the higher resolution and the devices DAC capabilities, but on traditional Redbook (16 bit 44.1 kHz) files the qualitative difference was/both startling and evident. You don't expect to hear the instruments, so as to separate them, especially on the go, but this was indeed possible on the move: buses, trains and walking about town. Contrary to popular belief, you CAN take it with you...the Black Label brings . i-Fidelity to transportable gear at an every-man price.

CONCLUSION

iFi has created a portable workhorse of DAC/Headphone amplifier. At the price, I can heartily recommend the unit. Yes, the sound may not be to everyone's exact preference, but headphones play a big part there. A lot of factors at play here: headphones model/brand, DAP model/brand and lastly individuals' level of hearing.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: The unit is built to last. It is sturdy and rugged. If I were to choose something portable/transportable with which to concuss, the iFi Nano DSD Black Label would be high on my list.

Sound Quality: It is not just a portable/transportable solution. I could very well see some folks using this product as their desktop/system DAC. There are several sub £500 DACs out there which should be quaking in their boots right about now.

Value for Money: At £199 this item is a steal, an absolute no-brainer. Even if you don't own a DAP (portable player) it is great to be used with headphones connected to a phone/tablet /computer

Pros: All of the above

Cons: The price makes it hard to quibble, like other manufacturers it would be nice to have a Micro USB cable in the box



REVIEW

LONGDOG AUDIO PH 1 MOVING MAGNET PHONO STAGE



The recent revival in vinyl and explosion of new turntables has spawned an equal number of new phono stages from the bargain basement models to the highly specialised audiophile units costing thousands. Nick Gorham from Longdog Audio noticed that the market was short on quality budget units, so he decided to design one to appeal to most newcomers to vinyl or those on limited funds. The result is a very straight forward moving magnet only unit costing £199. Ian Ringstead takes a listen.

IAN RINGSTEAD

The recent revival in vinyl and explosion of new turntables has spawned an equal number of new phono stages from the bargain basement models to the highly specialised audiophile units costing thousands. Nick Gorham from Longdog Audio noticed that the market was short on quality budget units, so he decided to design one to appeal to most newcomers to vinyl or those on limited funds. The result is a very straight forward moving magnet only unit costing £199. Ian Ringstead takes a listen.

CONSTRUCTION

As a budget unit the PH1 arrives in a simple cardboard box but well packaged to protect it and has a standard plug top switch mode 12v dc power supply. The unit is compact and comes in a nicely made aluminium case with very good quality phono sockets for the input and outputs. Nick usually designs very high-quality products with higher price tags than the PH1 but his experience in electronic design has allowed him to eek as much as he can out of the limited budget to produce a truly bargain-basement unit. Nick uses a combination of isolated and regulated power supply technology, along with second stage inductive filtering and a third stage of active regulation. No electrolytic capacitors are used as Nick believe they can impair the sound quality, instead film capacitors are used for the filtering and smoothing. Quality precision components are used throughout the unit to achieve a highly accurate RIAA equalisation curve. Noise and distortion is extremely low, and hum is negligible. I can testify to that.

One end of the case has the two phono socket inputs with an earthing post and a blue power LED. The other end has the two output phono sockets and the 12v dc power input socket. There are no facilities for

adjusting level or capacitance due to the unit's budget, so the fixed level is a good compromise and keeps everything simple for the user.

SOUND QUALITY

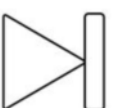
As a budget unit moving magnet is the affordable option, I dug out my trusty Goldring G1092 and AT95E with paratrace stylus. That's the beauty of my Jelco arm as it has a detachable headshell making comparisons so much quicker and easier. I tried out a complex album first, Yes's Tales from Topographic Oceans, an album I know very well and one that I heard recently at their 50th anniversary concert. If you are into progressive rock, then this album is a real treat and deserves higher recognition than it got when it was first released in 1973. It was very brave of a band then to release and then perform live the whole album which consisted of four sides all twenty odd minutes long. I queued for three hours outside the Sheffield City Hall with a school mate in my sixth form wagging it from school to get tickets for that concert. Fortunately, we got the last tickets and it was a great concert. Being progressive rock the mix on this album is very dense at times when all the musicians are playing and really going for it, so it requires a good turntable, arm, cartridge and phono stage to clear away the dense layers and portray them accurately.

I know what my Luxman, Jelco and cartridges can do but what about the PH1? The great news is that it performs remarkably well. There was no hum and the noise floor was very quiet through my speakers. I was greeted with a very clear and articulate soundstage. Jon Anderson has a very clear and distinctive voice which is very pure and high-pitched, and this came through beautifully. Chris Squire, the bassist, plays very complex rhythms and unless a system can produce



REVIEW

LONGDOG AUDIO PH 1 MOVING MAGNET PHONO STAGE



REVIEW

LONGDOG AUDIO PH 1 MOVING MAGNET PHONO STAGE

these correctly then the result is very disappointing. I love tight fast rhythmic bass guitar which Chris Squire excels at and it was easily heard acting as the backbone to the music along with Alan Whites frantic drumming.

The PH1 was more than capable of casting a clear image with depth and all the musicians came over as a cohesive unit. Rick Wakeman on keyboards showed his flamboyant style and deft ability to change the pace instantly like a rally driver hurtling down a forest road going hell for leather. When hearing this music live I marvel at the musician's ability and if my system can get near to the real thing then I am satisfied. Steve Howe, a fabulous guitarist who has an amazing collection of many acoustic and electric models, including slide guitar, sounded sublime with his precision clearly portrayed through my Audio Physic Avanti's and sounding holographic, a trait they are famed for. The PH1 didn't let me down here, coming up trumps once again.

Randy Crawford is a fabulous singer well known for her singles "You Might Need Somebody" and "Street Life" with the Crusaders. I played Secret Combination, an album I have loved since it came out in the late seventies. I spent many a happy hour listening to this album in my bedroom when still living at home and even now it sounds fresh and thrills me. It's a laid back album compared to my progressive rock collection, but it allows me to chill out and relax when I don't feel like rocking. The arrangements are simple, with a horn section and superb backing musicians from the likes of Jeff Porcaro on drums, Steve Lukather on guitars and a whole host of who's who session musicians. No wonder it's a great sounding album. The album oozes quality and the PH1 lapped it up bringing out all the nuances of the different performers skills and touches. I love to be transported to the studio and wish I could have been in the recording sessions on the mixing desk grooving to the beat of the music. This album does that in spades when reproduced properly, and emotionally I was moved. Another album that transfixes me is the Crusaders "Rhapsody and Blues". Here were three jazz musicians at the top of their game, who are as tight as a drum when they performed together. The arrangements flow seamlessly and are truly magical to my ears. The PH1 again conveyed the inner beauty of the tunes and allowed the spacious recording to really reach out in my living room and let me drift away (no drugs were involved in this listening session !!). This album always amazes me whenever I play it on a good set up and this set up did just that. I listened to other albums of course but the three listed stood out for me.

Even in my system costing £15000 at face value prices, the PH1 did not disgrace itself. I would be normally using a much more expensive phono stage (Gold Note PH10) which has the performance and versatility I need, but buyers on a tight budget with a moving magnet or high output moving coil won't be let down.

CONCLUSION

Is the PH1 a giant slayer? Maybe not, but for such a restricted price I can't help but admire its verve and joie de vivre. Keeping it simple has paid dividends in its performance and the money has been spent wisely on the components inside the case to extract maximum benefits.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Excellent for the money with a nice case and good socketry.

Sound Quality: Clear with a very low noise floor and no hum.

Value For Money: Excellent when compared to similar priced alternatives and well worth trying out. The designer has made the compromises where it matters so giving maximum value for money.

Pros: Great build and performance.

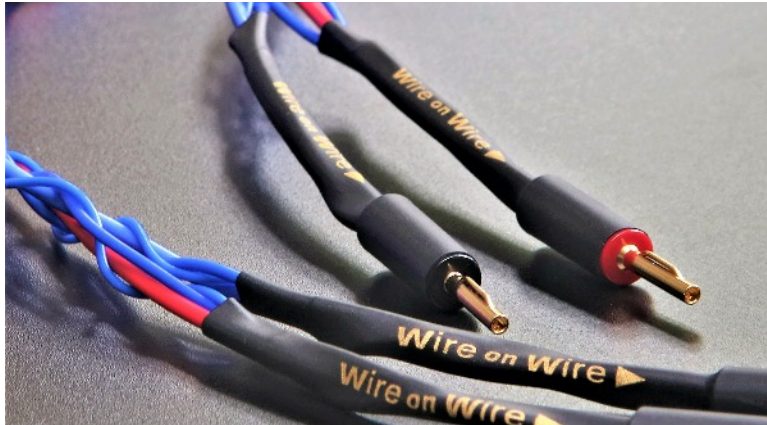
Cons: Only moving magnet with no adjustments but what do you expect for the low price.

Price: £199 direct from Longdog Audio.



REVIEW

WIRE ON WIRE 660 SPEAKER CABLES



Hifi Pig review of the latest cable from innovative UK company Wire On Wire. This time it is their 660 speaker cable that has, to say the least, an interesting, and configurable, geometry. Contains a video of the owner of Wire On Wire explaining the concept behind his cables.

DM

Regular Hifi Pig readers may recall that Hifi Pig reviewed the [Wire On Wire interconnects](#) a while ago and so we now move on to their Experience 660s loudspeaker cables.

CONSTRUCTION

As the loudspeaker cable's construction follows along a similar path to their interconnects, I have copied some paragraphs from the interconnect review:

At first look it looks like something a drunk spider has fabricated after a generous slug of some home brew with what appears at first sight to be a haphazard weave pattern, but look past that and you find a cable that obviously has great attention paid to its construction. Anyone can do a simple three strand plait weave blindfolded, but this cable is a lot more complex than that and according to the designer Chris Bell it took an inordinate amount of research and experiment into arriving at this final design. The resultant geometry is called "REDpurl" and I understand that a patent has been applied for and pending (GB1602578.5).

Most of us will (hopefully) know that resistance, capacitance and inductance are all traits inherent in any speaker or interconnect cable and whilst resistance remains fairly constant dependent on wire metallurgy, tamper with capacitance parameters and inductance falls victim to that and vice versa. Some designers rely on those two parameters to shape the final sound but it is fixed once the cable is manufactured into the final product. Wire On Wire decided that there was an opportunity to manipulate these parameters in their favour and also allow the end user to do likewise by a simple yet ingenious method of adding or subtracting spacers to vary the geometry of the weave

pattern. These spacers are not introduced randomly, they are allocated at predetermined intervals or "nodes" along the length of the cable. A well laid out handbook explains where within in the cable length the spacers should be introduced (or subtracted) as required.

Wire On Wire have chosen silver plated copper conductors despite this configuration having a reputation for having a sharp edgy treble performance, but that is mostly earned by cheap silver plated copper wires and many leading cable manufacturers also use this combination of silver plating and copper core to good effect, so that reputation is rather too generalist, applied with a very broad brush and perhaps not applicable to all silver plated copper wires. Although not actually measured, the conductors themselves appear to be of different diameters, some with a red outer insulating jacket to preserve polarity for termination, which can be either 4mm banana plugs or spade terminals. Insulation is by PTFE. The spacers are manufactured from black plastic and appear to be a custom moulding.

SOUND QUALITY

The review sample was received in a "naked" state with no spacers actually installed, with spacers attached by cable ties in the appropriate places to make my life a bit easier for the initial listening tests.

My first impression of them was very good, the sound being evenly balanced throughout the audible spectrum, nothing untoward manifesting itself in the sound, which before any running in period was commendable. Without any instructions to the contrary, I allowed 50 hours of running in time before I commenced the actual evaluation.



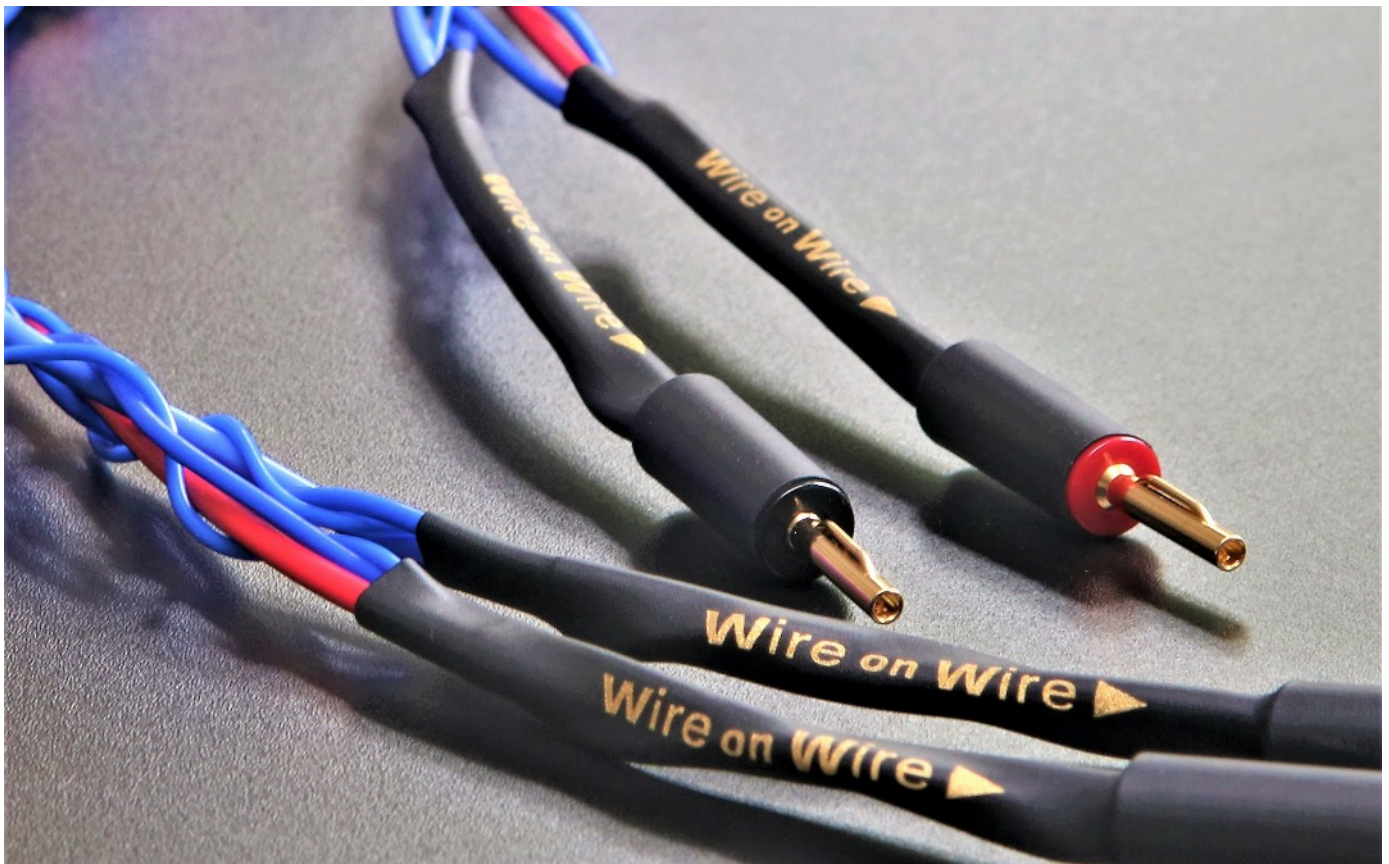
REVIEW

WIRE ON WIRE 660 SPEAKER CABLES



REVIEW

WIRE ON WIRE 660 SPEAKER CABLES



REVIEW

WIRE ON WIRE 660 SPEAKER CABLES

My resident speaker cables are by Studio Connections and the Wire on Wire Experience 660s almost matched them in sound quality, much to my surprise. I then had to ask the question could I wring some more performance from the Experience 660 cables by tailoring the sound with the spacers in situ?

Bearing in mind that other people's results may vary considerably, with many factors to consider like system components and listening preferences to name just two. The best I can therefore achieve is to convey to you the results that I obtained.

Now for some music and into the CD drawer went my reference recording in the shape of Fink's "Wheels Beneath My Feet" live album and that has many cues that puts any hifi components through their paces for me. The first is the ambiances recorded at each venue of Fink's European tour to perform this music selection where each has its own unique reverberation and of course, each audience too has its own signature in the way they cheer and applaud the performance. I would expect to hear each as unique and the Wire On Wire cable performed this with ease, so you could easily tell the capacity of each theatre by that ambiance. Imaging width and depth was very good, with steady instrument placement in the sound-stage. Bass however was just the tiniest fraction behind my resident cable and almost mustered the definition and shape of bass notes the resident cable can portray down in the lowest registers. Mid-band was equally as clear and lucid - male and female voices too for that matter was certainly on a par between the two cables. I went through most of my CD collection over a period of two weeks and then I felt the time was right to introduce the full "spacered" up variant of the Experience 660 speaker cables.

The sound to me was a fair bit away from what I heard from the "naked" cable; what was a sweet and natural sound from the bare cable took on a tiny amount of edginess and that didn't surprise me at all because the Quadral speakers already ran that knife edge of treble detail between just perfect and leaning towards a slight brightness artifact. Very similar results in the mid-band too which I attribute entirely to the Quadral's ability to seek out even the smallest details and inflections. Bass definition and coherence was always right on the mark no matter what spacers were installed. However, Wire On Wire suggest inserting the spacers into nodes 5, 12 and 26, which sure enough produced a marked uplift in image definition and depth.

Thankfully, Wire On Wire thoughtfully provide a handbook that shows how to tune the cable by subtracting and adding their plastic spacers to the cable, the nodes being numbered and counted off from the source end, no matter which way round the cable is initially installed.

CONCLUSION

Wire On Wire's website has an anecdote about Chris Bell's cables which says their product HAS to sound good or the man will be locked in the shed until it does. He obviously has been let out on good behavior.

I recall that the Wire On Wire Experience 680 interconnect I also reviewed sounded at its best in my system without any spacers being added at all in the final analysis. To be honest I didn't altogether relish another review which meant I spent many a long hour putting spacers in and out with the Experience 660s speaker cable, only to find I preferred it best sounding with no spacers at all in the "naked" configuration, like the interconnect. Having such a revealing speaker

used during the evaluation that was already running at peak performance showed up how little change was needed to provoke the sound a bit over the top, which with any other "normal" run of the mill speaker wouldn't exhibit.

I will then sum up this review with the statement that it was a real pleasure to evaluate a cable that actually did what it said on the tin it would do, at least during the time I had them. That increase in image definition and depth was claimed and executed so that is a real milestone in a reviewer's experience of cables and makes worrying about "synergy" almost redundant.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: A real tour-de-force in hand-built cable geometry.

Sound Quality: It isn't a static entity like other cables, so it's within your power to achieve the sound you want. Hifi Pig's editor Stuart was very impressed with the WoW demo at the Cranage 2017 hifi show.

Value For Money: Good quality wire hand built with a complex weave pattern from scratch will never be cheap.

Pros: Great sound already and able to be tuned to suit, so what's not to like?

Cons: Cannot think of any. Get them on your audition list, I say.

Price: (2m length pair with 4mm banana plugs) £480.00.

Submitted by email for editing and publication 21st February 2018.

Watch the video of Chris Bell explaining the concept of his cables



REVIEW

NOMADIC AUDIO SPEAKASE



The Nomadic Audio Speakase is a brand new Kickstarter campaign by Morel featuring a fully featured open baffle Bluetooth loudspeaker system but pop it into its dedicated carry-on suitcase and you have a fully fledged loudspeaker system. Price is dependent on the package you take but for the case and speaker expect to pay around \$400 on Kickstarter.

STUART AND LINETTE SMITH

The Nomadic Audio Speakase is a brand new Kickstarter campaign by Morel featuring a fully featured open baffle Bluetooth loudspeaker system but pop it into its dedicated carry-on suitcase and you have a fully fledged loudspeaker system. Price is dependent on the package you take but for the case and speaker expect to pay around \$400 on Kickstarter.

When we were first asked to take a listen to this prototype I was, to say the least, a little sceptical. What we have is a Bluetooth APTX standalone speaker that slots into a wheeled carry-on suitcase that is being launched on Kickstarter this month and that won an Innovation Award at CES 2018. I'm sure you can understand my scepticism as this really isn't the kind of product that we would usually entertain but I'm so glad we agreed to the review as I think this, let's face it, gadget, will transform the way we listen to music when we travel. The Speakease is designed and made by well-known speaker manufacturer Morel and so it has a reputable history, which sort of sealed the deal for this review.

DESIGN

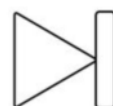
The Bluetooth speaker itself is 42 X 11 X 6 cm, weighs a kilogram and comes in a black colour with rose gold centre console that includes a volume control knob, a bass control knob, a treble control knob, the on/off button, a source/pair button for Bluetooth and a phone button. There is also a USB port so you can charge your phone. All in all, it's an attractive lozenge shaped proposition that will fit in with modern home furnishings. Connectivity is wirelessly via Bluetooth or you can connect via a 3.5mm mini-jack. There is also the opportunity to use "stereo mode pairing" where two of the units can connect together to

give you a proper set of stereo speakers...but more of this later. The speaker has an onboard rechargeable battery with a ten hour lifecycle and which can be recharged via the mains from 100 to 240 volts, so wherever you find yourself in the world you are covered.

You get a Class D amplifier that will kick out 60 Watts (25 Watts RMS) and the speakers are two 6x4" woofers and two 22mm tweeters that sit independently, but in the middle of the woofers. Now here's the interesting part of this design which really sets this speaker apart – the speakers are an open-baffle design, meaning the rear of the speakers are not enclosed in a box.

So that's the speaker design out the way but you also get a relatively conventional trolley suitcase in with the deal and this is where things get interesting. It's a fibreglass strengthened nylon polycarbonate design that is water resistant and has a handle and parts that are designed to be "rattle silenced" for reasons that will become apparent shortly. It's a 40litre design that Nomadic Audio say should be OK for carry-on on all airlines. All in all it looks like a pretty standard modern suitcase, other than it having three cut-outs (which can be closed) on the side panel of one side of the case – this is where the Bluetooth speaker slots in, essentially turning it into a 40litre loudspeaker with a max SPL of 97dB @ 1metre and a claimed frequency response of 35 – 20,000 Hz. Getting the speaker into the case is a matter of slotting it in and fastening a couple of straps to keep it securely in place. All the speaker's controls can be accessed from the panel and it takes a matter of seconds to slot it in or take it out, so if you do get asked to remove it at customs you aren't going to be fiddling about overly.

SOUND



REVIEW

NOMADIC AUDIO SPEAKASE



REVIEW

NOMADIC AUDIO SPEAKASE



REVIEW

NOMADIC AUDIO SPEAKASE

First of all we took a listen to the Speakease as a standalone Bluetooth speaker and connected it to the smartphone via Bluetooth which was painless and took a few seconds. Press pair on the speaker, open the phone, access Bluetooth settings, hit pair and you're done. I played John Martyn's Solid Air first of all, it's a good test track as it's so well recorded. The sound of the speaker is typical of a largish Bluetooth speaker and was pleasing enough. Where it did stand somewhat apart is that it has a more audiophile feel to the sound – more open and more balanced with less emphasis on the bass – I find many Bluetooth speakers just too bass heavy and come out sounding all boom and tizz. There is plenty of detail in the sound and the open-baffle design does add a certain airiness to proceedings. All in all a pleasing and good sounding speaker that I'd be happy to live with in the bedroom or kitchen.

However, there are a million and one Bluetooth speakers out there and whilst this one does sound very nice, the unique selling point is the integration into the suitcase, which, as I mentioned, basically turns this unit into a 40 Litre Hifi loudspeaker. We popped a few clothes into the case for a couple of reasons: a. If you're traveling you are likely to leave clothes in your suitcase – I always do anyway and b. We thought they'd offer a bit of dampening like you would find in a conventional loudspeaker.

Popping the unit in the case is simple and it takes up only a tiny amount of space - the company reckon 4%. Close the lid, pop it a little off the floor (like where you would pop your suitcase in a hotel) and play a tune. Our jaws basically dropped to the floor. You still have that very open sound but there is just so much more than before and the bass is just so much more pronounced – and in a good way. The music comes from the direction of the case, of course, but it also comes from around it in a rather pleasing kind of way. Detail in the music is very good with vocals forward in the mix and a lovely midrange. The words I kept writing down as I listened were balanced, detailed and open.

Popping on Juno Reactor's Invisible, a hard party track, we're rewarded with lovely tight synthesised bass has a reel slam and punch to it, which was way beyond what I was expecting from this box of tricks. Turn the volume up and you just have to party. The room, we have a large listening room, was filled easily.

Sweet Jane by the Velveet Underground was up next as it seemed an apt track with the opening lines "Standing on the corner, Suitcase in my hand" and we weren't disappointed. Vocals were clear, again lots of insight and detail to the mix and again I'm going to use the word open.

We threw loads of different music at the Speakease and it sounded fab with them all, be that Lee Perry's "Party Time" where we were treated to bouncy bass and snappy tops or Hawkwind's "The Aubergine That Ate Rangoon" where we heard that openness once again.

Now Linette and I are party people and we travel a lot and often find ourselves in need of some form of music and the Speakease could be seen as a party in suitcase and I love that idea. Usually our traveling kit revolves around a Chord Poly and the Mojo and I could see us using the Speakease with the Chord kit plugged into the 3.5mm input on the front of the Speakease to give us access to all our tunes that we can listen to at proper volumes. Where I think the Speakease will come into its own for our use is having a case each and pairing them – this way

we can enjoy a proper stereo set up in our room or when we put on one of our Hifi Pig parties.

If you are going on holiday and renting a place with a pool one or more of the Speakease are going to be perfect. Set it or them up, hit play and party.

So, it is a party in a box but it also has refinement and poise and will be a real treat for music lovers of any genre who don't want to the music to end when they close their front door. With the Speakease you have a practical suitcase allied with a cracking Bluetooth speaker, but then combine the two you have an absolutely fabulous way to enjoy your tunes whilst away from your main rig.

CONCLUSION

We were chatting about the Speakease in the car earlier and when I was half way through writing up my notes and we both came up with it being the perfect, portable, party-prescription and I reckon that just about sums it up.

I hate gimmicks and gadgets that serve little point, but whilst yes, the Speakease could be seen as a gadget, it is also much more. Singularly you have a great sounding speaker you can enjoy whilst away from home. Buy your traveling partner one too and you basically have a full blown home Hifi whilst away from home.

Last year at the London Indulgence Show we put on a Hifi Pig party with a DJ and had to organise and set up speakers and wires and all the rest that goes with it. The next party we put on whilst away from home will be with a phone, a playlist and a pair of these.

And Now Linette's Thoughts

Sceptical is the word that Stuart used when we were asked to review the Nomadic Audio Speakease before its Kickstarter launch and I must admit I was of exactly the same frame of mind. Had it not been made by Morel with the involvement of PureAudioProject, the open baffle loudspeaker brand that we first encountered a few years ago on the new-comers stand at High End Munich, I don't think we would have entertained it. However, when a very clever loudspeaker designer, working with a loudspeaker and driver manufacturer that has a great reputation and heritage, asks you to have a listen to their speaker in a suitcase, you pay attention.

There are many, many standalone Bluetooth speakers on the market. From the cheap and cheerful to the very high end. The Nomadic Audio offering is definitely towards the higher end of the scale with a very easy on the eye design, featuring rose-gold accents and a slim, elegant and tactile body. As a standalone unit the sound quality is excellent, clear and airy but with a good punch of clean bass. So far so good. However, popping the unit into its suitcase brings it totally alive. It sounds like a proper hifi...to say I was gobsmacked was an understatement! I was expecting a gimmick but what was delivered was a quality, hifi sound. Still retaining the clear tops and mids, bass was delivered in a clean and lively package, with much more punch than with the standalone unit.

To me this is a no-brainer. If you travel a lot and love to listen to music at your destination then it is absolutely perfect for you. If you travel as



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a couple and have a pair, even better. I suppose it just reinforces the fact that sometimes the most simple ideas are the best, and when implemented by a brand that has a true audio heritage, that simple idea becomes an incredible product. It is a portable party in a case, built by audio specialists for nomadic party people.

[KICKSTARTER CAMPAIGN LINK](#)



BIRD'S EYE VIEW



We Are All In This Together

LINETTE SMITH

Linette Smith takes a look gender imbalance in the Hifi Industry and Audiophile Community and how to attract more women into Hifi, both as an industry and a hobby.



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BIRD'S EYE VIEW

I'm a woman and I work in the Hifi Industry, well, the journalism side of it. Working as a Hifi journalist puts a person in a unique position. You get to know everybody in the industry, from all over the world, because it truly is a global industry. You talk to people every day and because of the internet you can just as easily be speaking to someone on the opposite side of the world from you, or just down the road. You speak to manufacturers, company MD's and CEOs, PR people, marketing people, distributors, dealers, designers, technical people, engineers... You meet people at Hifi Shows and events. You take in information from a multitude of sources and then send it out into the world. You get a full overview of the industry, where it's progressing, where it's standing still or even moving backwards.

One thing that I noticed as I got into this industry six years ago, was that there didn't seem to be a lot of women in it. I say seem to be, but actually the more you get to know the industry, and make connections, you start to realise that there are a lot of women in Hifi. Maybe the reason people think there are not is because they may work at a company where there is just one woman, they may be that one woman. The balance is definitely skewed towards male but there is a strong female force there too. There are female role models, of which you will meet a few in this edition of Hifi Pig Magazine, but the truth is, we need more women in the Hifi Industry and more female consumers of Hifi. We also need to get more young people involved for the industry to survive and a more diverse industry will attract younger people better than one with a stuffy and dated, male dominated image.

So how do we do this? How do you as someone who is either working in the Hifi Industry, or is into Hifi, is an audiophile consumer, make Hifi a more appealing interest or career for women?

Look Beyond Gender

Let's use a Hifi Shop or Showroom as an example here. Say for example two men walk into your shop. One is black and one is white, or perhaps one man is able bodied and the other has a physical disability... would you treat those men differently as customers who are coming in to buy Hifi? My guess is, no you wouldn't. (If the answer is 'yes you would', then you probably need to replace 'gender' in the title above with 'race' or 'disability' and have a bit of a think about it and a word with yourself). What I am guessing you would do, as a good Hifi Salesperson, is talk to the man that just walked in. Ask him questions to find out what he is looking for. What system he has at the moment, is he a novice or a Hifi expert, what's his budget, what music is he into...you know the usual kind of questions that will help this end up with a very happy customer leaving the shop with the perfect product and probably returning again soon. You would then, as a good Hifi Salesperson, adjust your language and technique to suit the person that you are advising and selling to. You haven't made a judgement based on who just walked through the door, you have used your skills to work out the best way forward with them.

So, how do you think a woman feels if she walks into a Hifi Shop and is just immediately treated as if she knows nothing? (I'm not saying this is what always happens by any means, but it does happen.) If you want to make us feel welcome treat us exactly the same as a

male customer. Don't assume our level of knowledge, find out. Don't assume that if we are there with our male partner that it's him that is shopping and we are there under sufferance, find out. Involve us, don't ignore us. Ask us the questions and find out what we want, not what you think we want. This applies just as much to visitors to your exhibit or room at a Hifi Show. Or to people using a Hifi group on Facebook. Connect with us, involve us. Don't go over the top and try to bamboozle us with your superior technical knowledge (this actually may completely backfire on you when you realise that we might know more than you). Trying to belittle a woman and 'put her in her place' is a sure-fire way of completely putting her off, just as it would someone who is a complete novice. Connecting with people and treating them with respect should be applied to all the people you come across in Hifi. You'll make sure that Hifi Shops, Hifi Shows, Hifi Groups etc are a nicer place to be for everyone involved. Look beyond gender and see the person, treat them properly.

If you are looking to employ someone to work for you then looking beyond someone's gender is just common sense. If you want a diverse and harmonious workplace just employ the best person for the job. True, there may be more men that have the qualifications for a technical role, simply from the way the education system has worked in the past and has fed through to the workplace. Things are changing though and girls and young women are actively being encouraged into the sciences and engineering, there should be a stream of intelligent, qualified and knowledgeable female graduates all looking for an exciting career, and that's what the Hifi Industry offers, an exciting, fulfilling and fun career.

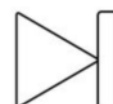
Be Inclusive

So, let's hope that we are getting more women coming in Hifi Shops, joining discussion groups on social media, getting jobs in the Hifi Industry. We need to make them want to stay, to feel valued and respected. We are not asking to be treated with kid gloves, we are not asking to be treated differently to men, but there are some things that have to change. This goes back to what I said earlier about making the Hifi Industry and hobby inclusive to everyone and shedding its previous image. An industry or hobby that has been traditionally male dominated, whether it likes it or not, can have ingrained traits that are sexist and discriminatory. Things that are seen as 'the norm' and these 'norms' can build barriers that simply put outsiders – women, novices, young people – completely off.

Banter in the workplace or on social media, there is nothing inherently wrong with it. I like a bit of 'Bants' with my friends as much as the next person. I can literally be reduced to tears just having a laugh with my friends, male and female, over the silliest things. But, there is a difference between banter between friends, taking the piss, a bit of gentle teasing, whatever you like to call it, and it becoming nasty and bullying. With your friends you generally know how far you can push it. If you are in a group/workplace that has an established culture of banter, then you need to take into account that this may come over quite differently to someone new to the group/workplace. Be aware of people's feelings and the impact you may have on them, be inclusive and adjust your behaviour accordingly. No one wants to be accused of being a bully.



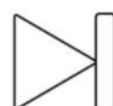
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BIRD'S EYE VIEW



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BIRD'S EYE VIEW

I'll use this as an example. A Facebook Hifi discussion group is made up of mainly males. There are several female members in the group. There is a culture of posting pictures of scantily clad women in the group and making lewd comments about them. One day some of the female members voice their opinion that it is sexist and has nothing to do with the group's purpose. Some of the male members agree with them and support them, others say 'well, that's what we do here, deal with it, it's just banter'. Think about it, that's not the inclusive behaviour that's going to help get more women interested in Hifi, is it?

And so to Mansplaining, the buzzword of the moment. Mansplaining is basically when a man talks condescendingly or patronisingly to someone (especially a woman) about something he doesn't have complete knowledge of, and he mistakenly assumes that he knows more about the subject than the person he's talking to does. This happens all the time in Hifi. It's different to explaining, if we don't understand something, if we need more information then we will ask someone to explain it. It doesn't just happen to women either, I've seen plenty of guys being 'Mansplained' at by another guy who thinks he knows everything about everything in Hifi. No one can know everything, we all need to keep learning, but in the interest of everyone's sanity can people stop with the Mansplaining. It's highly likely to put off newbies and novices as well as women, if we think we are going to be talked down to all the time by people that think they are superior to us, without even bothering to find out what we already know.

There are many men that are already enlightened about my next point, thankfully. I've seen them complain about it as vocally as women. Unfortunately, there are still many more that think it is perfectly normal and acceptable to show the prowess of a piece of Hifi by draping an attractive and underdressed young woman over it. This, of course, was much more prevalent in the advertising and at Hifi Shows of decades gone by. The decline of this practice is broadly welcomed because it's sexist, out-dated and has nothing to do with the performance or sound of the piece of Hifi in question. I was challenged on this recently. Again on Facebook, a picture was posted of a very beautiful young woman, in an outfit that was barely there, posing next to a pair of high end loudspeakers at a Hifi Show in, I believe, Hong Kong. I pointed out that she was nothing to do with how the loudspeakers sounded so why was she there, if not just to grab the attention of men looking at the image. I was told that it was 'normal' behaviour and that I 'didn't understand their culture'. Now here's the thing. I uphold the right of anyone to dress how they please, this may have been her day to day dress or she may have been hired to wear the outfit and stand next to the speakers. She may have been the designer of the speakers, she may have been an engineer that built them, she may have been a brain surgeon that loves Hifi and goes to shows...but none of this was pointed out. The image that was posted just showed a scantily clad woman next to some speakers with the specific intent of getting men to comment on it. And as a woman that pointed out this was wrong, I was told to 'accept it, it's normal'.

We Are All In This Together

We have come a long way on this issue, but as I, and many other women will testify, we still have a long way to go. It can only benefit

the Hifi Industry and community to make it a place where women can feel totally comfortable and enjoy their job or hobby alongside men, safe in the knowledge that we are seen as, and treated as, complete equals.

There are plenty of people, journalists, companies, brands, shops, distributors etc that are on the right path, but we can always do more.

If you encounter sexism or discrimination in the Hifi Industry or the Audiophile Community don't stand by and let it happen, call it out when you see it or hear it. You are doing your bit in helping us to make Hifi an interest and industry that is seen as diverse, inclusive, exciting and fun...something that everyone wants to be involved in.

Let's be forerunners in smashing gender inequality. We are all in this together.



Hifi Pig
www.hifipig.com



STU'S VIEWS



WAF! WTF?

STUART SMITH

Apparently Women have the vote and everything. Stu Smith connects tongue firmly with cheek and discusses the dreaded Wife Acceptance Factor!



STU'S VIEWS

Hey guys, you do know it's 2018 and that women have had the vote, in England at least, for the last 100 years – admittedly, then it was only if they were over thirty and were householders, but you get my drift. You do know don't you that throughout the sixties and seventies there was a movement called Women's Liberation with a broad set of goals that included bringing women into the mainstream of society – I believe they burned their bras or something to make their point. You do know that using the term Wife Acceptance Factor makes you look, at worst, like some kind of chauvinist bell-end and at best some throwback to the fifties. Perhaps I'm wrong, perhaps women who are married to blokes who like to spend their time fiddling round the back of a collection of boxes and removing and inserting their many varied cables (never mind the length, look at the girth) ad infinitum until they reach, as Jeremy Clarkson might have put it, a state of aural crisis, are a "well trained" lot who like nothing more than ensuring their husbands dinner is on the table the moment he returns from a hard day's hunting and gathering to provide for the little lady and their litter. Perhaps these same little "little ladies" are happy to allow their husbands to pop along to their local purveyor of rare and exotic Hifi, to purchase whatever they want and install it in the family cave, but the truth is, if what I read on Facebook groups and pretty much everywhere else that a largely male assembly gathers to discuss all things audio is correct, it is actual these same women that in reality rule the roost in said family cave.

Let's have a look at what Wife Acceptance Factor actually means in the tone it is most often used and I mean in a "My fellow audiophiles, I do love how yonder piece of audiophile loveliness sounds, but Lordy, it hath been hiteth by the ugly stick quite severely and the Lady of the house will not alloweth it to cross the threshold of our humble abode" kind of way. What you are actually saying here is that you, as the man of the house, are not allowed to make your own decisions on the kind of Hifi that you really want to buy. See what's happened there? There's been a paradigm shift in power of decision making from you to the female of the species. It's feminism gone mad I tell you! They'll be wanting the vo...oh wait a minute. I jest of course, but what you are actually saying when you use the term WAF is one of two things. You are saying either: "I'm not allowed to make decisions on my own, guys, as when I do I make a bit of a bollocks of it and get it all wrong and the house ends up looking like something from The Hoarder Next Door" or "Me and the wife don't really speak and discuss Hifi purchases because, bless her, she just doesn't have any interest, but I do know it's not pretty enough for her to allow in the house". In short, using the term WAF makes you look like either a complete nutcase, or weak and vulnerable in front of your peers - so stop it for those reasons if no other.

Here's the thing as I see it. I go to lots of Hifi shows around the globe and I get to see the audiophile in his natural state and, invariably, the ratio of men to women is huge. When you go out to buy a bed, or a carpet, or a sofa, or a cooker, or pretty much any other lump that is to take its place in your home you do it together and come to a decision, before purchase, that you are both happy with. Why does this not seem to happen in audio? Let's face it, women like music too, don't they? Perhaps audiophilia is a bit like those Gentleman only clubs you see in the posh areas of London...only much more expensive. Perhaps blokes want to keep audio as the preserve of the male of the species and to exclude women unless they are draped over some loudspeaker wearing a come-hither pout and little

else. Perhaps a good proportion of Hifi is so damned ugly that only its mother (and male audiophiles) could possibly love it. Again, I jest, but come on people, what is wrong with you? Let's be inclusive in this hobby, let's not make women who do attend shows feel like some kind of side show to be mentally undressed or to be photographed on the sly so you can take said pictures home, take it down to mom's basement where your bed and rig are kept and fantasise that one day you will have the courage to speak to a member of the opposite sex. You think I joke, but at Munich a couple of years ago I was in the Audio Reference room along with Linette and she wandered off to look at some Audio Research amps or whatever. Between me and Linette were two mid to late twenties looking lads who were taking photographs of Linette and showing them to each other as if she was some kind of rare and near extinct species they'd never happened across before. They got a bit of a surprise when she wandered past them and back to me and realised I'd been watching this sad show of "manhood" unfold before me. Their faces were a picture, but I do wonder what they did with the pictures they took later in the day...eeeeeeugh!

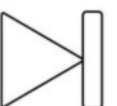
We as an industry and at the hobbyist level (I do hate the term hobbyist when used to describe someone who is into both music and the kit it is played on, it makes us sound like some kind of sad and lonely train-spotters) need to be inclusive when it comes to women. On the manufacturers front you need to make better looking kit that doesn't look like it's come out of the laboratory of some mad scientist, and on our level we need to take our significant others to shows, take them along when buying gear and, who knows, we may well find that not only do women actively participate in the sport that is audiophilia, but also that they actively embrace it and become part of the community themselves.

WAF + WTF = WTAF

OK, this is a bit of an addition to the piece above and is written after I'd finished it. After I finished writing I went and did my chores, Linette scolds me if I don't, and once they had been checked for thoroughness by her I was allowed some time on my computer to play on Facebook... and WTAF. Carol Clark, our good friend from Positive Feedback made some comment about being a female audiophile and men made comments along the lines that she couldn't be an audiophile because she was wired differently to her male counterparts. Now this is the kind of utter claptrap that really does give this game a bad name. And it wasn't just the usual subjects. Now, I expect a bit of an over the top conservative attitude from some quarters, but I genuinely thought that millennials had come on in leaps and bounds in the progressiveness stakes and had adopted a thinking more in line with the year we actually live in rather than some Victorian time gone by. But apparently not. I don't think Steve Guttenberg's recent video helps a great deal either. He opens with a "Where are the ladies? Where are the Women audiophiles?" and then goes on to prescribe what he considers to be an audiophile in a very male kind of way and suggesting that any woman, or bloke for that matter, that doesn't fit into this definition isn't an audiophile. What he describes as an "audiophile" isn't a normal person, what he is describing is a mental ailment where the person is so obsessed with their system that little else matters. I believe the shrinks call this OCD and let's face it, no one wants to admit they have a mental ailment do they. So, where are all the Ladies and audiophile women?



STU'S VIEWS



STU'S VIEWS

They are outside having lives, living their lives and enjoying their systems and music on their terms and not some patriarchal, predefined set of rules that either allows you into the club or not. To me this is an open house, the music and the gear is open to all whether black, white, yellow, red or candy striped, male, female, trans...whatever!

Anyway, that's your lot for this month, I've just had the shout from Linette to tell me her dinner is late and that the hoovering needs to be done, the cats need herding and I'm to make myself look pretty because she's got the girls coming round for a vinyl session.



WOMEN IN HIFI



WOMEN IN HIFI INDUSTRY 2018 - THEIR VIEWS

Meet twelve of the many amazing women that work in the Hifi Industry. Here they tell you, in their own words, what it is like to be female in what is often a male dominated industry. They tell it like it is, the good, the bad and the ugly. You will find some shared experiences from women across the globe, some cultural similarities and some differences. Find out what they think about how the industry is progressing for women, if it is it a good industry for a woman to work in and have they encountered sexism or discrimination?



WOMEN IN HIFI

Kathleen Thomas **Sales Manager, ELAC Americas** **24 years in the Hifi Industry**



I was in my first commercial for Hifi Buys in Atlanta GA in 1973 when I was just a couple of weeks old. Spent much of my life at Hifi stores and often worked at my parent's rep firm during the summer. I got my first paycheck in Hifi at 20 doing sales at Hifi Buys...so officially 24 years in the industry, but really 44.

I have been groped and grabbed at Hifi shows and store events!

Being a woman in the industry is a double-edged sword. I love men and most of my friends are men and it definitely helps being unique in furthering your career, not that I think I was given any breaks because I was a woman, but I know I am memorable in part because I am female and I know my stuff. The other edge of the sword though ranges from unwanted attention, to bias, to harassment, to outright sexual assault. These are things that are encountered by most women in male dominated work environments, but there are some unique aspects to the sexual politics of working in the audio industry as illustrated by a few anecdotes. (honestly, I have so many that I am having to really work to narrow this down!!)

I have to constantly review my resume with customers: When I worked retail, I was often mistaken for "counter help". I would have to detail my experience for them in order for them to allow me to help them put together a system. Sometimes, they would still not want help from me and would ask for man, who would often have to come back to me to answer questions as I had a deeper technical knowledge than most of the guys in the store. For the longest time, I never really noticed it until a cashier at the store told me "I never see guys having to work so hard just to get to the first step of the sale."

I still get mistaken as the wife of someone who works for me, a receptionist, or a marketing person. My favourite was my friend

David Ellington who reported to me when I managed North American Sales for AudioQuest. Someone asked if I was his "significant other" and he replied "She is my MOST significant other, that's my BOSS!!!!".

I sat at a "selling to women" talk at a major buying group in the US. Everyone mentioned talking about "the experience" with women and not the gear, making their stores more "homie", focusing on add ons like blinds and lighting. I was one for the few women in the room, and when I mentioned that maybe they should ask the female customers questions to qualify what their interests and needs were, just like they would a male customer, I was met with deafening silence.

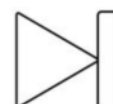
I have been groped and grabbed at Hifi shows and store events. I had one particular event that escalated to assault, and I had to meet with the customer the next day as they were a big dealer of the company I worked for at the time and I didn't know what to do.

The hardest part though, honestly, is the grind constantly having to tell people how you became interested, listen to the remarks that women aren't interested, women aren't technical, women don't care about gear. I am a woman. I get tired of telling men exactly why there aren't more women, that the constant gaze combined with sexist remarks on forums and the boys club atmosphere of the industry at every level, chases away women that would otherwise be interested, and am met with silence or worse, that what I am saying simply isn't true...girls just don't like gear.

Emma Smith **Brand Manager, Harbeth Audio Ltd.** **2 years in the Hifi Industry**



I've worked at Harbeth for two years now. For me, it's the perfect combination - being able to use my marketing background and passion for all things music. Overall my experience of working in the Hifi industry has been a positive one however, I have received a few sexist comments, including being asked at an industry show - "what do you do at Harbeth then - make the tea?". I still find it surprising to



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see women portrayed as props at shows and in Hifi magazine advertising - we're in 2018! Things can change but I think we need more women working in the industry to influence this. When I was studying music production and engineering at university I was one of only a handful of women on the course. Even in this environment there was sometimes hostility from tutors being a woman studying a course like that, which I found disappointing but made me more determined to be successful in my studies.

Generally, the response I've received has been positive, particularly from fellow professionals. Being a woman in this industry doesn't come without its challenges and its evident from the number of women at shows and in Hifi media that it is still predominantly a man's world, but things are changing and women are rising.

Juliane Thummel
Managing Director, KMS Event,
Organiser CanJam Europe, Co-
Founder HEADSOUND Audio
7 years in the Hifi Industry



Most of the time I'm leaning against loudspeakers in a short dress and just smiling. No, I'm kidding. I'm running my own businesses - KMS event, which organises the CanJam Europe shows and additionally HEADSOUND audio, an onlineshop for portable audio. I've been doing this for seven years now and most of the time I am actually the only woman at business events not being paid for leaning against loudspeakers.

In 2011 I started an onlineshop for headphones with my husband, HEADSOUND audio, because a lot of interesting headphone brands were not available in Europe or Germany. This was our aim - to find great manufacturers from all over the globe, bring them to Europe and establish the brand here.

In 2013 I also initiated and organised Europe's first dedicated headphone show CanJam Europe, which had grown out of a community meet. Last year, German industry association High End

Society approached me about hosting a headphone show in cooperation with their High End Munich show. And now, this May it's going to happen! This is in addition to the regular CanJam Europe in November 2018 in Berlin.

I didn't start my career in the Hifi industry, so the change was quite a jump: from uptight suit-wearing business types to what often feels like a small family of enthusiasts. I really appreciate that friendly atmosphere. Most of the time, working in this industry is very enjoyable and you can rely on people and their promises. But some men are stuck in their old ways and can't believe, that I'm the boss and not the assistant. Or that I might have insight into the business. There is a lot of mansplaining. A lot! Some try to ignore me or - in one special case, where they feel threatened - even backstab me.

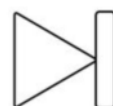
The Hifi industry is still a "man's world", and to be honest, I doubt that this will ever change. But, nevertheless, it is important and necessary to attract more women to Hifi topics and hopefully to the Hifi industry. And this will not work by just using the ridiculous "Woman acceptance factor", or just putting some bling on headphones. We need to welcome newbies - both women and men - with open arms and appreciate their questions and ideas.

Kimberly Stahl
President/CFO, Purist Audio
Design Inc.
28



I have spent 28 years working in the industry. I grew up with a father and married a man who both have a passion for music and enjoy the quality music reproduction in the comfort of their home nightly. I have come to enjoy music myself not just nightly but daily throughout my day.

Sexism and harassment, this is a complicated issue to talk about...When beginning in this industry I recall women in the industry at the time being nicknamed things like 'dragon lady' (one that I recall). I had the fortune of being exposed to mostly very respectful men. That said, I have had some men who would not talk



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to me due to the fact that I was a woman. I also recall, at dinners, being the only women at a table of many men. After a few drinks, sometimes jokes were told, and some men would quickly apologize for telling it once they remembered I was not just one of the guys. I usually laughed it off. There were times that the men were not so respectful by ogling other women, some of whom were in the industry. The men talked, in my opinion, in a disrespectful manner. One night was so bad my father apologized for having to put up with such things. The one thing I knew early on was to keep my mouth shut when I encountered such things because it was bad for business. Like I said, this was not a common occurrence. I did encounter many men who were respectful and even protective and would come to my defense in times of a threat or rude behavior toward me. I also have seen recently how men in the industry talk about women in the industry as if they can not succeed in this business. It was surprisingly done in front of me about other women! This did strike a nerve in me. I start to wonder if that is what they think about me? Does 28 years not speak for itself? Oh, do I have a not so nice nickname?

I get the feeling that, some, NOT all men really are not interested in my opinion or trust it!

Another thing about the industry, there seems to be a subjective language shared to describe quality reproduction of the music in the system, and it always seems to me that if I used the same words in the same way they would look at me like I was speaking a foreign language. This is frustrating because I am a highly intelligent woman and frankly have better ears than most men I have met. I get the feeling that, some, NOT all men really are not interested in my opinion or trust it!

The industry has come a long way over the years with many more women being an integral part of the industry, but it still needs to see more women in the forefront of the industry to lead and demonstrate that women can succeed in this industry. If we stop seeing women as being in the way of our sales, i.e. the WAF, Wife Acceptance Factor, and welcome participation from women in the industry, then, more women will become members in the industry both as part of the business aspect and as potential customers. We would open 50% more of the world to our industry! This will be huge for the growth of the industry that many says is dying.

Frankly, the music helps me get through my days of multitasking and continually changing hats of responsibility, by helping reduce stress and giving me enjoyment, relaxation, and energy!

Fang Lei Owner, Talsiaudiosystemas 12 years in the Hifi Industry



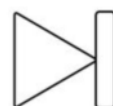
I am the owner of Talsiaudiosystemas in Latvia and previously worked for the Chinese company Kuans Audio.

Hi-end audio systems are a man's toy, in the audio ring, men have absolute right to speak, so men think women do not understand sound, do not know how to listen to music. This is a form of gender discrimination. Therefore, within this range of ideas, it is very difficult for women to work in the audio industry. We can see that almost all audiophile-fever circles are male. A small number of women are used only for embellishment.

In my years of experience in the audio industry, I rarely encountered harassment, but in most of them encountered gender discrimination

In my years of experience in the audio industry, I rarely encountered harassment, but in most of them encountered gender discrimination. I know that for women, this may not be a good job at all, because we are not necessarily good at technology. But men have forgotten that we have good ears and we have a keen sense. So even if we can't say technical indicators, we can say that the sound is better. So, in judging whether a set of sounds is good or not, we also have the right to speak. Sometimes we can give a more rational judgment from a third-party perspective. Women are more sensual and men more rational, the partnership between men and women in the audio industry should be a Yin Yang relationship, working together and complementing each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Women are men's helpers and men need women's help. What we need is to help them in the right place. So, I understand that the position of the woman in the audio world is not embellishment, it is not a leader, but an equal partner and helper.



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Pam Merrigan
Financial Director, Telurium Q
9 years in the Hifi Industry



I am a director at Tellurium Q Ltd, and have been involved with the company since its inception in 2009, so have been in the industry for 9 years. In fact it was me that initially funded the company's first project. At present there are 3 directors, two of which are women and our head of production is also a woman. We outnumber the male contingent when you look at all the staff.

**We have lovely distributors
none have ever made me feel
like an outsider in this industry
and our Thailand distributor is
a wonderful lady!**

At the beginning I worked full time as a Manager with a Financial Services Company later becoming a director of that Company. My role now is as the financial director of Tellurium Q but being a relatively small company also regularly work at the sharp end with production making cables.

I have been to many Hifi shows around the world and have met many exceptional people both male and female working in this industry. We have lovely distributors none have ever made me feel like an outsider in this industry and our Thailand distributor is a wonderful lady! I have never been made to feel like "a woman in a man's world" and I just love the work I am doing now.

Janine Elliot
Writer & Reviewer, Hifi Pig
18 years in the Hifi Industry



I have spent my whole life in some way connected with audio and Hifi. As a young child I had interest in Hifi owning a Philips amplifier, turntable and speakers, gradually replacing it all as I went higher up the Hifi ladder. I also created my own radio station broadcasting to my parents and friends via cassette and reel to reel tapes and was involved with a local talking newspaper for the blind.

After a music degree specialising in electro-acoustic music it was obvious to me that I would work for BBC radio, which I did for 24 years. I was involved in the design and roll-out of equipment, and worked in the Hifi industry advising a company on mains conditioners and cables. This included a novel mains conditioner in an IEC plug.

During this time, in the 1990s, I was asked to contribute to one of the UK's in-print Hifi magazines, writing a column where I wrote about weird and wonderful things in Hifi that no one else would talk about. Once the magazine changed ownership I unfortunately left. I felt that being the only female writer at the magazine caused some issues and I felt I was only permitted a few reviews, and only lower-end items. I was brought in to the magazine due to my honesty in discussing and reviewing Hifi, but when the magazine changed ownership it went back to an all-male affair. Having suffered discrimination in a previous working environment, I could sense here a reluctance to trust a woman to write for a Hifi magazine.

now write for Hifi Pig and teach 1-to-1 music in schools and have written a few albums and played with some famous musicians around the world.

With more and more manufacturers being women or involving women I see things have much improved since my earliest writings. The industry is, though, still highly male dominated and will take a number of years before that changes completely. However, I hope I have contributed in changing the misnomer that Hifi is a male pursuit, and that is certainly being shown in the increasing number of women attending the hifi shows. This is a great hobby or career for the woman. After all, we hear better than men do.



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Eva Kujath **Manager, “Hifi Pawlak!” Hifi Shops** **10 years in the Hifi Industry**



I do get mansplained to from time to time. The classic being when addressing a customer whether he needed help and the answer is “No thanks, I have got a technical question”. But on the whole I have to say that the experience is mainly a very positive one. Customers seem to be intrigued in the most positive way to be advised by a woman. It may sound cliché, but being female often helps to get the wife on board as well. Of course it makes the job, i.e. running a Hifi shop way easier when you know your stuff. This is in fact true for dealing with the final customer as well as dealing with a distributor/manufacturer.

Luckily I have never had to deal with sexual harassment.

Luckily I have never had to deal with sexual harassment. The only thing that happened a couple of times were invitations to dinner and when they were refused, the customer was never to be seen again and thus no business made. But since I have changed my name after my wedding this has never happened again.

I think that when it comes to dealing with the final consumer, it can definitely be a big pro to be a woman. Even the critics can usually easily be convinced when you demonstrate expertise in the field. Even my mom, who started working in this business in the seventies, says so. Where I really see difficulties for women is the distributors' side. Here women always have and to my mind still very much have difficulties being accepted. And I do not see things changing there. Maybe when there are more women working in Hifi shops.

In that sense I think that in 2018 we are indeed still working in a mans world.

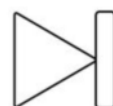
Nia Davies **Managing Director, Leema Electro Acoustics** **10 years in the Hifi Industry**



I've worked in electronics for 16 years now, and coming into it as a 21 year old woman, I thought I'd seen the worst of the delightful sexism that flies around anything technical, but then I got into Hifi. As the Managing Director of an audio company, I sit in quite a lot of meetings where I am the most senior decision maker in a room and yet invariably if the people in that room are trying to sell us something, or expect the company to agree to a relationship, the entire conversation will always be directed to my male co-workers. The guys I work with are uniformly brilliant at making sure people know that the final decision is likely to be mine, but there is a huge amount of resistance in the industry to actually asking a woman. I've had people refuse to engage with me directly and instead get one of my male colleagues to ask me a question... I don't think I'm that scary! Before now I've been introduced as the boss to an industry member at a Hifi show only to be met with the response of “oh really, I thought you were going to offer to make me tea!”.

As an industry, Hifi is very insular, everyone knows everyone else. Sometimes it can feel like a real community, but when you first get involved, especially as a younger woman as I was at the time, it can be really intimidating. In reality, it's the perfect industry for any women with an interest in the technical and a love of music, at the end of the day that's what it's all about, but I think there needs to be some real work before we will be capable of presenting a welcoming face. At Munich High End show, as an industry we apparently still think it's okay for scantily clad women to be draped over some speakers as a sales method. In 2017. Why would women want to get involved in an industry that still treats them as mere window dressing?

Even in the short time that I've been involved in Leema, I've seen a real change in the customer dynamic at trade shows and in customer enquiries. When I first started coming to shows to get more than two women in the room at once was a triumph, even though most of



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them seemed to be unenthusiastically accompanying their partners. Nowadays I'm seeing a huge increase in the number of interested women at the shows, even if they are still heavily outnumbered. There's no reason that we shouldn't be excited about Hifi, I know plenty of women that are hugely enthusiastic about their musical loves, why wouldn't they want to hear it at its best (even if it is Bon Jovi when it's me).

Dona Moon
Co-Owner, higherfi.com
20 years in the Hifi Industry



The beginning years were tougher because our business was an online business and many manufacturers saw us as competition, not strategic partners. It took years to convey the message, we are not competition and that we can work with manufacturers, dealers and individuals. We have as many as 50,000 customers a month coming to our site looking for highend items most dealers do not carry. Many are customers who have a trade in they need to sell in order to step up to new gear or a very exotic and expensive item they just need to sell. We have helped many of the largest and most prestigious manufacturers and reviewers sell an exotic and super expensive item when it was time as this is one of our real specialties. Our customer base is International. It is easier for us to find a buyer, than it is for a person in a limited area. We have heard more high end systems than almost anyone out there because we have sold many different brands of almost all the top equipment made in the world. Customers who will to spend \$100,000.00 or more for a system, usually don't have time to travel all over the world to experience each component. And it's almost impossible to hear their dream system with all pieces together in any one place. Our customers come first. We have many customers we have worked with for years that will send their room dimensions and budget, and tell us to match a system for them. If they ever upgrade, they can be assured we will handle selling their old equipment also – even if they didn't buy it from us originally.

So my experience is basically, hands on.... and when the guys start talking to me about some uber expensive item they are always

shocked when I respond "yes, that's nice but have you also heard the XYZ". I think men are surprised when they meet a woman who has perhaps had more experience in high end audio than themselves... they just don't expect it.

The wife acceptance factor (WAF) might be a problem because no one has "womensplained" why equipment is built like it is.

If you are going to specialize in a single product, it may be easier. If you have a passion for Hifi, it also helps. I have had a couple manufacturers ask for advice to gain the women's market. They have suggested producing gear in feminine colors, my response has been, how many pink cars do women buy? If a large speaker is a problem, painting it pink won't help! Women are educated buyers, they want to know the differences in the gear. I think some women are intimidated by not knowing where to start.... from my experience, once they do start and know what to look for and what questions to ask, there is not stopping them. The wife acceptance factor (WAF) might be a problem because no one has "womensplained" why equipment is built like it is.

Performance is very important to a women. I do believe some men would prefer to keep the hobby a man's hobby. These are the men who like to laugh at women who ask questions about gear, although I have not met any personally, I have heard a few stories from some of my female clients. The funny thing is, those men just lost a great customer. I do believe there are areas where women do the same to men, it is more about the person. If we all treated each other with respect, the industry would benefit greatly. I honestly don't think any man would want his wife or daughter treated poorly.

In my 20 years, I can say I have rarely experienced any sexism. I have had men question me on technical issues, but when I tell them what my "girly" system consists of XY and Z which are all high end pieces, we both laugh. That makes me suggest, this industry needs more laughter. I have had men laugh when I call a mover to help move my "BIG" speakers. I tell them the weight is 1 ton, and they still send 2 guys! When they arrive, they are instantly on the phone ordering the additional help they need to move the speakers... ha ha.

The elephant in the room is... the man's world sometimes ends up landing in the women's lap. If a spouse dies and leaves a house full of audio equipment, having a wife who does not know the value is a terrible thing. Over the last 15 years we have been listed in peoples wills as the ones to call to help the wives sell the gear when the husband passes away. In some cases, the women are reminded of their husband's after the passing and want to learn how to use the gear or even make changes to it so it suits their own lifestyle. We have worked with women and almost instantly, they are hooked. A headset for one isn't nearly as fun as a party room for many, or listening room for two!



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Lynn Scott Partner, Definitive Audio & Living Voice 20 years in the Hifi Industry



I am a partner in Definitive Audio & Living Voice. I joined the industry in 1997 when I met (and shortly afterwards married) Kevin Scott. Kevin had set up Definitive Audio in the late 1980's and then set about establishing his Living Voice brand a couple of years later. When we met, Definitive Audio was at a turning point, and he was busy developing new products and expanding the brand. He needed some hands-on assistance with the day to day running of the business and so I stepped in to provide him with some support. We soon found new premises in a magnificently refurbished Victorian Lace Mill between Derby and Nottingham, and we have been here ever since. It is more than just a place to work, it is a foundation and central to our ideas; a place where we can think and create as well as make, and I have always felt lucky to have it.

I was very much aware that I was entering a man's world of course, but I didn't see this as an impediment in any way, I simply set about carving out a role. I have never accepted that things have to be a certain way and like to make changes where I can, and in this way, I suppose, I invented my own job. There were big issues to begin with but none that were related to gender or equality. The biggest challenge was to develop an understanding of what was required in a small business led by an entrepreneurial person. It needed a completely different mind-set to anything that I was remotely familiar with or "conventional". Transitioning from the comfort of a large organisation that operates according to procedures and timetables with a regular salary and guaranteed holidays was tough. It took a while, but I have a resilient nature and eventually adapted. I realised that I was actually enjoying the learning process as I went along and soon began to embrace this approach; something that continues to this day.

Working alongside someone who has a lot of creative energy with enough drive and motivation to make things happen can be a thrilling and exhilarating experience, but it can also be exhausting and

requires an enormous amount of determination. Having a flexible and resourceful attitude helps to embrace new ideas, but the challenge is to keep a sharp focus on the day to day nitty-gritty running of the business whilst also adapting to quickly changing situations. And for all of the excitement and thrills there are plenty of late nights and anxieties and a fair share of rallying around when things go wrong, as they inevitably do. But being at the coal face with a team of like-minded people and seeing ideas evolve and dreams materialise is infectious. It helps make it all worthwhile.

Equality in the work place is very much a part of the current conversation, and 2018 is turning out to be a year of momentous changes for women around the world. When the streets of London were full of women marching on International Women's day a couple of weeks ago, to demand the right to live and work without fear of harassment, it signalled a collective shift; yes big changes have been made but not enough. Women can lead the narrative and it's always going to be easier to change the attitude of an individual than an entire industry, so we need to be able to speak out without fear of reprisal and tackle issues head-on.

Equality in the work place is very much a part of the current conversation, and 2018 is turning out to be a year of momentous changes for women around the world.

Hand on heart I have never experienced sexual harassment in the Audio industry, although I have in previous jobs. In the early days I might have a conversation with an older person who was slightly suspicious that a woman could understand the needs of an audiophile, but even that rarely happens these days; maybe because people know me better or maybe because attitudes have changed.

The audio industry is crowded with people who are highly intelligent and talented, and the simple fact is that the overwhelming majority of these people are men. Unfortunately, a large percentage of these men are very sure of their own importance and I've seen plenty of unattractive 'Alpha-male' behaviour targeted towards other men (which may be considered inverse sexism, of course). However, in my experience the majority of these people are liberated in their attitude to women. In fact, on the whole I would say that most people would actually like to encourage more women in.

The facts about gender diversity in the workplace are well documented and it is common knowledge that companies who employ more women in key roles and have a good overall gender balance perform far better than those who do not. It is not rocket science. Personally, I have always felt a part of a team and lucky to be living my life doing something that I enjoy, surrounded by so much talent and learning something new almost every day.



WOMEN IN HIFI

Yvonne Hawkey Marketing and PR, Sonata Hifi 6 years in the Hifi Industry



Since working in the Hifi industry I have been lucky enough to hear some amazing systems that have made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end. Once you've experienced this level of intimacy with your favourite music there's no going back really. The other plus point of working in this industry, is I've met some great people who have become really good friends rather than just work colleagues. The ultimate passion we all share is our love of music so there's a natural affinity occurs where one doesn't have to try too hard and that is quite precious!

There is something quite vile about being mentally undressed by a sweaty, socially challenged middle-aged man who probably still lives with mammy!

The worst experiences I've encountered have been at Hifi shows and from the general public rather than colleagues within the industry. There is something quite vile about being mentally undressed by a sweaty, socially challenged middle-aged man who probably still lives with mammy!

The Hifi industry is still very much a male world but I do think it's improving. More and more women are coming to shows these days and are becoming interested in having music within the home again. I don't think women will ever get over enthusiastic about a knob

control dial on an amp, or excited at a circuit board layout, it's just not naturally in our psyche. But, I do think the whole headphone and vinyl revival is bringing women back in (thank God!!) and women love music, right? And, women have really good ears, right?

The one thing the Hifi industry needs to lose and lose quickly is the whole 'wife acceptance factor' (WAF) phrase being gratuitously used. But, sadly WAF does occasionally hold some truth and I now know from first-hand experience that some men sneak their Hifi purchases into the home with any sign of a receipt being simply unheard of! In these situations, it's the breakdown of communication between the man and the women that really upsets me, the fact that a man who works hard is afraid to treat himself and indulge in what makes him happy. I really don't get it? If I want to treat myself to an expensive pair of headphones, dress, bag, guitar or pair of shoes, I shouldn't feel worried or guilty about what my husband or partner thinks and vice versa! We need to respect our partners' hobbies and loves and allow for freedom to indulge in these passions within the home. If not, what is the point of living and sharing your life with someone? Let's lose WAF and promote HAPAF ('hobby and passion acceptance factor')!

Yes I do think the Hifi industry is a good place for women to work, and the more women that get involved, the more chance for change and change for the better! For example, from a visual, interior design aspect within the home, I think the Hifi industry needs to seriously catch-up. To capture more of the female market, just like the car industry has done, audio manufacturers need to wise up to what women want. And, at an educated guess that would be a good Hifi that performs well, looks good, is easy to operate, works properly and is reliable – currently not a lot of Hifi components tick all these boxes I'm afraid.

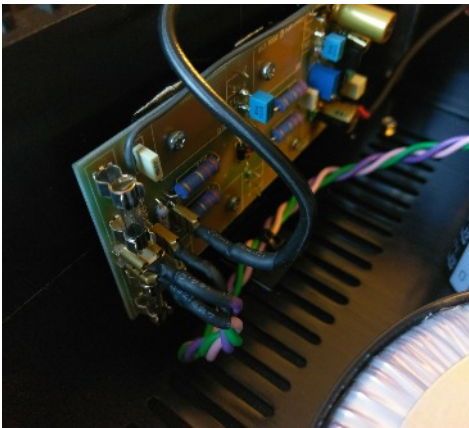
**IF YOU ARE A WOMAN WORKING
IN THE HIFI INDUSTRY OR JUST
INTO MUSIC AND HIFI, THEN
CLICK TO JOIN THE WOMEN IN
HIFI FACEBOOK GROUP**



THE FEMALE AUDIOPHILES



Hifi Pig Talks To Three Female Readers Who Are Very Much Audiophiles



THE FEMALE AUDIOPHILES

Sera Jay, Norfolk, UK



HP: What was it that got you into Hifi?

SJ: I got into Hifi just after I really started seriously listening to music at around the age of 11. It was the love of music which subsequently fuelled my passion for making it sound as good at home as I possibly could. I bought my first budget Hifi bits, some Mission M71 bookshelf speakers (which I incidentally still own!), with pocket money I had saved up over the course of the year. From then it eventually grew into a full system and after that I just started upgrading bits as I could afford to.

As I got older and started going to see live music events my passion grew into seeking to be able to reproduce music in my home, with the same energy and presence as a live event. And it's that which drove me to start to become fascinated with engineering my own equipment to reproduce sound in the best possible way.

HP: Tell us about your current Hifi set up. If you have more than one system then tell us about them all.

SJ: I have two systems set up at home; one in the sitting room and one in the studio for recording/mastering. The amplification is the same in both, but they differ totally in set up.

My main system consists of a DIY built and modified VTA SP12 and PH12 valve pre-amp, DIY built and modified ESP P101 MOSFET power amps and a Marantz NR1504 AV DSP (used for centre/rear channel AV only). The sources are a Roksan K2 CD player, Roksan Radius Mk1 turntable with modified Rega RB250 arm and Ortofon Black Cartridge, Sonos Connect: Amp for streaming/lossless (served by 4TB NAS) and a Sony UBP-X800 4k Blu-ray/Hi-res audio player. The Speakers are Acoustic Energy AE2 on signature stands with an Acoustic Energy Aegis for the centre, Mission M71 at the rear and a BK Electronics XXLS400 subwoofer. The cables are a mismatched set mostly DIY made with VDH cable and Neutrik connectors.

My studio system consists of a DIY built and modified VTA SP12 and PH12 valve pre-amp, DIY built and modified ESP P101 MOSFET power amps, Breeze Audio DAC, Digidesign 003 Interface, a custom build PC for digital/streaming via optical, Acoustic Energy AE100 speakers and similar DIY cables to my main rig.

HP: What would be your dream system, money (and room size) being no object?

SJ: A set of big Linkwitz active speakers with a set of my own amps and an endless supply of new music to listen to. Most importantly the ability to position it all and set up as perfectly as possible in a room with ideal audio response and the ability to crank it up a bit!

HP: Realistically now, what upgrades are you looking at for the future?

SJ: I'm currently working on another set of power amps, with a few different tweaks to the current ones in my system. And I've also recently designed some speaker enclosures for an active speaker project which I really need to find time to finish!

HP: What music are you into? Favourite artists/bands, favourite genres? Who inspires you? What's your favourite song/piece of music?

SJ: I have what has been described a totally eclectic taste in music. Most assume I only listen to heavy metal and rock. But, in reality, I have a love for almost all forms of music, whether it's blues (Joe Bonamassa, Gary Moore), rock (Def Leppard, Sevendust), metal (Opeth, DevilDriver, Children of Bodham), industrial (Nine Inch Nails, XRX, Combichrist). And a whole host of others from Lady Gaga though to NWA. I'm inspired by amazing rock and blues guitarists such as Joe Satriani, Joe Bonamassa, Zakk Wylde and Randy Rhodes. I have a few favourite songs but currently I'm loving Sevendust 'The Wait', Stone Sour 'Song #3' and Lunatic Hooker 'My God is Bigger Than Yours' (my girlfriend's bands newly released song!). My favourite test tracks are, Lindsey Stirling 'Crystallize', Daft Punk 'High Fidelity' and Nightwish 'The Islander'.

HP: If you had to listen to one format for the rest of your life what would you choose and why?

SJ: FLAC/Streaming/HiRes Digital. Much to the disappointment of many of my Hifi enthusiast friends I am very much into lossless and hi-res digital formats. Predominantly due to ease of listening, but also due to their superior technical capability in terms of noise floor, dynamic range etc as the engineering geek in me has a passion for technical perfection.

HP: What does the word 'Audiophile' mean to you?

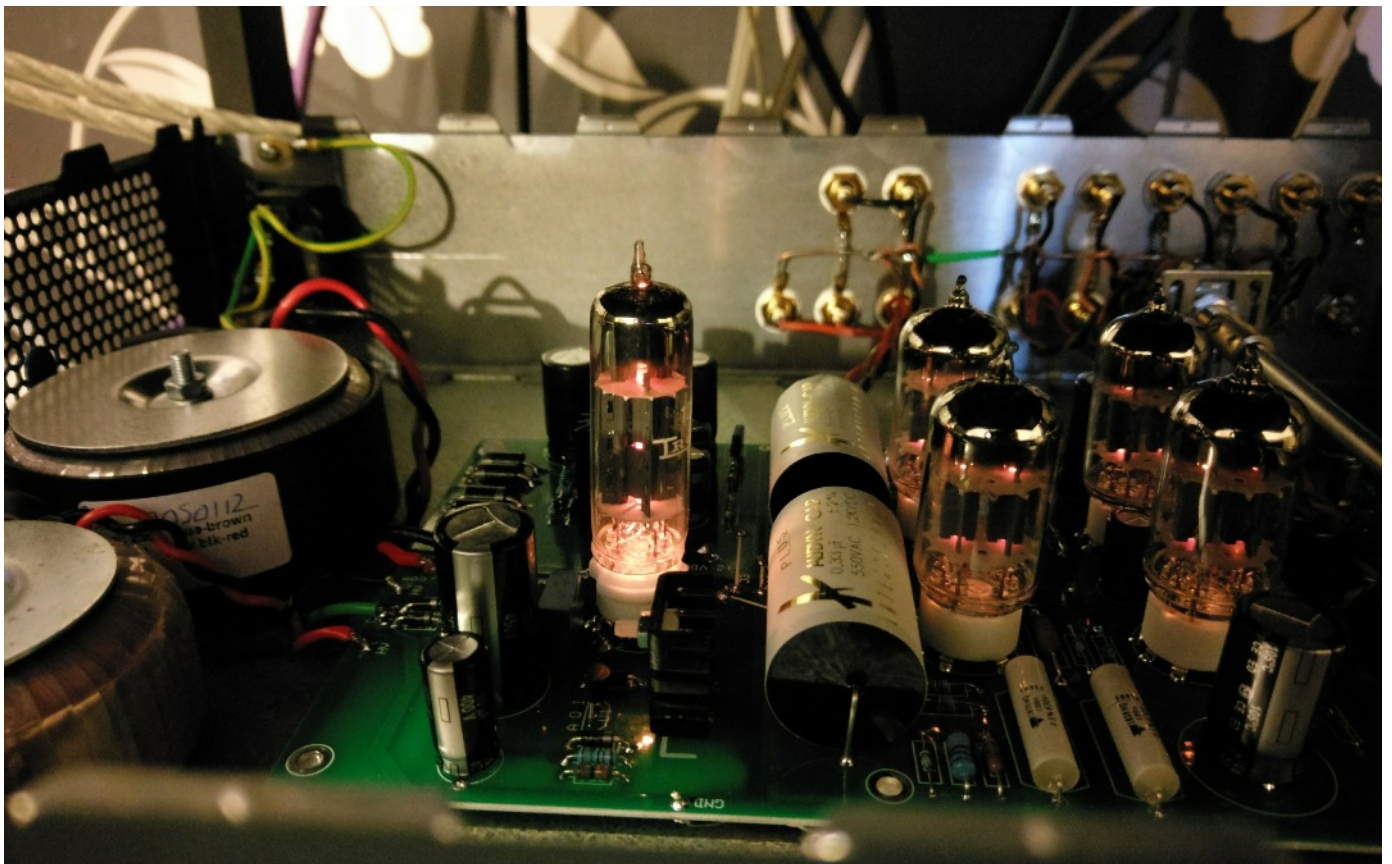
SJ: A controversial question with a suitably controversial answer! "Someone who listens to their equipment rather than the music".

HP: How do feel the Hifi/Audiophile community treats you as a woman?

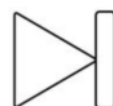
SJ: I get the impression there aren't that many women who are into Hifi. From attending a few shows and talking to people there, it



THE FEMALE AUDIOPHILES



THE FEMALE AUDIOPHILES



THE FEMALE AUDIOPHILES

seems to be a novelty for a woman to be involved in the hobby and you certainly don't see many when attending events or mingling on the Facebook groups or internet forums. I don't want, or expect, any special treatment as a woman who is interested in Hifi, just to be treated the same way as anyone else with a shared passion, and by and large I feel that way. In fact, I've found the audiophile groups better in this respect than other typically male dominated hobbies I'm engaged in. Is it a shame that there aren't many women in Hifi? Yes of course, but equally we cannot force people to enjoy it either. I don't believe that this is necessarily a failing of audiophiles to attract women to the passion at all.

HP: How do you feel that the Hifi Industry treats you as a woman, for example when you visit a Hifi Shop or Hifi Show?...Tell us about your experiences.

SJ: I've not had any bad experiences in my dealings with the Hifi industry. By and large, while it's a male dominated hobby there seems to be less inherent sexism in this hobby than in most others. Even the advertising is pretty neutral...

HP: When you are not listening to music or tinkering with your system, what else do you like to do?

SJ: I am an engineer professionally, and it was my hobbies which shaped my career path, so unusually for a woman I find myself with many stereotypically male hobbies as I grew up around cars, bikes, engines and things that make a lot of noise. I built, and now race, my own American muscle car. I have also built a few custom motorbikes in the past five years. I also enjoy shooting (clay pigeon and target rifle). Equally I have a lot of traditionally female centred interests too, especially if it involves buying shoes, clothes or makeup!



THE FEMALE AUDIOPHILES

Kym Skiles, Dallas, Texas USA



HP: What was it that got you into Hifi?

KS: My oldest brother is a musician and a vinyl collector; I followed his interests because I loved the music.

HP: Tell us about your current Hifi set up.

KS: I'm not a high-end audiophile by any stretch of the imagination, but I do care about the sound quality for my listening sessions. I currently use a Marantz 6350Q turntable, a Marantz 2238 receiver and the speakers rotate a bit these days (Sansuis and Technics).

HP: What would be your dream system, money (and room size) being no object?

KS: Ha! My answer changes daily. I've got a bit of a fixation on VPI turntables right now though so....

HP: Realistically now, what upgrades are you looking at for the future?

KS: I'm focused on speakers at the moment, still doing research and testing.

HP: What music are you into? Favourite artists/bands, favourite genres? Who inspires you? What's your favourite song/piece of music?

KS: My tastes range from Jazz to Death Metal. My favourite living/active musician is Nick Cave. I tend to be most inspired by the subversive and outside the box type of artists. The weirder you get, the more I'm interested.
I can't possibly choose just one song as a fave.

HP: If you had to listen to one format for the rest of your life what would you choose and why?

KS: Vinyl forever, it's always been my preferred format because of the sound quality and the physicality of the medium.

HP: What does the word 'Audiophile' mean to you?

KS: A lover of sound.

HP: How do you feel the Hifi/Audiophile community treats you as a woman?

KS: Honest answer? The majority of the time everything is hunky-dory but there have been dozens of occasions where I've been talked down to or dismissed and I'm not exactly shy about pushing back in those situations. I find that I'm less involved in the audiophile communities and groups because it's just exhausting a lot of the time. I'd rather talk about the music than the gear.

HP: When you are not listening to music or tinkering with your system, what else do you like to do?

KS: I'm a photographer so that takes up a lot of my time. I also enjoy smashing the patriarchy in the evenings.



THE FEMALE AUDIOPHILES



THE FEMALE AUDIOPHILES

Amelie Forget Dubois, Montreal, Canada



HP: What was it that got you into HiFi?

AFD: When I was around 18 years old, I used to study music (classical singing and flute). I would always go to the music library to listen to music on a turntable with big headphones and cut myself from the environment. But, I didn't know then, it was possible to have such a system at home. Years later, I met a friend who had a pretty good sound-system at home, it sounded so nice, like real musicians were there, I fell in love! (with both, he is now my husband!)

HP: Tell us about your current HiFi set up.

AFD: My sound-system is in the living room: Leben integrated amp (Cs 300x) and phono stage, Harbeth speakers, Linn LP12 Turntable, EMT TSD15 cartridge, Auditorium 23 step up, Magnum Dynalab tuner, Revox B77 Reel to Reel, Rega Apollo CD and DAC, Luna interconnect cables, ST-2 antenna.

HP: What would be your dream system, money (and room size) being no object?

AFD: I would love the Sonus faber Aida Loudspeakers, with the Nagra Pyramid monoblock amplifiers, Garrard turntable and a Koetsu laquer cartridge...

HP: Realistically now, what upgrades are you looking at for the future?

AFD: Nicer Tubes for my amp and pre-amp, I love the sound of Shindo amps, but there isn't enough connections to plug all my system into it...

HP: What music are you into? Favourite artists/bands, favourite genres? What's your favourite song/piece of music? Who inspires you?

AFD: Jazz, classical and progressive rock, but also folk, electro, and alternative from time to time. Bill Evans is my favourite pianist of all time! I also like Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holliday, Louis Armstrong, Emerson Lake and Palmer and Alison Kraus. I love Opera, classical music from the romantic period and the beginning of 20th century (especially Debussy and Ravel), I also like Gershwin. Musicians who play with all their heart inspire me, when they are generous and you can feel their emotions through their music. My favourite piece of music is a Dvorak Cello Concerto.

HP: If you had to listen to one format for the rest of your life what would you choose and why?

AFD: Vinyl, definitely! There is something magical about it! You have to take time to appreciate the cover, you listen to the all of the album like the band expect you to. I have noticed several times, when I invite some friends home to listen to music, when I put a CD or MP3 music, they will look at their phone once in a while. When I put a record, they stop everything and they listen! Even my three year old son, if I put certain records, (the Winter Album from Sting for example) he will stop everything, look at the speakers and listen!

HP: What does the word 'Audiophile' mean to you?

AFD: That you want to listen to music for real, to take time to appreciate the sound and the music. To be able to listen for hours. We try to recreate a real band or orchestra in the comfort of our home.

HP: How do feel the HiFi/Audiophile community treats you as a woman?

AFD: Depends. In the Montreal community, if I show up to an audiophile event, they are super nice to me, they are always astonished to have a women there, "Look we have a women today". But I'm not really feeling to be part of the group yet. I always somehow feel a little apart. But I think it's changing, slowly.

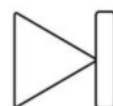
HP: How do you feel that the HiFi Industry treats you as a woman, for example when you visit a HiFi Shop or HiFi Show?...Tell us about your experiences.

AFD: I had some bad experiences at shops, I wanted to buy some nice audio furniture and the guy in the shop sent me to Ikea. (I went to his competitor instead!) I recently had the chance to be part of a special project at the last Montreal audio show. They wanted to show the Industry that women are interested in audio, so they create this "Audiofille" (means audiogirls) room where female music lovers had to choose a great sound-system and show it to the public. It was super cool!

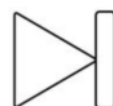
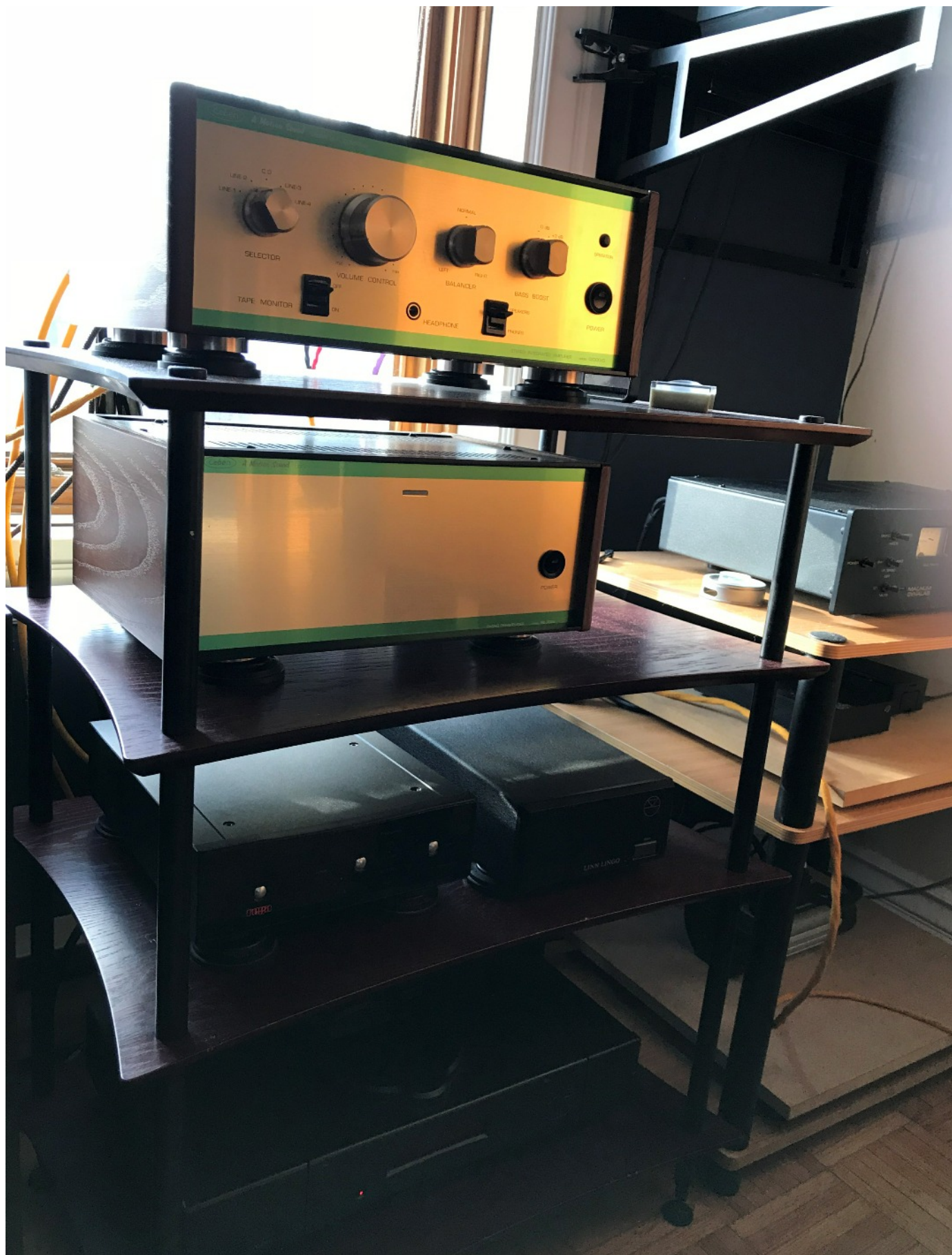
HP: When you are not listening to music or tinkering with your system, what else do you like to do?



THE FEMALE AUDIOPHILES



THE FEMALE AUDIOPHILES



THE FEMALE AUDIOPHILES

AFD: I'm working for a small label called "Return to Analog Records". We re-issue LPs, mostly from Quebec. Otherwise, I like to cook (international cooking), to garden, go to concerts, and raise my wonderful little boy.



JAMES FLEMING



A BESPOKE SONG

NINA SIMONE RECORDED MORE THAN FORTY ALBUMS AND FUSED MANY GENRES. JAMES FLEMING TAKES A LOOK AT THIS AMAZING AND INSPIRATIONAL WOMAN.



JAMES FLEMING

A daredevil that could hold any steely gaze or walk tall on the finest rice paper without tearing it. A thorn in the side of the corrupt and a rose in the palm of the downtrodden. A woman who cared, cared deeply and didn't give a shit, Nina Simone transcended such trite terms as "iconic," and "genius," and "masterful." She moved up from such earthly planes to her own realm of individuality, where record sales were too scarce but expression and freedom were bountiful.

It was a hostile land, ravaged by bipolar disorder and fiery storms of wrath. But it bore nourishing, plentiful LPs - over 40 albums. Over 40 records that collectively sold one million copies in the last ten years of her life alone. Rumours, a single album, has sold 40 million copies in total.

A testament to Simone's uncompromising nature.

Where her classical composer idols and influences were paid to play - and appeal - to their bourgeoisie patrons, Simone refused to buckle or bend beneath the weight of a system that scorned her. A system that refused her entry to Philadelphia's Curtis Institute Of Music. But upon realising their mistake, gave her an honorary degree.... Nine days before she died.

Yet on her version of I Hold No Grudge, Simone sings "I'll extend the laurel wreath and we'll be friends." I Put A Spell On You is best known for Feeling Good. And most tellingly, she sang "I've got life, I've got my freedom... and I'm going to keep it."

When the powers that be want you to walk stooped, the best thing to do is stand straight. And when they want you to comply, refusal is the right road. Nina Simone, even when she sang the blues, refused to let fear and gloom and despair rule her. Even when that's what the world wanted.

That refusal was a powerful act. Simultaneously daring to care and not giving a good-God-damn. They say if you can walk on rice paper and leave no rips then you are the strongest person on this earth. Nina Simone knew this truth and was unafraid to stretch out a tender hand. For that takes great strength: To care and say "fuck the begudgers."

Simone's striving to rise above the blues' pitfall trap of gloom is a strong contrast to Billie Holiday's stark, beautiful singing. Lady Day sang the blues. Simone was the high priestess of soul. Not of jazz, and not even of soul music. But of the multi-faceted technicolour soul.

Just as she melded genres - jazz, classical, blues, gospel - Simone mixed and matched emotions in her music. From the bleak but necessary social commentary of Strange Fruit to the humour of Marriage Is For Old Folks and onwards to the life-affirming I Ain't Got No, I Got Life. All emotions are represented equally in this parliament. And all of their voices are heard and heeded.

For when Nina Simone sings, all eyes, ears and spotlights are on her. All attention-spans, no matter how short or fickle, are riveted by that vibrato-laden contralto and that keyboard mastery. She carried every song, her own compositions or otherwise, with sophistication and elegance. Performing them from deep within her core so that

while she may not have crafted them all, her care for each and every one of them is audible and inescapable.

Her music shows us that the woman born Eunice Kathleen Waymon was a woman of her convictions. She often interwove her music with activism. Her songs Jim Crow and Mississippi Goddamn so pissed-off the backwards elite down South that Carolina radio stations smashed the promo copies.

All movies need a soundtrack. Be they romances, horrors or real-life documentaries. The Civil Rights Movement was all of the above. And Nina Simone had a song for every scene. A song she believed in with all of her being.

The very fact of her being, that a black woman so talented and creative and refined walked her walk, must have ruffled some finely tailored feathers. Rocked the very foundations of their Babylonian penthouses. She did it not with WMDs or a science-fiction doomsday device, but with eloquence and taste, dignity and elegance. Above all else though, she did it with pride.

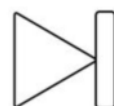
That was her weapon: Pride. The deadly sin of Beelzebub, a blasphemy cast down upon us to keep us docile and bowed. Simone was a proud beacon that has guided many an individual onto their true path. Where the roads diverge in that autumnal wood, creatives like Nina Simone give us weary travellers a nudge in the right direction. Singing words of encouragement low in our ears.

Listening to music is a very personal experience: What one feels another may not. But no matter the feeling, words always fail to even adequately capture the experience, that flush of emotion. Nina Simone means many different things to many different people. She sings a bespoke song to all those road-worn travellers. And no sweeping statement can hope to accurately convey the intimate twists and turns those airs take.

The beat that matches the rhythm of a person's walk. The chord that speaks in their inner voice. The melody that flows from heart to mind and the delivery that sets the hairs standing on their skin. Most artists dwell in mediocrity, unable to provoke that sort of reaction in anyone. Nina Simone has provoked chills and thrills and gasps from many. But still too few.

It is only now in 2018, 15 years after her death from breast cancer, that Nina Simone will be inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. One million divided by 40 is 250,000. Far from multi-platinum status for any of her stellar recordings. Albums that hold themselves high with grace and self worth. Which says a lot more about the record-buyers than the record-smith.

"When did mediocrity and banality become a good image for your children?" asked the comic-prophet Bill Hicks. And when Nina Simone's illustrious and vast catalogue just scrapes platinum status, but the latest six-pack/thong's most recent platter of drivel shoots into our playlists and consciousness, it sets a very poor example for the young generation.



JAMES FLEMING



Photo by kind permission
Teddyyy



JAMES FLEMING

A generation that, between the globe's impending doom and the cultural emphasis on blind partying, may never get the chance to grow. Getting old is not an option. But growth is!

Growth is a choice. A body will mature and eventually wither away whether we like it or not. But the mind and soul need not only nourishment but guidance too if they are to work together to make a well-informed choice. To ensure not just the mere continuation, but the development of us homo sapiens.

Merriam-Webster defines "priestess," as "a woman regarded as a leader." Nina Simone was the high priestess of soul. She led not by orders, demands or threats. But by example. She fought tooth and nail for her right to be recognised as a vital, creative and valid person. She should not have needed to wage that war. But in doing so, she set down a fine example for our children.

Her example of daring to take the overgrown path in that yellow wood should be held in as high esteem as her tremendous musical achievements. It is but an example, not the concrete answer. But that's all anything is. Nina Simone's example however, is considerably better than most others.

The high priestess of soul still sings to many. She still lends us those encouraging words. And if we listen, Nina Simone will help lead us in a harmonious chorus of bespoke songs



LIVE MUSIC

Paul Draper – The Caves, Edinburgh

Back in 1997, Mansun's album *Attack Of The Grey Lantern* hit the number one spot in the UK album charts. Now, to celebrate the album's 21st birthday, former Mansun main man Paul Draper is taking it out on tour and playing it in its entirety.

Mansun outsold Hanson two to one during their respective weeks at the top of the charts but I'd be willing to bet that more people could name the American brothers' hit from their album than any of the tracks from ...*Grey Lantern*. 1997 was all about The Spice Girls, Oasis, Blur and Radiohead and it seems in retrospect that Mansun came and went again without anyone really noticing. Or did they? On the evidence of tonight's show, perhaps not.

The stage at The Caves is situated at the end of what is basically a subterranean stone vault, not boding well acoustics-wise for a loud rock gig. As it turns out, the sound is not as bad as you might fear but as good as you might hope for. The band come over reasonably well, although the keyboards are occasionally buried, but Draper's vocals are largely incomprehensible. This, as we shall see, is not so much a problem for the second part of the show but slightly mars the opening set which features songs from his new album, *Spooky Action*.

Tonight, Draper is supported by a four-piece band; Beau Barnard on bass and Jon Barnett on drums provide a solid grounding for Christina Hizon's keyboard embellishments, while Ben "The most Static Man In Rock" Sink dazzles inconspicuously on lead guitar. They say that you know that you are getting older when policemen start looking young; the same is evidently true of lead guitarists as Ben looks barely old enough to buy the bottle of beer that he occasionally sips from.

The songs from Draper's new album go down well enough with the twenty to fifty-somethings packed into The Caves tonight but there is little evidence that they are particularly familiar with the material. All that changes, however, when Draper and the band return after a short break.

The second set sees Draper and the band play *Attack Of The Grey Lantern* in its entirety, something that Mansun never did. As the taped intro to *The Chad Who Loved Me* fades, the crowd take up the vocals along with Draper and this remains pretty much the state of play for the remainder of the show. Mansun's *Only Love Song* is taken up with aplomb then Taxloss sends the place into a frenzy. Combining two songs from The Beatles' album *Revolver* - *Tomorrow Never Knows* and *Taxman* along with Little Jimmy Osmond's *Long Haired Lover From Liverpool* has never seemed a better idea.

Since I appear to be one of the few here who isn't intimately acquainted with ...*Grey Lantern*'s lyrics, it's Draper's melodies that really impress. Combining the best aspects of Blur, Oasis and Pulp they have the audience bouncing at every opportunity. Wide Open Space's blissed-out euphoria is a particular delight.

It's hard to tell whether Draper is as impressed by the audience's reaction as I am but as we hurtle through highlights like *Stripper Vicar* and *Egg-Shaped Fred*, Draper promises that he'll be back next year at a bigger venue with Mansun's follow-up album, *Six*.

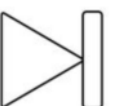
The evening's encore, *An Open Letter To The Lyrical Trainspotter*, is a singalong song with meaningless lyrics about a singalong song with meaningless lyrics. Draper encourages the audience to wave its hands along with the chorus; his intended irony, however, flies unheeded over many of those upraised hands as everyone is, with an extra helping of irony, too wrapped up in having a brilliant time.

Paul Draper is on tour until 8th March. Catch him if you can.

John Scott



LIVE MUSIC



LIVE MUSIC

The Men That Will Not Be Blamed For Nothing - Newcastle Support: IDestroy, Trillains, Newcastle

Arh man I hate days like this, sitting in front of the computer trying to compose a witty, yet informative review of a band that you know simply won't do them justice. I mean they are certainly cornering a niche market here, punk/metal Victorian comedy anyone? And I know several if not all of those words will put some people off, but oh they are glorious to behold, especially live.

In essence they look like the local AmDram auditioned for the cast of Oliver and only punks and metallers turned up (this is not a criticism) and all their songs are about the Victorian era but just looking around the crowd you have to admire the diversity of people they have won over and when soaking up the atmosphere you have to wonder if this is what floating on a cloud of laudanum is really like?

Goths, punks, metallers and a crowd of "normal" blokes who look like they may have taken a wrong turn when exiting Wetherspoons, like a little island of plaid in a sea of Victorian undertakers are all enthralled and greet each song like a load of MP's who've just discovered an expenses loop-hole.

If you can show me another band that can weave politics, religion, Cthulhu and baby farming into a set that makes you laugh your arse off then I'll happily eat a stove pipe hat. The pure pun genius of "There she glows", a song about Marie Curie and the accompanying glow in the dark t-shirt will stay with me, well as long as radiation. It's absolute punk pun perfection from start to finish. Mind I'm wary of selling these guys short by over egging the comedy, they are not a "comedy" band, where the laughs come at the expense of great music and football chants replace the need for good songs. The Men deliver both great tunes and biting comedy in equal measure, so as much as I love a song about Charles Darwin, if the melody was pants then even I couldn't be persuaded, fortunately it's not, so that's ok.

There's no doubt that guitarist Andrew O'Neill is a massive metal fan as he ploughs through riffs relating to the audience's t-shirts during a gap in proceedings. Impressive playing and what seems like a genuine love for a genre that is obviously a massive influence. Essentially though they sound like a punk band, although again that's unfair considering the variety of music being offered up. A little cockney knees up, a dash of 60's pop, some doom metal, a pinch of music hall and a sing-along hymn to atheism (This House Is Not Haunted), christ what more do you want, there really is something for everyone without, I hasten to add without losing any of their originality.

Lead singer Andy Heintz looks like he could have been an inventor on Vision On and plays the saw and bow perfectly, giving that ethereal Theremin sound that normally no one really likes but sounds great tonight. Bassist Marc Burrows adds to the anarchic comedy and still maintains a rein on the music along with drummer Jez Miller making them as tight as the proverbial gnat's chuff.

Tonight, they've found the perfect mix of older, popular songs like the Cthulhu eating your granny on a day-trip to Margate one and Doing it for the Whigs fitting right in with tracks from their new album Double Negative which introduces songs about Burke & Hare, the Jack the Ripper marketing machine and as previously mentioned Marie Curie and baby farming. It's darker and heavier than previous releases but still has The Men's propensity for catchy melodies and intelligent lyrics. I think The Men describe it best. "It's dark, savage, brutal and holds up the rotten corpse of Britain's past as a mirror to the sorry state of the present...and then rubs yer face in it so you won't do it again."

So if you fancy something a little different, quite loud and massively entertaining you need look no further, The Men provide all that and more in bucket loads, all with a socialist conscience and an interesting take on our collective past endeavors. No googles or top hats needed, all comers welcome, grab a gin and get them knees up!

Edit: and to the young gentleman who looked like he was making his first foray into the gothy subculture and seemed awkward as shit. You can relax now, you've found your tribe. It ain't going to be easy, outsiders don't always get it, but by the look of pure joy on your face at the end of the gig I'd say you were home.

"Welcome to my house! Enter freely. Go safely, and leave something of the happiness you bring."

Fiona Hardy

Photos David Ellis



LIVE MUSIC



BOOKS

Sebastian Bach – 18 And Life On Skid Row

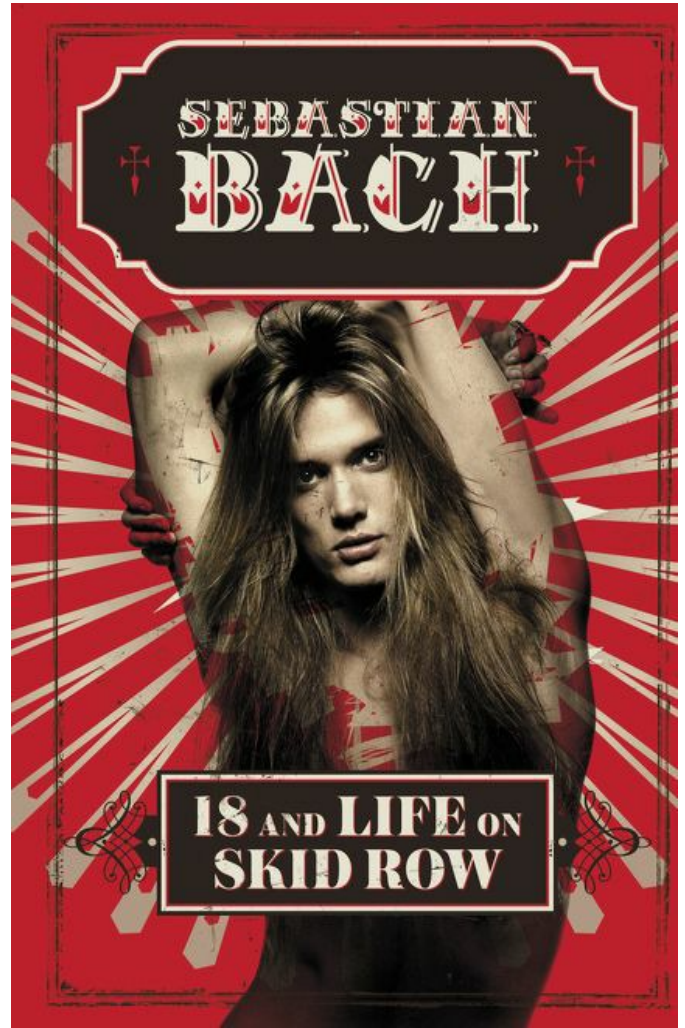
Being a child that was born in the early seventies and grew up in the eighties, in the Midlands region of the UK, most particularly near Nottingham, there was always going to be Rock music in my life. Nottingham was a very Rock and Roll/Heavy Metal kind of a place at that time. We had the Mecca of Rock City...an infamous nightclub and music venue that played host to many legendary names, and of course the Monsters of Rock festival at Castle Donnington. General entertainment would involve underage drinking either in the Town Square (Cider or Thunderbird), some of the pubs with a lesser regard for the legal drinking age (Snakebite and Black) or getting into a gig at Rock City (drinking anything you could get your hands on). But although I could get away with jaunts into the city, my parents put their collective feet down at the idea of me going to the 1988 festival at Donnington to see my heroes, Guns and Roses. The idea of a teenaged daughter in what would be an orgy of Rock and Metal was just too much for them, I was furious, especially as you could actually see (and hear) it, in the distance, from our upstairs windows.

Gun's and Roses were my absolute favourite band at the time, their LA cool and total disregard for authority, combined with Axl Rose's unique vocal and some very catchy tunes made them a favourite on the turntable or Walkman. But of course, once you get into one band on a scene, you discover more, and one of those was Skid Row. So while flicking through music related books online, Sebastian Bach's autobiography, "18 And Life On Skid Row", caught my eye and was immediately ordered.

I do like to read an autobiography and when I read one, I hear the voice of the author in my head, telling the story. No, of course, I might not know what their speaking voice is like in real life, so they kind of get assigned something that works...Sebastian got a 'Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure' inspired accent, it seemed somehow fitting!

I really enjoyed the book. It's a very personal and honest portrayal of the life of the singer and a real slice of rock and roll history. I found it very entertaining and, constantly surprising. By early 1991 my musical tastes had changed and you were likely find me at a rave in a field rather than in a rock club. So I parted company with the life and music of Mr Bach and Co, and I had no idea just what a massive band they became, selling out huge stadiums at their gigs around the world.

Growing up in Canada, Sebastian joined his local choir and discovered he had a voice, and his voice was nurtured and trained which stood him in good stead for Heavy Metal screaming. Inspired by his heroes like Van Halen and Kiss he decided to become a Rock Star. Bach says that after the divorce of his parents in 1978 his world became consumed by music and, in particular, Kiss, and the book is strewn with brilliant images of the young guy paying tribute to the band. It is obvious that Bach was going to be a star, with hard work, loads of practice and a huge Rock inspiration to be like the bands he admired on the stage.



Before a series of chance encounters including giving a cassette of his music to Nikki Sixx of Motley Crue, which found its way to Bon Jovi's manager, Doc McGhee, lead to Bach joining Skid Row in 1987, he leaves Canada to join Madam X. Madam X are later invited to photographer Mark Weiss' wedding where Sebastian ends up on stage and Jon Bon Jovi's parents hear him...they introduce him to their friend Dave Sabo. Dave has a band called Skid Row and is looking for a singer. This is all pretty amazing stuff for such a young guy from Canada....now it really does start to look like he's going to join the true stars of Rock and Metal and make his dream come true.

Now along with a lot of dedicated singing and learning his craft, young Mr Bach does 'a lot' of partying. You hope (and expect) it from an autobiography written by a Rock and Roller. There are many, many stories to enjoy featuring a lot of big names...and drugs and drink.

One chapter is entitled 'Bunch of booze, mountain of blow, Quaaludes and tennis...my time with Metallica'. Metallica are fondly referred to as 'Alcohollica'...as you can imagine a lot of alcohol gets imbibed along with mountains of cocaine on a roof terrace where they have a mini Wimbledon. Crazy Rock and Roll guys! You'll have to read the book for the Quaalude story.

BOOKS

Another moment is when Sebastian goes to visit Ace Frehley of Kiss. Ace seemed to like cocaine too...according to Sebastian there was a huge grinding machine in Ace's basement in which he was grinding up 'boulders of cocaine the size of softballs'! The book also documents Bach's friendship with Axl Rose of Guns and Roses, which I of course found very interesting.

So yes, there is a lot of partying and it makes for very entertaining reading but Bach does say later on that he hates Cocaine and what it does to people, including himself.

Bach has just turned 50 this year and though he has had a long and successful career in Rock he also branched out performing on Broadway and having a TV career. He is now happily married and enjoys a good glass of red wine.

I would recommend this book even to people who are not particular fans of Bach or Skid Row. It reads very much like a personally diary, yes it skips around in places as one memory leads to another but that adds to the 'diary like' feel. It's an enlightening read, very entertaining and gave me several 'laugh out loud' moments. If you have an interest in Rock and Metal and the life of a star then so much the better. It gives a real insight into making it as a successful Rock Star, life on the road and the sheer hard work that is involved. Bach comes across as a likeable guy who partied as hard as he worked and has had an interesting and varied career to say the least.....Happy Birthday Sebastian!



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



LIVING THE Hifi LIFE WITH ALISSA VASSILKOVA

Alissa Vassilkova is a Founding Partner and the CEO of the Estonian High-End loudspeaker brand, Estelon. She gives us an insight into her busy life filled with work, snow, High-End Hifi and...cats!



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



6.45 AM "Human, wake up. Give me food!" Meet my furry alarm - Mummu :)



"I am also here. Food, please" Meet my second furry alarm - Kusti :)



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



No day starts without a freshly made cup of coffee by my
love



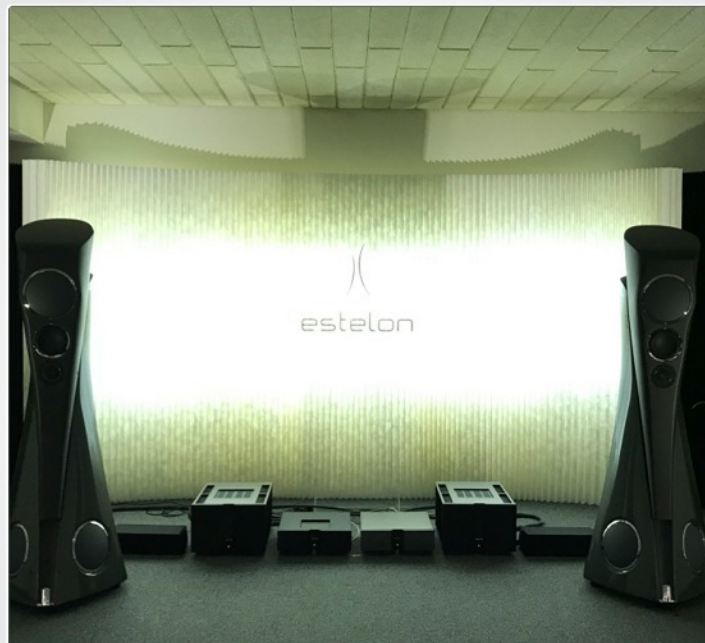
Welcome to Estonia - definitely below 0 degrees, AGAIN,
today



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



8.45 AM and my journey to the office starts



9.15 AM another cup of coffee and some good music to wake up. Time to do some planning for the day!



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



10 AM weekly team meeting and celebrating yet another award for our Estelon speakers



My view from the desk. And yes, the furry ones travel to the office with us daily!



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Lunch time and a quick seminar at the university as a guest lecturer – sharing the experience of building a brand.



Some more meetings at the office...



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Something beautiful in the making...



And back on stage again!



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



This time sharing the experience of exporting to other Estonian exporters.



Getting new contacts to develop business to even higher level.



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Enough of business. Time for crosscountry skiing and time for myself!



Photobomb! Not for long - Alfred is out skiing too.



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Driving home and enjoying the most beautiful sunsets in the City.



A bit of glamour – attending Entrepreneur of the Year Gala.



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



And another beautiful day has started



With lots of snow!



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Luckily it is weekend. So I can just lie down and do nothing:)





1. Which band had a US hit with “Cherry Bomb” in 1976?
2. In 1967 which group sang “Jimmy Mack”?
3. Robert De Niro's waiting and he's talking Italian, but which group had a hit with the tune in 1984?
4. What year did The Crystals have a hit with “Da Doo Ron Ron” ?
5. Which composer wrote “Vieille prière bouddhique - tenor, choir, and orchestra (1914-1917)” ?
6. The composer Robert Schumann's wife was a renowned pianist and composer in her own right. What was her name?
7. Recognised as being the first African-American woman to be recognised as a symphonic composer, who wrote Ethiopia's Shadow In America in 1932?
8. ‘Girl group’ AKB48 hail from where?
9. Brittany Howard fronts which band?
10. Led by Sydney Sierota this band released their debut album “Talking Dreams” in 2013. Name them.
11. Chrissie Hynde fronted which band?
12. Alie Glass fronts which band from Toronto?
13. Formed in 1978 this band had a number 5 hit in the UK with Motorhead and their joint EP St; Valentine's Day Massacre.
14. Who performed Manic Monday?
15. Originally a Runaway, who went on to join forces with The Blackhearts
16. Nancy and Ann Wilson. Name the band.
17. Gwen Stefani fronted which band?
18. Who Fronted Hole?
19. Formed in 1986, Bjork's band was called...?
20. Vi Subversa fronted which band?

1. THE RUNAWAYS
2. MARTHA AND THE VANDELLAS
3. BANANARAMA
4. 1963
5. LILI BOULANGER
6. CLARA SCHUMANN
7. FLORENCE BEATRICE PRICE
8. JAPAN
9. ALABAMA SHAKES
10. ECHOSMITH
11. THE PRETENDERS
12. CRYSTAL CASTLES
13. GIRLSCHOOL
14. THE BANGLES
15. JOAN JETT
16. HEART
17. NO DOUBT
18. COURTNEY LOVE
19. THE SUGARCUBES
20. POISON GIRLS