

Hifi Pig



MAY 2018

Interview with
Andrzej Sosna of
Fyne Audio

Interview with
Lothar Kerestedjian
of HIGHRESAUDIO

My Musical Journey
with GIK's Dave
Shevyn

Living The Hifi Life
with Angela Cardas

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

158 Pages of Great
Content

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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





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WELCOME

Well last months **Women In Hifi special** certainly caused a bit of a stir around the world and certainly seems to have ruffled a few feathers. We will continue to pursue our policy of giving a voice to women in the industry as well as to women music lovers.

This month it's back to boring old me doing the editing and putting together of the e-mag, but what a great edition it is. We have loads of news, masses of great reviews (including a couple of products that win the coveted Outstanding Product Award), some great interviews and over twenty pages of gig reviews. Also this month the popular Living The Hifi Life feature has Angela Cardas letting us know through some very cool photos just what she gets up to when out and about.

We've also got Dave Shevyn from GIK taking us on a journey through his musical past...and I do likewise in my views Of Stu piece.

But, as most readers will be aware, the Munich show looms large and we have been especially busy this year in making sure we are fully prepared. Expect live video streams, great reports from the show and a whole lot more.

As always, I hope you enjoy this months e-mag but don't forget to follow us on **Facebook** where you can keep bang up to date with everything we are up to.

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YOUR HIFI NEWS: All the latest news from around the world. **GO!**



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of Fyne Audio
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**KRALK AUDIO TBD4
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**AMPHION ARGON 7LS
LOUDSPEAKERS** **GO!**



INTERVIEW: Lothar
Kerestedjian of
HIGHRESAUDIO
GO!



**TELLURIUM Q ULTRA
BLACK XLR
INTERCONNECTS** **GO!**



**ORIGIN LIVE
RESOLUTION TURNTABLE
& ZEPHYR TONEARM** **GO!**



**ATLAS CABLES "THE
ELEMENT SUPERIOR"
RCA INTERCONNECT**
GO!



**CHORD ELECTRONICS
DAVE DAC** **GO!**



**TIMESTEP HE V LINEAR
PSU FOR TECHNICS
1200 FAMILY
TURNTABLES** **GO!**



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BRYAN FERRY **GO!**



JAMES FLEMING: Truth, justice, rock n' roll, and how they are wrong **GO!**



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MUSICAL JOURNEYS: Dave Shevyn of GIK takes us on his own musical journey **GO!**



PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING **GO!**

LIVE MUSIC:



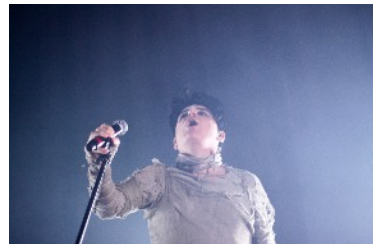
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JOSH ROUSE **GO!**



CHRYSTA BELL **GO!**



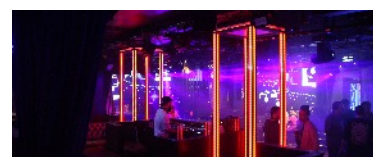
GARY NUMAN **GO!**



NEARLY DAN **GO!**



LIVING THE HiFi LIFE WITH ANGELA CARDAS
GO!



HIFI PIG VISIT TAPE IN LONDON **GO!**





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YOUR HIFI NEWS



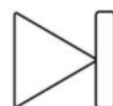
DS AUDIO TAKE SAEC TONEARMS GLOBAL

DS Audio of Japan, who are well known for their optical cartridges, have set up DS Exports, who will export high end Japanese audio products to the rest of the world.

Thirty years after its first release, SAEC, one of the brands that DS Exports are representing, have announced the re-release of their double knife edge tone arm, the WE - 4700.

This double knife edge technology relies on an advanced cutting machine but must be finished by a craftsman with "the skill of a watchmaker or sword polisher". The tonearm will retail at USD \$8500 - 9500.

DS Exports will also be represented at High End Munich 2018 in Rooms F126 - F128, by their German distributor High Fidelity Studio.





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

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FESTIVAL OF SOUND - NEW FORMAT FOR INDULGENCE

After two innovative and successful years pushing the boundaries and bringing the industry's leading high-quality audio, headphones, portable audio, and streaming products back to the Capital for the first time in a decade, all under one roof, The Indulgence Show is rebranding as the Festival of Sound, The Music and Audio Show, in 2018. The event will, once again, take place between 28-30 September at Novotel London West, Hammersmith International Centre, breaking the mould of industry events for music lovers from across the UK.

The new name reflects the exciting progression and evolution of the event in embracing all things music; from a global premiere of some of the world's most expensive audio products, vibrant product demonstrations and innovative equipment showcases; to live musical acts from renowned artists to individual buskers, and lessons to master musical instruments; to packed-out record producer seminars that have all inspired a multitude of new consumers to try out, listen to and be bowled over by internationally-acclaimed audio and musical brands.

This year's Festival of Sound is planning to be even more music focused. Most of the exhibitors and brands from the audio, headphone, portable audio, and streaming sectors that exhibited at the first two shows are returning, including the partnership with the renowned headroom™ event. Additional exhibitors and brands from musical instruments and other music related sectors have expressed a keen interest in committing.

In addition, live music will be in abundance, including an exciting VIP concert to be announced over the coming months.

The hugely popular music-oriented seminars will be back, with world-renowned producers and recording engineers Chris Kimsey, Gary Langan and Liam Nolan inviting some very special guests from the international music scene to join them on stage to reveal their in-studio stories about some of the world's most famous albums from the likes of Adele, David Bowie, Marillion, Queen, Yes, ABC, Led Zeppelin, Rolling Stones, Rita Ora, Art of Noise, Jesse J and Liam Payne.

In addition, an exciting initiative, in conjunction with a key music charity and a major London recording studio, is being planned to bring live performances from budding artists into the show, engaging with a younger audience.

Vernon Hamblin, producer of the Festival of Sound, says, "The first two years of our consumer show were naturally moving further and further into the realms of music in all its guises - whether that was through the abundance of quality products and technologies on display enabling consumers to listen to music effectively at home or on the move; the vinyl fairs and musical instruments, and the live performances from individual artists and renowned bands. Therefore, to reflect this evolution and to reinforce the pervading musicality of the event it made sense to rebrand to The Festival of Sound, The Music and Audio Show. After all, it's what we do best."



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



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



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



"Erleuchtet", ZEN
"Höhepunkt", ZENith



"Ein sehr empfehlenswertes Gerät"



"Einfach Perfekt"



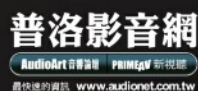
"Extrem feiner, detailreicher Klang"



"IFA-Highlight! 6 von 6 Punkten"



"Facettenreich"



"Innuos ZENmini Mk.II 擁有它，就成了「數位新貴」"



"Εξαιρετική διαχείριση των αρχείων"



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



"textura, dinámica e riqueza harmónica"



TIMESTEP'S NEW TONEARM

How many times have you read a glowing review of a high quality, low compliance phono cartridge, only to find yourself bumping up against a 'but...' asks the latest press release from Timestep. The 'but' in question being the caveat that, in order to enjoy the cartridge's full performance potential, you'll need a high mass tonearm.

"Times change," says Timestep's Dave Cawley, "and sometimes it can take us a while to catch up". He is referring to the fact that our current leaning towards low-to-medium mass tonearms can be traced back to the 1980s, when high compliance moving magnets were the norm and moving coil cartridges were just beginning to catch on. "To accommodate the new moving coils, compromises were made, and to a large extent we're still living with some of those compromises today," Cawley explains. "But cartridges have evolved in the past 30+ years and many of the high quality, low compliance moving coil models need to be partnered with a high mass tonearm to perform at their best."

Cawley therefore set out to make one. "I wanted to create a modern, cutting edge, high mass tonearm that was specifically designed to excel with moving coil cartridges." Which he has achieved by taking some essential 'DNA' from the legendary Japanese Fidelity Research FR64S tonearm (from the late 1970s) and combining it with bang-up-to-date technology.

The development process has taken a couple years, due in large part to Cawley's determination to source the best possible materials and components for the job. In fact, his quest took him all over the world on a hunt for companies who were able and willing to make his specific components to the requisite standard.

The result is the new Timestep T-609, T-610 and T-612: one tonearm available in three lengths (9, 10 and 12 inches).

The armtube is crafted from titanium and is a low resonance design. Bearing friction has been lowered thanks to a combination of a stainless steel bearing block fitted with ultra-fine tolerance ABEC7 ceramic bearings, which are washed and re-treated with a high quality lubricant. Internal wiring is pure silver, while the tonearm connector is a bespoke PTFE and gold design. Frictionless magnetic anti-skating allows for effortless fine-tuning and the headshell (not supplied) is fully detachable and interchangeable, with many possible options.

The Timestep tonearm is available now in a choice of three lengths (9, 10 or 12 inches). Priced £1,450 (incl. VAT).

Price excludes mount, headshell and interconnect cable.



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NEWS



TCI ANNOUNCE NEW CABLE RANGES

TCI Cables have been manufactured at their base in Lisburn, Northern Ireland for over 20 years. Their first product, TCI Cobra, was originally designed in 1993 and although refined over the years, remains largely true to its original design.

True Colours Industries not only design the cables but also the plugs that terminate the connection. This includes mains plugs, RCA phono plugs and 4mm speaker plugs. The highest quality connectors designed by TCI are marketed under the True-Plug™ brand and feature the use of materials such as Gold plated Beryllium Copper and Silver plated Tellurium Copper alloys as well as Rhodium plated mains plugs.

The company have recently announced a whole new collection of interconnects, speaker cables and a pair of distribution blocks.

TCI have also announced that they have appointed Audioplus, based in Den Haag, to represent them in Benelux.



TELLURIUM Q WIN QUEENS AWARD FOR ENTERPRISE

Every April The Queen's Awards are announced and Hifi Pig is delighted to announce that this year Tellurium Q, the cable manufacturer based in the SW of England, have been nominated for the Queen's Award for Enterprise.

The Queen's Awards for Enterprise is an awards programme for British businesses and other organizations who excel at international trade, innovation or sustainable development. They are the highest official UK awards for British businesses.

The award is in recognition of outstanding export growth over the last three years. The UK's highest accolade for business success!

Developed and manufactured in the UK, Tellurium Q cables are now in 37 countries after just 9 years.

Geoff Merrigan, managing director said, "to all our customers, dealers and distributors can we say a big thank you and we hope that you will like the research developments that are coming. We are focused on bringing you performance that unleashes your system's potential".

Congratulations to all at Tellurium Q from Team Pig.





sound | **kaos**

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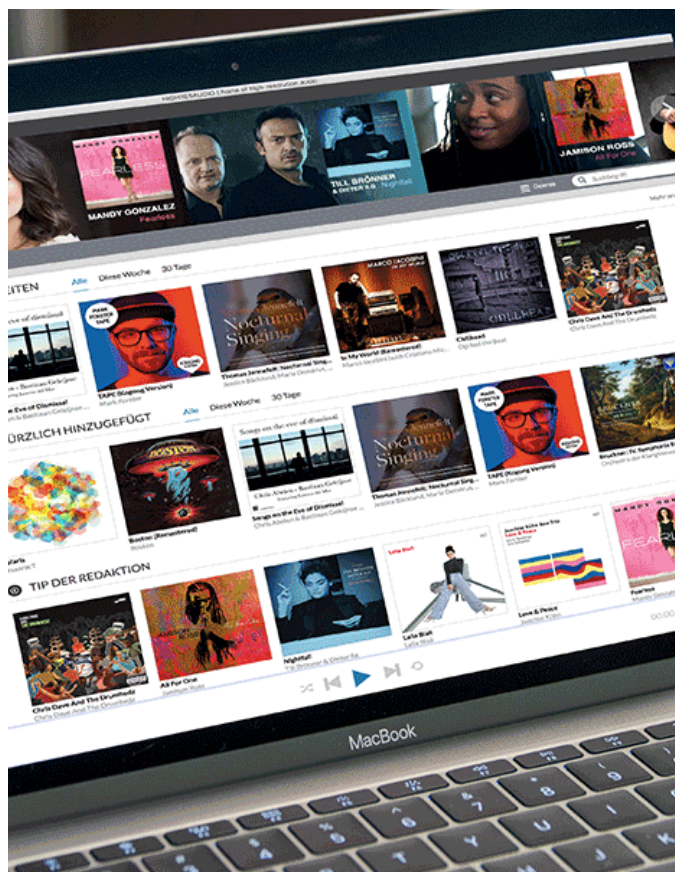
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NEWS



HIRESAUDIO LAUNCH STREAMING SERVICE

HIGHRESAUDIO is launching its own highresolution 24-bit subscription streaming service in April 2018. HRAStreaming is aimed at the music-loving music connoisseur, HiFi enthusiast and customers that appreciated a high-quality sound reproduction. For the past eight years, HIGHRESAUDIO has been able to archive and make available for downloading an impressive music catalogue of very high quality and selected new recordings and analogue-to-digital remasters.

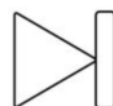
HIGHRESAUDIO's has a strict quality control program and the company's long-term philosophy in to offer only the native, purest, true original source and best sounding repertoire. With more than 200,000 registered customers and an average of 64 new customers signing-in per day, HIGHRESAUDIO emerges from the niche into the mainstream, covering a broad target group of quality-conscious music listeners from age 27 to 77.

"I believe that there is a target group beyond the mainstream that values sound quality and wants to be served honestly and competently." Said Lothar Kerestedjian, CEO HIGHRESAUDIO and continuing "Now, is the right time to offer our customers access to our complete archive via a subscription. HRA-Streaming is available as an annual subscription and allows access to currently 35,000 handpicked albums in the original and native sampling rate in the 24bit FLAC codec. On average, 100 new albums are added per week to the HIGHRESAUDIO archive, which are also included in the streaming subscription. Furthermore, the customer receives curated and thematic playlists. Playlists today are the form in which we most like to hear our music. Creating good playlists is an art in itself, so we do not leave it to chance. It is important to us that our customers have access to carefully and competently compiled playlists. This is why renowned music journalists, editors and musicians create new playlists every week."

HRA-Streaming is initially available in the following countries: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Greece, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Italy, Ireland, Croatia, Luxembourg, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Czech Republic, Norway, Switzerland.

The customer receives with his HRA-Streaming subscription a HIGHRESAUDIO desktop app for Windows and / or Apple OSX. To be used via USB from his computer to the DAC to the stereo system. The desktop app for Windows and Apple OSX was developed in cooperation with the Berlin based audio specialist digitalklang. digitalklang is also developing the HRA-Streaming apps for iOS and Android, which will be available to subscribers free of charge for mobile use throughout the year.

"Pure will, determination and passion have moved me to develop the perfect source for the purest and pristine sound experience at home. Future-oriented technologies and developments are now paving the way for HRA-Streaming to offer an editorially managed and high-resolution music streaming service at a very attractive price point. " said Lothar Kerestedjian.



NEWS



NEW MONOBLOCKS FROM AUDIO RESEARCH

After two years in development, the all new Reference 160M (REF160M) Monoblock Power Amplifier is announced.

It features a refined audio topology with fewer and better components in the signal-path than in previous designs, switchable Ultralinear/Triode operation, proprietary auto-bias, output tube monitoring and protection, an advanced power meter. (U.S. Retail: \$30,000/pair)

The designers at Audio Research wanted to create a new style that would complement the look of the REF6 preamp while also featuring a transparent faceplate that allows a view of the glowing KT150 output tubes. While this window allows you to see the output tubes, it also incorporates an innovative dual-layer construction with distinctively etched markings that create an integrated power meter. The power meter's output-level markings illuminate via hidden LEDs, and the illumination brightness is adjustable. Livio Cucuzza, the creative genius responsible for Audio Research's new aesthetic, comments, "The new REF160M is the apex of the Audio Research design language, and the first step in a new era of products. With its transparent meter, we are giving shape to the most renowned Audio Research sound characteristic: transparency. As an enthusiast and Audio Research customer, I can say that REF160M is the coolest tube amplifier on the planet!"



The REF160M includes a sculpted cover with an integrated fan to cool the heat generated by the four (4) KT150 output tubes and two (2) 6H30 driver tubes. Solid-state power regulation was chosen to provide increased efficiency, stability, and reliability. The power supply stage uses a newly developed High Energy Capacity Transformer and a hefty bulk storage-capacity network to provide extremely high current on demand for transient peaks and intense dynamics.



The REF160M also features a proprietary auto-bias circuit that works with various tubes types, including 6550, KT88, and KT120, in addition to the supplied KT150 and works constantly to maintain precise bias of the output tubes, while also adjusting for tube wear. There is no need to check or adjust bias ever again. Audio Research has been deeply enamored with the KT150 output tube as we feature it in all of their amplifiers, from the VSi75 to the REF750SE. It is important to know that the tubes supplied by Audio Research are burned in for 48 hours before measuring and grading using their "Certified Matched" process. A built-in tube hour meter allows the owner to monitor tube usage, while the amp's tube protection circuit features separate high-quality fuses for each output tube and are located inside the amp for replacement, if ever necessary.

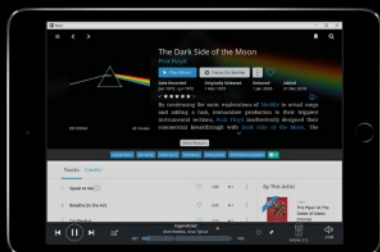


The REF160M tube status indicators on the front panel will indicate if a fuse is blown, and which one. Some music lovers prefer or require a tube amp that provides higher power and operates in Ultralinear mode, while others (usually with high efficiency loudspeakers or those who listen at lower levels) prefer Triode operation, which produces less power. The REF160M is the first amplifier from Audio Research to directly address these varying needs by providing a front panel switch to allow the user to select the preferred mode of operation. The REF160M will provide 150 Watts in Ultralinear mode and 75 Watts in Triode mode.




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

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

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Tellurium Q



GAYLE SANDERS' NEW LOUDSPEAKERS

Gayle Sanders, co-founder of MartinLogan, turns a new page in his career with the introduction of his new company, Gayle Sanders Eikon. The world premiere of his new digital active loudspeaker system, featuring the Image1 and Eikontrol, took place at AXPONA.

Once again, he began designing and building prototypes in his garage. Working through several prototypes over four years, Sanders refined their industrial design and improved their performance. The result is the Image1. Today, Gayle Sanders Eikon occupies a dedicated workshop in Norwalk, Connecticut, where the Image1 speakers are hand-built, tested, and refined.

"I'm a bit of a curator," Sanders said. "I'm utilizing some of the new DSP technology, which has vastly improved over the last few years, and putting it together with my own engineering. It's a perfect solution designed to work together in perfect harmony in any environment, and it wasn't ready for prime time until recently."

"I've always been obsessed with the purity of sound, and passionately explore new opportunities to create a true musical experience," Sanders said. "I want to make this technology accessible to everyone."

With the DSP-based Eikontrol serving as the command center, the Image1 system can accept any digital or analogue input, and can be easily accessed and controlled with any smartphone or computer. By integrating the latest-generation amplifier technology, directly coupled to extremely low-distortion drivers, the system can achieve excellent precision and coherence without the need and expense of big stacks of gear.

The Image1 cabinet was designed using a proprietary, constrained-layer cabinet system that dramatically damps spurious chassis activity while significantly eliminating sympathetic resonances.

Additionally, due to the capabilities of greatly improved DSP algorithms, the Eikontrol is capable of acoustic wave-shaping in the room, minimizing sidewall interactions. Customized bass performance has been perfected using advanced wavelet signal processing for room control. This process dramatically expands the Eikon system's ability to recognize and analyze energy buildup in the amplitude and time domains.

This sophisticated system is easily accessed and controlled from any smartphone, tablet, etc. (iOS/Android), and controls all of the basic preamp functions as well as multiple contour mapping settings, fine adjustments and environmental settings.

System Price: \$24,500 (includes speakers, amplifiers, and Eikontrol)

Black Piano Gloss finish immediately available; other finishes coming later.





Pro-Ject
AUDIO SYSTEMS

The Classic



August 2016



Best Turntable 2016-2017

An Instant Classic

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

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

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

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

Available Now for £799.00 (UK SRP)



Distributed by Henley Designs Ltd.

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AUDIO ANALOGUE'S PURE AA LINE WITH PHONOSTAGE

In 2016, Audio Analogue celebrated its twentieth birthday with two 'Anniversary' editions of the company's earlier integrated amplifiers, the Puccini and Maestro. Now, the Italian brand has launched its 'PureAA' line of products, drawing key ideas from the Anniversary amps and adding further features. Second in the line, following the AAcanto amplifier, is the new AAphono.

Audio Analogue's PureAA line aims to draw on some of the key ideas and features of the Anniversary amplifiers but to apply them in a slightly different way. While the Anniversary amps are of minimalist focus, the PureAA line sports a set of added features designed to appeal to music lovers who seek a wider range of functions and connections in a single product.

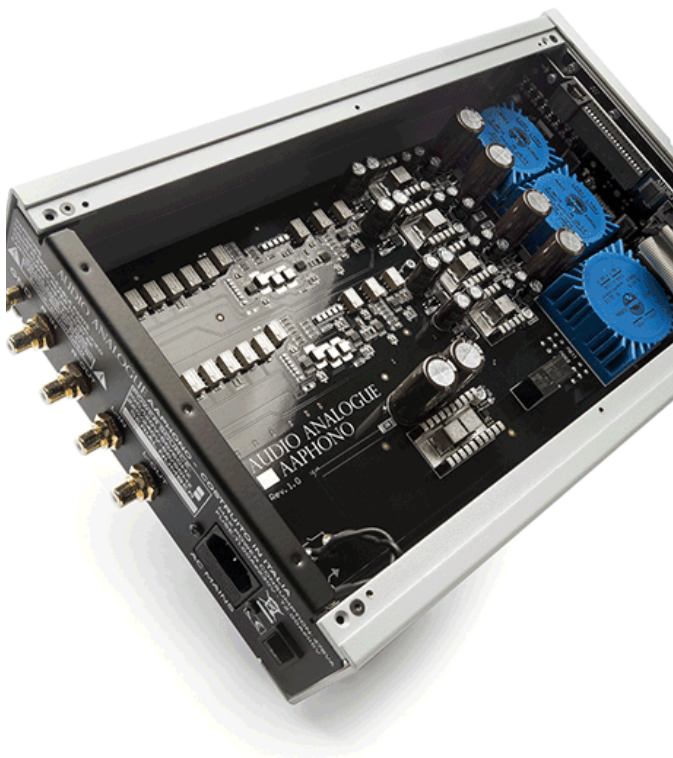
The new AAphono phono stage is fully configurable for both MM and MC cartridges. It offers plenty of adjustable options that allow you to tailor its set-up according to your chosen cartridge. These include gain and loading for MC cartridges but also the less common MM input capacitance and resistance. At the same time, the AAphono is simple to use. No need to power off, cool down and delve 'under the hood'. Simply press an easily accessible button to make your adjustments, which will be saved when the unit is switched off or even disconnected.

The amp uses three separate toroidal transformers form the heart of the power supply, and hence the heart of the phono stage: one for each of the stereo channels (left and right) and a third one supplies the control circuitry. In addition, the power supply includes multiple filters.

The AAphono features high quality components with very tight tolerances throughout. It also incorporates a parallel circuit design.

The amplification is split between two separate gain stages with a subsonic filter placed between them, such that any low frequency oscillation is prevented from reaching and saturating or overloading the final gain stage. Following the second gain stage, a special DCblocking circuit ensures that no potentially harmful direct current reaches your amplifier, effectively providing a level of protection more typically associated with separate power cleaning units.

The Pure AA line's casework is resonance-damped and beautifully finished, in keeping with the brand's classically simple design philosophy.



Wire on Wire

REDpurl™



Variable Geometry

UK patent pending GB1602578.5

EU Registered Design No. 002544171

Experience**680**

Reference Audio Cable

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

Experience**680**

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

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

Conductors: Silver plated copper

Insulation: PTFE

Capacitance: 69pF/m variable

Connectors: WBT 0114 phono plugs

Geometry: REDpurl™

For further information contact:

Wire on Wire 01372 800605

info@wireonwire.com

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NEWS



GIK VIRTUAL ROOM PLANNER

Acoustic treatment manufacturer GIK Acoustics has launched a new 3D drawing tool that will aid customers in devising acoustic solutions for their space. The GIK Acoustics Virtual Room Planner enables customers to create a 3D rendering of their room and place GIK Acoustics products around the room.

Incorporating room treatments in a space is often daunting because treatments make a visual as well as aural impact on a room. GIK Acoustics new Virtual Room Planner allows customers a platform to treat their room before making a real life commitment. The Virtual Room Planner uses both virtual reality and augmented reality which allows users to both walk through a digital environment and place digital objects in their own home. This easy-to-use advanced modelling technology takes the guess work out of placing treatments in a room.

GIK Acoustics offers a wide variety of room treatments and customers using Virtual Room Planner not only have the option to select the size and quantity of GIK Acoustics treatments, but they can also select fabric colours and plate finishes allowing them to see how treatments will fit in with existing décor. Similar software tools are used by furniture and home improvement companies to help customers feel confident about their selections.

“Over the past few years, GIK has expanded our product offerings to fit the needs of our customers. But there’s a paradox of choice and we don’t want to overwhelm customers with options.” says GIK Acoustics President Glenn Kuras. He adds, “So again we have created a solution to help our customers. The Virtual Room Planner allows clients to see our treatments on the walls, on the ceiling, in corners... it’s an invaluable tool when making the decision to properly treat your space. There is no better investment than room treatments, so we want to make the process of selecting finishes easier rather than harder.”

The Virtual Room Planner is available on all GIK Acoustics websites as a free tool for clients. In addition, GIK Acoustics continues to offer free acoustic advice and design consulting services.



NEW FROM TARA LABS

For more than 30 years, TARA Labs has been manufacturing audio cables in Oregon, USA. They now are releasing their Apollo Extreme series which includes an interconnect and speaker cables, which are available in both stereo and bi-wire models.

TARA Labs use a new, specialised, extruded pure copper oxygen free conductor, as well as a new proprietary dielectric material that is specifically manufactured with high entry-mid level audio component systems in mind, for the Apollo Extreme interconnect cables.



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NEW AMP FROM BENCHMARK

Benchmark has introduced a new headphone / line amplifier with four 256-step relay-controlled attenuators and four 16-step relay-controlled boost amplifiers.

Together these form two fully-independent, fully-balanced stereo volume controls. One volume control is dedicated to the line output and one is dedicated to the headphone output. Each has a +15 dB to -122 dB range in 0.5 dB steps. The lowest step provides a full mute. The volume controls feature metal film resistors, gold contact relays, and fully buffered inputs and outputs.

John Siau, VP and Director of Engineering at Benchmark Media Systems told us "Our goal was to produce an analogue volume control with the highest achievable transparency. We wanted to be able to place this volume control in front of our AHB2 power amplifier or in front of our THX-888 headphone amplifier board without diminishing the performance of either device. Our volume control would need to have lower distortion and lower noise than either of these amplifiers".

"The AHB2 power amplifier and THX-888 headphone amplifier have similar specifications; they are virtually noise free (SNR > 132 dB) and distortion free (THD < -120 dB). Our new analogue-to-analogue volume control would need to exceed these specifications to avoid being a weak link in the audio chain. As we looked at available solutions, it became clear that we would need to design something better".



TITLE OF ARTICLE

VPI Industries debuted the production models of the VPI JMW Fatboy tonearms at Axpona 2018. Both Unipivot and Gimbal versions were on display and are available choices for all VPI turntables. In addition, they can easily be mounted with other turntable brands. The availability of Unipivot and Gimbal options is to provide arm option styles for all listeners says the company's press release.

The Fatboy adds a new level adjustment to the VPI type tonearm. On the Unipivot flavour you can adjust azimuth using the side arm tube setscrews, the adjustable side weights, or the included dual pivot. By having the combination of a 3D printed tube with the fine machined back stock it creates the "perfect balance of precision and balance for your tonearm" and the fine adjustable counter weight makes cartridge set-up easier than ever.

Initially the Fatboy (Uni and Gimbal) are only available in 12", but eventually will be released in 10" and 9" too. The wands retail for 4,000 USD and are backwards compatible for all VPI turntables (Note, will not fit on Travelers or Nomads V1 without some serious DIY work!)



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NEW DENON SOUNDBARS

Denon have announced the new HEOS HomeCinema HS2 wireless soundbar and subwoofer system, the latest addition to their HEOS wireless multi-room range.

Hands-free music is available to stream via Amazon Alexa voice control, and the HEOS HomeCinema HS2 features bi-amplified mid-woofers and tweeters with DSP processing, plus the package includes a wireless subwoofer. The soundbar comes equipped with dual 2-inch by 5-inch drivers for the upper bass and midrange, a pair of 20mm dome tweeters handle the high frequency range. Price is £699.



iFi xDSD

iFi launch the xDSD.

iFi's digital-to-analogue conversion system supports PCM and DXD audio data up to 32-bit/768kHz and DSD up to 22.57MHz (DSD512). A customised 'True Native' Burr-Brown DAC chip handles PCM and DSD natively. Performance is optimised by high-end digital audio technologies trickled down from iFi's sister company Abingdon Music Research, such as the Global Master Timing (GMT) femto-precision clock and intelligent memory buffer that eradicate jitter.



Support for aptX and AAC codecs over Bluetooth enables enhanced-quality streaming from both Android and Apple devices, while the GMT clock system further improves performance. The xDSD remembers up to eight devices once paired. The xDSD comes loaded with iFi's latest firmware v5.3, including playback of MQA. iFi's proprietary '3D+ Matrix' and 'XBass+' circuits may be switched in or out as preferred. Proprietary low-noise op-amps and dual-mono headphone drivers supply sufficient power to drive high-impedance headphones. Although digitally controlled, volume attenuation occurs entirely in the analogue domain.



The xDSD's microprocessor-controlled Cyberdrive system optimises power drain and battery life, automatically switching between 'portable' and 'desktop' modes. The fast-charge-compatible internal battery is charged via a dedicated micro USB input and supplies up to 10 hours playback time, depending on usage. Asynchronous USB input is provided by a Type A interface, preferred for connection to multiple devices (Android via USB OTG; iOS via Apple CCK). Coaxial and optical S/PDIF connections are enabled via a combined 3.5mm/mini-TOSLINK input (a full-size TOSLINK adapter is also supplied). The xDSD's output can be switched between headphone and line-level mode, the latter delivering a fixed 2V output that bypasses the volume control.

Price is £399





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

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EMOTIVE'S DIFFERENTIAL REFERENCE AMPS IN UK

Emotiva's DR Series' XPA-DR1 mono, XPA-DR2 two-channel and XPA-DR3 three-channel models utilise up to three pairs of Differential Reference™ Amplifier Modules, fed by a fully regulated, 3 kW switch mode power supply within a heavy-duty chassis.

The DR modules are deployed in pairs to provide each channel with a balanced low-noise signal path from differential input to fully-discrete analogue Class A/B output stages. The output stages use Soft-Switch™ Class H power supply topology, allowing each to operate on a lower supply voltage at low power levels.

The amplifiers' front panel blue LED display and protection system are designed to work with the maximum number of channels so need not be updated with the addition of extra channels. Unoccupied rear panel slots are covered with protective cover panels (XPA-DR1 for instance is configured with a pair of Differential Reference Modules and up to two further module pairs can be added).

The Emotiva XPA-DR1 (pictured) delivers 650 watts RMS into 8 Ohms, and 1000 watts RMS into 4 Ohms, with less than 0.1% THD. Price £1300.

The Emotiva XPA-DR2 delivers 550 watts RMS into 8 Ohms, and 800 watts RMS into 4 Ohms, both channels driven, with less than 0.1% THD. Price £1750.

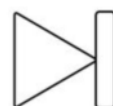
The Emotiva XPA-DR3 delivers 450 watts RMS into 8 Ohms, and 600 watts RMS into 4 Ohms, all three channels driven, with less than 0.1% THD. Price £2150.



NEW IEMS FROM ASTELL AND KERN

Billie Jean is the latest collaboration of In-Ear-Monitors (IEMs) between Astell&Kern and Jerry Harvey Audio which feature a new Dual Balanced Armature (BA) driver system.

The new IEM shell has been optimised to fit well in the ear, utilises a 2-Way 2-BA design, Silver Tinsel cable and L-type plug. It is available for pre-order at 349\$ and is the new entry level product for the Siren Series.



One More Time



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

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**WHAT HI-FI?
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MIXCDER noise cancelling cans

American audio brand, Mixcder, has announced the availability of its latest wireless active noise cancelling headphone, the E7. Featuring ANC (active noise cancelling) tech and an easy-to-carry design, E7 is designed to appeal to travellers and commuters who do not want to be disturbed by external noise.

The Mixcder E7 Bluetooth headphone adopts ANC technology, which can not only isolate noise physically, but also blocks out noise by smart and active technology. When the headphones detect an incoming noise, a digital signal processor (DSP) analyses the sound waves and creates inverse waves to cancel out the ambient sound.

The E7 is equipped with 40mm drivers and CSR Bluetooth and features buttons and a microphone to allow for wireless control of music and hands-free phone calls. The ear cups have soft foam covered by soft pseudo leather and its extendable arm makes it adjustable to fit most heads. The battery on the Mixcder E7 allows users to play music or make phone calls for around 20 hours whilst on the go. When the battery runs out, users can plug in the included 3.5mm audio cable to connect the headphone to their smart phone or MP3 player. The Mixcder E7 Active Noise Cancelling Wireless Bluetooth Headphones are £41.99/€49.99.



CARY AUDIO'S NEW AMPS

Cary Audio say that the introduction of the SA-200.2 ES and SA-500.1 ES solid-state power amplifiers represent the next generation of the SA design.

The SA-200.2 ES is a 200 watt stereo amplifier into 8 ohms, (350 watts into 4 ohms), with balanced and single ended inputs. The SA-500.1 ES is a 500 watt monoblock amplifier into 8 ohms, (1000 watts into 4 ohms), with balanced and single ended inputs.

Billy Wright of Cary Audio told us: "When we designed the SA-200.2 ES and SA-500.1 ES power amplifiers, one of our primary goals was to create a product that would give years of consistent and reliable use without any maintenance. To achieve that goal, we took a hard look at the designs and choice of components. For example, we use high-precision metal film resistors in almost all our circuitry, even in places where their use is not required. We have overbuilt the output stages and increased the heat dissipating capabilities of the amplifiers by as much as 50% over previous designs. The changes encompass almost every part of the designs, down to the choice of thickness of the chassis sheet metal. The monolithic front end brought major advantages to the amplifier designs with improved temperature stability, low offset, and a substantial reduction of all types of distortion across the full frequency spectrum". The retail price for the SA-200.2 ES is \$4,495 and the retail price for the SA-500.1 ES is \$4,995.





MC Step-Up Transformers
Phono Amplifiers
Pre Amplifiers



NEWS



S.A. LABS ANNOUNCE HERCULES AMP

Hercules Integrated is the younger brother of S.A.Lab's flagship Hercules MkII Magister of Music. S.A.Lab say it is 'a more compact and affordable amplifier which is technologically identical to grand Hercules MkII Magister of Music'.

S.A.Lab Hercules Integrated's output power is 2 x 75 W (4 Ohm). 'Hercules Junior' has inherited Senior's tubes: 6072, 6v6 and Russian output 6n36c. All the valves used were produced in the 1970s and earlier.

S.A.Lab have a longstanding tradition that the output transformers are custom designed and handcrafted by the company. The transformers are similar to those used in the Hercules MkII and have a power-to-size ratio of 800 W each (2 x 800 W). The power supply contains a 600 W transformer. Separate transformers are provided for heating (200 W), biasing and the driver stage. The overall transformer's power exceeds 1 kW.

The volume control unit is based on relay resistor arrays. There are five line inputs (4 RCA и XLR) and outputs of both types and terminals for 4 and 8 Ohm speakers. The front panel is manufactured from polished Corian (artificial marble) which allows you to choose almost any colour.



NOMADIC AUDIO SMASH KICKSTARTER GOAL

Nomadic Audio, who are a sub-brand of Morel Hifi, launched the Speakase on Kickstarter last month. It's a carry-on suitcase that transforms into a large Hifi quality speaker by utilising the suitcase's internal volume with a slim Bluetooth audio device.

Hifi Pig was the first [Hifi publication in the world to review the Speakase](#), have a read here for all the information and our thoughts on this innovative new product.

"A speaker is made of a cabinet and transducers. A suitcase can be a cabinet too. Technology enabled us to design a Hifi speaker that its cabinet is a usable traveler suitcase and its transducer is a Bluetooth device." Says Oren Mordechai, Morel's CEO and Head of R&D.

Nomadic Audio still have some time to run on their Kickstarter campaign and have already doubled their original target.



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CYRUS



Cyrus Mono X 300 Signature (Pair)
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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.

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NEWS



ELITE AUDIO TO DISTRIBUTE BURSON IN UK & IRELAND

Japan based Chris Sommovigo's Mk. II update to the Black Cat Silverstar! 75 Digital cable incorporates a "lite" variant of the RF rejection materials employed in both the Digit-75 and, to a greater degree, the TRØN Super-Reference SPDIF cable.

"I've been planning this improvement for a while and have recently gotten down to the brass tacks of it," said Mr. Sommovigo. "The inclusion of the RF rejection materials, plus an additional pure-copper shield - all braided under a multifilament nylon yarn jacket - elevate the Silverstar! 75 without breaking the \$300/m threshold."

Available with 75 Ohm BNCs or the new Lovecraft MINI RCA (or a combination), the new Silverstar! 75 Mk. II is now in production.



TAGA HARMONY ANNOUNCE NEW PLATINUM V.3 SERIES

TAGA Harmony, who manufacture speakers and audio electronics, have unveiled the first models in their totally new Platinum v.3 series.

There are only a few components which the newest Platinum v.3 series shares with the previous edition, namely the shapes of TLIE enclosures, BOM bassreflex ports, TTP Tweeter Top Plate and speaker terminals. All other components are new or upgraded.

TAGA Harmony's Polish designer and the well-known audio reviewer, Mr. Arek Ogrodnik, tuned each model in the series. TAGA have therefor named the crossovers in the Platinum v.3 series "Ogrodnik Crossovers".

The new speakers are floorstanders, F-120 (pictured) and F-100 plus the B-40 standmounts.





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.

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NEWS



NEW EL34 AMP FROM SOUND CARRIER

Croatian Hifi brand, Sound Carrier, who specialise in making valve amplifiers, have released their new 24 kg EL34 Monoblocks.

Sound Carrier describe the new amp as "Controlled. Smooth. Powerful".

They went on to say, "It has 140W and in line with our philosophy it has a simple, classic and elegant design. Price is not yet defined, but will be very reasonable as with all of our products".



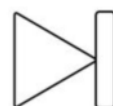
NEW CARTRIDGES FROM SUMIKO

Sumiko is introducing 4 new moving magnet cartridges, the Rainier, Olympia (pictured), Moonstone and Amethyst which join the existing Oyster product lineup; and 2 new moving coil cartridges, the Songbird and Starling which will be part of the Reference Series product line.

Sumiko told us: "The four new additions to the Oyster series are the most ambitious Moving Magnet (MM) cartridges we have released to date. The Rainier, Olympia, and Moonstone all utilise a common housing and generator assembly, so the stylus assemblies are interchangeable. You can purchase the Rainier and upgrade to the Olympia or Moonstone without replacing the entire cartridge. They set a new performance standard for the audiophile on a budget. The Amethyst is our flagship Moving Magnet (MM) design and requires its own unique cartridge body to maximize the performance of the excellent Nude Line Contact stylus. This exceptional cartridge even surpasses some moving coil cartridges in resolution and detail, setting a new benchmark for moving magnet cartridges with replaceable stylus assemblies. Joining the Reference Series line are two new Moving Coil (MC) designs including the new Songbird, which features exceptional tracking capability and the flexibility to mate well with a wide variety of tonearms and turntables. The Songbird's high output voltage ensures noise free musical reproduction compatible with not only moving coil phono inputs but also moving magnet inputs. The Starling is our new reference open architecture design featuring a MicroRidge stylus on a boron cantilever in a low output/low mass configuration. This is a powerful, dynamic cartridge with a very refined coherent presentation. The Starling (second picture) is the latest manifestation of Sumiko's forty years of refinement of phono cartridge design. Both cartridges feature a new CNC-precision milled high grade aluminium body with optimised resonance properties".



Shipping is expected to begin in May, with suggested retail prices as follows: MC: Songbird - \$899, Starling - \$1899 US dollars . MM: Rainier - \$149, Olympia - \$199, Moonstone \$299, and the Amethyst \$599 US dollars



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NEWS



BRYSTON ANNOUNCE NEW SIX CHANNEL AMP

Bryston used the AXPONA show to launch their new 24B³ six channel amplifier. The 24B³ delivers 2 x 300W into 8Ω and 4 x 75W into 8Ω all from a single chassis. The amplifier features six Balanced Inputs (XLR or TRS) and six Single Ended Inputs (RCA).

It is available with silver or black faceplate.

Price TBD



CLARUS POWER CONDITIONERS

Clarus®, the cable brand that is a "sister" company to Tributaries A/V cables, is introducing its first-ever line of AC Power Conditioners: Duet, Sextet, Octet and the flagship Clarus Power.

Pricing for the four models: Duet, Sextet, Octet and Clarus Power will range from approximately \$600 to \$2,500. Availability is expected to begin fall 2018.



NEW FROM NELSON PASS

The successor to First Watt's SIT-1 and SIT-2 amplifiers is now going into production. Like them, the new SIT-3 uses a Static Induction Transistor (VFET) in the power stage of a simple no-feedback amplifier.

The SIT-1 and 2 operated the SIT device in Common Source Mode, which delivers both voltage and current gain. The SIT-3 operates in Common Drain Mode, which delivers only current gain.

Nelson Pass says: "While a lot of people love them, the SIT-1 and SIT-2 have the kind of distortion figures (deliberately) that the 'Measurements-are-God' folks would shake their heads at. The SIT-3 has 1/5 the distortion, so is more mainstream."



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003



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NEWS



ZENITH STATEMENT FROM INNUOS

The new Innuos ZENith Statement music server builds on their ZENith Special Edition.

The ZENith Statement has several new features and improvements to its predecessor including a new power supply architecture designed in partnership with Dr. Sean Jacobs, a separately enclosed AC/DC conversion stage to isolate transformer vibration and EMI emissions, a regulation stage within main system enclosure to shorten the clean DC power path, an Innuos-designed USB board with a dedicated 5V power line and a custom motherboard exclusively designed for Innuos.



NEW PRE AND PHONO FROM PASS LABS

Pass Labs say that "we don't change our products unless we feel that the changes are significant improvements over previous versions". At AXPONA they launched a new series of preamplifiers, the XP-22 Preamp and the XP-27 Phono.

Replacing the XP-20 Preamp that was introduced in 2008, the new XP-22 uses double shielded, low-noise toroidal transformers in an external supply connected via aviation-grade circular connectors using silver over oxygen-free copper. The power supply is dual mono, with two transformers.

The gain circuitry continues to use transistors from Toshiba but has a larger, higher-biased, output stage like the Xs Preamp, and includes auto bias. The volume control is a single stage instead of two stages and has more range. Suggested Retail Price: \$9,500.



The twin-chassis XP-27 Phono Preamp uses double-shielded, low-noise toroidal transformers in an external supply, connected via aviation-grade circular connectors using silver over oxygen-free copper.

The power supply is dual mono with two transformers. The XP-27 input and gain circuitry are similar to that found in the Xs Phono. Suggested Retail Price: \$11,500.



NEW SPEAKERS FROM MURAUDIO

Muraudio has announced the launch of the new SP1 loudspeaker. Based on their Domain Omni series of loudspeakers and Muraudio's high output continuous curve electrostatic technology, the SP1 incorporates many of the same components in a smaller, lighter speaker.

The Muraudio SP1 is priced at \$14,700 USD



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



NEWS



CAMBRIDGE ADDS TIDAL

Cambridge Audio customers will find even more connectivity on their network players and AV receivers from now on with the addition of TIDAL. The streaming service will bring CD-quality audio to the 851N, CXN, CXN (V2), CXR120, CXR200 and Stream Magic 6 (V2) devices.

Customers taking advantage of the offer will be able to access TIDAL's catalogue of more than 53 million tracks in HiFi sound quality and thousands of expertly curated playlists. To access TIDAL on their players, customers will need to update the firmware on their devices and ensure they have the most up to date version of the Cambridge Connect app, which can be downloaded via the App Store on iOS or the Play Store on Android.

Commenting on the addition, MD Stuart George said, "We're excited to bring TIDAL to our products. We know how popular the service is amongst our customers, we've heard the requests and we're proud we've been able to deliver. TIDAL is at home on Cambridge Audio."



TEKTRON COMES TO UK

Tektron Italy is launching a UK office. We first came across these wonderful looking valve amps a few years ago at the Munich High End and really loved their design and so good to see them in the UK.

Tektron was established in 1990 as a company for the restoration and sale of antique radios. As the times changed, the company expanded into selling tubes and accessories for antique radios and tube amplifiers. Most recently, they have added a complete line of tube amplifiers - of both kit and mounted types. They also offer full online technical support for all their products.



Wilkinson Hi fi in Nelson, Hi-Fi house in Dorset will be selected dealers for the UK market.





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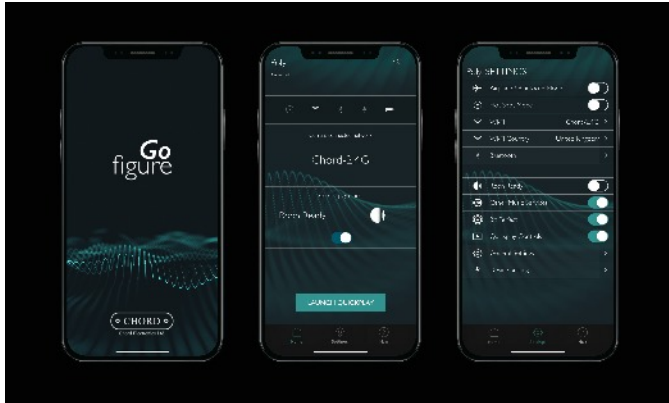


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GERMAN HIGH-END
MANUFACTURE.



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ACOUSTIC

NEWS



CHORD LAUNCH GOFIGURE APP FOR iOS

Chord Electronics has launched Gofigure, the official configuration App for the advanced Poly network music streamer. Gofigure is a configuration App which provides easy network set-up and simple settings management, all on one interface. The App, which will initially be available for iOS devices with Android to follow, offers navigation through Poly's main configuration options and features an easy-to-use software wizard for simple network set-up.



NEW CANS FROM ERZETICH

Erzetich Audio has launched two new limited series of headphones. Dutch singer Anneke van Giersbergen (pictured with the Mania headphones) has also been unveiled as the brand's first ambassador to coincide with the latest release.

The first pair of headphones is named Phobos, with an octagonal shape and the addition of planar magnetic drivers positioned in the cups. The second pair of headphones are named Mania. Both are available to pre-order until end of April 2018.



SOTM NETWORK SWITCH LAUNCHED

The sNH-10G is a SOTM's first network switch, it has 8 LAN ports and 2 SFP ports, the sCLK-EX and the 10MHz master clock connector are optional add-ons.

They also will be having a demonstration for their first master clock, sCLK-OCX10, twice each day. Attendees will be able to see the direct comparison of sound with the sCLK-OCX10 versus sound without the sCLK-OCX10 during the demonstration. A Q&A session will be held after the demonstration.

SOTM used the recent AXPONA show to launch the new product where they partnered their products with the Magico S1 Mk II.



NEWS



DALI'S LATEST SUB

The newest member of the DALI Subwoofer range is the DALI SUB C-8 D.

DALI's new sub is built around a 8" down-firing wood fibre woofer and a 170 Watt RMS Class D amplifier. The cone is constructed by using a high-quality paper pulp, which results in a rigid cone.

The subwoofer is able to deliver 220 watts at peak power and is available in a White and a Black Ash finish.

AFFORDABLE IEMS FROM FLARE

Following the release of last year's award-winning Flares® PRO earphones, British brand Flare Audio now offer the affordable Flares® JET.

Available in two models, JET 1 (RRP £49) and JET 2 (RRP £69), the duo claim to deliver the superior sound quality only offered by some premium big budget alternatives.

Davies Roberts, founder of Flare Audio explains: "Imagine having X-ray hearing, the ability to hear 'inside' the music. All our products are built with the same principal in mind; we aim to make music clearer and to deliver sound to the listener with the smallest of interventions. By doing so, we remove all audible distortion, revealing detail and subtle nuances never heard before, unveiling the true feeling of a song, like a breath taken before a vocal line or fingers moving against a guitar string. As our entry market offering, Flares® JET brings this technology to a much wider audience of music lovers than ever before."

Having made its name as a pro audio manufacturer, providing speakers for concerts, festivals and a range of venues, Flare has already achieved quite an industry following, with big name producers, musicians and DJs acclaiming their tech.

Flares® JET 1 is made from a high tensile polymer with a black satin finish. Flares® JET 2 is precision turned from aluminium using only the latest, state of the art, CNC machinery. Made from a stronger and sturdier material, Flares® JET 2 is the higher-grade version out of the two.

Both models come with three sizes of silicone tips that fit the majority of ear types. Both also have mic and control capabilities and are supplied with a branded drawstring pouch.

Inside each Flares® JET, high power 10mm drivers create what Flare Audio describes as "the most enveloping and immersive sound." continuing "Bass feels unlimited with great depth and power, yet without taking over or muffling other sounds. Mid-frequencies are strong and clear, yet in total balance with every other frequency, while higher frequencies whisper around the listener without sounding harsh or overwhelming."





HEADPHONES WITH INBUILT HEARING TEST

Following a hugely successful Kickstarter campaign in March 2017 where the funding goal was reached in just 15 hours, stretch goals were exceeded, and more than \$460,000 was raised, Audeara say it is pleased to announce the availability of the world's first full fidelity headphones with an in-built hearing test.

Their press release says "Everyone has a degree of hearing loss. Not just as a result of every loud gig they've been to, every busy street they've walked down, or every police siren that's ever gone past but also damage can be sustained purely by listening to their headphones too loud. More and more young people have some loss of hearing, an increasing number with the same hearing health aged 30 that people would usually associate with a 60 year old".

The Audeara Headphones are available for £299.99



ENTRY LEVEL IEMS FROM ELIPSON

Elipson announce their entry into the highly competitive headphone market. The 'In-Ear No.1' Bluetooth earphones combine latest technology and high quality audio with a stylish and ergonomic design, says their recent press release.

Elipson's new IN-EAR No.1 earphones are available in the UK from this month at an SRP of £89.99.



CAMPFIRE IEMS

Campfire Audio have launched two new earphones, Comet (\$199) and Atlas (\$1299).

The new stainless steel earphone bodies are drop forged and then CNC machined before being hand polished to a mirror finish. Each earphone is assembled by hand in their workshop. Both Atlas (pictured) and Comet feature all new custom driver designs. In addition to custom driver design, Campfire Audio is also working on 3D acoustic modelling.

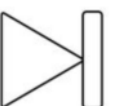


INTERVIEW

Scottish-based loudspeaker manufacturer, FYNE AUDIO, is brand new, but the 7-strong management team brings over 200 years' audio industry experience. The teams goal is the designing and manufacturing a range of high performance loudspeakers. Hifi Pig speaks to MD Andrzej Sosna.



INTERVIEW



INTERVIEW

HP: How did you initially enter the world of HiFi?

AS: I have loved music and Hi-Fi since I was at school. We had a music club with a reasonable Hi-Fi system and went along in the evenings with our coveted vinyl. I was blown away and it made me realise how music could sound with even a fairly modest system. I had discovered music the way it should be heard and that fuelled my life-long passion for both music and Hi-Fi. However, I didn't actually work in Hi-Fi until I was fortunate to get the role of Sales and Marketing Director with Tannoy, in Jan 2000.

HP: What would you say is Fyne Audio's USP?

AS: It's combination of things. We are new brand for sure but with many years' experience across the Hi-Fi and particularly loudspeaker industry. We have developed some unique, patented technologies and, combined with our know-how across acoustics, engineering and speaker manufacturing, we have created some really exciting products. Fyne Audio now offers two complete ranges of audiophile loudspeakers boasting an incredibly natural, detailed and spacious sound at very competitive prices.

Our flagship F-Series will showcase the pinnacle of our technologies and experience, both acoustically and industrial design, creating loudspeakers that are as engaging to look at as listen too. Over-riding this philosophy we have a unique chance to build a brand without the corporate constraints we have experienced before. This freedom has given us the energy to be truly creative, fast in developing products, and really focussed on actual customers' needs.

HP: How important is it to you and your team that your loudspeakers are made in Great Britain?

AS: It's critical. An essential part of the Fyne Audio DNA is being a Great British brand. Of course, commercial pressures mean it is simply not possible to manufacture the more entry level products in the UK. However, every Fyne Audio product is conceived, researched, designed, developed, prototyped and tested in the UK and we give huge attention to all facets of offshore manufacturing.

As we go up in performance and value, we see a huge benefit in taking that one step further to full UK manufacturing. It allows us to hand-craft loudspeakers to exacting standards and create truly outstanding premium ranges. As a new brand we are using cutting-edge machinery and processes from the outset, so we are not restricted by legacy manufacturing practises or equipment. That is paving the way for some very exciting plans for our UK manufacturing side of the business.

HP: what loudspeakers do you have on the market at this time?

AS: We currently have three ranges of Hi-Fi and AV loudspeakers. The F300 range is our entry level series, using discrete drivers and vinyl wrapped cabinets. It is a highly cost-effective solution to delivering great sonic performance at an affordable level. The team has decades of experience in designing, sourcing and manufacturing at this level, so the F300's fit, finish, attention to detail and, of course, sound are class leading at the price.

The F500 range is a really exciting line for the brand as it introduces our point source technology in the Isoflare driver and our BassTrax downwards-firing port system. The range is finished in

real, sustainable oak wood veneers to give them the look of fine piece of home furniture.

The Flagship F1 range highlights all of our new technologies. Built in Scotland, the series distils the vast experience of the team inherited from Tannoy. Dr Paul Mills in R&D, Stuart Wilkinson in Product Development and Gabriel O'Donohue in Operations, together bring over 80 years of loudspeaker design and manufacturing expertise to the Fyne Audio brand.

HP: Your speakers use a point-source system called IsoFlare, can you explain the system to readers and outline its benefits as you them?

AS: It's a point source driver so it combines the high frequency tweeter and bass/mid-range driver into one, time-aligned unit. It's the way nature produces sound, from one point rather than several discrete points and it gives a very natural sound with amazing stereo image even off axis. The frequency response is the same in all directions so isotropic, and that's how we derived the name Isoflare. The flare is a very precise computer designed waveguide positioned near the centre of the drive unit and it makes sure the frequency response is flat with no acoustic reflections.

HP: The F500 series and the flagship F1 also incorporate something you call Basstrax. What is Basstrax and what does it do?

AS: This is one of our most visible patent applied technologies. We wanted to improve the bass performance of the point source technology, particularly on the timing and control of the bass and how the speaker integrates with the room it's placed in. BassTrax converts the downward firing planar sound waves into a 360-degree sound field using a special porting and diffuser system.

The diffuser has a particular mathematical profile called a tractrix, which was first defined in the 1600s and later studied and refined by Newton. I won't go into the mathematical details, but Wikipedia has a very good entry on it. The shape was first used in loudspeakers in the 1920s as a horn profile. We are using the same mathematically defined profile as a diffuser. The effect is that the speaker has very precise bass timing and control and is much less dependent on room placement than a rear ported designs.

HP: Your driver surrounds use Fyneflute. Again, what is Fyneflute and how do you see it improving the sound of your speakers

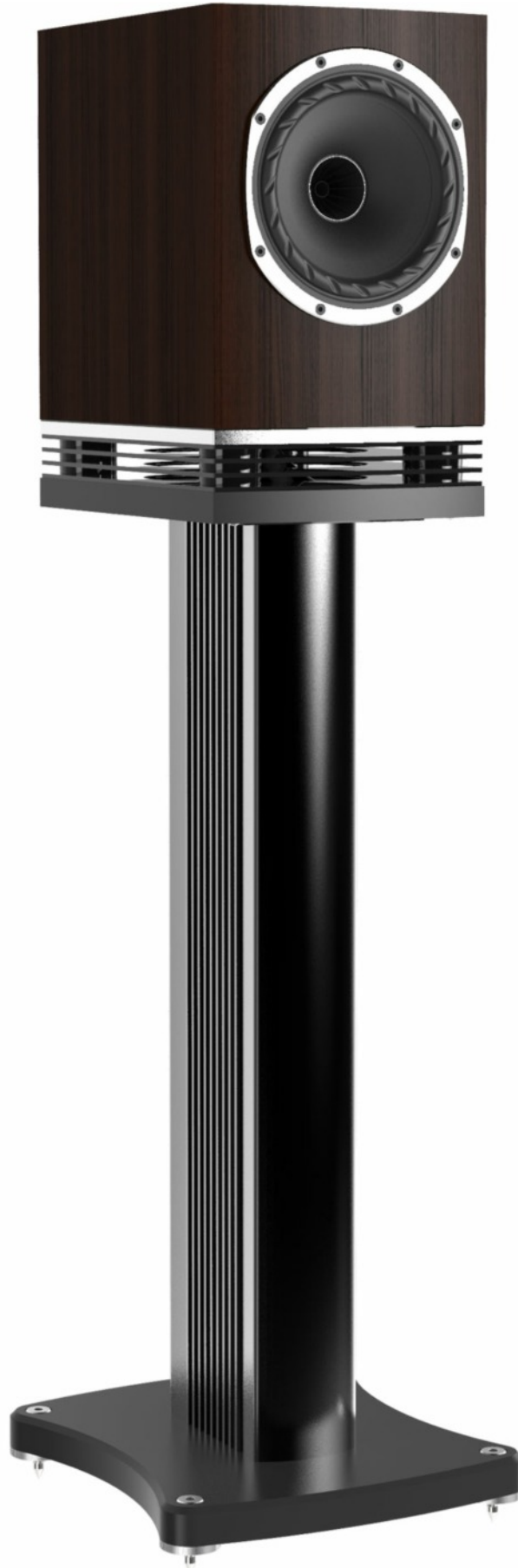
AS: Our F1 range uses a double roll fabric surround to terminate the cone energy and reduce unwanted reflections back into the cone. In our view this is the best way of terminating this energy and avoiding mid-range colouration. However, this kind of surround is only feasible to use in a high-end, large cone driver. So, we have developed FyneFlute to do a very similar thing using rubber roll surround for smaller drive units. The FyneFlute design minimises energy being reflected at the edge of the bass cone and delivers outstanding mid-range detail.

HP: As a relatively new company entering a very competitive market what do you see as your main challenges?

AS: Like any new company we need to convince all our customers and the trade we have something of value to bring to the market. It's



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not just special products, we already have these in place, but we need to have the customer service and responsiveness to match. Our challenge is bringing all these facets of the business together to serve our trade partners and consumers all around the globe.

HP: Where do you see your key markets being globally?

AS: The UK is very important since it's our home market and that focus extends to key European countries even after Brexit. Asia and North America have traditionally been very strong markets for British brands and we are already supplying the major consumer territories across Asia. To be honest we are targeting only 20 countries this year but hope to have more than 50 on-board with Fyne Audio by the end of 2019. That would ensure a solid global presence for Fyne Audio, making us a significant UK exporter and UK-based international brand.

HP: Industry and public alike seem to be talking the state of the UK market down, do you see the market in the UK as being healthy and growing?

AS: The market is changing all the time, but we do see a good future in quality Hi-Fi. Today's consumers are looking for engaging experiences and good Hi-Fi delivers a captivating music experience in the home. The premium end of the audio market remains very healthy and there are massive new markets opening up globally as countries like China, India and Vietnam develop into huge consumers.

There are some good signs with the vinyl and turntable resurgence that a younger market could be coming back to engage in the HiFi listening experience too. Lossy MP3 and older Bluetooth formats are giving way to higher quality codecs as music fans want to add quality to the convenience of streaming. Multi-room entertainment continues to be a big growth area, so Hi-Fi is no longer limited to just one room – or, more importantly for Fyne Audio, just one pair of speakers! It's up to us an industry to make Hi-Fi accessible and engaging to the newest generation of consumers. We will play our part by bringing amazing and affordable loudspeakers, that's for sure.

HP: A constant question being asked in the Hifi industry is how we can better engage a younger audience, how do you see Fyne Audio specifically and the industry in general engaging with this audience?

AS: We need to make the language and the experience easier to understand. Hi-Fi can appear baffling, cliquey and un-cool but it boils down to what I discovered at school – enjoying music the way it should be heard. We need to highlight the connection with music and simplify the decision process to get a younger generation engaging with audiophile products in the first place.

At Fyne Audio we are striving to be relevant to a younger audience through our product design, marketing activities and social media. We also have some very exciting joint events planned, partnering with brands and experiences that already connect with this demographic.

HP: What music do you listen to relax?

AS: If it's just about relaxing I either turn to some female vocal like London Grammar or one of the old comfort blanket favourites like Floyd or Dire Straits.

HP: What was the standout live performance that you attended?

AS: Wow, that is a tough one as I have seen a lot of bands over the years. The Wall back in 2013 was probably best for the amazing pure audio and visual experience. For my most fun event though it would be The Blockheads when I saw them last year in Edinburgh. 200 people crammed in to a small venue, standing room only, beer in hand and just feet away from the band. It was pure music enjoyment.

HP: What system do you have at home?

AS: I have several systems at home but the one which is closest to my heart and has huge nostalgic value is my classic 'separates' system from my younger days. Wharfedale Lintons, a Teac receiver and a Garrard turntable I have long since forgotten the model number of. They can still do a turn and my kids like them. Around the house, we use Sonos as its great for background music and easy to use for all of the family.

My main system has evolved over several incarnations and seen many of the last four decade's 'must have' audiophile components come and go. My system today is based on a Rega Saturn R CD player and Elex R amplifier.

Needless to say, I have owned many high-end Tannoy loudspeakers but it is Fyne in most rooms now. My main system has an early prototype pair of F1's that have accrued a phenomenal number of air-miles travelling all over the world on demonstration to distributors. They look 'well-travelled' too, so I am awaiting a new sample pair in custom piano black lacquer. I'm just as excited by the prospect of getting them installed as I was heading to the school music club clutching my vinyl all those years ago. It's clearly still about the music and experiencing it the way it should be heard.



INTERVIEW

Hifi Pig catches up with Lothar Kerestedjian, the main man behind HIGHRESAUDIO who has an interesting and varied past in the music industry, not least his time spent with INXS.



INTERVIEW

HP: You have an interesting past that involves INXS, tell readers a little more about this

LK: I joined INXS after the internationally successful "Kick" album, leading me to work as personal assistant to the band during the "X", "Welcome to Wherever You Are" and "Live Baby Live" albums. Certainly a great and interesting time in my exciting and colourful life's history.

HP: Any standout incidents you are able to share with our readers?

LK: I was around when Michael Hutchence broke up with Kylie Minogue and invited Helena Christensen to Sydney. Michael and Kyle did love each other deeply but they had too many differences, which clashed at the end. Then I met Helena, wow what an awesome girl. A perfect match! Michael should have stuck to her instead of falling into the poison trap of Paula Yates. I highly believe, if I would have stayed with the band, that I could have saved Michael's life. I was close to him and understood his needs. Which often others didn't, or didn't have the patience. Very sad, that he isn't with us anymore. The band members still suffer deeply from this loss.

Anyway, working for INXS was a very demanding and exhausting job. Imagine you have to handle six boys that conquered the music world by storm. Everything was in abundance. You can afford anything and be anywhere in the world. Keeping up is nearly impossible.

While Jon Farris was on honeymoon, I got a chance to play and record drums on the "Welcome to Wherever You Are" album with Andrew Farris. Demoing the track "Wishing Well".

HP: Where else have you been involved in the music industry?

LK: The list is long, here are some highlights, I have worked for Michael Jackson, Prince and Whitney Houston while they stayed in Sydney, Australia. I have worked for Philips leading over from Laserdisc to Video-CD and fighting the format war MMCD vs. SD disc as European products and business development manager. After Sony & Philips lost the format war, I packed my stuff in Hasselt, Belgium and joined the winning team Toshiba & Warner moving within 5 weeks to Tokyo, Japan working for Toshiba and Daikin US Comtec Labs preparing the DVD for mass market. Then I moved to San Francisco joining Sonic Solution/Daikin to lead the development of DVD authoring and MPEG-2 encoding systems for the Hollywood studios. Working closely with SGI, Apple and Microsoft to bring DVD production to the desktop.

A few years later I moved back to Germany joining Panasonic Europe to bring DVD to Europe and also to fight another format war DVD-Audio vs. SACD. Initiating the DVD-Audio as premium audio playback format. I could talk for hours ... I fought another format war HD DVD vs. Blu-ray and a few more. So, you can see, that I have gained enough experience in fighting for something you stand and believe in.

HP: You launched HIGHRESAUDIO a few years ago with just

downloads of high resolution files, do you see high resolution as being the future of audiophile music.

LK: Yes, as a matter of fact in 2010 HIGHRESAUDIO is privately owned by myself. I have no investors, venture capital, financing or a rich daddy to back me up. I only employ long-time experienced studio engineers, that are musically trained. The editorial staff is a collective of well-known Germany music journalists supporting the daily operation. My twin brother Frank is the technical operation manager and a great studio and live-sound engineer, that understands his craft and needs for our business very well. I couldn't run HIGHRESAUDIO without him.

It is so important that in the non-physical world, we also have a high-quality / high-resolution product. Since MP3 in 1998 flooded the market for convenience factor, the music was so heavily compressed, spliced in tracks and pushed to the limited (loudness war), that I had to do something against this trend. Digital video was advancing to HD – so why not digital music. That was my initiation to convince the record companies back in 2009.

Any digital format has its pitfalls and hurdles to overcome. Preparing and delivering high-resolution audio files is certainly a big challenge, which is not to be under-estimated. We take great pride and care in what we do and offer on HIGHRESAUDIO. We installed right from the beginning a professional quality control department and tools to analyse, verify and check every delivered file prior to uploading it to our homepage. Almost 30% of incoming material falls through our quality control. This is because: up-sampled, bad mastering, high compression = no dynamics, transparency, musically poor (artist related), bad recording quality.

There are so many customers out there, which seek a trustworthy and professional service. You'll need a service that you can trust – otherwise you'll buy / hear a lot of rubbish. We don't only cater for audiophiles. In the past three years, we've gained a lot of younger, conscious music-listeners that have invested into a nice digital stereo system, expensive headphone or portable audio-players to enjoy a much better music reproduction.

HIGHRESAUDIO as service and platform is also important for artists and labels that cherish and appreciate their art and work. Many musicians, sound engineers and producers are quality conscious and driven by perfection for the love and art of making and recording music. HIGHRESAUDIO offers fans and artists a perfect platform to meet and discover each other. I believe, that HIGHRESAUDIO as a company and service is essential for the music industry, audio manufacturers, consumers and artists. HIGHRESAUDIO needs to get grant-aided support on all levels to secure its existence. I do hope that will be the case.

HP: There is a lot of journo's, particularly in the States decrying MQA, what are your thoughts on the format?

LK: I call that "Fake News". The massive hype from the States makes me sick. It doesn't matter what it is – they jump on it and make it big (for a short period of time) and then something new comes along. There is no persistence feel. Two years ago it was DSD, then MQA and what's next. I do appreciate progressive,



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competent and forward thinking journalism, which they do practice in the States and I do read a lot of US hi-fi magazines, but please get a different twist into your coverage. The English hi-fi magazines have adopted a much better and honest style - my opinion!

A re-encode MQA is not worst or better than a FLAC. I adopted MQA three years ago, because Bob Stuart played me some demos in Huntingdon Cambridgeshire, which sounded pretty good to me. Although, the demo files were a few db louder than the original ;) Over the past 2 years, the initial product concept, company's attitude and the way MQA was marketed has changed and felt dishonest to me. Hence, the abrupt stop. Bob Stuart promised me many things but none of them have come through so far. I wonder why?

The MQA albums that we offer are all analysed and verified. That means, that we used the origin PCM studio master and all files have passed our strict and professional quality control process in order to guarantee the customer a genuine and native Studio Master. These MQA albums remain in our online store. All others that we can't check and verify its source, we will not offer.

As soon as we have an MQA encoder and quality control software to analyse the MQA encodes, we will offer a wider selection of MQA albums. This is something that we are very peculiar and exceptional about - in the customer's interest.

We are in a very sensible and delicate niche music market. Over the past eight years we have established a very good market position, created a new business for the music industry and artists and customers that cherish the best audible sound reproduction. We moved the music and HiFi-industry into a new business domain, with very little support from anyone. Our USP is that we guarantee (and this is not just said and done) our customers, nothing but the true, native and original source. We can analysis and verify any other audio codec (with MusicScope even DSD and DXD). For MQA there is nothing available to assure that the customer is getting our promise". We are in the first and front row, selling music and technology to a new and established customer, that truly expects nothing but the real thing!

Selling HiRes Audio files requires so much dedicated and detailed work prior in selling (downloading / streaming) the music. This time needs to be invested by qualified audio engineers and a team that understands the total reproduction path. An extensive quality control is therefore a „must-have“ and needs to be in place to fulfil the „promise“. Which we do!

Last but not least, we continue in offering a selected and handpicked repertoire in MQA. MQA has many obstacles and is not user-friendly. Nevertheless, we offer customer choice and the customer will need to decided which format and codes she/he wants to purchase.

HP: What are the biggest selling genres for HighResAudio and where in the world are most of your customers to be found?

LK: Due to the fact, that in Classical music, there are a lot of details and transparencies and highly skilful musicians, they always record with top-notch recording equipment. So, Classical is about 40%,

followed by Jazz with about 27%. Than Pop/Rock, Blues, R&B, Electronic, Hip-Hop and Acoustic Guitar. We offer any genre and music, as long as there is an audible benefit over CD. Unfortunately, many pop/ mainstream, rock albums that are produced today are still heavily compressed with far to much overloaded output levels. Such albums we will not offer. There's no benefit! So, the selection and repertoire on HIGHRESAUDIO will not expand rapidly. On average over 12 months, we add 100 new albums per weeks That is already pretty good going, considering that we only offer selected and handpicked content that sounds great.

We work closely with the SAE and Verband Deutscher Tonmeister e.V. (VDT), to let the sound and mastering engineers know, that there's a distribution channel and customers out there, that appreciated and valued dynamics, transparency, details and space in the music. We regularly hold workshops and seminars to change there thinking and approach to recording.

Many records from the past may never get re-mastered and released on HighResAudio, because the original tapes do not exist or are in bad shape. The record companies have failed to preserve the jewels from the past. I initiated in 2010 with Bertelsmann/avarto and DADC, that the record companies must look through their archives and studios to obtain the master tapes and recordings and use a professional company to extract and preserve these important recordings for a lifetime. This initiative has made good progress and we and our customers benefit from this initiative too.

HP: You recently launched an online streaming service, tell us more.

LK: I have experimented the last three years in offering 24bit streaming. About two years ago we launched VirtualVault, this is the name for our digital locker. Customers don't need to download the files anymore. Once purchased, they are instantly available to be streamed from our server in 24bit in their native sampling rate up to 192kHz. This is a truly wonderful product and feature – for free! Unfortunately, only a few manufactures did actually integrate VirtualVault.

VirtualVault is also fully integrated into Audirvana, the HiRes software for Mac and Windows. Based from the experiences gained from VirtualVault we developed HRA-Streaming. Three years in the making. HRA-Streaming is a commercial-free, audiophile and the world's only high-resolution music streaming service in exclusively 24-bit (HiRes Audio) supplemented by extensive editorial expertise of experienced and well-known German music journalists. HRA Streaming grants access to the entire music archive of close to 35.000 handpicked and carefully selected albums from the HIGHRESAUDIO platform. On average, over 100 albums are added each week to our archive.

"I believe that there is a target group beyond the mainstream that values sound quality and wants to be served honestly and competently."

We offer two HRA-Streaming types:

HRA-Streaming: Special introduction price: 179,99 GBP / 199,99 EUR (12 months)

HRA-Streaming + Downloads: 229,99 GBP / 249,99 EUR
Streaming + Downloads (12 months)



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7 days free trial

With the Download option in the streaming subscription, the customer buys Downloads at a permanent discount of 30%. An attractive offering for when the customer wants to own his favourite albums.

HRA-Streaming is initially available in the following countries: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Greece, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Italy, Ireland, Croatia, Luxembourg, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Czech Republic, Norway, Switzerland.

We developed our own 24bit FLAC software player for Mac and Windows and a user-friendly interface aimed at the look and feel of our homepage. The customer receives with his HRA-Streaming subscription a HIGHRESAUDIO desktop app for Windows and / or Apple OSX. to be used via USB from his computer to the DAC to the stereo system to access the high-resolution audio files for a pristine and unadulterated sound reproduction. All files are played out of the cache / RAM for best performance and the ultimate sound reproduction. For this development I hired an experienced Berlin based company, Digitalklang. They are software audio experts, who instantly understood my concept and requirements. I have already received tremendous feedback from various sound specialists and hifi journalist, that HRA-Streaming sounds truly amazing.

"My goal and aim is to deliver a world-class music service beyond the mainstream with our experience, expertise, creativity and commitment."

Strategic partnerships: Partnership with airable by TuneIn: The partnership with airable provides access to HRA-Streaming through Arcam products, Cambridge Audio, Cocktail Audio, AudioNet, T+A, Simaudio, AVM, Cyrus, CH Precision, Harman Kardon, Mark Levinson, Panasonic, Quadral, Yamaha, Primare, Revox, Russound, TechniSat, TeleStar and Lindemann Audio. The airable platform partners include Audivo, Frontier Silicon, engineeRed, StreamUnlimited, Quantek TW, SkiDeev and Shenzen Ulysee. The airable.API includes HRA-Streaming and VirtualVault. Newly added manufacturers are regularly listed on the homepage. Prior to the HIGH END show in Munich, HRA-Streaming will go live.

HP: What music do you enjoy to listen to?

LK: I'm a big fan of Level 42, David Sylvian, Wally Badarou, Bryan Ferry & Roxy Music, Prefab Sprout Toto, Dream Theater, Porcupine Tree as well as the US record company GRP Records well, Dave Grusin and Larry Rosen. Matter of fact, I listen to any kind of music, as long it is musically well done and has a good hook-line.

All of the bands I have already contacted myself to license their content that they possible own them self. Unfortunately, only a few of them have answered but nothing happened. Which is disappointing. I was prepared to do the 24bit analogue to digital re-mastering and release the re-masters on HIGHRESAUDIO. I do hope, that one of them may read this interview ;)

HP: Tell readers a little about your personal system.

LK: I must admit, that I'm patriotic and support Germany

manufacturers as much I can. I guess, it is because I like to meet, know and be friends with the people that make the products. It is so important to pay respect, gratitude, appreciation and support to those hard working people.

I have a digital and analogue set-up:

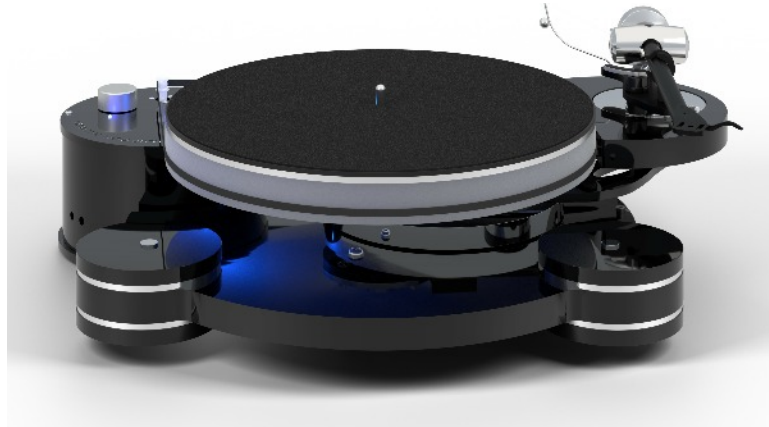
Digital: Kii-Audio THREE loudspeaker, AURALiC ARIES G2 inkl. 2TB SSD and AURALiC VEGA G2. Interconnects are all Audioquest, IsoTek EVO3 Polaris plus all IsoTek power cables.

Analogue: Audiodata Partout (limited edition) loudspeaker, Octave V110SE + Phono module, NAD M50MK2, Phonosophie PAS1 Network-Player, LINN Basic + Adikt, Interconnects are all Phonosophie, IsoTek EVO3 Polaris plus all IsoTek power cables.



REVIEW

ORIGIN LIVE RESOLUTION TURNTABLE & ZEPHYR TONEARM



I've been a long-time fan of origin Live tonearms having used their Silver tonearm on a fully modded Technics 1210 and on my previous vinyl spinner from Analogue Works, the logical next step for our vinyl front end was to upgrade the arm and to buy one of OLs turntables. We have and here are our thoughts on the British company's Resolution turntable with upgraded PSU and triple layer Acrylic platter, partnered with their Zephyr tonearm. The total price of the turntable as tested here is £5550.

STUART AND LINETTE SMITH

The Resolution turntable falls bang in the middle of this UK company's range and costs £3300 for the turntable with the upgraded, and I think vital, transformer power supply adding a further £340. The upgraded platter on the our turntable, which adds two further layers to the Acrylic platter, adds a further £960. We didn't have the opportunity to compare with the standard platter, but Origin Live reckon this to make a more significant improvement to performance than the upgraded PSU. The Zephyr tonearm is the top of the fully gimbaled range from the company and comes in at £950. For the purposes of this review I used our reference Goldnote Tuscany Red cartridge retailing at €5799.

Origin Live have got their packaging right and first thoughts are that this is an outfit that make sure they have all bases covered, which immediately inspires confidence in the product, not something that can be said of every manufacturer.

Putting the turntable together is a simple affair with little more than pouring the required amount of bearing oil into the housing, placing the platter on the deck, getting the separate motor housing in the right position and attaching the belt. In total the job takes a little over half an hour, including fitting the arm, which in itself is a doddle due to the open nature of the Resolution. On the rack the turntable certainly looks the part and more than one non-audiophile visitor has commented on its styling with him declaring, "I don't know what it is, but I want one!"

The armboard is designed to resist rotational and vertical modes of vibration, whilst the sub-chassis helps to decouple the main bearing, the pics in this review will give you a better idea of construction. Levelling is achieved by a trio of feet which is so much easier to get right than systems using four feet.

The platter itself is, as mentioned the three layer Acrylic option and is three centimetres thick and is then topped off by Origin Live's very thin rubber-like composite mat.

All in all, and I'm no engineer in any shape or form, the Resolution turntable looks to be well put together, well thought out and sensibly engineered.

LIGHT SPEED CONTROL

This is the fourth incarnation of the Resolution turntable and one of the big developments is the motor unit which has a nifty speed stabilisation system built in. The motor is called the Light Speed Control and it's a clever solution for belt drive turntable that suffer speed drift for a number of reasons, mainly based around belt tension. What the LSC hopes to achieve is the accuracy of a direct drive system with a claimed accuracy of drift of below 0.0001%. The motor itself is a high quality, low noise design but the nifty thing here is the platter speed is constantly measured and adjusted. Look under the platter and there is a small reflective strip that passes over a sensor in the motor unit itself and then a feedback loop makes instant corrections. It is a very impressive bit of engineering and the Origin Live team must be applauded in what they have achieved with it.

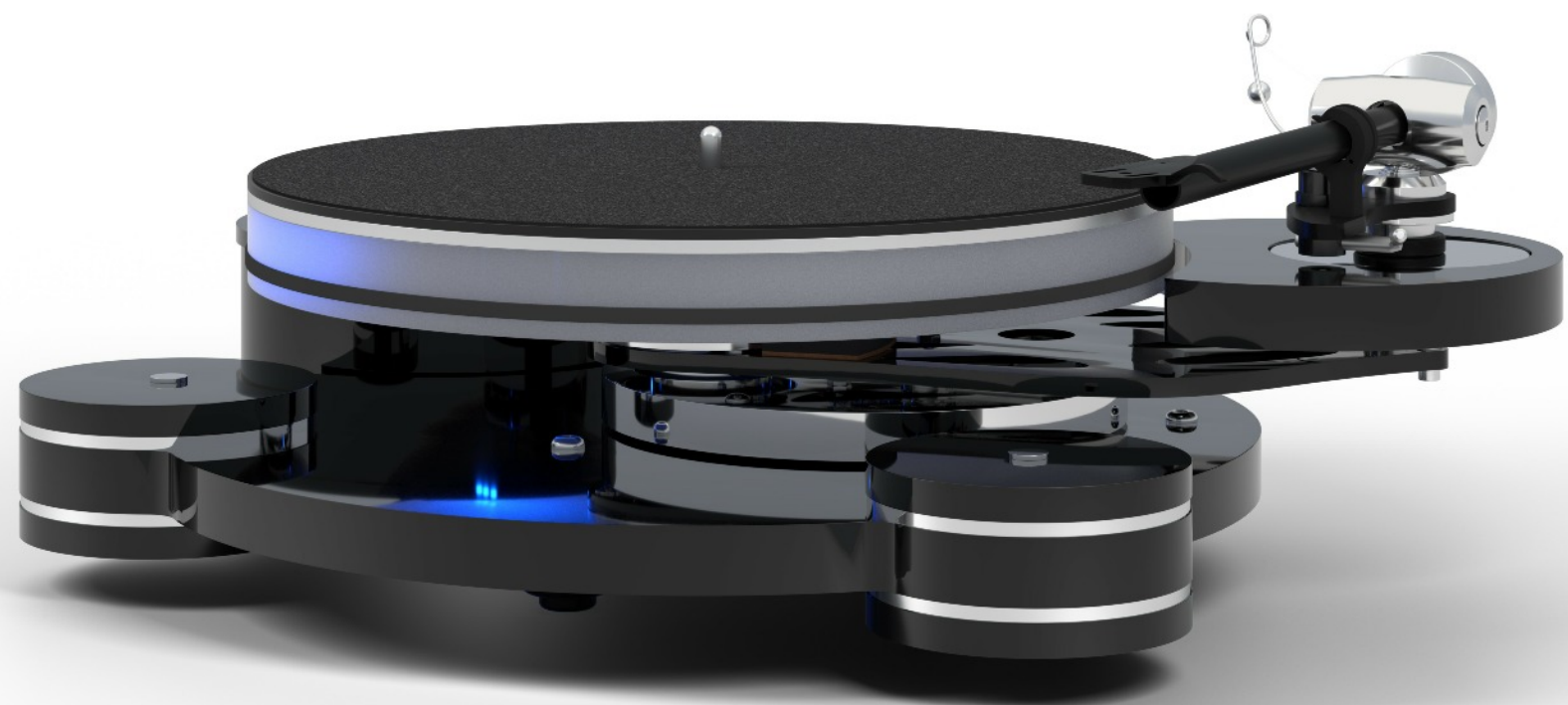
THE SOUND

I'm very familiar with this arm and cartridge set up's characteristics having used the combo as our reference for well over a year; the sound is dynamic, clear and without either bloat at the bottom end or harshness at the top end. Pop these two onto the Origin Live deck and sonically what I have in front of me is a huge step up, with the music



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just seeming to become more cohesive and more of a whole rather than individual parts that go to make the whole, if that makes sense. Of course, if you listen for individual parts such as bass-lines then you can clearly hear where they are in the mix, both in a dynamic sense as well as a spatial sense, it's just that with the Resolution coming into play I got a sense of really connecting with the music much more. Indeed, Mark who heads up the company phoned me to chase me and ask if I was going to do a review at all, I'd already bought this deck, and my response was along the lines of "I've barely played anything but vinyl since I installed the deck and I've just been enjoying going through tunes and albums that I've not pulled off the shelves in ages." We had a friend in the industry come to visit a few weeks prior to me actually sitting down to listen and actively take notes about this turntable. He's a huge fan of The Jam and I have great respect for his opinions on sound, but really wasn't looking for them in this case. However, I put on a copy of the band's All Mod Cons onto the platter and he declared it the very best he has ever heard it on any system - anywhere, which I took as being very high praise indeed.

It's often difficult in written reviews, to say what you are hearing from a particular piece of equipment without sounding like you are simply describing portions of your record collection, but many people will be familiar with certain tunes I use as test tracks and so this methodology, though flawed in some way, serves as a good way of describing what something brings to the aural party.

VCMG's Lowly from the album SSSS has an authority to the bass kick drum and the analogue synth bass-lines, the album is made using a huge collection of classic synths, just bounce along and sit perfectly in the soundstage/mix. What really comes across here is that there is a texture to the sounds that I'd not heard in our previous set up and that the experience was more akin to listening to real synths playing live. Spatially the track just seems to have opened up to become more three dimensional than it had before with sounds in some cases just seeming to hang in the air in front of me. If you are reading this and thinking to yourself, but that's electronic sounds and not real instruments, then I maintain that these instruments are equally relevant to the review process as any orchestral piece.

However, John Martyn's classic Solid Air has to be dug out (I've said this before, but the Abbey Road half speed master is one of the very best recordings anywhere and on any format) and again when listening closely to the record I'm left somewhat gobsmacked with what this vinyl spinner brings to the table. Detail is there in bucketsful with all the tonal texture of Martyn's vocal being a standout. Musicians are laid out before me in the stereo mix beautifully and whilst I previously said the music just seems to come together with this turntable, audiophiles will be cock-a-hoop in the way it is so easy to pull out individual instruments. Never once does this record become anything more than pristine in the way it is presented here. What is more important though, again as I mention a lot, the connection I have today with this piece is as great an aural/emotional connection as I have had using any piece of equipment at any price. What also springs to my mind is the lack of surface noise I'm hearing... not something I'd really noticed before but when you look for something you do notice its absence. Further through the album something else that strikes me are the clarity of small details in the music - the way the strings are slapped on Don't Want To Know being a case in point. This is a studio recording, of course, but there

is the sense that the musicians are laid out before me in the room in a way I'd not previously experienced to the same degree.

Lynyrd Skynyrd's Pronounced album is an album I played endlessly in my mid-teens and I bought it again a few months ago. Tuesday's Gone is a tune that I must have played several hundreds of times over the years and today and on this record player I am once again reminded why I got into Hifi in the first place. What we have here is the record being played with as high a fidelity as I could ever imagine. The little orchestral parts, the pianos all sound...well just better, and again, there is that connection to the music and it really speaking to me. Little flourishes on the drums that may have been missed before are clearly heard and the slightly dragging snare at times just sounds perfect, a sign to me that this turntable's timing itself is rock solid. There are times when this records soaring multiple guitar lines can become confused and a bit of a mush but there is none of that here and whilst again, there is a coherency to the song, it's still easy to pick the mix apart.

Culture's Vital Selection has the bass lines bouncing along with a solidity and reality that just want to make you get out the chair and dance. And that's something we've done a lot of since this turntable arrived. Yes, we sit and listen to music a lot in a critical way, of course, but when a piece of equipment also gives you the urge to move your ass, you know it is doing something right.

OK, so I think this record player is something rather special, but there is a lot of things I will not even claim to understand in any way. First of all, to my mind the perfect record player will spin the record at the right speed, have anything that can feedback to the stylus as isolated as possible and that's about it. However, turntables do sound very different with this one being as technically close to what is in the grooves coming out the speakers as I have heard. So, why then when I plug in the upgraded power supply do things get more focussed with more energy with bass-lines in particular feeling more solid? The motor is spinning the same as it was before, but things improve across the board. I don't understand but the improvement is undeniably clearly audible and why at the opening parts of this review I said I reckoned it vital part of the package.

Do I have any niggles with this turntable? Yep, nothing is perfect, and whilst sonically I genuinely feel this to be pretty much as good as it gets, there is no dust cover included which I would like to see. I've looked at having one made but the way my Audio Suspension wall shelf is designed doesn't really allow for a standard cube one to be bought and the design I put in to a manufacturer that followed the shape of the Resolution was very expensive. My second niggle is the front right "arm" is the perfect place to rest your hand whilst putting the needle on the record resulting in the whole of the turntable tilting forward. To be fair you only make this mistake a handful of times before you learn.

CONCLUSION

We have had a handful of products come into Hifi Pig towers in the last year that have really blown us away with what they bring to the party and the way our system has evolved as a result has taken it to what I consider to be a truly world class system. One of these products is of course this turntable and arm combination, and whilst there are much more expensive packages out there I can't see me feeling the



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urge to upgrade any time soon, though I probably see a top of the range tonearm from Origin Live in my Hifi life in the future.

What you have here is a relatively affordable, I know it's a lot of money but in sonic terms and given there are much more expensive options out there, I reckon it to be a bit of a sonic bargain that has the ability to really connect you to your record collection in a meaningful and emotional way. I've bought more vinyl since it arrived than I have in a long time and I've played records that haven't seen the light of day in ages, which should be recommendation enough.

If you are in the market for a record player in this price range then the Origin Live Resolution should certainly be on your "must hear" list.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Solid build quality, with a well thought out format for the turntable itself. Feels like a product that easily justifies its asking price. Easy to put together and mount the arm.

Sound Quality: Difficult to quibble in any way with regards to the sound quality of this product. It is revealing and dynamic with detail and insight into the recording aplenty. Add the upgraded power supply and it is even more engaging. The speed stability, given this is a belt drive is astounding.

Value For Money: Again, very hard to quibble with the price. There are more expensive, much more expensive, turntables out there that perform nowhere near this level

Pros: Sonically engaging, hugely dynamic and revealing, well-built and the Light Speed Control takes all the guess work out of whether the turntable is running at the correct speed.

Cons: Would have liked a dust-cover to be included and the temptation to rest your cueing finger on the outrigger causing the deck to fall forward.

Price:

Turntable: £3300

Upgraded Power Supply: £340

Three Layer Platter Option: £960

Tonearm: £950

Total: £5550

Having nominated the Resolution for Outstanding Product Award, Linette will now say a few words about what she thinks of the product to decide whether it achieves the award or not.

One thing that I have noticed about the arrival of a new turntable at Hifi Pig Towers, is it is usually a pre-cursor to shouting...and quite a lot of it, so I generally leave Stuart to get on with the fiddly task of set-up it on his own, and retreat to a safe distance, unless I am required to 'hold that bit there and don't drop it'. After the unboxing of the Resolution I was surprised that I heard none of the aforementioned shouting and came back in to find everything set up as it should be.

That was a result to start with. Secondly, it looks the business, with a stylish, open design that looks a hell of a lot more expensive than it is. Turntables are one of those components that really can express a beautiful 'form follows function' design, and the open design seems to really help with things like set up and maintenance.

The Light Speed Control is an incredibly clever thing indeed in a 'why has nobody thought of this before' way...and I think this assurance of accuracy translates into the sound. There is a real sense of improvement in the connection to the music when using this Turntable that I was not really expecting, giving that we were already using a pretty high-end cartridge and arm. But putting the same arm and cartridge onto the new turntable showed just how much difference it could make. I'm not going to pretend to understand why but there is something clever in the engineering that gets every bit out of the music...it's more alive and musical, if that makes sense.

I have generally found vinyl to be a format that I have embraced more over the years. My go-to format always used to be CD over vinyl (which I still prefer to streaming) but the ease of use of the Origin Live along with the sound quality has had us buying and playing more records than we have in years. Yes, you can spend much, much more on a turntable but I think with the Resolution, Origin Live have made that high-end exclusivity a lot more achievable for people without a bottomless budget.

I love it and I never thought I would be quite so charmed by a turntable. It gets an Outstanding Award for sure.

Review Equipment: GoldNote Tuscany Red MC cartridge, Music First step up transformer, Music First phono-stage, Music First Baby Reference II preamplifier, Merrill Audio Thor monoblocks, Avantgarde Duo XD loudspeakers, Tellurium Q Silver Diamond speaker cables and interconnects and power cables by Vermouth Audio and Atlas. Power distribution by Atlas Cables. Balanced mains unit by D. Worth



REVIEW

CHORD ELECTRONICS DAVE DAC



Stuart and Linette Smith have had the Chord DAVE DAC sat on their rack for the best part of a year now and don't want it to go home. Find out why.

STUART AND LINETTE SMITH

I remember being at the High-End Show in Munich a couple of years ago and John Franks the MD and Chief designer from Chord Electronics announcing the launch of their new DAC, DAVE in a hail of superlatives which frankly I greeted with a degree of caution. Indeed, the name alone screams overkill, with DAVE standing for Digital to Analogue Veritas in Extremis...digital to analogue truthful in the extreme. I needn't have been so concerned and I'm going to do this review, to use the vernacular of my home town, a bit arse about tit and say that Chord Electronics' DAVE is indeed the most accurate DAC I have had the pleasure of using in our system – you can, if you like stop right there. My current reference, the fully loaded Lampizator Big 7, is certainly no slouch in terms of sheer musical enjoyment, but when it comes to accuracy and High-fidelity it is left somewhat in DAVE's wake...but more on that in a short while.

CONSTRUCTION AND FEATURES

DAVE arrives in excellent packaging, has an easy to follow set up guide and within seconds it was on the rack and looking a little lost in the place where the Lampizator had sat – DAVE is not a big bit of kit in its raw form measuring just 333.5mm wide, 71mm high, 154mm deep and weighing in at 7kg – I had some pretty hefty cables hanging out the back of DAVE and it never budged a millimetre. You can of course add the dedicated rack which adds to the cost but, in fairness, I think adds to the aesthetics of the unit. Speaking of aesthetics, DAVE does divide opinion somewhat with its rounded off, oblong shape of its Choral range counterparts and porthole style LCD display. I like its looks and it is frugal on rack-space-taking should you be limited in that department. On the top of the unit you have a wave shape of holes drilled in the aluminium chassis that presumably allow heat to be dispersed. You

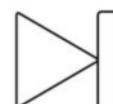
have four solid buttons that move you around the LCD display, allowing you to select which settings you would like, change input and screen colours and a volume knob which can be used to mute DAVE when pressed. It's simple, it's intuitive and it all feels very well put together.

On the front is a properly sized quarter inch headphone output and that's your lot.

Also included in the box is a remote which is functional rather than anything glamorous and I would have liked the option to have a remote that echoed just the functions of DAVE itself and perhaps made from the same materials, but I'm guessing that the included remote will also work with other Chord Electronics' products and adding a posher unit (I was thinking along the lines of the Devialet remote) would inevitably add substantially to the cost. Needless to say, Chord Electronics are not alone in skimping a little on the remote but it does work fine.

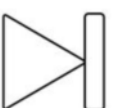
Round the back of DAVE and reading left to right you have a pair of balanced XLR and unbalanced RCA outputs, A USB 2 input, 2 BNC Coax digital inputs, an AES balanced XLR digital input, a pair of optical inputs, two more BNC inputs, four DX digital outputs and then the power input and switch. The DX digital outputs are for use with Chords digital amps, but were not used here.

The bright and very easy to read LCD display shows in the top left the sample rates and changes colour accordingly, whilst also displaying the chosen input. Next to this quarter of the display you have the volume in dB and then a centre area where you can choose which of the four menu options you want to change – these are PCM/DSD, the Phase, HF filter and display mode. At the bottom of the screen you are shown whether the DAVE is in headphone mode, DAC mode or Digital



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Pre-amplifier mode, which is again all pretty logical and easy to fathom after only scant perusal of the user manual. Hit Display Mode and you get to choose between the four modes, with mode 1 being the one I favoured and is broadly outlined above. Switch to mode 2 and the screen goes to black with white text where you don't get to see the changing colours for sample rate or volume. Mode 3 looks like mode 1 only with a blue background rather than black and mode 4 which is the same as mode 1 but switches off to save the screen after 30 seconds and until you press one of the function buttons. The modes are interesting to have a bit of a play with but to be honest the review unit was left in mode 1 for the duration.

The HF filter I'm not even going to try and pretend that I understand any of and will refer you to Chords comments

"This turns on a sharp high frequency cutoff filter set at 60kHz. This filter bandwidth limits higher sample rate recordings to reduce noise shaper noise from the ADC. You may find that the noise will degrade the sound quality by increasing noise floor modulation as the out of bandwidth noise causes intermodulation distortion with the wanted audio signal in the analogue electronics."

I have quite a lot of hi-res files and whilst the effect of switching the HF filter on is not night and day, there is a positive impact that is there but hard to put your finger on.

You have the option to change the signal phase of the XLR and RCA outputs but again I left it in the positive for the vast majority of the time and you can of course toggle between DSD or PCM mode.

The final mode is Dual Data Mode as this acts only on the BNC inputs and I used AES, Optical and USB only having no relevant sources for BNC, but will again turn to Chord for an explanation

"Dave supports dual data mode on its BNC inputs. This is where a 176kHz data rate is supported by sending a left 88kHz signal and a right 88kHz signal via separate BNCs. For example, this function is supported with our Blu CD Transport. To operate DAVE in dual data mode you should connect the left BNC to 'input 1 BNC' and the right BNC to 'input 2 BNC'. Following this you should select BNC1 on the menu and, upon successful pairing, a letter 'D' will appear with the sample rate. To operate a second dual data input please connect the left channel BNC to input 3 and the right channel BNC to BNC input 4."

As mentioned DAVE can be used as a straight up DAC or as a DAC/Pre to go straight into a power amp. To use DAVE in DAC mode and use your own pre, as I did much of the time, press the left and right cursor buttons around the volume knob at the same time and you are in DAC mode. Output is fixed to 3 volts unbalanced and 6 Volts balanced and obviously the volume knob on DAVE is deactivated. Turn DAVE off and on and handily it will remember this mode's settings without resetting. Conversely press the two cursor buttons together again and wait for the display to read Digital Pre and you can hook DAVE up to your power amp. As soon as you plug in a pair of headphones DAC mode turns off and the volume knob works again so you can adjust the volume of music on your headphones. You can also have a play with 4 "crossfeed settings" in headphone mode using the up and down buttons. This essentially slightly changes the sound and is interesting to play with to find what you prefer.

I used DAVE with a laptop running a variety of players and you can download the relevant drivers from the Chord website and all is relatively painless. Download the driver, connect DAVE to your computer using a USB (there is one supplied but I chose to use a couple of boutique cables I own), go to the control panel of your computer and select DAVE as the audio device, hit play and et voila, music. However, I also have a Melco Library, which is basically, and without going into too much detail, a clever NAS drive that you can connect directly to DAVE via USB. I loved this option. Go to your player on your smartphone or tablet, I simply used BubbleUPnP, select MELCO DAVE as the media renderer and select the MELCO as the library and off you go. You can also use this to stream from online services such as Tidal of course.

The tech inside DAVE is probably best described by them but differs from normal chip DACs in that

"At its heart lies a new version of the advanced Spartan 6 Field Programmable Gate Array (FPGA) with 1,000x the processing power of the traditional mass-produced chip DAC. DAVE's FPGA is loaded with over a million lines of code to confront complex timing issues head-on, with speed and precision."

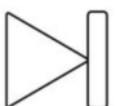
Basically, and as far as my tiny little mind will allow me to understand, this is a processor from Xilinx that Chord have written specific code for, and as such sets DAVE apart from the norm immediately. It will decode any of the files I had to hand and some that I don't have, or even knew you could get hold of including: 44.1Khz – 768Khz, DSD64,128,256,512, native DSD + DoP ...that should cover pretty much any eventuality.

SOUND QUALITY

Now this is usually the bit of the review where I start to tell you about all the different genres and tunes I listened to and try to convey a sense of what I am hearing using descriptive words and comments, but it's not quite that easy. My notes, and I have sat down for literally days if not weeks in front of DAVE, rarely get further than "The best thing I have ever heard" or "Wow" or, more often than not, absolutely nothing written down at all as I just got lost in the tunes.

Our Lampizator is musical, it is a thing of great beauty and it connects me with the music on an emotional level in a way I had never experienced before, DAVE is just like that, only more so. More accurate, more connecting and just breathtakingly good. Everything is of course there from the highest tops, the lowest bass and everything in between and I truly believe that what DAVE is giving you is the best (that I have so far heard) conversion of those zeros and ones into sound. I have played literally hundreds upon hundreds of tunes through DAVE and so long as the recording is good, DAVE delivers. Play badly recorded, badly enregistered tunes and DAVE is pretty unforgiving.

Great recordings on hi-res formats just sound incredibly good and whereas some bits of kit can err on preferring one style of music over another (when listening to the Lampizator for the first few times I found myself wanting to listen to jazz or classical music more than I would normally) DAVE just gets on with getting on with the conversion of those ones and noughts, whatever the style of music.





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It's an utterly pointless exercise me trying to tell you that the bass guitar line on Smoke On The Water from Live in Japan has the right amount of growl, it's meaningless for me to speak about the crisp hats flying about the mix and sounding just as they should on Once Again Back by Hardfloor before the huge bassline kicks in and destroys you. I genuinely believe that what you have with this product is as faithful a translation as currently possible of digital bits into something your amplifier and speakers can make sense of and I loved it. Add to the fact that you get a pretty stunning headphone amp that will drive anything and, unless you really want, you don't need a preamp Chord Electronics DAVE is without peers in my estimation. One thing I did find, and I do love my Baby Reference II pre-amplifier from Music First, is I enjoyed the slightly, ever so slightly, softer feel I got from going direct to the power amps, but this will be down to personal taste.

I never go online and look at reviews of products we are sent before I sit and write my own... and this was the case here too. However, once it was written I searched online and came across Alan Sircom's review which is VERY much in the same vein as my review here in saying it is simply the best DAC he has heard. I have considered long and hard whether to add more to this review to distinguish it from Alan's, but I believe in doing so I would not have been honest to my true findings about this exceptional product. Alan's a nice guy anyway and certainly knows his onions and so it is good we concur.

CONCLUSION

Pop DAVE Into a great system and you will be rewarded with what I consider to be the best DAC I have ever heard. Will it shine in a less than great system, I don't know, DAVE went in our reference system and has sat there ever since. If you have the required money DAVE is simply a no-brainer and will reward you with whatever your files are made up of for years to come. I prefer the black unit in its rack, but that is down to taste.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Rock solid and very well put together. The looks do divide and the remote could be more in keeping with the unit itself

Sound Quality: I have never heard better

Value For Money: It's a DAC, It's a pre, It's a headphone amp and it sounds freaking awesome. It is a lot of money but it is worth every penny

Pros: Stunningly faithful to the recordings

Cons: The remote is a bit plasticky and there is no digital RCA input

Price: £8500

And now Linette's thoughts:

Chord Electronics are a brand that divide opinion. Personally, I love the space-age, glowing look of their gear, but like any brand with such a distinctive appearance, they are not everyone's cup of tea. What Chord do is make Hifi fun. They make solid, well made gear that works, they give their gear quirky names and raise a smile...who else would call their DAC DAVE? I am always impressed when I hear their gear

at shows so it was nice to get our mitts on DAVE to sit in our own system. There is not really that much more that I can add to Stuart's comments. DAVE does exactly what it says on the tin, he delivers a truth in the sound that I just love. He is quite a diminutive little guy, he fitted into the system without any problems and is somewhat more user friendly than many DACs, that seem to have to be coaxied into working. I think that a DAC is really one of the most important parts of a system, get a good DAC and you have the 'brain' of the system sorted, it's worth spending money to get it right and I think DAVE justifies every penny of his purchase price...he's not a cheap date but you probably will be together for life. DAVE makes listening to music an absolute pleasure, he does his thing time after time and doesn't grumble. He really is a fantastic guy, faithful, hard-working, good-looking and honest...what is not to love about him? One of the easiest 'Outstanding Awards' to decide on.

Review Equipment: Laptop and various players, Melco Library, Merrill Thor amplifiers, Avantgarde Duo XD loudspeakers, cables by Tellurium Q, Chord, Atlas and o2A, balanced mains unit DIY.



REVIEW

CYRUS ONE AMPLIFIER & ONELINEAR LOUDSPEAKERS



Aimed at the budget market the Cyrus ONE amp packs a lot of features into its diminutive box, allied with the equally budget friendly ONELinear speakers you have a full system for a little over £1000.

IAN RINGSTEAD

I'm very familiar with Cyrus products having sold them for twenty-five years and having owned a CD8 and 780SE speakers when Mission and Cyrus were one company back in the 80's and 90's. The original Cyrus One amplifier was very popular and was loved by people because it was so neat and compact, being half width compared to the usual 430mm / 17" boxes. The speakers always proved popular and won many awards being easily accommodated up against a wall. With this new range now thirty-five years on from the original amp and twenty odd for the speakers, Cyrus as a separate company from Mission have put all their experience and know how into a radical new amplifier design and compact pair of speakers.

CONSTRUCTION

Both the amplifier and speakers come well packaged in neat boxes with good internal foam protection, an important point as not all manufacturers do. It's a bug-bear of mine that manufacturers go to a lot of trouble and expense to design adequate packaging for their product and then customers just throw it away never thinking about the practicalities of keeping it for future use in case they move, servicing or repair maybe required and maximising resale value if sold. I always told my customers this and have followed my own advice religiously. So, rant over with, well done Cyrus for taking the time and effort to protect your product.

The Cyrus ONE amplifier has been reviewed by Hifi Pig before, but as a fresh pair of eyes and ears I will give you the reader my thoughts on it. The amplifier follows the original models form in being half width, with neat minimalist front panel made from polished black acrylic. The main casework is solid and has a textured, rubberised and high-gloss

black finish. The front is dominated by the large round volume control and input selector. There is also a 6.35mm headphone jack socket for headphone lovers and a neat power switch. The volume control on the right-hand side has an outer ring of white LEDs that light up when the amp is switched on and as the volume is turned up the LEDs will light up in turn, giving a very clear indication of the level. The left-hand function selector has legends by its right side for the different inputs and each is lit by a white LED when selected. These LEDs are rather bright on full power, but Cyrus have thankfully thought of this and the brightness level can easily be dimmed by pre-set levels using the very compact creditcard sized remote supplied with the unit. I found this feature very handy. The back panel is very busy because there are a lot of inputs and two sets of speaker binding posts per channel. The mains IEC input socket is located next to the left channel speakers binding posts and then centrally on RCA sockets there is the input for a dedicated moving magnet cartridge with an earthing post, four line level inputs including an AV bypass and a set of pre outs for an additional amp for bi-amping or using a more powerful unit, not that the Cyrus ONE lacks power. There is aptX® compatible Bluetooth, a high power, high voltage Class AB headphone facility. App control (iOS and android) with IR remote control, user upgradable firmware allows for updates to the latest firmware for new features.

The Cyrus 3rd generation hybrid Class D amplifier gives an output of 2 x 100W.

SID – Speaker Impedance Detection which cleverly measures the connected speakers and automatically calibrates the amplifier to deliver the best possible performance. A large toroidal transformer which is the reason this unit is quite heavy, a linear power supply throughout



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CYRUS ONE AMPLIFIER & ONE LINEAR LOUDSPEAKERS



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for minimal noise, and eleven separate power supplies to maximise separation of different circuits. Wow, I'm worn out after all that! You can see Cyrus were determined to make this amplifier amazing value for money and feature rich for the modern age.

The ONElinear speakers are a premium loudspeaker system, which were designed to ideally match the Cyrus ONE amplifier, but also providing great performance with a whole range of other audio systems. The ONElinear is engineered with a classically 'British' linear frequency response curve. Cyrus wanted a completely neutral sound, so allowing the full character of the music to be revealed. The ONElinear bass/mid driver has a double-wound copper-coated aluminium voice-coil. This is light, and so produces a stronger induced magnetic field, therefore good control is achieved with the lower frequencies. The voice coil is bonded to a carefully profiled KEVLAR cone material. KEVLAR is light and responsive, storing little energy and retaining its shape well, so the audio characteristic is maintained even when pushed hard. The bass response is excellent for a compact design, with speed and accuracy. The tweeter is a textile soft-dome, having an extended frequency response.

The crossover uses high quality electrolytic capacitors to maximise the performance and the cabinet was developed using the latest techniques of advanced computer modelling and delayed cumulative spectral analysis which in English means that the cabinets noise levels are reduced (i.e. resonance) considerably by 35dB below the drive units output. The computer modelling was also used to design the crossover to maximise its performance. The ONE linear is rear-ported and designed to be positioned between 10-30cm from a rear wall. The best bass performance will generally be achieved following this advice, but as always experimentation is advised dependant on individual room situations and equipment choice.

They come finished in either high gloss black, which is what I was sent, or a gloss white, both of which will suit modern environments, and I am sure Cyrus had this in mind getting away from the usual wooden veneer.

SOUND QUALITY

After all the lengthy details of the products design what did they sound like? I used the amp and speakers together for most of the review period but also tried them separately to assess their performance individually.

The Cyrus ONE was no slouch and its hybrid Class D design certainly afforded plenty of power driving the ONE linear speakers effortlessly... or any other speakers I tried including my Audio Physic Avanti iii. I like class D amps and the hybrid design in the Cyrus ONE works very well giving a lively, open presentation that didn't lose control if not pushed too hard volume wise. I know this because I tried the android app you can download to your mobile to control basic functions and whilst trying the volume out the slider on my screen suddenly shot up increasing the volume to an unpleasant level. I muted the volume hurriedly as I didn't want to damage the speakers. Fortunately, it hadn't but it made me go back to the credit card remote which was far more responsive, and I had no issue with that. Applications on mobiles are all well and good but I'll stick to the standard RC.

I tried Nils Lofgren's classic album out "Nils Lofgren Acoustic Live" CD and the much-used demo track at shows now "Keith don't go". I get why manufacturers use it but when you hear it in nearly every other room it spoils it for me in the show environment. Anyway, the live recording was reproduced exceedingly well on the Cyrus ONE with all the vibrancy intended by the engineer and to give the listener the same experience the audience had that night at the concert (lucky people). Live acoustic recordings for me are a great test of a system as I can relate to them so well as I attend a lot of concerts. It's the sheer rawness and vitality of the artist in their element who is clearly excited by performing for an audience who appreciate their talent and music. The atmosphere of the concert was clearly conveyed by the Cyrus ONE with all the acoustic clues in place of space, location and depth and the audience in the background lapping it up.

After a few CD's I thought let's try the phono stage out. I'm glad I did. I hooked up my Luxman PD300 with my trusty Goldring 1092 mm cartridge as it is a mm only input on the amp and spun Kate Bush's last album of her live concerts in Hammersmith in 2014 "Before the dawn". I love her music and this concert conveys the atmosphere on the nights she performed. The audience are muted somewhat in the sound mix which quite a few fans criticised, but I don't mind, it's down to personal taste like anything. A personal favourite is "Running Up That Hill" with its intro of the keyboard effects and the drumming building up with Kate's superb vocals piercing the soundscape having great urgency about them. It's another track I never tire of hearing or being moved by. The Cyrus ONE handled this album well and I thoroughly enjoyed listening to it in its entirety. So, the mm input is well designed and compares favourably with other amps I have used with a built-in phono stage in its price range. Certainly, for those folks who buy this amp and don't want the hassle of an add on phono stage its ideal as it won't let the side down and fulfils the designers' intentions.

Included in the review package was the Google Chromecast package. Cyrus teamed up with Google and TIDAL, enabling the customer the chance to enjoy an almost limitless library of bit-perfect, CD quality music. The Chromecast unit is small and easy to use and anybody familiar with it already will appreciate its abilities. I connected it up to the amp and tried the Tidal website out with the promotional offer streaming CD quality music straight through the system. It is an easy and convenient way to sample music before you buy it and can save a small fortune in disappointing purchases. Oh, how often have I bought an album on the strength of one track I liked or a recommendation only to be gutted by the sound or music on the rest of the album. I personally don't listen to streamed music all the time, especially through my system at home, but I find it very useful on my mobile with Amazon Prime music to sample albums before committing to buying any. The facility worked seamlessly, and the results sonically were fine, showing how variable music can sound and I have to say a lot of modern music/artists don't do it for me. Call me old fashioned but if I like an artist enough I will support them by buying the CD or LP as I like the physical connection and ownership.

The last feature I tried on the amp was the headphone stage. Cyrus are proud of this feature in their promo material and are aiming it specifically I reckon at people who are into sound on the move using headphones but who also may well want to chill out in the evening at home without disturbing the rest of the household or neighbours. If you are a big headphone fan anyway then fine. I used my Sennheiser



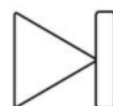
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Momentum 2's which I use every day at work for chilling at lunchtime, but don't use that much at home preferring to listen to my speakers. The headphone stage is certainly good and drove my Momentum's easily, giving a clear and articulate sound with solid bass, clear detailed midrange and sweet highs, a feature of the Momentums I really like. I didn't have any other headphones to hand, but I am sure the results will be similar with any good design.

As Cyrus state the ONElinear was specifically designed to match the Cyrus ONE amp and that certainly bore out in my listening. They reminded size-wise of my old 780SE's, but this new design is bang up to date. I set them up on my trusty Atacama Nexus stands to give them a good foundation and located them about 45cm from front wall of my living room. Running in time was not a major issue and I soon liked what I heard. Neutrality is what Cyrus wanted to achieve and although it's hard to say that that is the case (think of monitors like ATC) they certainly entertained me. They were quick and agile with a lively open sound like the Cyrus ONE amp with no nasties affecting the overall presentation. Imagery and depth were good but not holographic like my much more expensive Audio Physics and the bass was obviously limited by the cabinet size and design. This is not a criticism, just an observation and in the context of the price range and systems it will be used in, the ONElinear performs very well. I have high standards and having listened to hundreds if not thousands of speakers over the last 45 years I can soon tell if I like a speaker design or not. The ONElinear doesn't disappoint. As mentioned earlier in this review the music I used was conveyed in the same manor as the Cyrus ONE amp. That is, albums came over convincingly with good depth and imagery between the speaker's, but unlike some more expensive designs, lacked that extra magic of greater width and depth. The fact the ONElinear is only £349 is a real credit as it performs very well in its class. The bass won't plumb the depths of the lower registers, but it doesn't try to show off and try too hard sticking to the design brief of accuracy and control. The mid- range was clear on vocals with no real issues and the treble was not harsh, being well controlled. I acclimatised to the ONElinear easily as they did indeed sound good to my ears and very entertaining too... not all highly neutral systems are enjoyable believe me. Accuracy is a double-edged sword. Like a high-quality camera lens, it shows up in super detail warts and all (the faults as well as the good bits which the human ear may or may not tolerate dependant on the individual). Trying the ONElinear on another amp my MYST TMA3 conveyed similar results so confirming Cyrus' claim that they will perform well in other systems.

CONCLUSION

This is a lengthy review only because these two products, especially the amp pack a lot of modern technology and design into them and I didn't want to sell the manufacturer short on their benefits. Cyrus are to be applauded for these innovative products aimed at both new customers to our exciting hobby and older ones like myself keen to see great value for money product being offered to the masses. Cyrus know their customers well and thoroughly researched the market to come up with two exciting products.

AT A GLANCE

Cyrus ONE

Build Quality: Very good for the budget, the amp is well made and specified.

Sound Quality: Powerful and lively presentation

Value for Money: Great value given all the features and facilities on offer.

Pros: Feature rich, remote control, good mm input, great headphone output, powerful and compact.

Cons: Remote is neat but being so small could easily be lost. Android app is ok, but I prefer the standard remote.

Price: £699

ONElinear

Build Quality: Very good for the budget, well presented and nicely put together.

Sound Quality: Powerful and lively presentation that is easy to get on with.

Value for Money: Great value compared to its competition.

Pros: Good sound that for the budget won't disappoint and a neat compact design easy to position.

Cons: he black lacquered finish although smart looking shows up dust and finger prints like mad.

Price: £349

Review Equipment: Luxman PD300 turntable, Jelco 750 arm, Goldring G1092, Marantz SA11 S2 sacd player, Myst TMA 3 integrated amp , Audio Physic Avanti iii, TQ Ultra Black speaker cable and Way silver RCA's, Hifi Racks podium slimline.

HIGHLY
Hifi Pig
RECOMMENDED



REVIEW

KRALK AUDIO TBD4 SPEAKERS AND STANDS



Alan Clark at Kralk Audio in Yorkshire, England has designed a budget range of speakers and called them The TBD range, standing for The Dogs B***s. Ian Ringstead auditions the TBD4s, the second smallest of the range and costing £355 to £465, depending on the finish chosen, to ascertain whether these really are the dog's danglies, or indeed a dog's dinner.**

IAN RINGSTEAD

Regular readers will be aware of Kralk Audio's speakers as I have reviewed them several times. Alan Clark the designer and owner was speaking to me last year saying how he wanted to design and sell a budget range of speakers suited to the lower end of the market and for the price conscious fans on limited funds. He went around several dealers to see what was currently out there and to get a feel for current trends to see what he was up against.

The result was the TBD range. When asked what TBD stood for Alan in his inimitable Yorkshire way said "The Dogs B*****s ". In other words, the real business or deal. You have to love him for his down to earth sense of humour. Initially there are four models in the range, the TBD2, TBD4, TBD6 and TBD8. Matching stands are available for each model too.

CONSTRUCTION

To keep the costs down Alan has used chipboard for the cabinets instead of the more usual MDF or birch ply. Every model in the range is hand built to order using real wood veneer or any colour painted finish (extra charge applies for painted finish) the customer requires. Alan uses quality drive units and hand-built crossovers with Solen Capacitors and Falcon Acoustics coils providing quality parts for your money. Twin 100mm bass drivers and new 75mm x 25mm Planer ribbon tweeters are fitted for a detailed lifelike sound, and the cabinet is a twin ported bass reflex design. The cabinets are mirror finished for superior stereo imaging and the tweeters are recommended to be on the inside of the soundstage for best effect. Real wood veneers are used on 5 sides and black Leather look front baffle. The high-quality gold-plated speaker terminals are hard wired direct to the crossover.

The TBD-4 is a 2 way stand mounted speaker and was designed to give a detailed lifelike performance even at low to medium volume levels. They are suitable for small to medium sized rooms and come in real Oak veneer and leather look Vinyl baffle. Other painted finishes are available at an additional cost and I was given the Rosso Red finish to review. There are two 4" bass drivers and the twin port acoustic loading extends the bass for such a compact size. The new Planer ribbon tweeter is interesting and great to see in a budget speaker. The drive unit layout is mirror imaged to aid sound quality and stereo imaging. Also, a tweeter level pad gives the listener full control over the output from the tweeter in order that the user can balance the speaker system to the room acoustics or their personal taste.

The crossover is hard wired for extra reliability with high quality OFC wire and is a 12db Bessel unit with Solen capacitors and Falcon acoustics air core inductors. Terminals are over size 4-way gold plated with 4mm banana plug capability. The cabinets, as mentioned earlier, are 18mm braced chipboard with real wood veneer or paint finish. All internal bracing is screwed and glued for maximum rigidity and long life without rattles.

Alan supplies dedicated stands at an extra cost of course and a pair were also supplied for this evaluation. These are well put together and match the TBD's ranges looks of solidity and great value for money.

SOUND QUALITY

Alan told me he had purposely voiced the TBD4's like all the other models in the range to be different to the competition so as not to be another 'me too' speaker. I gave them a few days to run in and initial thoughts were mixed. A cross between a PA speaker and a hifi one



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was my first impression. After a few more days and going back to them I suddenly started to like them. You can certainly drive them hard and they are an easy load. The twin 100mm bass drivers pump out the volume and the new 75mm x 25mm Planer ribbon tweeter gives a relatively sweet and detailed top end which can be adjusted to taste with the level pad control should you prefer a brighter or duller presentation. The soundstage did not extend hugely beyond the speakers but remember these are effectively a budget speaker which fair very well against the competition I have heard.

I put a favourite album of mine on Wishbone Ash's "New England" which is 42 years old now and was made when they moved to America for a while. I love every track, so I never tire of listening to it and it is a good test if I enjoy it on a system. There are hard hitting rock tracks and some great atmospheric ones as too, giving a good balance on the album. The classic duelling twin lead guitar sound, is unique to the bands performances, and one of the reasons I love them. I saw them numerous times in the seventies. The twin bass drivers coped well with the bass guitar and kick drum which were the firm foundation to the tracks, whilst the lead guitars soared left and right in the sound stage and vocals were locked centrally and clearly defined.

The ribbon tweeters are a nice touch normally seen in more expensive speakers and they extend to 32KHz so giving air and atmosphere to the sound, even though most adults can't hear above 12KHz as they reach maturity. The human ear and brain are very good at interpreting sonic information and feeling the sound even though you can't hear it. It's all about psychoacoustics and I find it fascinating. The fact you can adjust the HF output is a bonus, especially for those listeners who are sensitive to high frequencies or helping to control more difficult listening rooms with harder surfaces and reflections. (Of course, you can dampen a room with diffusers such as carpets, rugs, wall hangings etc, but a tweeter control is handy to have). Cymbals and hi hats were particularly well conveyed on the track "In all of my dreams you rescue me" which starts with cymbals and bass interspersed with the lead guitars and the plaintive vocals. The track has great rhythm and is imaginatively written, showing off the real talents of the band. It ends with the sound of crickets on a hot summers night adding an ethereal atmosphere which the TBD4's handled well and then the next track suddenly rips in with great gusto. I like contrasts in music and both the speakers and Wishbone Ash acquitted themselves admirably.

When I went up to Alan's house to collect the TBD4's he let me listen to the bigger TBD6's and TBD8's. It was interesting to hear how different each model sounds, so I strongly recommend auditioning them if you can. The largest model, currently the TBD8's, are Alan's personal favourite and sound great on rock music, but they might not be to everyone's taste. Isn't that the point though of offering several models in a range? The fact they all differ

CONCLUSION

The TBD4's I feel offer a good balance of qualities for most listeners on a budget, or who have smaller listening rooms. In a cheaper system than my reference set up using the Myst TMA3 integrated amp the TBD4's were well suited and didn't let the side down. If you crave more bass, then the TBD6's or TBD8's will satisfy your addiction. It took me a few days to like the TBD4's, so either running in took a while or my brain was slower on the uptake than usual. Either way they are well

worth a listen. The matching stands complimented the speakers superbly being the correct dimensions, nicely made and great value. They feature powder coated MDF tops and bottoms with leather look vinyl uprights to perfectly match the TDB series baffles. Gold plated adjustable cones for the base and Sorbothane isolators for the tops finish them off. The stands are only available for purchase with the TDB range and aren't sold separately.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: For the budget, excellent with high quality parts and the usual Kralk Audio finish Alan is so good at.

Sound Quality: Lively and engaging with good top to bottom clarity for their class.

Value for Money: Alan has done a very good job of crafting and designing a cheaper range to cater for the budget conscious listener and finish is as good as any I have seen for a similar price from the bigger companies out there.

Pros: Great sound and quality finish, with high frequency adjustment, and an easy to drive, room friendly design. A range of stands to match are an added bonus and great value.

Cons: They took me a while to adjust to the sound but are worth the effort.

Price: £355 - £465 dependant on finish. Stands £60- £86 dependant on size and accessories.

Review Equipment: Luxman PD300 t/t, Jelco SA750 arm, and Goldring 1092, Tisbury Audio Domino phono stage, Myst TMA3 amp along with Temple Audio mono blocks and Tisbury Audio passive pre amp, Marantz SA11 S2 SACD player, TQ Ultra Black and Van Damme speaker cables, Way and Missing Link silver interconnects, Hi Fi Racks Podium slimline rack.



REVIEW

AMPHION ARGON 7LS LOUDSPEAKERS



Made in Finland these floorstanding loudspeakers from Amphion cost £3600. Lionel Payne takes a listen for Hifi Pig.

LIONEL PAYNE

Amphion Loudspeakers are based in Kuopio, Finland and were established in 1998. Although they began life as manufacturers of loudspeakers solely for the domestic market, more recently they have moved into the professional and studio market and I understand this has been a very successful move.

CONSTRUCTION

The Amphion Argon 7LS are an updated version of the Argon 7L's and I'm reliably informed that there are several subtle alterations with one major difference being the replacement of the twin rear ports for a pair of passive radiators. Amphion explains, correctly in my opinion, that this change produces a much more even, flatter response in the lower regions as ports tend to be tuned to one specific frequency and can sometimes produce a chuffing sound. The bass response of these loudspeakers cannot be faulted at the price point but I will write more on this later in my review.

Standing 1160mm high with a width of 191mm and depth of 305mm, the Argon 7LS' s have a modern understated elegance about their appearance. Available in a choice of standard black or white or a premium walnut veneer finish with further colour options for the fixed grills, they are a two-way design with the titanium 25mm dome tweeter set into a Corian waveguide which helps with dispersion as well as creating excellent integration with the two 165mm aluminium woofers which flank it in D'Appolito fashion. The crossover point between woofers and tweeter is set at an unusually low 1600Hz which allows the tweeter to handle all of the critical hearing range of 2 to 5kHz.

My review pair arrived in white with black grills and black plinth. I've never ever considered that I would like to have a pair of white loudspeakers before, but quite surprisingly, I really found them attractive as they blended well within my décor. Round the back are the two aluminium passive drivers and a single pair of speaker terminals. These terminals are like nothing I've seen before: made of heavy duty plastic, they will take both banana plugs or spades and, despite my initial reservations, I came to rather like and appreciate their well thought-out design.

SOUND QUALITY

One of the biggest selling points for these Amphion loudspeakers must surely be their claim that they are less susceptible to boundary interaction than most. I'm often asked what is the most important part within the Hifi chain and most people are astonished at my answer of - "your listening room itself". I'm sure anyone ever attending a Hifi show can fully understand this after hearing what appear to be amazing systems fail miserably simply because they do not work correctly within the constraints of the room allocated to the exhibitor.

I was extremely keen to test the Amphion claims and set about moving the loudspeakers closer and further away from both back and side walls. I can happily report that unless you plan to put these speakers virtually touching the back wall there shouldn't be a problem with their placement. Of course, that's not to say that given the opportunity to play with their placement, you will not be rewarded. I actually preferred their mid-band presentation the most when I had the speakers around a metre from the back wall: this provided a real presence and veracity to both male and female vocals in particular. However, the Argon 7LS



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loudspeakers are great communicators and can be thoroughly enjoyed from any position.

The largest compliment I can give to a loudspeaker is that they simply disappear and let you enjoy the flow and rhythm of the music and this is exactly what the Argons do. If I were to highlight any particular strength that they possess, I would have to pinpoint their superb bass control and output. They reach a claimed 28Hz at the low end and I don't doubt that figure for an instant. However, I have heard many a loudspeaker reach these kind of lows and still get the overall balance wrong, but happily the Amphions are bang on with their heft, tightness and sheer dexterity. Anyone who loves to pick out the bass guitarist, or indeed the drummer within the soundtrack will love these speakers. Listening to the re-mastered Beatles classic, Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band was a case in point: my favourite track from this legendary album is the final one, A Day In The Life, and the reproduction of Ringo's drumming is superb – or to quote the lyrics from the song in order to express my reaction - "Oh Boy !"

I paired the Argons with several amplifiers and found them all to be a good match. My reference Musical Fidelity Tri Vista 300 hybrid amplifier worked a treat and the Argons clearly highlighted the strengths of this amplifier's dexterity at the low end of the sound spectrum.

Listening to the track 'Horsemen' by New Model Army from their 'Between Dog And Wolf' album was a real treat. The track opens with an incessant low drum beat and an ethereal female humming. Listen carefully and there are also a few strikes of drumsticks upon one another and some background clapping in tune with the drumbeats. The Argons produced all of these sounds with great separation of the individual instruments in a most impressive manner.

Moving on to something a little gentler I put on Damien Rice's album 'Live From The Union Chapel'. Listening to the haunting duet between Rice and Lisa Hannigan 'Then Go' from this album highlights how well the titanium tweeter handles the vast majority of the midrange. Rice and Hannigan's vocals intertwine beautifully and the acoustic environment is very well laid out. Other amplifiers used were a pair of Nord One SE UP NC500 Mono blocks (Class D) paired with a Morgan S500 valve preamplifier, an original Rega Elicit integrated as well as an old classic Audio Innovations S500 integrated valve amplifier pushing out a mere 25 watts per channel (8 Ohms). All these amplifiers had the Amphion Argon 7LS's singing beautifully. Particular mention should be made of the partnership with the AI S500 classic valve amplifier as the pairing were extremely well matched and proved that the loudspeakers are easily driven and present a fairly benign load.

CONCLUSION

At a price of £3600 the Amphion Argon 7LS's are in a very competitive market with many rivals. What a product needs in this situation is a unique selling point and I believe the Argons have just that ! You wouldn't believe the number of audiophile friends that I have who struggle from one equipment change to the next without addressing the major fault within their system – the room itself. However, here is an alternative – a pair of loudspeakers that work extremely well in almost all rooms. If you do have a difficult listening room (there are many of you out there) you owe it to yourself to book a home demonstration of these loudspeakers. For those of you that have a non-problematic listening room please don't discount these Amphions

as they are rather good with that wonderful quality of being able to simply disappear and let you listen to the music. And if you love listening to tuneful and powerful bass notes then you should definitely give these a listen.

The Amphion Argon 7LS are highly recommended.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Very well made and solid design

Sound Quality: Good overall sound with tremendous, dexterous bass

Value For Money: If you have a difficult listening space they could prove to be an absolute bargain

Pros: Fantastic bass response. Does what a loudspeaker should : it gets out of the way and lets you simply listen to the music. Ideal choice for audiophiles with a difficult listening room.

Cons: In a price range that has many competitive rivals.

Price: £3600



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AMPHION ARGON 7LS LOUDSPEAKERS



REVIEW

TELLURIUM Q ULTRA BLACK XLR INTERCONNECTS



Ian Ringstead tries out the Tellurium Q Ultra Black XLR interconnects costing £540 for a 1m pair.

IAN RINGSTEAD

I recently reviewed the Tellurium Q Black II speaker cables and was highly impressed by them. Geoff Merrigan rang me recently and asked if I'd care to try their Ultra Black interconnects as I now had the Ultra Black speaker cables in my system. Of course, I said yes and promptly received a set of XLR to XLR 1.5 metre cables to use between my ATC pre and Jeff Rowland 112 power amp. Trying out cables at this price is perfectly valid I believe when you have appropriate quality kit and so I happily burnt them in and then started to listen.

I must say the build quality is excellent, as it should be but these give the customer pride of ownership and longevity of use. I used to sell all kinds of interconnects and it was amazing how they differed in quality of build and materials used. Obviously, the cheaper ones weren't as durable and if used for demonstrations they usually failed after a few months. Of course, in a domestic situation you wouldn't be changing them all the time, but even so it inspires confidence if they are built to last.

Geoff is naturally secretive about how his cables are made and what's in them, but states how they are designed on solid scientific principles and not alchemy. They act as filters and dependant on the materials used do sound different. To be honest I don't mind not having any idea what the cables make-up is and I think it's just a question of using your gut instincts and experience in materials technology and experimenting with different designs based on your given approach. Jean Hiraga many years ago highlighted that cables sounded different when it was all flat earth and only certain cables were recommended. I like many became intrigued and have ever since tried many combinations from cheap to relatively expensive cables, including interconnects, power cables and loudspeaker cables

I approach cable reviews with as much objectivity as I can. Do they make a difference and indeed is there an improvement in the sound? If they don't improve the sound, which is the main aim here, then what's the point. My close friend reckons if a cable is made of quality copper then that's all that matters and this cannot be improved upon...needless to say I disagree with this point of view and I keep an open mind and use my ears to decide. He is a sceptic and won't be swayed by any snake oil or wild claims about cable qualities.

I do use good cables and won't compromise given the level of my ancillary equipment, so the Ultra Blacks from TQ were a welcome addition. Immediately on connecting them up I noticed how clear and detailed they sounded in comparison to my previous cables, complimenting the rest of the system very nicely indeed. My Audio Physic Avanti's have exceptional imaging capabilities and with these cables in place I was given an even more three dimensional image. Integration from the very top the very lowest frequencies was seamless with a lovely open mid-range that benefited vocals and acoustic instruments. It's the tiny details and intricacies that make the difference for me when I listen to recordings I think I know inside out and suddenly hear new things and here these details I certainly did with the Ultra Blacks in place. Equipment takes it part here, but cables are the glue that hold it all together I believe and these cables pull an already very good system together to sound greater than the sum of its parts. The Ultra Blacks are not TQ's top level cable so if these sounds so good then what must the one's further up the range sound like? (Here's a review of Tellurium Q's Silver Diamond interconnects and speaker cables - Ed) Until you hear the better cables you don't know what you are missing, but once you do hear the improvements, as plainly heard here with these cables, it is very difficult to go back to a lesser cable.



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TELLURIUM Q ULTRA BLACK XLR INTERCONNECTS



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TELLURIUM Q ULTRA BLACK XLR INTERCONNECTS



REVIEW

TELLURIUM Q ULTRA BLACK XLR INTERCONNECTS

The Ultra Blacks along with matching speaker cables naturally worked in harmony and it is well known that matching cable looms are recommended as the sum of the whole is greater than the individual parts and I heartily recommend that if you own the interconnect or speaker cables then you should seriously consider the full loom. I had no problem listening for hours to my system and boredom never crept in, a good sign in my book. So often cable can increase sibilant frequencies or artificially bloat the bass to the point where it sounds unnatural and artificial...not so with these cables.

Price: £540 for a 1m pair.

Sound-wise the Ultra Blacks worked supremely well. Take Mike Oldfield's Tubular Bells Two album. I love this reworking of the classic original that everyone will know and prefer it in many ways. As he plays all the instruments and mixes them it is a tour de force of musical achievement. Dynamically it has big swings and the cables clearly showed and highlighted this and could react along with my power amp to the sudden changes in level and intensity. There are a lot of subtle parts in this album; bells, various guitars, keyboard effects etc. and the mix is very complex. If you listen to it on a cheap system you certainly miss all the subtleties and detail and you don't realise what you are missing until you hear it properly. The Ultra Blacks could unpick the mix like a difficult puzzle and reveal the answers with great aplomb. The Ultra Blacks do a fabulous job of unravelling all the signals and nuances in a recording.

CONCLUSION

The Ultra Blacks are a conduit to the sound like a motorway (on a good day) compared to a B road. In other words, they allow you to have a faster and more enjoyable journey than on the inferior roads. The Ultra Blacks aren't cheap and only you the customer can make the decision on whether they are worth the asking price, but my experience with them was very positive indeed. Any dealer worth their salt should allow you to trial them at home in your system to see if they work as you want them to and I heartily recommend that the Ultra Blacks are on your audition list if you are looking for interconnects in this price range. Not everyone has the same tastes in sound and presentation. Believe me I know from my retailing experiences how people differ dramatically at times in perception and expectations of a sound and system balances. The Ultra Blacks for me did just what I wanted them to do and that is to be honest and truthful to the recording, neither highlighting nor hiding anything.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Excellent for the price.

Sound Quality: Natural, open and detailed.

Value for Money: Excellent compared to some far more expensive cables I have heard.

Pros: If you have a good system then it deserves great cables like the TQ Ultra Blacks. Neutral and natural presentation.

Cons: None other than they aren't cheap, but still offer great value against some other brands.



REVIEW

ATLAS CABLES "THE ELEMENT SUPERIOR" RCA INTERCONNECT



David Robson takes a listen to the relatively budget "The Element Superior" interconnect from Scottish brand Atlas Cables costing £72.50 for a 1 metre pair.

DAVID ROBSON

It's been a little while since I've had some Atlas cables in for review, and I was pleased when Andy from Atlas made contact and asked if I would take on a pair of the new Element Superior RCA's by Atlas Cables Ltd originating and operating from Kilmarnock in Scotland since 2001, and making some of my favourite no-nonsense cables.

When new cables are developed or a new line introduced, there is always something in their make-up that is a little different from their predecessors or peers. This cable has some new technology incorporated within that is sure to boost the performance, without taking it out of its perceived value for money foothold within the marketplace.

CONSTRUCTION

The new technology incorporated here is in their joining of the conductor to the RCA plugs. There are several ways to do this, soldering, crimping and compression screws. There are pros and cons to all styles of connection, the ultimate aim for whatever connection used, it's to have as little effect of the signal path and purity as possible, adding or taking nothing away from the music being replayed. Atlas have researched and invested in some new equipment to address this issue and have found "Cold Weld Crimping" has won out over soldering on listening tests. This, incorporated with the 100% calibrated compression fittings for both the signal and return conductors has they say, very little or no effect on the characteristics of the cable. The internal copper cable has been increased by 20% to aid in giving a natural character to the sound. This sits wrapped in a stabilised foamed and polyethylene dielectric and polyethylene outer. The cables have their own brand non-conductive "Integra" RCA plugs as terminations.

These I have found to be very good on the other Atlas cables I have tried in my little man-cave.

SOUND

Out the box these cables are silver gray in appearance and quite flexible. The Integra RCA plugs look very nice and quite classy. There is no directionality printed on the cable so I hook them up in the direction of the printed writing on the cable sheathing. I hook The Element Superior up to my Dac, they slip on effortlessly and feel secure and in no way easily dislodged. Left for a good 72-100 hrs to settle them in, I pop Derrin Nauendorf's "Natural" album into the CD Transport. The Atlas cables are attached to the pre-amp via a digital coax and DAC then the Atlas superior to the Pre Amp.

Normally when I have a cable change there is an immediate change to my usual sound, there was very little change from my reference. The sound came across smooth and sleek, no obvious peaks or troughs. Mr Nauendorf's song "Too Much Wine" where the track is guitar and drum led with a smattering of percussion came crashing crisp from my set up, the leading edge to his guitar was sharp without being ice hard. The transients had finesse and lasting realistic decay. "I Won't Turn My Back" sees a single acoustic guitar and vocal come stirring out from an inky blackness. The weight of the strings comes across as clean as you would like, the Atlas Element Superior delivering just the right amount of detail to put it up there in the big league. Again, vocal bass weight is delivered with a great realism and has Mr N's words hanging out in smack in the centre of the performance.



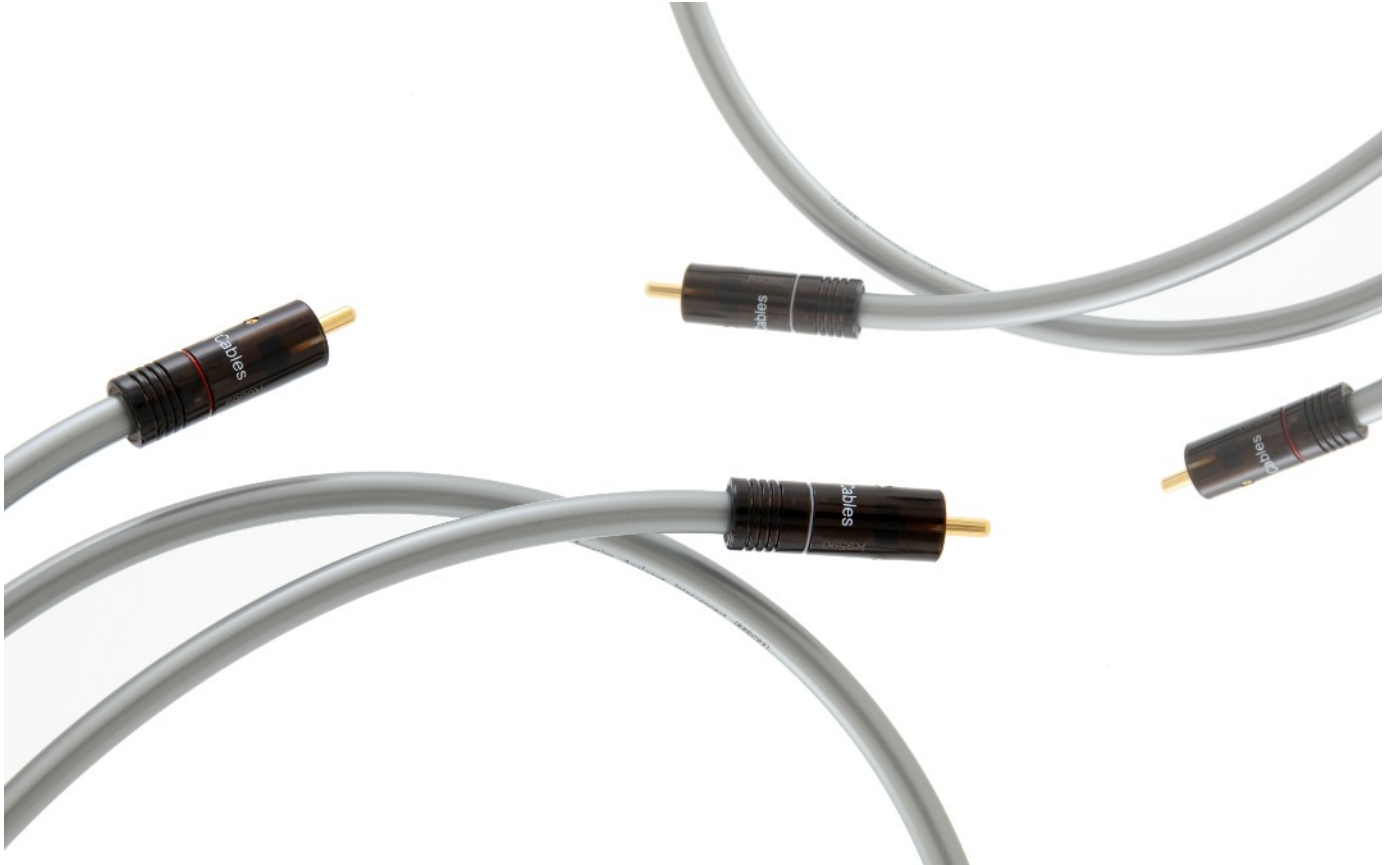
REVIEW

ATLAS CABLES “THE ELEMENT SUPERIOR” RCA INTERCONNECT



REVIEW

ATLAS CABLES “THE ELEMENT SUPERIOR” RCA INTERCONNECT



REVIEW

ATLAS CABLES “THE ELEMENT SUPERIOR” RCA INTERCONNECT

Swapping to an old classic, Dire Straits “Telegraph Road” The title track is atmospheric, the delicate nuances of the intro carry out of the speakers with deft lightness, the accompanying low bass rumble is tight and clean the rumble of thunder some way off in fantasy land, no fuzziness to the tonal delivery. Once into the vocals the Element Superior has great separation, music and voice in an open space, with individual instruments easily followed. During music with quiet passages you can hear a slight background noise with some lesser cables, the Element superior doesn’t suffer this fate I’m glad to say! This effect would spoil the delivery of “Private Investigations” again a atmospheric and haunting track, the Atlas brings this all together in a coherent musical story. The sound effects of breaking glass and shoe fall on paving stones is portrayed with texture and realism, not a crunch and scrape. For the cost of this cable it can easily play with some other higher priced alternatives. Together with the detail the verve this cable puts out keeps rhythm and fun factor going and keeps you focused on the passages of music and song, it carries enough bass weight and bounce so not to sound lifeless or sterile. “Industrial Disease” is a track that has this effect plenty going on to get your teeth into. The sound effect of air escaping throughout the track can become irritating as it seems out of time with the beat at times but it’s not harsh or piercing and becomes part of the entertainment. A very enjoyable experience.

CONCLUSION

This is yet another great cable from Atlas. It’s well constructed and falls well into where it’s aimed at in the market. Seems to have the balance just right. If you’re looking to take a safe step into the “better” cable market this is an excellent starting point. If you’re already moving up that Hifi ladder this cable won’t unbalance your sound, will in many ways enhance it.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Excellent, and surpasses its price point.

Sound Quality: Easy going, detailed and neutral sound. No elements that would make me worry about adding it to any system.

Value For Money: Another great cable from Atlas. Putting those on the road with a view to their first foray into cable upgrading onto the right path for very little outlay.

Pros: Great, even and balanced sound. Clean and neutral and doesn’t try to impress in any one area.

Cons: Nothing of note. Does everything it should and nothing it shouldn’t at this price.

Price: £72.50



REVIEW

TIMESTEP HE V LINEAR PSU FOR TECHNICS 1200 FAMILY TURNTABLES



The Technics 1200 and 1210 turntables are gaining a good deal of favour with audiophiles who are adding better arms, power supplies and more. Here, in his first review for Hifi Pig Alan McIntosh adds the £495 HE V Linear Power Supply from UK company Timestep to his own Technics 1210.

ALAN MCINTOSH

While the pedigree of the Technics SL1200 is clear among many generations of DJ's across the globe due to its sheer quality of engineering, robustness and ability to deliver time and time again without fail (in often less than perfect conditions) for many audiophiles it does have some niggling sonic gremlins to address – among them the power supply. Traditionally the internal power regulator has resulted in a less than smooth supply which is a weakness many can't accept – me among them. This is where Timestep ... well.. step in!

Last year as I started to mod my primary Turntable (1210 Mk3D) I had done some research and after many recommendations opted to invest in the then-current PSU on offer - the Timestep HE III - but on hearing of the impending release of the new HE V last month I had to try it.

The Timestep HE V (fifth generation in the range) is an external PSU for the SL1200/10 and a key component on Timesteps flagship modified version of the GR version of deck - the Evoke. Dave Cawley the brains and face behind Timestep is an award-winning engineer (specifically for Technics modifications) so he should know what he's doing.

Available as a purchasable standalone product designed primarily for the Evoke version of the GR to enhance an already quality offering, the HE V offers best in class supply for us lesser mortals owning the original turntables at a very achievable budget.

2 versions are available – Black and Silver - to match both the 1210 and 1210 models of the Technics turntable

As this is a linear, external power supply removing the original power supply and regulator is required. A single solder is then needed and

an easy earth connection to a screw point on the main PCB (detailed and simple instructions are included including photographs). A Furutech power cable then runs out of the deck to the PSU.

CONSTRUCTION

Straight out the box the build feels very solid, no movement sensed within the sleek low slab of steel casing. The transformers are manufactured in Wales to guarantee local eyes on quality control. It comes as a main PSU unit with Furutech female termination for the decks cable, thick solid braided power cable with male Furutech termination and then Neutrik IEC for mains. Connecting the Furutech cable from turntable to PSU provides a satisfying click and is easily released via push tab.

One downside of removing the internal power from the Technics is you also lose the ability to use the twist power knob on the 1210 (there is a further mod to correct this but feels like over engineering for me). The iconic strobe still functions but with the previous HE III this meant that unless you had a switched power bar your deck once turned on at the wall, along with all your other kit, was "on".

A welcome addition then of a rotary power switch adds to this well engineered and well thought out unit. One red LED provides indication that all is well when switched to on.

A visually austere product in ways but it's there to deliver power not to be viewed as art.

It should be noted the HE V is fully backward compatible with the power cable on the HE III.



REVIEW

TIMESTEP HE V LINEAR PSU FOR TECHNICS 1200 FAMILY TURNTABLES



REVIEW

TIMESTEP HE V LINEAR PSU FOR TECHNICS 1200 FAMILY TURNTABLES

SOUND QUALITY

Improved over the standard Technics setup – not “night and day” but every incremental improvement in your setup’s overall delivery counts in my book.

Using some reference track’s, I enjoyed listening to my 1210 with the HE V immensely – On Dave Gilmour’s Faces of Stone (Live at Pompeii) the details and decay on his intro give a real sense of refinement and clarity without muddy or loss of edge. On Zimmer’s Bladerunner 2049 OST the unit was able to support the power needed from such a weighty and dense epic of music with ease. It just felt like refined strength was on tap as needed. And no background hum or mains noise anywhere to be heard.

CONCLUSION

A PSU replacement on a Technics won’t be a existentially transformative experience as the original certainly isn’t awful, but that “less than flat” feed of the standard power supply can create a muddying haze on some finer details, especially if paired with the right cart and arm that exposes the issue (I’m using a Denon DL103r low output MC cartridge – I don’t doubt on finer arms such as the Origin Live Zephyr the difference is even more revealing) .

Detail is, I feel, finer and drive of overall sound just more solid – it may be confidence in what’s happening in the deck, but it’s certainly gives me comfort to know the sounds isn’t being fogged by a “saw line” supply as was the case with the original internal regulator and power supply of my 1210 Mk3

At the price point, if you are seeking a strong audiophile set up and want your beloved 1200 at the heart of it then this is a must I believe. It isn’t an esoteric piece of hardware at an eyewatering cost – its solid engineering, based on electrical expertise, locally designed and manufactured (in the main) that solves a genuine problem and only improves your experience and confidence in listening.

This is a solid, high grade piece of audio equipment coming from a well-regarded stable who focus on doing Technics Mods well. Very well. And dealing directly with Dave at Timesteps I was very comforted in his great service and approach to continuous improvement and excellence in his products.

A no brainer I’d say,

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: One word - solid. The Steel designed top and bottom are there to remove any last chance of resonant hum from the new higher quality transformer (which is where the majority of Timesteps costs are due to UK build). Connections are as expected from Furutech and Neutrik are leading class. Cables are again solid and come with a comforting level of thickness.

Sound Quality: Detail is, I feel, finer and drive of overall sound just more solid and capable of anything you throw at it. Add a good cart and pair with a suitable tonearm to reveal more of its value.

Value for Money: For some, spending close to £500 on a power supply for a what is a workhorse turntable to begin with may sound a lot but for me the HE V comes at a very acceptable price point for an outboard PSU, any lower and you would know the quality of build just couldn’t be achieved. (An earlier and slight less expensive model – the HEIII - for example did at times present a barely audible but present “hum” from the unit – one that is completely gone from this incarnation).

I am seeking to remove all weakness in my setup (watch this space for the tonearm upgrade) and power was one that is now off my list.

Pros: Relatively easy upgrade to apply, very solid build, welcome addition of power switch, utterly silent running, quality components all round. Reasonable price point.

Cons: Requires basic soldering skills which I simply don’t have, or a local shop to fit. (cost to me was ~£90).

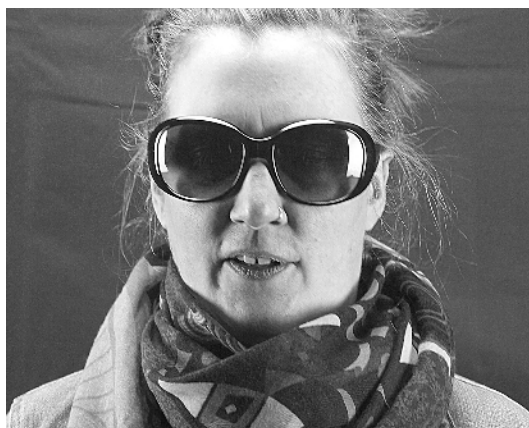
Price: £495

Review Equipment: Technics 1210 Mk3 D with Denon DL103r MC cartridge, Isonoe Isolation feet, Funk Firm Achromat, Pro Ject DS+ Phono Stage, Musical Fidelity M3Si Amp, DALI Sensor 3 Speakers, Ecosse ES2.3 cables, Chord Clearway Interconnects.

HIGHLY
Hifi Pig
RECOMMENDED



BIRD'S EYE VIEW



The Survivor's Guide To Munich High-End

LINETTE SMITH

Some handy hints and tips for making the most of the upcoming High-End Show in Munich which opens its doors on the 10th May for the press and trade and the public on the 11th and finally closing its doors on Sunday 13th .

The show is a mammoth undertaking for anyone, so heed her words wisely if you are popping along to the MOC for the show.

An advertisement banner featuring audio cables. On the left, a red box contains the text 'Tellurium Q®'. Below this, it says '10 products of the year awards & most wanted components'. To the right of the red box, the text '+44 (0) 1458 251 997 telluriumq.com fb.com/telluriumq' is displayed. At the bottom center, the 'Hifi Pig' logo is shown with the website 'www.hifipig.com' underneath. On the far right, there is a small icon of a right-pointing triangle inside a square frame.

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BIRD'S EYE VIEW



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BIRD'S EYE VIEW

You may think that I am over exaggerating, but unless you have been to the behemoth that is High End Munich, you really need to prepare yourself for it. 'Yeah, yeah, yeah' I hear you dismissing my point, but I've been for the last several years...and unless you know some tricks, you are going to come back sore, aching, bloodied and wondering what the hell you just went through...I exaggerate not.

The Munich Virgin

We have all seen them, and we all were one once. Do you remember your first time? Bright eyed and busy tailed, excited beyond belief that you were actually at the MOC for the greatest Hifi Show on Earth? Chances are, you walked in and then spent at least the first day wandering through the huge halls on the ground floor, not paying any attention to the floorplan and getting quite a bit lost. I admit, I still get lost in those halls, it is really difficult to remember what 'street' you went down a minute ago. My top tip would be, get a floor plan, have a look where you really want to go first and do those rooms/stands and tick things off when you have visited them. That way, when you get to the Sunday you are not going to have the 'surprise' that there is a whole floor that you missed out that is stuffed with some of the brands you really wanted to get to...believe me, a nice surprise it is not!

Take It From The Top

I learned pretty early on that the 'top down' policy was the way to deal with a hifi show. Most people (see above) will start at the bottom and wander aimlessly until they get to the higher floors of the show. If you get in and move with purpose right up to the top floor (after grabbing a floorplan) your life will be a lot easier. Those rooms on the top floor above hall and atrium four play host to some of the most 'must see' brands, but they get very hot and very busy...get up there early and then work your way down. However, if there are issues with the lifts (last year we got stuck in one for a short while with a huge German guy that thought jumping up and down would fix the problem) maybe take it as a sign that you need to reassess your plans and hit the top floor the next morning.

All I want Is A Photo In My Wallet

The chances are you are going to take a lot of photos at the show. You'll want to show your friends and put them on social media, or you may also want to remember a specific new brand that you have discovered and want to investigate further. So, this is my fool-proof tip. When you go into a room take a photo of the door notice with the exhibitor details. While you are in there take snaps of the kit lists to help jog your memory when you are flicking through your pictures later. Once you get into the hang of this you will realise just how simple it makes things, true, people look at you gone-out because you just snapped a door, but that's because they don't know how effective this tip is. Bear in mind we take thousands of pictures at a show, we have to be organised and it works for visitors too.

Footloose

This is very important. You are going to walk a very long, long way. I'm quite interested to see how far I walk at this year's High End Munich as I have one of those little 'prison tag' things that counts the

distance you have covered. So if you are on your feet all day then you need to look after them. This starts with your footwear. Go with what you know is comfortable, this is not the time for breaking out new shoes. I favour Converse, I never do heels at shows that I am walking round, especially not Munich. Mr Hifi Pig has had some serious issues with his feet at shows, being practically crippled and on strong anti-inflammatories after pounding the hard hallways for just a day. We resorted to special insoles for him that really do the trick, so bear this in mind if you have any kind of foot problem. Also, don't carry too much around with you. All those leaflets and freebies may seem tempting but be ruthless, and sieve out what you really want to keep. I generally refuse to take information that isn't on a USB stick. Your feet, and back, will thank you for it! You also need to make sure that you are 'Munich Fit'....if you are not used to walking long distances, up and down stairs and standing for long periods of time, then get some training in now, walk, walk and walk some more!

Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate!

You really need to keep hydrated. You are going to be walking a long way in what will be a hot but also very dry and air-conditioned environment. Luckily the MOC is very good at catering and there are plenty of places to grab food and drink...including a nice cold beer in the beer garden between halls 3 and 4. Making sure that you take a break now and then is important, it can be very overwhelming and you want to enjoy the experience, plus you will get to meet the nicest people from all over the world when you share a table. Another tip is that the water in the vending machines comes in glass bottles, take your own refillable bottle and transfer water into that...it will be one less thing to carry.

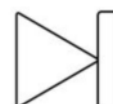
Weeeeeeeee!

What goes in must come out...take your toilet breaks when you can. Again the MOC has plenty but you don't want to finally get a seat in a brilliant room and realise that you should've used the facilities that are now a long way back along the corridor.

Form An Orderly Queue

This is where it gets a bit like a theme park full of rollercoasters, let's say like Alton Towers. It's really busy and you end up queuing for the next dem 'outside a room, in a corridor, not listening to any music and being hot and bothered. I'm not saying don't ever queue, if you are queuing to hear something that you are considering buying then it is really the reason that you are there. Now, I have the luxury of a Press Pass which does allow some queue jumping but if you don't then have a word with the people on the door and explain you are a serious potential customer and see if you can arrange a time to pop back when they can give you a more private demo. Also pick your times, getting to the room you really want to see and hear either as soon as the doors open or waiting until later on in the day is a good policy.

So that's it. If you come prepared you will thoroughly love the show, it really is the greatest Hifi Show there is. You will have your eyes and ears delighted and have a really fun time. There are other tips that I could give you. Don't eat the Weisswurst would be one, or if



BIRD'S EYE VIEW



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you are going to chance it then peel the skin off first. But basically, come to the show and enjoy yourself and be sure to get out into Munich itself, it really is a wonderful city. See you at the show!



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A Journey Through The Past

STUART SMITH

Neil Young had an album called Journey Through the past so I thought, instead of pontificating about this or that, it may be of interest to readers to see how I ended up where I am today in a musical sense.



STU'S VIEWS

Instead of writing about specific albums or records I thought I'd speak in broader terms about bands and artists, perhaps even movements, that had a profound effect on me and the way I view the world. All the stuff I'll talk about over the next few days will have shaped the person I am today, for better or worse. Expect these posts to be a bit structureless and rambling, but I do hope you enjoy them.

So, first up is The Jam

Looking at Wiki to check the dates, I'd not realised I was so young when I got into this trio from Woking. All Mod Cons came out in 78 and I was 11. I saved up and bought it from Casa Disco in Barnsley and was instantly hooked on the sounds that Weller, Foxton and Buckler made. There is something about a three-piece band that just sounds so right to me. The classic Motorhead line up of Lemmy, Philthy Phil and Fast Eddie is another three piece that just seemed to click with me.

The Jam were flying high and the record finishes with two belters by way of A Bomb in Wardour Street and Down In The Tube Station but All Mod Cons is one of those records that is, to coin a well-worn phrase, all thriller and no filler. To Be Someone is a great tune about the trappings of the rock star life until it all goes wrong, the money is gone and the cocaine has been replaced by ground chalk. English Rose is completely out of kilter with the rest of the album, being, as it is, more a poem sung to music.

I don't know why this album resonated quite so much with me but it did and, of course, I had to buy the albums that preceded it. In The City, the bands debut album, apart from Away from The Numbers, didn't really do it for me but then I bought 1977s This Is The Modern World and what a belter of a record that was...and still is for that matter. And, even though it came out just seven months after their debut album it's a completely different beast and much more mature in its structure and form...to my mind anyways. At direction on the album is by Bill Smith and you can read into it whatever you like but our eldest was given the name billy 12.

Me and a mate Eddie Johnson went to see The Jam a few times. The two times I remember most vividly were when they played with the Piranhas (Tom Hark) and The Vaoprs (Turning Japanese) and so this will have been 1980 and I'll have been thirteen...ish. I can't imagine many parent these days letting their barely teenage sons pop off on their own to go see a band but they were different days where stranger danger paranoia hadn't permeated the collective psyche quite so much as it has today.

When Setting Sons came out you couldn't turn the radio on without hearing the band. From the opening chords of Girl On The Phone it was clear that this record was something very special indeed and there is an underlying message to the record, for me anyway, that did affect my view of the world I lived in and that shaped many of the beliefs I have today with regards work, friendships and how I see myself in the world. Thick As Thieves is a story of friendship found and lost, Private Hell lets us know that we are not alone in having degrees of mental torment from time to time, Eating Trifles (Eton Rifles) everyone will know I'm sure, Little Boy Soldiers is an anti-war

anthem and Wasteland, I get goosebumps just thinking about the tune, is a story of love in a desolate post industrial landscape....

And when or if the sun shines
Lighting our once beautiful features
We'll smile but only for seconds
For to be caught smiling is to acknowledge life
A brave but useless show of compassion
And that is forbidden in this drab and colourless world

I love that sequence of lyrics from the song. They speak to me still as strongly today as they did when I was a teenager.

Smithers Jones (a Bruce foxton tune) made me realise that the world of the nine to five really wasn't for me and that to the bosses you were little more than a number on a card, an expendable commodity to be hired and fired at will. Saturdays Kids reminds me of going into Barnsley on a Saturday afternoon and having a cuppa in the BHS café and the lines "There mums and dads smoke Capstan non-filter, wallpaper lives cos they all die of cancer" ensured I never succumbed to cigarette smoking. The album finishes with the Martha And The Vandellas classic Heatwave and is as great a cover version of any record that you are likely to hear.

By this time I was pretty obsessed by The Jam and couldn't wait for Sound Affects to come out. Thinking about it now this album was a total change in direction for the band and I look back and just now thought "I didn't really get this record" but then I look at the track listing and realise that actually I did and it was a truly fabulous record. But, like I say, it was a change in direction and by the time The Gift came out in 82 I'd moved on to pastures new – I didn't even buy The Gift, which for someone so obsessed with the band previously was a bit of a shocker.

So, there you have it, The Jam. They shone like a burning sky for a few years for me, but they were a glorious few years that I will never forget, and yes, I do still play the records today...All Mod Cons will be sat by the record player downstairs as I type from my pit.

The Heavy Metal Years

So The Jam were yesterday's heroes and Metal was sweeping the nation. I'd started drinking in a pub called the Ting O Bells in Barnsley where the juke box was full of classic rock tunes, there was a weekly "disco" in the back room run by Mr Mushroom that played pretty much wat was on the juke box but louder and every week there was another metal disco at the Portcullis club. Hair was grown suitably long and I'd bought a leather biker jacket with the fifty quid I got for passing my O levels. The Ring O Bells was a bit of a den and SWIM was knocking bags of mushrooms out to the regulars in the back room as well as the Angels and Satan's Slaves...a pound got you a bag of thirty.

This was a time of Axe Attack and Kerrang and whilst outwardly I looked very much the metalist and did the whole headbanging thing at the rock nights I went to, at home I would listen to Neil Young, Motorhead, Simon and Garfunkel and Lynyrd Skynyrd. Others were getting into the American bands like Guns N Roses but the whole hair rock thing really didn't do it for me I'm afraid. I did go see Kiss in



STU'S VIEWS

the metal years, just after they took their make-up off but, apart from Cold Gin I couldn't name another tune they played. One mate was a mad Led Zep fan and bought all their bootlegs, but then he was on twenty quid a week pocket money, a huge amount of dosh then when I could go out with a quid, pay my two pence bus fare into town, have a pint and a half of John Smiths and still have my five pence bus fare home. Truth be known, apart from IV I didn't really get Led Zep...sacrilege I know.

I never really saw Motorhead as a metal band at all. To me Motorhead were a rock band and I loved them...it's that three-piece thing again. I went to see them a few times and loved every minute of every set. Eventually I started six form college, ditched the leather jacket and bought an Afghan coat and what with my hair down to my ass I looked every bit Neil, the hippie character from The Young Ones TV show. I was playing football for Tingley Athletic at this time too and distinctly remember waiting for the bus in Wakefield and getting Neil shouted at me.

Oh yeh, the music. Like I say metal was huge but Neil Young was becoming a huge part of my life and around the same time I had a pile of punk records given...Subhumans, Crass, The Mob etc and even started writing my own anarcho songs and signing them off Stu (Pid). I remember going to Sheffield to a punk night and my mate Foody coming out and jumping all over a posh car. I was driving my grans old and battered Escort MkII, someone took the number and we got nicked for that, but the gig and a subsequent squat gig in Barnsley really changed my life, my political outlook (which was already pretty anti-establishment anyway) and steered my musical taste. I think this will have been around 84, I was still drinking in the same pub and still knocking out shrooms but my musical taste was all over the place. Hippie dippy Americana, Southern Boogie, Anarcho Punk and wait a minute, what's this band of ne'r do wells blasting out their sonic attack? Well I'll be blown, if it isn't Hawkwind. It was inevitable really wasn't it. I loved Motorhead, had a head that was psychedelised pretty much constantly and was anti-establishment. Hawkwind were the perfect band for me. I loved them and they just spoke to me and given my love of Motorhead it's a wonder I'd not happened across them much earlier than I did. Of course, the Juke box in the pub had Silver Machine and, I think Seven By Seven on the B side so I knew of them, but it didn't really go much further than that. Hawkwind had an urban heads down attitude that resonated with me completely and by this time my musical diet was Crass, Subhumans and Hawkwind. When I went to uni up in Sunderland I'd go round folks houses and if they weren't playing Hawkwind I'd whip whatever they were playing off and put Hawkwind on...

And that was my musical diet from around 1980 to 1988 when everything changed.

You Got Into Further Education?

So, I got my four A levels, I know, no one was more shocked than me, and I got a place to study Environmental Studies in Sunderland in the North East of England. The first year was a bit of a catch up for those that hadn't studied geography, chemistry and biology and so for me it was a bit of a waste of time and effort and so naturally I made no effort at all, preferring to spend my days in a hazy bubble of

acid, dope and psychedelic music. Hawkwind still loomed large and I explored all the bands side projects too amassing pretty much a full catalogue of everything they had committed to tape. At the same time I was listening to other bands too. Dukes Of The Stratosphere, a spin-off of the band XTC, and their album 25 O Clock is one record that springs immediately to mind. This will have been '86 I reckon and I was getting into the likes of Lindisfarne and American garage rock – The Nuggets series of records always appealed to me and I remember thumbing through them in a record shop in Newcastle but they were just too expensive for an impoverished student to buy. I was also getting more into punk like The Dead Kennedys but was getting exposed to stuff I'd just not heard before like Gil Scott-Heron.

Me and a mate went to see Gil at the Newcastle riverside. Needless to say we were ripped on acid and arrived far too early for the show. The venue was empty but they let us in and we had a few beers and played pinball. Some geezer happened along and asked if he could play too. We obliged, had a few more drinks with our new friend and chewed the psychedelic fat. The place filled up, our friend disappeared and then the lights on the stage go up and there's our new buddy sat behind his electric piano at the front of the stage. Yep, we'd spent an hour or so chatting and playing pinball with the man himself but weren't aware until we saw him on stage.

Around 88/89 I took a year off from uni, actually I should have just about finished the course but for one reason and another I hadn't, and moved down to London and lived in a squat in Hackney. I'd already heard some of the new-fangled acid house tunes on a compilation called Acid Trax and was immediately hooked on the sound of the Roland TB303. I'd also visited a club night in Sunderland when the newspapers were full of scare stories around the new and dangerous musical scene. Music in the squat, however, was limited to a crappy old tape player and I remember picking up a tape from Dalston market called Vitamin E. This tape got hammered constantly and introduced me to The KLF, Hipnosos (Droid) and, importantly Frankie Knuckles and his tune Your Love, a tune that was to become very important to me in the form of The Source and Candi Staton's You've Got The Love. Linette and I got married to this tune and we still play it very regularly. Towards the end of my spell in London I swapped a Korg MS10 synth for a carrier bag full of CDs which had been liberated from Rough Trade Records. Amongst these CDs was a whole load of reggae including Lee Perry's Secret Laboratory which sparked my interest in reggae and, in particular, the work of Adrian Sherwood.

I returned to Sunderland after about a year, threw myself into consuming as much house and techno as I possibly could. Network Records played a big part of my life and the Yorkshire Bass and Bleeps movement just struck a chord with me. Unique Three's The Theme is a track that really changed how I thought about music and I'd picked up a compilation album of Antler Subway whilst in Prague and I was well on my way to becoming a full on Technohead. Network were releasing stuff from the original Detroit techno producers too and so that opened up a whole new set of sounds to me. A pair of Technics 1210s had been procured and I taught myself to DJ, eventually getting a slot on the first commercial community radio station, Wear FM. I even took a bag of records to Prague and bagged a DJ slot at a club just off Wenceslas Square called The



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London Club where I remember playing a lot of records on the Rising High imprint.

We were now in 91/92 and whilst my passion was for house and techno the radio station wanted us to play a Sunday lunchtime slot where me and my DJ partner Maz played everything from punk to rock to reggae and back again. I can pretty much guarantee there will be few times you could have heard Crass's Reality Asylum followed by Hawkwind and who knows what on a commercial radio station – that said, we rarely played the adverts we were supposed to.

Eventually we got given a night time slot as part of the Boogie Bass and Soulfish sessions on Wear FM, changed our name to The Midnight Train To Doomsville and Maz played dub whilst I played a mix of house and techno. I was now on the mailing lists for a good number of record labels and the tunes came thick and fast. I remember vividly the first time I heard Bizarre Inc's Playing With Knives on the Vinyl Solution label and thinking it was just such a different and creative track. It was also incredibly fast for the time – if I recall correctly it was 129BPM which was, when compared to some of the stuff coming out of Rotterdam, actually pretty slow.

We put on beach parties on the docks at Hendon in Sunderland which invariably ended with the boys in blue turning up and asking us to turn it down but this was before the criminal justice bill of 94 and there was very little they could actually do. I do have a vivid memory of playing The Orb's Little Fluffy Clouds as the sun rose over the North Sea...not exactly Ibiza, but I like to think we opened a few minds to the music with what we did. I played music pretty much constantly, morning and night and made countless mix tapes. Maz and I were getting a bit of a name for ourselves with tapes of our shows been circulated all over the world. I walked into a club in Edinburgh called Sativa and the organisers all knew me, had mix tapes and insisted I return to do a set of house in the back room – I ended up playing that club a good few times but also had a residency at a club called Fat Tuesday in Sunderland and was doing community work with young lads in Peterlee who had got into trouble with the law...whoever thought it was a good idea for us to teach them how to DJ must have been mad! Lin and I got together, put on a whole load of MASSIVE parties and eventually opened a record shop called Mr Music Man. We ran that for a year or so before selling it and moving back to my home town of Barnsley, and whilst I still loved music I'd sold my decks and tunes and was left with just a few CDs. This sort of closed that chapter in my musical life and so is perhaps a good point to stop today's rambling discourse for another day.

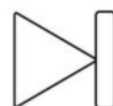
Back To My Roots

We're back in Barnsley, it's 96 and we've got a toddler and neither of us have jobs, all the records are gone to pay the bills and we don't have a hifi on which to play the CDs and tapes we have. I knew where I wanted to work and hassled the people at Yorkshire Post newspapers until they relented and gave me a job selling ad space on the phones at their offices in Leeds. The commute was an hour each way and so most of the music listening I did at that time was in the car – I even toyed with the idea of putting amps and extra speakers in there but in the end never got around to it. The CDs were mainly the ones from many years ago and previously

mentioned, plus a few I'd been sent and bought in the years Djing. Stupidly I put all the CDs in a couple of Case Logic style cases and threw the jewel cases away but fortunately both these cases got stolen from the car and I had a large chunk of money to buy whatever CDs I wanted and so I started replacing some of the albums I'd previously sold and a few extras too. I tended to go for the classics: Rumours, lots of Hawkwind...you get the idea.

Linette got a job working in Our Price record shop in Barnsley and I moved to work for The Barnsley Chronicle. A great thing about Lin working where she did was that she got to keep some of the promo stuff that came in on CD and one night she came home with Jay Z's first album Reasonable Doubt. I'd not been much into hip hop previously but this album blew me away. It was lyrically clever, if a little gangster, and it got played and played and played. I lost interest in Jay Z after his next album but I'd got a taste for a more laid-back rap style and particularly the West Coast G Funk style – Warren G's Regulate...G Funk Era being a specific case in point and a superb example of the genre. Mr Grimm's Indosmoke is another classic of this style and, if I'm not mistaken, has been used in a television advert recently – the track was also produced by Warren G. Now I know this kind of music isn't particularly popular in audiophile circles and I reckon a lot of this may be down to many not having explored it particularly, but much of it is funky as hell, clever and well produced, though content is often questionable. By this time we did actually have a Hifi of sorts having ventured over to Sheffield and Richer Sounds to buy an affordable Cambridge amp and CD Player with speakers been given to us when they were ripped out of my folks' pub – Wharfedale something or others I think.

We were also throwing a lot of parties around this time, well not so much parties as a couple of friends coming over from Manchester, us getting mashed up and taking the speakers into the garden in the early hours. How the neighbours didn't lynch us I will never know. Money being pretty tight music tended not to be bought so often and the CDs on the front of Mixmag provided a lot of our playlist. I Love 1992 and Funky German house were two of these CDs that we played a lot but also the Network retrospective and a Mambo collection that had a "Classics" Cd in there. We also started to go to a club in Manchester called The Electric Chair hosted by the Unabombers and they played an eclectic mix to an eclectic crowd that often included Hooky from Joy Division/New Order. We also went to a more grungy/crusty night that played acid techno and often got very messy, with Lin and I often being the main instigators of said messiness. I remember turning up at the door one night, Linette had a John Paul Gaultier dress on and I was wearing DKNY (I was managing the B2B sales force at this time and earning good money), the bouncers stopped us as we got to the front of the queue and asked us if we realised what kind of music the club played, suggesting that we just wouldn't fit in with the crusty hippe crowd. Our enthusiastic response to the bouncers was along the lines of "Yeh, ACID TECHNO! We LOVE acid techno!" Later in the early hours the same bouncers would come over to us on the dancefloor and suggest that we cease our "lewd behaviour" or get booted from the club. At the same club a few months later Linette proposed to me, I can only assume she was a little "loved up", in the middle of the dancefloor to pounding 909 bass kicks and soaring 303 basslines...well it was a leap year.



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House music was changing in the clubs and it was becoming much more mainstream with dance hits being played on Radio One and I just didn't feel the same for this more commercialised style of slickly produced, dance for the masses. It seemed to have lost its spirit and its sense of community, and that's perhaps why we chose the more underground clubs. On the acid techno front, I'm reminded of going to a squat party when I lived in London that was hosted by Chris Liberator.

Clubs were changing though and becoming more edgy as the drug of choice moved from the happy vibes of ecstasy to cocaine and, like the music, the whole vibe seemed to have been lost and we again chose to party at home, though we did venture to The Fruit Cupboard in Leeds fairly often.

One record from 1999 that really was a standout for me was Todd Terry's Blackout album. Todd, famed for his skippy beats in a house style changed direction and went for a harder, but still brilliantly produced, breakbeat style with tinges of hip hop thrown in for good measure. If you don't own this record then get yourself a copy, it is fantastic and often gets used when putting a review system through its paces.

But it wasn't all house and techno in our house. When, in 2001, The Strokes first album "Is This It?" came out I played it over and over and over again and thought that it sounded fresh, vibrant and alive...if a little contrived given the background of some of the members. No longer would I play just dance music or G Funk in the house and car, I was mixing it up with a whole load of other stuff from past and present: The Velvet Underground, Gorillaz...loads of stuff. The radio was full of a new style of music called UK Garage with the likes of So Solid Crew and Oxide and Neutrino being name checked...I just couldn't get on with it and to me it sounded like someone had taken all their pots and pans to the top of the stairs, thrown them down and recorded the results.

Around this time I'd also got back into making my own music, this time the 8 track tape and 16 channel desk being replaced by Proppellerheads Reason software and their other bit of software that had a rack of two 303s and an 808, all within the desktop computer. I loved it, and whilst my efforts never saw the light of day some of the stuff was pretty accomplished...I think.

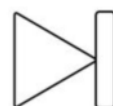
So, we were on holiday in Brittany, France in the late summer of 2005, returned home, I had a casual look online at property for sale, found a restaurant with a flat and loads of land and emailed it to Linette with a "shall I buy it?" note. She came back with an immediate "Yes!" and so I did and by December 15th of the same year we were the proud proprietors of La Petite Peche in an area steeped in the music and the culture of the Breton people, and so another musical doorway was opened...

Fortune favours the brave they say, but when you are in the middle of nowhere with a new business, only a smattering of the language and you hear that other expats Brits are getting their houses burned down by the Breton Liberation front, or whatever the nationalist nut-jobs in the area are called, you do start to question whether the move to Brittany was less brave and more foolhardy. However, we

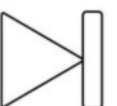
had a business to run and of course we needed a music policy for the restaurant. But before we can actually play any music we have to jump through hoops, fill in countless forms and pay SACEM (French performing rights) a considerable sum of money. We were going for a sophisticated vibe in the restaurant and certainly were not marketing ourselves at fellow expats. Menus were in French, advertising was in French and the menu was European in flavour. Music was an interesting one because whilst neither of us was particularly lovers of Jazz or female vocal dross, this seemed the perfect soundtrack. Madeleine Peyroux, Miles Davis, Norah Jones, The Rat Pack and even a soupcon of Robbie Williams' Swing When You're Winning. Actually I quite got into the whole swing and lounge jazz stuff but upstairs in the flat we had acquired a Revolver turntable and I was playing the handful of records I'd not got rid of. Rumours, Zappa and a bit of Hawkwind.

The Brittany Years....Love A Bit Of Brittany I does

Now, if you have ever visited the region of Brittany you will be aware that the Breton language is still fairly widely spoken. It's similar to Cornish and indeed, the area we live in is called Cornouaille. I found it fascinating to be going round the supermarket and to hear small groups of older people stood in the aisles and speaking this completely alien language. The whole of Breton culture is equally enthralling with tales of tree spirits, hobgoblins and a touch of the Arthurian stories. Add to this a whole load of megalithic standing stones and you get a region that feels pretty magical. The first summer here we attended the local crepe festival and my eyes were opened to the wonders of Breton music. That first time at the festival was a pretty moving experience and if you ever get a chance to visit a similar event the grab the opportunity. To see hundreds of people from the ages of 4 to 84 all dancing traditional Breton dances in perfect unison is a wonder to behold. The dances originate from when neighbours would visit people in their area who had recently moved into a new home and had mud and clay floors (terre battue) and the dancers, with their traditional clogs, would dance to compact the floor. The clogs are called Sabot and are made of wood and the word sabotage is derived from this (to walk noisily). The story we have been told says that during the industrial revolution the peasants (being a peasant is a proud and noble tradition here and does not have the negative connotations it has in the UK) were put to work in the factories where they, in order to throw a proverbial spanner in the works, would throw their heavy wooden sabots into the machinery in order to break it. Anyway, I digress. The Breton music is broad in its styles ranging from the vocal only styles of Freres Morvan to the more rock oriented styles. Whatever the style the crowd do the same dances and know exactly which dance goes with which tunes...it's uncanny and almost as if it is built into their collective psyche. The traditional music uses traditional instruments of course and the favoured instruments in Brittany are Celtic harp, Violin, Clarinet, wooden flute, bagpipes (every town has its own marching bagpipe band), the veuze (a bit like bagpipes and similar to the Galician pipes) and the bombard (similar to the oboe). The music itself really appeals to me and in many ways it is a lot like techno in that it is repetitive and cyclical in structure. Too much of it though and it can begin to sound like someone has stood on the cat. Anyway, my ears had been opened to Breton music and I began to explore it a little



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more. On the coast you have the Chant Marins (Mariners Chants) which are still massively popular. My favourite tune from the region is a song called Tri Martolod (Three Sailors) which actually dates back to the 18th Century but was made famous by Breton harp player Alan Stivell, whose father came from the town we now call home. More recently Nolwenn Leroy has recorded the tune and damned fine her version is.. Every year in Gourin, our nearest town, there is the Competition of Traditional Music but timing has always been terrible and we've yet to make it there.

Music is an important part of people's lives here and every June 21st there is a national holiday and The Fete de la Musique where every town and village will put on some kind of live entertainment. Not wanting to be outdone and wanting to show our love of music we cleared out our barn, built a stage (pink of course) put some lights up and every Sunday afternoon throughout the summer months we would put free live music on. One of the best people we had play was Dik Banovich who plays his own style of acoustic blues and roots and he really opened my eyes to the likes of Big Bill Broonzy. We got to know Dik pretty well and he played a few times and when it came to choose an artist for Linette's fortieth birthday party Dik was the first person we thought of.

Our house was always filled with music. Harry, our youngest had taken up guitar and loved the music of Oasis, whilst our eldest son Billy had somehow got into metal. It's a good job that now we have converted the restaurant and flat into one, that it is a big house. I was still playing techno and all the other stuff, had picked up a full Linn system for the incredible sum of 300€ (yes there was even an LP12 in there) and had begun dabbling with Djing again, only this time using Traktor DJ and some control interface. This caught the attention of eldest son and pretty soon our Saturday nights would be filled with us taking it in turns to DJ through the Hifi. Billy was later to move to Edinburgh where he became president of the Uni's Dance Music Society for two consecutive years and started to make his own music under the Lounge Panther pseudonym .

On the subject of techno, this whole area has a rave happening pretty much every weekend and we have attended a few. They are always free (Rave Party Suavage), sort of legal and the music is fast and pounding speedcore, acidcore and pretty mental (Check out the DJ Manu Le Malin for a taster of what to expect should you ever have the chance to visit one of these parties

The parties are incredibly well organised with bins, bars, toilets, BBQ areas and at breakfast time everything stops and people eat breakfast. The first time we happened across one of these parties was the first winter we were here. We were awoken at 2 in the morning to what we thought was a group of lads pulled onto our carpark and banging tunes out of their car stereo...but no, it was a few miles away in the next valley. Needless to say we did go looking for it. We have a friend here called Ifiq who DJs at these events and had recently squatted a quarry and its associated buildings. I've played with a few brilliantly talented DJs (Claude Young is a case in point) but this guy is by far and away the most talented DJ I have ever had the pleasure to hear. What he does with two records is absolutely mind-boggling but he has no airs and no aspirations to make money from it. True TEKNO!

I'd almost forgotten. Unbeknownst to us when we bought this place but Gourin has one of the largest gay, lesbian friendly clubs outside of Paris...it's also for echangistes (Look it up). Anyway, every year there is the Festy Gay organised by The Starman Club where floats are put together and gay and straight people come from far and wide to take part. We went the first year as the Front Nationale were making noises about turning up for a spot of "Queer Bashing" and we wanted to show our support for our LGBT+ friends. Anyway, the music in the streets was fantastic and we crashed the organisers' pre-club event and later went to the club itself for a bit of a dance about. We left the club at 4 amish and prepared ourselves for the five or so mile hike home in the dark. But no, i wasn't having that and basically hijacked a delivery driver and his van by banging on his window (he was asleep and waiting for the newspaper shop to open) and telling him he was our driver and he must take us home. Surprisingly he obliged!

We're very lucky to have one of Europe's biggest festivals take place a ten minute drive from here and it is called Vieilles Charrues where we have seen Neil Young, Lou Reed and others. One of the most magical musical experiences happened at Vieilles Charrues a few years back and on the eve of my birthday. We had gone to see Neil Young and he was with Crazy Horse, Dylan had played a year or two before and was terrible, but Young was brilliant, doing a fabulous version of Blowing In The Wind in a sort of "Dylan may not still have it, but I do" kind of way. Towards the end of the set they cleared the stage whilst Young played feedback from backstage, and newspapers were blown across the stage to mimic a storm. At one point during this "storm" they played the "No Rain" chant from Woodstock and Lin and I turned to each other as they were spraying water from the stage to give the impression it was raining...only they weren't, it really was raining – I get goosebumps just typing that. So, I'm fully Hified up, exploring new musical styles and genres and managing to replace long lost records, the restaurant is closed and I've got a well paid job selling health insurance to expats throughout Brittany and Normandy, but that wasn't to last obviously!



JAMES FLEMING



Virtuous Silliness

Truth, justice, rock n' roll, and how they are wrong.



JAMES FLEMING

Hey, don't worry; don't be afraid, ever, because this is just a ride."
- Bill Hicks.

Ignorance is bliss. Unaware - either consciously or unconsciously - of the truths of the matter, the 21st century runs its treadmill. Humming along with the radio, it ignores the soapbox-prophets trying to get their word in. The creatives trying to make their living fighting self-deceit. Trying to show us "what is."

Aleister Crowley claimed there was no sin greater than self-deceit. That to blind oneself to the way of the world or the way of the self was evil work. For as the comic-prophet Lenny Bruce said, "the truth is what is." And self-deceit is to hide what is from yourself. To deny the most basic fundamentals of the world. To deny the existence of the treadmill beneath our feet.

The function of a counterculture is to remind us of that treadmill. To remind us that "this is just a ride." The Hippies spoke through Bob Dylan, the punks through John Lydon/Rotten. They spoke the truth as it was then: That the past generation had failed them. And that change was imminent.

Both hippies and punks were maligned by the powers-that-be, regarded as dangerous subversives out to topple western civilisation. Simply because they brought the truth, not unknown but unsaid, out into the spotlight. Truths that the previous generation didn't want to acknowledge. For fear of the inevitable change.

And in songs like Blowin' In The Wind, God Save The Queen and the alt-rock generation's Smells Like Teen Spirit, the change had a medium. A church door to nail its manifesto to. The first step is to recognise the truth. The second is to spread the word. The songwriters who penned these anthems for hopeful youth were messengers between the young generations' collective consciousness, and the predators up the food chain. Creative ambassadors to the record companies and the world-at-large.

These messengers often get shot. The musicians spreading the word are often criticised venomously - or even threatened with harm/death - by the press, the politicians and the parents. But they are only the messengers, the voice with which we speak. They put in to words the unspoken, but not the unknown. "The truth is what is," remember. The musicians do not create the truth. The silencers, the offended powers, do.

And through our self-deceit we let them get away with it. With the war and famine their corruption feeds. Musicians like Nirvana, Bob Dylan, The Sex Pistols attempted to reach us through our clouds of self-deceit. So the third step could be taken.

Once the truth is revealed, and carried on song-back across the globe, it is then the audience's responsibility to do something about it. The truth itself is merely the state of things and not necessarily good. But acknowledgement of it and striving to right the truth's wrongs is righteous. It may be as absurd as Sisyphus trying to roll the boulder up the mountain. But it's virtuous silliness.

The truth is not the answer. The truth is the question: "What are we going to do about it?" Musicians down through the decades have

asked that question of us. Knowing as any philosopher must that there is no concrete answer. That only time will tell and that time is the curve in a question mark. Always awaiting tomorrow's answer.

Dylan told us that "the answer is blowing in the wind." But that we "...don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows." The truth may not be up to us, but the answer is. It is our course forward through the years: Whatever route we take is our answer. It may not be right. It may be to march on with our heads in the sand, humming along with the radio. To keep running this treadmill of self-deceit.

Despite the warnings of Frank Zappa, the Sex Pistols, Dylan, Black Flag, et al, that is exactly what we've done. We continue to deceive ourselves into submission. To forsake "what is," for "what we want."

"What we want" is an expectation, it is a goal. And to achieve that goal we must first accept and understand the reality around us. For we cannot change it until we know what it is.

Rock n' roll was born of conveying the truth, of revealing "what is." With its origins in the blues - a vehicle for the expression of black people's alienation and struggles - rock n' roll owes its existence to striving for change. For the documentation of the truth in the hope that something better will spring up in its place.

Sisyphus futilely pushed that boulder up the mountain, day after day. The moral of that myth is that to search for meaning in human existence is absurd. And that we have to be content with the infinite effort of the search. That the very fact of our looking for a meaning in our existence is meaning enough.

We have the truth. What we need is a solution to the truth's problems. We may never find one. Or find it too late for it to be in any way purposeful. But the striving for a better world, to right the truth's wrongs, is better than self-deceit. Utopia means either "good-place," or "no-place." And it may prove to exist only as a concept in the Shangri-La of our imagination. But the same was said about every human discovery: "Wouldn't it be great if..."

Good rock n' roll music communicates the truth. It is honest with itself and others. Too often it has become a puppet in deceitful hands. Reduced to a mere illusionist's trick, a flashing light on this ride called planet earth.

As we speed down the rollercoaster tracks, blinded by the neon and our own selfishness, it is easy to lose sight of the truth. Rock n' roll's finest purveyors are there to remind us that the path we're on is not right. It's only the truth. And as it usually is: the truth is ugly. But it doesn't have to be.



MUSICAL JOURNEYS

In the first of a new series of Hifi Pig articles, David Shevyn, General Manager of GIK Acoustics Europe, takes us on a journey through his musical history, sharing the music he loved, and still loves, and explain what it meant to him.



MUSICAL JOURNEYS



MUSICAL JOURNEYS

When you work in Audio Industry you are often asked about what equipment you use or once owned, about your journey with regards to your making, producing or listening to music, but for most of us the passion runs a lot deeper than this. It is music that is in our blood, it is in every breath we make, every step we make and every soundtrack we have in our head. For me I can't even remember a time without music engulfing every moment of my day. My earliest memories are of my Dad's record collection and Saturday morning when he spun his vinyl. His tastes already remained contemporary despite being a huge Beatles fan. So childhood memories of when I was very small living in the Midlands flash between Culture Club, Tangerine Dream and The Police on the turntable. Blondie and Roxette played on the incredibly badly wired cassette players in any number of worn out minis; The Jam and Toni Basil on Top of the Pops and re-enacting the Adam Ant videos when we wasn't busy pretending to be the A-Team. For me these tracks go hand in hand with memories of my childhood.

First Records

It wasn't long before I was starting to choose my own records and before I ever went out to the shops and purchased my own actual records, asking for an album for your birthday or Christmas was the only option. The first record that I ever asked for was pretty inevitable for my age group and can be pretty much put down to one horror inspired video that was everywhere at the time and that was Michael Jackson's Thriller.

It's hard to imagine now what a cultural impact that Michael Jackson had on the music at the time, but he was as known for his dancing as for his music and at a very early age the whole performance completely takes over you, but he was also an artist everyone in the family loved from my Dad to my brother to me. He really was a true crossover artist and the production in the studio with the use of rock guitars as well as those funk basslines and danceable tracks ensured that his appeal was universal. I may have been living in the West Midlands, but when you played Thriller you were transformed to another place.

I was 12 when I went out and bought my first ever single and my first album. By this time we had moved away from my childhood home of Walsall and was now living in Leighton Buzzard. This was the late 80's and bands like Bon Jovi and Europe was dominating the charts. Although most of us had not yet got anything as fanciful as Sky TV and MTV. We were aware of the cultural impact it was having. The only way to access music pre internet and cable TV was either the radio with programmes such as the Evening Sessions on Radio 1, The Friday Night Rock Night with Tommy Vance or on TV with The Chart Show or Top of the Pops. Mostly we just read about the bands and imagined what they sounded like. Maybe if you were lucky the magazine would give out a free sample tape. I wonder how many bands and fan fellowships in those days were made based purely on pictures and interviews?

So that first single was Whitesnakes "Here I Go Again" and the first album was Iron Maidens "Seventh Son of a Seventh Son" (which incidentally turned 30 last week).

Gig Addiction

When I told my Dad about this new music I had heard on the radio and that I liked it, it started off a musical relationship that lasts till this day. He would go out on Saturday to car boot sales and come back with armfuls of vinyl from the likes of Judas Priest, AC/DC and Rainbow. These would later be replaced by packages of rolling tobacco and Neil Young Tapes when I was in my university days. I was not alone in my new life of rock and metal though, I found others liked it at school and soon we were travelling to Aylesbury or Milton Keynes to see anyone from AC/DC to David Lee Roth to Kings X on a regular basis. I have never lost that excitement of going to a live gig.

First ever gig; Thunder at Aylesbury Civic Hall.

As the eighties turned to the 90's though life was about to change in lots of ways. This really was the start of globalisation and suddenly the whole world seemed more open to us, but more importantly peoples attitudes were changing and where one day people were very suspicious of anything outside of the norm, the musical landscape had shifted.

First had come all the acid house and raves which I was too young for but what it did do was introduce a tolerance, an acceptance that the underground could go overground and that the experience and particularly the shared experience of music was more important than the differences. I am sure the drugs helped too.

At this time what I was listening was also changing with metal being replaced by bands from the US that had musical influences well beyond the New Wave of British Heavy Metal I was used to. There Was Red Hot Chili Peppers and Faith No More (whose Live at Brixton Academy video is still one of the most awe inspiring live videos I have ever seen). Pearl Jam and Nirvana were also only months away from introducing a guitar revolution in the UK charts, but the band for me that was at the forefront of all this was Jane's Addiction and "Ritual De lo Habitual". This was an epic, inspired album that was twisted, had pop rock hits and semi tragic tales of love lost and life lost. This was a band that looked like they had escaped a freak show and to someone living in Bedfordshire it couldn't come more exotic than this.

I think with music everyone has a bit of a Eureka moment when their whole musical world starts to open up and for me it came with two records played on the same day and the same radio show in 1991. The records that changed my world that day was Teenage Fanclub and "Bandwagonesque" and My Bloody Valentine's "Loveless". This was guitar music but not metal? This was the first time that I ever got to hear what can be done on a guitar that was just shredding and it opened up a whole world for me and even better, these bands were all playing down the road in London all the time and were easily accessible. This was a time of T-Shirt bands like Carter USM and Neds Atomic Dustbin, Blur and the Manic Street Preachers.

Djing

By 1993 I had moved to Bradford in West Yorkshire to go to university. This was still the days where the student bars were packed, all universities had bands on but most of all, as any of you



MUSICAL JOURNEYS



MUSICAL JOURNEYS

that have been to university will attest to, it's a whole time of discovery.

The live music scene was epic in that area at the time; Bradford had the University, hosting the likes of Terrorvision, Cypress Hill and Nirvana, St Georges Hall catering for the likes of Little Angels and Queen Hall which had bands on everyday with Blur, Chumbawamba and Babes in Toyland all playing in my first week. Nearby Leeds had 2 Uni's, the Town and Country Club and the legendary Duchess of York, which at that time was playing host to all the burgeoning Britpop scene with the likes of Elastica, Radiohead, Oasis, Pulp, Sleeper playing on a weekly basis.

For me there was 2 life changing aspects to my musical journey at this time. Firstly I presented my own radio show on the University Radio which was also FM city wide giving me access to all the gigs for free and interviewing the bands and secondly I DJ'ed the local clubs indie nights. When I started DJing I still thought The Fall wrote 'Victoria' I was still that naïve, but for anyone who knows the scene is tight knit regardless of what genre of music you play and I was soon at techno nights, trance, drum and bass... It is east to look back on this period as the time of Britpop but my sets were littered with crossover acts that were just as popular at the time; Orbital, Underworld, Aphex Twin, Chemical Brothers, Basement Jaxx, Groove Armada, Dreadzone, Massive Attack, The Orb and many others.

Band Days

By the early 2000's I was back living in Bradford following a stint in Birmingham (Grandaddy "Under the Western Freeway", Mercury Rev "Deserters Song" and Death in Vegas "The Contino Sessions" was the playlist to my Birmingham days) and guitar music was in vogue once again with the emergence of The Strokes and The White Stripes; a bit like Oasis v Blur a few years before we had to choose between them apparently and this is where my musical journey took me partly away from the mainstream and resulted in GIK Acoustics.

I joined a band; Hoover Dams; and subsequently spent the next 7 years playing where and when we could. This meant that I got to see a huge amount of live music (which can be good and bad - eventually it gets too much, there a lot of bad bands out there too), some fantastic experiences, being on Channel 4, loads of press and radio coverage and playing some of the most fantastic and breath taking gigs ever. On the other hand this becomes your world. Those people in the band your life, and you see very little of anything else for that time. However it did lead me to having some of the most fantastic times and to eventually meeting the guys I would start GIK Acoustic with. Yes, we came to the business from the home recording route.

Now

Well my journey is still ongoing. I have the pleasure of working directly with the music creators and enablers and that is always exciting on a daily basis. I write for an online magazine about rock and metal and still go to gigs. I have seen The Damned and Black Foxxes so far this year and have tickets for Download Festival, Foo

Fighters and Def Leppard. I listen to everything and anything all day long every day.

The passion never dies!

Dave has put a comprehensive Spotify Playlist together for you to take an aural trip through his musical journey: [You can find it here.](#)



OUT AND ABOUT



Tape Nightclub Installs PMC monitors in Their Studio

ADAM BILLINGHAM

Adam Billingham checks out the exclusive Tape club in London and has a listen to their studio's newly installed PMC monitoring system.



OUT AND ABOUT

As well as a music and HiFi obsessive I have been DJing and producing dance music for over 25 years so when the call came in from HiFi Pig Towers for my first assignment, to attend the launch of the new PMC QB1-XBD-A monitoring system at Tape Studio in London, I dived at the opportunity faster than Tom Daley in some particularly snug Speedos.

Tape is situated in Hanover Square in the heart of London's Mayfair. It is unique in the fact that as well as a nightclub and private members club it also has a state of the art music studio. The main club is an impressive set up with a dancefloor for around 200 punters, a large DJ booth in the centre, a VIP area with comfy seating behind the booth and a good sized stage for live acts and performances. Clearly no expense has been spared on the design, lighting and main soundsystem (top of the range D&B Audiotechnik) and I guess the young, wealthy and beautiful people of WC1 would expect nothing less. The ceiling is lit with an impressive array of RGB lighting, the bar has large LED screens behind it with various funky projections and all around the club are strategically placed dance podiums for the paid or drunken extrovert dancers, I was tempted to bust out my best moves but thought better of it. The whole club had somewhat of a 70's New York feel about it and that's a very good thing indeed.

Behind the main club there is another room which is the Tape Members area. This is a 100 capacity room with the same quality and attention to detail as the main club. There is a bar, a small raised area which can be used as a stage, behind it is a brilliant wall of old retro tape machines and leather Chesterfield banquettes seating all around. At one end of the bar is a door sized, triple glazed glass screen where one can see into Tapes studio and I got my first glance of what I had come to see and hear, PMCs incredible monitoring system. For audio nerds like myself this was like staring into the wardrobe and glimpsing into Narnia for the first time.

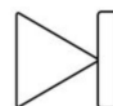
Tape Studio features the only PMC QB1-XBD studio monitoring speaker system in the country and to be honest when I walked into the studio I was quite surprised by the relatively diminutive size of the room for the size of the monitors, about 14'x10'. Was this going to be a case of overkill? My fears were soon put to rest. Chatting to Tapes head studio engineer, Heff Moraes, who has worked with the likes of Trevor Horn, Paul McCartney and Annie Lennox, mixed 9 number one singles, 10 number one albums as well as winning a Grammy and 2 Brits it soon became clear that Tape wasn't some rich investors fancy, Tape means business. Heff explained that they get a lot of artists from the US who come to the club and like to use the studio when in town. A lot of the artists tend to be Hip-Hop, modern R&B and pop producers making music for the dancefloor and in the US bass is important! One of the producers said he loved the club and studio but felt the previous monitoring system wasn't up to accurately producing the thunderous low frequency levels required, he had used PMC in the States and suggested that Tape look into it. Tape contacted PMC and a plan was hatched to install one of the best monitoring systems in the UK.

The QB1-XBD use Advanced Transmission Line Technology (ATL). Transmission line technology isn't a new thing, the enclosure uses an acoustic transmission line within the cabinet, as opposed to a ported or sealed cabinet. Instead of reverberating in a fairly damped

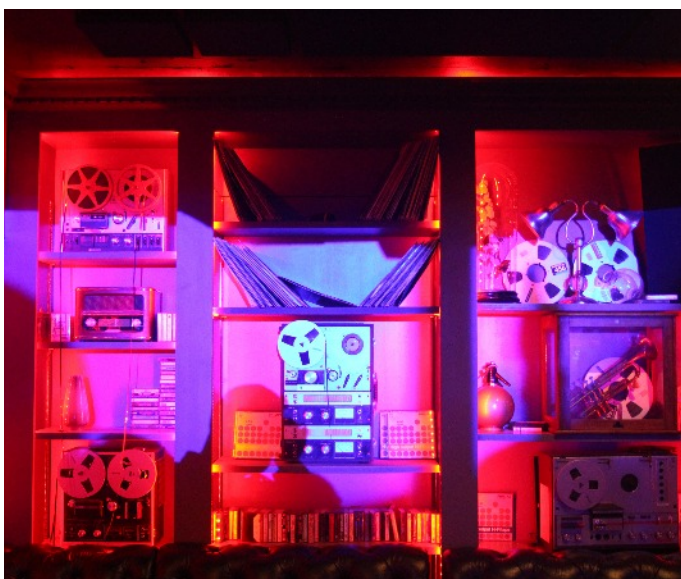
enclosure, sound from the back of the woofers is directed into a long folded, damped pathway within the enclosure, which allows greater control of the speaker energy when compared to conventional cabinet designs. This ATL technology allows for exceptional low frequency extension with no colouration, fantastic tonal balance at all levels, higher SPLs without compression or listener fatigue and is more efficient. The very affable Peter Thomas, chief designer and founder of PMC explained to me that it was only relatively recently that modern manufacturing techniques were able to allow them to create a transmission line monitor speaker of the quality that they were happy to put the PMC name to. The PMC team also worked closely with Heff and the Tape engineers to ensure that the room QB1-XBDs were being put in could handle them, after all there would be no point having such a high end system if the bass bounced around like a cricket ball in a lighthouse. All sorts of clever and invisible bass trap technology had been hidden in the ceilings and the walls of the studio.

So how did it sound? Well absolutely mind blowing. Unfortunately, the small studio was fairly busy with people wanting to listen and ask questions so I only had the opportunity to listen to a couple of tracks, a drum and bass track and a reggae track but I can tell you of years of listening to systems at HiFi shows and PAs in clubs I have rarely heard anything which to my mind sounded so clean and accurate. The volumes I listened to were at sternum vibrating levels yet the sound was so clean you could still easily have a conversation with the person next to you. The separation was so good that not only could you hear the separate sounds, but it almost felt like you could hear the individual frequencies in each sound. The high frequencies had a beautiful crisp shine without a hint of fatigue. The midrange is incredibly balanced with superb sense of imaging and the bass? Oh that bass. It's the kind of bass you'd take out for dinner and ask its hand in marriage at the end of the night. Despite the bone shattering volumes it was taught, crisp with the kind of punch you'd expect from Anthony Joshua and the precision of a laser guided missile. What can I say, I'm in love!

PMC and Tape have done an incredible job of producing one of, if not the best sounding small studios in the country and I only hope some of our brilliant UK producers and artists get to use it, we can't let our American cousins have all the fun. As for me, I cannot look at my Yamaha NS 10's anymore, they know something is up but alas they have nothing to fear, I feel it might be quite a while before I have the 100k plus to replace them with the QB1-XBD.



OUT AND ABOUT



LIVE MUSIC

RUMOURS OF FLEETWOOD MAC – The Queen's Hall, Edinburgh by John Scott

It has been just over two years since the last time I saw Rumours Of Fleetwood Mac perform. The hook for this current tour is a 40th anniversary celebration of the Rumours album, although we are actually now closer to the 41st anniversary. The band has recently undergone a radical restructuring with original members Allan Cosgrove on drums and Dave Goldberg on keyboards, guitar and vocals being joined by two new female vocalists, and a new bassist and guitarist.

These changes have gone largely unannounced and have taken some of the band's loyal fans by surprise but in my opinion they have resulted in the band being even better than they were before.

Speaking of loyal fans, earwigging into the conversations going on around me before the show reveals a number of people who have seen the band four or five times and who have traveled hundreds of miles to be here. There's a real buzz in the room; it's Saturday night and people are clearly out to have a great time.

The show opens with a video introduction from Mick Fleetwood as the band take to the stage, as good an endorsement as a tribute band could possibly have. Singer Emily Gervers, who sings and plays Christine McVie's parts, explains that for the first set the band will play the Rumours album "note for note, in its entirety". From the opening notes of Second Hand News, they do exactly that and the audience lap it up. While I totally get that Rumours is an absolute classic of the AOR genre, I've never really been a massive fan. Even I can't deny, however, how well all of the songs stand up in performance; there is not a duff song here. Occasional between-song video clips from Fleetwood, Christine McVie and Stevie Nicks, taken from old documentary footage, help to set the album in context and tell the famous story of the internal band struggles during the time the album was recorded.

Old favourites like Don't Stop, Go Your Own Way, The Chain and Songbird are obvious standouts but less obvious tracks such as Oh Daddy and Gold Dust Woman also shine. Jess Harwood shares vocal duties, taking Stevie Nicks' parts while Scott Poley and James Harrison, both on guitar and vocals, have all of Lindsay Buckingham's parts covered. The first set ends with Silver Springs, which was recorded for the Rumours album but had to be left off due to lack of space.

The start of the second set takes us back to the band's Peter Green-led era. Dave Goldberg, who has spent the first half of the show hidden behind a bank of keyboards, takes on guitar and lead vocals for this section. Black Magic Woman, Man Of The World, Green Manalishi, Albatross and Need Your Love So Bad showcase this period of the band's history.

Gervers and Harwood return for a final section that wraps up the non-Rumours hits from the Buckingham/Nicks era along with a

couple of lesser known songs. Encores Big Love and the fantastically mad Tusk bring the night to a close. Rumours Of Fleetwood Mac are a bit more than just a tribute band, they are keeping the spirit of Fleetwood Mac alive and their audience love them for it.

Setlist

Second Hand News, Dreams, Never Going Back Again, Don't Stop, Go Your Own Way, Songbird, The Chain, You Make Loving Fun, I Don't Want To Know, Oh Daddy, Gold Dust Woman, Silver silver Springs, Black Magic Woman, Green Manalishi, Albatross @Cover, Need Your Love So Bad, Man Of The World, Oh Well, Gypsy, Seven Wonders, I'm So Afraid, Sara, Landslide, Little Lies, World Turning, Everywhere, Rhiannon, Big Love, Tusk



LIVE MUSIC



LIVE MUSIC



LIVE MUSIC

CHRYSTA BELL – The Voodoo Rooms, Edinburgh by John Scott

Texan singer Chrysta Bell first came to my notice when she played Agent Tammy Preston in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks: The Return*. CB, as she is known to her band mates, first met Lynch in 1999 and they have worked together on a number of musical projects including her debut solo album *This Train* and a 5 track EP *Somewhere In The Nowhere*, both of which were co-written and produced by Lynch.

Last year saw the release of Chrysta Bell's most recent album *We Dissolve*, produced by PJ Harvey collaborator John Parish, featuring guest musicians Adrian Utley (Portishead), Geoff Downes (Buggles, Yes, Asia) and Stephen O'Malley of Sunn O))). Having toured the album and stopped at The Voodoo Rooms last year, a show I regrettably missed, she's back here again to play to a capacity crowd.

Abstract images of trees and stone play on the rear of the stage accompanying a taped soundscape. Chrysta Bell takes to the stage, twisting and turning; not so much dancing as being inhabited by the music around her. A massive snare hit from drummer Jayson Altman scares me out of my skin and we're off into the first song, 52 Hz. Immediately, I wonder if CB might actually stand for Charisma in Bucketloads, as Chrysta Bell certainly has it. It seems unlikely though; I don't think bucketloads is a particularly Texan expression.

More plausibly, it could also stand for Confidently Beautiful as CB is nothing if not poised, elegant and, it has to be said, stunningly attractive. Setting that aside, her voice is equally stunning; capable of a tender whisper one minute and a shrieking roar the next. As guitarist Jon Sanchez carves out layers of vibrato-soaked chords and baritone bass string twangs, I'm reminded of another *Twin Peaks* special agent: Chester Desmond, or more specifically the actor and singer who played him, Chris Issak; were Issak's songs to be steeped in a barrel of quaaludes and ketamine and hung out to dry.

In a set that moves from keening, yearning dream-poppy songs of desire to primordial, swampy rock and roll thrashcore driven by bassist Chris Smart, Chrysta Bell and her band provide an unforgettable evening. In the final song *Swing With Me*, CB sings: "I wish this night would never end". Yeah, me too; but end it must. I'm already looking forward to Chrysta Bell: *The Return*.

Setlist

52 Hz, Devil Inside Me, Night Ride, Friday Night Fly, Somewhere In The Nowhere, Blue Rose, We Dissolve, Beat The Beat, Undertow, Down By Babylon, Real Love, Sycamore Trees / This Train, Everest, Beautiful, Planet Wide, Swing With Me,



LIVE MUSIC



LIVE MUSIC

NEARLY DAN – The Voodoo Rooms, Edinburgh by John Scott

I've been a bit sniffy about tribute bands in the past, and deep in my bones I suspect I always might be; it's the "it's not really them" factor I suppose. But having seen three of the best in the business: The Australian Pink Floyd, The Musical Box and Rumours Of Fleetwood Mac, I've learned to appreciate how seriously these bands take the work they do and how much their fans love it as well.

Just like the previously mentioned tribute bands, Nearly Dan have built up a loyal following over their 21-year history. The Ballroom at The Voodoo Rooms is crammed to capacity with fans who have seen the band before and when the nine-piece band take to the stage they are welcomed like old friends.

One thing is for sure; if you are going to be a Steely Dan tribute band then being merely good just isn't good enough; you need to be exceptional and right from the outset Nearly Dan show that they are up to the task. A brisk run through The Boston Rag from The Dan's Countdown To Ecstasy gets both the band and the audience warmed up nicely. Dr Wu features the first of several fine solos from sax player Tim France. Lead singer and guitarist Steve Hayes describes Everything You Did as a work in progress that they have previously shied away from due to the "impossible" guitar solo. Lead guitarist Rob Rolph makes a perfectly good fist of it as far as I can see but it is clear that the band feel that they haven't quite nailed this one yet.

As the evening progresses it becomes increasingly clear just what a superb bunch of musicians Nearly Dan are. Steve Hayes USA fine guitarist in his own right. Trumpeter Phil Nichols meshes effortlessly with France and delivers some excellent solos as well. Bandleader and keyboard player Gary Davies simply gets on with the job of providing a solid backbone for the rest of the band, as does drummer Carl Hemingsley. It seems unfair to single out one of the band for particular praise but bassist Ollie Collins is simply superb, despite appearing to have some technical issues with his five string bass. My only criticism of the gig is that backing vocalists Kate Robertson and Sarah Miller are rather too buried in the mix.

The band's first set is impressive enough but the second set really pulls out all the stops. Do It Again, Black Friday, Kid Charlemagne, Reelin' In The Years and Bodhisattva – what a set of songs. For the encore the band play what Steve describes as "the 12" version" of My Od School, my favourite Steely Dan song. If Steely Dan had ever played Freebird, this is probably what it would have sounded like. Steve and Rob trade guitar lines, Ollie dazzles on bass and the band stop dead so that Phil and Tim can make the sound of California tumbling into the sea.

Nearly Dan might not be Steely Dan but they are nearly, and tonight that is more than enough.



LIVE MUSIC



LIVE MUSIC



LIVE MUSIC

BRYAN FERRY – The Usher Hall, Edinburgh by John Scott

Bryan's back in town and the Ferry fans are out in force; it seems unlikely that a bleached blonde in a blingy black blouse will anywhere to be seen outside of the Usher Hall tonight. And that's as it should be; after all, septuagenarian sex symbols are in short supply and who knows when this one will pass this way again.

Ferry arrives on stage, still looking every inch the elegant flâneur in a rumpled suit and open-necked shirt. His smile remains boyish, eyes twinkling from under those famous languid lids and if there is a touch more grey in his carefully coiffured quiff, then that is only to be expected. The evening opens strongly with *The Main Thing*, *Ladytron* and *Slave To Love*. The set then settles down to a sedate pace with some of the slower songs from the Ferry/Roxy catalogue before *Re-Make/Re-Model* picks things up again and takes us right back to Roxy Music's 1972 debut; Jorja Chalmers on sax and one-time Womble Chris Spedding on guitar convincingly covering Andy Mackay and Phil Manzanera's sax and guitar parts.

And then there is *In Every Dream Home A Heartache*, Ferry's love song to an inflatable doll. There ought to be scope for Bryan to breathe new life into this; you would think that singing it as a 72 year-old would bring some change of perspective or added pathos but tonight it just seems awkward.

Ferry spends much of this section of the show behind an electric piano, seemingly because it affords him an opportunity to sit down rather than any particular requirement or desire on his part to play it. The slow numbers continue: *More Than This*, *Bête Noir*, *Bitter-Sweet*. A couple of Ferry's classic American Songbook covers, say *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*, *These Foolish Things* or *As Time Goes By*, might have helped here, retaining the slow pace but varying the tone. And where are the Dylan songs? Ferry is one of Bob's best interpreters and earlier shows on the tour have seen *Simple Twist Of Fate* and *Don't Think Twice It's Alright* given an airing but they are absent tonight.

All is forgiven though for the final section of the show: *Love Is The Drug*, *Virginia Plain* and *Let's Stick Together*. Bryan is back on his feet, sashaying across the stage almost like it's 1974. *Jealous Guy* and *Do The Strand* provide the expected encores but a cover of Sam and Dave's *Hold On, I'm Comin'* is a welcome surprise. Ferry's stamina may be waning but his power to charm remains undimmed. As the blingy black blouses spill out to the street, I can't help but wonder if this will be the last time they'll fall under his spell.

Setlist

The Main Thing, *Slave to Love*, *Ladytron*, *Out of the Blue*, *A Waste Land / Windswept*, *Zamba*, *Oh Yeah*, *If There Is Something*, *Re-Make/Re-Model*, *Avalon*, *In Every Dream Home a Heartache*, *More Than This*, *Bête Noire*, *Bitter-Sweet*, *Love Is the Drug*, *Virginia Plain*, *Let's Stick Together*, *Jealous Guy*, *Editions of You*, *Do the Strand*, *Hold On, I'm Comin'*,



LIVE MUSIC



LIVE MUSIC



LIVE MUSIC

LONDON ASTROBEAT ORCHESTRA – The Voodoo Rooms, Edinburgh by John Scott

London Astrobeat Orchestra are touring throughout the year. Look out for them coming your way

Edinburgh in March can be a cold, damp, miserable place. So used are we to wet, windy weather that we even have a special adjective to describe it: Dreich. If only there was a band who could bring a waft of warmth, a shaft of sunshine, a hint of hot African nights. Step forward then, London Astrobeat Orchestra for a two night residency at The Voodoo Rooms.

London Astrobeat Orchestra fuse West African rhythms with the nervy New York funk of post punk pioneers Talking Heads. It's a perfect fit; David Byrne had looked towards Africa for rhythmic inspiration as far back as 1980's *Remain In Light* album. London Astrobeat Orchestra go further, infusing Byrne's songs with intricate, interlocking guitar, bass and drum patterns with the kora – a traditional African instrument – for added authenticity. Kicking off with *Burning Down The House* from the Heads' album *Speaking In Tongues*, London Astrobeat Orchestra suck us into into a groove so tight and intricate that it threatens to mess with the space/time continuum.

Life During Wartime and *Once In A Lifetime* are equally absorbing. The band use the framework of the Talking Heads songs as a launchpad to spin out a series of dazzling musical excursions. Time and again I find myself having to consciously withdraw from the music so that I can objectively observe what is happening in front of me. Which song is this again? Does it matter? Do I care? Not in the slightest.

Unbound by the task of having to write a review afterwards, the rest of the audience certainly don't care. The room is bouncing in a frenzy; guitarist Kingfire D Isakongo teaches us some dance moves straight out of Congo. Such is the enthusiasm of the young lady to my left, that the camera on which I am attempting to video this mayhem is sent spinning from my hand.

Slowing things down for a much needed breather, singer and guitarist Julian Burdock works up a version of *Psycho Killer* from scratch, looping guitar lines with swooshes and bleeps from his Kaoss pads before being rejoined by the rest of the band. *Take Me To The River* tops off the set, giving each band member the opportunity for a quick solo. Mosi Conde moves from kora to cowbell, Julian and Kingfire trade guitar lines, Moody Ndiaye rattles out a drum solo and band leader and bassist extraordinaire Edd Bateman ratchets up the rhythm even further.

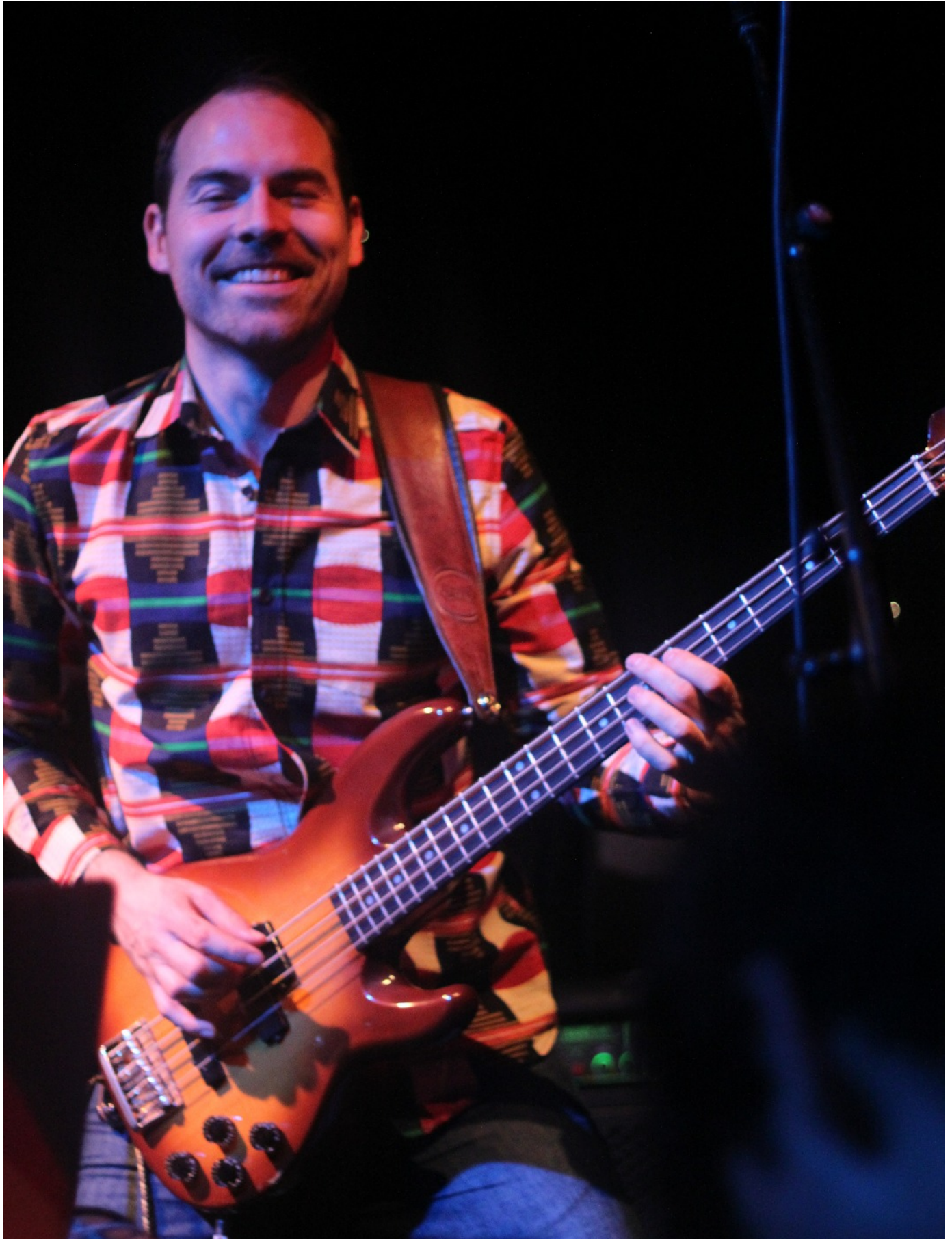
An encore of *Road To Nowhere* brings the evening to a close with both band and audience clearly having had the time of their lives. As we leave The Voodoo Rooms tonight we know it is going to be cold, wet and dark outside but for the last ninety minutes or so, we've basked in the West African sunshine.



LIVE MUSIC



LIVE MUSIC



LIVE MUSIC

– The Usher Hall, Edinburgh by John Scott

I last saw Public Service Broadcasting three years ago, here in the Usher Hall, opening for the Kaiser Chiefs. As much as I enjoyed their set, I struggled to imagine how they might sustain their mix of electronics and newsreel audio and video samples over any more than forty five minutes without running out of steam. Tonight, I found out.

That mix of sound and video sampling still lies very much at the heart of what the band do - they tip a tacit nod to that by playing Bowie's Sound And Vision in its entirety as their walk on music – but the band has grown in confidence and ambition to produce an outstanding evening's entertainment that takes the audience from the depths of the Welsh coalfields, upwards to the summit of Everest and onwards into space.

PSB open with a trio of songs from their latest album Every Valley. Shrouded in darkness, the title track sets the scene as lights in the style of miners' Davey lamps descend from the overhead gantry. It's a simple effect but a moving one. The Pit echos the closed-in conditions at the coalface; guitarist J Willgoose spins out plangent guitar lines underscored by mechanical drumming from band mates Wigglesworth and JF Abraham and darkly brooding horns from the three-piece brass section. The dark irony of People Will Always Need Coal paints a bright future for the mining industry and secure employment for its workforce but the baleful glow from the Davey lamps tells a different story.

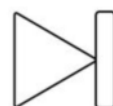
Taking a break from the Every Valley material, Theme From PSB kicks up the energy levels. Taking charge of the visuals on the screens behind the band, Mr. B mixes stock footage and images with live performance from the band themselves. The Now Generation and, particularly, Night Mail really shine in their live incarnations and ramp up the pace which continues on into a couple of tracks from the Race For Space album. Progress and They Gave Me A Lamp take us back to Every Valley, the visuals and spoken word samples almost tangibly charging the atmosphere in the hall.

ROYGBIV, Sputnik and The Other Side take us to the climax of Go!, possibly the only song to turn a NASA mission control checklist into a singalong anthem.

The first encore, a fiercely angry All Out seals the deal on a fabulous gig as far as I am concerned but follow ups Gagarin, featuring a pair of cavorting cosmonauts, and Everest are welcome additions and top off a terrific night.

Setlist

Every Valley, The Pit, People Will Always Need Coal, Theme From PSB, The Now Generation, Night Mail, Korolev, Valentina, Progress, They Gave Me A Lamp, ROYGBIV, Spitfire, The Other Side, Go!, All Out, Gagarin, Everest,



LIVE MUSIC



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LIVE MUSIC

JOSH ROUSE – The Mash House, Edinburgh by John Scott

They say that familiarity breeds contempt. It would seem that unfamiliarity does likewise. I'd mentioned to a few people over the last couple of weeks that I was going to see Josh Rouse; the response was invariably a variation on: "Never heard of him" and implicit in these statements was the conviction that if they hadn't heard of him, he couldn't be any good.

Fortunately for Rouse, the Mash House tonight is chock-full of people who have not only heard of him but are happy to sing along with almost every word. When we arrive, the Mash House's boxy, low-ceilinged room has been somewhat over-enthusiastically filled with fog, to the extent that we can barely see the stage, even from about ten feet away. Fortunately, by the time Rouse arrives, the air has cleared sufficiently for us to be able to see him, and he us.

The set opens with Salton Sea, the first track on Rouse's new album Love In The Modern Age. The Eighties pop production of the album is largely stripped away in live performance although guitarist Xema Fuertes supplies a few synth lines where required. Ordinary People and Women & The Wind, both from the new album, follow and if the audience are unfamiliar with the new songs, they show no sign of it. 1972 from the album of the same name is taken up as an enthusiastic sing along. Rouse has recorded in a variety of styles, from 70's sophisticated radio pop to countrypolitan-tinged Americana but at the heart of it all is a deft grown-up pop sensibility – think Paul Simon or Neil Finn but less earnest - that results simply in effortless-sounding songwriting and brilliant tunes.

Tonight these tunes are filtered through a tight, lean 4-piece band: Rouse and Fuertes on guitars and vocals, James Haggerty on bass and vocals and Marc Pisapia on drums and vocals. Haggerty zooms up and down the neck of his bass, combining melody with a rhythmic counterpoint to Pisapia's spot-on drumming. It's a killer combination that ensures the pace never really lets up. If I'm being really picky, Businessman from the new album is a little lacklustre but otherwise Rouse and the band roll out one highlight after another. My pick of the evening though is Slaveship, another track from the 1972 album. Coming on like something the Velvet Underground might have recorded in one of their poppier moments, it's an absolute cracker.

An initially unaccompanied Sad Eyes slows things down for the first encore before the band return to build it into a slow burning climax. Finally the pure pop brilliance of Love Vibration tops off a simply superb evening. "We'll be back" says Rouse. I hope we don't have to wait too long.

Setlist

Salton Sea, Ordinary People, Ordinary Lives, Come Back (Light Therapy), Women & The Wind, It's the Nighttime, 1972, Love In The Modern Age, Businessman, It Looks Like Love, Simple Pleasure, Slaveship, Hollywood Bass Player, My Love Has Gone, Winter in the Hamptons, Sad Eyes, Love Vibration,



LIVE MUSIC



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LIVE MUSIC

GARY NUMAN – The Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh by John Scott with Photos by Alan McIntosh

Ghost Nation, Halo, Me! I Disconnect From You, The Fall, Down in the Park, Bed of Thorns, Pray for the Pain You Serve, Here in the Black, Haunted, Mercy, Love Hurt Bleed, My Name Is Ruin, Cars, When the World Comes Apart, Are 'Friends' Electric?, A Prayer for the Unborn, My Last Day

Nostalgia tours roll into town with rapid regularity. Missed one Seventies or Eighties hit-maker? There will be another along before you know it. Nostalgia sells. It's less common though for someone who had their first number one in 1979 and their last top ten single in 1982 to come storming along with a set that draws heavily on their new album and yet delivers a credible, and relevant, performance.

Exactly a week before tonight's gig, Numan celebrated his sixtieth birthday but if anyone has come along this evening expecting a stately, measured amble through the Numan back catalogue then they are in for something of a surprise. They also almost certainly haven't heard last year's album, *Savage* (Songs From A Broken World).

Numan takes to the stage dressed like a character from Frank Herbert's monolithic *Dune* series of sci-fi novels. The garb of a futuristic desert dweller suits *Savage*'s vaguely middle eastern tones. Opening number *Ghost Nation* paints a picture of a desiccated dystopia warning of the dual threats of global warming and religious fervour; maybe not so much science fiction after all.

Me! I Disconnect From You and *Down In The Park* take us briefly back to the days of *Tubeway Army* but the bulk of the songs played tonight were born in the 21st century.

To some extent the songs from *Savage* share a sonic palette with 2013's album *Splintered* (Songs From A Broken Mind). That album's songs focussed on an internal, mental conflict as opposed to *Savage*'s global meltdown but brought together, the combined onslaught of industrial oppression makes for a devastatingly heavy experience.

Bed Of Thorns provides a relentless, crunchy undertone leading into *My Name Is Ruin*, perhaps the signature song of the evening. This is extraordinarily contemporary stuff from a Seventies synth icon; but then, from the cold war and seemingly impending nuclear winter of the late Seventies to the current Soviet face off and ISIS- led Jihad, have we really come very far?

The big hitters are, of course, *Cars* and *Are 'Friends' Electric*, both sounding completely at home with Numan's new material. I'd have put good money on these having been saved for the encore but *A Prayer for The Unborn* from *Pure* and *My Last Day* from *Splinter* take the honours.

On the evidence of tonight's performance, Numan is as far from the nostalgia circuit as you can imagine. I can't wait to see what he comes up with next.

Setlist



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LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



LIVING THE Hifi LIFE WITH ANGELA CARDAS

HIFI SHOWS AND ADULT BEVERAGES WITH ANGELA CARDAS OF CARDAS AUDIO.



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Flying out of Portland, a five hour drive from home, at o'dark thirty, as usual.



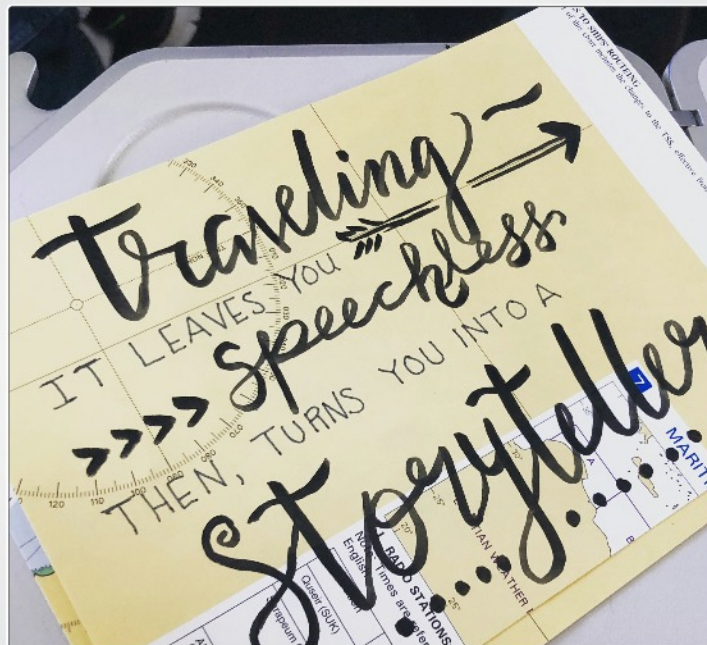
Flying with banners - someone didn't think out the ship dates for this show.



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



A mimosa to get up the nerve to get on that plane.
I need more, but the United Lounge in PDX is not
the greatest.



How I pass the time on the plane - hand lettering
positive quotes.



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Hello Chicago!



Who authorized this upgrade?! Oh yeah, me,
\$25/day to keep Josh happy.



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Always nice to see my home system on guys at setup.



The easiest set up in the industry - "here's the cables!"



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Sometimes a big cable can take more than two hands to wrangle."



All set up and breaking in.



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Setup mixer - reconnecting with old friends. Andy from HiFiman is always good for an interesting story!



All set up and breaking in.



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Appetizers, drinks and dessert.
My kind of dinner.



Some may think I'm shy.... just kidding, no one thinks that. I was the first one to step up to chat with Music Direct's Bes on Facebook Live.



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



A bustling first day.



Always a pleasure to see Jack Woo!



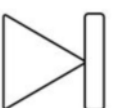
LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Listening to the new headphones from one of my favorites - Mr Speakers



Comfy seating in the lobby!



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Always a good "sign" to spot! This was at Audio Technica's booth on the tradeshow floor.



After hours - time to take a load off these heels -
Led Zeppelin and adult beverages with the guys from
MoFi



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



We love all our cable friends - especially Issac and Alex from AudioQuest.



Late night "networking" with the British HiFi contingent - HiFi+, Chord and Innuos. Michael from BelCanto "helped" with the photography.



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



New daddy Mat Weisfeld from VPI happened to have some baby pictures handy!



Mat and I with Tom and Pete from HiFi+



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Late nights mean the next morning may require a little extra pick me up.



At the end of another long, full hallway - I have a hard time passing by good light.



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Writer Chris Kimmelshue has a strong selfie game.



Sometimes you never run into someone, other times you can't escape. Carol and Dave from Positive Feedback got to see us about 100 times.



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Homeward bound!



Good thing I kinda like the man-spreader sitting next to me on this flight.



LIVING THE HIFI LIFE



Liquid Courage!



Artistic distraction.

