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Ed's remarkable life is why dCS is proud to celebrate him posthumously as a recipient of our dCS Legends Award.



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In House

The soundtrack of assembling the issue...

JONI MITCHELL

BOTH SIDES NOW

Joni Mitchell is an editor's favorite for as long as we can remember.

We've all bought crazy things on E-Bay late at night, and this one's no different. Cool package, put in a bid at 2 a.m. and go to sleep. Awake to the message, "You had the highest bid."

Like so many of you that collect things, merely for the sake of having them, we are guilty as charged on this one.

However, with a pile of CD players to audition for this issue, it was time to break the shrinkwrap, and spin one of Joni's more obscure discs.

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When John Atkinson came to measure, I insisted he listen...
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and the absence of reproductive artifacts were remarkable.
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Michael Fremer, Stereophile, May 2020



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TONE

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Cover Story

The **Naim** ND555/PS555 DAC/Streamer
World-class digital.



64

Shhh....

We celebrate low level listening with **Totem**, Vintage **Marantz**, and a little help from **Pro-Ject**.



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(and on...)

Playlists

Our readers, staff, and industry friends **share** what they are listening to with you.
Sponsored By Qobuz



39

The Audiophile Apartment

We've got two great compact systems from **Naim** and **Technics** to take you way beyond the soundbar.



120

Roundup:

We've rustled up a few more compact disc players for you!

mybwmhabit.com

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Journeyman Audiophile

We've got a lovely DAC/ Disc player combo from Luxman:

The D-03 CDP



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MINE: It Should be Yours

You can't live on music and hifi alone, so here are some things to spice up your existence.

104

Swill

Enough hifi, let's have a beer! Comedian Cam VanDerHorst puts a twist on bubblegum. Sponsored by Cardas Audio

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TONE's list of approved dealers. These are the folks you can trust your hard earned dollars with.

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Last Word

Yep, we still love cassettes.



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We look back fondly on a warm summer evening in Wisconsin, when Jeff Beck rocked Milwaukee's Summerfest.



86

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Emily Duff is back with some great tunes she can't stop playing. (and singing along with!)

160

Future Tense

Products in for **review** and on our near horizon.



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what's inside:



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Old School...

Our publisher takes a look back at his earliest digital days. (notice the green marker on the edge of that Joe Jackson disc!)



TONE is published 6 times yearly in the beautiful Pacific Northwest. And except for that one print issue, we've been online only, Saving the trees since 2005.

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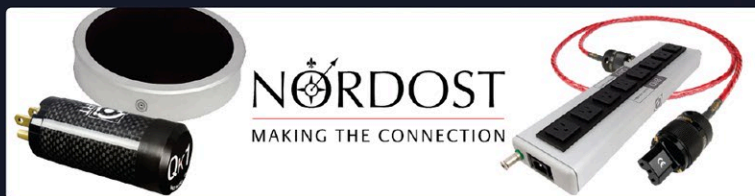
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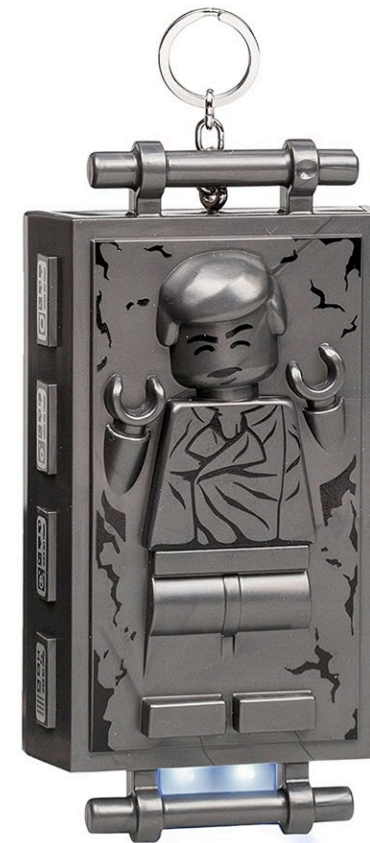
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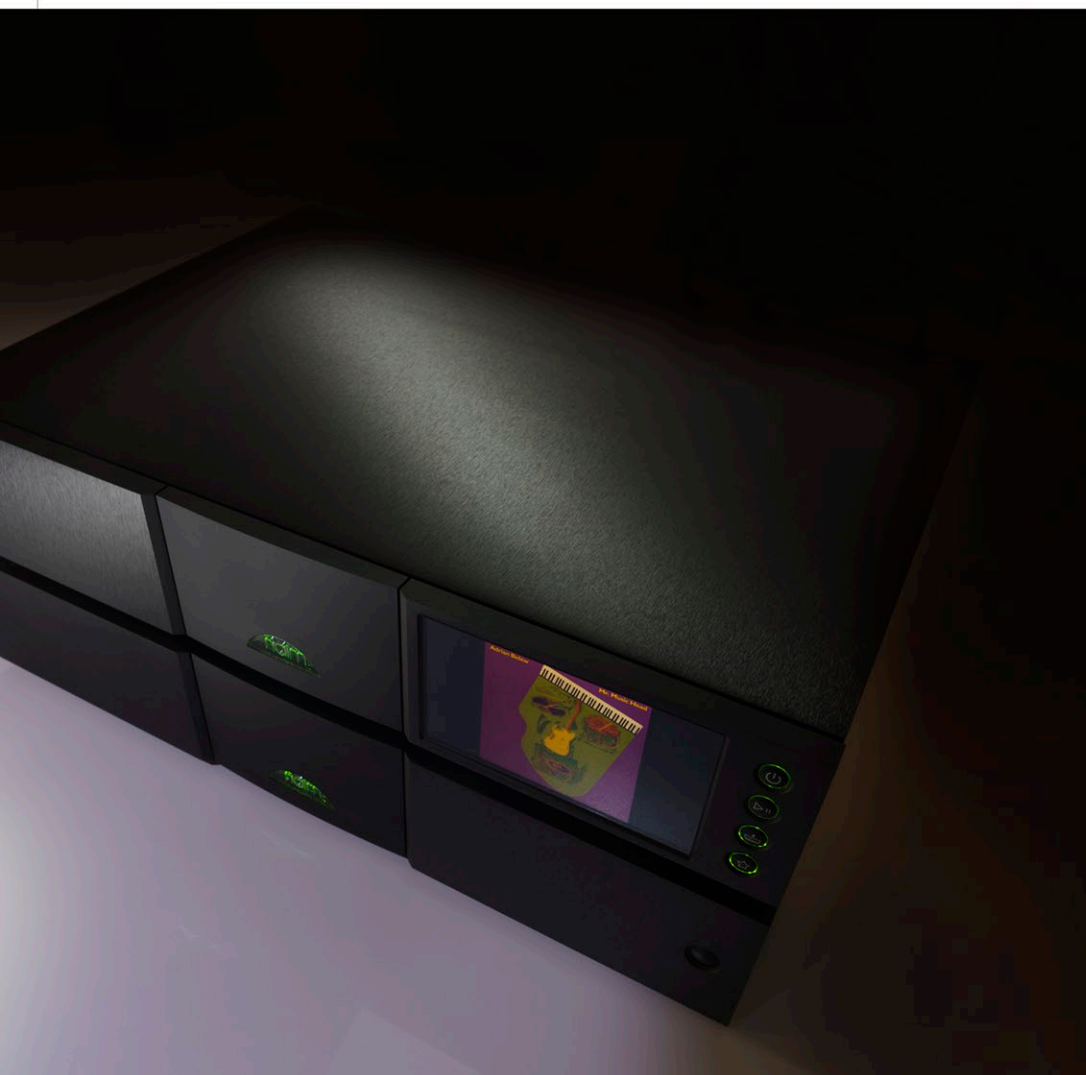


new arrivals...

We are thrilled to have Jim Macnie returning to write about Jazz and offer up a few good playlists, (which he's already done on page 21.)

Currently the editorial director at Vevo, Jim's worked in the past for VH-1, and a number of prominent Jazz publications. He currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.





Cover Shot:

Naim's 500 series digital player is one of the world's finest - as long as you don't need to play shiny discs.

Captured with the Sony A7IIIr at ISO 100. 6 seconds/f13 with a 60mm Leica R lens and Novoflex adaptor.



Walnut **NEW**



Maple

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no.106

P u b l i s h e r s L e t t e r

A

bit snowed in while I write this copy. We rarely get snow here in the Pacific Northwest, and it rarely sticks when it does arrive. The weather app on the iPhone says that in a few days, we'll be back to high 40s, more rain (it is February) and then it's gone again.

But for now, we've got nearly a foot on the ground, and in the backyard surrounding the studio, it's incredibly quiet. There's just something about the quiet that a fresh blanket of snow offers. Makes me think of Denmark. Maybe that's why there are so many great driver and speaker manufacturers in Denmark, because they truly understand what quiet really means.

Speaking of speakers, next issue in 107, we've got an entire issue devoted to smaller footprint loudspeakers, but for now, we're talking digital. I still remember the day I brought home the first Denon CD player to audition from my local hifi dealer (The Audio Emporium, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin – www.audioemporium.com) for a weekend. They sent me home with two discs, a Denon sampler and Joni Mitchell's *Court and Spark*. If memory serves me correctly, that player was about \$1,500 and discs were pretty close to \$20 each.

The sound was relatively flat and sterile compared to the Oracle Delphi II/Dynavector Karat I was listening to, but when NAD brought out a \$799 player, I was all in. What the hell – I had a cassette deck and an open reel deck, so why not embrace the new format as well. The two major magazines I followed (Stereophile and The Absolute Sound) were up in arms. They were freaked out, like rabid dogs, complaining about how "digital sucked." Maybe it's just memory fade, but it wasn't that bad.

It didn't take long for CD players to wind up in cars, and that was very cool. It may not have bested my favorite turntable, but digital in the car environment was way better than cassettes, and it made for great road trips, because CDs were so portable. I recall more than one road trip where a duffle bag full of music and a few clean t-shirts was all that was required.

Somewhere in the 90s, the compact disc started to sound good, and it has improved ever since. Much like the turntable, now that the CD is a mature format, it's actually quite good indeed. While we certainly love streaming, a number of manufacturers have kept the flame burning for the CD player. Along with Naim's flagship streaming DAC, we have a number of different players here for you to peruse.

Considering how much music is still out there on CD, some of it not available on any of the current streaming platforms, having a disc player still isn't the worst idea. To those who never gave up on the medium, you know what I mean. For those new to digital physical media, you might enjoy it more than you know.

Drop by our Facebook page and let us know what you think.



Somehow, we can never resist the soul of Daryl Hall and John Oates. Here's a few faves, and we're sure you've got a couple, even if they are guilty pleasures.

Watch for our upcoming podcast series on Guilty Pleasures.



Whole Oats – Southeast City Window

Abandoned Luncheonette – Had I Known You Better Then

Abandoned Luncheonette – Las Vegas Turnaround (The Stewardess Song)

The Silver Album – Sara Smile

Bigger Than Both of Us – Rich Girl

Bigger Than Both of Us – Do What You Want, Be What You Are

X-Static – Wait For Me

H2O – Family Man

Big Bam Boom – Posession Obsession

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Toshiba's XR-P9: Totally 80s

As we're doing an issue on digital players, it just fits to pull something out of our distant digital past. Sometime in the middle of 1986, I still didn't really have faith in the CD format but had amassed a small collection of about 100 or so CDs.



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Now you know why I publish a HiFi magazine. Downsizing my system from a pair of Krell Monoblocks, an Oracle turntable, a Krell PAM-5 preamplifier, and a set of Acoustat 2+2s, I was headed to Scottsdale, Arizona, in search of warmer weather.

My record collection of about 1,000 albums was carefully packed and stored at my parents' house. Mom agreed she could sneak one box of records a week out through the shipping department without anyone finding out. Yay, Mom. But I needed a CD player and was looking for something compact. After looking at the Sony Discman and a few other things, the Toshiba you see here, based in part on its mention in Stereo Review, got the nod. It was small, \$300, and featured an attractive wedge shape. This would not turn out to be the first CD player purchased for aesthetics.

A few weeks before heading West, a bit of break-in time for the Toshiba made sense. The sound was more than acceptable, especially in combination with the NAD amp and Spicas. It felt good to leave a 21 degree (F) day in Wisconsin and head for Arizona two days later. Thanks to the snap-on external battery pack, some Sony Sports Earbuds, and a few sets of C batteries in the carry-on, warmer weather was only about three sets of batteries away. I was a portable audio listener way before headphone forums. Ha.

Staring at the cacti in the new neighborhood from the hot tub, audiophile minutiae wasn't on the agenda. It was almost like being in college again, using a pair of record crates as stands for the Spicas and another one for the NAD. The little Toshiba served me well for several years, until the beginning of 1990 when I stepped up to a Nakamichi OMS-3.



Enjoy the Experience



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At times, going the vintage route can be an exciting and involving experience. Usually, that's an incredibly cool pair of speakers or a tube amp. With digital, it's hit and miss. This time, it's a miss – the XR-P9 is definitely crunchy sounding.

Unfortunately, it lacks a digital output. Outboard DACs were still not a mainstream item in 1987. The fixed level output will require a 1/8" stereo plug (like a pair of wired earbuds) to RCA left and right. But be warned, we're talking 14-bit digital processing here. Toshiba took this route to keep battery life long, claiming that a 14-bit device uses ¼ the power of a 16-bit DAC chip in the service manual.

In the big system, the XR-P9 is not a disappointment; it's an indication of how far digital had come when so many were screaming that "digital sucks" to where it is today.

Today, \$349 will buy you a pretty nice CD player from Cambridge Audio. However, much like going back to one of your favorite classic albums, certain gear takes you back. Should you decide to join me on this pilgrimage, be sure the seller has installed the transit screw on the bottom side of the player. If this screw is missing, you stand a high chance of getting a piece of junk. Ask me how I know. Expect to pay about \$30-\$90 for one, and don't be disappointed if the sound is less than awesome.

This is something you buy for the memories, and that's priceless.



TONE106.029

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1095

Great sound around a G...

By Jeff Dorgay



Two from **Leak:** **Stereo 130** and **CDT**

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With so many old things being new again, what could be more hifi fun than an update on a British classic? You might mistake the new Stereo 130 for a vacuum tube amplifier from the late 60s or early 70s; it's actually modeled after the original Leak Stereo 30, which was, in fact, a solid-state amplifier. Though Leak did make a vacuum tube integrated, the Type 15, in the mid – 1940s. (Maybe they'll bring that back to life next. We can dream, right?)

Beyond current parts updates, today's Stereo 130 still offers an on-board MM phono stage. Yet, where the original had an input for a tape head (which wouldn't be out of place), there are digital inputs. Which is perfect for the matching Leak CDT transport. Or your favorite streamer. At \$995 for the amplifier (\$1,195 with walnut cabinet) and \$695 for the CDT (\$895 with cabinet) this is a compact combination that looks great and is reasonably priced. But, how does it sound?



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The Stereo 130's 45-watts per channel is just enough for most smaller spaces and more efficient-ish speakers. Of course, the Wharfedale Linton or Dentons are an excellent match, as are the 90db/1-watt Vandersteen Ones, or perhaps something like the Zu Audio Dirty Weekends. These offer a 97db/1-watt sensitivity and will blow you off your couch, Maxell guy style. Even the current Focal Kanta no.1s in for review (87db/1-watt) turned in an excellent performance with the Stereo 130.

Shiny disc time

The CDT plays Redbook CDs, with a front, slot-loading transport, but it does a fantastic job. If you need a CD transport that does not take up a ton of space, this is an excellent choice. However, it is designed to be a bookend to the Stereo 130. That is how we used it for the majority of our listening time. In addition to playing CDs, the CDT also has a USB-A socket on the front for a thumb drive, if you care to play music back in this manner. The controls are the traditional transport controls and a power switch – simple, basic, classic.



Around the back, the CDT offers a coax digital output and an optical output. Playing through the DAC in the Stereo 130, it was challenging to tell the difference between using either output. For the sake of exploration, running optical and coax SPDIF cables through our reference dCS DAC, the CDT's coax output did have a slight edge in musicality. The uppermost frequencies were smoother and more fleshed out. But even at this level of digital playback, it wasn't a really staggering difference.

Digitally speaking

Most of our listening was with the CDT transport, yet the Stereo 130 offers several digital inputs for additional devices. It's important to note that the Stereo 130 does not have a built-in network streamer. Yet, streaming Tidal/Qobuz/Roon via a MacBook Pro connected to its USB-B input proves easy and enjoyable no matter which format we played.

The DAC section of the Stereo 130 leverages the ESS Sabre ES9018 chipset, providing the ability to decode files up to 32/384 and DSD256. Wireless access is available with Bluetooth aptX support for high-quality streaming, making the Stereo 130 perfect for hanging out, streaming some tunes from your mobile device. Or perhaps a friend's mobile device. Flexibility is the name of the game here.



No slouch in the analog domain

The onboard JFET phono stage does a cracking job with vinyl and your MM cart of choice. Staying with the British vibe, breaking out the Rega P3 with Elys 2 cartridge makes sense, as it's priced reasonably enough to be considered for pairing with the Stereo 130. However, our vintage Technics SL-1200/Shure M44 combination proves equally tasty.

Cueing up a few MoFi vinyl favorites from Supertramp, XTC, and Santana makes this a retro audio lovefest all the way around and shows off the quiet, dynamic character of the Leak's phono section. In the context of a thousand-dollar amp that has a built-in DAC as well, the performance is excellent and equally matched to the rest of the combination. It's resolving enough that you'll be able to tell the difference in quality and resolution between a budget bin LP and your favorite audiophile pressing.

Engineered for Reality

Testing

Wireworld

Cable Technology

was founded with the unique mission of perfecting audio cables through objective listening tests.

Far more revealing than normal cable comparisons, these tests compare cables to virtually perfect direct connections between components. Robert Harley, editor of *The Absolute Sound*, described this "Cable Polygraph" as, "illuminating insight into exactly how each cable affects the sound."

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Don't forget the phones

The Stereo 130 includes a 1/4-inch headphone jack on the front panel. Like its other sections, the headphone out is equally balanced in performance to the rest of the amplifier. Running a gamut of phones in the \$100-\$400 range from Grado, Audeze, and Sennheiser reveals excellent performance here as well.

The bass and treble controls (yeah, it's got those too!) really help with budget phones. They even made my hamburger headphones sound better than expected! Though many will scorn the tone controls (you can bypass them with the "direct" button), if you live in a less than an optimum room or have some less than awesome recordings, they do come in handy. There is no specification listed for the tone controls on the Stereo 130. Still, they cut in fairly quickly on both ends of the audio spectrum, so a little goes a long way.

Overall sound and use

The Leak combination offers good bass control with speakers with more low-frequency capability and surprisingly has no problem driving more difficult speakers. Even powering a pair of vintage Acoustat 1+1s (with two of the latest REL Tzero mk.3s in the system) is engaging at moderate levels. You won't mistake the Stereo 130 for a tube amplifier, but its Class A/B has more punch than you'd imagine and serves the music well.

The key to the Stereo 130/CDT combination is overall balance. No aspect of its sound or functionality overshadows the rest.

www.leakaudio.com

We achieved excellent results with several speakers in the \$600 - \$2,000/pair range, making this a perfect hub for a music lover on a real world budget. You can get great sound without spending five or six figures, and the Leak combo makes for a system to be proud of.

Thanks to their compact form factor (both boxes are almost 13 inches wide, 6 inches tall, and about 11 inches deep), these two should fit anywhere and sit nicely on normal furniture. However, both are pretty substantial, weighing in at around 20 pounds each, so they are somewhat deceptive.

We can tell that Leak obsessed over the details when they decided to bring the brand back to life. Fit and finish is very good and we consider the Walnut real wood veneer cabinets a must. You'll either drool over the vintage/mid-century aesthetic, or be turned off and move to the more typical looking gear in this price range. But if you're in the "love it" category with us, these two components from Leak are a fantastic combination.



Part 1:

The Naim Mu-so, 2nd Gen. \$1,690

naimaudio.com

Time flies when you're having fun, the saying goes, and Naim's Mu-so is an incredibly fun way to enjoy music. The initial launch of the Mu-so at the Munich High End Show a few years ago raised the bar – dramatically for what can be called a desktop audio system. And a gorgeous one at that. As someone who's been listening since the Mu-so arrived, this was a mega product to begin with. We've been living with the original Mu-so QB since the review. Pam looked at that, and just said "mine."

And what's not to love? Both Mu-so's offer powered speakers, incredible industrial design, massive digital connectivity, and stunning sound. Thanks to their partnership with Focal, the Naim engineering staff has been able to leverage Focal's expertise to produce a second-generation product offering true high-end sound in a box taking up a smaller form factor than a sound bar. If you've been thinking about a top sound bar for your TV, forget about it – buy a Mu-so.

What lurks inside this exquisite packaging? Read on.



Compact yet majestic

Don't let the compact (about 12 x 24 inches, and only 5 inches high) form factor fool you. The new Mu-so packs 450 watts of power, into this enclosure, via a pair of DSP controlled, three-way speakers. When the original Mu-so was introduced, this was its most impressive feature – it could play loud, and with authority.

Nothing's changed. After all of 8 seconds to pair up the Mu-so 2 with my iPhone, I'm rocking out. Robert Plant's "Little by Little" has a solid bass groove, and about 20 tracks of Robert Plant later, this tabletop system is massively engaging, even using Spotify as a source. Fortunately, this is the lowest quality setting of which the Mu-so 2 is capable of.

With DAC and streaming circuitry derived from the flagship 500 series (which, incidentally, is also our cover story) the Mu-so 2 is able to decode PCM files up to 24/384khz PCM files and DSD 128.

Different, but the same

The new version of the Mu-so looks nearly the same externally, but Naim says (with their typical wacky sense of humor) that the new model is "95% different." This means nearly everything has been gone over, optimized, and improved. It may look the same, but Naim has taken a class leading product and improved every aspect of it except one (and maybe that's the 5%) the amazing volume attenuator. This is one of those works of engineering art that should be in museums everywhere. It feels just like the control in Naim's top of the line Statement preamplifier. And when you power up the Mu-so, the backlit ring around the control dial glows in a circular fashion for about 20 seconds until warm up, revealing the unit's control panel/main menu. It's so beautiful to behold, you just might find yourself dimming the lights to see it more than once.

Considering every aspect of the Mu-so 2s performance is upgraded or tweaked, this component that is way more than the sum of its individual parts. Thanks to analog, USB, digital, and network inputs (wired and wireless) you can connect anything to the Mu-so 2. We tried everything, because again, Mu-so 2 is so much fun.



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Connects to everything

First: old school analog. Thanks to the standard analog input, you can connect a turntable and phono preamplifier to the Mu-so 2. What better than a Technics 1200, fitted with a Denon 103 cartridge and a Naim Stageline phono? Should you hook a turntable up to your Mu-so 2, we suggest not placing the turntable on the same shelf. The Mu-so's extended bass response will cause acoustic feedback. If you have no other way to go, investing in some kind of isolation platform or perhaps a wall shelf directly above the Mu-so 2 so you can keep cables to a minimum. This was our approach, and it was fantastic.

Next: new school analog. As we have Cambridge Audio's new Alva Bluetooth turntable, this seemed like it might be a perfect fit for someone in close quarters, that needs to put their Mu-so 2 one place and a record player all the way across the room or pull it out and put it on a table somewhere for a night of record playing. The two paired effortlessly, and within 60 seconds we were playing records. Even though this is not a Naim piece, it makes a perfect complement for the Mu-so 2.

Streaming: via iOS device (or other). Just like the Alva, the iPhone synched with the Mu-so 2 in a heartbeat and proves easy to control. All our listening was with Spotify, and because of this relatively low-quality stream, does not show off everything the tabletop Naim is capable of. Compared to CD and high-resolution digital files, there is a lack of resolution, causing a smaller, less defined soundfield to expand in the room. In all fairness, it's still pretty damn great.

Connecting the Mu-so 2 to a wired ethernet network via CAT 6 cable and making it a ROON endpoint shows off what this baby can do. When streaming a combination of 16/44, 24/96. And 24/192 files, the Mu-so 2 disappears in the room like a full blown hifi system. Naim got this right the first time, and it's only better now. Comparing it to a few premier soundbars, or our Zeppelin wireless – the Naim is miles ahead in terms of dynamic range, and optimization of the DSP. Eyes closed; it really sounds like there are a pair of speakers on stands in the room.



Enjoy the Experience



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Listening to heavy rock tracks and electronica titles with substantial low bass output, the Mu-so 2 digs in and goes deep. Thanks to a friend that lent us his original Mu-so (and we still have our Mu-so Qb) this is where you really feel the differences. Highs are cleaner, more defined, and have better, more anchored placement. As are the lowest frequencies – the new model goes down deeper and with less effort. Naim’s collaboration with Focal really shows itself to excellent result here.

All of the other major streaming services are compatible with the Mu-so 2, but if you happen to be a ROON user, this is such an exquisite pairing, and almost makes the Naim app useless. However, if you are not streaming with ROON, the Naim app allows you to control nearly every parameter of the Mu-so 2, so take your pick. This also comes in handy if you happen to be streaming your music collection via ripped CDs and a UPNP network. Linking the Mu-so 2 to our Naim Uniti Core, with 2TB internal drive was frightfully easy.

Finally: Television/movie sound. As I mentioned at the beginning of the review, don’t even think about buying a so called “soundbar,” when you can have a Mu-so 2. Out in the living room, using a projector to get about a 14-foot image on our main wall, putting the Mu-so 2 on a small table, about 18 inches off the ground, provided room filling sound.

Again, what impressed us the most, especially in this context is the Mu-so 2s sheer ability to play loud musical passages and its ability to handle gun shots, and various other cinema related crashes and booms. Streaming Netflix from a MacBook Pro, going to the Mu-So 2 via the Mac’s USB output was the best way to go here, but again, you have options, as this version also offers an HDMI input.

Fantastic, from beginning to end

As lovely as the Mu-so 2’s packaging is, it really should have confetti spray out when you open it. This is a party in a box, waiting to enjoy. Regardless of how you engage Naim’s Mu-so 2, it’s up to whatever music related tasks you can give it. We tend to pooh-pooh all in ones, but this one is true to its heritage and worthy of an Exceptional Value Award for 2021.



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Part 2:

The Technics OTTAVA
SC-C70Mk.2
\$999.99

technics.com

Pushing the play button on the new Technics OTTAVA SC-C70MK2, with a MoFi copy of the Superfly soundtrack fills the room with a big, broad soundfield and a solid bass line. Technics has hit nothing but home runs since they re-entered the high-end audio world with a passion about five or six years ago. Their depth of manufacturing and engineering expertise is without peer, and the products they've built have heavily leveraged their heritage, while being fashion forward at the same time. It's a great combination.

As desktop/tabletop music systems continue to evolve in functionality and performance, the OTTAVA certainly qualifies as a music player that even the most fanatical audiophile will engage. Regardless of how you consume your music, this player can accommodate your needs, whether you strictly want to have an all-in-one component, stream your favorite music, or connect a turntable via the analog input. (or dare we say, a cassette deck!)

Gorgeous from the inside out

The mid-century modern aesthetic of the OTTAVA begs inspection and interaction. This approximately 18 x 9 x 4 -inch enclosure will be a smart addition to wherever you decide to place it in your home, office or other environment. Seriously, I'd pack it in bubble wrap and take it along on a road trip! Nothing like having great music wherever you go. As the cliché goes, don't let the good looks fool you, there's a lot more that doesn't immediately meet the eye here.

The 2.1 speaker system inside the C70MK2 utilizes a pair of 8cm(3.14 inch) woofers, 2cm (.78 inch) silk dome tweeters and a built-in 12cm(4.7 inch) subwoofer, driven by a 30-watt per channel amplifier on top, and a 40 watt dedicated amplifier for the subwoofer.

There is an analog 3.5mm (1/8th inch) stereo analog, line-level input, an optical digital input and a USB-A connection around back, along with a standard ethernet socket, so you don't have to rely on entirely what's inside the box. (though you could and be completely happy)

If you take a detour to the Technics website, you can see the major tech that exists inside of the OTTAVA. (<https://www.technics.com/us/products/premium-class/all-in-one-music-system-ottava-f-sc-c70mk2.html>) This also lists all the different kinds of files and sources the C70MK2 will stream – which is basically everything. Tidal, Deezer, Spotify, and others are all accessible. The only thing it doesn't do native, is function as a ROON endpoint, but because it can be setup as a Chromecast node, you can do that too. So, anyone can listen to whatever they'd like via the SC-C70MK2. And listen, we did.

The bad and the good

This is not a brainlessly plug and play device, as many powered speakers and desktop systems are, but if you are willing to be patient for about five minutes, the reward is well worth it. Of course, if you want to just play CD's or listen to the radio, you can do that right away with the supplied (and beautiful) remote. To be more exact, to get the most the SC-C70MK2 has to offer, you will need to install a couple of apps, and spend a little time fine tuning setup.



If you've taken the time to install Google Home and the Technics Audio Center App, you are rewarded with incredible control flexibility, four levels of DSP adjustment (3 presets and one you measure yourself), and a wide variety of inputs and streaming options.

So, the good news is, this is by far the most capable tabletop/all in one music player we've used. With power comes responsibility. You can't just jump in an airplane cockpit and access all the controls without a little time reading the manual and following the menu prompts. The SC-70MK2 is truly a high-performance machine, inside and out.

Beyond the top facing disc player, the OTTAVA is a high resolution player in every sense of the word, able to decode files from you NAS or USB device. The only thing off the menu is MQA. Like Technics larger SU-G700 amplifier, it also utilizes their LAPC functionality, which optimizes the amplifier circuit for the speakers.



Spacey

While the OTTAVA comes with three standard DSP settings to optimize the sound for wherever you might place it (free, near the wall, and near the corner) again, you'll be rewarded by taking a few minutes to run the Space Tune™ app. This works like a full-blown room optimization system, measuring your room, adjusting the output of the OTTAVA accordingly to deliver the best sound.

Experimenting in a few different room locations reveals Space Tune™ outperforming the preset functions every time. Most times, the difference was so dramatic, it felt like we had just moved up a couple of models to a bigger, more resolving player. Good as this is, the most dramatic test of Space Tune™ was our initial listening. Just pulling the OTTAVA out of the box, placing it in the middle of the messy studio tamed a bass heavy, and somewhat hollow sound once Space Tune™ was run. Fantastic. While the preset selections for room corner, tabletop, and open air were excellent, taking the time to take the measurement and apply it to the custom preset, made for a more spacious, more tonally correct top to bottom sound. It's worth the couple of extra minutes. Hard-core audiophiles will love the ability to save their new measurements.

The SC-70MK2 does an excellent job with midrange clarity, creating a massive soundfield. The level of serious bass produced when playing bass heavy tracks is a testament to just how much air a pair of three-inch woofers and a 5-inch subwoofer can produce with great DSP.

On most musical selections, the SC-70MK2 is able to play incredibly loud without distortion, however those that survive on a steady diet of hip hop and electronica will most likely find the limits of the device, when rocking the house.

It's worth mentioning that taking the time to run the measurements and save a custom DSP preset will be the difference of the SC-C70MK2 having more natural, linear bass and upper midrange response. The presets are fine, but you'll notice some of the tubbiness from putting it on a counter-top disappear with a custom setting – taking this box from good to great.

Everyone exposed to the little Technics player was consistently impressed at how big the sound was, and in a small-ish room, on a table, the ability to feel like an amplifiers and pair of speakers on stands it is.

Taking the party vibe a step further, we made use of the tiny Pro-Ject Ultra 500 phono preamplifier here for a recent review to connect our vintage Technics SL-1200 mk.5 and spin some vinyl. This was almost too much fun, and again, the overall aesthetic of the SC-C70MK2 fits perfectly with a Technics turntable, new or old.

It's all good

This truly is the audiophile's desktop music player. For \$999.99 it's an excellent combination of sound, features, and versatility. The nearly \$1,700 Naim Mu-So 2 we just recently reviewed will play a little louder and go a little deeper, but it costs almost twice as much and there's no CD Player or the ability to custom tune the DSP. Not to mention positively stunning mechanical design – this one looks and feels like an object with a much higher price tag.

Overall, this one checks all the boxes, and some we didn't even know needing checking. Audiophiles often talk about desert island records. I'd take a Roon subscription, some streaming music and maybe a pile of my all-time favorite CDs to the desert with me.

If that doesn't make for an Exceptional Value Award, nothing does. Technics has created a product that appeals to everyone. Entrenched audiophiles will be happy with the sound (and functionality) and music lovers craving simplicity will be amazed at just how much sound \$999.99 can buy. I know I want one for on top of my toolbox out in The Audiophile Garage...

technics.com



Late Night Garage Playlist -Cam VanDerHorst

For those of us in colder climates, February and March signify the end of winter and a prelude to spring. If you're a car enthusiast like me, though, it also means a mad scramble to complete winter projects that you lacked the time, motivation, and intestinal fortitude to complete previously. Late last year, I bought this barn-find 1987 Merkur XR4Ti that hasn't moved since I was in middle school. Here's a playlist of heavy duty '80s rock that keeps me swinging wrenches deep into the night as I battle the cold to get my Merkur ready for the spring, summer, and fall of '21. No deep cuts here – just hard-hitting riffs that will keep you going all night long. Here's hoping that this year – and your project car of choice – go a little more smoothly than the last one.



The Scorpions - The Zoo

Whitesnake - Still of the Night

Loverboy - Turn Me Loose

Rush - Subdivisions

Van Halen- I'll Wait

Judas Priest - You've Got Another Thing Comin'

Ratt - Round and Round

Iron Maiden - 2 Minutes to Midnight

Motley Crue - Wild Side

Ozzy Osbourne - Shot in The Dark



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Journeyman Audiophile

by Jeff Dorgay

Luxman D-03X

luxmanamerica.com
\$3,595



A

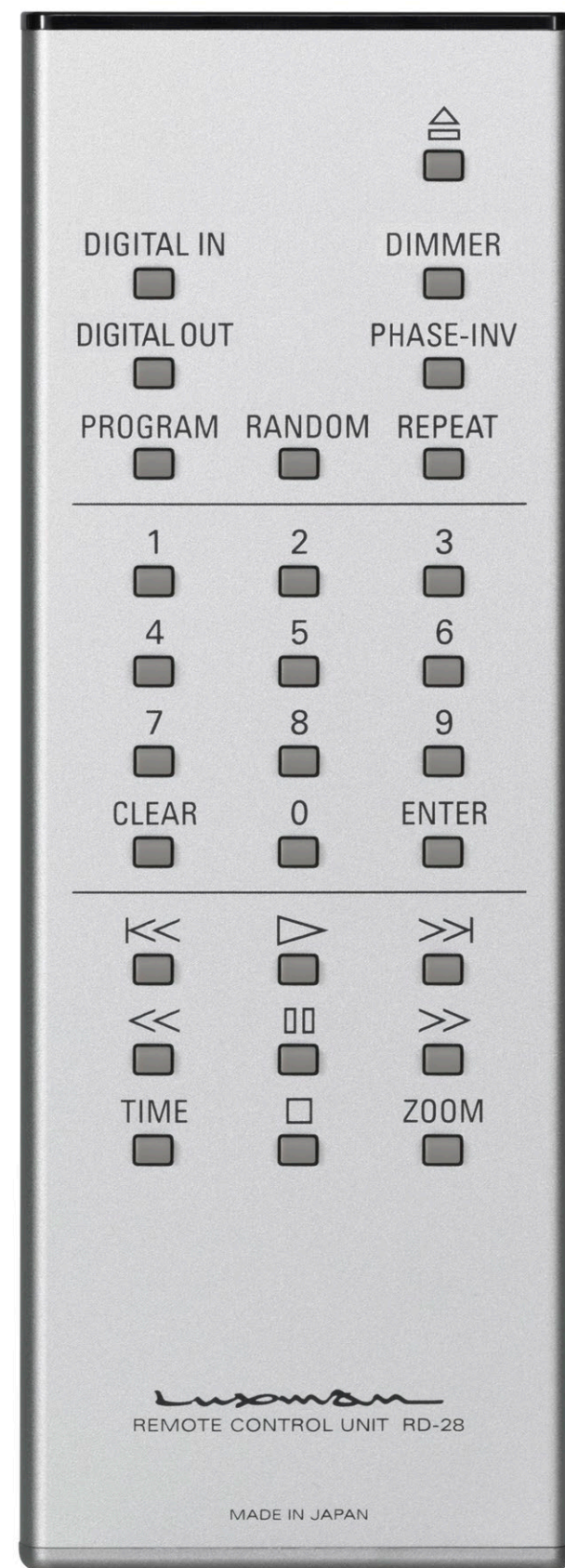
s Geri Soriano-Lightwood's slinky voice fills the room via the Supreme Beings of Leisure's 11i CD, it's tough to take the old-timer hard line that "digital sucks." Far from it, actually. It's hard to believe sometimes, nearly 40 years after the introduction of the compact disc, that digital audio is now a mature technology. Damn, this player sounds good. It's not crazy money, either. \$3,595 will put a D-03x of your very own in your listening room. While some might consider it heresy, but I dare you to find a great analog front end for the same price (we're talking table, cartridge, and phono stage) that sounds anywhere close to this good. And this versatile. Flame retardant clothing donned.

Journeyman Audiophile

Visiting all the CDs in the studio, makes for a quickly curated pile of about 30 discs to run this Luxman through its paces with, making for a great few days of listening. Dispensing music via Roon, it's easy to lose track of why the CD format was so much fun in the first place. Enjoyable as it is to have the world at your fingertips, it's equally enjoyable to listen to an album in the order it was intended, from start to finish, without even having to get up to flip the record over.

With so much music available via streaming services, you might pooh-pooh a CD player in the year 2021. Much as we love this aspect of music playback, our readers of all ages have told us repeatedly, that they still enjoy physical media, whether analog or digital. Our more ravenous music collectors know some selections just aren't available via Tidal, Qobuz, or the others. Finally, there's still the immediate satisfaction that comes with putting a disc in the tray and pushing the play button. If you're in that category, I suspect you will really enjoy the D-03x.

Music lovers that want both, can easily stream via the digital inputs, and even take advantage of MQA if you are a Tidal user, or collector of MQA encoded CDs. (A bit of a rarity, but it is out there) The only thing not here is an on-board streamer, however Luxman chooses not to include this in any of their players. With enough reasonably priced streamers on the market these days, this is hardly a deal breaker. If you are not interested in using the ROON ecosphere, there is a Luxman media player included with the D-03x, which will help you play music stored on a NAS.



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The future is here, and it's good

Ten years ago, a CD player with this level of refinement would have had a 10 or 15-thousand dollar price tag. To sweeten the deal, Luxman's D-03x also serves as a high-resolution DAC, that also offers the ability to unfold MQA files. Add a computer or your favorite streamer, and you have a pretty awesome digital front end. It's hard to believe that this is, for all practical purposes, Luxman's entry level player. True to the Luxman ethos, the D-03x offers the same, luxurious unboxing experience; standard equipment with all Luxman products.

Typical with the Luxman brand, the D-03x offers a solid helping of the fundamentals. Circuit construction along with careful attention to electrical and mechanical details rule the day, yet each model up the range offers a greater degree of refinement and sonic excellence. If you are a major fan of the compact disc, this is a phenomenal player, and considering how many great discs are still available new and in the pre-owned market, this is a great way to roll.

In and around

Once you remove the D-03x from its triple box packaging, you can get down to the business of spinning discs. The front panel of the D-03x is straightforward; standard transport controls, along with a digital input switch and a phase control. The disc tray is silky smooth, with an 8mm thick solid aluminum tray base – no plastic here. Mirroring the color scheme of Luxman electronics, the front panel has an amber readout, offering a magnification mode.

Regardless of user age, this is really handy when trying to read it from way across the room. All functions are available on the Luxman remote, though it might get redundant if you have a Luxman integrated or control amplifier, you'll have two of them on your listening table.

The back panel is equally uncluttered. RCA and balanced XLR analog outputs are available, though they are both fixed level outputs. The D-03x is not meant to be used in place of a preamplifier. RCA/coax and optical SPDIF digital inputs and outputs are on tap, along with a USB digital input. Luxman makes use of a fully balanced line amplifier, and for the bulk of our listening, the balanced outputs were used. It's worth mentioning Luxman's equally exciting L-550AXII integrated amplifier was the partner for most of this listening. Should you be in the market for an entire system, the 550 (priced at \$5,995) is an outstanding mate for the D-03x, and for many, could be a final destination system. Our reference pair of Dynaudio Confidence 20 speakers, with a six pack of REL S/510 subs rounds out a great system with all Luxman electronics.

Nary an out of place bit

Luxman uses a pair of Texas Instruments PCM1795 DAC chips to decode digital signals up to 32-bit/384kHz PCM resolution, and as mentioned, DSD and MQA files will also be decoded. We threw everything but DSD files at the Luxman when using it in DAC mode, as we don't have a ton of DSD files. The few things we did listen to from Nagra's Rene LaFlamme, were all highly satisfying and lifelike.

Moving from budget to more refined digital components, there is a point at which things sound more musical and organic, while feeling less digital, if you will. More often than not, that point was usually in the \$10k players. Today, that level of excellence is right around \$3.5k, and the Luxman D-03x is a perfect example. You don't get everything for \$3.5k – note the lack of SACD playback, and streaming capability.

Rather than be everything to everyone, the D-03x provides great digital file playback and great 16/44-disc playback, with everything in the electronic and mechanical domains executed to perfection.



Journeyman Audiophile



Tracking through acoustic, and vocal heavy music clearly illustrates the level of refinement this player offers. Heading back to the violins in The Jung Trio's *Dvorak Trio in F Minor Op.65* is completely liquid in delivery. The violin is a two-edged audiophile sword in the sense that it can sometimes sound smoother when played back on a vinyl record, because of the LP's inherent smoothness, yet on a less than world-class table, minute speed accuracy can get in the way of the presentation. Yet with digital, the perfect speed accuracy of that medium can be overshadowed by metallic harshness. Fortunately, the D-03x has neither of these problems, presenting a lifelike rendition of the trios' instruments, giving each of them a separate space as well. Ditto for the piano tracks played for the same purpose.

Even something as simple as the opening bongos in Lyle Lovett's "North Dakota" hang in the air as the drum heads are hit, with the initial attack immediately followed by the drum surface springing back. This player is incredibly convincing. The more you listen to it, the more you forget it – as it should be.

The big question is, is it a great \$3,595 CD player that can also be used as a high-res DAC or is it a great DAC that offers CD playback as well. Either way, we are happy to award the D-03x one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2021.

The Luxman D-03x CD player

\$3,595

www.luxmanamerica.com

Peripherals

Amplifiers: Luxman L-550AXII, Conrad-Johnson CAV 45II, Octave V110

Speakers: Dynaudio Confidence 20s w/6-pack of REL S/510 subwoofers

Cable: Cardas Clear

Associated Reviews:

Luxman PD-171 Turntable

Luxman L-550AXII Integrated

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Shh....

The fine art of low level listening
By Jeff Dorgay

It can be a lot of fun to mix new and old together. Sometimes, this can be a magic combination, others, quite forgettable.

Not this time, however.

It has always been part of our review protocol to try new speakers with as many different forms of amplification as possible. Part of this is sheer curiosity, part trying to log more data points in the endless compatibility database floating around in our heads.

Having a few vintage receivers around always makes for interesting and surprising combinations, and the one we have here is no exception.

In case you aren't familiar, a handful of the lowest powered Japanese models from Sansui, Pioneer, and Marantz (to name a few) had a melliflous tonality to them, even though they were early solid-state designs. Perhaps it was just the right mix of ingredients, or possibly the lower powered amplifiers and resulting circuits being inherently simpler that ruled the day.

20 watts per channel isn't a lot, but if you aren't listening at a high volume, it's amazing what you can accomplish.

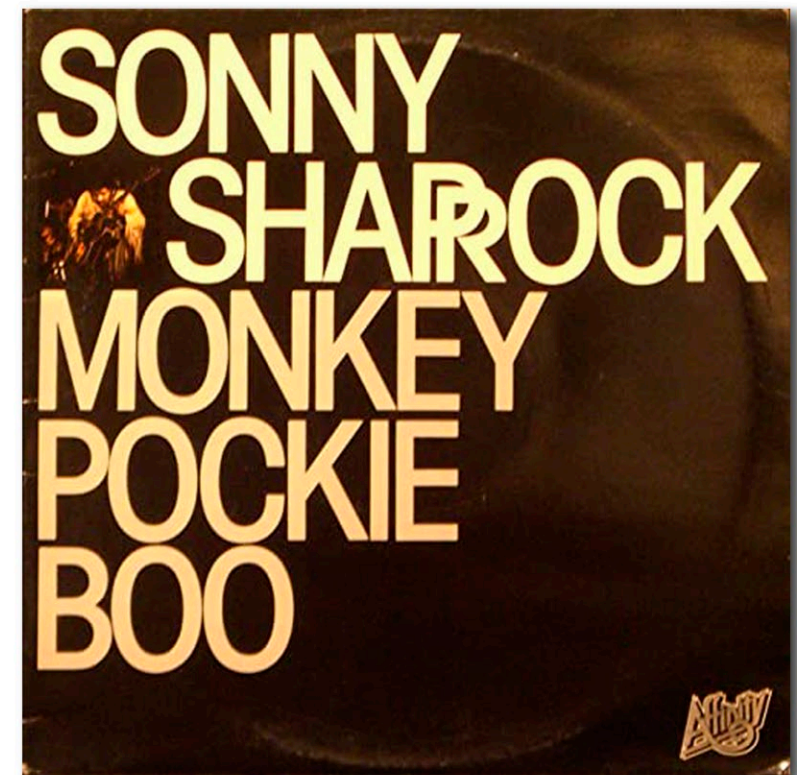
Here, we submit the Totem Skylight speakers, and a Marantz 2220B. The Totem's will set you back a little more than \$1,000, and a very clean example of the Marantz about \$250. Should you be lucky enough to find a 2215, that one possesses and even warmer character.





While we love to make fun of hifi pictures featuring the amplifier, turntable, and speakers on the same shelf, fear not - we have not abandoned our principles for the sake of “lifestyle” photography. The Marantz offers a decent MM phonostage, but this is a streaming and FM system only. The headphone section also provides respectable performance, for when you need to be really quiet.

Streaming is winning the day in this system, and thanks to the miniscule Stream Box S2 Ultra from Pro-Ject Audio, nearly any digital format is easily accessed, and being ROON ready, a snap to integrate into our environment.



Our listening begins with the always trippy Sonny Sharrock

The chanting and asynchronous drumming that makes up the title track still translates to a low-level listening experience that is very fulfilling. We'll have more of this for you in our upcoming YouTube series, “The Comfy Chair.” Stay tuned. Taking advantage of the bass and treble controls of a vintage amplifier really comes in handy at low levels, because they are less muffling and intrusive than the loudness button. Adding a bit more bottom end works wonders at low volume.



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- Kal Robinson, [Stereophile](#)

“Every Impact was realistic, with a visceral quality that I felt in my chest.”

- David Vaughn, [Sound & Vision](#)

“The JL f110v2 is a mighty-mite of a sub, conceding little to its larger brothers.”

- Kal Robinson, [Stereophile](#)

“But do they ROCK?
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- Jeff Dorgay, [TONEAudio](#)



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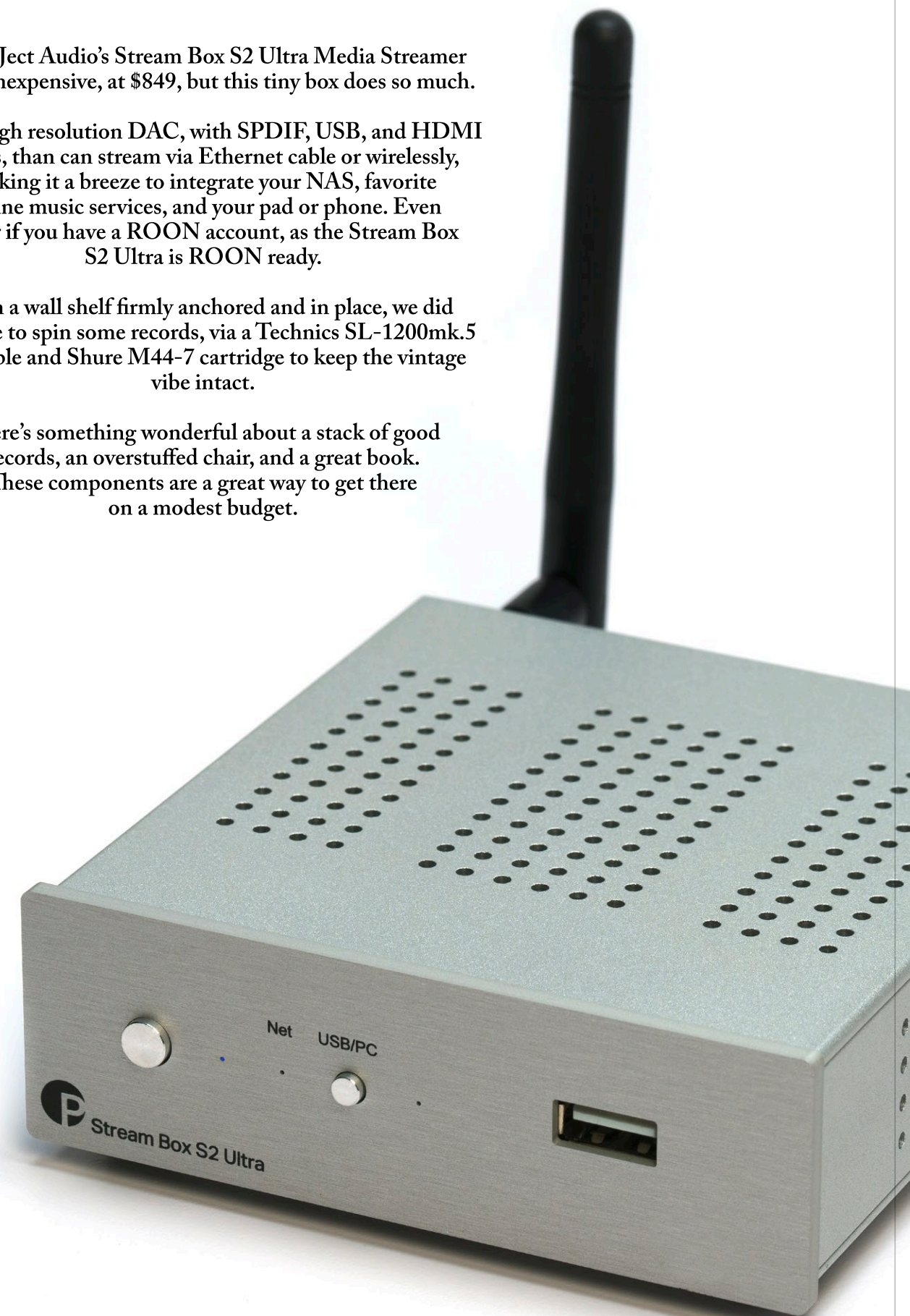
Shh...

Pro-Ject Audio’s Stream Box S2 Ultra Media Streamer is not inexpensive, at \$849, but this tiny box does so much.

It is a high resolution DAC, with SPDIF, USB, and HDMI inputs, than can stream via Ethernet cable or wirelessly, making it a breeze to integrate your NAS, favorite online music services, and your pad or phone. Even easier if you have a ROON account, as the Stream Box S2 Ultra is ROON ready.

With a wall shelf firmly anchored and in place, we did manage to spin some records, via a Technics SL-1200mk.5 turntable and Shure M44-7 cartridge to keep the vintage vibe intact.

There’s something wonderful about a stack of good records, an overstuffed chair, and a great book. These components are a great way to get there on a modest budget.



The Pro-Ject Stream Box S2 Ultra is NOT to scale here, It is much smaller .

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Think about this for a second and let it sink in...

Pro-Ject Audio is celebrating their 500,000th Phono Box phono preamp sold with this limited-edition Phono Box Ultra 500, an upgraded version of their Phono Box S2 Ultra.

It just happens to be chrome-plated, weighing twice as much as the standard edition. A heavy copper layer is underneath the chrome plating. Those of you that happen to be vintage car enthusiasts know this is the right way to do chrome plating.

Yeah, yeah, the chrome-plated enclosure is very cool, but 500 thousand phono stages? That's incredible. One SKU. If you're familiar with Pro-Ject, you know how many different components they make, not including a full line of turntables. In the 30 years since Pro-Ject formed, that would come out to about 300 Phono Box preamps a week, 52 weeks a year, for 30 solid years. That's pretty impressive.

Cartridge Dude.

Keeping it in the groove.



Ultra S2 or Ultra 500?

Pro-Ject's founder, Heinz Lichtenegger is a brilliant guy. Pro-Ject is responsible for some of the world's greatest values in high-end audio. Limiting this product to only 500 pieces will undoubtedly drive a number of you crazy, especially at \$399. Fear not, if you miss out on one of the 499 Phono Box Ultra 500s (yeah, I'm buying the review sample...), you can still buy the \$349 Phono Box S2 Ultra. But you'll wish you'd bought the chrome one if you see it later.

Pro-Ject claims that their thicker, copper-lined enclosure provides a lower noise floor, doing a better job at rejecting RF than the standard model. With two amateur radio operators in our neighborhood, every Saturday night verifies this claim. Fortunately, the TONE studio is a big, metal building behind my house that acts like a giant Faraday cage. The network is hardwired, and phone signals barely get through, keeping the Hams at bay.

However, the house is a different story. There's so much RF bleed through in the living room, we've abandoned the idea of playing vinyl there. Even with a .25mv output Dynavector 17DX cartridge, there's no trace of my neighbors DXing efforts with the Phono Box Ultra 500. Considering how many people live in densely packed urban environments, perhaps Mr. Lichtenegger can be persuaded to keep making this product – that copper shield does the trick. Back out in the studio, it doesn't make a big difference – there both units sound nearly identical.

Another secret to these tiny phono stages sounding so good is their all-discrete design. We can argue on whatever forum you'd like. Still, we almost always find the sound of op-amp phono stages flatter, almost digital in their delivery. From the lowest bass notes to the highest highs, the Phono Box S2 Ultra and Ultra 500 sound musical and alive.

dCS | LEGENDS

Only A Few Engineers Become Legends

In the world of music production, there's a select group of recording engineers who have strived throughout their career to deliver the highest quality listening experience possible.

Over the course of his nearly forty year career, Mark Wilder has mastered or remastered over two thousand recordings for such diverse artists as Aretha Franklin, Herbie Hancock, Pat Metheny, Phish and Sting. And as senior mastering engineer at Sony Music's Battery Studios, Mark's golden ear and pursuit of sonic perfection can be heard in many major titles found in the incredible Legacy Recordings catalog.

To date, Mark has won six GRAMMY® Awards for his work on such iconic albums as Bob Dylan's *The Cutting Edge 1965-1966: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 12*; and *The Basement Tapes Complete: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 11*; Bill Withers' *The Complete Sussex and Columbia Albums*; Billie Holiday's *Lady Day – The Complete Billie Holiday on Columbia 1933-1944*; Louis Armstrong's *The Complete Hot Five & Hot Seven Recordings*; and Miles Davis and Gil Evans' *The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings*.

Mark Wilder's dedication to his craft and his passionate commitment to music are why dCS is proud to honor him as the latest recipient of our dCS Legends Award.



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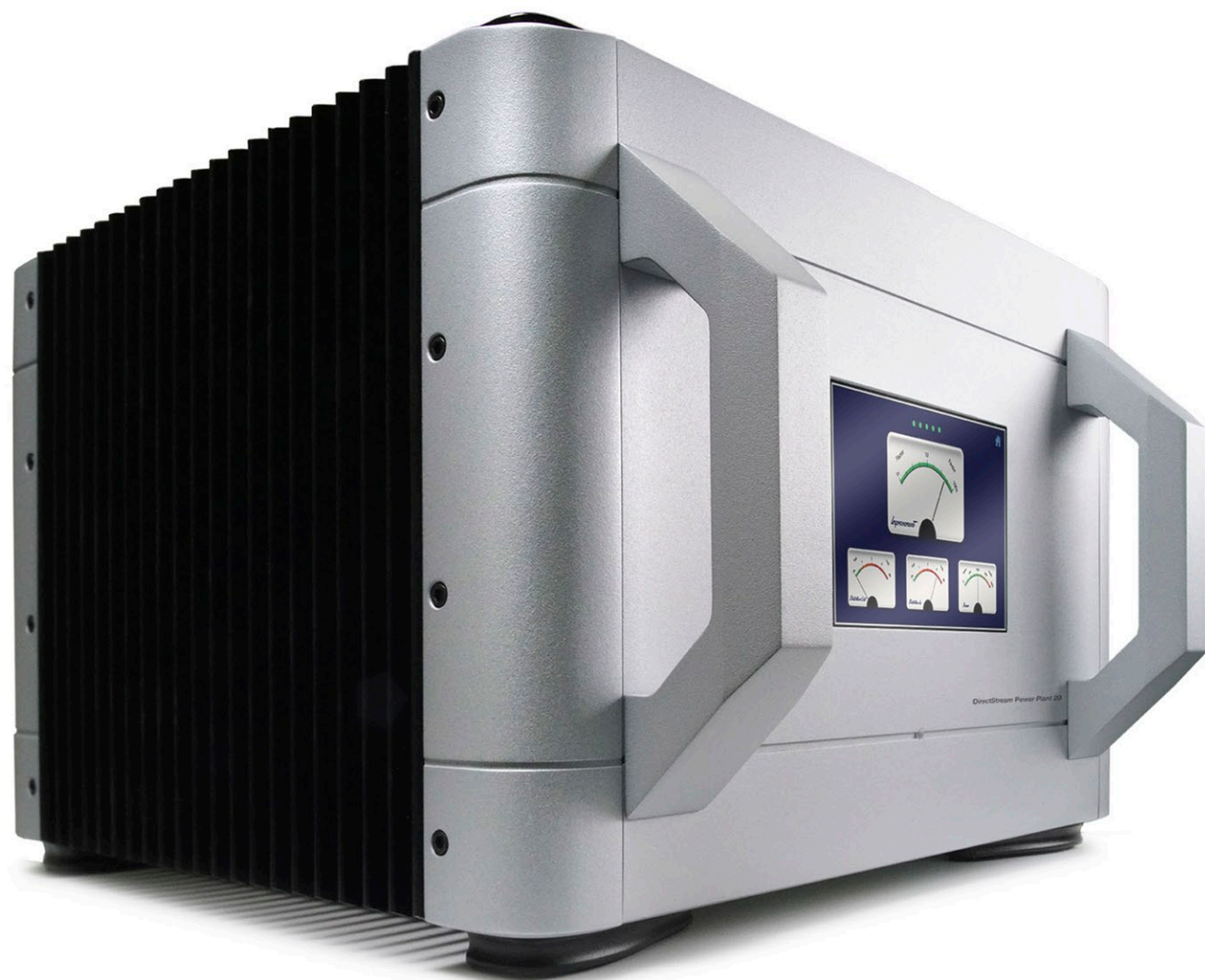
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dCS
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—Jeff Dorgay, TONEAudio



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Cartridge Dude.

Keeping it in the groove.



A balanced approach is the key to the Ultra 500s' success. At this price, most budget phono stages key in on one or two features. This might make for quick notoriety, it often makes for a product you quickly outgrow. The only thing missing from units costing significantly more is a level of resolution and dynamic swing that only a massive power supply and more elaborate circuitry provide.

Phono Box S2 Ultra and Ultra 500 offer sonic simplicity and clarity. MM is the standard 47k, with capacitance adjustments for 100, 200, 320, and 420pf, allowing you the ability to get the most performance out of a wide range of new and vintage MM cartridges. The MC section provides 10, 100, and 1k ohm settings. The 10-ohm setting is perfect for high-performance MC cartridges needing barely any loading. (like the Rega MC's)

Two sets of small DIP switches on the bottom of the Ultra give the instructions for gain, loading, and capacitance. It's worth noting these two are a breeze to set up. Plug the power supply into the wall, the connector into the 18v socket, running an interconnect from the Ultra to your amplifier or preamp. All that remains is to plug the turntable of your choice in. Only 103 x 110 mm, (barely more than a 4-inch cube, that's an inch tall), the Ultra will fit anywhere.

Front and rear panels are sparse, with only a power switch on the front panel. In addition to RCA jacks for input, output, and a ground lug, Pro-ject thoughtfully includes a switchable subsonic filter, providing an -18dB cut-off at 20Hz. Those with spongy floors will appreciate this.

Easy upgrade

The basic circuit is so well implemented, and there is an excellent upgrade path. Pro-Ject also offers their Accu Box S2, a battery power supply. This will almost double the price of these units at \$329, yet well worth the price.

An Accu Box S2 was not available in time for this review. Still, we did cobble together a DC battery solution to isolate the Phono Box S2s from the wall and associated noise. Even a modest system benefits from the additional level of sound quality lowering the noise floor provides. This level of functionality allows you to keep your Phono Box as you upgrade your analog front end. Fitted with the external supply, both versions of the Phono Box easily compete with other units we've tested, costing twice as much. Pro-Ject saves a lot of money keeping the PCB and the casework compact. Even with the supplied wall wart, this is a high-performance product.

While some four-figure cartridges were investigated (merely to find the outer limits of the Phono Box S2s performance envelope,) most of our listening utilized a Technics SL-1200 with Shure M44/Jico Stylus to evaluate the MM setting. A Technics SL-1100/SME 3009 (re-wired by our buds at Gig Harbor Audio) and a Denon DL-103r was the MC reference. These setups are well within reach of what we'd consider a cost effective match for the Ultras. Of course, if you have a Pro-Ject table, this will be a perfectly synergistic pairing.





Cartridge Dude.

Keeping it in the groove.



Rather than going on and on about the subtleties of specific tracks, suffice to say these two phono preamplifiers from Pro-Ject are class leaders. On one hand, you can only expect so much from a \$350-\$400 phono pre. Conversely, I can't imagine something in this price range delivering more. What really sets the Ultra apart from its competitors is the sheer level of musical information it reveals, and the extremely high build quality. The Pro-Ject Ultras both do a fantastic job with midrange tonality, and possess the ability to produce a substantial, three-dimensional sound field from your records.

And that chrome case is stunning. If you end up with the standard Phono Box Ultra S2, it is available in silver or black. Highly recommended.

The Pro-Ject Phono Box S2 Ultra \$349
The Pro-Ject Phono Box Ultra 500 \$399

www.project-usa.com



We have no idea why we're on a big Scorpions kick again lately, but stress and heavy German music just seem to go well together. Our publisher and Jerold O'Brien have been in the garage, polishing the M cars for the upcoming warm weather, so what better tunes to crank when removing wax?



- Blackout
- Backstage Queen
- Loving You Sunday
- Lovedrive
- Lady Starlight
- The Zoo
- Long Tall Sally (From *Tokyo Tapes* '79)
- Bad Boys Running Wild
- Rock You Like a Hurricane
- As Soon As the Good Times Roll
- Still Loving You
- Don't Stop at the Top
- Rhythm of Love



SMALL, BUT PERFECTLY FORMED

The F1-5 bookshelf and F1-8 standmount are the latest additions to Fyne Audio's critically acclaimed F1 Series. Featuring the same Isoflare™ point source driver technology and signature BassTrax™ low frequency system as their floorstanding siblings, the new models deliver class leading audiophile performance with breathtaking detail, dynamics and imaging. Designed, manufactured and hand finished in a deeply lacquered walnut veneer cabinet at our UK Head Quarters, the F1-5 and F1-8 are small, but perfectly formed.



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- Antonio Long, Audio Vision San Francisco

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- Matthew Counts, Hawthorne Stereo Seattle

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- Lawson Hale, Sound Image Atlanta



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The Clarus CODA

claruscable.com
\$300

It's amazing how much DAC performance is available for \$300 these days. Clarus Audio is much better known for their cables and power conditioners, but their first entry into the portable DAC/Headphone amplifier puts them squarely at the head of the class. For many of you, the product you're much more familiar with is the AudioQuest Dragonfly. Somewhat long in the tooth, the Dragonfly hasn't really had a major challenger until now. The Clarus CODA has higher maximum resolution, and the ability to unfold MQA files. If you're part of the "MQA is just snake oil" mafia, this will be of no consequence to you. We can all argue about that at a distant hifi show if we ever make it all to the same room at the same time.

For now, those of you that are streaming music via Tidal, where MQA files are available, you will probably want to take advantage of this functionality, and the Coda does an excellent job with decoding these. The blue LED on the front of the CODA (indicating 16/44, or standard definition files) will change to green for high resolution files, turning magenta when MQA files are present.



HeadphoneArts

Jumping right in with Chicago V's first track "Hit by Varese," the Coda turns magenta (confirming an MQA file has been decoded) and when comparing things to standard, ripped 16/44 files, delivers high resolution playback, with a smoother, airier, more relaxed sound. Using a pair of \$200 Grado phones, the difference between high-res files, or MQA versus standard CD resolution was not terribly noticeable. However, when stepping up to the Audeze LCD-2s or the Focal Stellias, the ability to resolve extra information is easily heard, and worthwhile.

Fly swatter

Some quick back and forth comparisons prove the Coda to best the Dragonfly in every aspect of playback, and the better your phones, the more the advantage will fall to Clarus. But like the world of racing, where Mercedes was making horsepower last season, Honda may just surprise us all this year, took the CODA to an iPad and the first Grand Prix of 2021, where Max Verstappen's Honda/Red Bull nearly put the wood to Louis Hamilton's Mercedes. No doubt, the next round of these little miracles will prove competitive, but for now Clarus is the one to beat.

Listening to the cars zoom in and out of the pit sounds incredibly lifelike with the CODA in the equation.

Checking out a few things on Netflix, found a few familiar shows also offering high-resolution sound. Much fun as listening to high res tracks are with the CODA, the level of sound design that goes into today's shows often shows off what a great pair of headphones combined with the CODA can really achieve. The desolate, atmospheric, tinkly soundscape of *DARK* proves even more engaging with the CODA, opposed to the straight headphone output of a Mac Book Pro. Apologies for the obvious audiophile cliché, but using the CODA goes a long way to making the headphones feel as if they have disappeared on my head. This DAC provides big sound.

The CODA plugs directly into a USB port, and it is supplied with a USB-C adaptor, which works well with an iPad Pro, but will not plug into current iOS phones. It's a shame Apple messed with us in this manner. The CODA is such a worthwhile addition, makes me want to switch... There are no batteries to deal with, nor drivers to to install. Mac or Windows it just works, though I did find on the Mac side it was necessary to use the MIDI control panel to access higher resolutions.



BACKERT LABS

Preamplifier specialists.

We build each Backert Labs preamp by hand in Pennsylvania. Our goal: musical performances in your listening room that feel like they are happening right now.

We include luxuries such as the Elma switch from Switzerland. Fully balanced input and output via Neutrik XLR connectors. Furutech power cable inputs. All employed in highly innovative circuits. For example, most manufacturers' power supplies include significant capacitance. Our patented power supply uses almost none. Capacitors have a sound to them, which we seek to minimize.

The results: natural tone. Accurate dynamics. Correct timing. Music that is more lively, and more intimate.

Hear what they heard, when they recorded it. Feel what they felt. Like it's happening right now.



HeadphoneArts

Regardless of program material, the CODA is bold and dynamic. While it uses the latest version of ESS Sabre chip, the amplifier and analog sections are what sets the CODA apart from its competitors. The true smoothness and lack of grain that the CODA portrays shows just how far digital has come not only from its early days, but even in the last few years.

A great home digital experience

What will really blow you away is using the CODA in the context of a home, 2 channel audio system. Dusting off an older Mac Mini as a ROON core, and the CODA as a preamplifier to drive a recently upgraded Dynaco ST-70 and a pair of Zu Dirty Weekend speakers makes for an incredible, yet reasonably priced audio system. Good as the CODA is driving headphones, if you don't need analog, or if you're looking for a great digital front end on a low budget, I submit the CODA is outstanding.

In this context, it was easier to hear and evaluate the sound quality of the CODA. This mighty little DAC produces a massive soundstage, and while we caught a glimpse of it with various headphones, it's low frequency performance is tremendous when used as a source component. The CODA also does a fantastic job with offering a lifelike performance with acoustic instruments, with an absence of grain. Listening to violin, piano and acoustic guitar pieces is a true treat.

You just might end up buying two

A combination of music, movie, and racing makes the Coda a must have, and for the day when we all start traveling again, this is going to be one accessory you'll want to have in your suitcase. Yet it makes such a great all – around digital device, you might want two of them.

The Clarus CODA more than qualifies for one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2021. The performance bar has been raised.



Can't Get It Out of My Head

Post-Grammy Edition by Emily Duff

Emily Duff remains undaunted in the midst of the current crises, staying madly productive (she's got a new album out, and it's awesome,) and always remaining an incredibly positive force. She's certainly a huge boost to all of us. Here's the four records on her mind right now - enjoy!

After not watching the Grammys, I'm spending too much time thinking about the Grammys.

Life is like that right now. Social media starts conversations. Most of which I don't participate in, and wish would go away. But this Grammy "rant" was very interesting to me because it was all about the sexualization of women in music. Apparently there was a pole dance. I don't know for sure 'cause I did not watch, and have only seen screen shots of the event, and a bunch of photos of men (Robert Plant, Rod Stewart, Mick Jagger, Michael Jackson, Justin Bieber, et al) wearing their private parts as accessories and grabbing their crotches on stage, from female friends in response to what they saw.

Seems like there was "too much" female sexuality on stage for some, and the point being that female artists need to dress and "act like whores" to get attention, sell records and win awards. Well, as a female artist, you can imagine how that discussion made me feel. I honestly couldn't care less. The discussion and the awards shows bore the heck out of me and I say, be who you are and do what you will. Is music still "music?" Are songs still songs? Are women still women? She, her, they, whatever.....This is not a new discussion at all and the fact that we are still talking about it tells me one important thing. Folks are bored and opinions are still like butt holes. Everyone has one and at the end of the day, it stinks! My rant is now over and here, right now, is what I personally Can't Get Out of My Head, and surprise!!! There's lots of female artists in here. Dig!



THE NEW LOOK OF PROVEN PERFORMANCE

If a loudspeaker is famous for its performance, why change it? MartinLogan's new **Motion® Series** achieve the same superior performance as previous generations, with lifelike clarity, exceptional accuracy, and dynamic range.

A stylish new enclosure design updates the look, with performance-enhancing internal bracing, reinforced baffles, new fabric grilles, and a choice of three beautiful finishes.

"...the vocals sounded eerily lifelike, and the instrumental timbre was natural, with a depth so palpable I could practically reach my hands into it."

David Martson, *The Absolute Sound*, on Motion 60XT

Can't Get It Out of My Head

by Emily Duff

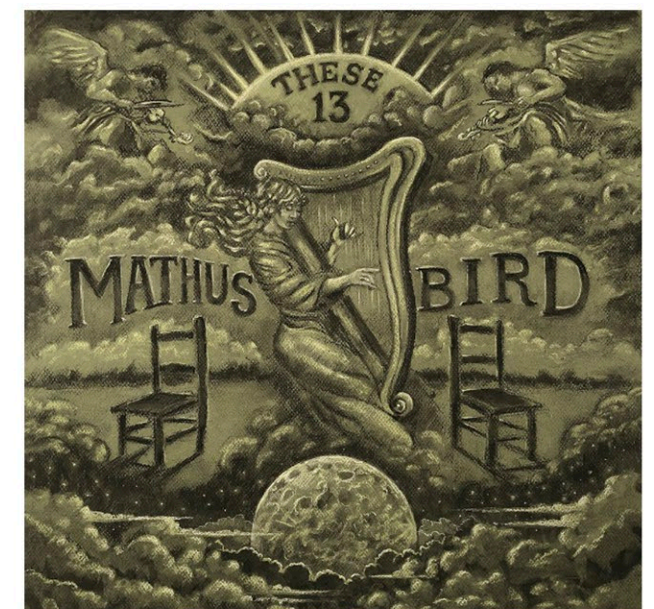
“Sara Petite released a great record last month called *Rare Bird* and she is just that. The track “Feeling Like an Angel” will reveal the many seductive sides of this San Diego singer/songwriter, who has indeed won some of those awards I don’t care about, and I still really give a good goddamn about her, and her exquisitely crafted and produced tunes. With all the sexuality that great music should have to move you to Not Feel Like an Angel, this authentic, real deal artist will win the only award that actually matters: your time, your attention, and your money to buy her records!

Jimbo Mathus and Andrew Bird have teamed up to release *Mathus Bird: These 13*, and there is an organic blend of dirt and deliverance here that plucks all the right strings. The harmonies are sweet and desperate, the fiddle parts are soulful and full of melancholy, just the way I like ‘em! The track “Three White Horses and a Golden Chain” speaks LOUD AF to me so I have it on repeat throughout the day. I invite you to put this one in your ears and go for a covid walk to think about the past 12 months of voodoo and loss. Textures, vibrato, whistling and a fragile, human journey to make your head spin like a busted, empty pinata swinging in the rain after a 55-year olds unattended funeral.

We might not be able to go to live concerts right now but we can listen to Charlie Overbey sing about it in his song, “Ode to John Prine.” Charlie enlisted a whole catalogue of friends who are “greats” to get this one done and it’s a cracker! LP, Jimmy Vivino, Rami Jaffee, Darryl Jones, and Steve Ferrone generously bequeath their talents to this tribute and story about our current state of stay at home, lack of community and musical “family.” The proceeds from the sale of this tune went to benefit NIVA/ Save our Stages. Thank you Charlie! A great song about a great songwriter we lost to an illness that has been keeping us all apart for a year. I needed this tune!



I was born in the mid 60’s - the music that shaped me was probably the best of the best IMHO. 1972 was an especially great year. So that is the year I went back to recently when I dug into the Melanie records I have in my LP collections, specifically, *The Four Sides of Melanie* (Buddah Records, 1972). Born Melanie Safka in Astoria Queens, NY, this singer-songwriter wrote a big part of the soundtrack of my youth. This record is a masterpiece. With 23 tracks, it’s difficult to pick a favorite but if you don’t own this one on vinyl, you really need to ask yourself why? Do you not love great songwriting? Are you afraid of recorded vocals that stir all the feels? Melanie resonates on every level and you’ll revel in how many of the tunes you know and love. She sticks in quite a few brilliant covers but you will be blown away by her hits. “Brand New Key” was a #1 Chart Topper and yeah she’s won a few awards... but who cares. Buy this collection and enjoy!



“No one offers a better combination of high performance, classic good looks, and functionality in a compact form factor than Nagra does with their Classic Line. When you want maximum performance in a minimal footprint, this is the way to go!”

Jeff Dorgay, Tone Audio

NAGRA

SWISS INNOVATION SINCE 1951

Joe Lovano
Trio Tapestry
Marilyn Crispell
Carmen Castaldi

Garden of Expression

ECM

Joe Lovano Trio Tapestry Garden of Expression

ECM - CD, LP

Never let it be said that Joe Lovano isn't open to change. Throughout his run on the Blue Note label, the 68-year-old reed player shifted through a series of ensembles and programming concepts, his catholic interests often pairing him with a parade of equally talented mates, such as Bill Frisell, Enrico Rava and John Abercrombie. Discovery is key to his trip.

Trio Tapestry is Lovano's latest adventure, and their 2019 debut set the tone for the music's bespoke character: hushed, cryptic, fetching. Their second ECM outing doubles down on that template, creating a suite of nuanced episodes whose collective nature is obvious. It's a distinct step away from the leader's more trad persona - that of a bold and earthy soloist.

The interplay between Lovano's genteel sax lines, pianist Marilyn Crispell's fanciful glisses and percussionist Carmen Castaldi's textural ruminations is deep. *Garden of Expression* is an introspective affair that charms even when the musicians pause to sniff around an idea, even when their dawdling threatens to mar their flow. That's because the group has mastered a subtle form of momentum that sweeps things along while maintaining an ethereal slant. Castaldi chooses poetry over pulse. A tom-tom thud here, a cymbal rustle there. It's a leeway gambit, developing open spans for his partners to fill. Each of their thoughtful phrases manage to gracefully entwine the other.

At certain points the pianist creates brocades of notes that signify radiance and prompt a gust of animation from the horn player - "West Of The Moon" has a dreamy brio. Their chemistry, guided by the lithe trajectories Lovano maps out, is hale enough to power the calm of Trio Tapestry's explorations. When they close with a seductively static piece called "Zen Like," and show us how suspenseful it can be, they've told us everything we need to know about their ambitions.



JAZZ

By Jim Macnie

Miguel Zenón & Luis Perdomo El Arte Del Bolero

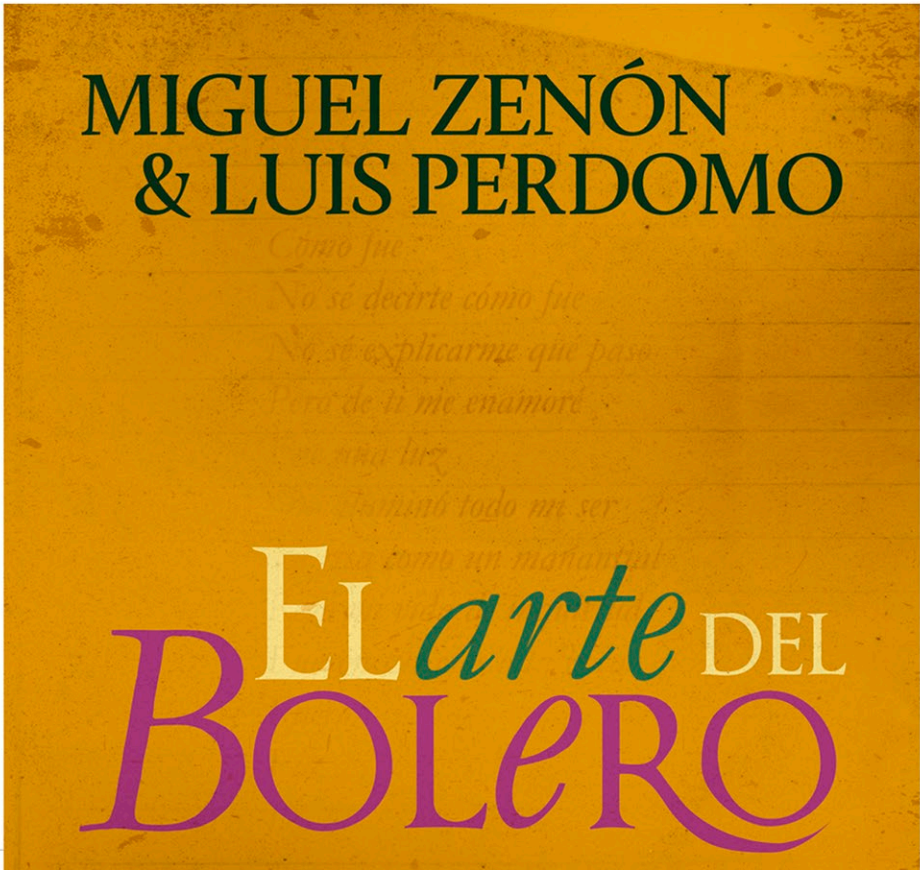
ECM - CD, LP

You can be seduced by the lines an improviser plays, or you can be seduced by the sound of their instrument itself. Virtuosity has marked saxophonist Zenón's work for the last two decades - the Puerto Rico native with the genius grant, Guggenheims and Grammy noms in his pocket has sounded like a prodigy from the get-go. Back in 2002, the solos on his first album made critics' jaws drop; no one has ever questioned his skills as a soloist.

Those talents are front and center on this duet with longtime piano partner Luis Perdomo, but it's the sound of Zenón's horn that has made me continually return to this record. Working through a book of poignant boleros (a trad Latin form with folkish origins that's occasionally been deemed "ballads with black beans on the side"), Zenón dedicates himself to the art of expression. Key to that tack is his

instrument's timbre. As ballads by Benny Moré, Aresnio Rodriguez and Bobby Capo float by with heart on sleeve, Zenón's luminescence amplifies their romance. Aching trills, sentimental phrases, motifs that blow kiss after kiss - recorded live at New York's Jazz Gallery last fall, the duo captures a warmth that has always been hinted at in the saxophonist's work, but never presented so revealingly. Here, his playing is prettier than ever; each of his notes feels like it's being vocalized. This is family music, tunes hummed and sung and played on guitars and parlor pianos by abuelas and tíos during informal family gatherings.

In the liner notes, Zenón calls the tunes "beyond familiar." Live with El Arte Del Bolero for a stretch, and they'll become the same for you.



JAZZ

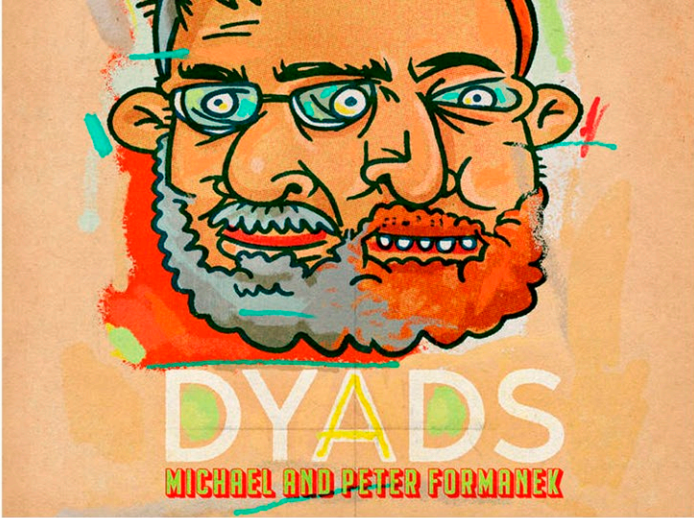
By Jim Macnie

Michael and Peter Formanek
DYADS
(Out Of Your Head)
outofyourheadrecords.bandcamp.com/album/dyads

There's something to be said about keeping it the family. If jazz is about communication and communication is about rapport, it's little wonder that Michael and Peter Formanek are speaking the same lingo on their debut, DYADS. The bass/reeds duo is a father/son team built on the concept of give and take, and these 13 performances have a spry demeanor. As the moods shift from track to track, buoyancy and momentum triumph, each piece nudging you into the next. The veteran bassist has made valuable contributions as both a leader and sideman, and these days he's as active as he's ever been. There are five fierce drummers in the digits of his right hand; the bass lines arrive with a disarming drive. His tenor sax partner is a twenty-something on the come-up who acquits himself with both authority and daring. The measured growls he provides his dad on "How Was the Drive" illustrate his skill at fashioning fluid push and pull tactics.

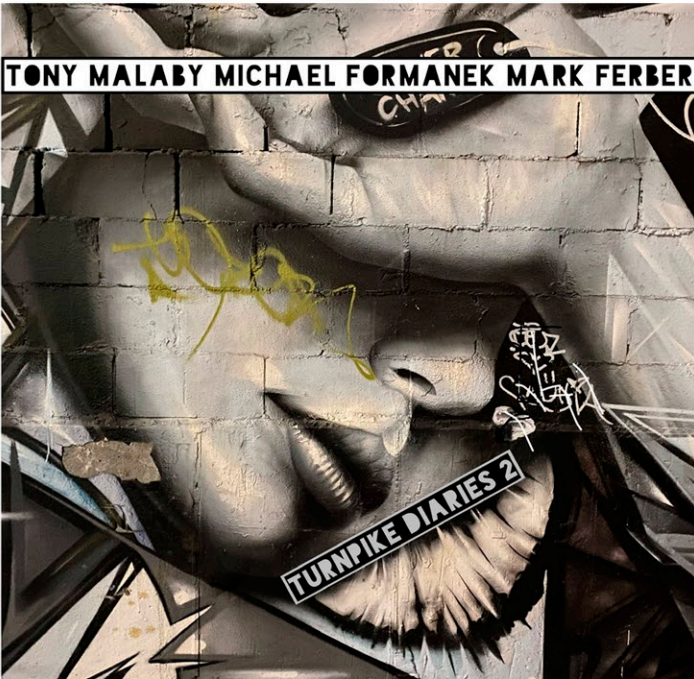
Patricia Brennan
Maquishti
(Valley of Search)
patriciabrennan.bandcamp.com/album/maquishti

Solemn and spacy auras mark the solo vibraphone program of the Mexico-born, New York-based improviser's first album. Not only does each feel very much at home, but deeply comfortable with its mate. A glowing recital that casts introspection as an advantageous way to greet new listeners, Brennan's debut becomes more and more captivating with repeated listens - an invitation to dodge the day's barrage of stimuli and focus on a single voice. The instrument itself can enhance pensive episodes, but the mallet techniques and sustain devices that Brennan employs here mess with the "typical" sound of the vibes and marimba. And she wisely varies her temperaments. Nuanced shifts in texture and tempo give her 12 originals a sizable scope. "Magic Square" is a quick-paced blend of intersecting lines. "I Like For You To Be Still" is a prayer of serenity. "Away From Us" is an eloquent drone. And "Derrumbe De Turquesas" is stillness itself - an essay on all things pacific that nudges Maquishti onto a list of must-hear solo vibes discs that includes those by Walt Dickerson, Jay Hoggard and Bobby Naughton.



Tony Malaby
Turnpike Diaries Volume 1
(Tony Malaby)
<https://tonymalaby.bandcamp.com/>

Last summer, with COVID squelching indoor rehearsals, Tony Malaby used a stretch of public sidewalk under the Jersey Turnpike as a spot for socially-distanced interplay. As the months ticked by, various pals were invited to participate, and the saxophonist began recording the action. Now the first volley has emerged in the form of a two-bass (Mark Helias and Michael Formanek), two-sax (Malaby and Tim Berne) quintet, and the impressive abstraction of this album's two extended pieces is full of architectural smarts. The aggressive horn exchanges bob 'n' weave. The bassists' oomph boasts a provocative lyricism. Drummer Ches Smith provides just as much orchestral color as he does swing. The 57-year-old boss is a focused player whose eloquence often arrives when his expressionism begins. He's searching for a head space where he can shut his eyes and let the music flow. And when the cast of characters surrounding him are on the same wavelength, he usually finds it. That's exactly what happens here.



Jim Macnie was kind enough to give us a playlist of his latest finds. This one's a little more work as these are all albums. Good news - more music to explore!



Jason Moran *The Sound Will Tell You*

María Grand *Reciprocity*

Charles Lloyd & the Marvels *Tone Poem*

Julius Hemphill (1938-1995) *The Boye Mult-National Crusade For Harmony*

Jane Ira Bloom & Mark Helias *Some Kind of Tomorrow*

Milford Graves *Percussion Ensemble*

Peter Stampfel *20th Century in 100 Songs*

Chick Corea Trio *Trilogy*

Jacob Bro *Uma Elmo*

Russ Lossing *Metamorphism*

Simon Nabatov *Plain*

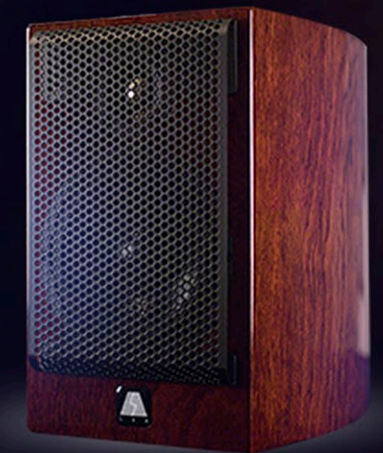
Brian Drye *Trio Love Call*

UNDERWOOD HIFI DELIVERS

Internet Direct Pricing on
High Value – High End Audio



EDITOR'S CHOICE –
THE LSA 10 STATEMENT –
AFFORDABLE STATE
OF THE ART



LSA HP-1



PLANAR MAGNETIC
HEADPHONE
A GIANT KILLER

.....
"Once in a long while, a product comes into the listening room that takes hold of me and does not let go. The HP-1 is such a product and has been in constant use since its arrival".

Frank Iacone – Editor and Publisher - headphone.guru
.....



EQUI=CORE 1800 mkII

BEST VALUE BALANCED POWER
AVAILABLE ANYWHERE

.....
"So how does the performance of the Equi=Core stack up?
To be frank, it is a giant killer".

Sam Rosen – September 2020 - [posit+ive feedback](http://positivfeedback.com)
.....

UNDERWOOD HIFI

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Setlist

Summerfest Grounds, Milwaukee, WI

June 25, 2010

Photo by Jeff Dorgay

Not quite a year earlier, I'd seen Jeff Beck in the Miles Davis hall, at the Montreux Jazz Festival, where he was still performing most of the setlist from his highly successful *Live at Ronnie Scotts* album.

While this was an epic show, with an incredible set of musicians, by the time he took the stage in Milwaukee, his Emotion and Commotion record had just been released, so the performance had been modified to include an ample portions of the new material.

Gone also was bassist Taj Wikenfeld, now replaced by ex-Prince bassist Rhonda Smith.

While Beck wasn't copping any Prince riffs, the overall presentation had become more funky with Smith's addition.

And at an age that a lot of dudes are bouncing grandkids on their lap, Jeff Beck was still bouncing the whammy bar on his Stratocaster, with the same level of emotion he did the first time he played Milwaukee in 1975.

I know. I was there too.



W H A R F E D A L E

The reviews are in.



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This new column is devoted to music composed specifically for motion pictures. Nearly a century after Al Jolson's 1927 *The Jazz Singer* debuted as the first feature-length film with recorded music, numerous film scores have achieved “legendary” status. This column's first soundtrack comes from Ridley Scott's 1982 sci-fi thriller *Blade Runner*.

Blade Runner is set in an acid-rain drenched 2019 Los Angeles, where the Tyrell Corporation creates replicants or humanoids for off-world work. Four replicants—Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), Leon Kowalski (Brion James), Pris Stratton (Daryl Hannah) and Zhora Salome (Joanna Cassidy)—have illegally returned to Earth. Detective or “Blade Runner” Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) is recruited to “retire,” i.e., terminate, these rogue replicants. While pursuing his risky mission, Deckard falls for the beautiful Rachael Tyrell (Sean Young) who is unaware that she is also a replicant.

Evángelos Odysséas Papathanassiou, better known as Vangelis, became a film score trailblazer for his use of synthesizers as emotive sound-generators in this and other well-received films like *Chariots of Fire*, and *Antarctica*.

There have been various official and unofficial soundtrack releases. A 1982 Warner Brothers LP with orchestral “adaptations” of some of the original Vangelis compositions appeared soon after the film's debut and, quite frankly, is best avoided. The original 1994 soundtrack CD (running time of 57:53) was released on the East West label in the UK and Atlantic Records in the US. The 2007 Warner Brothers 25th anniversary 3-CD set contained a remastered original soundtrack, additional soundtrack music, and compositions “inspired” by the film. A limited-edition 2013 Audio Fidelity hybrid SACD was followed by 2015 and 2017 LP soundtrack reissues on Atlantic Records and East West Warner labels, respectively. Various “bootleg” versions of the *Blade Runner* film score do exist but vary in sound quality and tend to be costly.

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Soundtracks

by Lawrence Devoe

The original film score was recorded and mixed in London's Nemo Studios in 1982 under the composer's supervision. The recorded tracks used numerous synthesizers including the Yamaha CS-80 and the Roland ProMars, three different pianos—a Steinway Grand, a Yamaha CP-80 electric grand and a Fender Rhodes—and various percussion instruments—a gamelan, gongs, tubular bells, glockenspiel, and timpani. With the exception of “Memories of Green” from Vangelis's 1980 album *See You Later*, all of the other selections listed below were in the film's original score:

1. Main Titles
2. Blush Response
3. Wait for Me
4. Rachel's Song
5. Love Theme
6. One More Kiss, Dear
7. Blade Runner Blues
8. Memories of Green
9. Tales of the Future
10. Damask Rose
11. Blade Runner (End Titles)
12. Tears in Rain

The score covers a wide range musical idioms: Mary Hopkin's haunting vocalise in “Rachel's Song,” Dick Morrissey's sentimental saxophone in the “Love Theme,” the 1930s-vintage acoustics of Don Percival's “One More Kiss,” the smoldering chords of “Blade Runner Blues,” and Demis Roussos's exotic middle-Eastern vocal on “Tales of the Future” that segues perfectly into “Damask Rose.” Four of the tracks —“Main Titles,” “Blush Response,” “Wait for Me,” and “Tears in Rain”— contain brief bits of dialogue.

Spacious echoes and pulsating bass lines produced by the various synthesizers play off well recorded vocals and acoustic instrumentals. I suggest listening to this record at reasonably high levels to approximate what filmgoers heard in the theater. Once this is accomplished, *Blade Runner* becomes the immersive audio experience the composer intended it to be. The 2007 remastered CD version improves on the 1994 original, the 2013 hybrid SACD is even better, but for the best sound, get the East West-Warner 180 g LP reissue.

Blade Runner was, and still is, a barrier-breaking sci-fi film with a score anticipating a dystopian future dominated by electronica while still paying homage to its film-noir influenced past.



Sean Zloch managed to get a vinyl copy of Run-D.M.C.'s *Raising Hell* before Mobile Fidelity sold out. Hmmm. I think that says a bit about stepping outside the box for vinyl reissues. Maybe a little more Hip Hop and a little less Dylan?

Either way, big points to MoFi for the choice. Perhaps we'll see a few more Run-D.M.C. titles?

On the following page is Sean's take on the pressing.



King of Rock - King of Rock

RUN-D.M.C. - Rock Box

Raising Hell - You Be Illin'

King of Rock - You Talk Too Much

Raising Hell - It's Tricky

Tougher Than Leather - Mary, Mary

Raising Hell - My Adidas

Down With The King - Down With The King

Run-D.M.C. - Sucker M.C.'s (also featured on *Krush Groove 1*)

Tougher Than Leather - Run's House

Raising Hell - Walk This Way

A Very Special Christmas - Christmas in Hollis



Run DMC

Raising Hell

MFSL 2-494 45RPM 2LP

After months of waiting, Mofi's reissue of Run DMC's *Raising Hell* is finally here. I like *Breakfast In America* and *Kind of Blue* as much as the next guy, it's nice to see Mofi try something outside their wheelhouse. *Raising Hell* is an excellent choice. Not only is it the first multi-platinum Hip-Hop album, it has crossover appeal with a great cover of "Walk This Way" (featuring Aerosmith's Steven Tyler and Joe Perry).

The original Profile LP sounds OK. It has great bass, much to my surprise, but the highs are a little rolled off. The sound is a little compressed causing the overall sound to be a little two dimensional, which would be fine if I were listening on a boombox in 1986. Everything just sits between the speakers.

By comparison, the Mofi is three dimensional. Reverend Run and DMC pop out of the speakers, their raps nice and clean, up in front, not buried in the back with the rest of the music. On "Walk This Way" Joe Perry's guitar rings out clearly throughout the song. The bass is just as great as the original LP but the highs are extended, making the recording sound more open than the original.

Raising Hell is one of the first Hip-Hop albums to breakout to a mainstream audience. Hopefully it will also pave the way for more high-quality reissues of Rap and Hip-Hop to come.

-Sean Zloch



Swill

Sponsored by Cardas Audio

By Cameron VanDerHorst (photos: Jillian Klemm)

This issue's brew comes from 3 Floyds Brewing Co. out of Munster, Indiana. Located in the northwest corner of Indiana, 3 Floyds enjoys a close proximity to the greater Chicago area. This juxtaposition of big-city boldness and small-town subtlety inform the flavor of every brew 3 Floyds Brewing Co. offers. That dichotomy is on full display in their Gumballhead American wheat ale.

The wacky, bright colors of the can are dominated by a cartoon of a yellow cat, the titular Gumballhead himself. He's the star of an independent comic strip by Rob Ayers. Gumballhead the cat may wear a sour scowl, but Gumballhead drinkers will thankfully be in a much brighter mood.

Gumballhead combines the best aspects of domestic ales, with a smooth wheat taste that incorporates a vague, mildly sour flavor that is quite pleasant to the palate. You'll also notice a hint of grapefruit, with just a touch of bitterness that makes the overall experience more robust.



audio research

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Al Chieng, Positive Feedback

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Steven Stone, HiFi+

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Swill

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By Cameron VanDerHorst (photos: Jillian Klemm)



It may be psychosomatic, but I noticed a hint of a sugary flavor, not unlike the gumballs I'd get as a kid at the barber shop. You know the sort of place I'm talking about – mounted fish on the walls, back issues of *Autoweek* in the waiting area, and a rotating, striped pole out front. It's not often that a beer – especially one I've never tasted before – makes me feel nostalgic. Well done, Gumballhead.

I found it tremendously easy to polish off the entire six-pack in an evening of working out in the garage (see my playlist elsewhere in this issue). It's a delicious, full-bodied beer, but no single aspect of the flavor is overpowering. As stated above, "bold" and "subtle" aren't necessarily diametrically opposed, especially in this case. There's plenty to stimulate your taste buds and keep you engaged, but each part of the experience is so fleeting that you'll keep coming back for more.

It's somewhat reminiscent of the way that, as a kid with a fresh haircut, I'd keep right on chewing that sugary bubblegum long after it lost its flavor (typically about three seconds after I put it in my mouth). Thankfully, 3 Floyds Gumballhead is far more flavorful – and that flavor lasts just a bit longer.

My only complaint is that I can't buy another 12 ounces for a quarter. At least it's less likely to give me cavities.

Legal Stuff: While we all enjoy consuming adult beverages, (if you're of legal age, of course) TONE and Cardas Audio ask you to be responsible...

If you are considering adding Naim's top digital streaming DAC to your system, and if by some chance you are not fully integrated into the Naim way of doing things, please read the instructions first.

This is not a plug-and-play device.

Our reviews don't usually start with such a stern note (we're the fun hifi people, after all), but it's really critical to get this player installed in a specific way to get it to work correctly. As with so many of us, there are two ways to do things, ours and some other way. Serious Naim enthusiasts stay within the Naim ecosystem of SNAICs, Burndys, and such. If you are so equipped, you'll be able to use the supplied premium Naim interconnects and plug them right into your system.

Unpack and setup

Here's some setup advice for the rest of you that won't read the damn manual. Download and follow the quick start guide from the Naim website to the letter. This means unscrewing the four transit screws that keep the DAC board floating. Do NOT tip the ND555 up vertical to do this – hold it over a counter or shelf top and quickly unscrew all four of these, then very gently move the ND555 into place. Take the 4 transit screws, put them in a Ziplock bag, and toss them back into the ND555 box, in case you move or need service. You'll thank me for this in about 8 years.

Next, remove the two Burndy cables from the accessory box and take careful note that one of them has a single red stripe, and the other has two green stripes underneath the black sheath covering the cables. These correspond to output 1 and output 2 on the PS555 that connect to the same inputs on the ND555.

Another tip from a long-term Naim owner – these cables have a plastic index pin in the pin matrix that is easily broken (ask me how I know this), so very carefully align this pin and gently insert the power supply connector into its socket. The outer, locking collar will then twist into place solidly. Again, gentle is the word. Now you're ready to power it up, power supply first, then the ND555. Follow the prompts on the crisp LED screen, and you're almost there.

The one thing not in the quick start guide

Integrating the ND555 into your non-Naim system requires a pair of RCA interconnects. If your ND555 makes no sound, even though it appears to be playing, you need to go back to the app to make this change.



Cover Story: A Perfect Pair

Naim ND555 & PS555

\$19,990 and \$11,990
(both pieces required)
Naimaudio.com



There is no way to access this via the front panel and remote. Go to "Settings," then "Output Settings," then choose RCA.

While in here, you can also fine-tune the appearance of the app, and whether you'd like fixed or variable output levels. Though the ND555 offers a variable output, Naim suggests this is a digital volume control to be used with some streaming services like AirPlay. Naim's Steve Sells says, "we strongly recommend a true analog preamplifier for best sound quality."

A plethora of inputs at your disposal

The ND555 works with a vast range of digital sources. It's a Chromecast device, it works with Tidal, Qobuz, Spotify, internet radio, and of course, our favorite – it's a Roon end point too. Integrating the ND555 into our Roon network took less than a minute, but if you are not a Roon user, the Naim music app is very good. If you only have a few thousand selections in your music library and don't want another subscription, the Naim app is convenient to use.

You will need a single PS555 power supply to operate the ND555, but like the CD555, you can use a pair of them to get even more sonic excellence. Where dCS and Esoteric give you the option to add an external master clock (and in the case of dCS, an additional outboard upsampler), Naim offers increased performance by providing additional power supply capacity. This is a known upgrade path with their gear that works incredibly well.

We did not ask Naim for a second PS555, but having used one with the CD555 when it was a reference component, the improvement is dramatic enough that the genuinely obsessed will want to budget for one at some point. Perusing the Naim forum, the owners who have taken the plunge all seem happy with the choice and indicate a similar resolution and dynamic improvement as we noticed with the CD555. Rest assured that if your check writing fingers are tired after unpacking this combo, you'll still have a ton of fun with the single power supply version.



SCULPTURE A



LE PHONO SE

Working strictly as a class A single ended device with no feedback, our phonostage uses only solid state components (no op-amps) with the shortest signal path circuit possible.



Tailor built for your cartridge with carefully selected and matched high end components, it works with any MC cartridge from 0.1mV (74dB of gain) up to 2.5mV.

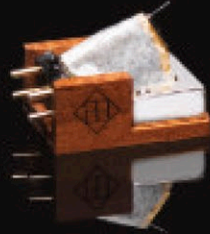
Le Phono SE, a solid-state design without the usual issues of tube electronics.

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A.3 & A.4 SCULPTURE A PHONO CARTRIDGES

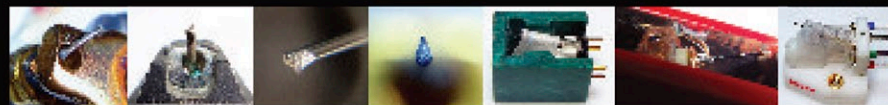
Already awarded by French press with a « Remarquable » award, the A.3 and A.4 phono cartridges display a minimum tracking of 90 micron @300Hz lateral that will allow you to get the full definition of your records. For this we have developed a specific damper and use only boron cantilevers with dedicated geometry diamond tips.

With outputs from 0.1mV to 0.3mV with either silver or copper coils and impedances between 3 to 40 ohms.

It is the perfect companion of our Le Phono Single Ended phonostage and others.

With a compliance of 12 @100hz and three bodies, mixing impregnated wood with pure brass, copper, silver or gold, we are able to fine tune the weight and fine tune the sound of your cartridge to match perfectly the mechanics of your tonearm.

The A.3 is a fixed characteristic design, the A.4 is a tailor made cartridge up to your requests.



retip

Our insights on cartridge "repairs"

What if each cartridge was restored as unique artefact ? We do not believe that glueing a cantilever and diamond tip is enough. Aging has an effect on your cartridge as well as usage wear, dust, hygrometry and UV.

Cartridge service : your cartridge does not sound as good as you remember ? The damper might have been tampered with, the azimuth of your diamond tip is starting to be off or maybe the piano wire is getting loose ?

We can check it out and get back the original parameters without altering the parts of your cartridge.

Fine-repair : we are able to completely rebuild Neumann DST (or Lumière), Clément cartridges and most MC cartridges available. Open coils ? Stiff damper ? Broken cantilever ? We know how to deal with these issues and will do our best to get your cartridge as close to its original status, even though we can certainly alter your cartridge up to your requests.

If we weren't still living in a travel-restricted, COVID unfriendly world, I'd tell you to put the 555s on repeat and take a couple of day holiday. So, if you can ignore the sound coming out of these Naim boxes for about a week of play, it will improve tremendously. For those skeptical of the burn-in process, listening to the same two or three tracks every day at the beginning of your listening session will convince you. Even solid-state components need a certain amount of time to fully stabilize thermally; if you can leave your 555s powered up all the time, they will stay right at the optimum point.

Serious listening

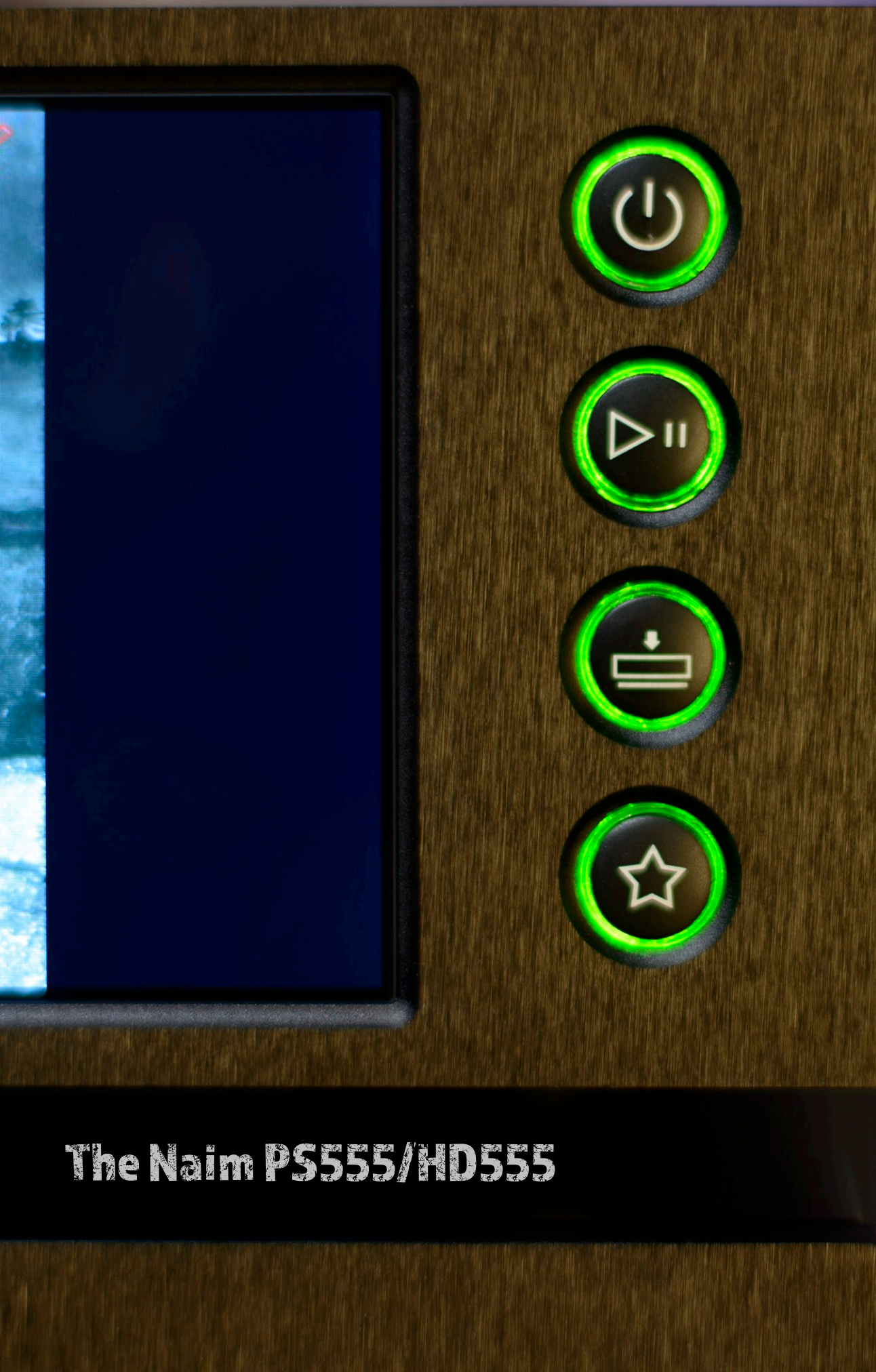
With that out of the way, the ND555 is truly brilliant. A digital front end at this level should have no short comings in playback or operation, and the ND555/PS555 does not. Nothing. I've been fortunate enough to live with this player for the better part of a year. After wiggling through the setup maze, sitting back to enjoy the fruits of that labor and just listen is terrific.

While we're ticking boxes, this is the point in the review where the product in for review is compared to the long-term reference and is found to come up slightly short. Regular readers might be thinking, "how does it compare to the dCS?" Fantastic, but different. Here are a few comparisons, which will hopefully resonate on one level for you.

Comparing these two players is like choosing between a Porsche 911 Turbo S and the 911 GT3. Both are stunning performers, but the way they present the experience is entirely different. The Turbo S has more power, features all-wheel drive, and uses Porsche's PDK, dual-clutch automatic transmission. The GT3 offers a normally aspirated motor with a 9,000 rpm redline, rear-wheel drive, and 6-speed manual gearbox.

Which would you choose? Do you want to feel every nuance of the road when going fast, or would you rather have a bigger, broader, weightier experience? This is the difference between the Naim and the dCS.





The Naim PS555/HD555

The Vivaldi has slightly more weight and dynamic heft, with a slightly smoother top end, where the Naim offers a bit more inner detail and offers the slightest touch of extra dynamic contrast that the dCS does not. If you have the roads and the access to track time, only the GT3 will squeeze your adrenal gland that hard. However, if you're driving your 911 everywhere, you'll appreciate the extra comfort the Turbo S brings. What is the best? Only what suits your needs the best. And everyone finds their joy in a different place. I could live with either, but I'd love to own both. Even when seeking stratospheric components, there are still choices to be made.

Those of you at the pinnacle of analog might relate to this comparison more... The dCS feels more like a Clearaudio Goldfinger, and the Naim, more like the Lyra Etna. Or, if you remember film photography, the dCS is Kodachrome, and the Naim is Fujichrome. (NOT Ektachrome) What does all this mumbo jumbo mean? Glad you asked.

Where the dCS sounds fantastic with everything played (In all fairness, the Vivaldi One is an SACD player, so consider the comparison to the Vivaldi DAC, which is similarly priced to the ND555/PS555.) when switching back and forth between it and the Naim, the Naim gets the edge pulling the most detail out of perfect recordings. However, when the road gets a little bumpier, the dCS is a comfier ride. This is such a fine distinction, that it will probably be decided by the overall tonal balance of your system.

For example, when listening to a handful of Monkees' tracks, or to be more current, nearly anything from Jack White is a bit grating through the Naim. Not unlistenable, but grating. These are dreadful recordings, to be sure, and in the end, reminiscent of early digital playback. Switch up the playlist to some exceptional recordings, and the Naim never disappoints - It's sonic splendor is not limited to high-res recordings. Just like the CD555, the ND555 proves how much music is happening in well-recorded 16/44 tracks.

It would be easy to wax poetic about how great Patricia Barber or Louis and Ella sound through this player... that's just low hanging fruit. Those feeling a little more adventuresome or avant-garde may even enjoy the latest, Frank Zappa, high res releases on Qobuz. "Don't Eat The Yellow Snow" has been a favorite since college days, yet playing *Apostrophe* through the Naim player is a revelation. Frank Zappa built a reputation for complex, densely packed music, full of the tiniest musical nuggets that often required headphones and trendy chemical amusement aids to uncover.

The ND555 goes deeper into this mine than ever. It's an incredibly engaging experience. This is why you write the big check.

Specs, tech, and functionality

Even after a lengthy review like this, there is still more we haven't unearthed. We suggest revisiting the Naim website and even the Naim forum, where you can get a healthy dose of unfiltered comments from ND555 owners. I've always enjoyed the Naim forum and have found excellent tech advice there over the years.

The final argument that can be had about the Naim and its Burr-Brown based chipset vs. the shortlist of DACs that do it all in software is the question of earlier obsolescence because a chipset-based digital decoder will obviously become obsolete faster than one that can merely have new software and firmware uploaded.

The Naim PS555/HD555

In an ultimate sense, this is true; however, the ND555/PS555 (especially if you go for broke and add a second PS555) is so good, I can't imagine digital playback getting all that much better. At least not to the point that you'd want to scrap the ND555. Had streaming not hit the scene, the CD555/PS555 would still be my digital reference. Naim did not make the CD555 with a digital input. For all but the most ADD, this one should last you a lifetime.

If you tick the yes box

If you like what we've had to say so far, and you are looking for a destination digital front end, the next step is to make an appointment with your Naim specialist so you can see for yourself (and hear, of course) how lovely the ND555 is.

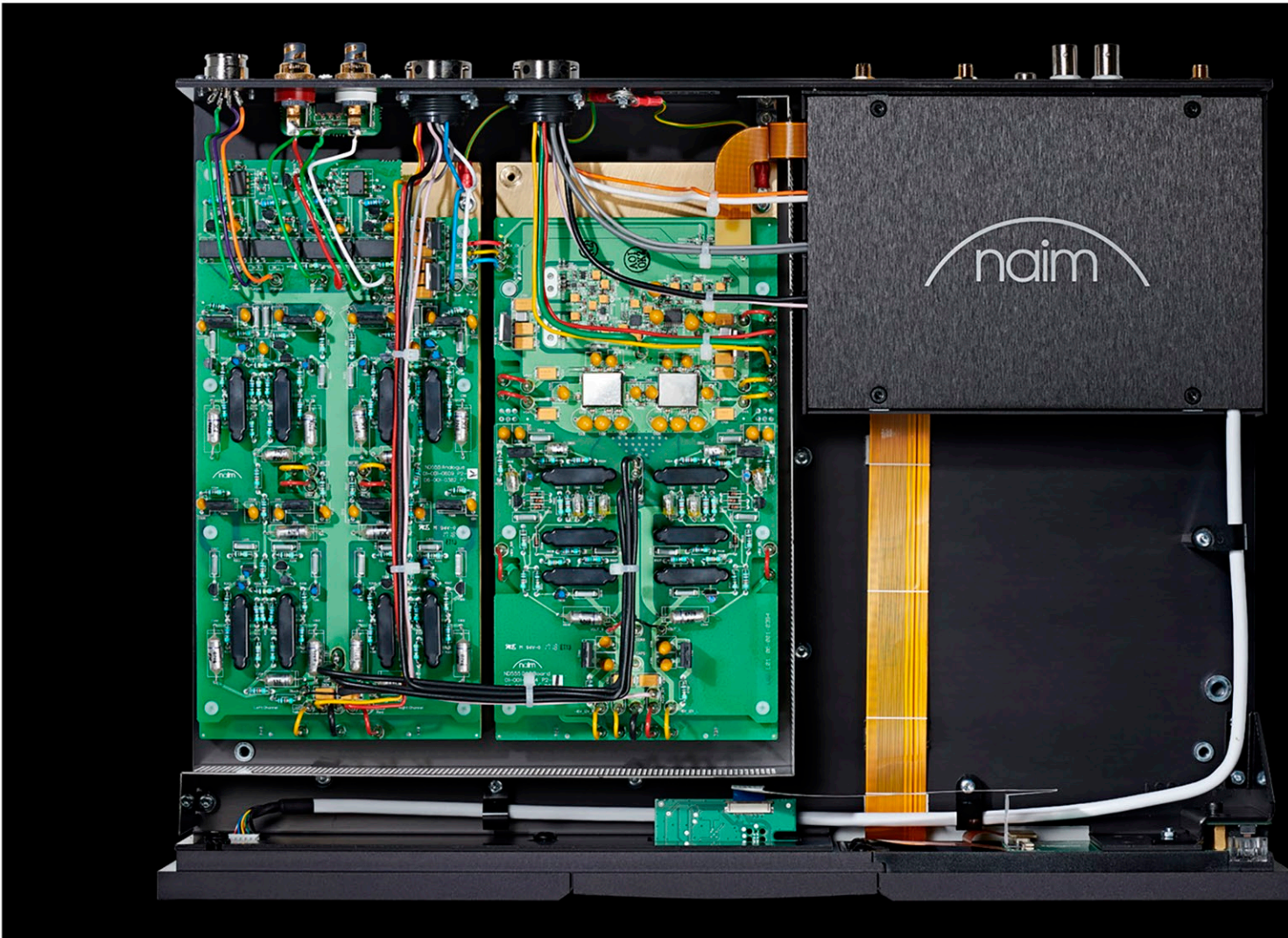
The biggest question of all is: is the ND555 "worth the money?" While that is always a relative question, and there are thousands of people on the internet that will tell you spending this much money on a digital player is insanity. Even beyond the sonic experience, don't overlook a level of build quality that isn't available in lesser components. Look at the paint on a 30-year old Rolls Royce compared to that of a 30 year old Kia.

However, if you've got \$32k in available funds, you A: aren't sweating how to pay this month's mortgage payment, and B: you've probably worked your way up the audiophile ladder a bit, and my hope is that you've heard many of the other offerings. There are a lot of great DACs in the \$9,000 - \$15,000 arena (even from Naim and dCS). After auditioning and living with a number of those, if you can make the jump, the level of musicality and ease that the ND555 creates is worth every penny. If you can take the big leap now, you won't lose \$2k-\$5k each time you trade up from a lesser DAC. It adds up in a hurry.

Yes, build quality at this level is superb, and of course, thousands of hours of research, testing, and prototyping went in the front door. But in the end, when you compare the finest DACs at this price point as a whole, they still outperform the DACs a click or two down years later. Finally, when you graduate to a player at this level, there is no more regret. You won't find yourself sitting in the listening chair pondering, "if it only did a little more of this, or a little less of that." Execution, ergonomics, and most of all, sound quality are all top. Another thought to ponder: because Naim can build a product at this level makes their entry-level digital products equally compelling. There's a deep pool of knowledge to swim in, so even if you can't play at the top of the mountain, it's still a good day wherever you can be. Naim makes a fantastic \$1,700 player because they have the engineering chops to make (and successfully sell) a player at this level.

Naim digital players are at the top of the mountain when capturing music's pace and timing. There is a correctness here that is achieved by precious few digital players, and when listening to acoustic instruments, everything in the mix feels as if it's the proper size and has correct spatial relationships. Some players can feel overblown, yet with the ND555, you can hear the difference between an upright Steinway and a Grand.

This level of musicality will have you looking at your turntable, wondering if you really need to fuss with vinyl anymore. It's that good.



Peripherals

Preamplifier	Pass Labs XS Pre
Power Amplifier	Pass Labs XA200.8 monoblocks
Analog	Pass Labs XS Phono, Grand Prix Parabolica, Lyra Atlas
Speakers	Sonus faber Stradivari, six-pack of REL no.25 subwoofers
Cable	Cardas Clear, Tellurium Q, and Red Miracle interconnect (Naim to preamplifier)

Naimaudio.com

Did you think we'd still be listening to the Compact Disc in 2021?

Considering listening to vinyl isn't really wacky (or is it?) in the 21st century, the slightly off center comeback of the Compact Disc makes perfect sense.

They are still being made, though in much lower numbers than ever before, but like the black discs, many of us still like to hold onto something.

Anything.

A number of the high end's top companies have not given up on the Compact Disc either. A few people, like Mobile Fidelity Sound Labs still press SACDs.

So on the pages to follow, we've got a few players for you at a wide range of different prices, depending on your level of obsession.

Some already have full reviews on the TONE website, while the rest are in the works.

If you love (or are still building) your compact disc collection, read on.



Technics SL-G700

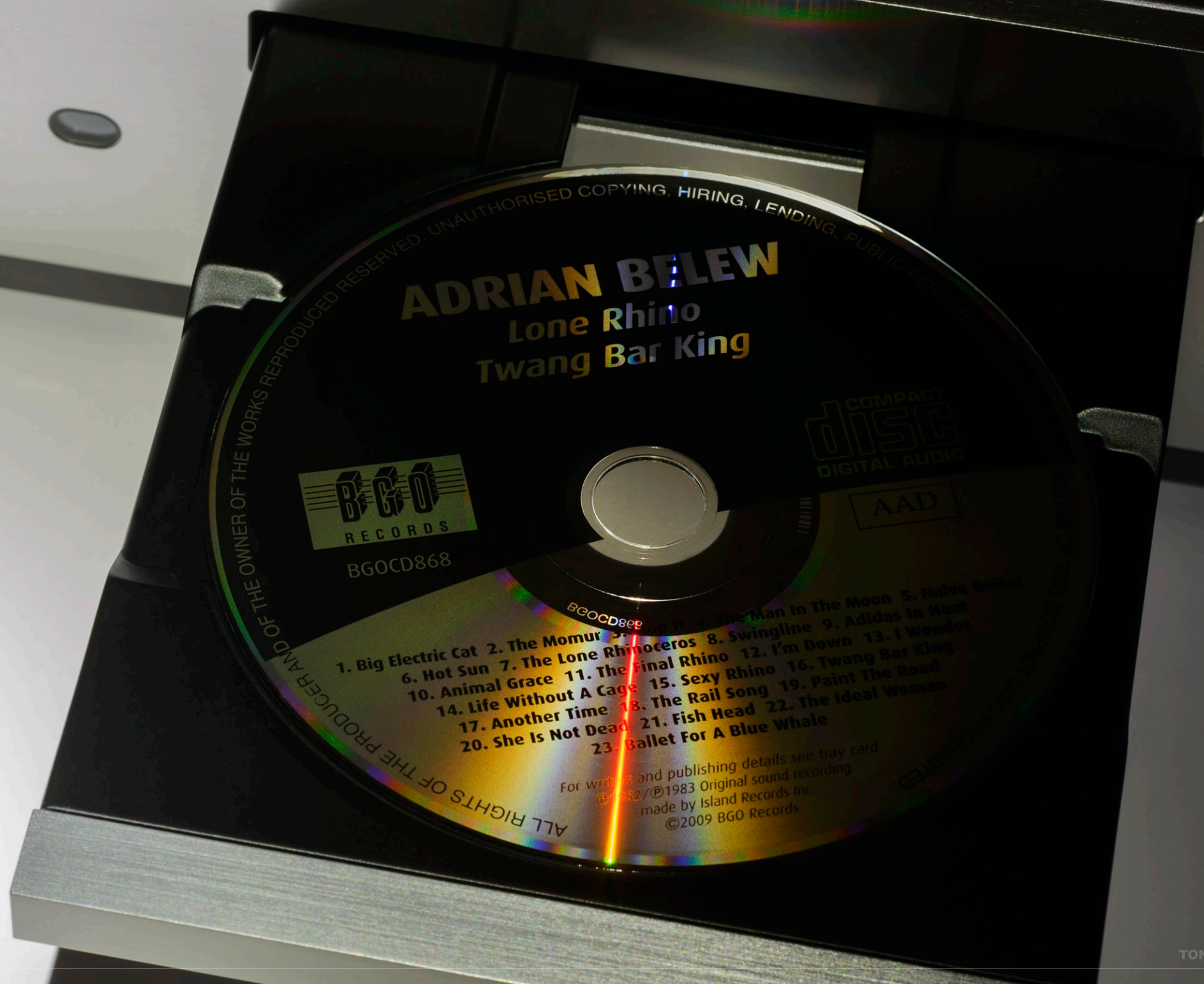
\$2,999.99
technics.com

If you happen to be someone with an SACD collection, and still enjoys playing them, there aren't a lot of choices under five figures, especially now that OPPO has left the market. Much like the \$4,000 Technics SL-1200 GAE, the SL-G700 has the build quality of a five-figure component. It has a heft to it that doesn't usually accompany \$3,000 components of any kind. Chalk that up to Panasonic being a company with a massively vertical manufacturing structure.

The sound quality is equally top in class, and for many, this could easily be the last disc player you ever buy. The SL-G700 would be a killer deal at this price even if it were just a disc player, but it is also a high resolution DAC and can be used to stream files from your NAS, linked with Technics own app. Or you can plug a USB drive in the front panel.

The only thing keeping it from perfection is that it is not a ROON endpoint, however it can stream Tidal, Spotify, Deezer as well as unfold MQA files. With Chromecast and Apple Air Play built in, you can still stream files via ROON to the SL-G700, but not at maximum resolution.

Three grand for 98 percent perfect is not a bad day. You can read our full review here.



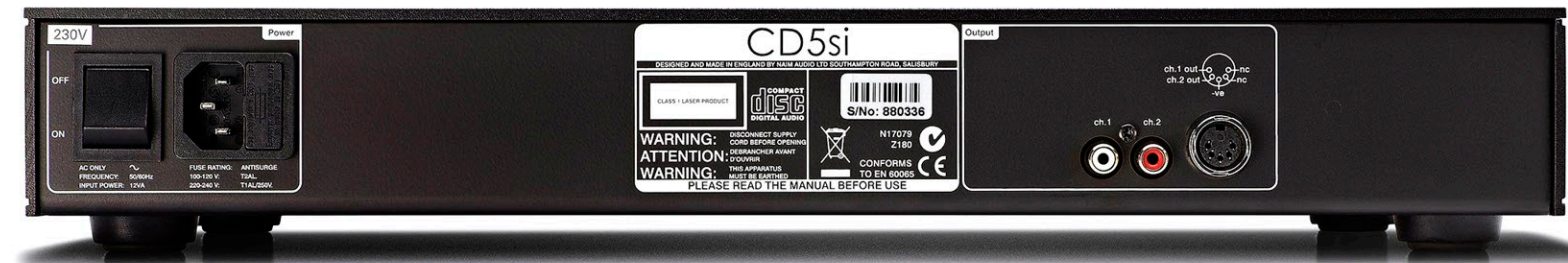
One of the biggest things plaguing CD players is the transport mechanism, particularly mechanism longevity and possible replacement at some point in time.

As Naim builds the drawer mechanism for the CD5Si in house, and it is a uniquely mechanical device, this is one you can count on for the long haul.

The CD 5 has always been a simple, basic, and robust CD player that is incredibly true to the music. It doesn't stream, you can't use it as a DAC, it just plays CDs. The current Si model, builds upon those strengths.

And it does a fantastic job doing so.

If you need the perfect player for this single task, there's a lot of CD555 DNA in this one.



Naim
CD5Si... the secret is in the drawer.

\$1,690
naimaudio.com

Line Magnetic LM-24CD... tubes!

\$2,195
line-magnetic.eu
toneimports.com

This player is the complete opposite of the Technics we featured a few pages earlier.

It has a vacuum tube output stage, and only plays compact discs - there is no SACD option, nor is there a streaming option. You can use it as a USB DAC, however.

But the LM-24CD is pure music. This is a luxurious player for the primarily CD oriented listener. We purchased the review sample to go with our Line Magnetic SET amplifier and ZU Dirty Weekend speakers, so you'll be hearing more about this one.





T+A MP2500R... does it all

\$13,000
ta-hifi.de

*T*his is one mighty digital player.

T+A's MP 2500 R, not only plays CD and SACD disks, it is a ROON endpoint, and an FM tuner! You know why we love it.

The photo really doesn't fully do justice to the fine craftsmanship inside and out of this player, which also features the same disc mechanism from T+A's flagship MP 3100 HV player, so you can be sure of long-term durability.

And the sound, is fantastically neutral, dynamic and lifelike.



Cambridge CXC v.2... the right tool for the right job.

\$599
cambridgeaudio.com

Just as so many music lovers are discovering vinyl for the first time, many new music lovers are having the same experience with the compact disc. Not to mention the Gen X'ers that like their boomer parents finding crates of records in the attic, are finding those boxes of CDs they've had lying about since high school. (maybe a few cassettes too - getting old is a cruel process.)

With so many using powered speakers, or an integrated amp with a built-in DAC, the Cambridge CXC v.2 is the perfect way to maximize fun at a reasonable cost.



Nagra CDC... compact but powerful

\$19,500
nagraaudio.com

Nagra is famous for compact masterpieces, and this is yet another, but with a twist. The CDC you see here has all the electrical and mechanical robustness you'd expect from Nagra in a compact package. But the CDC has a full line stage built in so it can be paired with the power amplifier of your choice to make an extremely compact, yet incredible sounding system.

Incidentally, the feet beneath the CDC allow for a perfect fit stacking on top of a Classic Power amplifier.

Welcome to MINE:

We're not just crazy about music and hi-fi here at TONE. While we can put many labels on our ethos, claiming to be music lovers, audiophiles, or perhaps even qualityphiles, that doesn't even cover it. Having met so many of our readers from all over the globe, I'd say our readers are playful and inquisitive to say the least.

You've told us you like automobiles, motorcycles, fine art, bicycles, toys, cameras... Well, you get the picture. Lumping this all under a banner labeled "Style" seems too limiting. Let's face it, we're all a little selfish when it comes to our stuff.

Let's call it what it is - MINE! We'll be sharing more of our favorites as we go.



Classic Black Kit Kat Clock

\$59.99

kit-kat.com

What could go better with your vintage hifi setup than one of these? (Maybe a McIntosh clock if you're a Mc lover, ok.)

These are back, buggy eyes and all, and are available in a range of fun colors.

THE COMPONENTS OF EXCELLENCE: LASTING VALUE

Before you buy a new audio component, consider why some people would rather own a used McIntosh than a new anything else.



Made in the USA

"The best source I know 'for all things McIntosh' is Audio Classics in Vestal, New York. They do a lot of restoration work on McIntosh products and are an authorized McIntosh dealer and service center."

Jim Hannon, VP/Group Publisher & Senior Writer, *The Absolute Sound*

Timeless design. Legendary construction.
Sound investment.

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MINE
it should be YOURS

In Celebration of...

George Harrison Record Player
\$500
project-audio.com

Pro-Ject and Universal Music Group bring you a very special expression of their Essential III turntable, with this bit of beatles memorabilia.

Featuring a factory mounted Ortofon OM10 MM cartridge, you'll be back in the USSR in no time.



Learn some cool sh*t on our [YouTube channel!](#)



PRIMALUNA
NEW! EVO 400 Tube Preamp
RCA & Balanced In/Out
\$4,499

53lbs of badass, dual-mono, tube-rectified bliss! Plus, transformer-coupled XLR. Look inside on our YouTube channel.



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MX-VYNL Our Favorite \$1000
Phonostage Is On Sale
\$749 (regularly \$999)

The MX-VYNL is fully-balanced, adjustable on-the-fly, and sounds fantastic. Pair w/ Sbooster for reference-level performance!



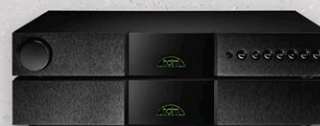
VPI
Super Prime Scout w/ 10.5"
JMW Arm & VTA On The Fly
\$2,899 (was \$58,997.32!)

Watch our video! Upscale Audio Exclusive with upgraded tonearm and base! Cartridge bundles. #1 VPI dealer worldwide!



PATHOS ACOUSTICS
Aurium
Hybrid Headphone Amp
\$1,295

Class-A, zero feedback hybrid design using two 6922 on the front end. Hot-rod it with a Sbooster Power Supply!



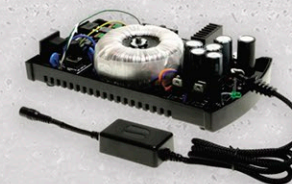
NAIM
NAC 152 XS + NAP 155 XS
Pre/Power Bundle
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62% off! We made your dream of owning Naim come true! Take a peek inside on our YouTube channel.



LUMIN
LUMIN Network Music Players
aka Streaming DACs
\$2,300-\$13,990

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SBOOSTER
BOTW Power & Precision MKII
Audiophile Power Supply
\$359-\$399

Vastly improve the sonic performance of any compatible device in your system. DAC, streamer, router, turntable, etc.



FELIKS AUDIO
Euforia
Tube Headphone Amp
\$2,599

Learn why Focal uses Feliks headphone amps to demo Utopia at our YouTube channel. Amps starting at just \$679.

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Restores THREE LPs
and ONE 45
Simultaneously



Upscale Audio Edition

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Interesting Accent

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Everything will be awesome

TONE106.137



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-HEAR THE TRUTH-



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Find out more about the benefits of granite enclosures, and the other advantages of Acora Acoustics
Visit <http://www.acoraacoustics.com>

Concert Safety

\$259

bulletproofoeveryone.com

No matter what your political views are, the world is getting a bit more complex daily. The folks at Bulletproof Everyone have some workable solutions, that are life saving, yet comfortable.

Their line of hoodies, regular pull-overs, vests, and even polo shirts offer IIA and IIIA protection, along with slash and stab resistance. All things considered, this might not be bad concert wear, going forward.



HIGH END BY OZ
THE WIZARD OF SOUND

"I have purchased the review sample to be one of our reference components, it's that good!"

Jeff Dorgay, ToneAudio



Thrax Enyo



North American Importer & Distributor

www.highendbyoz.com "The Wizard Of Sound"
Greenmount Drive, Woodbridge VA 22193 USA, (424) 344-0011

North American Dealers

Audio Limits

3132 Acacia Ct, Laughlin,
NV 89029 USA, (702) 299-0567
www.audiolimits.com

Stellar Home Audio

1 Nicolette Ct, Commack
NY 11725 USA, (631) 542-2728
www.stellarhomeaudio.com

Audio Den

105 Desperado Rd, Bailey, Co.
USA (303) 478-8221
www.audioden.net

United Home Audio

Stafford, VA
USA, (540) 295-8313
www.unitedhomeproducts.com

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Honey, I shrunk the floormats

\$6.95/pair
weathershield.com

Wanna keep your desk moisture free, or just show off your inner gearhead?

These mini floormat coasters from Weather Shield are outstanding.



Boulder

866 Integrated



200 Watts Per Channel

Roon Endpoint

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"This integrated amplifier
DAC/streamer is a triumph
of audio design and
engineering."
-Greg Petan
(Positive Feedback)

"When it comes to sound
quality, the main reason we
are all into this wonderful
hobby, the 866 Integrated is
fantastic."
-The Computer Audiophile

"This is an amplifier you
will keep... and enjoy!...
for the rest of your life."
-What Hi-Fi

Start your journey by scanning the QR code or contact your T+A concierge at:
concierge@ta-hifi.com



#musicreengineered
T+A Caruso

T+A
Engineering Emotion

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Keep it safe...

\$99 and up
ring.com

Ring has come out with a great line of stick up cameras that you can place just about anywhere.

Not a bad idea in these wacky times!



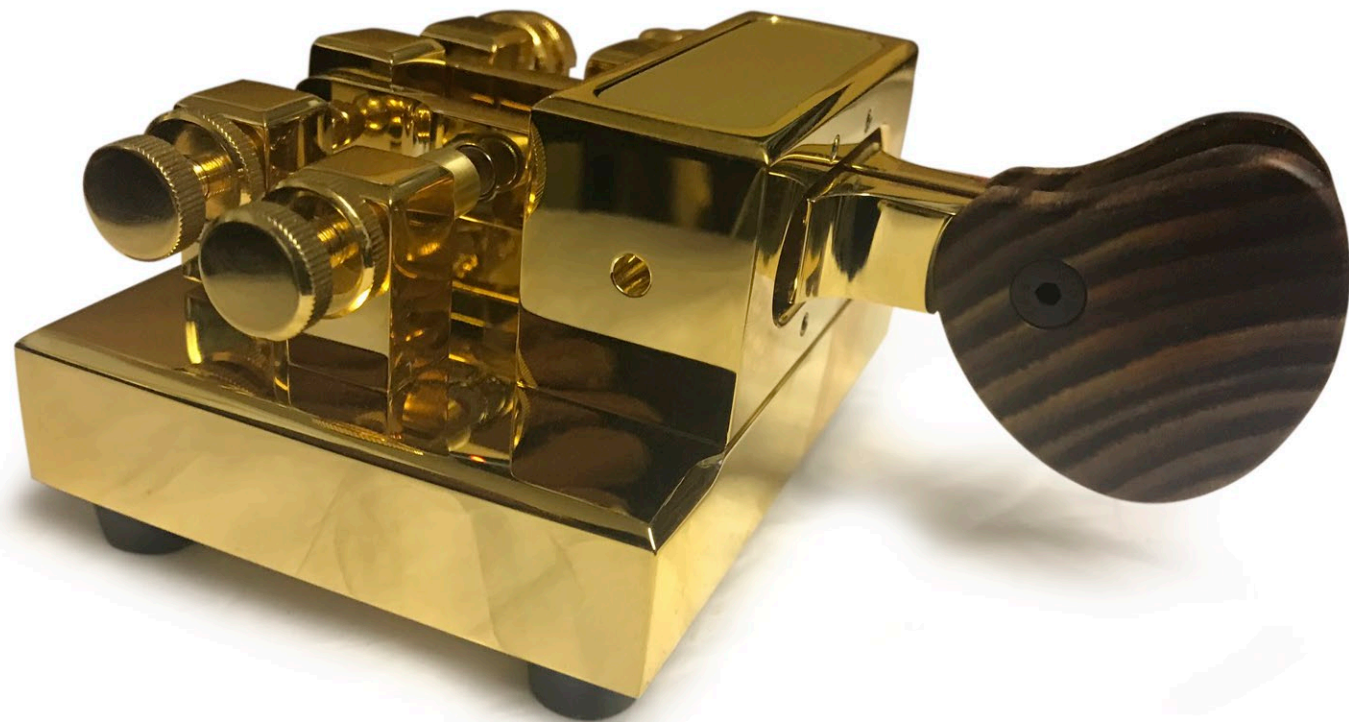
MINE
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Talk about ones and zeros...

All keys custom to order
chevronmorsekeys.com

Want to really be digital? Shut that smartphone off, fire up the transmitter and knock out some morse code. That's old school. That's really old school.

Kevin Gunstone (MOAGA) has been building these works of art since 2003, from his shop in Nottinghamshire, England. As you can see from this model, the craftsmanship is impeccable. No firmware updates or wall wart power supplies.



TONE106.145



[®]
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auditional wellbeing[™]

www.penaudio.fi & www.audiomania.fi

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Too Good to Put Pens In!

\$29.99
yeti.com

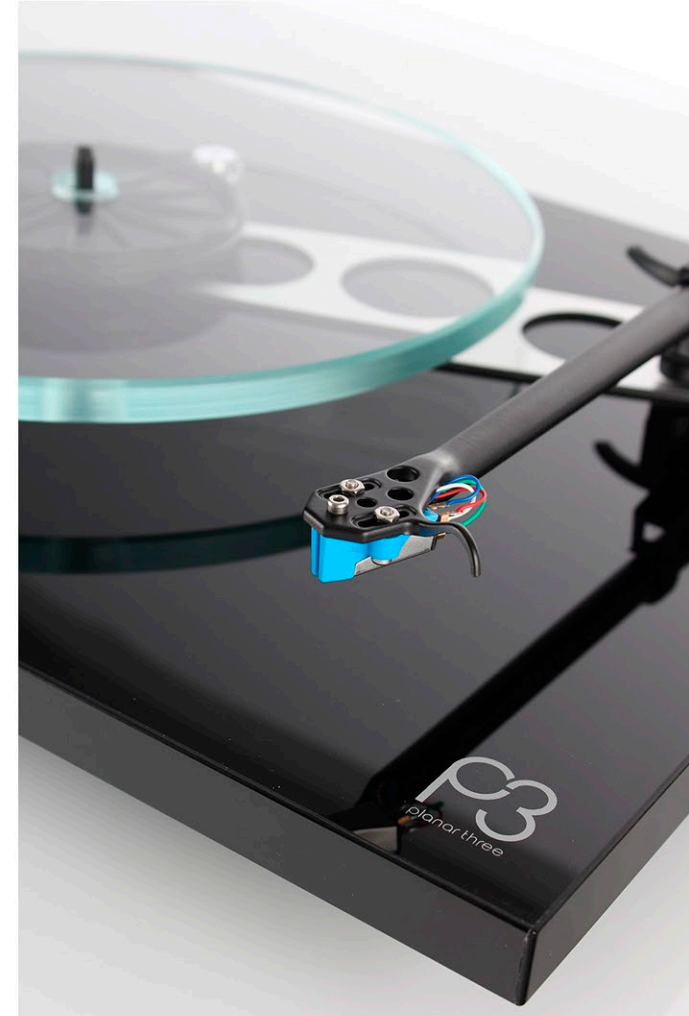
We love YETI stuff - it's nearly indestructible, and all of their products come in fun colors. And, as we like to coordinate our accessories, of course we had to get one that matches our YETI bucket.

You get two lid options with your YETI mug: a plastic lid that looks like an adult sippy cup, and the other, a stainless steel lid that is held on magnetically, making it easier to hold temperature on whatever beverage you have inside.



TONE106.147

rega



P3
planar three

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Rega puts the
music first.

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CHORD
COMPANY

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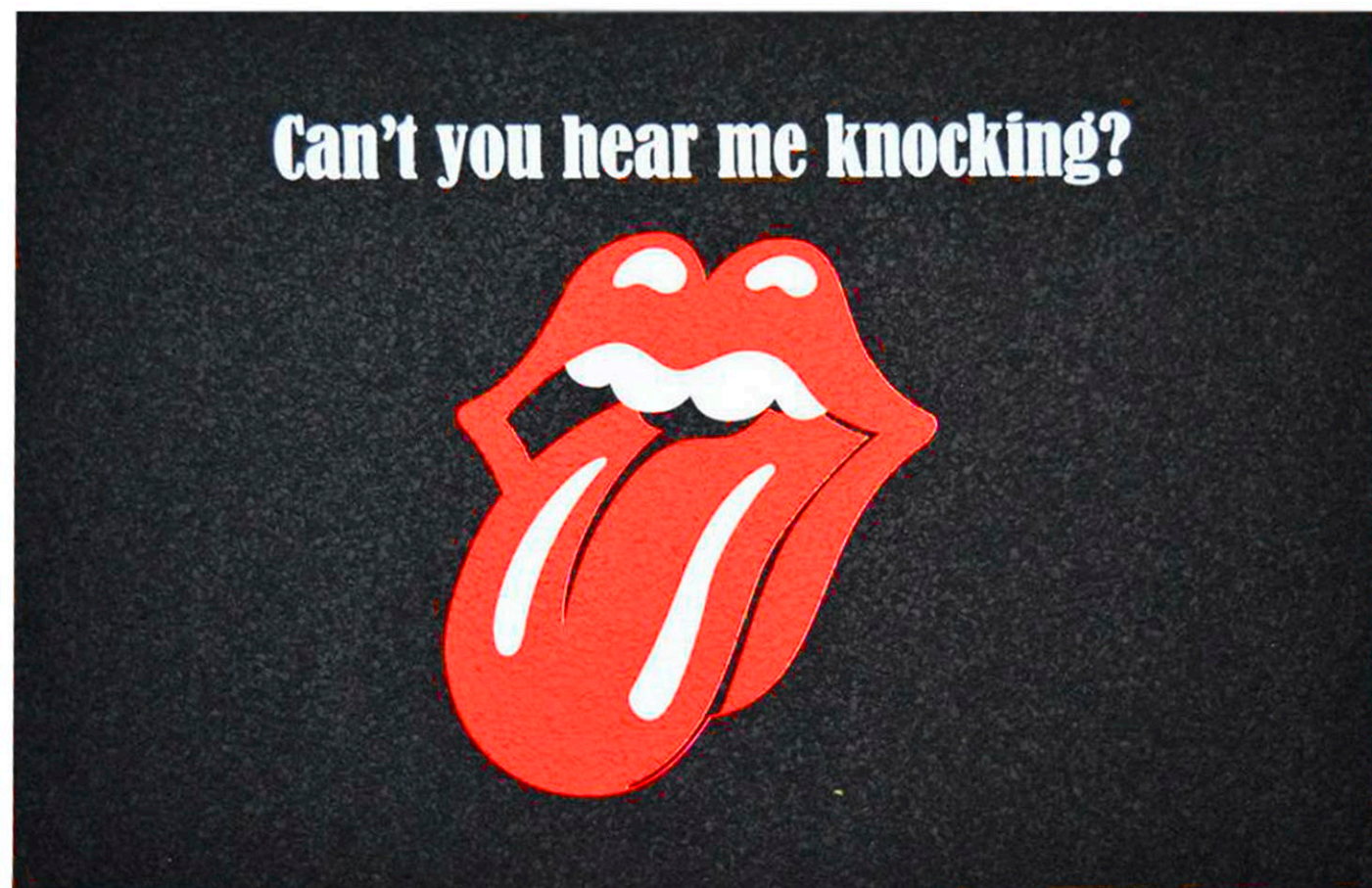
A Bigger Welcome

\$35
eastcoasters.org

A big Rolling Stones mouth sure is more intriguing than a mere welcome mat.

And while we're still on lockdown, it might make the door dash drivers take pause and chuckle. Who knows, perhaps by the time we can all visit each other, your guests will really enjoy this one.

Stones' fans, you can't be without this personal touch for your front door.



TONE106.150

We Are
Young.

We Are
Fun.

We Are
KIN Play



TOTEM
Discover yours
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 **Bluetooth**  **Qualcomm
aptX HD**

Meet the wicked sounding Totem KIN Play all-in-one music system. Stream tunes from your phone, kick it old school with a turntable, connect your gaming console and a whole lot more!

In House

The soundtrack of assembling the issue...

Brian Eno - *Before and After Science*

Good today as it was back in the day.



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EXCLUSIVELY AVAILABLE AT

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Better than the big boys at one-third the price

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And you can have it...while supplies last

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Jumping on the mega-box bus, The Who sells out yet again with this book, disc, poster collection of one of their biggest records.

TONE106.153

FOCAL®

EISA AWARD Best Product 2020-2021
BEST VALUE FLOORSTANDING LOUDSPEAKER
Focal Chora 826



HIGH-FIDELITY LOUDSPEAKER | CHORA 826

The Chora 826 bass-reflex loudspeaker is the embodiment of an accessible high-fidelity solution for a complete listening pleasure. Equipped with the exclusive Slatefiber cone developed and manufactured at the Focal site in France, the speaker drivers deliver balanced and precise midranges and perfectly articulated bass; leaving you to enjoy a big, full and generous sound. In addition, the presence of an aerodynamic front port eliminates distortion and gives more impact in the bass.

The flagship model
\$1,095

Behold *The New* D-10X

Accuracy, Sensitivity, Musicality



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luxmanamerica.com

FUTURE

TENSE

Reviews in our immediate future...



Harbeth HL C7ES-3 XD

\$4,890/pair (cherry) \$5,190/pair (walnut or tamo ash)
fidelisdistribution.com (US importer) harbeth.co.uk (factory)

The current version of Harbeth's middle speaker is improved, building on the success of the anniversary version. This is the first example of their new XD series, and it is fantastic. Everything you've always loved about this speaker is here in abundance, yet there is more extension and detail. A tough balancing act, but well done.

TELL YOUR SACDs: THE WAIT IS OVER

The GeerFab Audio D.BOB unleashes DSD64 from SACDs and 24/192 PCM from Blu-ray Audio discs and outputs to an external DAC. Legally. For the first time ever.

Unlock the potential of your SACDs and let them shine with staggering clarity, dynamics and presence.



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the absolute sound
2021 HIGH-END AUDIO BUYER'S GUIDE



GEERFAB
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geerfabaudio.com

FUTURE TENSE Reviews in our immediate future...

Stenheim Alumine 2

\$12,000/pair
stenheim.com

These small but mighty two-way monitors from Stenheim embody all things Swiss: Mega-build quality, an understated, tasteful elegance, and of course, great sound.

We'll have a full review of these as part of our speaker roundup next issue.



THE ALL NEW SERIE S

Only the Name is the Same

We completely redesigned our world renowned, award winning Serie S line to create mid-level subwoofers capable of reference-like performance, because our pursuit of perfect sound never stops.



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FUTURE TENSE Reviews in our immediate future...

Tactile 36" Mid-Century Modern Record Player Stand & Record Cabinet

Starting at \$1,295 (option and finish dependant)

tactileaudiofurniture.com

Have a minimalist system and no where to put it? We suggest the extremely stylish furniture from Tactile. They have a number of options for your records and system. We've ordered one and anxiously await delivery. Stay tuned.



Perfectly Balanced.



Announcing The New VK80i Integrated.

The warm glow of the quartet of 6C33 tubes distinguishes the VK80i as a pure Balanced Audio Technology design. Inside the stunning all-aluminum chassis is innovative technology and uncompromising audio quality. It's perfectly balanced for the discerning music lover.

BAT's proprietary *intelligent auto-bias and fuseless protection circuits* make this a tube amp that is easy to own and operate. You will always have optimal sound and total peace of mind. The balanced amplifier generates 55 watts-per-channel of *high current triode* power. This amplifier drives speakers with vigor due to the exceptional wide-bandwidth output transformers. With the VK80i, all you need to do is listen.

Contact your nearest BAT specialty retailer to audition this American-made powerhouse.

A Truly Balanced Approach.

For over 25 years, Victor Khomenko and the BAT team have been on a mission to build components that recreate music's natural beauty. When we started the company, we found that many products use complex designs to achieve unnatural perfection. There had to be a better balance.

BAT believes in the benefits of fully-balanced circuits to maintain the purity of the original signal. We use the fewest number of gain stages possible for the shortest signal path, and we go to great lengths to custom manufacture high-quality parts that meet our sound quality and reliability standards. Whether you choose one of our solid-state or tube designs, BAT components will give your system a "breath of life" that you've never heard before!

BAT

For more info visit Balanced.com
sales@balanced.com | 302-999-8855

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Reviews in our immediate future...

York MK1 MM/MC

\$429 (canadian)
sixacoustic.com

We're always looking for a fantastic way to get more people engaged in vinyl. We've found another winner from Canada.

The York Mk.1 is beautifully crafted, and sounds great. How great? We'll have a full review shortly and tell you all about it!



\$9k for a 15lb preamp?!

If you want to pay **\$9,000 for a 15 lb preamp** with mediocre parts, *that's your business.*

If you want to pay **\$4,699 for a 53 lb preamp** crafted with the finest exotic parts, *that's our business.*

Learn the truth on the PrimaLuna  **YouTube** channel.

PrimaLuna EVO 400 Preamplifier

Dual-mono design utilizing **two toroidal transformers** and **two 5AR4 rectifier tubes** to drop noise and maximize imaging and texture

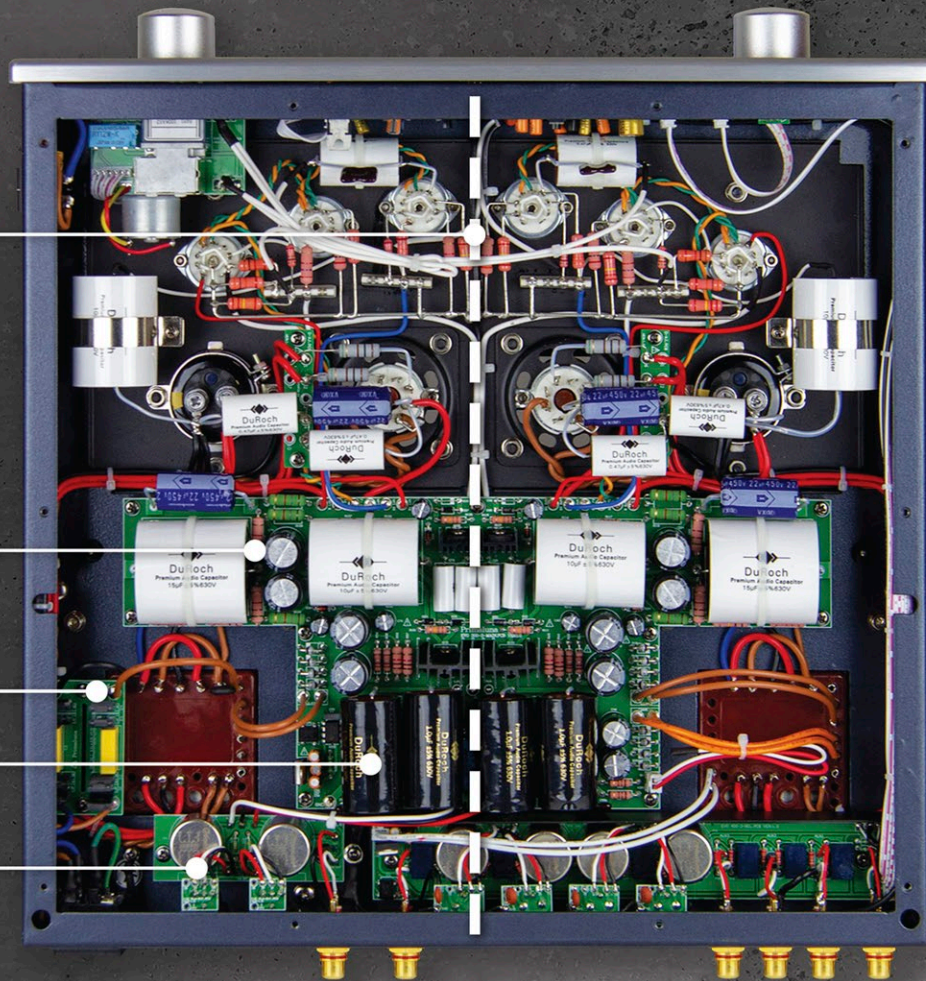
Point-to-point wiring with **Swiss-made silver-plated OFC wire** improves sound beyond what's possible with PCBs

Takman resistors from Japan renowned for their low noise, linearity, and musicality

AC Offset Killer lowers transformer noise to create a sense of space and air

Exotic Swiss-made tin-foil capacitors for the best sound without regard to cost

Transformer-coupled XLR plus RCA connections for ultimate flexibility



"...an insane audio bargain that delivers pure tube magic." DICK OLSHER, THE ABSOLUTE SOUND

The Absolute Sound
Product of the
Year 2020



TONE Audio
Product of the
Year 2019



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Music Illuminated[™]

primaluna-usa.com

909.310.8540

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Acora Acoustics SRB Speakers and SRS Stands

\$15,000/pair (speakers) \$5,000/pair (stands)
acoraacoustics.com

The Acora SRBs are at the top of the range for what you might expect to pay for a small pair of two-way monitors and stands. However, they are at the top of the list for what you can expect a pair of two-way monitors to perform like.

The SRBs are one of the top two-ways we've had the pleasure to experience. And, yes, you need the stands. Both are made from solid granite, and are as beautiful as they are functional.

Dealers That Mean Business:

You've read all the reviews, you've argued with the internet pundits,

and you're ready to write a check. Now what? If you're a slightly used customer that likes to shop for the best bargain you can find on Audiogon, this article is not for you. And, controversial though it might sound, I'm not against Audiogon. If you want a gently pre-owned preamp, love music, and just don't want to buy new, I get that – as long as you know what you're getting into. Audiogon can be a great place to buy pre owned gear if you know exactly what you want - and don't expect ANY service. But someone has to buy it new, so you can buy it used – remember that!

If you are the customer that likes to buy new, loves the feel (and the smell) of taking it out of the box for the first time, knowing no one else has touched it, I get that too. Personally, I'm about 50/50 on this experience, as I am with cars. Ask anyone who's bought a preamp or a used car from me, it's usually pretty pampered.

However, if you are going to spring for new gear, you need a good dealer. Someone who understands you, your music and most of all your perspective. You need someone to help you find the right components that will work together as a system, help you set it up in some cases, and offer support when things don't work out as planned. There's no substitute for experience, and a great dealer knows their products, and knows what will work best for you.

Nearly every audio system that has failed to achieve the greatness expected of it can be traced back to poor component choice (system and/or room) synergy and poor component setup. I've been to hifi shows, homes, and dealers all over the world – hearing sound good, bad, and somewhere inbetween. It always boils down to these two factors if something isn't truly broken, and it rarely is.

The solution is easy. Find a great dealer. While there isn't a hifi shop on every corner like there was back in the 70s, there are still some truly great dealers out there that will help you put together a stunning music system, regardless of your budget. And I'm on a mission to find as many of them as I can for you.

I'm starting with the folks I know, in this new section of the magazine. Most of the establishments in this list are running full page ads in the magazine – and there is a caveat. I will not accept advertising in this magazine from a dealer unless I've been to their place, seen the shop and have talked to a cross section of their customers to know they provide superior service. In most cases, these are hifi shops that I, or someone on the staff has purchased gear from as well.

These are not just people wanting to buy space in TONEAudio. Every one of these dealers carry my personal endorsement, and I hope that will help you on your journey. As we go forward, look for the "TONEAudio Approved Dealer" sticker on your favorite establishment. Know a great dealer, that you've had superior service from? Let me know, I would like to pay them a visit and add them to the list.



DON'T MISS THE OPPORTUNITY
TO HEAR THE BEST SOUND



Dealers That Mean Business - Listings

San Francisco, California - AudioVision San Francisco

www.audiovisionsf.com

1628 California Street

San Francisco, California 94109

415.614.1118



Austin, Texas - Whetstone Audio

www.whetstoneaudio.com

2401 E. 6th. Street #1001

Austin, Texas 78702

512.477.8503



No. 25

No. 25 commemorates a quarter century of our pursuit of perfect sound, while pointing to our next 25 years of building the finest sub bass systems available. No. 25 employs our most advanced design, engineering and craftsmanship, featuring our ultra-reliable 1,000watt amplifier, lightweight carbon fibre 15" driver and legendary filter sets, crossovers, and zero compression wireless connectivity.

Featured here is the No. 25 Line Array, three No. 25s arranged vertically, permitting bass to emerge more naturally as it propagates throughout the room, striking our sinuses, kicking at our chest cavities and rumbling along the floor with power and majesty. Welcome to the pinnacle of sound, 25 years in the making.

Join the Pursuit™ | rel.net

Dealers That Mean Business - Listings

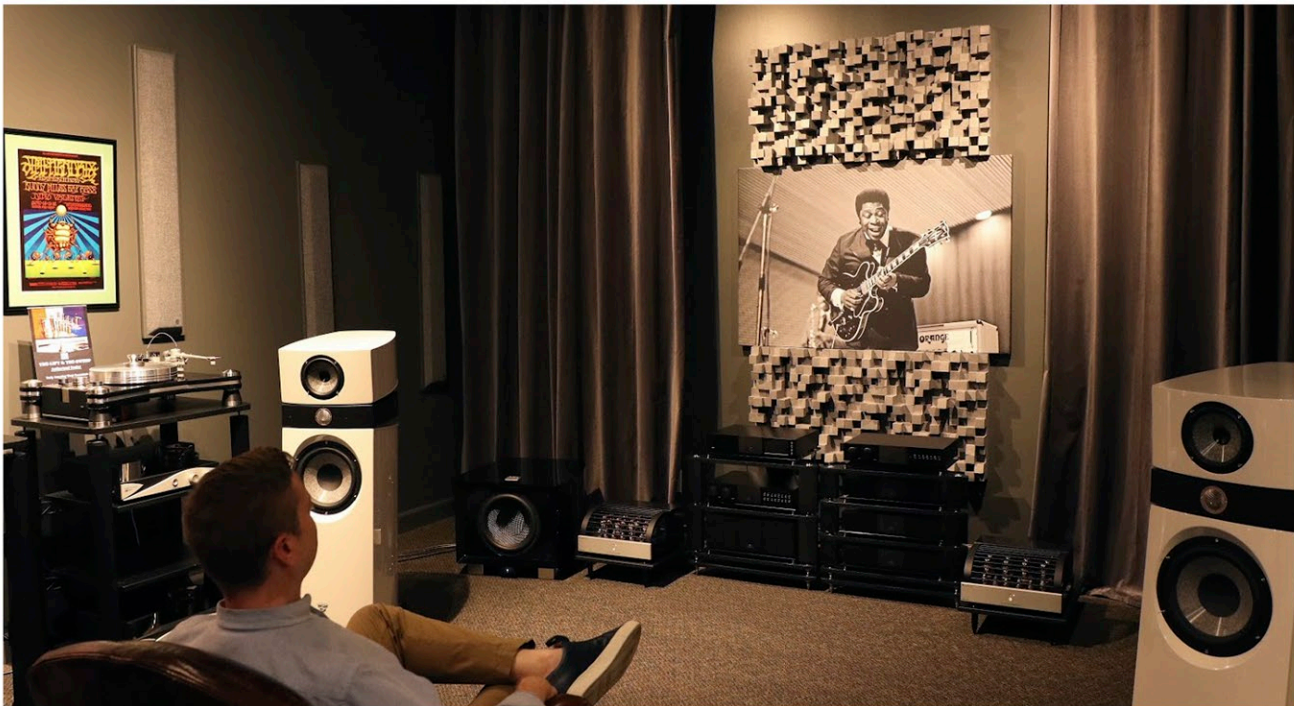
La Verne, California - Upscale Audio

upscaleaudio.com

2058 Wright Avenue

La Verne, California 91750

909.931.9686



Vestal, New York - Audio Classics

audioclassics.com

3501 Vestal Road.

Vestal, New York 13850

800.321.2834



Dealers That Mean Business - Listings

Morton Grove, Illinois - Quintessence Audio
quintessenceaudio.com
5701 W. Dempster Street
Morton Grove, Illinois 60053
847.966.4434



Scottsdale, Arizona - LMC Home Entertainment
lmche.com
15507 N. Scottsdale Road, Suite 135
Scottsdale, Arizona
480.403.0011



www.gryphon-audio.com

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PASS

Pass Laboratories
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(530) 878-5350 - www.passlabs.com

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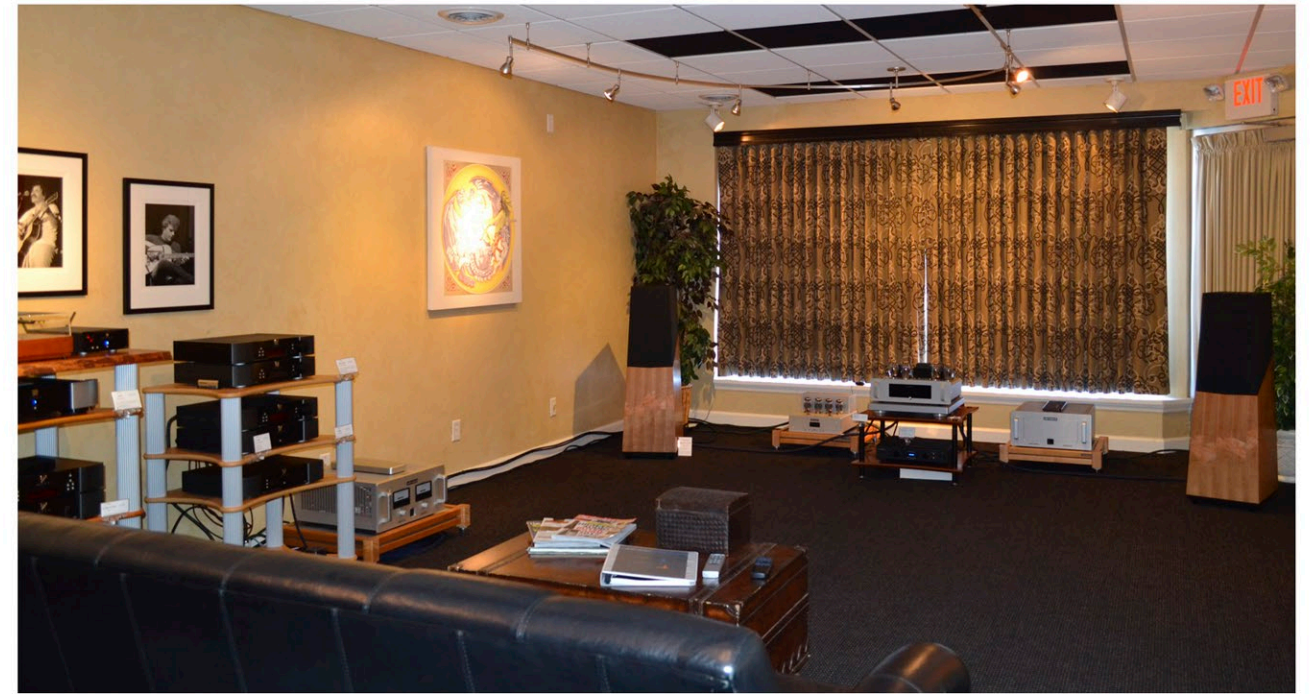
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin - Ultra Fidelis

www.ultrafidelis.com

7125 West North Avenue

Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53213

414.221.0200



Portland, Oregon - Echo Audio

www.echohifi.com

5904 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy

Portland, Oregon 97221

888.248.3246

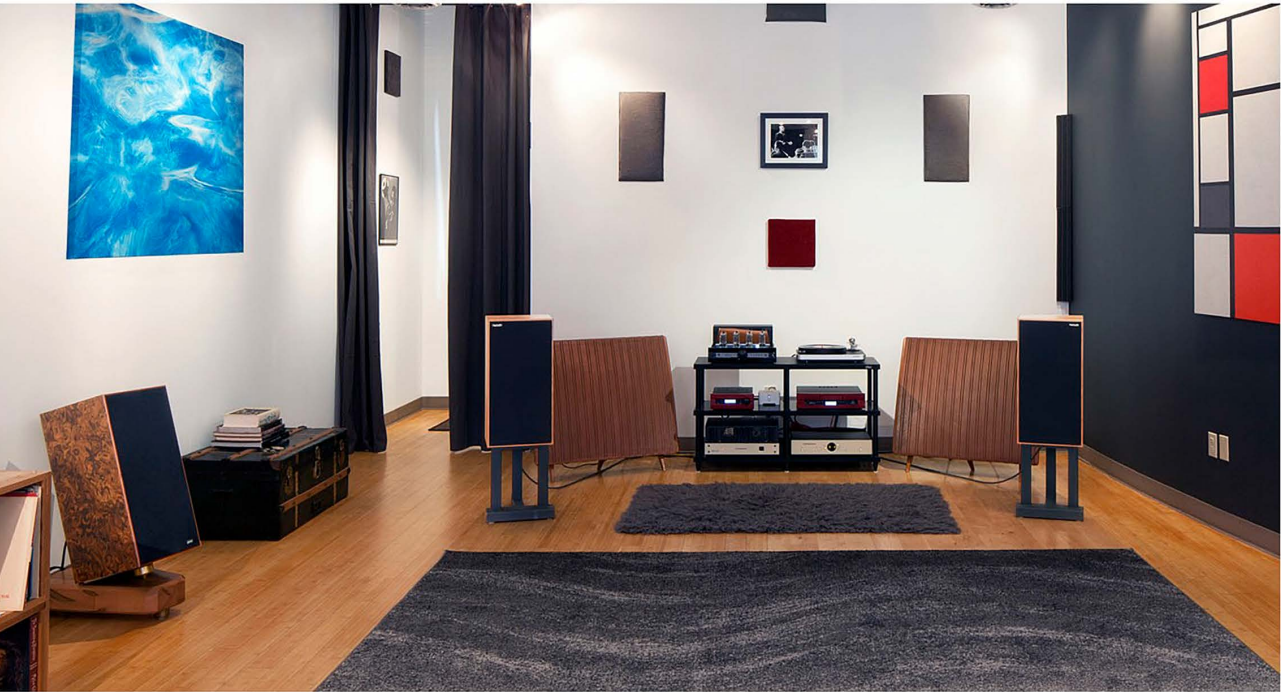


Dealers That Mean Business - Listings

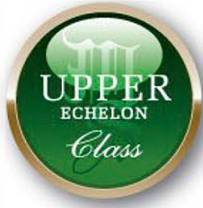
Marietta, Georgia - The Audio Company
www.theaudioco.com
146 South Park Square NE
Marietta, Georgia 30060
770.429.0434



San Diego, California - Deja VU Audio West
www.dejavuaudiowest.com
4848 Ronson Ct. Ste E
San Diego, California 92111
858.412.4023



— Formula xHD rev. 2 —



“MAGICAL EXPERIENCE”

“It’s simply magnificent. It is revealing without being trying, lush but not bloomy, and above all capable of captivating musical sound.”

Review: Andrew Everard
Lab: Paul Miller

aquahifi.com

aqua
acoustic quality

Dealers That Mean Business - Listings

Sarasota, Florida - Suncoast Audio

www.suncoastaudio.com
7353 International Place, Unit 309
Sarasota, Florida 34240 941.932.0282



New York City, New York - Noho Sound & Stereo

www.nohosound.com
62 Cooper Square
New York, New York 10003



Proud recipient of
the Publisher's
Choice Award for
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Dealers That Mean Business - Listings

Vancouver ,Canada - HiFi Centre
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433 Carrall Street
Vancouver, BC V6B 6E3 888.232.9995



Gig Harbor, Washington - Gig Harbor Audio
www.gigharboraudio.com
3019 Judson St. Suite D
Gig Harbor Washington 98335 253.228.6021



FOCAL & naim

FOR



HIGH-FIDELITY HEADPHONES & WIRELESS SPEAKER RADIANCE & NAIM MU-SO FOR BENTLEY SPECIAL EDITION

The best of electronics, acoustics and automotive combined. Focal, Naim Audio & Bentley Motors have developed two exceptional products: the Radiance headphones and the Mu-so for Bentley Special Edition connected wireless speaker. They embody the excellence and unique expertise of the three luxury brands.

Three brands, one collection

Club Mix compilation expert, Scott Tetzlaff’s theme for this playlist is “party mix.”

He tried to create an old school, house party vibe, and we think he’s nailed it. This one will nod to faves you already know, or lead you down some new paths. Enjoy.



Fort Knox Five - Reach

The Shaolin Afronauts - Flight of the Ancients

The Dakataris - Eitsuhg ibal Lasiti

Romare - Honey

Parov Stelar - Pink Dragon

Club Des Belugas - Skip to the Bip

Fort Knox Five - Keep it Poppin

Fatboy Slim - Kick Out the Chairs (whomadewho Remix)

Fatboy Slim - Jam Hot (Rhumba Rock)

Timewarp Inc. - Yuli Disco Breaks (soundsystem version)

Gabriels - Love and Hate in a Different Time

Gogol Bordello - Through the roof N’ Underground (Rob Garza Mix)

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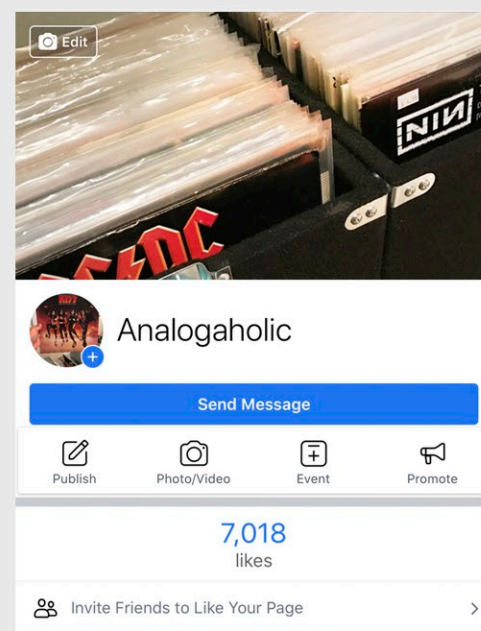
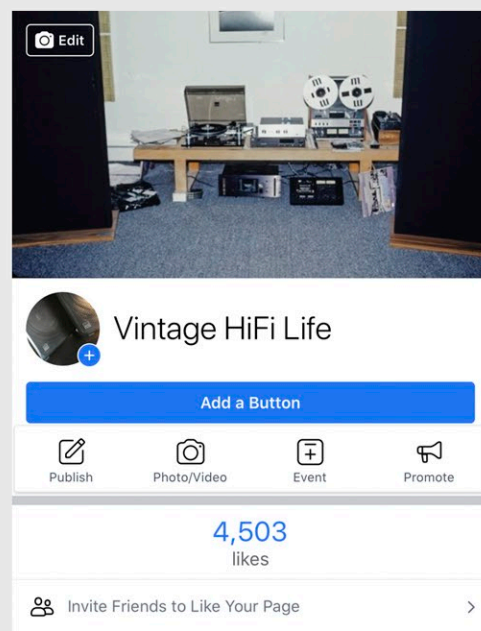
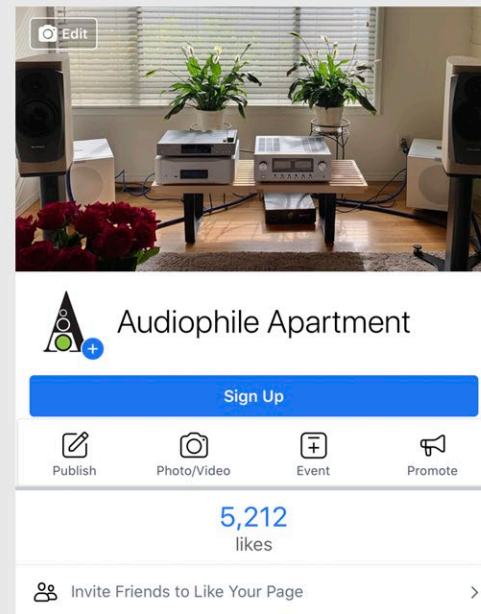
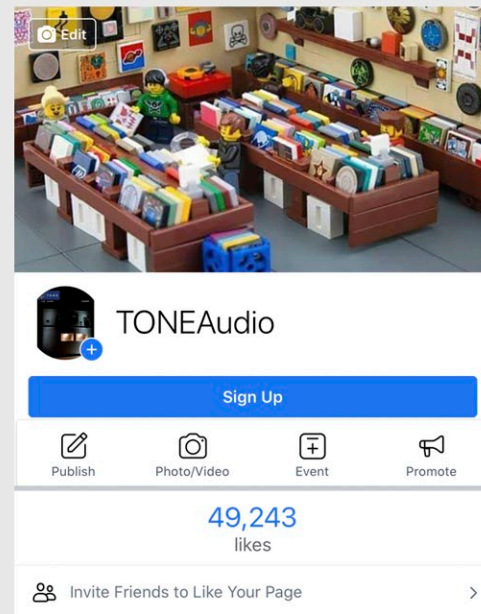
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Manley	manleylabs.com	Suncoast Audio	suncoastaudio.com
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Nagra	nagraaudio.com	Technics	technics.com
Naim	focalnaimamerica.com	Tellurium Q	telluriumq.com
Octave	octave.de	TONE Imports	toneimports.com
PS Audio	psaudio.com	Torus	toruspower.com
Paradigm	paradigm.com	Totem	totemacoustic.com
Parasound	parasound.com	Ultra Fidelis	ultrafidelis.com
Pass Labs	passlabs.com	Underwood HiFi	underwoodaudio.com
PrimaLuna	primaluna-usa.com	Upscale Audio	upscaleaudio.com
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Pro-Ject	pro-jectusa.com	Wireworld	wireworldcable.com
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REL	rel.net		



We've tried to make it pretty easy for you to find us out on Facebook, and have divided up our pages to be a bit more subject specific.

Here they are with links. Just click on the page that interests you most. We look forward to hearing from you when you have a spare moment.

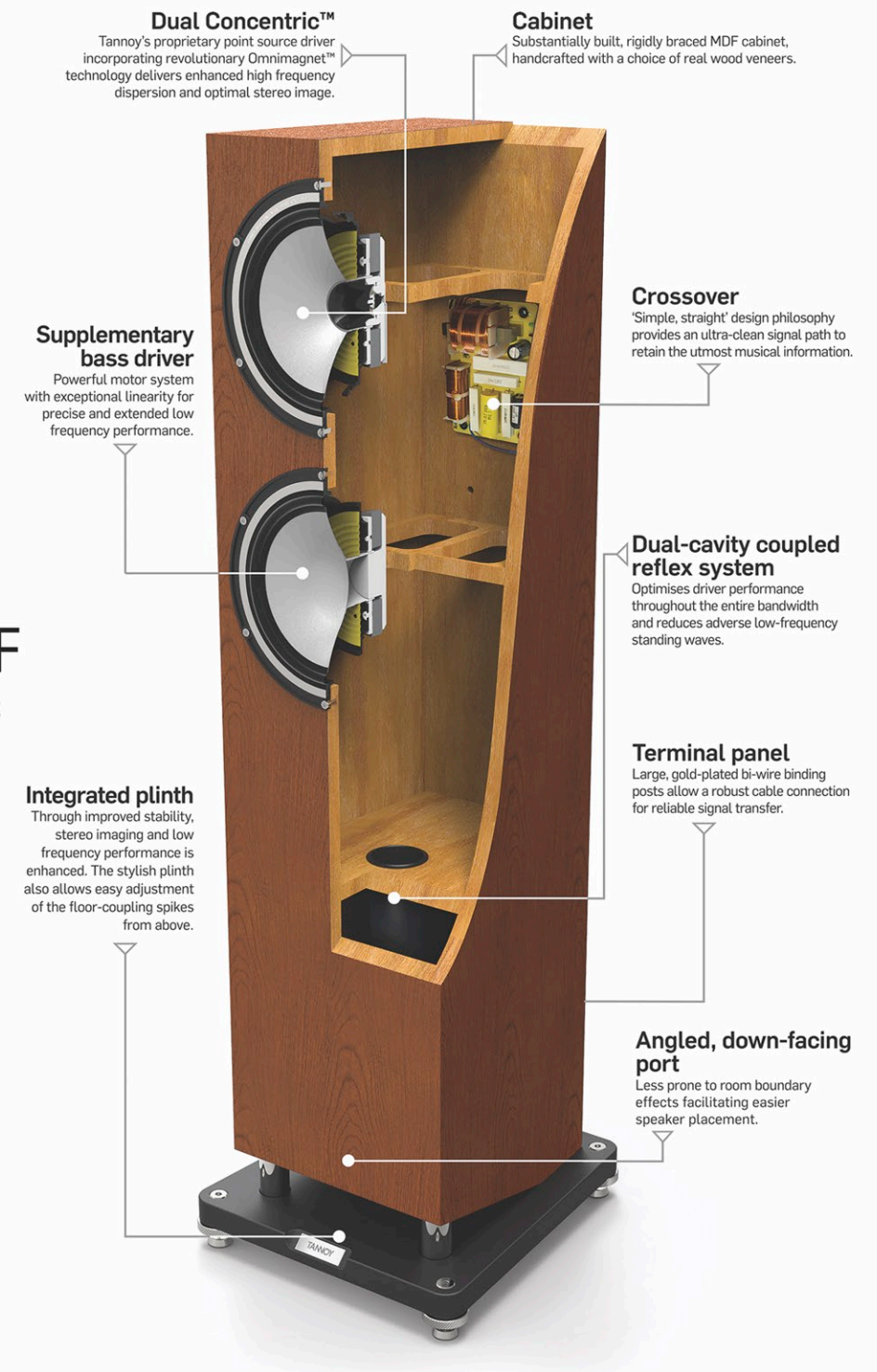


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TANNOY



"The Tannoy Revolution XT 8F was Robert Harley's top discovery at the 2015 Consumer Electronics Show. His first impression was as follows: 'After listening to it and looking at the real wood enclosure, I guessed the price at \$7000 to \$10,000. The Revolution XT's price was then revealed to be just \$2600 per pair.' After living with the 8F happily for several months, I was ready to declare it a sensational entry-level loudspeaker. But I see that I need to slightly amend that statement—the only thing entry-level about it is the price. The real wood veneers and level of finish don't suggest an entry-level product, and sonically it performs to a much higher standard. I'm in total agreement with Robert's assessment: The Tannoy packs a virtuoso midrange that is competitive with speakers approaching \$10k retail."

— DICK OLSHER, THE ABSOLUTE SOUND



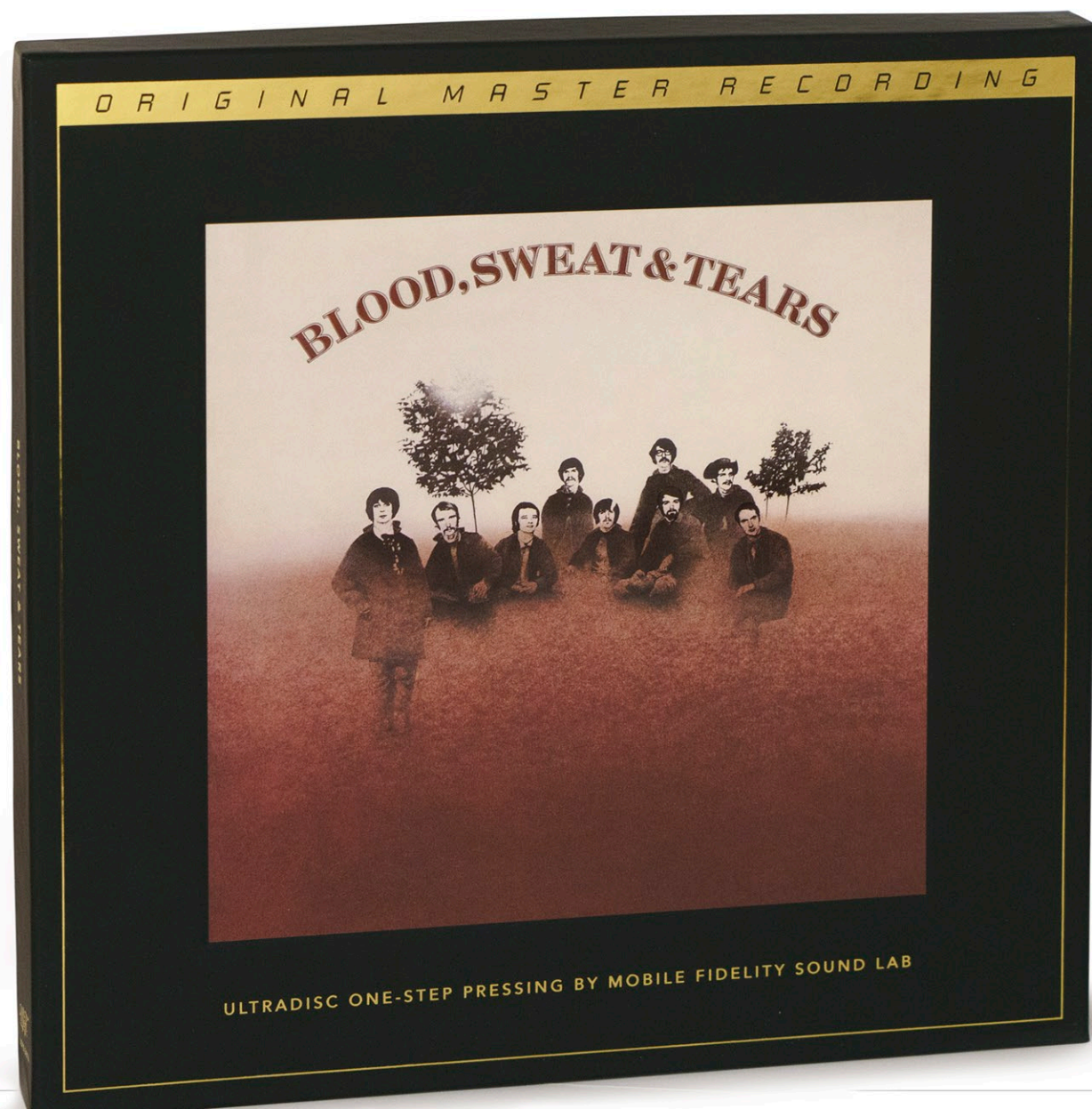
In House

The soundtrack of assembling the issue...

Blood, Sweat, & Tears - *Blood, Sweat, & Tears*

What more appropriate to play at the end of a long issue than this? This 60s classic was actually the band's second album, now featuring lead vocalist David Clayton-Thomas, perhaps the one more fans remember for "the sound," of this bands time in the sun.

MoFi's OneStep treatment is a winner, and if you enjoyed the original, this is big horns at their biggest. A true dynamic exercise on vinyl.



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Next issue, **107**:

Next issue...(mostly) accessible speakers

We've rustled up a group of great sounding speakers that won't impose that much on your room or bank balance.

We've rounded up some of our favorites at a variety of price points.

Stay tuned.

And as always, drop on by our Facebook page and let us know how you are...



TONE