

Trust Your Ears



Wilma Cozart Fine, lead producer of the Mercury Living Presence catalog during the 1950s and 1960s, conducted her professional career in the recording industry according to this simple philosophy: "Trust your ears." Wilma's ability to remember the sound she heard at a recording venue was legendary. She became remarkably proficient at judging a recording's verisimilitude to the live musicians. Her first goal was always to preserve the sound of a performance's "Living Presence"—capturing the event as she heard it in the concert hall.

She worked closely with her husband, recording industry pioneer C. Robert (Bob) Fine. He provided his music-driven engineering expertise and offered a constant stream of innovations in equipment and techniques. Together, they set out to tape a series of classical recordings that were as closely faithful to the original sound as the technology allowed. Wilma produced over 200 classical records, many of which are still considered references for lifelike music reproduction.

When it came time to remaster the Mercury Living Presence catalog for CD, she brought the same exacting standards to this new media as she demanded when producing the analog originals. As Wilma considered the equipment she'd use to convert the analog master tapes to digital, she eschewed products used by most engineers and producers of the time and searched for a better solution. After evaluating several alternatives, she ultimately chose the then-new *dCS* 900 for its high resolution, musicality, flexibility, and unique ability to produce 24-bit files—technology *dCS* pioneered.

Now, as part of the 70th Anniversary of the Mercury Living Presence label's inception, Decca Records has released the entire digital catalog to the major streaming services, allowing more music lovers than ever to access and enjoy Wilma Cozart Fine's legacy of vibrant, timeless classical music, lovingly recorded.



Celebrating the 70th Anniversary of the first Mercury Living Presence Recording.
Entire Digital Catalog on all major streaming platforms soon.
Visit dCSaudio.com for more information and details on upcoming events.



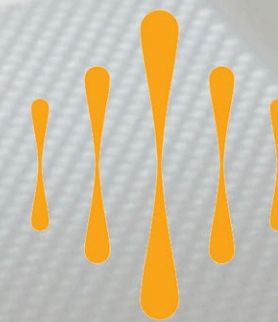
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Jeff Beck's explosive guitar work is always a great way to get a bit of an energy boost when starting to sort out all the bits for a new issue.

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When John Atkinson came to measure, I insisted he listen...
He let out an involuntary "Wow!" The presence of the images
and the absence of reproductive artifacts were remarkable.
It's what this hobby/pursuit is all about.

Michael Fremer, Stereophile, May 2020



When Music Matters



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Integrated Amplifier

A 95th Anniversary present



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We celebrate low level listening
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Sponsored By Qobuz

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More Analog...

Known for their digital prowess, Chord's Huei is an amazing phono preamp.

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Audiophile tone control option



Perfectly optimized optional input modules

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Old School...

Multi-tasking as always, our publisher finds a pair of vintage Altecs, while making Instagram posts, waiting in line for the morning coffee!

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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Record Cleaner
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new arrivals...

Pam Szeto-Griffin joins us to contribute more record reviews. If you spend any time on Instagram, you may have seen her page, Pams Record Collection. She's got a fantastic record collection, and incredible music insight.

You can read more of her writing at www.pamsrecordcollection.com

We hope you become as much of a fan as we are!





Cover Shot:

Luxman's special edition L-595A integrated amp takes the cover spot this issue.

Captured with the Nikon D800 at ISO 50. 4 seconds/f5.6 with a Zeiss 50mm f1.4 lens.



With a sculpted aluminum frame and patented IsoAcoustics integrated isolators, the Aperta Sub introduces a new standard in acoustic isolation for subwoofers. The Aperta Sub decouples the subwoofers from the supporting surface to prevent the physical transfer of energy that excites the supporting surface, causes room rattle and disturbs your neighbors.

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no.108

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

I am trying not to be negative about vinyl. I'm really not. I love listening to records. I used to really love shopping for records, and of course, love the sound of a well-produced record, whether I'm just being brainwashed into liking the particular combination of distortion present on a record, (the measurements people) or think vinyl sounds better and "digital sucks." (the vinyl loyalists) I don't consider myself a record collector, even though at one point I had over ten thousand albums, I truly appreciate people like staff member and friend Tom Caselli, who has the most amazing record collection I've ever seen.

He's a record collector.

I like the enthusiasm that guys like Tom used to bring to the table. He is my encyclopedia. Better than Google. You can't get passion like that any other way than being eyebrows deep in it. Tom joked once, when talking about his Jimi Hendrix collection, "the only thing I don't have is the coffin!" His advice over the years has been priceless, educational, and amusing, all at the same time. That's dedication.

I wish I'd been paying more attention back in the late 70s and early 80s when vinyl was on its way out, and grabbed a lot more first stamper this and first stamper that, but who knew? I never thought I'd have this gig. I never thought I'd have the hifi system I do now, back then. I wish I would have bought an 84 Carrera back in the mid-90s when you could get one all day long for 20k, but that's another story for another day.

I never, in my wildest dreams thought records would be selling for \$500 to \$1,000 apiece on Ebay, and that new MoFi (and other audiophile titles) would be selling out in minutes. Sometimes even before release. Yikes. While that's certainly awesome for the people making records – yay capitalism, it sucks for the true record collectors. With people speculating on record futures like tulips, it's sucked the fun out of record collecting as well.

We talk about the next generation of audiophiles, but I feel terrible that many of them may never get the pleasure of actually hearing anything decent on vinyl. Or have a record collection of more than 100 records, if that. Even with normal records selling for \$30-\$50 each, it's tough for anyone to really build an extensive collection. Makin' me not feel like investing in a dCS Vivaldi was so crazy after all.

I heard the sadness in Tom's voice a while back when we were chatting about the upcoming Record Store Day, and for the first time ever, he was no longer excited about it. But I noticed on the auction site, Bring a Trailer, that mid 80s Carreras are starting to come back down in price.

Maybe there's hope after all.



Some say Steppenwolf coined the term “heavy metal” in the track “Born to be Wild” on this record, which was their first radio hit. They went on to produce 12 more albums, and in Spinal Tap fashion, kept touring for years, in various lineups.



Steppenwolf – Born to Be Wild
Sookie Sookie
The Pusher

The Second – Don't Step on the Grass
Magic Carpet Ride

Monster – Move Over

For Ladies Only – Ride With Me

At Your Birthday Party – Rock Me
Jupiter's Child

Live – Hey Lawdy Mama/Magic Carpet Ride

Steppenwolf 7 – Snow Blind Friend
Who Needs Ya



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Back in the first year of college when Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours* hit the shelves, I was working at B. Dalton Bookseller in the local mall, still living at home and rocking a pair of JBL L-100s. The most excellent thing about our mall? We had a record store on one end (which I would end up working in) and not one, but two hifi stores, Team Electronics and Schaak Electronics, home of "Generous George's 24 hour sale." Little did I know, I would also work at Schaak a couple years later and have a super cool, orange business card that said "Jeff Dorgay – Audio Consultant." Ha. We used to joke and say we were audio insultants. Almost 40 years later, not much has changed I'm afraid.

Life as a mall rat

Being the excitable boy I was, I quickly made friends with the dudes in both stores, and as a fellow mall worker, they'd let me hang out provided I wasn't too much of a pest, or one of their female friends that they wanted to impress was nearby. I knew the drill. When the young ladies entered the store, I took off out the back door into the bowels of the mall, slinking back to the bookstore. As the great prophet Butthead once said, "oh yes, one day, I'll be the French fries." Soon I found out my boss was an audiophile, and he would accompany me now and then to provide "adult interference."



The speakers that really caught my eye were the new Altec 14s and 19s. I haven't been able to find any data on what these cost new, but memory feels like \$699 and \$899 a pair. A bit more than my L-100s. With no Ebay or Audiogon, you were at the whims of the classified ads, or worse, the Audio Blue Book behind the counter of the store. As L-100s were still in stock, the audio insultant smugly offered me \$100 for my L-100s that took me forever to earn enough for.

To torment me, he put on *Rumours* and played "The Chain" really loud. Ugh. They really kicked major ass, however this is where the senior moment kicks in. They might have been 19s, not 14s. I still remember the sales guy saying, "can your JBLs do this?" Yet in retrospective, the vintage L-100s that I owned until just recently had a lot more LF output than the Altecs now in my studio.

Being mindful, living for today

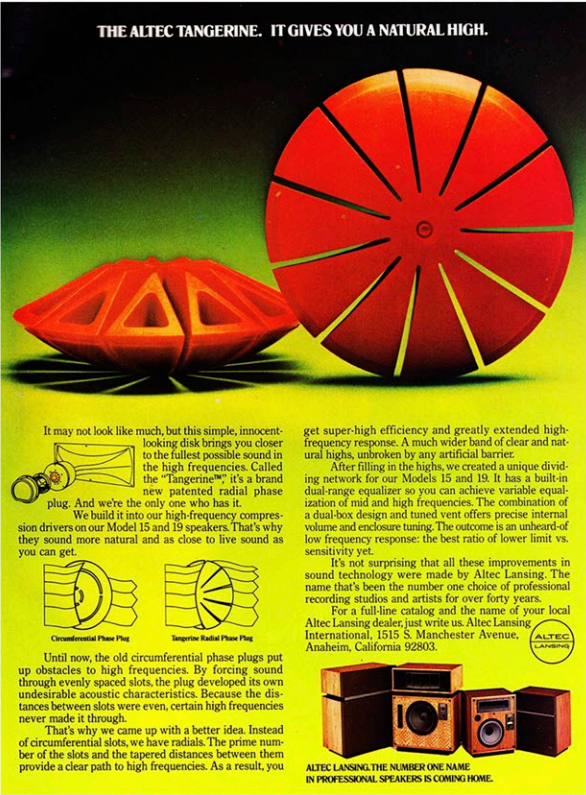
I'm a sucker for vintage audio and vintage BMWs, so when something nice comes along, look out. Perusing Instagram while waiting in line for the morning coffee revealed that my pal Erik at Gig Harbor Audio had a 14s for sale. Seize the I had my mocha in When the friendly through window said, today?" I smiled and

She gave me that tilted used to give me when

Thanks to my other be podcast co-host, in no time at all. He part of his day off to trip to GHA, and pick deck too! We quickly short, but squat floor room. Pamela looked head, and went back staying, are they?" was office.

A quick explanation and part of my past, so well with our mid-blah, she's still not having it. This is all kind of bizarre, because in the nearly 9 years we've been together, I've never had any push back on hifi. Then again, we've had a steady stream of really gorgeous speakers here over the years.

"Ok, I get it, but they're going out in your office, right?" Tough audience, but I'm thinking once I fire these babies up and crank the classic rock, she'll cave and admit to their complete awesomeness.



person at the drive "doing anything fun said, "Buying speakers."

head look that my terrier he was confused.

good friend and soon to Tom, the 14s were here was kind enough to burn make the 5 hour round up a Nakamichi cassette loaded the 75 pound standers into the living on with a semi-tilted to work. "Those aren't the comment from her

why these were so cool, etc etc., and how they go century house, blah, blah

Enjoy the Experience



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No and no

It's worth mentioning, should you get your hands on a pair of stock or relatively stock 14s, the speaker terminals are on the bottom of the speaker cabinet. Without a notch for speaker cable to exit, forget about using any kind of (thick) audiophile cabling. Tellurium-Q's new Blue II is perfect because it's really flat. Nordost White Lightning, with its ribbon profile is another great choice. After all, there weren't any garden hose sized cables back in the 70s.

Hooked up to the Boulder 866 integrated, (which has been making beautiful music with the Dynaudio Confidence 20s) was a less than involving experience. A couple of vintage solid-state receivers, and a Nakamichi 600 stack yielded similar, bland results. Now I was on a quest. Bringing in the Conrad Johnson CAV-45II was a major step in the right direction, and there was starting to be some semblance of music going on. *Rumours* was not rocking.

To their credit, the Altec 14s are very efficient, with a 96db/1-watt sensitivity rating. Back to solid-state to try them with the Luxman 595 Anniversary amplifier that is 30 watts per channel, Class A. Nope. The winning combination? Our Line Magnetic LM-805 integrated, producing 48 wpc in pure SET mode. Oddly enough, 115 degree temperatures were rolling into the Portland, Oregon area, and having those big tubes heating things up (the LM-805 uses a pair of 300Bs as driver tubes) just didn't make sense. Though this combination would be nice for winter.

In the end

Rod Stewart said once in a song, "She was alright for an hour, she was alright for a day, but it did not last for the weekend..." That pretty much sums it up. To put the final staple in the shipping carton, these speakers, with their 12" woofers and large enclosures just don't generate much low - frequency output. Dynamic - yes. Remarkably "un-honky" for speakers with horn tweeters - double yes. But to have cabinets this big that still need subwoofers (to their credit, they did mate very well with the pair of REL t-7is we had on hand) seems rather counterproductive.

Finally, I just couldn't romance Pam on the idea of having these speakers in our living room. She still had her angry eyes on. So, off they went to our other favorite vintage audio guy, Kurt Doslu at Echo Audio. Hopefully with all the older bungalows and mid-century houses in downtown Portland, these beauties will find a happy owner and a period correct home. By the time you read this, they will be for sale on the Echo website. You never know...



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SU-R1000 Reference Class Digital Integrated Amplifier

LSA's VT70 Integrated Amplifier

What's not to love about an EL34 amp?

\$1,199
underwoodhifi.com

There's always something special about an EL-34 based tube amp, with a pair of output tubes per channel, and a pretty simple circuit. Less to screw up, or as Nelson Pass likes to say, "simple circuits usually sound best." Honestly, I've never heard a bad EL-34 amp, but like Baskin – Robbins, there are a lot of different flavors, from vintage, warm, and syrupy, like a Dynaco Stereo 70 or Marantz 8B to highly refined, like an Octave or VAC amplifier. And plenty of variations on the theme in-between.

For years, the budget yet high-quality entry-level tube amp has been the Prima Luna ProLogue 1. I started my hifi writing career with this amp and still have the review sample. Nearly 20 years ago it was \$1,095 and a killer value. The new EVO 100 is still a great value, and benchmark, but it's \$2,395 now. So, what the audiophile world needs now is a great budget tube amp.

Enter the VT70

At \$1,195, we are slightly going outside the parameters of this column, but it's too good not to share. With 35 watts per channel on tap, it's got more than enough juice to drive most comparably priced speakers to a reasonable level, and three single ended RCA inputs should be more than enough for a phonostage, DAC, and maybe even a tape deck.



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At \$1,195, we are slightly exceeding the scope of this column, but it's too good not to share. With 35 Watts per channel on tap, it's got more than enough power to drive most comparably priced speakers to a reasonable level, and three single-ended RCA inputs should be more than enough for a phono stage, DAC/Streamer and maybe even a tape deck.

The VT70 also sports a headphone output as well as a preamp out to drive a powered sub. The remote control is a nicely presented steel remote, not a plastic, kids meal remote, as many other products costing significantly more bring to the table. The VT70 brings a lot of juice to the game.



It's a classic EL-34 design, with a 12AX7, two 12AU7s and four EL-34s (two per channel). The black chassis has a machined silver aluminum front faceplate sporting a pair of output meters that do double duty for biasing the tubes when needed. If you aren't familiar with this procedure, just follow the manual. Turn the volume all the way down, switch to "bias" mode and adjust the trim pots on the top face of the amp until the meter reads 100%. Be careful not to go past 100%, or you can burn up the output tubes.

Check the bias when you get your amp out of the box, we had two tubes at 200%, so a quick adjustment had us right back on the money and eliminated a slight hum as well. Pro tip: set bias when you unbox your amp, then check again after a couple of weeks. Fresh tubes usually need re-biasing at about 100 hours, and they stay stable until almost expired. Again, those handy meters make it easy to double check further changes.



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The incredible lightness of being tubey

Most budget solid-state amplifiers sound flat and lifeless. While the world’s best tube amplifiers from the major manufacturers take advantage of massive power supplies and custom output transformers to work their magic, a basic EL-34 amplifier can do wonders with the basics, and that’s exactly what the VT70 delivers.

You won’t mistake this amplifier for something from ARC, BAT, or CJ, (and you won’t mistake the price tag either...) but this little amplifier musters good sound, and is miles more engaging, than most comparably priced solid-state amplifiers. It’s so much easier to build a good tube amp for this kind of money.

While you can tube roll, and swap tubes forever with the VT70, I submit that this takes away from the approachable ethos. Spending another \$500-\$800 on boutique tubes for a 1,200-dollar amplifier doesn’t make a lot of sense. And the VT70 does arrive with a full complement of PSVANE tubes. Underwood’s Mark Schifter says that PSVANE is supplying them with matched output tubes – another little touch you’ll pay extra for elsewhere.



The setup

We stuck to three speakers with the VT70, a pair of Harbeth Compact 7s, the GE-Teddy speakers (also available from LSA) and our desktop pair of Jern EH-14s. That this amp plays fantastic with speakers 2-4 times its asking price tells you everything you need to know.

Bass is well defined, and the top end is nice and smooth, without rolloff. By comparison, our Dynaco ST-70 has fairly sloppy bass, and the highs roll off pretty quick. Power supply parts have come a long way in 50 years. The key to success with this amp is to not push it beyond what it is capable of. Playing at modest levels, not driving it to clipping (which ANY 35Wpc tube amp is going to do) is absolutely lovely.

Matched up with the Teddy’s, having a sensitivity of 89dB/1-watt is a sweet spot, led me to borrowing staffer Jerold O’Brien’s older pair of Vandersteen 1s, which have a 90dB/1-watt sensitivity as well. I’m sure LSA wants to sell you a pair of Teddy’s, but if you are really on a budget, you can snag a nice used pair of Vandersteens or something similar for about 600 bucks, find a great DAC and you have a rocking system for barely over \$2k. This amplifier is a great way to get into the tube experience. Trying to keep it all reasonable, I used my older Naim CD-5i, with fantastic results.

The setup

As with other favorite EL-34 amps, midrange is the strength. This amplifier offers up such natural midrange, with so much soundstage depth, you’ll forget what isn’t happening. You’ll be spoiled for solid-state. Going back to a recently re-capped Marantz 2270 receiver with the Teddy’s felt like I had asbestos in my ears.

And a nice 2270 easily fetches more on the used market than a new VT70. Impressive.

Again, playing to the strength of this amplifier, you’ll find yourself sifting through your favorite acoustic tracks and perhaps even some 60s and 70s classics should you feel so inclined. Cue up some Joni Mitchell, Crosby, Stills and Nash, or Greatful Dead and you will freak out. A long playlist of Bowie tracks from Hunky Dory all the way through Blackstar were equally tasty.

The Jerns don’t have a ton of deep bass output, so pulling in our SVS 3000 Micro subwoofer, rounded out the package to provide an incredibly powerful desktop system, which is actually where the VT70 is staying. It’s too much fun to send back, so this one is #toneaudioapproved.

Running through a short list of headphones from the LSA HP3 Novas, a pair of Audeze LCD-2s, and our workhorse Sennheiser 650s (with Cardas cabling) all worked well. Headphone fanatics are probably still going to want an outboard amplifier for the best results, but we’re on the budget tip here. This is certainly an engaging enough headphone amp to make you want to grab a set, and see what the excitement in personal audio is all about.

You can’t lose

With internet pundits claiming high end audio is going under on nearly a daily basis, this is precisely the kind of product to get more people interested in a decent music system that might have thought they couldn’t afford it. Honestly, we need a few more benchmarks like this.

The LSA VT70 is the perfect amp at the perfect price, whether investigating high - performance audio for the first time, taking your first spin with a tube amplifier, or perhaps looking for a great second system. It’s musically satisfying, aesthetically pleasing, and gets the job done.

Highly recommended.
#toneaudioapproved

LSA VT70

MSRP: \$1,1999
underwoodhifi.com



The EJ Jordan Marlow Speakers

A different approach to small.

£1960.00/pair, CE model £2280/pair,
both walnut. Rosewood is £160 extra
ejjordan.co.uk

Listening to Al Green’s “Let’s Stay Together” is increasing the gravitational pull of the couch the minute I hit the play button. If you’ve never heard a good single driver speaker, you might just freak out. In a good way. There is something so special about the absence of a crossover network, and all the artifacts that come along with even the best ones – you don’t realize it until it’s missing. And the EJ Jordan Marlows are great single driver speakers.

Moving on to Keith Jarrett’s The Koln Concert makes this particular listening session even more of a treat. There’s a silkiness to the piano that feels absent or forced on other speakers. Where something like a big pair of Wilsons, Focals, or Magicos almost seem hyperdetailed, there’s a relaxed detail here. You can’t have a speaker that is more coherent than one with a single driver.

No, you shouldn’t trade in your Grande Utopias just yet. If you are a true audio enthusiast, this is a pair of speakers you should own, just to have the experience – even if you have a massive pair of floor standers. Just as there are certain watches you should own if you are a watch collector, and certain motorbikes you should take for a spin if that is your passion – I submit you should own a pair of Marlows, and build a system around them. It’s a great experience.



Moving on to Keith Jarrett's *The Koln Concert* makes this particular listening session even more of a treat. There's a silkiness to the piano that feels absent or forced on other speakers. Where something like a big pair of Wilsons, Focals, or Magicos seem hyper - detailed, there's a relaxed detail here. You can't have a speaker that is more coherent than one with a single driver.

Amplifier choices

EJ Jordan states the Marlows will produce 86db with one watt – and with no crossover to absorb any power, they are more efficient than other speakers with a similar sensitivity. If you are familiar with Nelson Pass' theory of the first watt – (if the first watt doesn't sound great, the rest won't either) the Marlows are incredibly easy to drive. Staying with that train of thought, starting the listening with the First Watt F3 amplifier that is optimized for single-driver speakers is positively heavenly. The Marlows produce their most extended performance with this amplifier – delivering the most solid, extended bass response and HF response.

A handful of tube amplifiers on hand also prove excellent, but different. The Prima Luna ProLogue One (30 wpc, EL34 tubes) a warmer, mellower, almost fatter sound, than the Octave V110SE, which is more neutral, yet more dynamic. The conrad-johnson CAV-45 mk 2 in our living room system is right down the middle, in terms of dynamics and extension, but proves to be the most three-dimensional experience. My Dynaco Stereo 70 is yet another sonic journey.

See why these are so much fun?

Back to the music

Now, you don't have to be an obsessed audiophile to love the Marlows. Hook them up to your favorite integrated amplifier and just enjoy them. A pair of 4-inch drivers will only move so much air and play so loud. You can't rock the house with Zeppelin, but you might just be surprised at how loud these will play in a small-ish room. That's not really what these speakers are about. The Marlows are definitely a quality over quantity decision. They provide satisfying results in our 13 x 18 foot room, but are even more lovely when moved to our back room that is only 11 x 13 feet.

On a pair of 24" Sound Anchors stands, about 6 feet apart, finding the perfect spot from the back wall to balance bass and upper bass just right is critical. Plan on the better part of the day to really optimize these. If you don't you will find them only average, and it's not their fault. You can drive a 43 horsepower Austin Healy Sprite spiritedly down a country road, provided you don't waste a single one of those horses.



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The same approach applies to the Marlows. Use decent quality sources, a good amplifier, good cables and be relentless with the setup and they will make magic for you. If your musical taste does center more around vocals, string ensembles, and modest rock/jazz selections without the most major dynamic swings, these speakers will give their all. Going back to “Quiet Houses” from the Fleet Foxes s/t debut, and way back to “Helplessly Hoping” from the Crosby, Stills, and Nash debut both serve up equal levels of excitement. These speakers are all about subtle delicacy, providing a very immersive listening experience at a moderate volume.

Much like a pair of Magnepan SMGs, the bass response that the Marlows offer up is detailed and solid. Listening to the acoustic bass intro to Rickie Lee Jones’ “Easy Money” (especially in my smaller room) is more than compelling enough to have you lamenting what you’re missing. Ending the evaluation with Right Said Fred’s “I’m Too Sexy” is a ton of fun – as he proclaims his sexiness, the way RSF’s drawl eases into nothingness has me re-thinking the fidelity of this track.

Enjoy the Experience



PASS

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Familiar look, yet different internals

If you aren't paying careful attention, the BBC inspired styling cues of the EJ Jordan Marlow speakers might fool you into thinking you were looking at another LS3/5A. Yet these small British speakers couldn't be more different. Because they are not under license from the BBC, the Marlows are not held to the same design constraints.

They are meticulously made, yet these compact speakers utilize a single 3.93 inch (100mm) full range Eikona driver. If you click here to go to the EJ Jordan site and poke around a bit, you'll find out that their designer, Ted Jordan is a powerhouse of speaker engineering. The Eikona driver is assembled at Scan Speak with critical parts originating in the UK.

A major variation on the theme

I've never thought of LS3/5As as woolly or boxy (though they are a bit colored, through the mid bass range), but always as fun, very engaging, very musical small speakers that deliver a certain magic in a small room – in a near field situation. Thanks to my friend Erik at Gig Harbor Audio, I've even heard the LS3/5As rock in a medium sized room with a good subwoofer.

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Going back to my pair of reference LS3/5As, I'm now ruined by the clarity that the Marlows provide. I hope the folks at Jordan won't be too upset with me, but with a pair of REL TZero Mark IIIs staring right at me (with 6-inch woofers, easily able to keep up with the small Jordan cones) it begged to be investigated. I won't tell you that you must have a pair of small REL subs to enjoy the Marlows, but as someone who uses them with a pair of LS3/5As, you might really dig this combination. It's a different vibe than the Marlow's alone, yet with some care, it was easy to tune the RELs to come in ever so gently on the bottom where the Eikona driver rolls off. If your musical taste heads more towards electronica and more full scale music, it's cheating doing it this way, but really fun. It's almost like using a pair of Quad 57s (guilty of that sin as well) with subs.

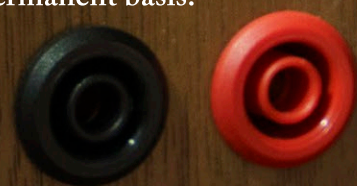
It's also worth mentioning here that Marlow suggests their stands that are optimized for these speakers. Though my Sound Anchors do, in fact have the solid plate that Marlow advises against. Rather than blu-tack them down as with any other speaker with a more dense, thick wall cabinet, digging a set of Finite Elemente Cerebase pods out of the toolbox, brought a cleaner sound overall. I suspect that going a step futher with the Jordan stands will offer every bit these speakers have to offer.



A must have

Whether you are building a compact, yet high-performance system for a small room, a second system, or even just want to keep a pair of these around for when you're in the mood for a different drive, the EJ Jordan Marlows are one of the most enjoyable speakers we've had the pleasure to listen too. These may just end up back here at some point on a permanent basis.

ejjordan.co.uk



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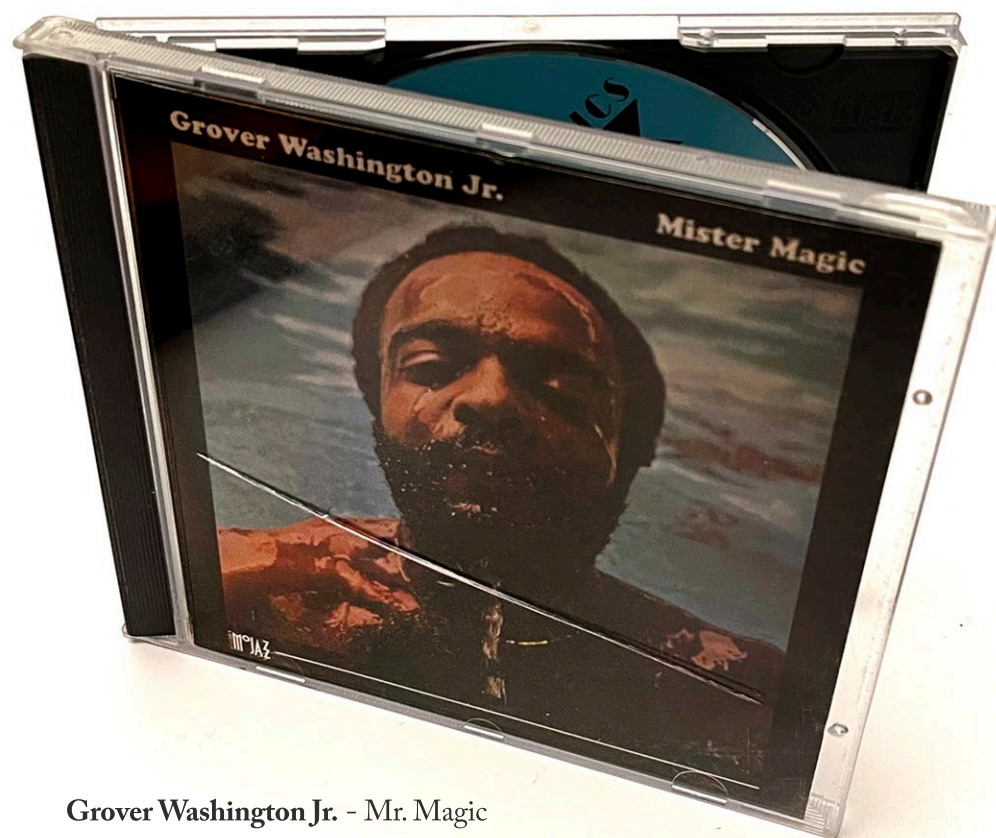
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Late Night Garage Playlist -Jeff Dorgay

I seem so be spending more and more time in the garage lately, now that I've installed a Cyrus CastONE. As a ROON endpoint, it's a breeze to have access to my entire digital music collection.

Somehow, wrenching encourages more relaxing musical choices. So this is probably a more mellow playlist.



Grover Washington Jr. - Mr. Magic

John Klemmer- Barefoot Ballet
Touch

Gato Barbieri - Dancing With Dolphins
Last Tango Theme

Herbie Hancock - Chameleon

Crusaders - It Happens Everyday

Miles Davis - Tutu

LA Express - Nordic Winds

Pat Metheny - Airstream

Joni Mitchell - Goodbye Pork Pie Hat

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The Ansuz PowerSwitch is equipped with a wealth of independent technical solutions and shows how much sound gain is still possible by focusing on the disturbance-free distribution of data. Even if the separate power supply for the active Ethernet cables is an innovative and exceptional approach, it is clear to me that the D-TC Supreme is the best-sounding switch that I have ever integrated into my network. So, the Ansuz PowerSwitch not only performs high in terms of price but also in terms of outstanding sound! HIFI STATEMENT Netmagazine, April 2020

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The Pass X150.8 Amplifier

Evolution.

\$6,750
passlabs.com

Nelson Pass is very humble about his contributions to the audio world, but few manufacturers have nearly 50 years of experience designing a plethora of highly coveted products. Pass once told me he's "a do-it-yourselfer at heart," so it's no surprise he always strives to find new ways to enhance his past designs. The X .8-series evolved from the company's experience with the highly successful Xs amps, and all they learned from its creation. The point-eight series certainly delivers the sonic goods, and his team managed to enclose all the advancements into a smaller chassis, too.

While the team at Pass produces amplifiers that perform to tight technical specifications on the workbench, they also embrace the idea that some musical experiences defy descriptions offered by numbers and graphs. They spend countless hours listening to their products. The two-part process ensures new products deliver realistic and immersive music experience before any component heads into production.

Love at first sight

Pass Labs puts a lot of care into delivering components with an attractive, modern, yet understated look. Modern lines milled into the X150.8's faceplate demonstrate evident attention to detail outside as well as inside the amp. All Pass products feature silver faceplates with their signature, blue power meter at the center.



JourneymanAudiophile

As the name suggests, the amp produces 150 Watts into eight-ohm speaker loads, and twice that connected to four-ohm speakers. The X150.8 is the smallest sibling in the X family. Larger and more powerful X amplifiers include choices for a one-chassis stereo solution or a pair of monoblocks.

Setup is simple. On the back of the chassis, you can choose balanced (XLR) or unbalanced (RCA) cables. Whether your speaker cables have a banana, spade, or bare wire termination, the binding posts offer the flexibility you'll need to get connected. After attaching the power cord, just flip the rear power switch on. From there, the listener can use the button on the front of the amp to toggle between standby mode and full operation. When in low-power standby, the meter's light fades, but the blue LED at the top of the dial remains on.



Feel the heat

Unlike the XA series that employs class-A circuitry only, the X amplifiers take a class A/B approach. The first few watts operate in class A, and then more energy-efficient class A/B takes over when playback demands more power. In the case of the X150.8, the first 13 Watts deliver pure class A. At normal listening levels, that's plenty of juice for a breathtaking

musical experience with efficient speakers. Once the needle on the blue meter passes to the right of the vertical position, the amp has moved from class A to class A/B operation. While driving a pair of GamuT RS3i speakers, the amp never crossed the midline. I suspect that speakers demanding more power will exercise that needle quite a bit more.

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Journeyman Audiophile

The X150.8 operates at a toasty 127 deg, F (53 C) when it's fully warmed up. When planning for the amp's new home in your listening space, make sure you have plenty of ventilation. A closed-door cabinet is not advisable. Also, know that this 100-pounder is relatively large at 19" wide x 21.25" deep x 7.5" tall. One reason for the large size is the geometrically stunning matrix of heatsink fins jutting to the sides of the chassis behind the faceplate. The pointy arrangement maximizes heat dissipation to keep the amp within its specified operating temperature.

When first powering up the amp, expect an audible hum to emit from your speakers. Fear not, though. In less than a minute after coming out of standby, that noise dissolves into silence, and music pours forth unhindered.

Summer serenade

When the amp arrived, I worried whether 150-Watts per channel (300 Watts into four-ohm speaker loads) could provide adequate control of my speakers. I was very wrong. The X150.8 – even as the baby in the X-line – provides all the oomph needed to get a solid grip. The result is a punchy and dynamic presentation. For owners of larger or more power-hungry speakers, one of the larger amps in the X line may prove a more ideal pairing.

According to the team at Pass Labs, the amps only require about 48 hours to complete their break-in process. During that time, one of the most significant changes I noticed is how vocals render in the sound stage. Vocalists' performances seemed a bit recessed initially. After 48 hours of playing, though, the amp pushed those same virtual singers forward into the room with lifelike size and quality. Voices from a variety of singers, including Leonard Cohen, Teisha Helgerson, Albert King, Gin Wigmore, John Campbell, and many others, sounded organic and intimate with an almost holographic presence.

The X150.8 also throws a massive left-to-right sound stage. Instrumental elements panned to the far left or right in a recording extend around the room, completely independent of the speaker positions. Despite the expansive presentation, each musical element retains a defined place in the bigger artistic picture.

Overall, the amp offers a sonic personality that's a touch to the warmer side of neutral. I've heard my share of solid-state amps that portray high-frequency information with a sharp and somewhat unpleasant edge. The Pass Labs amps avoid those artifacts while maintaining their adeptness at delivering smooth high-frequency extension. On the other end of the frequency spectrum, the bass is deep, tight, and very natural sounding. Bass drum kicks come forth with a high degree of realism, as do bass guitar licks.

All genres of music seem to benefit from the X150.8's presentation style. It does a marvelous job with reggae, rock, classical, jazz, acoustic, blues, electronic dance music, and anything else thrown at it. Despite its muscle, the amp also shows its mettle in delivering nuanced subtleties, too. For example, various degrees of reverberation float around vocals and instruments, giving a spacious quality to the music when the sound engineer dictates it.

In short, the X150.8 sonic signature offers a lot to love – and very little to nitpick. I'll offer fair warning: once you start the music, an hour of planned listening morphs rapidly into a several-hour listening session filled with enjoyment. Where does the time go?

Match made in heaven

If you seek an amp engineered for stunning sound and robust build quality, the Pass Labs X150.8 is an outstanding choice. Despite the long-term pedigree of Nelson Pass's product designs, this amp retails at an attainable price for those who crave realistic music playback. At \$6,750, it's an investment in your listening joy. However, the amp performs with the prowess of many amps at much higher price points.

If you seek a solid-state amp that can provide an immersive sonic experience, rock-solid reliability, and plenty of power to drive a variety of speakers, the Pass Labs X150.8 delivers on all counts.

For the stunning sonics it produces, and the long-term reliability Pass Labs products offer, the X150.8 earns itself a 2021 TONEAudio Exceptional Value Award.



Journeyman Audiophile

Additional listening: Jeff Dorgay

Long term readers know that I've been using Pass amplifiers in one form or another for about the last 12 years as my reference here at TONE. Make that 12 completely trouble-free years. However, I've been using Pass and Threshold (Mr. Pass' first amp company) amplifiers for my personal use for about 40 years now, and have never had a Pass product fail in service. That's impressive.

Ever since my first Threshold 400A amplifier, I've always enjoyed the "tube sound without the tube issues" that Pass class-A amplifiers offer up. While I use the XA200.8 monoblocks in my main reference system, (which offer 200 Watts per channel in class-A). As Rob points out, the X-150.8 stays class-A for the first 13 watts, easing its way into class-AB up to rated power. If you have even moderately sensitive speakers, you'll be surprised how far that 13 Watts truly goes.

The direct comparison to the big XA monos is one of scale and resolution. Whether you are a glass half-empty, glass half-full, or wrong glass person will determine your outcome here. So, we can evaluate the X150.8 as providing a decent percentage of the

XA monos performance at less than 20% the cost, the XAs costing too much, or as I prefer, the optimal match for a system comprised of components with similar performance and price.

In the context of the system assembled for this task, a dCS Bartok streaming DAC, a Nagra Jazz preamp, Pass XP-15 phono (with Rega P10/Apheta 3) and Focal Kanta 3 speakers, or Dynaudio Confidence 20s, the X150.8 is a perfect fit. I.e. this amplifier makes a fantastic anchor for a system in the \$20k-\$50k range. The right glass.

The sound is dynamic, and resolving, with excellent bass control and extended highs. Directly comparing it to the XA series that have been here, the X series amplifiers have slightly less warmth in their overall presentation, feeling slightly more neutral tonally than the class-A versions. However, performance for the price asked is off the chart good.

I agree with Rob's conclusions completely. This is an award winner. And in addition to getting one of our Exceptional Value Awards, it is #toneaudioapproved.



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Shh...

The fine art of low level listening
By Jeff Dorgay

We've enjoyed the EJ Jordan Marlow speakers so much, that they really warranted inclusion in this issue's Shhhh.... column.

As small monitors don't move a ton of air to begin with, they are more suited than most speakers to be used in a smaller-scale setup. A perfect fit for these wonderful, single driver speakers.

Tubes were tons of fun, but Pass Labs First Watt amplifiers are often optimized for single driver speakers, and the SIT-3, an incredible match.



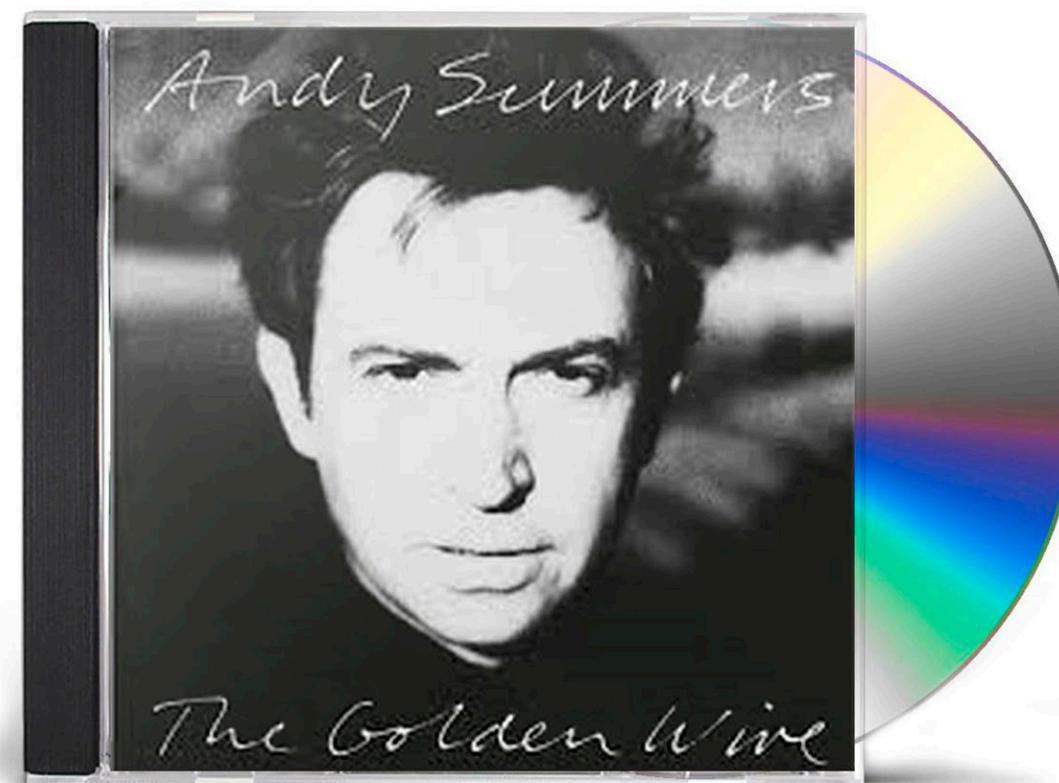
Shh...

First Watt
SIT-3

The First Watt SIT-3 amplifier, like all of the First Watt editions, are low powered amplifiers.

Nelson Pass is part genius, part mad scientist, and part Santa Claus. What better guy to get a really cool amplifier from?

The SIT-3, due to its power output of 18 Watts per channel (into 8-ohms) and low-ish damping factor (30) won't work with every speaker. But when it works, it really works, and that's certainly the case here.



Our listening begins with the Ex-Police guitarist Andy Summers, and *The Golden Wire*.

This disc is not available on any of the streaming services, which makes it perhaps even tastier.

It is readily available on CD, and once in a while, a vinyl copy pops up, but expect to part with about \$50.

The entire disc has an unmistakably Summers feel, but in more of a Robert Fripp kind of way. If this sounds like fun, check out his collaborations with Mr. Fripp.

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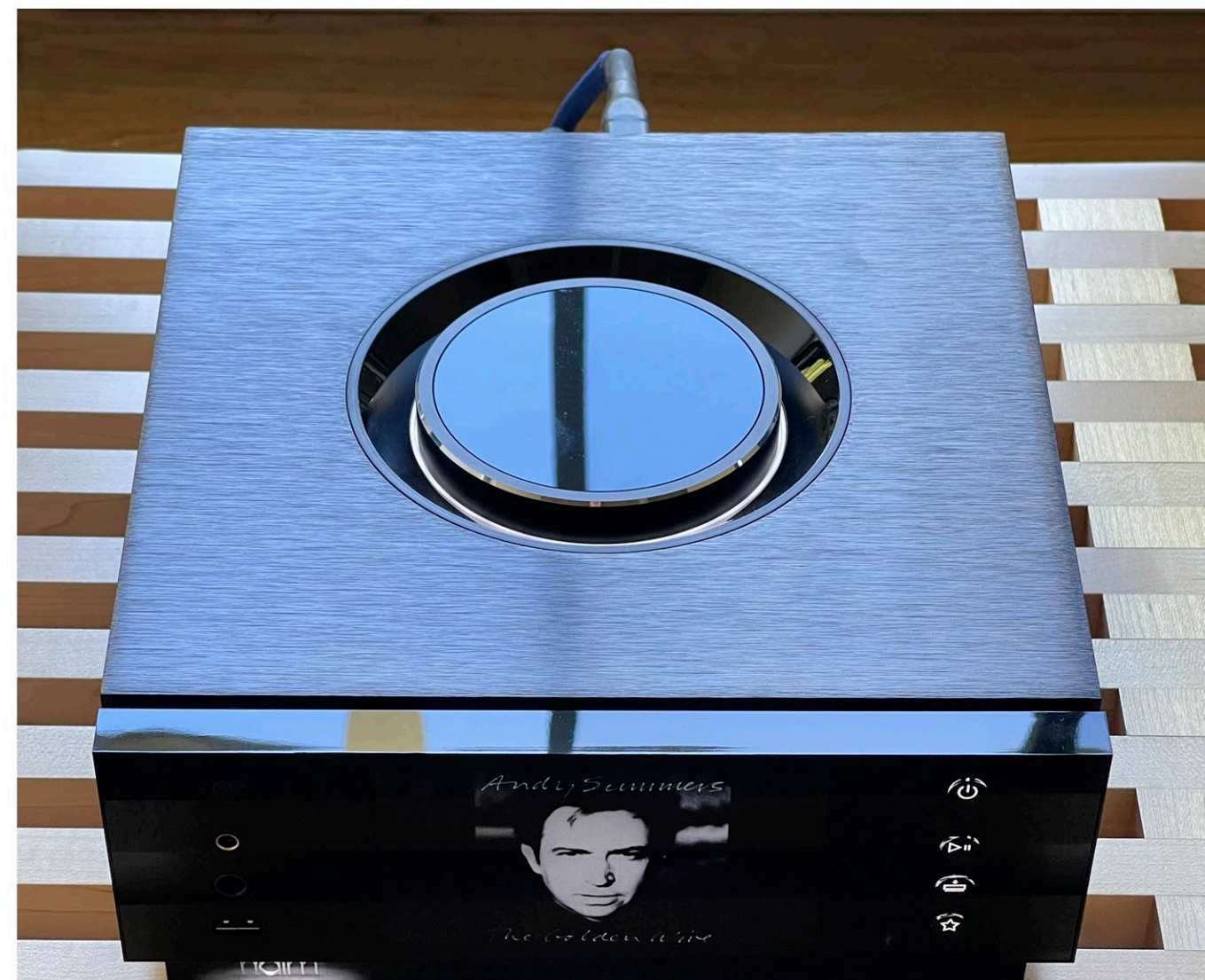
Shh...

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm supposed to be using the Naim Atom SE Headphone Amplifier as a headphone amp, (and it's certainly good at that) but in the context of a "not crazy money," yet high-performance DAC/Streamer/Preamplifier, it's a tough act to follow.

Three days after unboxing, I was back on the phone to the Naim folks, credit card in hand. It's a perfect building block for "Shhh" systems, and in this case mates incredibly well with the SIT-3.

If you have always longed for a system that reveals a ton of detail, consider building one around the Marlows, and everything else here.

Listening quiet is a great adventure.



The Chord Electronics Huei Phono Stage

Compact Miracle.

\$1,495

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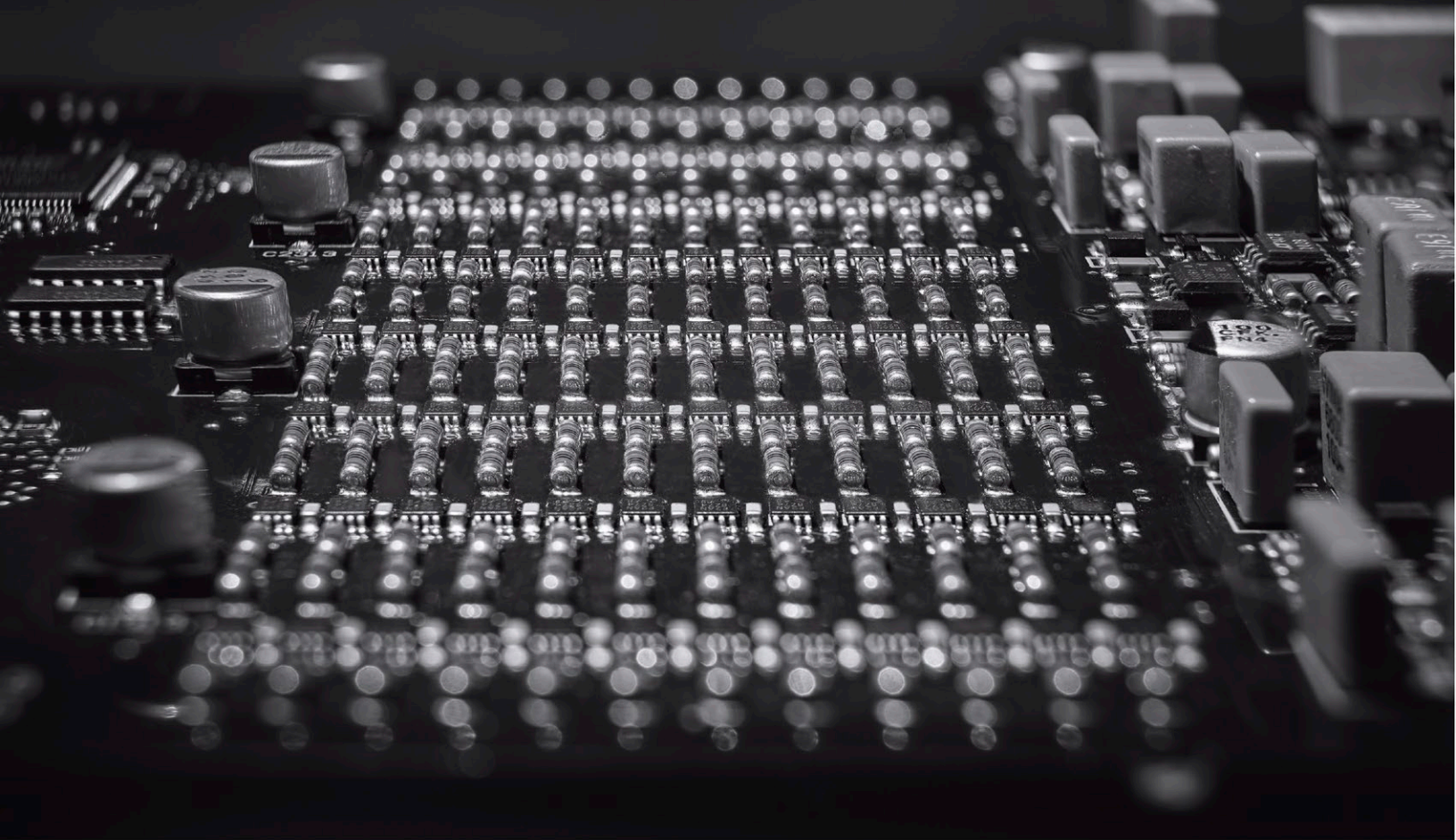
There are a lot of great phonostages with 5-figure price tags attached. And there are a lot of mediocre phonostages in the \$300-\$1,000 range. Chord's Huei is phenomenal for \$1,500. Exceptional Award phenomenal. For our ADD readers that don't care about the babble, this is all you need. We've not had the good fortune to find a phonostage for this price that is this versatile and reveals this much music.

The UK's Chord Electronics is well known for their massive amplifiers, and award-winning DACs, so you might not think of them as a go-to for vinyl. Yet, the Huei is fantastic in every way – if you are the reader that just wants the conclusion, this little marvel is worth every penny asked. The last compact, high performance phono stage we've used is the Boulder 509, and the Huei is not all that far off the mark.

Quick setup

The Huei is tiny, measuring only about 3 inches wide, 6 inches deep and just under 2 inches tall. (8.8cm wide, 16cm deep and 4.5cm tall to be exact.) Only about a pound and a half (657 grams) sans external power supply, means you can put the Huei anywhere. This is a tremendous bonus for those of you that would like to put a little distance between your turntable and the rest of the system, whether for vibration control, flexibility, or aesthetic issues. Experimenting with placing another turntable on the other end of the listening room, we gave the Huei a go with a 40-foot length of Cardas Iridium balanced interconnect with outstanding results.





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The RingDAC™ design began with an acknowledgment that all-digital audio hardware fell short of conveying the emotional essence of music. While identifying the deficiencies of the established standards, it became obvious the solution required a design that disassociated the noise and distortion all hardware inevitably overlays on the music signal. The RingDAC is central to our never-ending quest to unlock the limitless potential of recorded music, free from the constraints of physical hardware's finite accuracy and longevity.

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CartridgeDude

Oh yes, the Huei offers fully balanced as well as RCA outputs, along with a maximum output of 20v. To further confirm the robustness of the circuit design, playing the Huei through a 30-foot length of RCA terminated audio cable and a 1-foot pair of otherwise identical Cardas Quadralink cables again proves the Huei a champion. Our reference vintage C-J tube phonostage has a definite HF roll off when using 10 feet of RCA cable.

Setting MM or MC operation merely requires pushing the left most round button for a few seconds. It turns red for MM operation and blue for MC. The rumble filter (-24db/octave below 50hz) illuminates when in operation, dark when not.

MM gain can be set from 21dB – 42dB in 8 steps, and this is a fantastic feature if you have a very high output cartridge like some of the Regas, that produce up to 7.2mV. We've never seen this feature anywhere else. Especially if you are working in the context of a preamplifier with extremely high gain, or a passive pre that has none, the Huei is remarkably flexible. The ability to fine tune gain makes for the best possible dynamic range from your phono cartridge.

MC is equally adjustable, with 8 steps taking you from 49dB to 68dB and twelve steps of loading impedance from 100 ohms to 3700. Probably the only complaint here would be to forgo the last two on the top range in favor of adding a 50 and 25 ohm setting, but we're really being fussy.

Finally, it's worth mentioning that the Huei sounds great right out of the box, thanks to its extremely low power consumption, it can be always left on without environmental guilt. In which case, you will notice it opening up a bit more, and delivering a bit more space in its rendition once it's been powered up for a day or two.

More Listening

When auditioning a phonostage in the \$500 - \$2,000 range, we nearly always begin with our Technics SL-1200 mk.5/Denon 103 (now with the Denon Aluminum Body upgrade) combination, as this is a well rounded \$1000-ish turntable/arm package that makes a great match for a system like this.



We also use the AVID Ingenium Plug and Play with MM cart too. No point in connecting a \$1,500 phonostage to a six-figure turntable for the average end user. Plus, the Denon is a relatively low output cartridge, (.25mV) acting as a bit of a torture test, if you will.

The recent remaster of Bryan Ferry's *Boys and Girls* passes the test with ease. Thanks to an incredibly low noise floor, this phonostage is an absolute thrill to listen to your airiest tracks. All the audiophile cliches about inky black backgrounds and a holographic sound-stage apply. The Huei brings the quiet and dynamics you expect from the finest solid-state MC amplifiers, yet possesses a highly organic, non-electronic sound. We've heard our share of SS phono pre's costing a lot more that struggle with this level of analog refinement.

Moving upscale to a freshly rebuilt Lyra MC from our friends at Ana Mighty Sound (full review on that later) and a Clearaudio Jubilee MM, this phonostage is well worthy of using it with a much spendier cartridge and table. Huei even plays well with our new REGA P10 and Apheta 3 combination, though you will need to go down to the 100 ohm setting for this cartridge.

Hours of listening reveal an incredibly neutral/natural tonal rendition. Those of you madly in love with tubes may want a touch more romance, though when using Huei as the analog source for PrimaLuna, Octave, and C-J tube amps, the combination is brilliant.



But again, this phonostage never sounds forward, etched, or harsh. Much like our favorite (and much more expensive Boulder 509 Phono) the Huei neither adds nor subtracts tonally.

Tracking through a lot of records heavy in piano, drums, and various percussion shows off the massive dynamic swing this small preamplifier is capable of. A very long set of Rush, concentrating on the late Mr. Peart's drumming is very enjoyable. Spinning the audiophile clock way, way back for a spin of David Grusin's *Discovered Again!* clearly illustrates how quickly this phonostage can accelerate. Huei's clean, quick transient response makes for completely fatigue-free listening sessions.

Many virtues, no drawbacks

When comparing the Huei to a couple of five-figure phonostages, you can finally hear the lack of resolution, and the lowest bass weight that only a massive power supply and more elaborate design can bring – as it should be. Yet in the context of its price and design (and to be fair, even a few solid clicks above) the Huei is at the top of its class.

For many analog enthusiasts, the Chord Huei could be your last phonostage. It's that good. And from a company primarily known for digital? Who knew? Proof that great engineering transcends format boundaries.

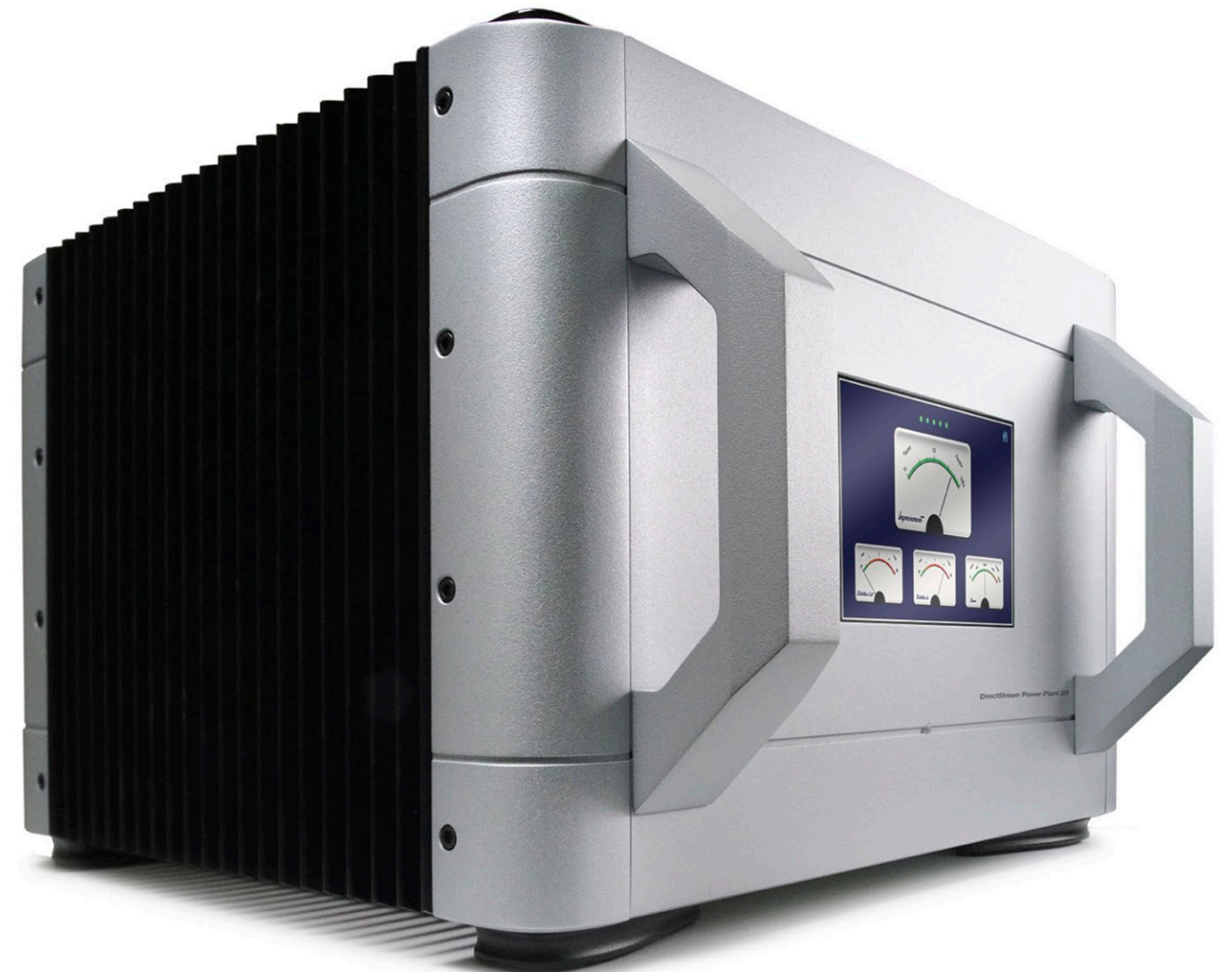
Very highly recommended.

www.chordelectronics.co.uk (manufacturer)

www.soundorg.com (US/Canada distributor)

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–Jeff Dorgay, TONEAudio



www.psaudio.com 720.406.8946 Boulder, Colorado

We are staying with the 90s on cassette for one more issue. It's been so much fun playing all the tape decks, how could we not?

It's easy to forget how much interesting music came out in the 90s and how much was still available, and how much was still on cassette...



Guns N' Roses - November Rain

Metallica - Enter Sandman

Pearl Jam - Alive. Even Flow

Alice in Chains - I Stay Away

Black Crows- She Talks to Angels

Nine Inch Nails - The Great Below

Beck - Where it's at

RUN-D.M.C. - Down With The King

Chili Peppers - Give it Away, Get on Top

Rolling Stones. - Has Anybody Seen my Baby?

Crowded House - Fingers of Love

Aimee Mann - Nothing is Good Enough

Aerosmith - Eat the Rich, Shut up and Dance



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Ampsandsound Nautilus

Top of the mountain

\$9,200
ampsandsound.com

The ampsandsound Nautilus adds to our set of data points when it comes to mega headphone amplifiers. Having spent considerable time with the V16 from Octave, the big two-box unit from Woo Audio and the 750-U from Luxman, they all provide top sound; each with a completely different approach. Our only complaint with the Luxman is the cost for a single use box. Its dual-function nature makes the ampsandsound piece shine (like the Octave and the Woo) brightest. It can be used as a single input integrated amplifier with a pair of high-efficiency speakers.

Selfishly speaking, this is super cool for several reasons. First, and perhaps most obvious, its easier to justify an \$9,200 purchase if you can use it for two things. Second, and perhaps most important, it sounds fantastic, and is worth the asking price, even if you only use it as an 8-watt SET amp, or a headphone amp.

Remember, Wavac and Audio Note amps cost five times as much. So, don't look at it as an expensive headphone amp, think of it as getting an amplifier that's as good as or better than a \$90,000 Audio Note amp for a tenth of the price, that can also be used as a headphone amplifier.

So much fun, we're not sure where to begin

While we were waiting for a pair of vintage Altec 14s from our friends at Gig Harbor Audio, listening begins with our Harbeth C7ES3-XDs. A pair of 86db/1-watt two-way monitors that you might not think a likely pairing with 8 watts per channel. However, this robust amplifier does a great job with the Harbeths in a 13 x 18 room. If you don't need ear splitting spl's, the 8 watts per channel the Nautilus provides is more than enough to be musically engaging.

Then, the Altecs arrive and they end up being more fun than I should be able to have. With every other amplifier tried (see the Old School column) these speakers sound awful. Yet, moving the Nautilus in is pure bliss. Where things sounded constricted and densely packed before, now there's tons of air and space. The Altecs even offer up some decent bass extension with the Nautilus, something they struggle with, using a number of other amplifiers.

Moving on to the very efficient Zu Dirty Weekend speakers (96dB/1-Watt sensitivity) is an even bigger treat. Combining modern day speaker technology with an amplifier capable of this much low-level detail retrieval is nothing short of stunning. Tracking through The Crash Test Dummies, "Superman's Song" has so much delicacy, between the strings and lead singer Brad Roberts ultra-quirky vocals, feels like a completely new recording. The decay in the piano, and Ellen Reid's backing vocals are distinct, now occupying their own distinct space, yet just creep into the mix so subtly, you don't know she's there until she is. The Nautilus unfolds a recording, deftly rendering it for your enjoyment, and provides a ton of depth, texture, and tonal contrast.

The only parallel I can draw with this amplifier is going from an off the rack suit, to an Armani suit, to either a bespoke suit, or a great suit that has been altered to your bod by a master tailor. At first glance, they all look like black suits on the rack, but as you go deeper and deeper, the details make all the

difference, and the experience is all the richer for it. The longer you listen to the Nautilus, the more you are drawn into the experience, and the more time you want to spend in its grip. Under its spell.

The engineering behind the fun

In case you missed it at the beginning, the Nautilus is a class-A, single-ended amplifier with zero feedback. It arrived with a pair of KT88 tubes (one for each channel) but the Ampsand sound website says that it can use "6L6GC through KT90 tubes, with KT120 and KT150 not supported."

Zero short cuts are taken in the execution of this deceptively simple design. Everywhere you look, the parts are of the highest quality, including the critical output transformers, and the rigidity of the chassis. Doing it right takes time. That's what you're paying for here. You can go buy an inexpensive tube amp and it will sound pretty good, but it won't come close to what the Nautilus offers. It is a masterpiece. This is a piece of gear like a Leica camera, or an Eames Lounge chair (a real one, not a \$600 Amazon fake) that you not only will hand down to someone in your family, but will have people fighting over who's gonna get it. In a day when you buy appliances that croak three days after the warranty period is up, it's really cool to see something with this much thought and care put into it.

But what about headphones?

Selfishly, I wanted this amplifier in for review, to listen to it as an integrated amplifier. Ampsand sound principal Justin Weber calls the Nautilus their "flagship personal audio tubed integrated amplifier." The front panel has individual taps/output jacks for 8, 16-, 32-, 100- and 300-ohm headphones. It produces between 5 and 8 Watts per channel into any of these outputs, but the incredible quiet that the Nautilus serves up will grab you right away. I will catch you off guard, trust me.

The dance starts with incredible sound, incredible value, and off the chart great build quality. The Nautilus is built the "way they used to build em," all point-to-point wiring. If they still make headphones and you can still get vacuum tubes in 75 years, I'll bet heavily this amplifier will still be an object of desire in someone's listening space. Whatever that might look like.

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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

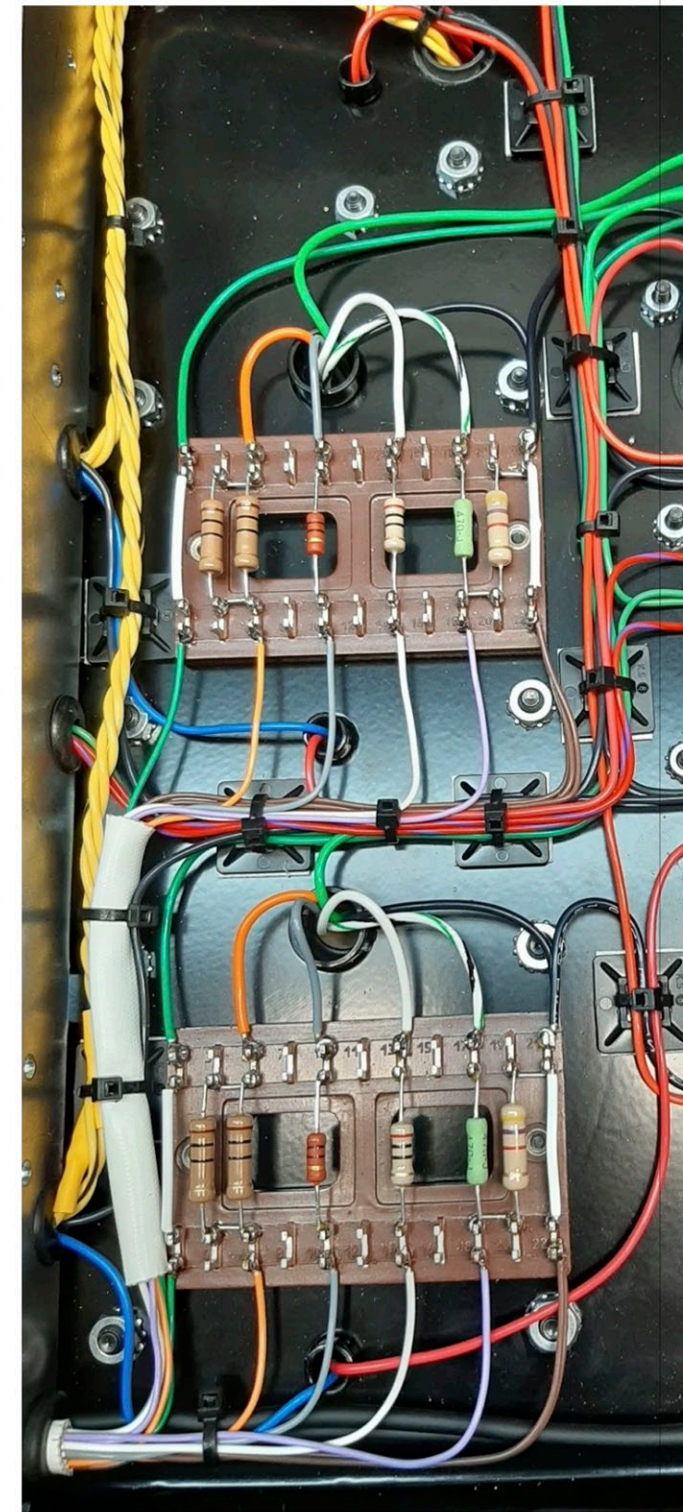
Another reason this amplifier is so dynamic, as if it gets a lot louder than an 8-Watt per channel amplifier, regardless of whether you are using headphones or speakers.

With a handful of phones' at my disposal, from my ancient Koss Pro 4AAs all the way up to the Stellia and Utopia phones from Focal, (with some Audeze, Dan Clark, Grado, LHA, and Sennheisers thrown in for good measure) this was one the most engaging headphone experiences I've had along with the other three amps mentioned at the beginning of this review. So, I'll put the Nautilus in my all-time, top four.

Everything mentioned about speaker presentation applies to headphone listening. Because headphones can be more resolving than some speakers, and with the drivers are so close to your head, the potential for high-resolution listening is exciting.

Ampsandsound claims on their website that there are no limitations in terms of headphones, and there certainly weren't with our lineup. Much like a big power amplifier really taking hold of a giant pair of floor-standing speakers, the Nautilus does this with headphones in a similar way. Ever remember going into a hifi show room where companies with modest speakers were using big, high-powered amps to drive them? And how you never thought those inexpensive speakers could sound so good? The Nautilus does the same thing, exerting so much control over the drivers, your current phones will reveal more music than you thought they were capable of. Even my 50-year old Pro 4AAs sound incredible with this amplifier.

The Nautilus excels at perspective as well as control. Some premium headphone amplifiers present the music in such a massive way, it almost feels like either you're taking hallucinogenic drugs (fun, but tiring after a while) or really overblown. The Nautilus delivers a big soundstage, but more in a listening to a big pair of speakers in a big room way. They go further at making the headphones disappear than anything I've yet experienced. The better your source and recordings, the more of this effect will be clear.



HeadphoneArts

It's important to mention here, that for all of the listening sessions, the dCS Vivaldi One was used for digital music, and the Rega P10 with Apheta 3 and Pass XS Phono were used for analog music. Both were connected to the Nautilus with a single pair of Cardas Clear interconnects, and Cardas Clear speaker cable was used for all the speakers, to keep evaluation as consistent as possible.

Decisions, decisions

The toughest part of all this is whether to buy an Ampsandsound Nautilus as an incredible 8Wpc SET amp and start investing in efficient speakers, or to buy it as a premium headphone amplifier, and maybe add speakers later. Of course you can use it for both functions, but I have a sneaking feeling no matter what your initial intentions are, you will end up modifying your listening habits to use it as both. A simple flip of a switch allows you to go from phones to speakers, so you won't have to waste time manually re-configuring things.

If you're a specs/measurements geek, you probably won't embrace this amplifier as warmly as I have, and you know why. Honestly, I didn't write this review to convert anyone.

However, I think if you approach the Nautilus as an SET lover, wanting to reach the top of the mountain, or a confessed tube lover that is SET curious, this amp will win you over with its sheer musicality

Best of all, this amplifier arrives in a bright orange finish, which is stunningly close to the Inka Orange on my 76 BMW 2002. A favorite to be sure. A happy color. The Nautilus is a happy amplifier – it certainly makes me happy. Looking at the Ampsandsound website, you'll notice that there are a number of different color choices available.

Custom colors are also available, but must be cleared with Ampsandsound. Expect a bit longer wait, just because of the extra work required.

At nearly \$10,000, this is not a casual purchase, and I won't treat it as such. But, you can buy a lot of mediocre things repeatedly, or you can buy something amazing once. If the latter is how you approach things, the Nautilus will be the end of your journey. Very highly recommended.



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"...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

martinlogan.com

Jerold O'Brien just loves R&B. So he gave us a list of Motown faves that happens to be floating around in his head lately...

Notice The Supremes popping up, again!



The Supremes - Where Did Our Love Go

Four Tops - I Can't Help Myself

Contours - Do You Love me?

The Supremes - Stop! In The Name of Love

Miracles - Shop Around

Temptations - Can't Get Next to You

Rick James - Give it to me Baby

Commodores - Brick House

Diana Ross - Love Hangover

Rick James - Superfreak

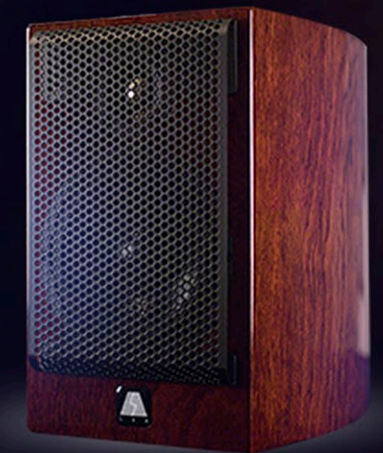
Marvin Gaye - Let's Get it On

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EDITOR'S CHOICE –
THE LSA 10 STATEMENT –
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Frank Iacone – Editor and Publisher - headphone.guru
.....



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Sam Rosen – September 2020 - [positive feedback](http://positivefeedback.com)
.....

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Setlist

The Dome, St. Louis Sept 26, 2021 Art by Ron Wood

How's this for a setlist? Hand drawn by Stones' guitarist Ronnie Wood.

And, if you'd like a copy for your wall, click here:

<https://store.digitalstores.co.uk/ronniewood>



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Blackie Pagano repairs guitar amplifiers in New York City and he's one of the best. Going through some of his tube stash, he came across this stub from a Siouxsie and the Banshees show from 1980.

Looking at the setlist from that evening's show, they did an eclectic set, opening with "Helter Skelter," playing "Israel" for the first time, and after two encores, closing with a live debut of Red Over White."

Totally 80s indeed.

Thanks to Blackie for sharing the photo. You can find him at:
blackiepagano.com

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With the recent re-release of George Harrison’s classic All Things Must Pass box sets, in various stages of excess, Pam Szeto-Griffin takes on the challenge of talking about the ATMP Super Deluxe Edition, on the following page.

Meanwhile, she’s given us her favorite GH tracks below:
(and... you can get the t-shirt from beatlesstorelondon.co.uk)



All Things Must Pass – Beware of Darkness

All Things Must Pass – All Things Must Pass

Living in the Material World – Give Me Love (Peace on Earth)

Brainwashed – Pisces Fish

All Things Must Pass – Run of the Mill

Dark Horse – Simply Shady

Somewhere in England– All Those Years Ago

All Things Must Pass – Isn’t it a Pity

George Harrison – Love Comes to Everyone

All Things Must Pass – What is Life



George Harrison
All Things Must Pass – Super Deluxe Edition

Capitol - LP, CD (vinyl reviewed [here](#))

It’s true that all things must pass, but some things are transformed and take on a new life. Such is the case with the new “All Things Must Pass” 50th Anniversary album. The first word that came to mind when I began listening was “clarity.” Some things should be clearly heard, like when Harrison sang,

“Not too many people can see we’re all the same
And because of all their tears their eyes can’t hope to see
The beauty that surrounds them.
Isn’t it a pity?”

I no longer have to strain to hear what George is singing, and the music sounds more lively overall. I’ve always loved “ATMP,” but there’s no denying that the original album sounds dark and slightly depressing. One of the things I’ll be paying special attention to over the next few listens is the extent to which that has changed. Is it still a dark album, or was that impression only a “Spector”?

The demos are equally as ear-opening, immediately imparting the different feel of several songs. I love the rawness of the “What is Life” demo, and Ringo’s drumming is another feature that struck me. It’s right up front in several of the demos, so the songs are interesting to listen to on many levels.

I was away from home for a few days and kept thinking about this box set. I texted my husband twice on Friday morning to remind him that this was coming and not to let porch pirates steal it. I finally got to begin my listening session last night and it continues today, revealing all the treasures in these grooves. I can’t help but think that this is what George originally imagined the album would sound like.

-Pam Szeto Griffin
[instagram.com/pamsrecordcollection](https://www.instagram.com/pamsrecordcollection)

Swill

Sponsored by Cardas Audio

By Pamela Dorgay



Ending the summer with lemon lager.

Who knew we'd find great beer only a mile down the street? How do I know it's a mile? I used to drive an EV. When you have an electric car with limited range, you become painfully aware of just how far everything is from you – actually, Mt. Tabor Brewing is 1.4 miles down the street.

It was 98 degrees at 5 pm, much too hot to cook, but just right for a good beer. The closest place to go is the local brewery down the street from us. Mt. Tabor Brewing is usually busy, a good sign that the pizza and beer is good, but for some odd reason, we've never stopped. We're spoiled in the Pacific Northwest with a McMenamins on every corner - so what could this little brewery have to offer?

Ed. Note: Those not familiar with the McMenamins chain, tune into Angela Cardas' Instagram feed (@cardasa on IG)

A lot, it seems. Pleasantly surprised, we find a full menu with Lager, Kolsch, Amber ale, and Hazy IPAs in an array of different aromas and finishes. Not being a beer snob, when push comes to shove, choosing something light and refreshing sounded like a good plan alongside a wood-fired pizza. Lemon Lager is the natural accompaniment to a heavy meal, provided you like the taste of lemon. Your Milwaukee native publisher was not having it, but I soldiered on.

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Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News

*"It's rare that you come
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that make it an
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Dave Hanson,
EnjoyTheMusic.com



*"...the Absolute is probably the
most flexible headphone amplifier
I've ever encountered..."*

Grover Neville, InnerFidelity

*"Fit and finish is impeccable,
as I have come to expect
from Manley..."*

Al Chieng, Positive Feedback

"An absolute joy to use."

Steven Stone, HiFi+

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Unlike a lot of those 'fruity' beers that don't taste like beer, Lemon Lager maintains a fresh, clean, refreshing flavor. Some beers naturally go with a lime (think Corona), a slice of orange (Blue Moon), or zest of lemon, in this case, puree lemon, not artificial flavoring. You really won't experience lemonade overload or puckering up either, unless perhaps for a kiss. This beer would be great for a picnic, with fish and chips, or just sipping on the porch on a hot summer night. If you like the crisp taste of lemon but still want a beer, order one up; it's not just for girls.

We brought home a 4-pack and bought another as a housewarming gift for our web guy, Nate. When you find something you enjoy, it's natural to want to share it with others. It's possible to order online or if you're in our neighborhood, we'll meet you down at the brewery for a cold one on tap.

And believe it or not, someone stole the last one out of the fridge. That's progress.

mttaborbrewing.com



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...

The Ronnie Wood Band - *Mr. Luck*

As a real fan of the Stones' solo projects, this 2013 live show at the Royal Albert Hall is a true charmer. Ronnie Wood never really gets the time to shine that he should, and he's assembled a crack team of guests here.

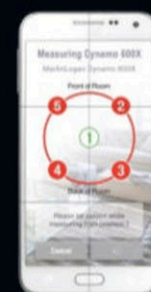
If you enjoy Wood, and you love the blues, this is a fantastic tribute to the great Jimmy Reed.



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We love to discuss the differences in amplifier technology. While there are a few digital amplifiers out there, (such as the excellent Technics model we have featured here) it's mostly tubes and transistors, as it's always been.

You probably have a favorite, there are so many examples in both camps, these days musical involvement is no longer limited to the glass bottle.

For this issue, we've rounded up a selection of integrated and separate power/preamplifiers to investigate. These are in a wide range of price points, so we hope there will be something for everyone's budget and sensibilities.

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



Luxman
INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER L-595A *Special Edition*



**Cover Story:
A Very Special
Edition...**

**Luxman
L-595ASE**

\$11,995

luxmanamerica.com

The first thing you might notice when gazing at Luxman's latest integrated amplifier is the absence of power output meters. Their Class-a amplifiers have yellow meters, the Class-AB amplifiers blue meters, and their highest power L-509x has white. But there are none on the new L-595ASE. You'll also notice a missing rotary input switch. In place of the meters and switch are a series of pushbuttons to call out individual inputs and functions. This is very cool.

What you might not know is that this amplifier is part of Luxman's celebrating 95 years of business. Let that sink in for a minute. None of us were even alive 95 years ago. If you're wondering about spending twelve thousand dollars on an amplifier, hoping someone will be around to fix it twenty years from now, I'm gonna stick my neck out and bet on Luxman being here.

If you've seen the movie *This is Spinal Tap*, you may recall the scene where when Rob Reiner interviews the band's lead guitarist Nigel in his room full of guitars. They stumble on a very rare guitar that "still has the tagger on it," and when our host wants to hold it, Nigel says, "no you can't touch it, you can't even look at it." Some things are that incredible – that beautiful to behold. The Special Edition L-595ASE is one of those objects. I wouldn't let anyone that viewed it look at it for more than a few fleeting seconds. I didn't want anyone's fingerprints or eyeball prints on it while it was here, and I unpacked it with gloves.

Should you be a new reader, or tuning into TONE merely to read this review, I must confess my incredible affection for Luxman products. Of course, they sound excellent, there are other brands that sound great. But there is an ethos of excellence and respect surrounding everything Luxman makes that barely exists anymore. Every time I turn the L-595ASE on, I just want to turn the lights down and bow my head in front of it before playing music. This amplifier is the epitome of understatement. Yet, when you get up close, noticing how exquisitely the casework is machined, right down to the lighted dials and buttons, the depth of thought and execution is boundless. The Luxman L-595ASE is worth every penny of its \$11,995 MSRP.





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PREMIERE FLORIDA DEALER



If you consider yourself a hard-core qualityphile, you can spend hours just reveling in the visual detail this amplifier offers. If this were a vintage car, it would be one of those cars that people would say in hushed tones, “it looks fast just standing still.”

Backstory

We’re still an audio magazine to the core, and form without function isn’t enough. This 30-Watt per channel class-A solid-state amplifier sounds glorious. Contributors Rob Johnson and Bob Gendron have both purchased the Luxman L-590axII on my suggestion, as have a number of friends. Legacy Luxman fans will notice the minute they unbox the L-595A, the homage to the vintage Japanese 540 and 570 integrations – both class-A power, and utilizing similar front panel architecture. Unfortunately, these amplifiers were not built for the US market and require 100 volts (instead of North American 120-volt power), so getting them to work here will be tough.

SCULPTURE A

LE PHONO SE

Working strictly as a class A single ended device with no feedback, our phono stage 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.

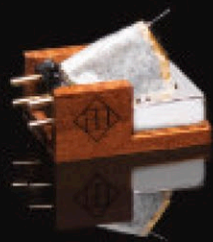
Le Phono SE, a solid-state design without the usual issues of tube electronics.

info@
anamightysound.com

Ana
MIGHTY SOUND



A.4 Silver



A.3



A.4 Copper



made by Ana Mighty Sound

A.3 & A.4 SCULPTURE A PHONO CARTRIDGES

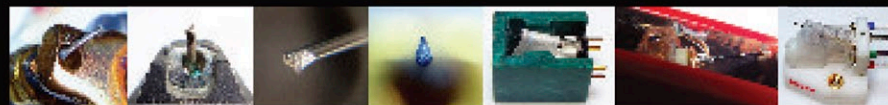
Already awarded by French press with a « Remarquable » award, the A.3 and A.4 phono cartridges display a minimum tracking of 90 micron @300Hz lateral that will allow you to get the full definition of your records. For this we have developed a specific damper and use only boron cantilevers with dedicated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



For those thinking this is merely an L-590aXII with a few tweaks and no meters, the difference is much greater. Luxman says using the pushbuttons instead of a rotary dial result in a quieter circuit – which you will also notice the minute you turn the L-595ASE on. It is even quieter than what you are used to with Luxman amplifiers. And the individual switches are unique to this model.

Everything we love about the L-590aXII is here with the L-595ASE. Without being able to talk anyone out of their L-590aXII, we couldn't really do a side by side. Pouring over listening notes on both the new and old versions of the 590, everything we find lovely about that amplifier is here in abundance. Aural memory can only go so far.

Embracing quiet

John Pravel and Jeff Sigmund answered a lot of my questions about this special, limited-edition amplifier. The differences go a lot deeper than just an alternate switching topology. Though the volume control retains the silky, yet positive smoothness of the other Luxman gear we've used, the L-595ASE introduces "ODNF-u" to the Luxman amplifier line-up. This is the latest, most advanced iteration of "Only Distortion Negative Feedback", with improved error detection and higher initial slew-rate. (than even the preceding ODNF 4.0) The new volume control section utilizes the LECUA 1000, 88-step electronically controlled attenuator, which minimizes sound quality deterioration at low levels.

Copper-clad steel shielding protects the internal signal path from external noise. Special "copper alloy" RCA terminals are featured for the Line-1 input. Expensive "peel-coat" PCB is employed for the joint input/output circuit board, along with Luxman's "bee-line" smooth rounded circuit trace patterns.

The power supply has also been upgraded, including a new power transformer dedicated to the L-595ASE. Special internal windings construction, wire insulation and potting/damping is applied to achieve very low noise. (No other Luxman model utilizes this exact, same power transformer) Large A+ B loudspeaker relays with very low internal resistance help achieve a lower internal output impedance and a resulting higher damping factor at the speaker terminals. Special internal construction Nippon Chemi-Con power supply smoothing capacitors are employed. And these are also designed to minimize vibration and be isolated from chassis vibration too.

Top Notch Phono

The L-595ASE has an excellent MM/MC phono stage built in, however, there is no adjustable gain or loading. The MC section is optimized for .3-.5mv cartridges with a 100-ohm load, as it is in all other Luxman integrated amplifiers.

There are plenty of great MC carts that can be used with 100-ohm loading, and we made it a point of putting a recently rebuilt Denon 103dr (from our friends at Ana Mighty Sound) through the paces here. Like every other aspect of the 595, quiet and dynamic are the key words.

Just like every other Luxman integrated we've reviewed, the strongest suit of these amplifiers is their perfect balance – every section delivers an equally high level of performance, yet no particular section outshines the other. This harmony of design delivers maximum performance no matter what source material you are listening to. Kept within the context of like performing speakers and potential analog sources, I can't imagine needing an outboard phono stage for this amplifier, though my only complaint is that I wish Luxman would have offered an additional phono input on the flagship. Even if it would have been separate MM and MC phono inputs.

That button

When you think of integrated amplifiers with a loudness contour button, no doubt visions of cheesy 70's receivers and mass market speakers fill your head.

For the weeks the L-595ASE was here I stared at that button. Dabbling with the tone controls a bit – Luxman does a fantastic job at offering tone controls that do no harm and subtly adjust the tonal balance to suit your room and speakers.

But a loudness button? No way. Yes way, especially at very low volume, as it was intended to be used.

The slight bit of bass and treble boost offered by the L-595ASE's loudness button is welcome when listening at ultra quiet levels. It brings some needed extra warmth to things and is very unobtrusive in its operation. If you purchase a L-595ASE of your own, don't hesitate to give it a try!

More listening

We can talk about the engineering and aesthetic aspects of Luxman's L-595ASE all day long, but the real thrill is in the listening. As a confessed tube lover, there are precious few solid-state components that offer up music in such an effortless, natural, and relaxed way that they vanish from your thought process. All the other ones I know cost more than the L-595ASE. A lot more. Even at the price jump from the L-590aXII, the L-595ASE is a major bargain, because it's all on one chassis. As with any other great integrated, just what you'll save not buying three power cords and two extra pairs of premium interconnects makes the L-595ASE a major value proposition.

There's no better reason to ignore specs than the Luxman L-595ASE. You might look at the Luxman and see 30 Watts per channel, with the thought this amplifier is incredibly overpriced. Yet, when you install it in your system, it's overbuilt power supply and output stage deliver more than enough dynamic range to drive nearly any speakers. Certainly nothing we have here is a problem, even the 86db/1-Watt Harbeth C7s or Magnepans. Yes, this 30 WPC amplifier will even drive Magnepans. The L-590aXII is one of the most superb Class-A amplifiers we've ever heard, and the L-595ASE steps the game up even further.



Tracking through any of our favorite multilayered vocal pieces, the level of fine detail will have you thinking there are some tubes under that incredible casework – but there isn’t. Bass control is incredible. Every speaker from the Sonus faber Stradiveris to the new Fink Team Kim’s we’ve recently acquired is fast, tight, and detailed. The midrange to top end of the frequency response is equally well represented.

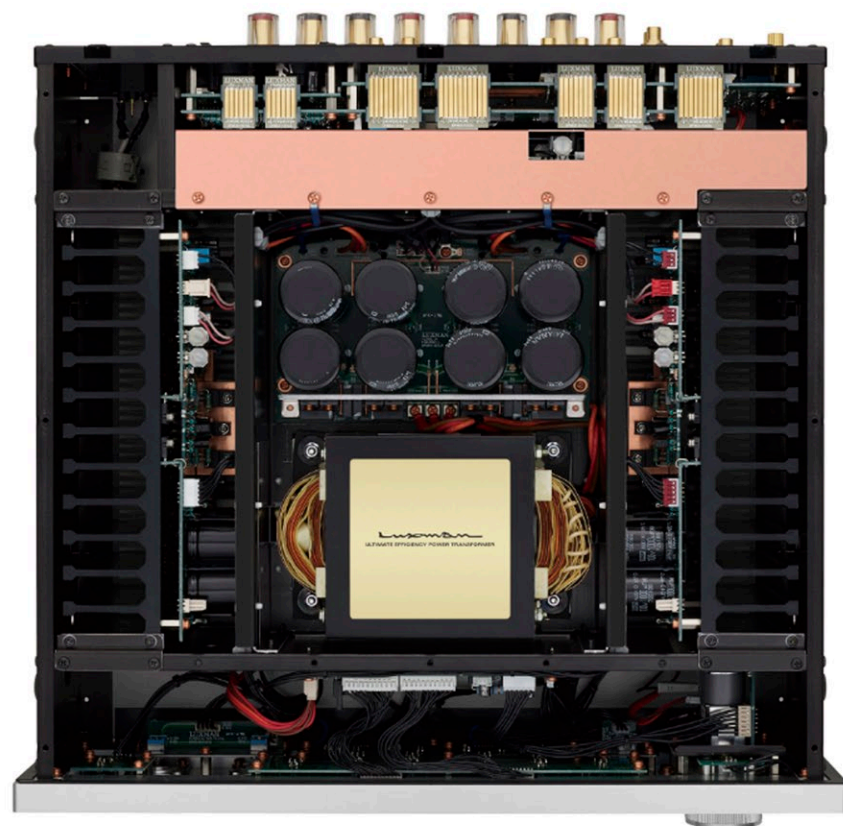
When listening to solo piano or violins, there isn’t even a touch of harshness or grain – putting this amplifier into that ultra-rare category, where you are neither paying attention to the amplifier, nor wondering about the technical side of it. It merely produces glorious, dynamic, music.

On all but the most demanding music played at extremely high level, the L-595ASE truly eliminates the need for separate components, and the argument

of whether an integrated amplifier can provide state of the art sound. It is that refined.

It didn’t take long to get used to no meters on the front panel of the Luxman L-595ASE, or functionality that is different from all the other Luxman pieces I’ve used and owned. It is going to take a long time to get used to it being gone. With only 100 of them coming to the United States out of 300 world-total, actually getting your hands on one will be a bigger challenge. If your dealer has one, and you have the cash, buy it immediately. You won’t get another chance, and I doubt you will see these popping up on the secondary market any time soon.

And if you are one of the 300 lucky people that manage to procure one, know I am very envious of you. In our issue 109, we award three products our Heritage Award, celebrating excellence on every level and longevity. I can tell you where one of these three awards is going right now.



“The L-595ASE is part of that ultra-rare category - where you are neither paying attention to the amplifier, nor wondering about the technical side of it...”



Lou Reed - The Raven

Lou Reed's concept album, based on the works of Edgar Allen Poe is pretty wild, adventurous, and haunting. Just another day at the office for Reed, right?

We particularly love "Vanishing Act," as it's such a great solo vocal track to demonstrate speakers with. If you've got your speakers set up as they should be, Reed will appear in your room. Really.

Nice to see this finally on vinyl. And now that the issue is complete, it's time for us to vanish for a little while.

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Jerold O'Brien – TONEAudio September 2021

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Greg Voth – Stereotimes September 2021



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CALL OR EMAIL TO ORDER

Luxman L-590AXII

\$9,495

Luxmanamerica.com

No other amplifier in our history has been purchased by as many friends, staff members, and readers than the Luxman L-590AXII.

If that doesn't speak volumes about how good it truly is, nothing does. Former Music Editor Bob Gendron has one, Senior Contributing Editor Rob Johnson has one. I used to have one and will again soon.

This 30 Watt per channel, class-A powerhouse can drive nearly any speakers, much like my Levinson ML-2 monos from back in the day.

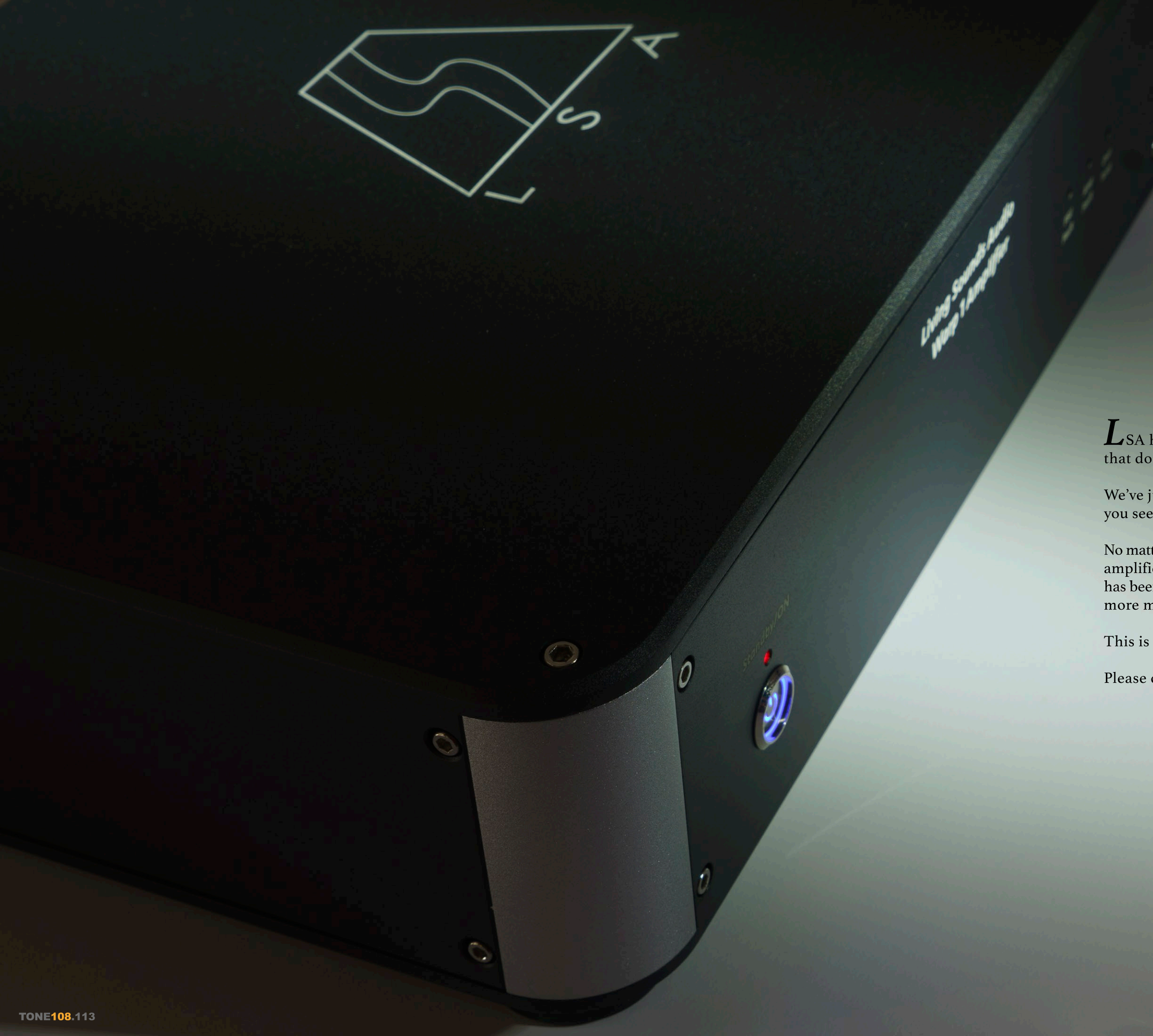
People ask all the time, "Is it really that good," and the answer is an unqualified yes.

What makes the L-590II so damn good is the package approach. Every part of this amplifier is equally good, and it is exquisitely built by a company that's been in business for almost 100 years. Impressive.

[Read our full review here.](#)

#toneaudioapproved.





LSA
Warp-1
\$1,199
underwoodhifi.com

*L*SA has been producing some really innovative stuff lately that doesn't break the bank.

We've just reviewed their VT70 tube amp and the Warp-1 that you see here, using Class-D topology. How's that for opposites?

No matter what you prefer, they've got you covered. This compact amplifier cranks out 150 watts per channel, and our experience has been that more modest powered Class-D amps tend to sound more musical.

This is a great budget system anchor.

Please [click here](#) to read our full review.



Linear Tube Audio Z40

\$7,650 and up
lineartubeaudio.com

Output transformerless (OTL) tube amplifiers have been around for decades, but they are fickle amplifiers, and compatible with few speakers.

Until now. The LTA Z40 leans on a core design from legendary amp designer David Berning, resulting in a compact, lightweight (no big, heavy output transformers!) amplifier that drives just about anything.

The end result is fabulous. It's amazing what happens when you take a few miles of wire out of the output page.



Nagra Classic Amp

\$17,500
nagraaudio.com

We've been to the Nagra factory in Switzerland a few times now, and never cease to be impressed with the level of passion underneath the roof of this legendary manufacturer.

Nagra's recent HD series components have been winning awards around the world, and back when we were all still attending hifi shows, delivering fantastic sound, everywhere they went.

For those who prefer the form factor (and price point) of the more compact, "Classic" series, this 100 Watt per channel stereo amplifier can be bridged to provide you with a pair of monoblocks, should you require it.

As with Nagra's additional power supplies for their DACs, phonostages, and preamplifiers, this is a great way to have a building block approach.

Regardless of your motivation, this amplifier brings fantastic sound, quality and style to your listening room.

But beware, it's tough to own only one Nagra component. Once you get used to how they do it, you may end up finding more Nagra boxes in your midst.

Please click [here](#) for our full review.



Manley Snapper Monoblocks

\$9,395/pair
manley.com

*E*ven though there's been a recent price increase at Manley, due to current world conditions, these modestly sized monoblocks are still one of the best values in high end audio today.

Hand assembled in “Chino not China,” the Snappers are made with the love and care that the finest components of audio's golden age were.

They look super cool, and sound even better. With 100 Watts per channel on tap, they are team players with any system you can connect them too.

Please click [here](#) to read our full review.

Audia Flight FL Three S FLS 9 and FLS 10

\$3,800 - \$10,500
audia.it (factory)
gramophone.ca (NA distributor)

On many levels, we wish all components were built with a modular perspective, like the Audia Flight trio you see here.

Each amplifier offers a core functionality, with 100, 150, or 200 Watts per channel at your command.

Their modular approach makes it easy to add an on-board DAC, phono stage, or two additional line inputs. Those wanting an all in one amplifier, to keep cords to a minimum will love this approach.

Sound quality is out of this world good, and of course, the casework is fantastic.

We will have a comparison review of all three very soon, accompanied by in-depth reviews of each amplifier individually as well.

Stay tuned.



Pass Labs INT-25

\$7,250
passlabs.com

Usually, we're reviewing big, heavy creations from Pass Labs, but the INT-25 is a unique, onto itself product in their lineup.

Nothing is compromised here in terms of build or musical quality, even compared to the mighty XS300 monos. On one hand the INT-25 might just resolve more of the most minute inner details, than anything Pass has to offer.

This is a very special amplifier, and if you can live with 25 watts per channel, this single ended amplifier is for you.

It's one of our favorites, and #toneaudioapproved.

[Please click here to read the full review.](#)



Vitus Audio SIA-25

\$27,000
highendbyoz.com
vitusaudio.com

Vitus Audio makes some of the world's biggest and most incredible solid-state amplifiers. Some might balk at the \$27,000 price tag for a 25-Watt per channel integrated, but like my Levinson ML-2s back in the 80s, (which were also pretty darn costly) this amplifier is so overbuilt, it defies mere specs.

The name of the game here is refinement.

If you'd love the sound of a six-figure stack of Vitus amplification, but can live with 25 Watts per channel and a lot of headroom, the SIA-25 delivers a lot of that experience.

Even this "small" Vitus amplifier still weighs close to 100 pounds, draws a fair amount of current, and generates a lot of heat.

But it is oh, so glorious.

[Please click here to read the full review.](#)





Parasound JC1+ Monoblocks

\$16,990/pair
parasound.com

The Parasound JC1+ monos are an intriguing product from a company that has always made “under 5-figure” components.

Yet, the “plus” version of the original JC1 amps, still designed by legend John Curl, are so much more advanced and refined than the originals, it’s almost as if these are entirely new models.

A quick trip to the Parasound website reveals a four page document, outlining all the changes that have been made.

While nearly 17-thousand dollars is not a small amount of money, in terms of the performance these amplifiers deliver, in relationship to their cost is incredible.

There are a lot of amplifiers out there, that have much higher price tags that don’t even come close to what the JC1+ monos deliver.

This is one of the best kept secrets in megabuck audio. #toneaudioapproved.

Please click here for the rest of the story.

Technics SU-R1000

\$9,499
technics.com

*I*f you haven't noticed, Technics has re-entered the world of high end audio in a big way in the last few years, starting with their direct-drive turntables.

As the flagship of their Premium Class, the SU-R1000 redefines a lot of the way we've always looked at the implementation of an integrated amplifier.

A true digital amplifier all the way through, the SU-R1000 utilizes a number of specific to Technics features, like their JENO jitter reduction system, ADCT distortion cancelling technology, and some major power supply upgrades as well.

Adding a level of fit, finish and attention to detail in a way only a company the size of Panasonic can muster, and it's a true sound revolution.

Read about the rest of the tech here, at the Panasonic site.

And you can click here for our full review.



Boulder 866

\$12,250 - \$14,450
boulderamp.com

*B*oulder has really been concentrating on some more accessible products in their lineup over the past few years, with incredible success.

Their 509 phono stage has achieved near legendary status, and the new 866 is sure to follow.

With 200 Watts per channel, and a relatively (for Boulder) form factor, this integrated can be ordered with or without a Roon-ready, streaming DAC. Unless you have a really amazing outboard DAC, go for the internal - it features top-tier performance and ease of use.

Because Boulder builds \$200k pairs of amplifiers on a regular, they've got the engineering and manufacturing chops to build something this good at this price.

Please click [here](#) for our full review.

And watch the cover of our next issue....

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.



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tiffany.com

These coolio bone china cups from
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Jim Hannon, VP/Group Publisher & Senior Writer, *The Absolute Sound*

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PRIMALUNA
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\$4,499

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



MUSICAL FIDELITY
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!



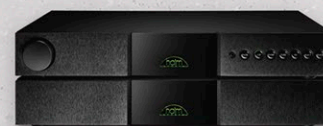
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Aurium
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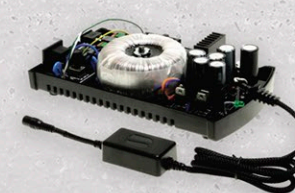
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Photo courtesy of Conway Electric



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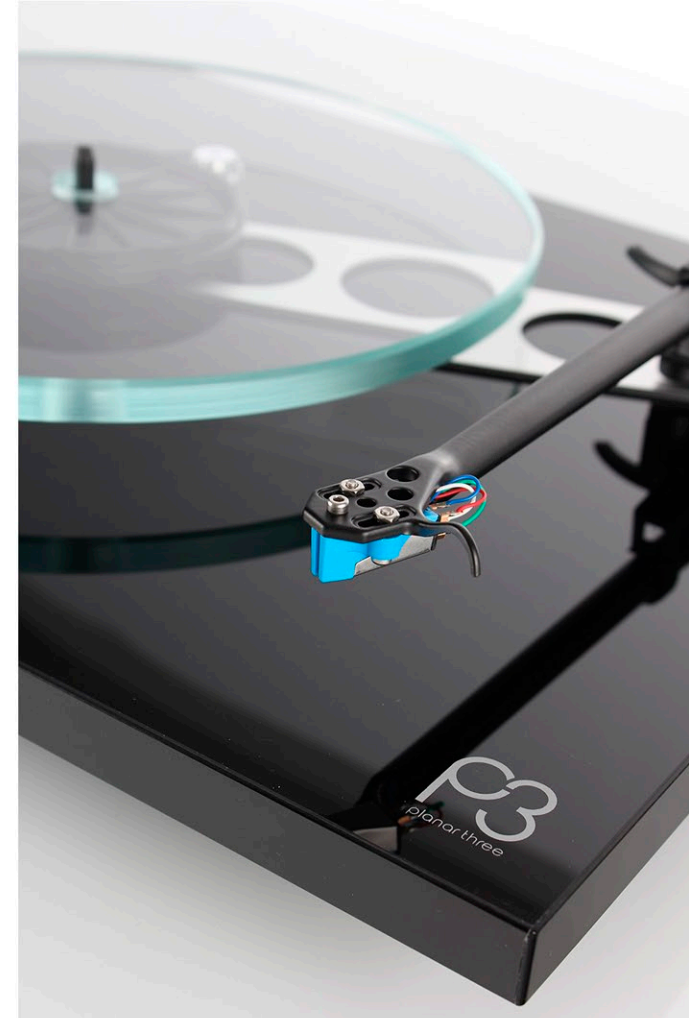
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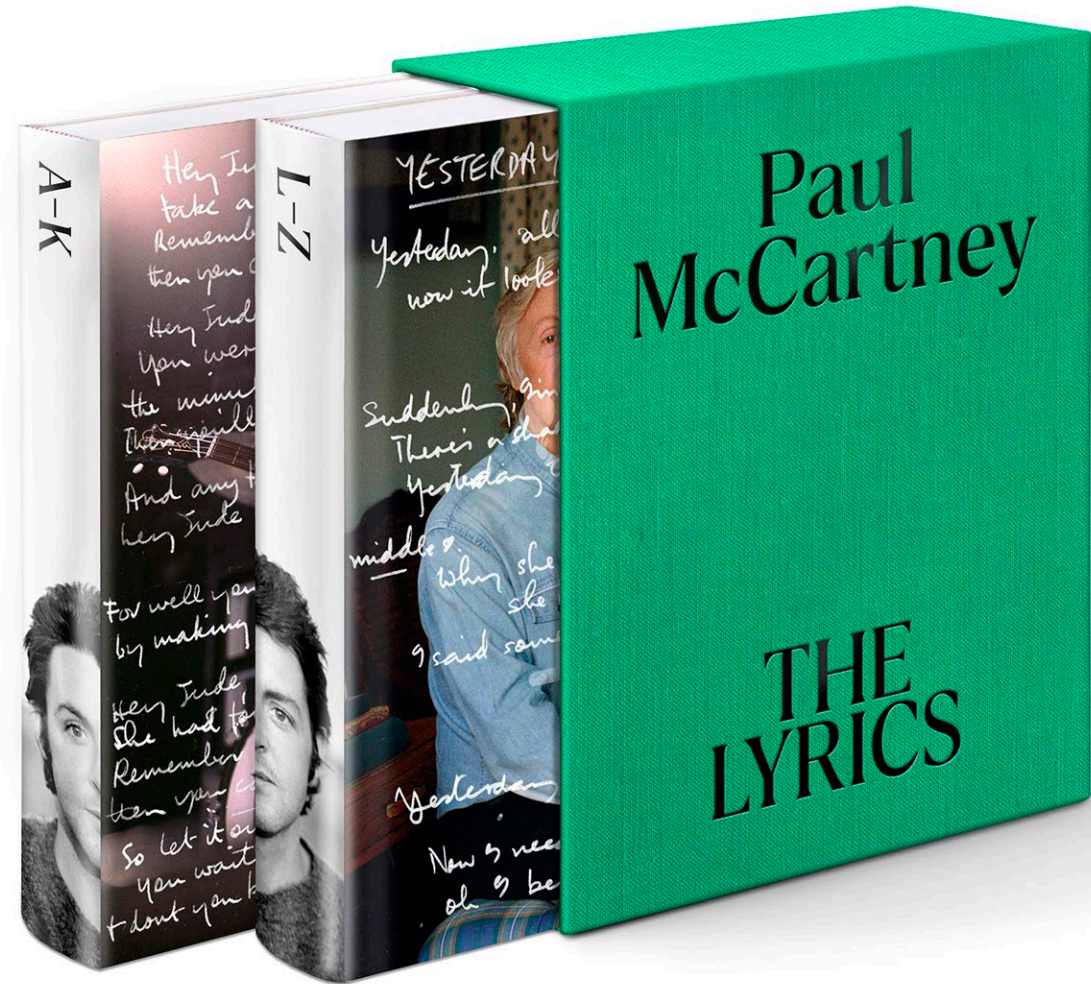
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Yesterday Isn't so Far Away Any More...

\$79.99 (preorder, out Nov. 2)
Amazon.com

Many have said that this is as close as we're going to get as an autobiography from the cute Beatle.

The Lyrics offers up McCartney's comments and insights on 154 of his songs, in alphabetical order, spanning two volumes, no less. Chock full of previously unseen photos, texts, and paintings, there's some major musical history here.

Perhaps this will put some internet arguments to rest. It looks like a lot of fun.

TONE108.147

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We Are
Fun.

We Are
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Discover yours
totemacoustic.com

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!

Classic Clock

\$125
shinola.com

Shinola's Guardian Travel alarm clock features a tumbled stainless steel case, that looks a lot like their watch with the same name.

The face also shares a simliar design aesthetic, with light cream numbers and a luminous dial. The Guardian is battery powered, taking up a tiny footprint of only 2.6 x 2.5 inches - smaller than what you see on the page.

It looks like a fabulous addition to a mid-century modern house, or a great travel partner.



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



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concierge@ta-hifi.com



#musicreengineered
T+A Caruso



T+A
Engineering Emotion

MINE
it should be **YOURS**

Craftsmanship Fusion...

Fender x MoFi PrecisionDeck turntable
\$3,495
musicdirect.com

Mofi Electronics' has taken their UltraDeck table to a new level of exclusivity, partnering with Fender's Custom Shop to create a unique record playing device.

Utilizing the same wood and finish from a Fender Precision Bass, this turntable is sure to be a show stopper.

Grab yours now, only 1,000 will be produced!



MINE
it should be YOURS

The Best Light

\$60

reliablecorporation.com

If you have a large record, and/or music collection, chances are you can use a little more light.

Whether you are highlighting part of your collection, lighting the way to your turntable, or always setting up another table, the UberLight Flex is an accessory you can't afford to be without.

Reliable's president, Robert Kahn, is an audiophile too, so you know that this has been designed with our needs in mind.

Chances are, once you get used to having an UberLight around, you might just need a few more. #toneaudioapproved.



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866 Integrated



200 Watts Per Channel

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(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

Boulder Amplifiers, Inc S. Taylor Avenue Louisville, CO 80027 (303) 449-8220, x110 www.boulderamp.com

[f BoulderAmplifiersInc](#) [@boulderamplifiers](#) [@BoulderAmps](#)

The Jack Kerouac Collection

Well, near the end of the issue, we usually need some kind of inspiration, and what better than the original beat poet? Our publisher bought this at a rummage sale years ago, on cassette, no less for \$15.

We've never played it till now. And it's just fitting to play it back on a vintage Nakamichi cassette deck.

Whoa.



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FUTURE TENSE

Reviews in our immediate future...

T+A Caruso R

\$3,800

Ta-hifi.de

T+A has been making the Caruso since 2008, and the level of refinement here shows clearly.

With 50 watts per channel on tap, a built in streamer, FM tuner and CD player, all you need to add is a pair of your favorite speakers and maybe a turntable. Watch for a full review very soon. Fantastic.





FATHOM® v2

f110v2 IN-ROOM POWERED SUBWOOFER

“Replacing the excellent low end of the (main speakers) with the tautly controlled f110v2 more completely disambiguated the sound of the guitar’s lowest strings from that of the wood, without diminishing the warmth and weight of either.”

– 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?
The answer to that question is YES!”

– Jeff Dorgay, [TONEAudio](#)



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© 2020 JL AUDIO, Inc. For more information on our complete line of subwoofers, please visit your local authorized dealer or www.jlaudio.com.
Authorized JL Audio Dealers do not sell via the Internet. Subwoofers pictured with grilles removed.

FUTURE TENSE Reviews in our immediate future...



Woo Audio WA7 Fireflies (3rd Gen.)

\$1,399
wooaudio.com

We’ve owned the past two versions of this incredible, compact DAC and headphone amplifier from Woo Audio.

Both were excellent, combining two necessary components for a mega desktop system.

Now, the third generation sounds even better, and is all on one chassis, so you won’t have to worry about losing that outboard power supply...

A lovely addition to your desk.

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P3
planar three

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Reviews in our immediate future...

Acora Acoustics SRC-1

\$28,000/pair
acoraacoustics.com

We had an absolute blast listening to the smaller Acora SRB speakers last issue. And the bigger, floorstanding SRC-1s, are just more of that experience.

Acora's founder, Valerio Cora has taken his unique vision of building speaker enclosures from granite, and built speakers like no other.

We can't wait to hear the bigger SRC-1s later this year in our studio.



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



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AUDIO
geerfabaudio.com

FUTURE TENSE Reviews in our immediate future...

Dynaudio Emit20

\$1,049/pair
dynaudio.com

Because Dynaudio makes all of their drivers in-house (and pretty much everything else) they are one of the world's top manufacturers when it comes to high quality, modestly-priced speakers.

With so much expertise at their disposal, they are able to make even a small speaker like the Emit20 have bespoke parts.

The proof is in the listening. Incredibly good!



\$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

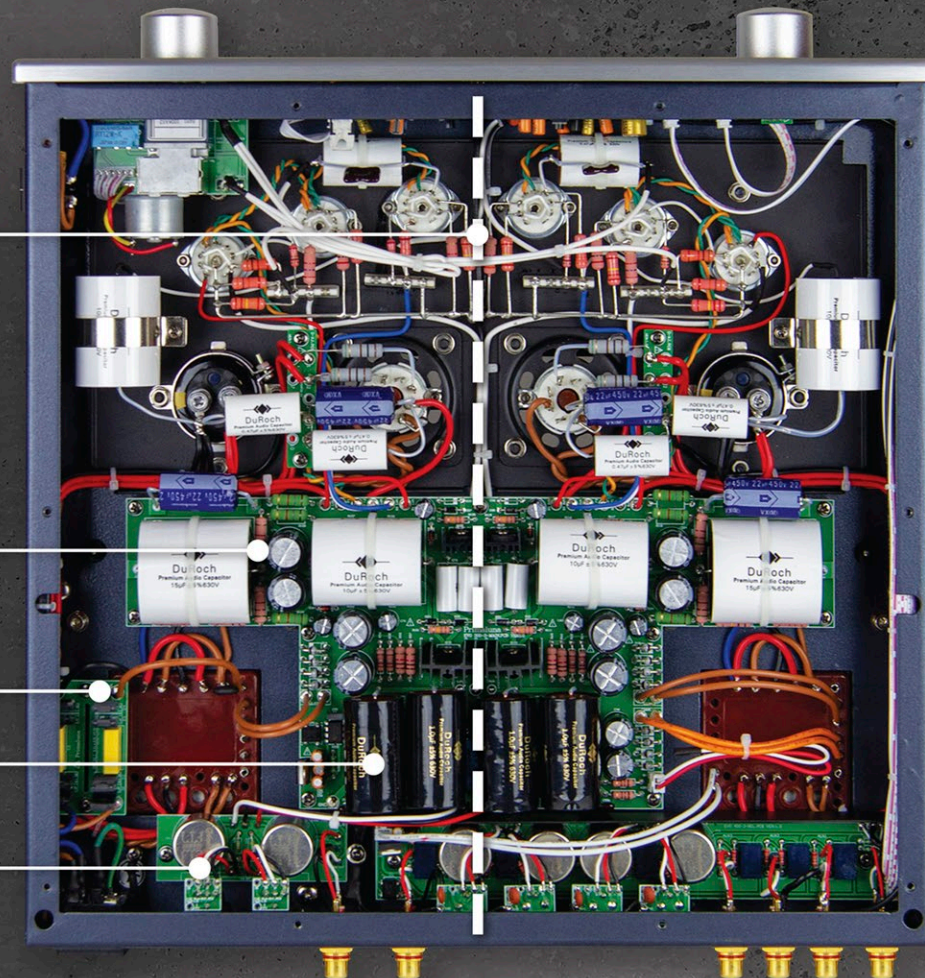
Point-to-point wiring with **Swiss-made silver-plated OFC wire** improves sound beyond what's possible with PCBs

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

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TONE Audio
Product of the
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FUTURE

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Reviews in our immediate future...



Dan Clark Audio Stealth

\$3,999
danclarkaudio.com

We had such a great time with the Dan Clark AEON phones, offering incredible value at \$800,

The chance to review the new Stealth has us ready to see what Dan Clark Audio has in store at the top of the range.

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

FUTURE TENSE

Reviews in our immediate future...



Bowers & Wilkins 802 D4

\$26,000/pair
bowerswilkins.com

Every generation of the 800 series looks and sounds more lovely than the last.

Adding the wood finish options to these legendary speakers should make them even more fashion forward.

The 800s remain one of the best values in mega speakers, and the D4 models have been upgraded in so many ways.

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FUTURE TENSE Reviews in our immediate future...

Classe Delta Pre Delta Stereo

\$9,999 and \$12,999

classeaudio.com

Classe is back, and their Delta components have always been an incredible combination of power, functionality, and stunning industrial design.

Their latest Delta components are no exception to that heritage.

The pre offers inputs for damn near everything, and the stereo power amplifier produces 250 Watts per channel. Stay tuned.



Behold *The New* D-10X

Accuracy, Sensitivity, Musicality



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luxmanamerica.com

FUTURE TENSE Reviews in our immediate future...



**Ana Mighty Sound
Sculpture A - Mini Nano**

\$995
anamightysound.com

The crew at Ana Mighty Sound always has something interesting in the analog world. And it's usually high-value, high-performance.

Their new Mini Nano step up transformer is exactly that. We'll have more info for you very soon!



Naim UnitiAtom-Headphone Edition

\$3,290
naimaudio.com

We've been big fans of the Naim Uniti series since they first appeared on our cover over a decade ago.

All the other Uniti's have been an all in one integrated amplifier with either a DAC/Streamer on board, or offering a phonostage.

The Headphone Edition might be the best Atom yet. While eliminating the power amplifier, it increases the performance of the headphone amp and preamplifier sections. Offering a Naim streaming DAC (ROON Ready) under the hood, and balanced XLR as well as RCA preamplifier outputs, this is the perfect segue to a full blown two channel system.



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Clearaudio
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Silver Turntable
Combo
\$3,199.99



Hana
ML Microline MC
Cartridge 0.4mV
\$1,199.99



AudioQuest
Monsoon AC
Power Cable
\$449.95



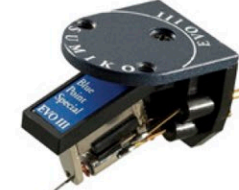
Quest For Sound
Isol-Pad Isolation
Feet (1 Each)
\$6.25



Sieveking Sound
Omega Headphone
Stand
\$179.99



AudioQuest
DragonFly Cobalt
USB DAC + Preamp
+ HP Amp
\$299.95



Sumiko
Blue Point
Special EVO III
MC Cartridge
\$548.99



Spin Clean
Washer MkII
Record Cleaner
\$79.99



VPI
MW-1 Cyclone Super
Record Cleaner
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Available)



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\$15,000
audioresearch.com

If you've been enjoying those 160 Monos from a far, but lack the budget, the space, or just don't need that much power, the 80S is definitely the ticket.

This reminds us a lot of the legendary D-79, and we can't wait to get one in for review.

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S E R I E S

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Founder is no ordinary loudspeaker. We've treated every part, large and small, as if it were the most crucial piece of the whole. Every component has been thoroughly researched, designed, engineered, and tested. Not only are the drivers completely new, so is their mounting hardware, the cabinet's internal structure and shape, and even the feet. By leaving no element unaddressed, we've created something that is much greater than the sum of its parts.



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who love great audio (*just like you*).



Shown: Founder 120H

paradigm.com/findmydealer

Totem Element Fire v.2

\$7,000/pair
 totemacoustic.com

We've listened to a lot of the smaller speakers in the Totem lineup with great results. Few companies offer more performance for the dollar than Totem.

The Element Fire v.2s you see here are their top stand mount speakers featuring a 2-way design, with a 7-inch woofer and titanium dome tweeter.

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— Angela Cardas Meredith, Cardas Audio

"The clientele are enthusiastic about the music. You see people of all ages...
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— Kevin Hayes, VAC

"The show was well organized, attendees were plentiful and interesting, with many new faces we don't see at other shows."

— Jeremy Bryan, MBL North America

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.



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Dealers That Mean Business - Listings

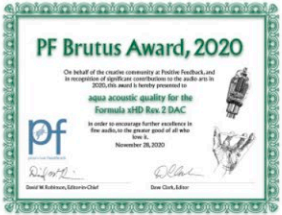
Marietta, Georgia - The Audio Company
www.theaudioco.com
146 South Park Square NE
Marietta, Georgia 30060
770.429.0434



San Diego, California - Deja VU Audio West
www.dejavuaudiowest.com
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Review: Andrew Everard
Lab: Paul Miller

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Sarasota, Florida - Suncoast Audio
www.suncoastaudio.com
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www.nohosound.com
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Dealers That Mean Business - Listings

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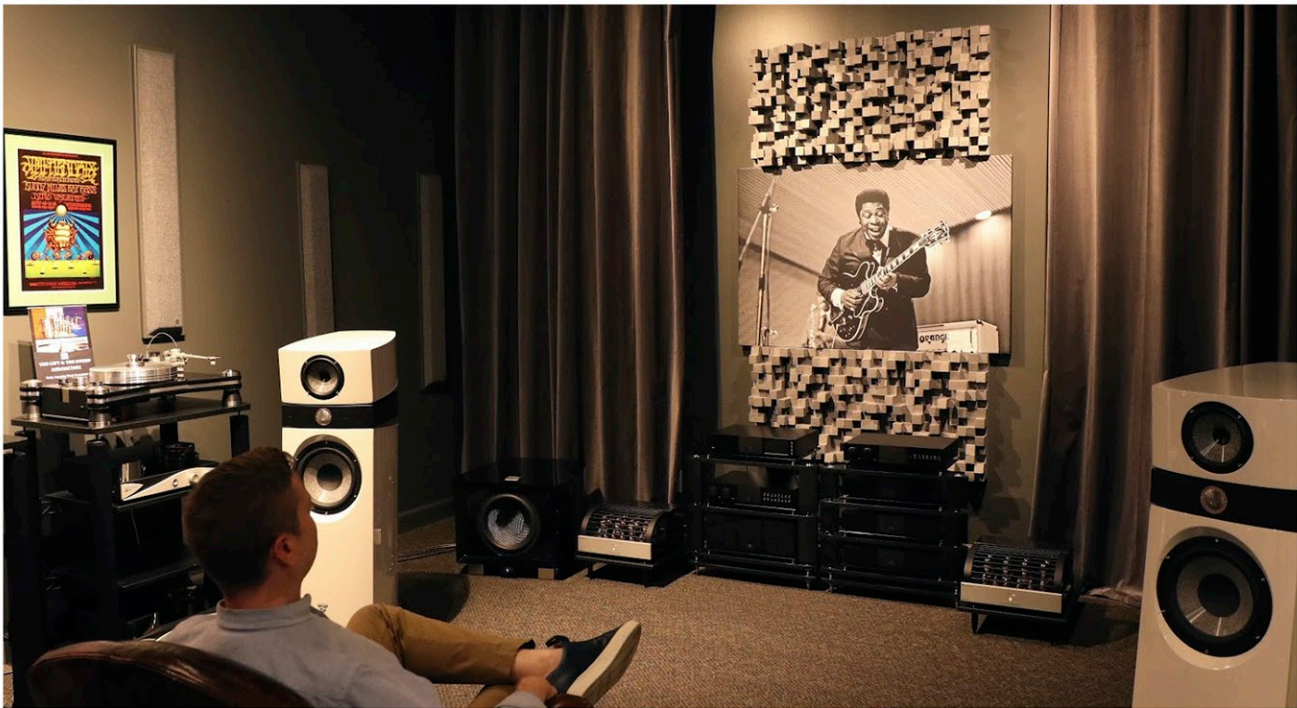
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Vestal, New York - Audio Classics
audioclassics.com
3501 Vestal Road,
Vestal, New York 13850 800.321.2834



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."

Technology

Cable Polygraph testing led to the DNA Helix conductor geometry (US Patent No. 8,569,627). Layered flat conductors with parallel strands prevent the 'eddy current' losses caused by twisted and solid conductors, providing superior preservation of musical detail, dimensionality and dynamics.

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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



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sonusfaber.com

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



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Dealers That Mean Business - Listings

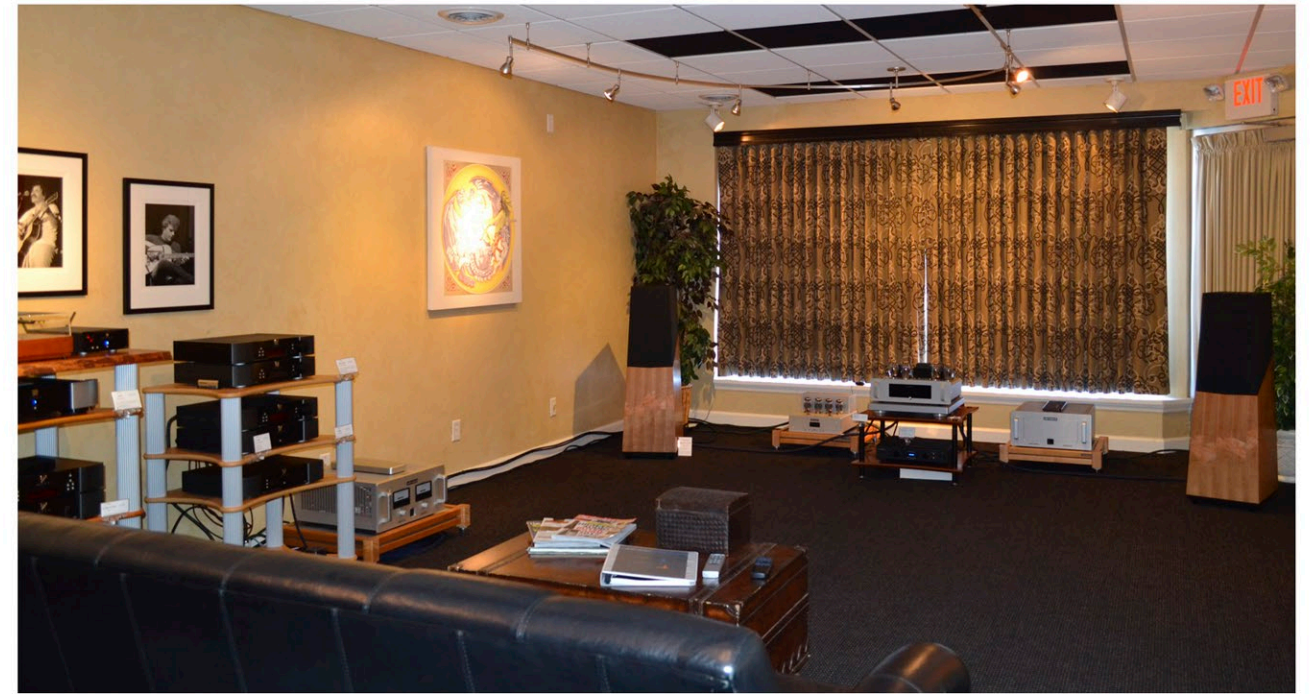
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin - Ultra Fidelis

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



Club Mix compilation expert, Scott Tetzlaff's theme for this playlist is "poolside."

Offering up a great mix of new, old, funk, some Stones, and some electronica, this is interesting even if you don't have a pool.

Enjoy!



Blank & Jones, Coralie Clement - C'est pas la mer à boire

Allah-Las - Ela Navega

Scary Pockets, Pomplamoose, Nataly Dawn- God Only Knows

Allah-Las - Raspberry Jam

Flight Facilities, Jess - Foreign Language

The Performers - Ocean Garage

Sebastien Tellier, Young Marco - Stuck in a Summer Love (Young Marco remix)

Tony Allen, Damon Albarn - Go Back

Nicola Conte - Kind of Sunshine

Jr Thomas & The Volcanos - Burning Fire

Africa - Paint It Black

Peter Tosh, Mick Jagger - (You Gotta Walk) Don't Look Back

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san francisco

welcome to the hifi show

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Audio Classics	audioclassics.com
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AudioVision SF	audiovisionsf.com
AVID HiFi	avidhifi.com
Backert Labs	backertlabs.com
Boulder	boulderamp.com
Cardas Audio	cardas.com
Clarus Cable	claruscable.com
Chord Cable	soundorg.com
Coincident	coincidentpeaker.com
conrad-johnson	conradjohnson.com

Core Power	underwoodhifi.com
dCS	dcsLtd.co.uk
Dynaudio	dynaudio.com
Echo Audio	echohifi.com
Elusive Disc	elusivedisc.com
Fidelis/Harbeth	fidelisav.com
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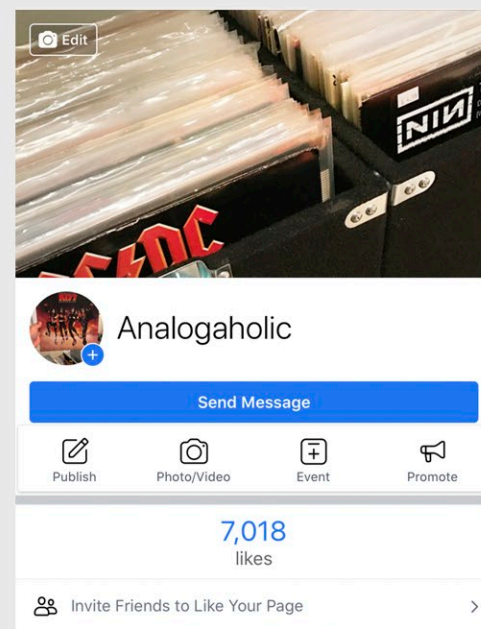
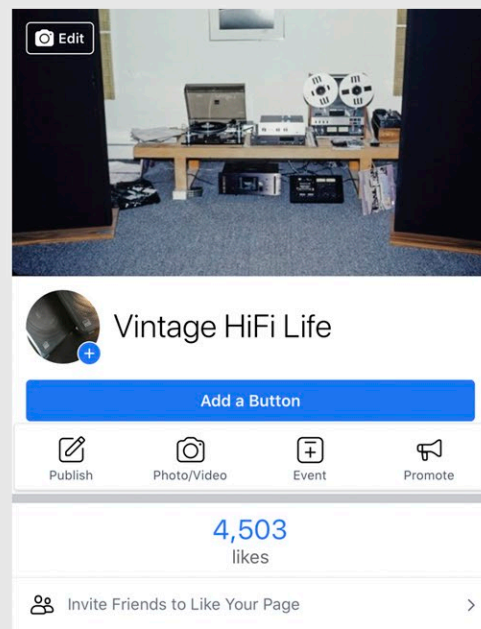
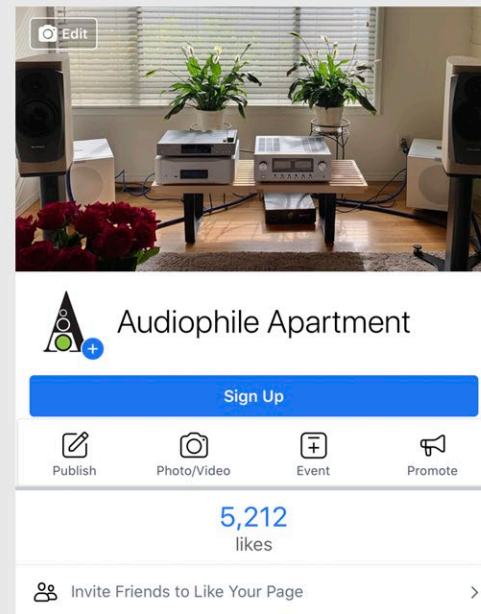
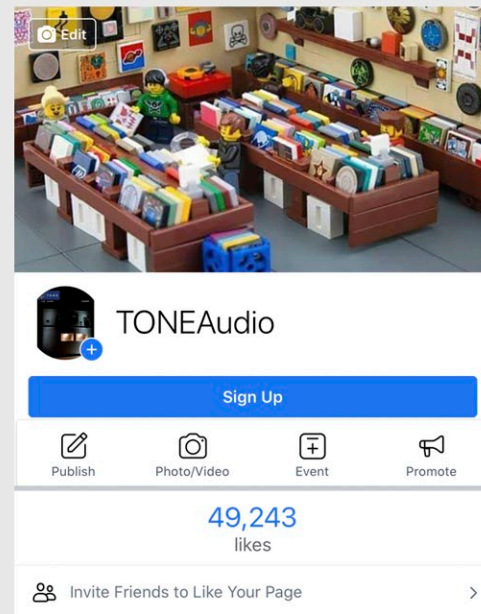
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Manley	manleylabs.com	Stenheim	stenheim.com
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PS Audio	psaudio.com	Torus	toruspower.com
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We've tried to make it pretty easy for you to find us out 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.

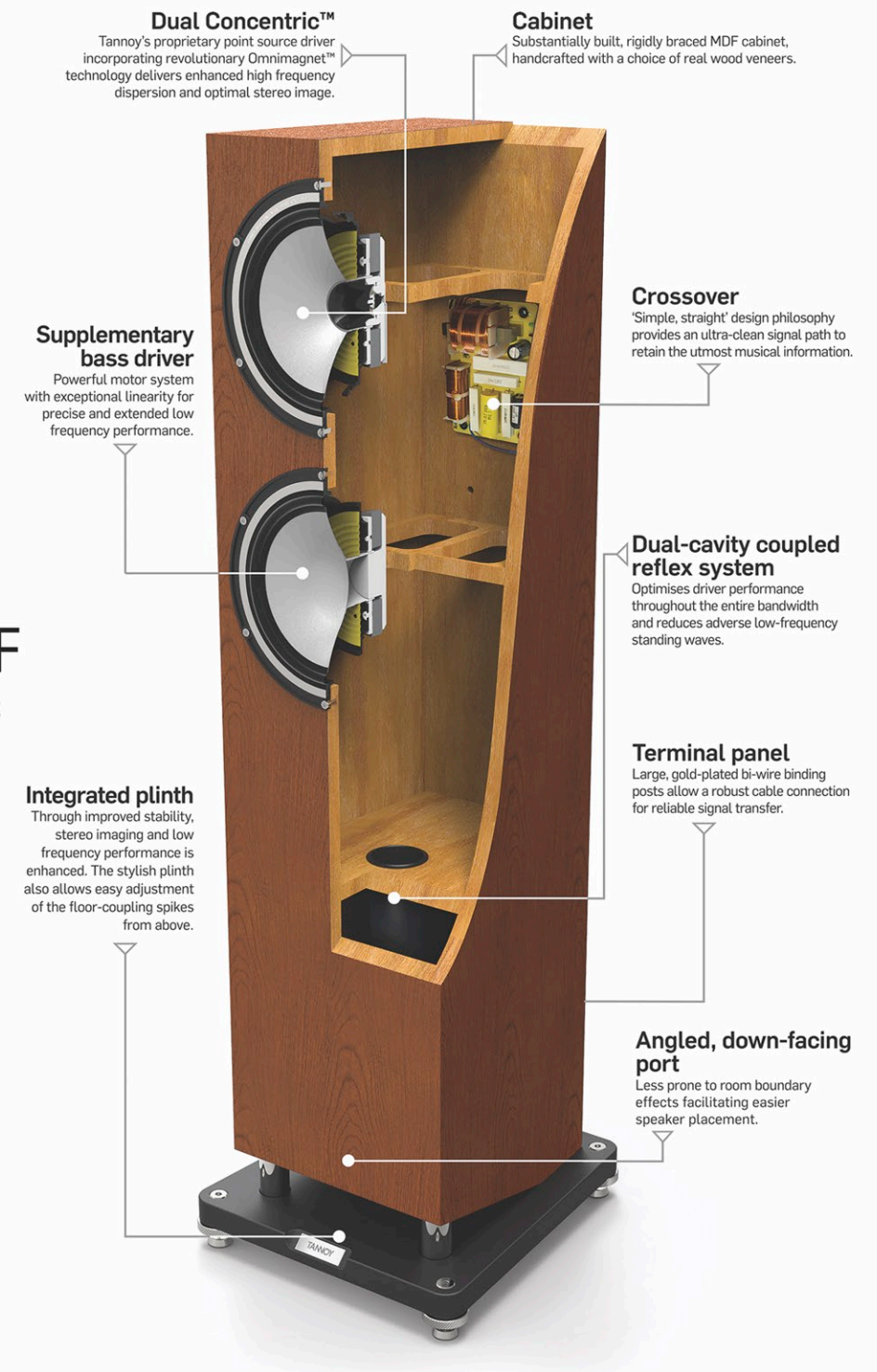


Revolution XT 8F

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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





I've really been getting back into vinyl with a fever lately, in part, thanks to the new Rega P10 and the Thrax Yatrus turntables. I haven't bought a new turntable in years, so this has been a ton of fun.

What better time to get a new record cleaning machine as well? The Degritter has been getting a lot of great press from nearly everyone, so this seemed like the logical choice.

Though costly, we're big fans of ultrasonic cleaners. They have a way of getting those grooves clean like nothing else.

But I haven't gotten rid of the VPI vacuum machine I've had for years. This is still a great "first round" cleaner for heavily soiled records. So much for clicks and pops!



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Next issue, **109:**

It's awards time!

We've picked our favorites, and we hope you'll enjoy what
we've decided on.

And, our usual columns...

Stay tuned.

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



TONE