

# NO.111



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**P**eople usually associate "Power Pop" with Cheap Trick, Big Star, and even Pezband. (Of course, you have your favorites...)

But there's an equally clever band from Zion, Illinois that often gets swept under the rug - Shoes.

And what more fun way to listen to this group than on a NOS, in the shrinkwrap cassette?



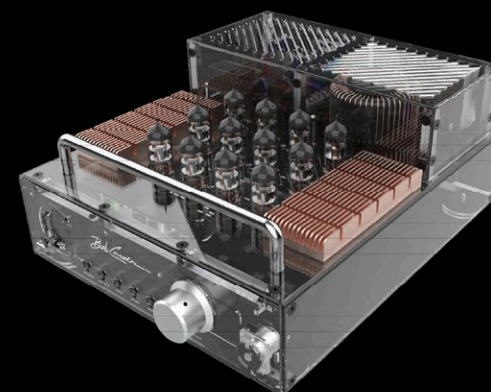
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When John Atkinson came to measure, I insisted he listen...  
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and the absence of reproductive artifacts were remarkable.  
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*Michael Fremer, Stereophile,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



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# TONE

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Learn more at [dcsaudio.com/APEX](https://dcsaudio.com/APEX)

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dCSonlythemusic





what's inside:



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## Cover Story

The **Bowers & Wilkins** Zeppelin just keeps getting better.



# 12

(and on...)

## Playlists

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

Sponsored By Qobuz

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Lots of speakers. Particularly these lovely Piegas.



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## The Audiophile Apartment

The compact, mega performance SP500s from **FYNE** are fine indeed. And you can put a pair just about anywhere...



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## MINE: It Should be Yours

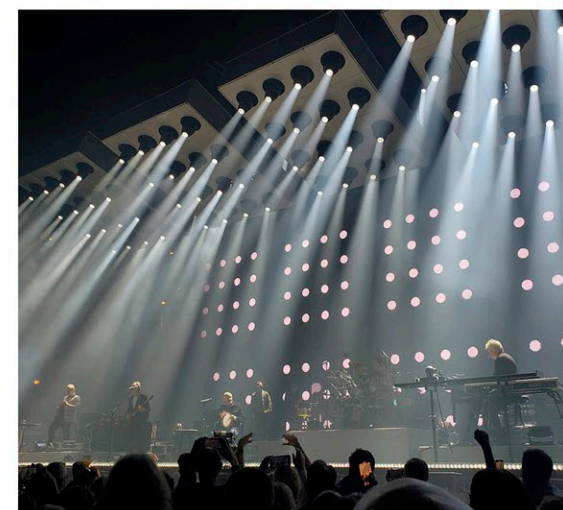
You can't live on music and hifi alone, so here are some things to spice up your existence.

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Enough hifi, let's have a beer! Cam's got Iron Maiden beer. Killer.

Sponsored by Cardas Audio



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## Dealers That Mean Business

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



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## Merch Table

We're all **DEVO!**

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## Get The Gear

Links to the gear (and our advertisers) in this issue.

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## Last Word

We've got puppies!



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## Future Tense

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







# Harbeth XD

"...nothing short of stunning..."

Jeff Dorgay *Tone Audio* on the C7 XD

"...Alan Shaw's Masterpiece"

*Tone Audio*  
on the 40.3 XD

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PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

WINNER | 2021  
Harbeth M30.2 XD



C7ES-3 XD



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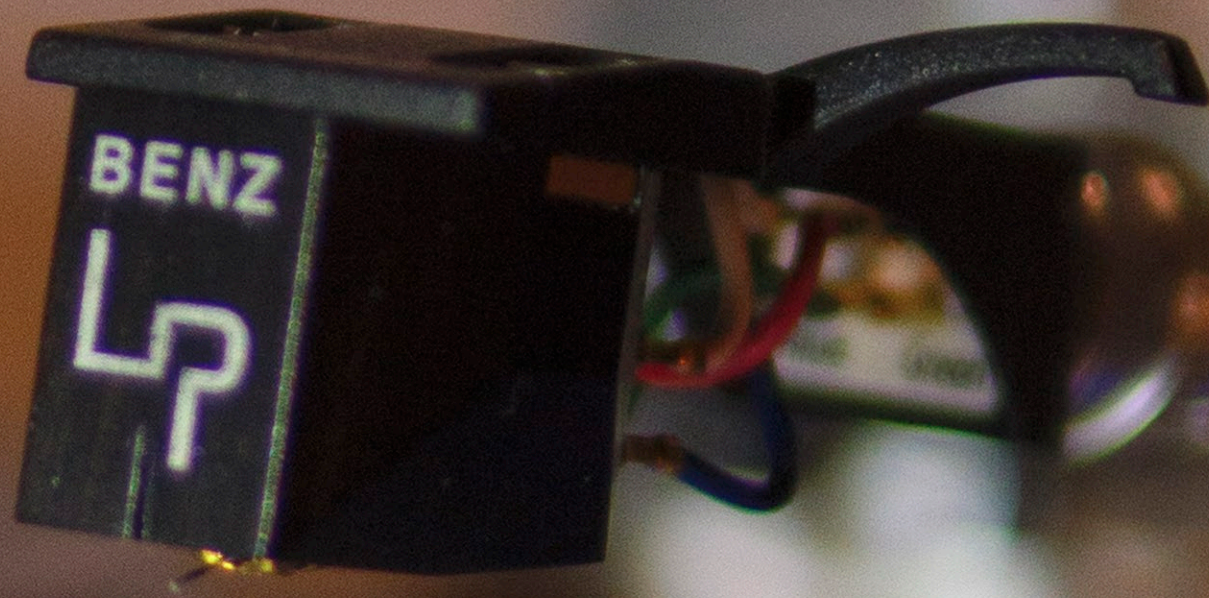
what's inside:



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## Cartridge Dude...

Benz is back, and the current LP-S is a serious challenger to the money no object cartridges.



— Formula xHD rev. 2 —



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

Review: Andrew Everard  
Lab: Paul Miller

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what's inside:



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## Old School...

Our publisher revisits a long, lost part of his hifi past with a pair of original AMT-1bs.

And, it's better than remembered.



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## new arrivals...

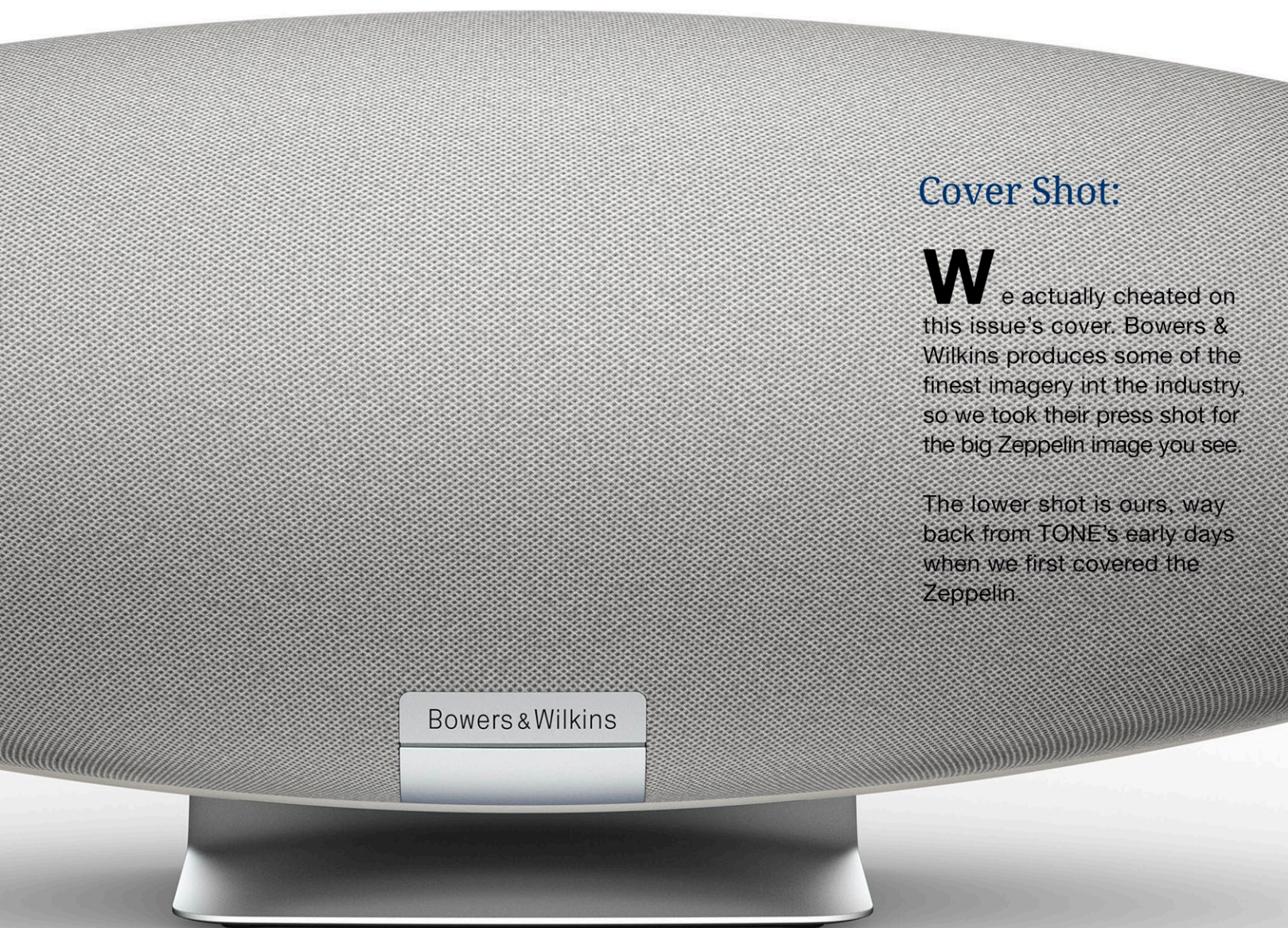
**G**reg Weaver joins us as our "Hyper Gear Editor."

He'll be taking over the top of the top-shelf gear reviews very soon, so stay tuned.

And no, we aren't letting this lego thing go...







### Cover Shot:

**W**e actually cheated on this issue's cover. Bowers & Wilkins produces some of the finest imagery in the industry, so we took their press shot for the big Zeppelin image you see.

The lower shot is ours, way back from TONE's early days when we first covered the Zeppelin.



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.111

## P u b l i s h e r s   L e t t e r

I have re written this column more times in the last 8 weeks. I can't even tell you. I truly hope you are all well. We've lost a few friends and family members since the beginning of the year, and it's been wackier than normal. Acquiring a pair of crazed Bull Terrier pups has helped to lighten the load somewhat, but has led to a massive dog-proofing in the house, garage, and studio. No, you will never see pictures of my dogs sitting on speakers or turntable dust covers, or...

Seriously. Dust, dirt, and moisture are the enemies of all things electronic and photographic for that matter.

As I'm finishing this issue, the Axpona show is going on in Chicago, and staffer Sean Zloch says it's been very engaging. The halls are packed. If I hadn't had so much last-minute emergency stuff on my plate, I'd have been there to bump elbows with you. But next year for sure.

Back when all of this started, a friend of mine, a doc at the Mayo Clinic said, "cancel your plans for the next couple of years, it's going to suck," was pretty much on the money. It looks like we are finally pulling out of this, and perhaps things will start to get easier. No matter what industry you're in, you've probably been affected by supply chain issues, and so on.

For those of you all still standing, I salute you. I hope that some time listening to music in some form of contemplation or at least enjoyment on any level has brought some comfort. Who knows, maybe you attended Axpona knowing there's a big tax refund check on the way and you can't wait to invest in some new goodies. I hope so.

Because we've lost a bit of time in the pits with a wheel nut that took 50 seconds to change instead of the usual 2, the next few issues of TONE will be a bit closer together, so watch for 112, 113, and 114 to only be about 4-5 weeks apart. We should then be back on track by fall season. It feels like it's been just over two years of "the dog ate my homework" here. Yet, we've got more fun in store, and we're holding our heads up. (and our tails wagging.) We look forward to sharing it all with you in the months to come.

A final thank you to all of the readers and friends that have stayed in touch since the beginning of 2020. We've made some new friends, renewed others, and strengthened still other relationships.

Here's to the future. Thank you again for reading.





Lets do something really easy and somewhat controversial. Hmm. How about a little smooth-ish jazz? We won't go all Kenny G on you but, here's some more mellow fodder to get into the day (or night). Enjoy! (or wretch...hahaha)



- John Klemmer – Touch
- Gato Barbieri – Ruby
- Herb Alpert – Rise
- Chuck Mangione – Main Squeeze
- Cantoma – Cosmopole
- The Crusaders – Chain Reaction
- Spyro Gyra – Starburst
- Michael Franks – The Lady Wants to Know
- Lee Ritenour – Dolphin Dreams
- Earl Klugh – Cabo Frio
- George Benson – Lady
- Chicago – While the City Sleeps
- The Crusaders – It Happens Every Day
- Herb Alpert – Rotation

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## ESS AMT-1b

Vintage ribbon-ish.

\$800-\$2,000 (current market price)

**I**t seems like only yesterday I was sitting in the showroom of Wacks HiFi in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, listening to a pair of ESS AMT-1s. “Sound as clear as light” they said. The new Heil Air Motion transformer, heady stuff. The sales guy pulled a cherry pit out of his pocket to demonstrate how the tweeter moved air. Super cool.

Today, Dr. Heil is more than validated by the number of people that use Heil-based drivers. Even the original ESS, now under new ownership is still building ESS speakers and supplying parts for the old models. That’s a 50-year legacy.

Much as I wanted a pair, they were a bit out of reach at the time. I would end up getting a very un-audiophile pair of JBL L-100s, but you know how it is, once you hear something, it’s tough to unhear it. Cool guy (with better job) Todd across the street went over the top, moving to the AMT-1 Towers, which featured a 10-inch woofer and transmission line enclosure, with less of a midrange suckout and incredible bass response. Oh yeah, he bought four of em for a quad system. Crazy.

Good friend and long time audio industry guy Mark Schifter tells me that he worked for ESS when he was 18. He laughs and says, “I must have demonstrated squeezing the cherry pit through my thumb and forefinger at least 100 times per week.”





Compared to the dynamic speakers of the day, they did feel like a breath of air in comparison. And damn, could these speakers paint a stereo image that was big and deep.

When Todd moved on to a pair of Magnepan Tympanis, I picked up one pair of his AMTs, and I remember carrying them up to my 2nd story flat, by myself.

That's love.

And these speakers did not disappoint. They did however, disappoint my downstairs neighbors – especially when playing Edgar Winter's "Frankenstein" at a fairly high level. Did I care? Nope.

For all the talk about the Heil tweeter being fragile, I never trashed one, so I can't comment on dealer or manufacturer service. Zero problems. Today, you can still get full air motion transformers and parts should you get overzealous with the volume control. However, with a claimed sensitivity of 97dB/1-watt, you shouldn't have to crank it up too far to enjoy the AMT-1s.



TONE111.015

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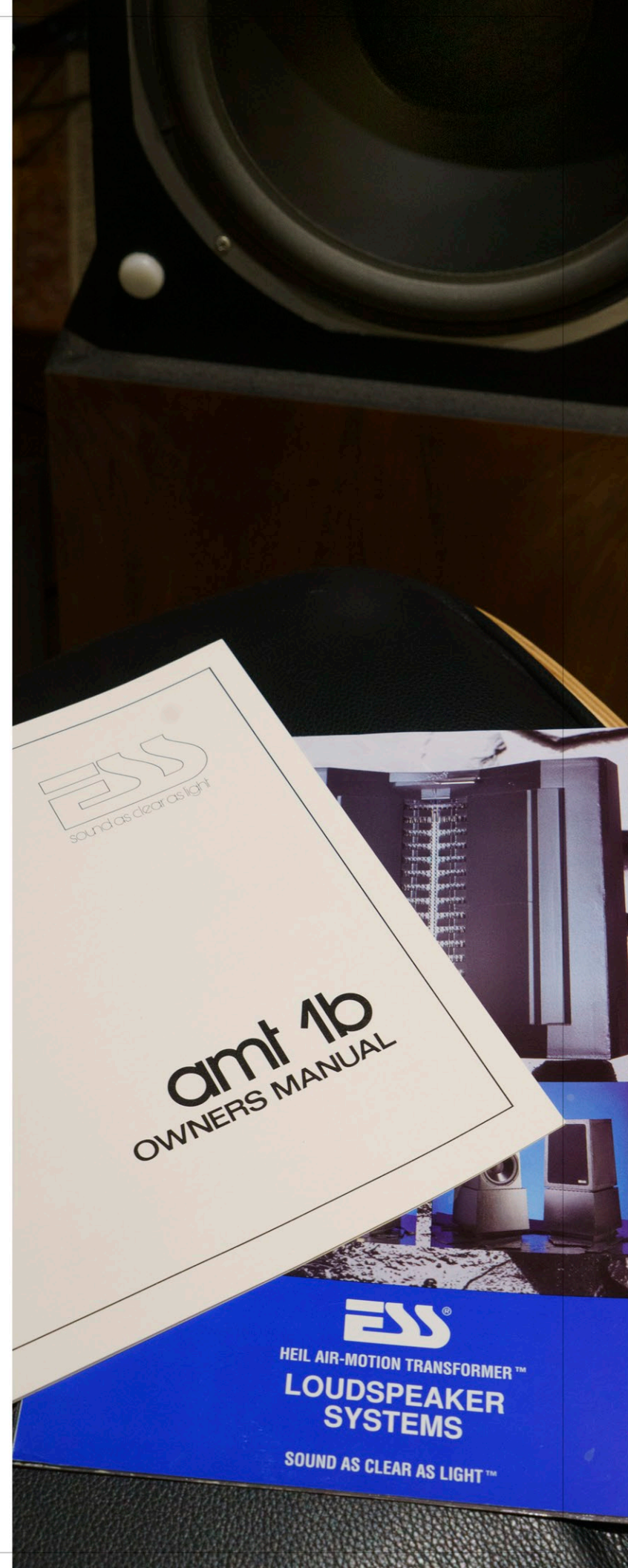
**T**hese days, a pristine set of AMT-1s fetch close to \$2,000. When they quit making them last year, ESS was only charging \$4,495/pair. They have to be one of the best hidden values in hi-fi.

This pair is from Fred's House of HiFi in Portland, Oregon. One quiet Sunday evening, an Instagram message pops up informing me a perfect pair had just been acquired from an estate sale. The price was right, and before you know it, I was headed over in the station wagon to pick them up Monday morning. When it comes to this kind of thing, fading memories can be a cruel reminder, not to mention the expectation bias.

However, as old as these are, they are still incredibly musical. Out in my 15 x 26 foot room, they produce a huge soundfield, and thanks to presence knob, most of the infamous "midrange suck-out" is gone. A little more work with speaker placement, and pulling in the PrimaLuna EVO 400 amplifier takes the setup the rest of the way. Vocals are truly "clear as light," and the AMT-1s have a surprising amount of low end grunt, though it is more of a one-note variety than what modern speakers deliver. Rebuilding the crossover networks with current parts Could prove interesting.

Comparing them to our reference Team Fink Kim speakers, using the current iteration of AMT technology, the original DNA is still there, but decades of refinement brings a more resolving, and dynamic speaker. But the concept still stands up remarkably well.

However, for the money, if you can find a decent pair, these are still viable speakers. I'm going to stock up on a few spare parts, just in case I find myself playing "Frankenstein" a bit too loud.



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## Conrad-Johnson ACT 2 (and S2)

Still reference worthy.

\$13,500 (new in 2005)  
\$4,500 - \$6,000 today (S1 or S2)

[conradjohnson.com](http://conradjohnson.com)

If you're the type of audio enthusiast that's always looking for maximum value, it's pretty much like buying a gently used sports car. Let the first owner eat the depreciation for the pleasure of being the first one to take it out of the box. While some manufacturers might not like this approach, because of course, they always want to sell you a new box. But...someone has to buy it new, so you can buy a used one, right?

As the friendly guy at the Bentley dealer said once, "Don't want to spend the money on a new one? Think pre-owned. These babies rarely get much use anyway, and you can save a lot of money." And so it goes with audio. We've seen ten year old components more often than not, with barely a few hundred hours of use. See what happens when you're on the internet arguing about minutiae? There are

pair of sneakers, so this can be a great way to assemble what would have been a mid six-figure system 10 years ago for about 25 cents on the dollar today.

So the big question is do you buy a new \$4,500 preamplifier, or do you search for a used 10-15 year old flagship product still in excellent shape? It depends on the piece. With new GAT preamplifiers tipping the scale at just over \$30k these days, the Act 2 (and the later Act 2 Series 2) is worth a look.





## Clear Beyond Interconnect

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CARDAS

When I launched TONE back in 2005, the changes in acoustic size that most music requires. My vintage Magnepan Tympanis were famous for producing an enormous soundstage, but flutes feel the same size as tubas. It ends up being a taste you can tire of. The Piegas keep it sorted; instruments have a certain spatial correctness about them. Listening long term is easy.

When I launched TONE back in 2005, C-J's Lew Johnson was one of the first people I met in the hall at that year's Rocky Mountain Audio Fest. Ironically, I was wearing a grey conrad-johnson t-shirt. Johnson was kind and gave me some great advice. He said, "avoid the cheese balls; you'll be judged by the company you keep." He also told me I needed a better reference system to be taken seriously and made arrangements to send me an ACT 2 and Premier 350 power amp after the show. "After the review, write us a check, or send it back, but if you send it back, send it back the way you got it. And, nice shirt by the way." Little did I know that this was not always how things were handled in the wacky world of high-end audio.

It would be more than safe to say conrad-johnson was a significant help to getting TONE off the ground with their gear in our reference system. The performance bar increased dramatically as I was using an original ModWright 9.0 at the time. It was like going from a Subaru Outback to a Porsche GT3. I was off and running.

In 2005 the 6H30 tube that is the heart of the ACT 2, was only used by a tiny number of people with mixed results. C-Js earlier ART preamplifier used ten 6922s and offered up a somewhat warmer presentation than the ACT 2, which is more forceful and dynamic in its delivery. There were still original Russian 6H30 tubes that the folks at BAT were using in their preamplifiers, and a good set cost about \$600. These were well worth it, as they took the ACT 2 even further still in the dynamics and resolution department. And these tubes initially meant for Russian fighter jets, were robust. That first set of 6H30s went nearly 20,000 hours before running out of steam!

The ACT 2 S2, out a couple of years later built on the success of the original model, with updates to the circuit path and power supply. Finished in the signature C-J light gold, the ACT 2 had a unique footprint, unlike anything before or since.

However, both units are chock full of CJD Design Teflon capacitors, created solely for this preamp. C-J was one of the first (if not the first) to replace the electrolytic capacitors in the power supply with large film capacitors.

At 30 pounds, the ACT 2 is heavy, but it will still fit in a standard equipment rack. The rest of the preamplifier is equally robust. The microprocessor-controlled level adjustments go up and down in .7dB increments and have "the Conrad-Johnson click." Like the faceplate color, you'll love it or hate it, but I've always liked the auditory feedback when using the remote from across the room.





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**E**ither unit is fantastic, but the S1 is probably the best ultimate value.

If you can live with single-ended RCA inputs and outputs (CJ has never produced a balanced component, believing that simpler circuits are better.) I defy you to find a new preamplifier at \$4,500 - \$6,000 that sounds anywhere near this good.

Best of all, C-J can still service the ACT 2, though like any component more than ten years old, go for the best casework you can find, as faceplates may now be non-existent.

Again, I have to go back to the advice from the Bentley salesperson: "when you buy a car like this used, even 20 years old, you're still getting 200-thousand dollar build quality.

The same can be said for the ACT 2.

All of the parts, inside and out, are of the highest quality, and wouldn't be out of place on a \$50k preamplifier today. (the friendly inflation calculator tells us that \$13,500 in 2005 is equal to about \$20k today)

Perhaps the best compliment we can pay the ACT 2, is that one rarely comes up on the secondary market, and when they do, they are gone almost immediately.





## LSA LS 50 Signature Speakers

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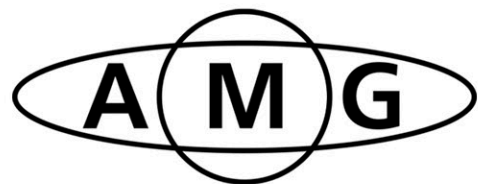
In just over four decades of evaluating speakers, the most memorable ones always pull you in with an ease that may not always be as visceral and exciting as some of the flashier "best" speakers out there, but they've got staying power. These are speakers that you want to sit on the couch and listen to for hours, perhaps for days. The Vandersteen 1, the Magnepan .7, and the ProAc Tablettes, come to mind. Anyone truly loving music can't turn their backs on any of these. I'm sure we all have a few others on that list.

However, these legendary speakers have all crossed the \$1,000/pair line some time ago. People stepping out of Sonos world, ready for an audiophile adventure, usually want something delivering more sonically, but not necessarily breaking the bank. Enter Underwood HiFi and LSA.

Speakers that are only sold factory-direct are not an entirely fair comparison, so let's level the playing field and compare a new pair of LSA 50 Signatures to a used pair of the three speakers mentioned above. You can find a pair of either of these on any given day at Audiogon, SkyFi, or The Music Room. You might even have a friend with a pair they want to unload or a great local dealer with a pair on the floor. You should be able to pick either of these three speakers up for about \$700 - \$1,000 pair. About double that for a new, in-box pair.







# FORTE TURBO

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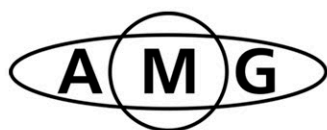
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**R**emoving the dealer markup aspect from the speakers mentioned above, most used models trade for about half of their original retail price. The LSA 50 Signatures still stand up, compared to the well-known speakers at this level. This is an excellent pair of small speakers that you can build a serious yet reasonably priced music system around. One that will sound like a massive jump up from a Sonos, Zeppelin, or whatever other single box system is your current fave.

We traditionally stand behind brick-and-mortar retailers at TONE. However, when you are trying to get in the game watching every penny – going used, or in this case, a manufacturer direct product is going to give you the most sound for your hard-earned currency unit. If you don't get excited about audio in the first place, you might never buy a \$30k pair of speakers someday. Right?

We hate to impose rules on hifi. It's different for everyone, but you need to go no further than any internet forum or Facebook page. Some know it all is blathering that you need to spend a fixed amount of your budget on speakers and only so much on an amplifier, blah, blah, blah. It's music. It's individual, and it's your journey.

However, I have never observed an awful speaker become a great speaker after 2,000 hours of break-in. Putting that in perspective, if you listen to your system 10 hours a week, it's going to take four years for your speakers to sound good. I don't have that kind of patience, and I'm guessing you don't either. So, forget the "needs 1000 hours of break-in" rule, especially at this price point.



**M**uch as you love panel speakers, they might not work in your environment. Your room might be too large for a pair of mini-monitors to generate any serious low-frequency energy. If you share your living space with one or more people, aesthetic concerns might also affect your choice. I suggest finding speakers you enjoy first, only because speakers are the most interactive component of your system, visually and physically.

Once you settle on speakers, it's much easier to find an amplifier that will work, rather than the other way around. That's the closest I can get to imposing my will on you. Though the Signatures claim an 86db/1-Watt sensitivity, they are easy to drive. LSA's Mark Schifter mentions how much work went into the crossovers, and this is truly where that work is realized. Even the 10-Watt per channel Luxman D-150 drives the Signatures to a more than reasonable volume level. There are no anomalies auditioning these speakers with a wide range of amplification from low power to high and modest cost to expensive.

### That ease

The LSA 50s sound is inviting right out of the box. While Underwood HiFi says they will take 100 hours or so to sound their absolute best, you won't grimace when you hit play or lower the tonearm on the first track. These speakers are slightly warm tonally, with solid bass response. Remember, keepers. Stay on the couch for a long time.

As the new Tears for Fears record, *The Tipping Point*, just dropped as I was unboxing the LSA 50 Signatures, it felt like the perfect time to revisit *The Seeds of Love*. Perhaps one of the best bookends of the 1980s, this ethereal, finely crafted record is full of great bass lines, layered vocals, and can define pinpoint imaging when played on decent speakers.

Using the audio show trick of plugging a \$600 pair of speakers into a six-figure system, the Signatures sound stunning, plugged into the Pass XA200.8 mono blocks, Pass XS Pre preamplifier, driven by the dCS Vivaldi ONE digital player. In addition to incredible bass drive, they produce a big window into the sound. But that's not how anyone will listen to them at home.

More good news. They still sound damn good plugged into a vintage Sansui AU-717 integrated, with the \$199 SONY SACD player we have in for review, and that's their magic. If you're starting out, you're probably going to cobble together whatever you can. That's what makes these speakers so cool. Granted, they do not resolve as much musical detail as with the more expensive hardware; their core character remains fully intact. That's the sign of a well-designed speaker. Too many "budget" speakers on the market sound fab with a big, high-powered amp but fall flat in your system. That's what drives people away from high-end audio.

### Moving right along

After a solid week of playing 24 hours a day, the lowest bass notes dig a little deeper and a little faster, the top end becomes slightly more extended, and the mids offer up a greater degree of transparency. All told, the needle has probably moved 5%, maybe a little more – but now we're getting all audiophile-y on you, and that's not what these speakers are about.

Set up is a breeze. After break-in out in the big room, the Signatures were moved into our 13 x 18-foot living room on the supplied (\$179 extra) LSA Stands. This rear-ported design delivers serious low-end grunt, so position them for a smooth low to mid-bass transition in your room first, and then go for a bit of toe-in to suit how lively or dead your room is. If you have an overstuffed room with rugs, couches, etc., you might need a bit extra toe-in to get the sparkle you'd like. If your space is more on the lively side like mine, minimal to no toe-in will be just fine.

Keeping with the Signatures' high performance, low-cost ethos, some of the living room listening was done with a PrimaLuna ProLogue 1 integrated amp (34 Watts per channel), and fresh EL34 tubes, an OPPO streaming DAC, connected with TelluriumQs Blue II cables. The bulk was done with the LSA 70 integrated amplifier that we reviewed here. It's a killer match. Total system cost: well under \$3k.

1095



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

Jeff Dorgay, Tone Audio

**NAGRA**

SWISS INNOVATION SINCE 1951



**T**he Signatures are a well-implemented two-way design, sporting a 6.5" woofer and a 1.1" soft dome tweeter. Thanks to some solid cabinets, they tip the scales at 26 pounds each. A quick rap against the surface of the cabinet feels substantial. In addition to the wood cabinets, the top and rear faces are covered in black leather. Execution is well above what is usually featured anywhere near this price.

It's worth mentioning a few things about the LSA stands here, for those of you that take this path. First, ignore the instructions and don't use a powered screwdriver to put them together. The mild steel, threaded columns will surely strip the threads with too much force applied. Do it by hand with a big Phillips head screwdriver and only go slightly past snug when securing the columns.

If you fill them with sand (and that's a great idea), consider getting some black RTV/Silicone sealant and running a fine bead around the bottom of the columns once attached. That way, you won't have small sand puddles after filling.

LSA does include some small brass pucks to put the rounded speaker stand's spikes in. If you are on a solid floor, they will come in handy. The round, ball-like ends on the tips should not punch through your carpet, so consider not using the pucks, as they may lead to instability.

### That groove

Heading full circle, back to Tears for Fears, the opening bass line in "Woman in Chains" feels solid. Ditto for the bass line in the Beatles' "Strawberry Fields Forever." The drums in A-ha's "Take on Me" are right there. These speakers do an excellent job of keeping the pace locked down. The critical mid-range is equally well rendered. Those preferring more vocal selections will enjoy the slightly warm perspective these present. Whether you like Ella or Eilish, they deliver the goods.

Again, the bass response is equally enticing. Running through a long list of hip hop, heavy rock, and electronica tracks, The Signatures dish up enough bass that you won't be clamoring for a subwoofer. The quality of the bass delivered is highly resolving. These are not one-note bass speakers.

# 1095

Because the Signatures accomplish so much, it is truly tough to find fault – remember this is a \$600 pair of speakers. In 40 years, only the Magnepan SMG and Vandersteen 1 (back when they were only about \$900 a pair) have offered this much sheer musical enjoyment for such a modest investment. Putting the LSA 50 Signatures in the same sentence with these two classic speakers is the highest compliment I can give them.

If you share my viewpoint that overall balance is the crucial factor in choosing a pair of speakers, I hope that those of you auditioning the LSA 50 Signatures will enjoy them as much as I have. In a world where speakers costing nearly a million bucks a pair get a disproportionate amount of attention, these are truly exciting. Because everyone can play.

Yes, a few modestly priced speakers (to be clear, we define that as \$500 - \$1,500/pair) do specific things better than the LSA 50 Signature. The precious few speakers that offer this level of coherency, useful bass response, midrange clarity, and deliver enough resolution that you can hear the difference between amplifiers and source components all cost more.

### The \$150 question

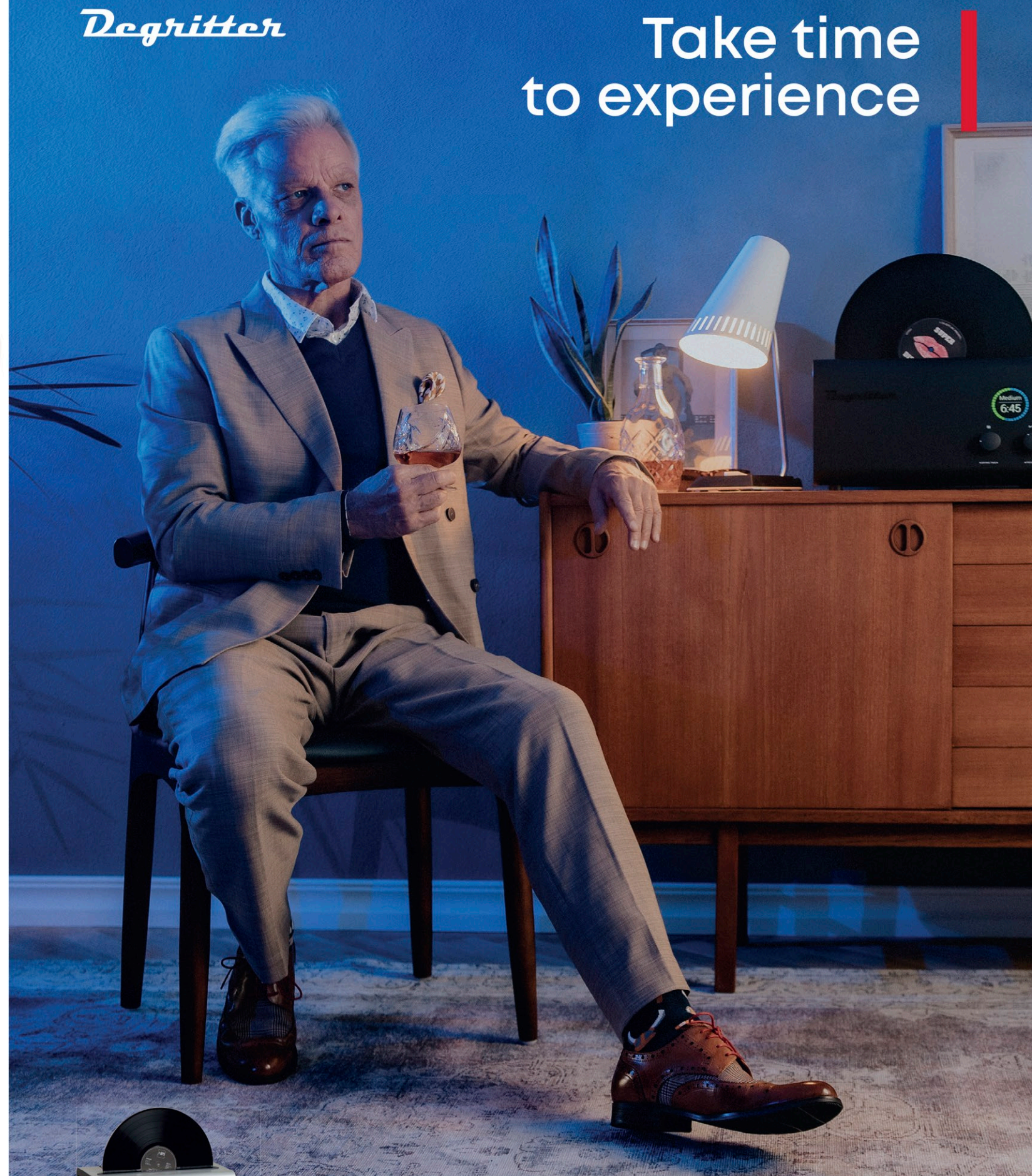
There's a cost to play because Underwood HiFi isn't Amazon, Best Buy, or Nordstrom. If you don't like the Signatures enough to keep them, there's a 15% restocking fee. And you'll have to pay to ship 50 pounds back. But remember, experience is what you get when you don't get what you want, and everyone has to keep the lights on.

If I've done a good enough job describing these speakers, and it ticks your boxes, I doubt you'll want to send them back. That said, these are worth rolling the dice for. Should your system grow beyond the roots you plant with the LSA 50 Signatures, I'll also bet you keep them for a second system or to pass on to your kids or a friend about to start their audio journey. They are that good.

The LSA 50 Signature speakers truly define the concept of our **Exceptional Value Award**.

*Degritter*

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## The Fyne 500SP Speakers

Where are they hiding the rest?

\$1,995/pair  
[soundorg.com](http://soundorg.com)

**S**mall speakers can rarely energize a good-sized room with full-range sound. This is always the magic that is FYNE. Featuring the coherence that usually only comes with electrostatic speakers, the time-aligned, coaxial driver of the FYNE speakers delivers a seamlessness that you might expect from a pair of vintage Quads, with a serious dynamic punch as well. Without the inherent graininess that plagues the other small speaker darlings – i.e., KEF and ELAC. (I say that with all respect, as a former Blade and LS50 owner) And it comes in an enclosure that isn't even a cubic foot. At \$1,995 a pair, these speakers are a mega value. The FYNE speakers are in a league of their own.

Tracking through Aphex Twin's *Syro* album, the 500SPs generate a vast sound field in all three dimensions in our 15 x 26-foot main listening room. Only about 6 feet apart and 4 feet from the rear walls (with about 10 feet to each side), the small FYNEs open up, rendering layer upon layer of musical detail. Perhaps this isn't the absolute sound, but music with a dense, atmospheric vibe needs this kind of presentation to engage you thoroughly.

Similarly trippy records from Yes, Art of Noise, and Steven Wilson are just as compelling. If you are a music lover who craves a spacious, dynamic sound at this price point and form factor, the FYNE 500SP should be at the top of your list. The toy piano in Gruppo Sportivo's "Blah Blah Magazines" jumps way out in front of the speakers, showing how immersive the 500SPs are.





## Superb Standards

Switching it up, The Ginger Baker Trio's *Going Back Home* reveals more insight into the level of nuance the SP500s deliver. Combining Baker's powerful yet airy drumming, Bill Frisell on guitar, and Charlie Haden on bass, these speakers prove their prowess with acoustic instruments. There's so much texture here in Baker's drumming, and Haden's runs up and down the neck of the acoustic bass, you'll swear you're listening to a much larger (and much more expensive) set of speakers. The extension and resolution of the lower frequencies are stunning with the SP500s.

Female vocal lovers will be equally delighted with the resolution the SP500s deliver. A long playlist of current and classic vocalists reveals the FYNE speakers are equally competent here. Though audiophiles have a tendency to lean on female vocals to judge speaker character, male vocals is where many speakers fail to deliver. Johnny Cash's "Delia," from his original *American Recordings*, is always a go-to track because of his husky vocal delivery.

Speakers lacking low-end reinforcement make Cash sound like a busboy with a lightweight character. The 500SPs allow this character to be the menacing executioner that the song portrays. Again, our favorites fall to just about anything by Tom Waits or Buddy Guy. I'm sure you have your favorite demo tracks to see how well these speakers work in this context.

Finally, the 500SPs can play loud when the mood strikes. Watching the Nagra Classic Amp's (100 Wpc) meter needles hit 0dB on peaks made a thunderous presentation indeed when listening to Mott The Hoople's "All the Young Dudes." FYNE suggests amplifiers in the 30 – 120 Watt per channel (60 Watts, continuous), and we agree.

In a moderately sized space, you may never find the upper reaches of these speakers' dynamic capabilities. Your only limitation will be with bass-heavy material. The big drums in Peter Gabriel's "The Rhythm of the Heat" are able to bottom the woofers at high volume, and this kind of punishment will likely be frowned upon should you return your damaged speakers to FYNE for repair.



## Where Have all the Good Stereos Gone?



We know. Sorting through the jungle that is pre-owned hi-fi gear can be tough. Myriad Internet forums and online shopping sites just don't offer the expertise required to make sound decisions.

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This is the double-edged sword of the 500SP. In addition to their impressive tonal characteristics, this is a very low-distortion speaker as well. It makes for fatigue-free listening, but approach high sound pressure levels slowly at first, so you can find the overload point for your system and your ears. You will be surprised at the high sound pressure level the 500SPs can produce.

### Choose your voice

Overall, the SP500s are a touch forward in their presentation but not harsh or strident. Thanks to a 90db/1-Watt sensitivity, they don't need a massive power amplifier to make music at adequate listening levels. A well-designed crossover network, with a first-order slope going up from the 1.7kHz crossover frequency and a second-order slope going downwards, is a huge contributor to the smooth vocal character and lack of artifacts in the crossover region. However, their high level of resolving power allows them to shine with higher quality components. This leaves the music lover a wide range of options. You may find yourself pairing the FYNE speakers with better components than you initially thought practical.

Rega's Brio-R remains one of our favorite high-quality integrated amplifiers for just under \$1,000 and is our starting point for this review after the initial break-in. A Prima Luna ProLogue 1 and the Luxman N-150 Neo Classic round out the picture for vacuum tube amplification choices. The T+A Caruso R and Cyrus Cast ONE both feature Class-D amplification, though the digital amps start to become too much of a good thing.



*Enjoy the Experience*



**PASS**

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The 500SPs resolving ability makes them less than perfect for vintage solid-state amplifiers and receivers only because they tend to expose the flaws in the components upstream. Giving them a go with a re-capped Marantz 2270 feels dull, though putting them in a system with a set of freshly rebuilt Nakamichi 600 components (a distinct step up back in the day) made for a charming overall effect.

However, we all like something different. But, if you have a digital amplifier, you've been warned. The 500SPs relative neutrality gives you a wider range of options than most speakers at this price level to fine-tune the voice of your system, a definite plus.

Because of their wide dispersion and a downward-firing port between the cabinet base and bottom, these are incredibly easy speakers to place in your room. They are top performers in an environment where the speakers can't always go in the optimum spot for perfect sound. If you don't opt for the FYNE stands, go for the most massive, rigid ones that make sense for your wallet and décor. Flimsy stands will compromise bass extension and quality.

One thing unique to the FYNE speakers is their fifth ground lug on the back of the speakers. FYNE claims it will "ground the driver chassis and eliminate amp or cable born RF interference." While the TONE studio is a big, metal building (essentially a Faraday cage), we don't usually have this problem. However, in the house's unshielded environment, taking advantage of this did make a slightly noticeable – and positive effect. A nice touch, indeed.

While the review set arrived in gloss black, gloss white, and gloss walnut is also available. The finish quality is exquisite. The 500SPs are designed and built in the UK. It shows. If you've spent any time at all with modestly priced speakers that hail from China, you'll notice that the fine details are not executed as well as they are here.

Should you put a pair of 500SPs in your system, the only thing you might consider after you're used to the speakers is a pair of high-quality jumpers to connect the woofer and tweeter, if you aren't using bi-wired speaker cables. Jumpers from Tellurium Q and Cardas both added another margin of HF smoothness that is worth exploring.

It's easy to give the FYNE 500SPs one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2022. Every aspect of these speakers is flawlessly executed within the price point.

[www.soundorg.com](http://www.soundorg.com) (US distributor)

[www.fyneaudio.com](http://www.fyneaudio.com) (Manufacturer)



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Late Night Garage Playlist  
-Jeff Dorgay

Troubleshooting wiring issues requires extreme concentration. No headbanging at a time like this. It's more like diffusing a bomb. Classical is a bit too mellow, but some ambient choices can make this job easier.



Brian Eno - Weightless

Sanford Ponder- Watergarden

Jean Michel Jarre - Oxygene

John Foxx - Underpass

Neu! - Hallgallo

Cluster - Fur die Katz

Ryuichi Sakamoto - Tango

Tosca - Zula Dub

Art of Noise - Moments in Love

Kraftwerk - Autobahn

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## The Benz-Micro LP-S Cartridge

*Best in Class.*

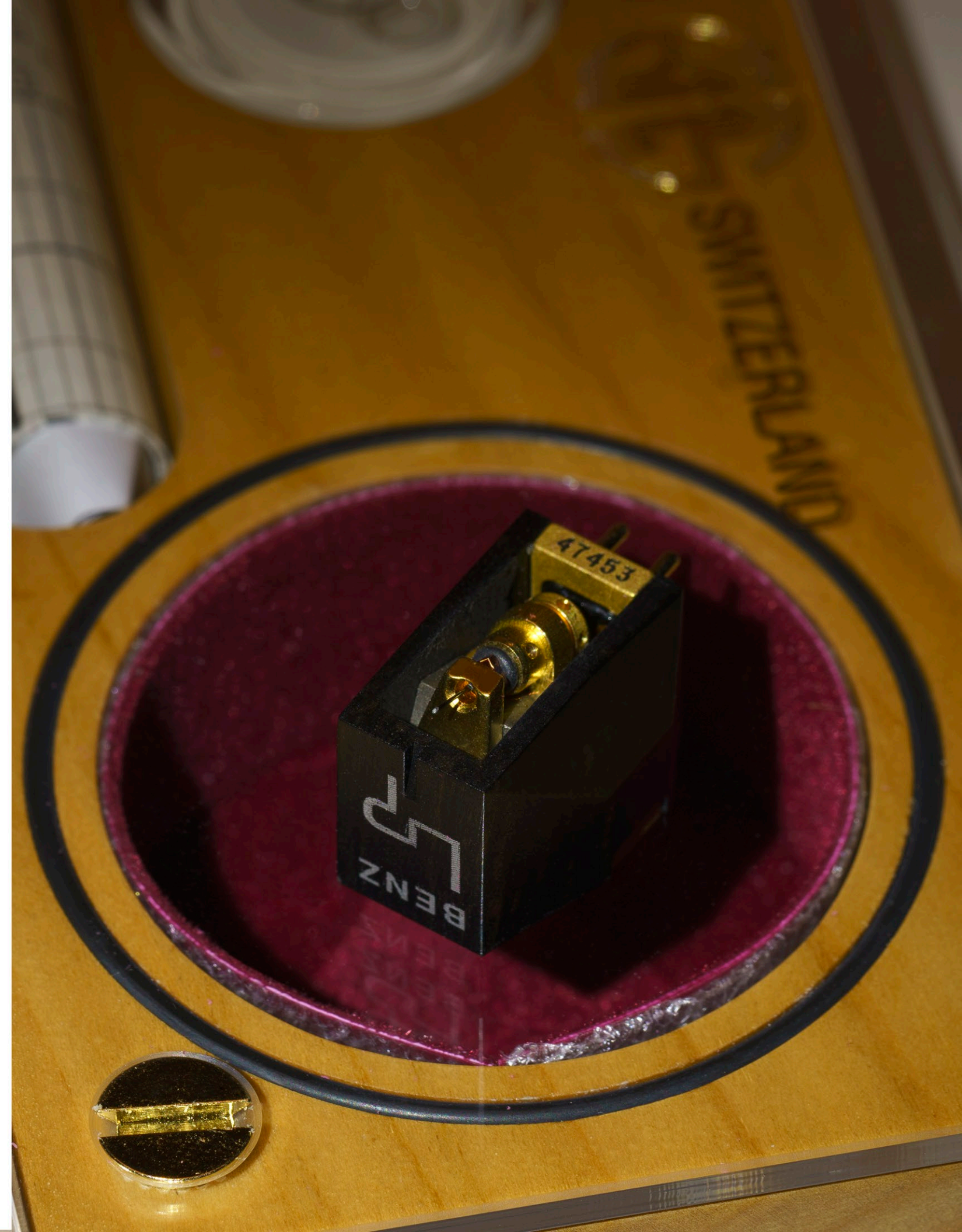
\$5,000  
sierrasound.com

If you're a fan of Benz Micro cartridges, and you've been trying to get your hands on one, you probably know they've been in short supply for a while. Benz is back, though they have cut their product range to just four cartridges, of which the LP-S reviewed here is their top model.

In a world where \$15k phono cartridges are becoming the norm, rather than the fringe, it's nice to listen to something, that while expensive at \$5,000, is in reach of a lot more analog enthusiasts than a \$15k - \$20k cartridge. If you have a mega-everything system, by all means, but for most (especially those stepping up from say, a \$1,500 - \$3,000 cartridge), the LP-S can be the top of your mountain. This former Goldfinger, Atlas, and Koetsu Jade owner came away from hours of listening with zero regrets.

The past LP-S and the Benz line in general has always had a bit of the warmth you might expect from a Koetsu, or even the Grado Signature cartridges, but with more energy and weight in the lower registers. It's always been a very forceful cartridge that some feel is too romantic, though we are not of that opinion. Even in the context of my reference system that is heavy on Pass Class-A amplification and Sonus faber Stradiveris, the LP-S feels totally immersive. This is the cartridge that makes you never want to hear a digital file again. It's hard to truly describe dreamy, but that's where the LP-S goes.

Listening begins with the simplicity of the Technics 1200GAE. This deck along with the LP-S make for a \$10k combination delivering a spectacular performance and is a fantastic daily driver. As Benz cartridges have been in short supply for some time, there isn't a lot of buzz on them out on the internet, however one thing crops up consistently among owners – they have a very low noise floor, and do a great job on records with higher-than-normal wear.





Once a few hours have been logged, and a basic familiarity with the cartridge noted, it was mounted to the Thrax turntable with Schroeder tonearm we recently reviewed.

This takes the foundation established with the Benz to a higher level of involvement. Though it is truly impressive how much of this cartridges' amazing performance is still revealed in the context of a \$4,000 turntable and tonearm combination.

Pulling a well-worn copy of the Police's *Ghost in the Machine* proves a perfect place to start. Playing this disc on an identical 1200 with an Ortofon Cadenza Bronze MC and the difference is startling. The Cadenza Bronze is still a great cartridge, to be sure, but it is the opposite in the sense that it tends to accentuate this kind of thing. It's not a great cartridge to play beaters, but it is a fantastic cartridge to play pristine discs. See why you really need more than one setup?

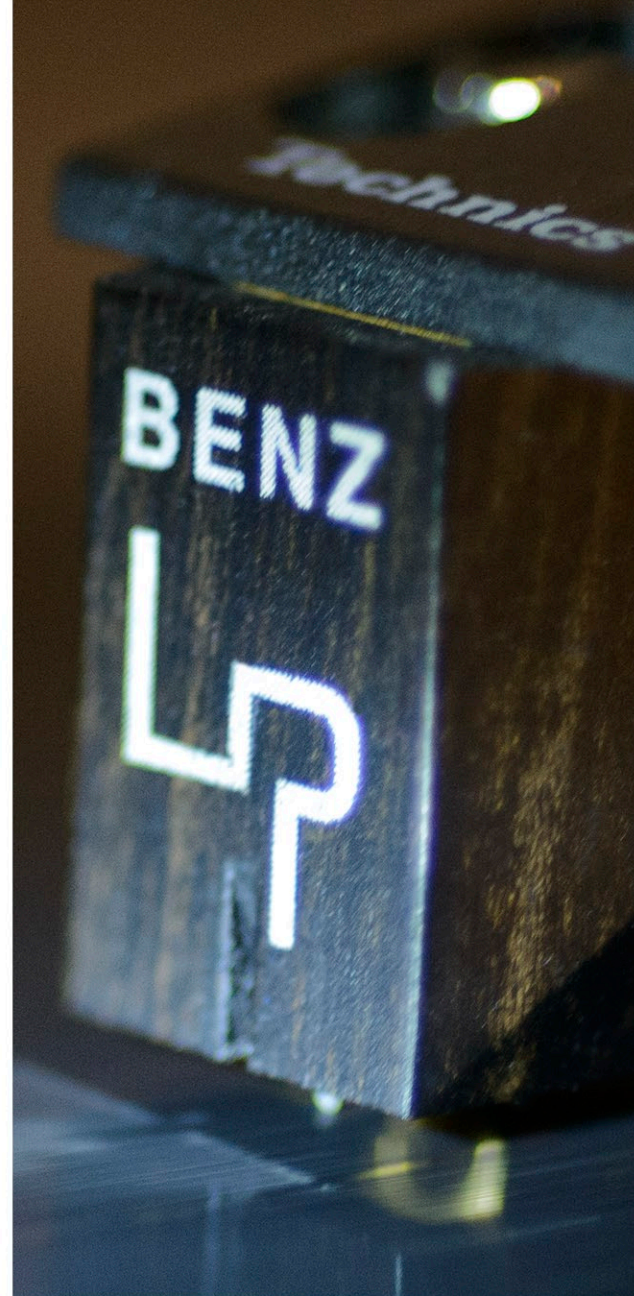
Tracking through this disc that has been played to death ends up being much better than in the past. It's an acceptable record to listen to now. Granted, you probably won't base spending \$5k of your own, hard-earned cash on a cartridge that only does a fantastic job on worn records, but it helps that this is not a cartridge that merely delivers its best on perfect vinyl.

## The Good Stuff

Not being one for too many bargain LP finds, most of my collection is in relatively good shape. Moving on to a more recent re-master of *Traffic's John Barleycorn Must Die* goes further at revealing the LP-S' true capabilities. This is one of the few records that I have a minty, Pink Island pressing to compare, and the results are excellent. This cartridge has such a smooth, resolving way with inner detail. More time spent in the listening chair making comparisons like these, makes the LP-S more rewarding. On so many levels, the LP-S epitomizes the true analog experience.

In addition to its ability to dig deep into a recording, the Benz also offers a deeper degree of micro harmonics, in addition to micro dynamics. If you aren't paying close attention at first, it's easy to dismiss this cartridge as merely being romantic. I am by no means a connoisseur of great single malt scotch, but as an inexperienced outsider, the top ones all seem to have a much more complex taste – overtones if you will. This is the best way I can describe the LP-S.

A certain amount of musical reproduction on a digital front end, even at the level of our reference Vivaldi ONE still lacks these last few molecules of character and complexity. This is a phono cartridge that demands your full attention, and if you are able to free the time to relax and embrace it, you will be rewarded. This is the analog magic that so many speak of, and you don't catch it until you settle yourself.



# PARASOUND

## JC 1+ Mono Power Amplifier

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Jeff Dorgay, Tone Audio

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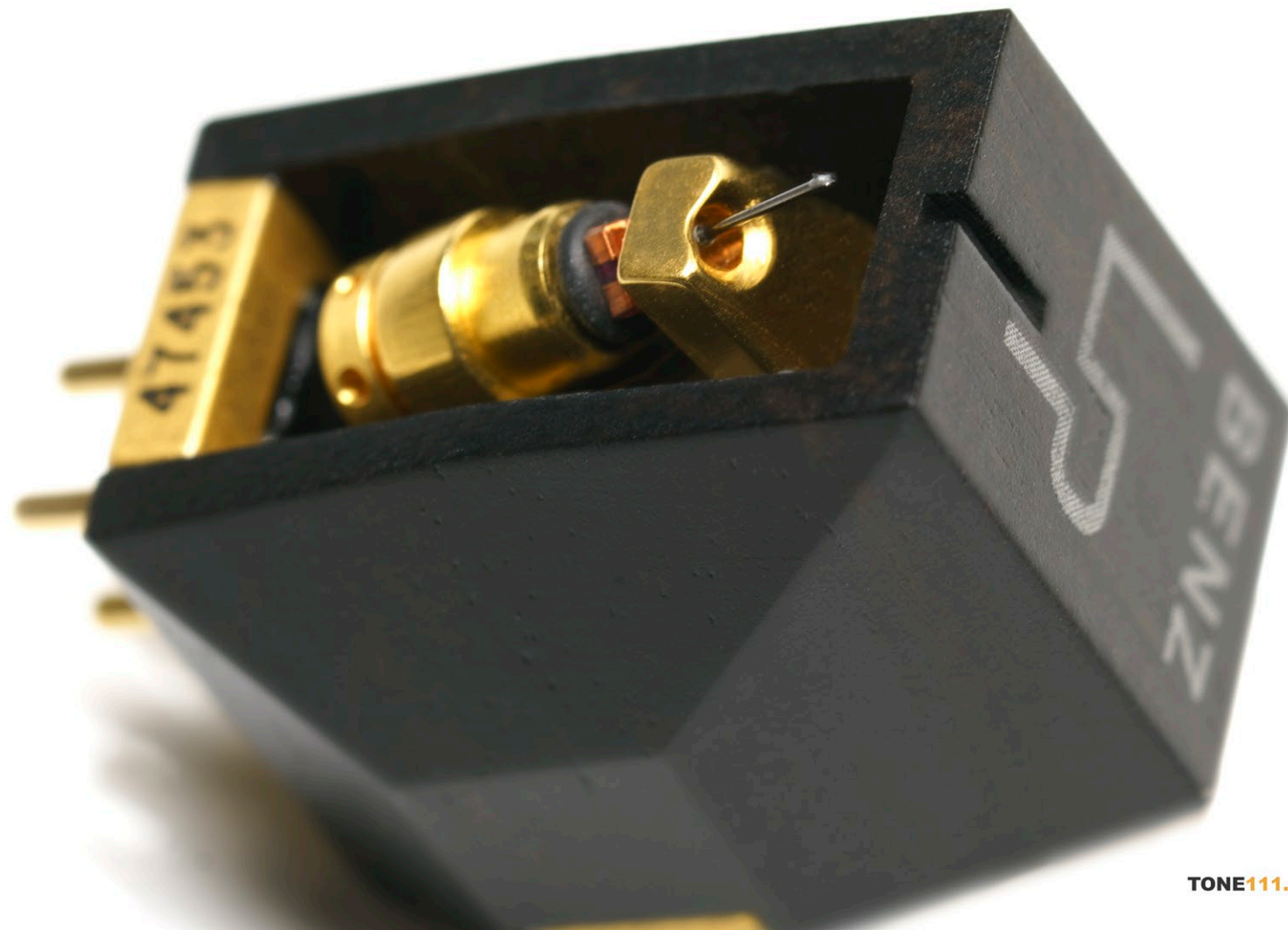
While I can only draw upon the memories of the Atlas, Goldfinger, and Koetsu Jade that used to be in service here, that feeling, that level of involvement was what I missed, stepping down from those cartridges.

## Tone, tracking, and texture

Female vocal lovers, craving every last breath at the microphone will be captivated by the LP-S, whether you are listening to Stevie Nicks, or Shelby Lynne. (or your particular favorite female vocalist that is well recorded) The LP-S is equally exciting listening to acoustic instruments. It's that texture thing again. A longtime favorite here is Liz Story's *Solid Colors*, a very early Windham Hill recording. Her piano is captured with 30ips, 2-track tape and even if you don't enjoy Story's playing, the recording has an abundance of texture and ambiance.

Benz claims a 16.4 gram body in the S model, with a higher mass frame. It will require setting the counterweight back a little further on your tonearm, but you may have to add an additional counterweight. The Goldfinger was also pretty heavy requiring this step. With a medium compliance rating of 15um/mN, it should be right at home on most modern tonearms.

Its tracking ability is excellent, and it not only handled all of our torture-test records with ease, but breezed through a few actual test records too. You'll notice this lack of inner-groove distortion even more, should you have some albums that have information going further in towards the labels than others.



TONE111.031



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**T**rackability plays a big role with more of today's audiophile pressings cut at 45 r.p.m. Again, the Benz excels. What better way to give this a trial run than with the 2-disc, 45 r.p.m. version of RUN-DMC's *Raising Hell*? The impact delivered on "It's Tricky" (and the rest of the record) is big. Switching it up for the 45 of Santana's self-titled MoFi is just as engaging. The intro to "Jingo" pulls you in with the bongos, and as the tune swells, Santana's blazing guitar dominates the mix, as you feel the sustain.

I try not to pigeonhole speakers or cartridges, but the Benz LP-S is a killer cartridge for rock music, injecting a level of excitement that I've only ever experienced with the much more expensive Clearaudio Goldfinger.

### Set up and tech

The most critical part of setting the LP-S up is paying close attention to, (outside of making sure you have a medium to high-ish mass tonearm) is that 16.4 gram body weight. Suggested tracking force is 1.8 – 2 grams, and on all three of the tonearms used, about 1.95 provides the best balance. Setting up the rest is fairly easy because the stylus isn't completely naked, hanging out in the air. This should make the LP-S relatively free from the casual accident.

Benz suggests loading the LP-S at "greater than 400 ohms." With the Nagra Classic Phono, this meant 470, and with the Pass XP-27, I kept freaking myself out switching back and forth between 320, 430, and 520 ohms. Additional loading options make it easy to use this option as a very finely tuned micro-treble tone control. Many of you will have a 500-ohm setting, and that will be just fine.

Both the Pass and Nagra phono stages have enough gain for this cartridge's .36mv output, though trying an older ARC PH7 phono, with its fixed 55dB of gain proves slightly lacking in dynamics. Interestingly, using the PH7 and a vintage PH3SE (54dB) with the Quadratic MC-1 step up transformer, made a brilliant combination. As you know, analog is always about experimentation. Bottom line: this should be an easy cartridge to integrate into your vinyl setup.

### A winner

You might think us crazy to give an Exceptional Value Award to a \$5,000 phono cartridge, yet putting the Benz LP-S in context with a fairly wide range of 10-15 thousand dollar cartridges, it offers incredible performance. I know I could get off the merry go round and live with this one forever.





## Naim Uniti Atom Headphone Edition

The Perfect (whole) System Anchor.

\$3,799  
naimaudio.com

It's no secret that Naim's compact components have always been a favorite of mine and here at TONE. Since the original Nait, back in the 70s, Naim has always prioritized squeezing incredible performance into a compact chassis. When the Naim Uniti hit the market in 2009, we promptly made it our Product of the Year. Naim really gets the message that not everyone wants a massive rack of gear in their living space. (Though they will happily sell you a rack of full-size components, should that be your desire.) Thus, we awarded the current Uniti Atom Headphone Edition, our digital Product of the Year for 2021.

It's so much more than just a digital component (though it has an excellent streaming DAC that is a ROON endpoint) or a headphone amplifier (though it is a world-class headphone amplifier on its own). In 2010 when reviewing the UnitiQute, I said, "Naim has hit the mark perfectly for a high-quality, yet reasonably priced all-encompassing HiFi component." Yet Naim keeps making the Uniti system better every year.

### Today

While this praise certainly applies to the current, all-in-one Uniti Atom, with a 50 Watt per channel power amplifier onboard, the Headphone Edition offers even more for certain listeners. Here's why.

Naim has always been big on building robust power supplies. One of the keys to this Atom's big sound is the enormous power supply under the hood. In this configuration, that power supply is free to power the DAC, headphone amp, and linestage, unburdened by the demands of a power amplifier. Crazy. Crazy good. Using my reference Focal Utopia, Stellia, and the new Clear Mg headphones (in for review), the difference in sound quality between the Atom and the Headphone Edition is dramatic. The extra power reserve makes for a bigger, bolder presentation, driving down listener fatigue more than you might realize. Staffer Jerold O'Brien still has his standard Atom, so it was easy to summon it for a quick apples-to-apples comparison.



**T**he current Atom with power amplifier is a fantastic anchor for a high-performance, modestly priced, do it all system. Connected to the Focal Aria 936 K2 speakers (\$6k/pair, also in for review), the Atom kills it, providing a sonic experience that you might think would be a lot more expensive. As Naim and Focal are launching more of their experience centers worldwide, you can get this entire system in one place. Easy.

The headphone edition shines in two distinct areas: a premium headphone amplifier for a personal audio enthusiast with a pair of top headphones or a compact front end to a high-performance two-channel system. Mmmm.

## Phones first

If you're thinking Focal headphones are a perfect match for the Atom, you are correct. The high quality of the Atom's headphone section makes it easy to hear the differences between the Clear Mg, Stellia, and Utopia phones. Still, it also has no issues driving the other phones on hand from Grado, Koss, Sennheiser, and Audeze.

In addition to the front headphone jack, there is a balanced headphone output on the rear panel, so anything you have at your disposal will connect. A few others have integrated streaming DACs into their headphone amplifiers, but no one has pulled off the level of execution that Naim has. There are way too many \$3,800 headphone amplifiers on the market that look like someone's high school electronics class project. Naim has always had an eye for timeless design, but perhaps all the time spent with the staff at Bentley has rubbed off.

This is a stunning piece of equipment to look at. Thanks to the large, crisp 5" TFT display on the front panel, it's always easy to see what's going on and what music you are listening to. If you don't want to bother with the Naim app (which works equally well on iOS and Android devices), the black remote mirrors the front panel buttons for functionality. As someone who always loses the remote, I love the Naim app – and just left it in the box for safekeeping.

You guessed it – I bought the review sample, but staffer Earle Blanton talked me out of it for a weekend listen, and it didn't return. I'm going to have to buy another. This is a component I don't want to live without.

Regardless of the headphones used, the Atom produces a massive soundfield inside the constraints of your head. Feeling groovy, serious listening begins with the Amboy Dukes' classic, "Journey to the Center of the Mind." Why not? The enormous stereo image, combined with deep, controlled bass response, lends itself to your favorite headphone-y tracks. Music with a large stereo image and elaborate mixes are sheer joy to listen to via the Atom. A healthy level of resolution also makes the Atom such a fantastic reference component because it is so easy to tell the differences between different phones. Returning to the Focal family; the things that make the Clear Mg, Stellia, and Utopia unique are easily discernible. No level of phones is off the table with the Atom as your reference.

## The ins and outs

Looking at both Atoms from the front, they seem identical. The casework and front panel screens, a long with that sexy Naim volume control on top, are all identical. If you're new to the Atom, you may never get tired of the simple act of turning it on – once powered up, it glows from the bottom and around the volume control while an LED lighted circle illuminates. This has to be one of the most understatedly beautiful components going, looking great in any décor. Naim includes an excellent, slim form factor remote, or you can access your Atom from the Naim app as well. We chose to use it as a ROON endpoint, controlling the Uniti from within ROON for all digital music playback for most of the evaluation.

The front panel offers connectivity for mini headphone plugs and standard ¼" headphone plugs and features a USB slot if you (or a friend) would like to plug a memory stick or external drive in to share music. With 1TB and 2TB solid-state drives becoming so inexpensive and compact, this is an easy way to have more music on hand.

The big difference is on the rear face – speaker terminals are gone, but there are RCA analog outputs and (very unique for Naim) balanced headphone outputs as well as a pair of balanced XLR outputs. This is incredibly handy for those wanting to leave their Atom near the listening chair, as it can easily drive a 50-foot pair of balanced cables. We did just that to excellent result with a 50-foot pair of Cardas Clear Light cable on hand.





# HeadphoneArts

Digital inputs include a pair of Toslink connectors, along with an RCA/SPDIF connection. There is a USB input, which was not investigated during this review, and the Ethernet connection, which we used nearly all the time. Using all of the digital inputs, streaming via the Ethernet connection is the fave. The Atom will find your network and stream several different streaming services directly or work with a NAS drive. It can't be more plug-and-play. The iPad detects it instantly, and 30 seconds later, music was being enjoyed by all.

## The hidden value

I mean no disrespect to the Naim team here, but good as the Atom Headphone Edition is, I love it even more as a compact yet high-performance two-channel front end. Thanks to the balanced outputs (with switchable hot pin), at least a dozen power amplifiers were auditioned. All with fantastic results. A few tube amplifiers were also tried, also excellent.

Keeping with the compact aesthetic, the Nagra Classic Amp (\$18,000) proves a perfect match for the Naim front end. These two components and a turntable easily fit on a table about 36-inches wide, making for a stylish combo indeed. Used this way with the Technics SL-1200GAE (sporting an Ana Mighty Sound Lyra rebuilt cart)

and our Naim Stageline phonostage, vinyl playback is a joy. Adding a single analog (RCA) input to the Atom is the final stroke of brilliance.

Again, the level of refinement this component offers is off the chart good. The biggest question is, do you want to buy an Atom Headphone Edition as a great 2-channel preamplifier with onboard DAC, or as a premium headphone amplifier that allows you to expand into the world of 2-channel, speaker oriented listening? Either way, it's all good.

## Teacher's pet

According to the letters, messages, and calls we get from our readers, many of you have (or are looking to build) systems in the \$5k-\$20k range. You're the type of person that loves music, has a substantial collection, and wants good sound. But you aren't a crazy money system person. We've also talked to quite a few people looking for an extremely compact yet high-performance personal listening system.

I can't think of a more capable piece to anchor such a system than the Naim Uniti Atom Headphone Edition. This is a rare product that I suspect will be as respected (and coveted) 30 years from now as the original Nait's are today.



TONE111.034



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# Setlist

02 Arena - London, UK

March 26, 2022

Photos by Adrian Goldsmith

**B**eing a big Genesis fan, I am incredibly envious of occasional contributor Adrian Goldsmith's seeing Genesis both nights of their final performance at the UK's O2 Arena.

This is the setlist from the last night, so this is the last Genesis show ever. Wow.

Behind the Lines / Duke's End  
Turn It On Again  
Mama  
Land of Confusion  
Home By the Sea  
Second Home By the Sea  
Fading Lights  
The Cinema Show  
Afterglow  
That's All  
The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway  
Follow You Follow Me  
Duchess  
No Son of Mine  
Firth of Fifth  
I Know What I Like (In Your Wardrobe)  
Domino  
Throwing It All Away  
Tonight Tonight Tonight  
Invisible Touch

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# Can't get it out of my head

by Emily Duff

## Aimee Mann at City Winery NYC 4/16/22



When Aimee Mann stepped onstage at the stunning and spacious City Winery NYC, I was struck with the notion that she looked taller than usual. As a mother of two teenagers I am used to humans that magically grow overnight, but this felt odd and close to surreal. It's true, Aimee Mann is tall. Lanky - And her writing has always been quite "elevated," while always being accessible and authentic. As she put on her signature Gibson J-45, clad in timeless denim, silk scarf and spectacles that allow her to see beautiful truths shrouded in darker places, Aimee and her impressive band launched into a one-hour set of the tracks of her years.

This was the 2nd night of her 4 night, SOLD-OUT run at the brand new, Hudson River venue, and she kicked it off in style with "You Fall," the first track from her newest record, *Queens of the Summer Hotel* (songs inspired from the novel, *Girl Interrupted*). She followed up with the last track, "I See You" from that same record. With the grace and ease of a group of good friends who love and respect each others talents, with the desire to serve these finely crafted songs, Aimee delivered "Patient Zero" and "Rollercoasters" off of her Grammy winning album, *Mental Illness*. To my delight, Aimee furnished us with selections from *Lost in Space*, *The Forgotten Arm*, *Charmer*, and even closed the evening with "Long Shot" from *I'm with Stupid*.

Mann has never been given to chatty onstage banter with her audience and tonight was no different. But that just beckons us to pay closer attention to the songs - which is easy to do. Tour manager and Sound Engineer, Chris Bailey does an incredible job with front of house sound and his nuanced moves allowed us to feel the subtle shifts in texture and mood with each song, gorgeously executed by the musical family that Aimee Mann has surrounded herself with for years. At one point, a baby in the audience started to fuss as Aimee sat down at the piano. In an uncharacteristically interactive moment, she said "I'm sorry baby - I'm sorry for my music - this song is called, "Suicide is Murder." Laughter from the audience was the perfect ice-breaker to offset what was about to fall on our heads and into our hearts. Aimee Mann communicates perfectly and we all understand why she is onstage.

Special shout out to guitar tech, Todd Demma who floats like a butterfly on and offstage with the stealthy fitness of a ballet dancer, handing off guitars and plugging in cords. This show is well oiled and as of night two there were not many "flaws."

The visual accompaniment to the live show are the paintings hanging on the second floor gallery of the sprawling space. Aimee Mann is an incredibly talented painter and visual artist as is evident on her social media and these fine paintings of American Presidents and a few First Ladies. Being off the road for two years due to Covid allowed Aimee to stretch out and expand her reach as an artist. And there it is! Aimee Mann looked taller because like every great artist, she's always growing.

Emily Duff is a singer you won't be able to get out of your head.

Find out more at: <https://emilyduff.bandcamp.com>

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

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## Immanuel Wilkins *The 7th Hand*

Blue Note Records - digital download, CD, and LP

When Immanuel Wilkins arrived on the national scene a few years ago, he came in hot. The alto saxophonist with the Philly upbringing and the Juilliard education was preceded by an enormous buzz about his bandstand skills, and even more heads turned when he helped animate his bestie Joel Ross's 2019 debut, *KingMaker*.

The 24-year-old grew up lovin' Benny Carter and Kenny Garrett, and had the foresight to regularly switch teachers to assure his work profited from a variety of perspectives. (It was Wynton Marsalis who encouraged him to learn Ornette

Coleman's "Peace" and "Sadness.") Kudos were everywhere, and the saxophonist validated them by presenting a strong statement when his Blue Note debut *Omega* arrived two summers ago, produced by freedom-swing sensei Jason Moran. The horn player's sound was both piercing and buoyant, and his inspirations went from life's many pleasures to what he called the "grotesque" pressures Black citizens live with daily in America.



If his tunes were a tad over-designed, his ensemble's improv skills judiciously cleaved wheat from chaff, cutting through to clarity. The 7th Hand benefits from further focus. Leading his squad of pianist Micah Thomas, bassist Daryl Johns, drummer Kweku Sumbry, Wilson's seven-part suite is punchy, poised, and swinging. Wilkins' work breathes a bit more these days, allowing pieces such as "Shadow" and "Witness" to offer a glowing allure. Elena Pinderhughes' flute is added to the ensemble on two tracks, bringing an airy buffer to the feisty "Lighthouse."

Indeed, the album marks a growth born of paring extraneous elements and trusting collective inspiration to carry the day. It also arrives with a mission statement. With each unfolding piece, the leader wanted his squad to bar any hindrance to the group dynamic, leaning, the press materials explain, into an "entirely improvised" mindset fueled by the passion of spirituality. "The goal of what we're all trying to get to is nothingness," says the former church saxophonist, "where the music can flow freely through us." That denouement is the 26-minute album closer. "Lift" is a frenzied excursion that succeeds in attaining Wilkins' wish.

Though filtered through stormy bluster, the quartet's housequake of a performance has a stream of sophisticated structural contours that repeatedly energize its landscape. The crew's rampage parallels that of its leader's fierce attack, and their whirlwind delivers the kind of cooperative dazzle that draws you deeper and deeper. Enticing and explosive.

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## Chris Dingman *Journeys Vol. 1* Bandcamp

Don't want to go out on too much of a limb here, but after the 20th go-round of Chris Dingman's second solo disc, echoes of Keith Jarrett's *Sun Bear Concerts* are in the air...and that's a good thing.

Improvisers often search for an effective balance between pith and expanse, and Jarrett's 1978 ECM excursion made each of its many thoughtful asides seem as essential as the nuclei of the micro melodies that generated them. Ditto for the airy rambles that mark the "ripples and chiming percussiveness" that the Brooklyn vibraphonist shares on *Journeys*. Dingman is a fine ensemble player, but during the last few years he's honed his solo approach to an enviable level, allowing a deeply artistic eloquence to emerge.

A foreshadowing of this can also be found in his previous project, *Peace*, which was culled from five hours of solo improvs he recorded to soothe his father during the final days of hospice care. He shared some of these outings with fans, and this morphed into a Bandcamp subscription series during the pandemic, when seclusion was the norm, and solo work was the safest work.

*Journeys'* five pieces were chosen by audience feedback, and the crowd's discernment was wise. Pulse aids temperament throughout the program. Dingman has investigated the seductive sounds of the African mbira of late, and the rhythmic ease that was easily identifiable in his previous music is amplified here. The composer cites a "struggle between meditation and anxiety" in one of the program's more radiant pieces. Maybe that's what conjures my Jarrett reference. Though *Journeys* trades elaborate melodies for repeated motifs, the flow of Dingman's transitions is fetching. Moods shift slowly, and how he gets from A to B to Z not only harks to the magic of improvisation, but has the power to float you away.



## Samo Salamon *Dolphyology: The Complete Eric Dolphy for Solo Guitar*

Eric Dolphy was such an advanced improviser that the craft behind his innovative tunes is sometimes overlooked. From his early work to his final recorded pieces, the saxophonist's originals are vibrant and memorable. Perhaps one of the reasons he was such a satisfying soloist was because he was such a capable composer, delivering sturdy melodies that were often deeply seductive.

Slovenian guitarist Samo Salamon has certainly fallen for them. His solo spin on the master's book boasts both familiar and revelatory feels, like seeing an old pal sporting a new suit. From pieces such as "G.W.," recorded in 1960 for Prestige, to works like "Something Sweet, Something Tender," from the '64 Blue Note classic *Out To Lunch*, Salamon brings a fresh perspective to the table. His interpretations honor his hero's expertise at teasing out new tangents from the material being addressed. "I have played Dolphy's tunes throughout my musical career," he has said, "but rarely in a solo setting; probably because of fear or respect."

There's no sign of trepidation in these 28 performances. Even when the guitarist is bending a theme or chasing down an idea, authority is in the air. "Burning Spear," from Dolphy's posthumously released *Iron Man*, is rollercoaster bop, with the guitarist delivering a flourish of notes. "Inner Flight II," which began life as a solo flute piece, is stark and contemplative by comparison.

The recent template for this full-catalog interpretive experiment is *Work*, guitarist Miles Okazaki's 2018 spin on Thelonious Monks songbook. Indeed, Salamon wisely united with Okazaki for advice on approaching his Dolphy recital. Happily, the iconic reed player is in the air of late.



Make a point of investigating vocalist Mary LaRose's *Out Here*, an ensemble romp through the master's pieces, including inspired updates of "245," "Music Matador," and "Warm Canto," which made my best-of-2021 list. Throughout the program, LaRose finds ways to underscore her subject's natural playfulness.

Dolphy's music buffered its gravitas with a sense of frolic, and the singer and her group never let that quality out of sight during their homage.



# JAZZ

By Jim Macnie

## Melissa Aldana

### *12 Stars*

Blue Note

Saxophonist Melissa Aldana's lines arrive with a sinewy sound - seems like the Chilean native with the Washington Heights address is perpetually tugging on the idea at hand. After five impressive albums, the 33-year-old's latest work reveals new advances in the tensile strength department. This time out, a sense of exploration finds her solos testing trajectories that use her horn's full range while constantly stretching to reach their destination, like a baseball runner taking a long lead on first base in order to steal second.

It's fascinating to hear Aldana swoop around her instrument on *12 Stars*, a quintet date produced by guitarist Lage Lund, who's also part of the band. Indeed, the group's chemistry boosts the leader's choice to simultaneously float and attack. Keyboardist Sullivan Fortner, bassist Pablo Menares, and drummer Kush Abadey provide a limber support system, making their boss's statements that much more striking. "Intuition," like many tracks here, finds them fluidly rounding corners, trading uproar for grace.

Aldana crafts a remarkably identifiable sound with this outing, one whose amiable vibe may woo occasional jazz fans who might not be up for a more tumultuous ride. Frenzy has its attractions, and the bandleader's work certainly isn't without tension, but her timbre has found a way to purr, and it works in tandem with a polished lyricism to expand that pliable vibe I mentioned above. It creates intrigue, too: could most of these pieces be deemed ballads? Even the mid-tempo titles? Probably not, but poise is so prominent, and barnburners so absent, a case could be made.

In this way, Aldana, the winner of the esteemed Thelonious Monk Competition in 2013 and the first woman to do so, has something in common with fellow tenor players Charles Lloyd and Adam Kolker. An aerated sound marks her boldest leaps or knottiest phrases. "Falling" all but swirls, and if you close your eyes during "The Fool," something elliptical might come into view.

The saxophonist explains that some of these pieces reference a period of doubt after the one-two punch of a romantic breakup and the loneliest months of Covid isolation. The impact of such turns can take their toll, but *12 Stars* was made by an artist with enough imagination to plot a course out of any conundrum.



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# JAZZ

By Jim Macnie

## Tim Berne, Gregg Belisle-Chi *Mars*

Intakt Recordings

Two years ago, after decades of creating rigorous melodies that solidified his rep as one of jazz's most progressive figures, Tim Berne challenged himself to come up with pithier themes. Home during the first months of the pandemic, he recorded comparatively compact pieces such as "Chicken Salad Blues" and "Mirth of the Cool" that showed up on his first-ever solo album, *Sacred Vowels*.

Impressive in both conception and execution, the tunes offered a bit more poignancy and a tad more clarity than the serpentine works of his extensive songbook. To a degree, they wore their heart on their sleeve. Just after this, Gregg Belisle-Chi applied himself to scads of Berne tunes in a solo setting on the album *Koi*. Using an acoustic instrument, the guitarist revealed a side of the 67-year-old Berne's work that had been previously shrouded.

The performances are delicate, delightful, and mildly revelatory. It was as if Belisle-Chi could see something about the music that a sizable throng of fans had missed all those years. Arriving on the heels of *Sacred Vowels*, it cast a new light on the saxophonist and his work.

Now comes their duet album of more Berne material, *Mars*. From Nels Cline to Bill Frisell to Marc Ducret to David Torn, Berne has collaborated with some of the most inventive guitarists around. This new 12-track program suggests that he's chosen another wily mate. The conversations they shared while discussing the architecture of *Koi* have nurtured a bond that's unmistakable on these miniature investigations (most pieces range from three to four minutes). "Big Belly" finds them taking coordinated, if overtly different tacks. The guitarist chips and slashes; the horn player glides and prances. "Rabbit Girl" is a bittersweet jewel, one of the most tender titles in the Berne book, and a tune that just may have Ornette's "Kathelin Gray" as an antecedent. Like "Purdy," it finds the duo embracing romance, investing in the ethereal, and tilting towards splendor.



TONE111.041

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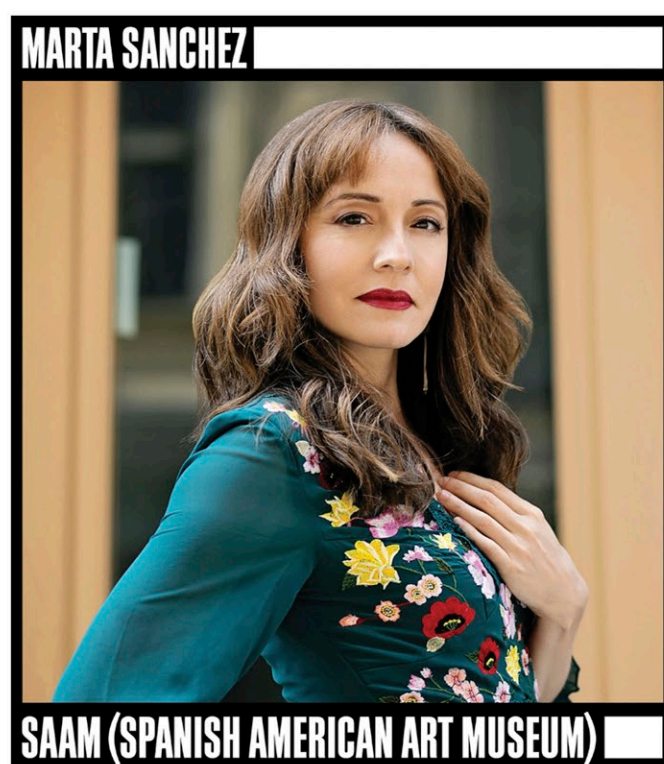


**Marta Sanchez**  
**SAAM (Spanish American Art Museum)**  
 Whirlwind

You could see it coming. The pianist's previous four titles for the Fresh Sound label were a winning mix of experimentation and craft, playgrounds where daring gambits of grooves and dynamics were folded into the loving arms of invention - the canny yielding the uncanny. With each new release the ensembles that Sánchez has helmed since 2015 have become increasingly refined; they've had to, because the composer's clever writing has been steadily honed along the way as well. It's always been thoughtful music, chock with interplay that somehow makes intricate designs feel cozy, but it's surely peaking these days.

The two-horn spiral that opens "Small Game" on her Partenika debut could fit snugly into SAAM's program. The Madrid native hasn't shifted her vision much since earning a sizable reputation in New York, she's simply sharpened it to where its eloquence is unmistakable. So SAAM's victory is one of blossoming. Sánchez still uses a pair of saxophones in front of her piano-bass-drums combo, just as she's done from the start. And she still dodges overt dissonance while coming off as deeply progressive. "Dear Worthiness" wafts along, with reed players Roman Filiú and Alex LoRe cuddling each other.

Throughout the record they follow the leader's somewhat orchestral paths, making the band sound more substantial than a five-piece outfit often does. Tricky architectural assignments are Sánchez's stock-in-trade. SAAM's title track allows just the right measure of friction, the rhythm section of drummer Allan Mednard and bassist Rashaan Carter creating counterpoint beats to thicken the action. Flamenco allusions, Cuban inflections, Brooklyn abstraction - SAAM is a program of nuances that gather to exude a cosmopolitan stance.



The leader doesn't stress her piano work, but here and there she reminds us just how sublime it can be. Sánchez lost her mother to Covid, and wasn't able to be in Spain to say goodbye. "Marivi" (featuring a radiant vocal from Camila Meza) and "December 11th" address the event; the latter spotlighting the gentle bounce that marks the leader's keyboard approach. Like her solo on "The Eternal Stillness," it enhances the track's emotional impact. Ultimately, though, SAAM is about what happens when five musicians are working as one. That's when we hear the flourishing of Sánchez's keenly personal ideas, that's when her sophistication resounds in an almost breathtaking manner.

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Shanon McKellar has a great review of Joni Mitchell's *Live at Carnegie Hall, 1969* out on the music section of our website. **You can click [here to read it.](#)**

We asked Shanon to give us her favorite Joni tracks, and here you go:



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- For the Roses - Let The Wind Carry Me
- Song For a Seagull - Song For a Seagull
- Ladies of the Canyon - Woodstock
- Court and Spark - Troubled Child
- Hejira - Song for Sharon
- Blue - Little Green
- Turbulent Indigo - Sunny Sunday
- The Hissing of Summer Lawns - The Hissing of Summer Lawns
- For The Roses - You Turn Me On, I'm a Radio
- Shine - Strong and Wrong
- Clouds - Both Sides Now
- Don Juan's Reckless Daughter - Off Night Backstreet
- Blue - River
- Clouds - Tin Angel
- Court and Spark - Help Me



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Nearly 15 years ago, our publisher called me, with that tone in his voice, to drop by and see this “new, cool i-Pod speaker from B&W.”

Yawn.

I’m not a convenience guy. I have automobiles with mechanical fuel injection, and motorcycles that still need the points set. So back in 2008, this didn’t sound like anything to be in a hurry over.

I’ve never been more wrong about anything.

Bowers & Wilkins has always made great stuff, but in a world where there was, (and still is) a lot of cheesy desktop-ish audio, that original Zeppelin was like a Bentley in a sea of used Hyundai’s. For my money, it still is. Bowers & Wilkins has kept the price in line. The original Zeppelin was \$599, and the current model is available on “special” pricing at \$699, down from \$799. At current inflation rates, \$799 is just about right and \$699 is an incredible bargain.





**I**n a sea of mass market, poorly crafted stuff, the Zeppelin stands much taller than its competitors. They were the first ones to build this kind of product at this level and execute from start to finish. Even the packaging was at an Apple level of quality.

Beyond the finish of that first Zeppelin, the sound was also head and shoulders above anything at anywhere near this price. Where the first model had a cradle to put your iPod in, it also had an analog input. Though Bluetooth was a fairly mature technology by then, that would wait until the next generation of Zeppelins. The big deal here Apple Certification, so it would snag the data stream from your phone or iPod. This was big stuff in 2008.

### Fast forward

Today's Zeppelin is exactly the same size and basic form factor. On one level, that contributes to the coolness factor, because most people won't look at your Zeppelin and snark "oh that's so 2008." It remains as timeless as the day it was first unboxed. I like that. However, the current Zeppelin is a kilo lighter than the first one, as the stainless steel rear panel has been replaced with plastic. Also gone is the analog input, so there will be no playing records on your Zeppelin unless you've got a Bluetooth enabled turntable.

Everywhere else we look, it's nothing but upgrades. The original Zep had a 50 Watt amplifier for the centrally mounted 5-inch subwoofer and this one has a 6-inch unit. Total power is now 240 Watts, where the original produced 100.

### Instant gratification

Because the current Zeppelin is a Bluetooth device, all that is needed is to power it up, and push the middle button on the back panel. Your phone or tablet should recognize it immediately. This has been one of the easiest Bluetooth devices I've ever setup, and I'm a crabby kinda guy with this stuff. I'm old school.

The Zeppelin passes with flying colors. I'm also really corny, so what's the first thing I play on the new Zeppelin? Led Zeppelin. You know it. Put "The Rain Song" on and cranked it up. Loud. Awesome. My garage is a no Patricia Barber/wispy audiophile chanteuse zone, I can't even tell you how it sounds with Patricia Barber or Lyn Stanley. That's your poison. But the B52s sounded damn good.

## Where Have all the Good Stereos Gone?



**W**e know. Sorting through the jungle that is pre-owned hi-fi gear can be tough. Myriad Internet forums and online shopping sites just don't offer the expertise required to make sound decisions.

That's where Echo Audio comes in. We have more than 20 years of retail experience in selling hi-fi equipment the way it should be sold: In a brick-and-mortar environment that provides you with personalized attention.

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So, when you are looking for high-quality, lightly used hi-fi gear, look no further than Echo Audio. Be sure to check out our Web site for current products and new arrivals.

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## Sound Comparisons

If you happen to be a long-term TONE reader, you don't even have to ask if we still have that original Zeppelin we purchased back in 2008. Of course we do, and every one in between. At this point Bowers & Wilkins should be writing us a huge commission check, as we've sold or given quite a few of these to friends and family members over the years.

Each generation of the Zeppelin sounds a little more powerful, a bit more dynamic and a bit more refined. The current model plays way louder than you might expect a desktop, single box unit to play. The only one that gives the Zeppelin a run for the money is the Naim MuSO QB, but it will set you back a cool thousand dollars. Everything else is pretty weak in comparison.

Not only does the current model have more low frequency extension, it connects in nearly every way possible except as a ROON endpoint. (Bonus points go to Naim, as they offer this functionality) The Zeppelin does however allow Deezer, Qobuz, and Tidal support directly via their proprietary app, which isn't dreadful – provided you're not used to working in the ROON universe.

We can go on and on about various tracks, but what has always struck me as exciting about the Zeppelin is that its, well, Zeppelin-y shape positions the tweeters way out at the end of the enclosure. That's what gives this player such a nice big soundstage that almost sounds like a pair of minimonitors on a shelf. (Bonus points to B&W all the way on this one.) The level of refinement in the tweeters along with a better DAC section also go a long way to a tabletop box that delivers true high-end sound. And you can cheat the situation using Apple's Air Play 2 as a way to use your Zeppelin with ROON, if that's your musical infrastructure.

As a matter of course, I've taken my various Zeppelins all over the house and garage. I've even built a custom Pelican Case to take it on trips. Now that hotel TVs are usually Bluetooth devices, it makes for a great portable sound bar as well as great mobile music.

You've probably figured out by now that I really love the new Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin. The bad news is so does my boss, so we're going to have to have a duel in the backyard over who gets this one after the check is written.

Fan boy stuff aside, the Zeppelin not only does everything right, it does everything to a high standard of excellence. This is a piece of technology that you will love to own, and it will work just as good in 20 years (when there is a new Zeppelin, I'm sure) as it does today. In today's disposable world, something with timeless performance and aesthetic appeal deserves credit.



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## Harbeth M40.3 XD

A Case of Bigger Being Better.

\$22,500/pair (Cherry)  
\$24,500/pair (Walnut, Rosewood, Exotic Ash)  
[fidelisdistribution.com](http://fidelisdistribution.com)

It's oh, so *American* to insist on bigger being better as a default mode, but in the case of Harbeth speakers, the top of the range M40.3XD really delivers the maximum experience. Other offerings from this famously small but mighty British speaker company are all excellent, and have their fans, but if you have the room (and the cash) for the bigHarbeth's, you'll never look back. Or listen back for that matter. You've been warned.

Decendending from BBC monitor technology, the M40.3XDs absolutely nail the vocal range - a must for being a monitor speaker. However, what these speakers do, like no other Harbeth, is light up the room when you turn the volume up.



Thanks to wide dispersion characteristics, and an easy crossover network (all part of that new XD thing) these speakers are easy to place. This makes them easy to enjoy nearly anywhere in the room.

The only thing to keep in check, is to invest in a good pair of stands. These are crucial to the M40.3XDs being all they can be.

The longer version of this story is out on our website. Please [click here](#) to read it.





## The Heretic A614

Audiophile Fusion.

Price TBD  
[fidelisdistribution.com](http://fidelisdistribution.com)

Looking at that white speaker below (another finish option) you might think you were looking at one of those monitor speakers, like the ones the Beatles' recorded on at EMI Studios.

They certainly were the inspiration. Canadian speaker designer, Robert Gaboury has been around for some time, and has always admired this "Altec" cabinet.

Designing a new, coaxial driver with modern materials delivers a sound that we think is even better than the vintage Altecs these speakers pay homage to. With a sensitivity rating of 97dB/1-Watt, your favorite flea-powered tube amplifier



will make magic with the A614s. And if you need more bass, their A612 speaker uses the same coolio 12-inch coaxial driver, but in a larger cabinet. This combination can produce another half octave of bass - we'll let you know, a review pair is on the way soon.

For now, we're keeping the A614s. These are a blast to listen to.

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





## PrimaLuna EVO 300 Hybrid Amp

What? Transistors and PrimaLuna?

\$7,295 (Black or Silver)

[upscaleaudio.com](http://upscaleaudio.com)  
[primaluna-usa.com](http://primaluna-usa.com)

**T**one goes back with PrimaLuna. Way back. Back to the beginning, before we didn't even exist. How's that for existential? PrimaLuna amplifiers have always been all-vacuum tubes, getting more powerful and more refined with every new iteration.

Yet, producing more power with tubes creates its own set of design challenges when you start getting past 100 Wpc. And PrimaLuna has built an incredible reputation for sound and durability. Plus, more power means more tubes, and bigger chassis. If you've ever picked one up, you know they aren't lightweights. So, to mix it up, PrimaLuna again takes their own unique approach with the EVO 300. This hybrid design sports an all tube linestage, and a solid-state power amplifier on a single chassis.



The result is a powerful, compact PrimaLuna offering up a slightly different sonic flavor, and some additional current drive, for those really demanding speakers. We think they've hit a home run sonically and economically.

The longer version of this story is out on our website. Please [click here](#) to read it.





## Piega Coax 711

Compact and compelling.

\$24,999/pair  
mofidistribution.com

Of all things, I'm listening to the *Bee Gees Greatest*, firing up the Piega Coax 711s after unboxing. Certainly not a musical selection that's the least bit audiophile-y. These speakers sound good out of the box. Really engaging. By the time "You Should be Dancing" drops four tracks in, the volume is up loud. Really loud. Greatest Hits compilations usually sound rubbish, but there's a lot of information in the mix here. The soundstage is massive, and those famous harmonies are distinct, fascinating, and engulfing all at once. These are absolutely lovely speakers.

As the PrimaLuna EVO400 monoblocks are in the system right now, that's where the magical mystery tour begins with the Piegas. Love the one you're with, eh? Ribbon drivers, efficient and easy to drive with tubes, rarely occupy the same sentence, but the Piegas are, D – all of the above. Even using the EVO400s in triode mode, with KT150s. 80 plus triode Watts per channel with speakers sporting a 92dB/1-Watt sensitivity is big sound heaven.

Before changing the mix to Slayer, a program change to old pal Jacqui Naylor and her 2001 *Live at the Plush Room* takes us back to a cracking live mix. This intimately miked set is much like the live records you've heard from Ronnie Scott's place in London, but smaller. This recording feels like you're sitting at the front table, where you can truly hear the room. Again, the Piega's paint a sizeable, but uniformly huge sonic landscape in a 15 x 25-foot room. Even at a modest volume, you can hear every breath Ms. Naylor takes.





If you aren't familiar, coaxial speaker drivers help to maintain coherence, much like a full-range speaker provides. While Piega does not specify a crossover frequency, I'll stick my neck out and guess it's somewhere in the vicinity of 250 – 400hz. Because the 711 features a coaxial midrange and tweeter arrangement, you get nearly all the benefits of a full ribbon tweeter with the dynamic punch the woofer/passive radiator combination brings to the presentation.

Much like MartinLogan, who has been coupling nearly full-range ESL panels to dynamic woofers, Piega has done an equally splendid design of mating the two different drivers seamlessly. In this case, the set and match point have to go to Piega, because there is no rear-firing radiation as in a ML, Quad, Magnepan, or other panel speaker, yet it offers all of the sonic rewards.

### Pure style from the beginning

The black aluminum beauties you see here have an MSRP of \$24,995/pair. They are also available in white and silver. Compared to a few other speakers that feature all-aluminum mechanical architecture, the Coax 711s have to be one of the best values going in ultra high-end speakers. Experience makes the difference. The level of execution that these speakers display is nothing short of extraordinary.

Precious few manufacturers have done a great job integrating the speed and voice of a ribbon speaker with dynamic/cone drivers. More often than not, it sounds like music coming from a tweeter here and something completely different going on with the cone drivers elsewhere. These floor-standing arrays use the Piega driver crossed over to a pair of 8-inch woofers and a pair of 8-inch passive radiators.

The low-frequency limit is claimed to be 22hz, and while we don't measure, dragging out the **Stereophile Test Disc no. 1**, with a series of low-frequency tones, makes armchair assessment easy. Merely using my Radio Shack SPL meter, there is barely a drop all the way down to the 25Hz tone, then dropping off enough at 20Hz that I know I don't need a meter to hear it. Going through a long playlist of ambient, techno, and hip-hop tracks confirm that the 711s generate some serious LF energy.

### Setup and compatibilities

The Piega 711s are remarkably easy to set up. Again, where past MartinLogans I've owned require a fair amount of fine-tuning in the room to truly make magic, the 711s sound great, literally tossed in the room with a small amount of toe-in. This will depend on your preference. Slight toe-in offers more detail and slightly more pinpoint imaging. Straight ahead to only a few degrees of toe-in provides a more prominent, but a bit more diffuse stereo image. Personally, I enjoy the latter better, but it's terrific to have tuning options. Another bonus that the Piegas bring to the table is a wider horizontal sweet spot than any of the ESL or planars I've used. Finally, these speakers have a small footprint, making them way more flexible than your favorite panel speaker

As mentioned at the beginning of the review, the 711s are very amplifier-friendly. Anything you have on hand from about 30 Watts per channel on up will do. Thanks to the high resolving power of these speakers, they will show off the quality of whatever is connected upstream. However, you could make the 711s your system anchor and upgrade everything else as you go.

Luxman's 95th anniversary 595 amplifier makes for a fantastic combination, as does their 509 integrated, which was here for review while the 711s were playing. Seriously, there was nothing on hand, either from our collection of reference components to the amplifiers that visited for review that *didn't* provide great results with the Piegas.

This coaxial driver achieves greatness in the way it is highly resolving, yet not harsh, or tipping any particular part of the frequency spectrum, faking detail. Think of the delta between a great pressing of your favorite record and then hearing it on a great tape machine. A few more layers of the finest detail are now present, but nothing has changed tonally. This is really what the Piega Coax 711s achieve.







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VAC AUDIO-VAN DEN HUL-VICOUSTIC-VIVA-VIVID AUDIO-VPI INDUSTRIES-WIREWORLD

PREMIERE FLORIDA DEALER

### The final piece of the puzzle

The perfect mating of the coax driver and the LF drivers makes for a speaker that can play anything. These speakers do not suffer from compression effects when playing your favorite music much louder than you should – watch the sound pressure level. The low distortion of the coax driver might have you end up rocking out a little louder than is safe for your ears. We warned you.

Best of all, the Piegas are articulate and inviting at low levels too. As my personal preference leans towards the slightly warmer sound of the Harbeth, Sonus faber, and Dynaudio speakers we have as references, I really enjoyed using the Piegas at a modest level with my MC275 and PrimaLuna EVO400 monoblocks in triode mode. The Conrad-Johnson CAV45 C2 (45Wpc-EL34 tubes) also proved spectacular at modest levels.

Yet, because these speakers are not “too much of a good thing” in the detail department, they are equally enjoyable with our Parasound JC1+ monos, and the Nagra Classic Amp. Both of these amplifiers are more natural/neutral tonally than any of the tube amplifiers on hand, or my reference Pass Class-A monoblocks.

In the end, the Piegas are incredibly easy to work around, regardless of your sonic preference and current system. The only downside to these speakers is they might have you considering a system upgrade or two because they resolve so much detail.

### Our first of the new year

At \$24,995/pair, the Piegas win our first Exceptional Value Award of 2022. They do everything well, and they do it to an incredibly high level of quality – both visually and audibly. The finish of the aluminum enclosure easily equals what you’d pay close to six figures for if we were talking Magico or YG – maybe even better. The level of sonic excellence is also the equal of many speakers we’ve heard, costing much more.

The Piega Coax 711s have been a very enjoyable experience. Without hesitation, I would suggest these to anyone considering a pair of speakers in the \$25 - \$100k range.

www.mofidistribution.com



## Acora Acoustics SRC-1

Miraculous In Many Ways.

\$28,000/pair  
[acoraacoustics.com](http://acoraacoustics.com)

Acora's Scott Sefton opened the door with their stand mount SRB speakers a while back, delivering a lovely experience. Even their stand mount speakers generate a lot of low-frequency energy from a compact enclosure. Like a well tuned, high-performance car, it's not just one aspect of the speaker that excites the senses. It is a speaker that all parameters have been carefully optimized from driver choice to crossover components to their inert cabinets – made entirely of granite. The result is as near perfection as it gets.

Valerio Cora, the man who designs the Acora speakers, chooses different driver combinations for each of their three loudspeakers for best effect. A casual look makes it seem like he's merely added a larger woofer and then two in the bigger SRC-2 model. This is not the case.

Where the SRB uses a beryllium tweeter, the SRC-1 features a soft dome tweeter. This accounts for the SRC-1 sounding slightly less forward than the SRB. It's not a huge difference, much like moving back about five seats in a good hall. The largest speaker in their range offers more bass extension and dynamic ability as well. In this respect, the Acora speakers feel more like a Magnepan or the old Acoustat ESL speakers, in that you choose the speaker for the size room you intend to place it in.





**A**ll three speakers share a family sound delivering a relatively similar performance when used in the correct sized room. Other than having a little bit less ultimate bass extension, the SRB in a small room at modest to loud levels sounds remarkably similar to the bigger Acora models in progressively larger rooms. This is no small engineering feat.

We are keeping these to become an integral part of my reference setup. They are such a great place to start when reviewing other components. They are that good. Will they be the speaker for you? Read on and see if this approach makes sense. I'll do my best.

Lack of coloration

Everyone perceives sound differently (just as we do color), and everyone has different goals for their HiFi system. If your priorities lean towards tonal accuracy, it's easy to get too much of a good thing, ending up with strident speakers that wear on you after extended periods in the listening chair. At times, that extra dose of resolution catching your ear at a HiFi show or in a dealer showroom is too much in your room after a few long days. Hyper detail can be a cruel and painful addiction.

The SRC-1s do not suffer from this issue in the slightest. The closest comparison that comes to mind is the 3000 series Boulder monoblock amplifiers. They are highly resolving yet not fatiguing, imposing no sonic signature of their own. You can listen to them all day without the slightest bit of fatigue or boredom. They offer an unmatched clarity that is unfortunately out of reach for most music lovers at just over \$300k per pair. You can't get that much money for both of your kidneys. At \$28,000/pair, the SRC-1s are not out of reach. Easter's coming; sedate a family member after dinner, snatch a kidney, bam. They won't miss it.



***Rather than hold  
you hostage till,  
the end of the  
review, here's the  
money quote:***

***The SRC-1 is  
the most neutral  
speaker I've had  
the pleasure of  
listening to.***





### Season to taste

Because music is so personal, most of us usually prefer "a sound." The Acoras let you play it straight, go for a bit more resolution, or a bit more romance simply by switching the components. The Boulder 866 integrated the T+A 2500 and the combination of the Audio Research REF 80S/LS-28SE all provide more neutral voices during extended listening sessions. The ARC combo is the most resolving of the group, creating a soundfield that is deep, deep, deep. Nagra's Classic Pre and Amp offer slightly more dynamic drive than the ARC pair, with a bit more presence in the lower registers, but still closer to what we'd consider natural/neutral. Granted, the hairs are being split here, but these speakers do it with an ease that few can.

My reference Pass XS Pre/XS Phono/XA 200.8 mono block combination delivers a warmer tonal balance than the last group, but the extra current drive on tap helps the SRC-1s create an even larger sonic landscape than the previous components. Warmer still, the PrimaLuna EVO 400 Monoblocks (with KT-150 tubes) shrink the sonic space slightly but add tons of personality, embellishing the midrange as a classic tube amplifier is wont to do.

Acora's 90.5dB/1-watt sensitivity rating only tells part of the story. These speakers are very easy to drive with anything. Should you be an audiophile that loves single-ended triodes, again, the SRC-1s provide a lovely presentation. Bringing the CARY 805 monos front and center produces a very colored but oh-so-magical SET vibe to the party. Sifting through a long playlist of vocal and acoustic tracks proves immersive and beguiling. If your musical taste is heavily weighted in this direction, you could happily live here.

It will be difficult to find electronics that will out resolve the SRC-1s unless you have Ferrari money at your disposal. The good news is, whether you purchase a pair of SRC-1s as the endcap on your audio system or use them to explore a wide range of components, cables, and recordings, they are incredibly versatile.

### Further Listening

The Acora speakers will bring a lot of "wow, I didn't hear that before" or "I didn't hear it like that before" moments. Rather than bore you with what seems like an endless barrage of record reviews, forcing my questionable musical taste upon you, suffice to say, these speakers will keep you riveted to your listening chair for hours.

The more time spent listening to these speakers the more challenging it is to describe their lack of sound and voice they possess. Treble is extended but not harsh, tizzy, or tipped up, and lower bass is equally extended, with a high level of resolution. All but the most hard-core electronica listeners should find the lower registers of these speakers more than adequate.

Interestingly, Acora suggests no toe-in for setup, and while this seemed a little counterintuitive at first, it works wonders. Bringing the speakers closer in (we ended up about 6 feet apart in the small room and 8 feet apart in the big room) and eliminating toe-in dramatically increases horizontal image size and image precision. At 246 pounds each, get a friend to help you to place the SRC-1s before you install the spikes, or you could damage something.

One small thing to note...Think of these speakers as 95% out of the box, yet an hour spent fine tuning the rake angle on the Acoras will give you the last bit of magic. Think of it more like a fine focus control, so proceed slowly and with small adjustments. They are capable of delivering even more if you take the time.

At the beginning of the review, there was a passing reference to planar and electrostatic speakers. I have always had an admitted bias towards coherence over almost anything else, and in this aspect, the Acoras excel. They feel like a single-driver speaker, but with extension and dynamics. Combined with the inert cabinet, these speakers disappear in the room like mini monitors.



## And, those cabinets

With a wily pair of Bull Terriers zooming around my house, pet-friendly speakers have become more of a priority. Lucy and Ricki's massive teeth can't touch that granite enclosure, and at almost 300 pounds each, they can not tag-team them to the floor either. I'm guessing the same amount of non-destructibility applies to those of you with toddlers as well.

The granite also makes for an incredibly inert way to mount drivers – making for an enclosure that simply lets the drivers do their thing. While companies like Sonus faber, Harbeth, and others "tune" the cabinet to work with their drivers, once you hear the purity of Acora's approach, you'll always hear the cabinets elsewhere, at least to some extent.

(And I say this as a Harbeth and Sonus faber owner.)

Practicality aside, the SRC-1s are beautiful. Not entirely as black as the Spinal Tap album cover, they still have some detail in the black and look absolutely beautiful when light hits them. They are austere enough that they should work within any décor, though they probably lend themselves to a more modern room. As does everything black. The amount of time and precision to cut granite to this level of accuracy should not be overlooked either. The cabinet joints and driver cutouts are perfectly executed.

## Are they your cup of?

The toughest part of writing about products like this (i.e., ones you really like) is not sounding like a fanperson. I genuinely hope that if the description of the SRC-1s sounds intriguing, you'll seek out a pair to listen to. These really have been a favorite. Very few speakers can serve double duty as a reviewing tool yet provide hours of musical enjoyment when not in gear evaluation mode.

Having a speaker with such a natural presentation on its own makes for a \$28,000 pair of speakers you can keep around for a very long time – maybe forever. When you consider the expense of buying and selling multiple pairs of \$10k speakers (and losing a few thousand bucks every single time) putting the SRC-1 in your system and getting your sonic moods satisfied by merely changing electronics is a pretty good value at the end of the day.

Actually an Exceptional Value. Award.

[acoraacoustics.com](http://acoraacoustics.com)

## PERIPHERALS

**Analog Source** Thrax Yatrus Table

**Digital Source** dCS Vivaldi ONE

**Preamp** Pass XS Pre

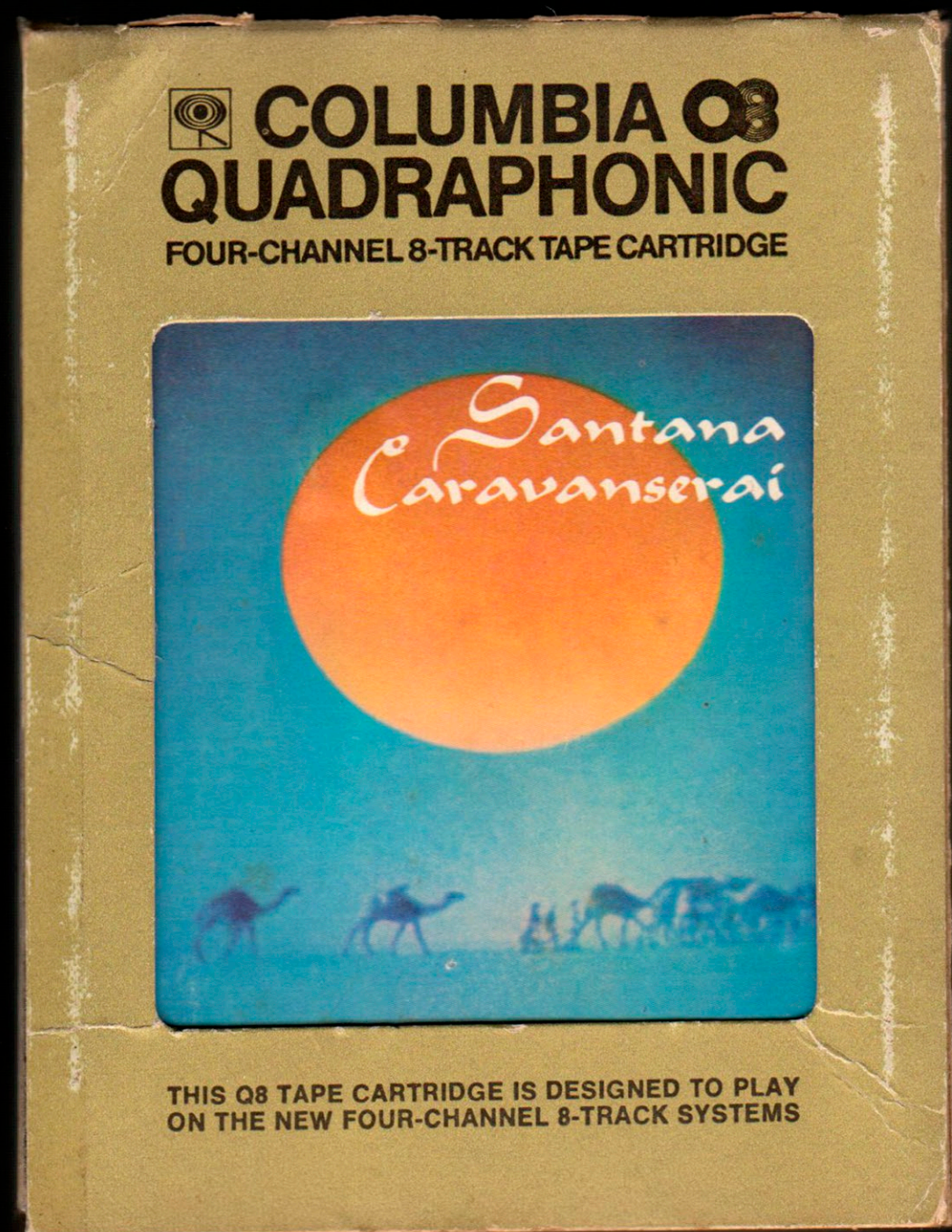
**Amps** Pass XA200.8s

**Cable** Cardas Clear



Santana -  
*Caravanserai*

You might have it, but...  
Do you have it on QUAD 8-track?

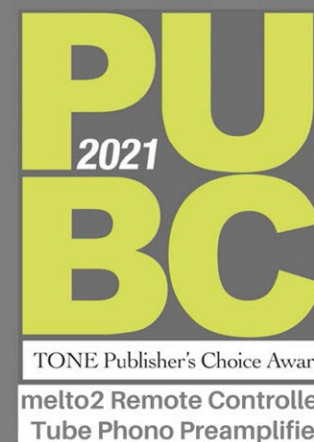


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Learn the truth on the PrimaLuna  YouTube channel.

## PrimaLuna EVO 400 Preamplifier

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

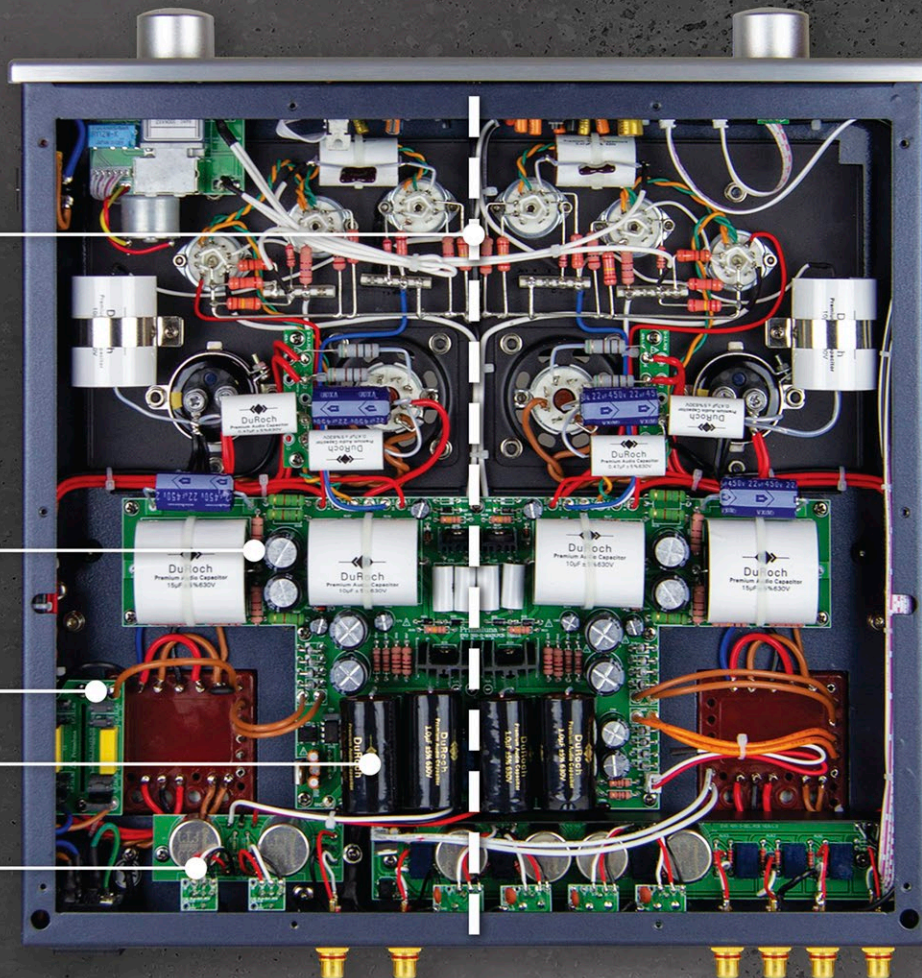
**Point-to-point wiring** with **Swiss-made silver-plated OFC wire** improves sound beyond what's possible with PCBs

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

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

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

**Transformer-coupled XLR** plus RCA connections for ultimate flexibility



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

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## Skyanalog G2

\$1,995  
gramophone.ca

This Chinese MC cartridge is showing a lot of promise right out of the box.

With a low-ish .35mv output, it's looking more like a super quiet phono pre is the way to roll.

Suggested tracking force is 1.6 grams, and suggested loading is 200 - 470 ohms.

We'll have more to report very soon.



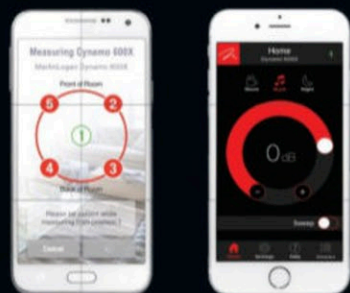




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## FUTURE TENSE Reviews in our immediate future...



### Luxman LMC-5

\$2,395  
[luxmanamerica.com](http://luxmanamerica.com)

Luxman's first cartridge in 40 years is a stunner, right out of the box.

We'll have a full review very shortly, but this is a lovely cartridge that is priced right.

Whether you have a Luxman turntable and amplifier or not, this one should be on your list.

And, as you might suspect, the LMC-5 is a perfect match for the phono stage in the Luxman integrated amplifiers.

They suggest higher than 40 ohm loading and a tracking force of 2.1 to 2.3 grams.

And, it's red.



# Tone Imports

ACOUSTICPLAN

AUDITORIUM 23

EMT

J.C. VERDIER

LEBEN HI-FI

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SENTEC

SHINDO LABORATORY

SPEC CORPORATION

SUGDEN AUDIO

TELLURIUM Q

TONAPPARATE

TONEIMPORTS.COM



**FUTURE** TENSE Reviews in our immediate future...



## Plenty of Outlets...

\$1,899/pair  
[underwoodhifi.com](http://underwoodhifi.com)

Core Power has done some major improvements to the latest (MkIII) version of their 1800-watt power conditioner/isolation transformer.

The new version is quieter than the last, and has more outlets.

Always a big help in system setup.





# 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](#)



JL AUDIO® | How we play.®

© 2020 JL AUDIO, Inc. For more information on our complete line of subwoofers, please visit your local authorized dealer or [www.jlaudio.com](http://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...

## Manley Labs Chinook Special Edition MKII

\$2,899  
[upscaleaudio.com](http://upscaleaudio.com)

The Manley Chinook has always been a killer deal in single input phono preamplifiers. This one delivers so much of what the legendary Manley Steelhead can, but with fewer adjustments and one input.

The sound is quiet and engaging. Available only from Upscale, this version comes in black or silver (to better match PrimaLuna components) and comes with hotrod tubes, hand picked by Mr. Deal himself.





# A New Classic.

The new Mini, A612, and A614 speakers from Heretic will take you back to a friendlier day.

Modern re-imagining of a classic design takes these compact monitors to a place that will make you smile.

Read the full story here.

[www.thehereticspeaker.com](http://www.thehereticspeaker.com)



FUTURE

TENSE

Reviews in our immediate future...

## Hana Umami Red Limited

\$3,950  
[musicalsurrroundings.com](http://musicalsurrroundings.com)

Hana has been making some incredible cartridges in the \$800 - \$1,500 range for some time now.

We can only imagine what their new flagship, for almost \$4,000 will sound like.

However, the photos are taken and we are ready to spin some records.

The Umami Red is made in Japan and features an output of .6mV, and a suggested load impedance of greater than 60 ohms.





# QUTEST SYSTEM



**DESKTOP AUDIO  
REDEFINED**



The Qutest range distils more than 30 years of award-winning British design, engineering and craftsmanship into a compact home audio system for the modern age.

**FUTURE TENSE** Reviews in our immediate future...

## SVS SoundPath Wireless Audio Adapters

\$119.99 each

svsound.com.

Always the leaders in hifi coolness at realistic prices, SVS introduces their SoundPath adapters to make your SVS sub a wireless device.

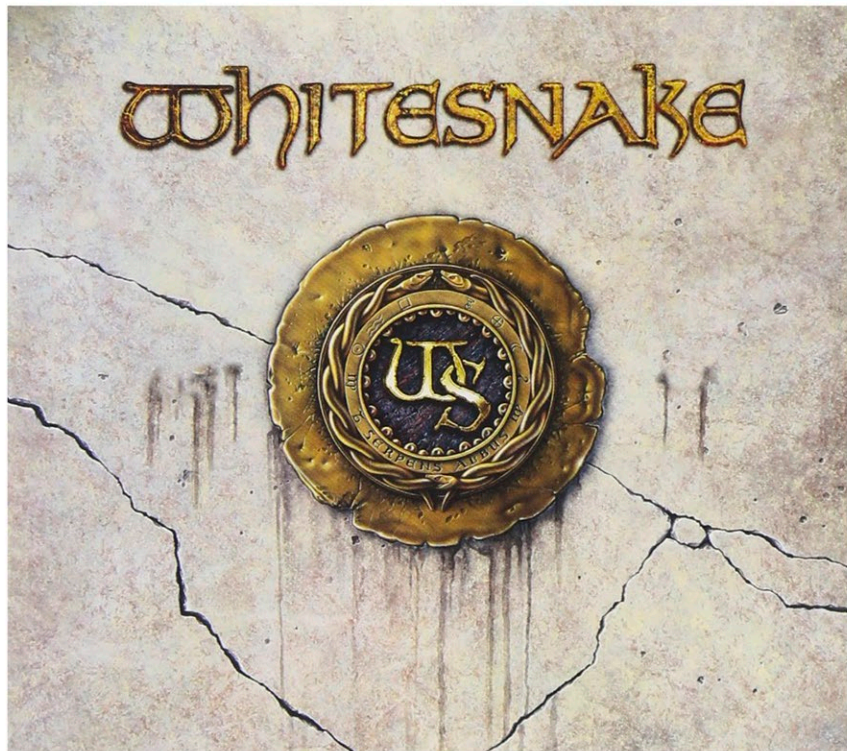
This makes positioning a subwoofer so much easier, no longer tethered by a cable.





COVID has somehow delayed our publisher from getting a haircut (again). A recent experience with a Barista, and being told he looked like a sheepdog prompted a hair metal playlist.

And a trip back to that period of time.



**Whitesnake** - Spit it Out

**Motley Crue** - Piece of Your Action

**Motley Crue** - Don't Go Away Mad (Just Go Away)

**Def Leppard** - Pour Some Sugar On Me

**Twisted Sister** - I Wanna Rock

**Guns N' Roses** - Down on the Farm

**Kiss** - Two Timer

**Loudness** - Rock & Roll Crazy Nights

**Spinal Tap** - Sex Farm

**Lynch Mob** - Wicked Sensation

**Ratt** - Lay it Down

**David Lee Roth** - Ladies' Night in Buffalo

VINNIE § ROSSI



## 300B, OR NOT TO BE...

Brama Integrated Amplifier's lineage is Vinnie Rossi's realization of the audiophile dream — having it both ways, each at the highest possible level of performance:

Whether you are seeking the tonally rich and holographic presentation of 300B directly-heated triodes, or the absolute purity of solid-state, the Brama lineage is the only one in the world that lets you enjoy both sonic presentations with the press of a button.

With 350 Watts RMS of power per channel into 4-ohms (2-ohm stable), Brama Integrated Amplifier's high-current, class AB lateral MOSFET output stage drives the most demanding loudspeakers with absolute conviction.

For a demonstration, visit our state of the art showroom. Brama Integrated, Preamp and Power Amp are on display.



# Swill

Sponsored by Cardas Audio

TEXT: Cameron VanDerHorst PHOTO: Jillian Klemm

**M**etalhead or not, Iron Maiden is a band that needs absolutely no introduction.

Bruce Dickinson's soaring vocals, Steve Harris' chugging bass, Nicko McBrain's pulse-pounding drumming, and, of course, the one-two guitar-god punch of Dave Murray and Adrian Smith combine to create a sound that, for some, defines the words "heavy metal." Incidentally, they happen to make a pretty damn good beer, too.

Like Iron Maiden, Brewdog is a world-famous name that hails from the UK (Scotland, to be exact). While you might be familiar with the Iron Maiden Trooper family of beers, as well as Brewdog's impressive output, Hellcat is likely a new name for you. It's exclusive to the US, and it's somewhat confusingly labeled "American India Pale Lager."



TONE 111.044

Paradigm<sup>®</sup>  
*Founder*  
S E R I E S

## When Art Embraces Science, Anything is Possible

**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.



Shown in Paradigm's  
exclusive **Midnight  
Cherry Finish.**



**Designed, engineered, and fully  
Crafted in Canada,** by people  
who love great audio (*just like you*).



Shown: Founder 120H

[paradigm.com/findmydealer](http://paradigm.com/findmydealer)



*"No reason to mince words: this is the best  
headphone amplifier I have ever used..."*

Ken Kessler, Hi-Fi News

*"It's rare that you come  
across something that  
is so totally different.  
It's a beautiful design,  
flush with fun options  
that make it an  
absolute joy to play  
with, and it sounds  
absolutely fantastic to  
boot!"*

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+

*"It does what an audiophile amplifier is  
supposed to do...to say it is musical is to  
barely scratch the surface."*

Gary Alan Barker, Headphone.guru

MANLEY  
LABORATORIES, INC.

absolute  
HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER



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Handcrafted in Chino, California

# Swill

Sponsored by Cardas Audio

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...

There's nothing confusing about the taste, however. Hellcat effortlessly balances traditional IPA flavors with the best of what good old-fashioned American lagers have to offer the palate (regular Swill readers will know that I'm quite fond of both). The light golden color and strong, aromatic citrus scent clues you in to the overwhelmingly pleasant drinking experience you're about to have. The taste exists in sharp contrast to the artwork on the can, which has become, in my eyes, at least, one of the coolest beer cans in my collection.

The design is aggressive, and grabs your attention immediately: flat black, depicting Iron Maiden's famous mascot Eddie as a lion emerging from the depths of hell, complete with the backdrop of a wicked thunderstorm. It's appropriate heavy-metal imagery from the band that brought us "Run to the Hills," "Aces High," and "The Trooper." Even if you don't end up liking the taste, a six-pack will look downright awesome hanging out in your fridge.

You will like the taste, though. Hellcat follows through on the promises made by so many mediocre pilsners before it. A strong – but never overpowering – citrus taste starts the party, with only the mildest hint of piney hops and a smooth finish. There's absolutely no bitterness to speak of, with a flavor that's somewhat sophisticated without being excessively challenging. You won't have to worry about choking down a can of this stuff – you'll cherish every drop as it goes down like the swill you killed by the case back in your college days. Speaking of which, it might be worth seeing if your old denim battle vest still fits.

No bark, no bite – Hellcat is a kitten among beers.



TONE 111.066



## 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, 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.

## Make Yourself More Snackable...

\$19.00  
swagboxers.com

You've probably figured out by now that we're a lot less grown up than those other hifi magazines.

But who wouldn't want Pop Tart underwear?

Yeah, you know who wouldn't.



## THE COMPONENTS OF EXCELLENCE: LASTING VALUE

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



Made in the USA

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

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

Timeless design. Legendary construction.  
Sound investment.

**WWW.AUDIOCLASSICS.COM**  
AUDIO • HOME THEATER • STEREO

3501 Vestal Road • Vestal, New York 13850 Call 607-766-3501 or 800-321-2834  
Hours: Monday-Friday 8-5:30 EST - Other Hours by Appointment



MINE  
it should be YOURS



### Mighty Meat Alternative...

\$12.00  
costco.com

I'm not vegan, but I'm always exploring meat-alternative foods, so I've got some choices when my vegan friends want to barbecue.

Though these are a little bit high on the sodium count (as Joe Jackson once said, "everything gives you cancer.") they are pretty yummy, and the spicy ones are really good.

Should you find yourself enjoying these, Costco is the hot ticket for buying them at the best price. Now if we could only buy pallets of tubes at Costco. Right?

TONE111.068

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



**T+A**  
Engineering Emotion



**MINE**  
it should be **YOURS**



### Condiment Dispenser ray gun...

\$18.00  
[amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Not quite sure about the sanitary aspect of this device, but in the event we all start attending tailgate parties and backyard cookouts again, this would be a great conversation starter.

Right?

TONE111.069

We Are  
**Young.**

We Are  
**Fun.**


We Are  
 **KIN Play**




**TOTEM** 

*Discover yours*

[totemacoustic.com](https://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!



MINE  
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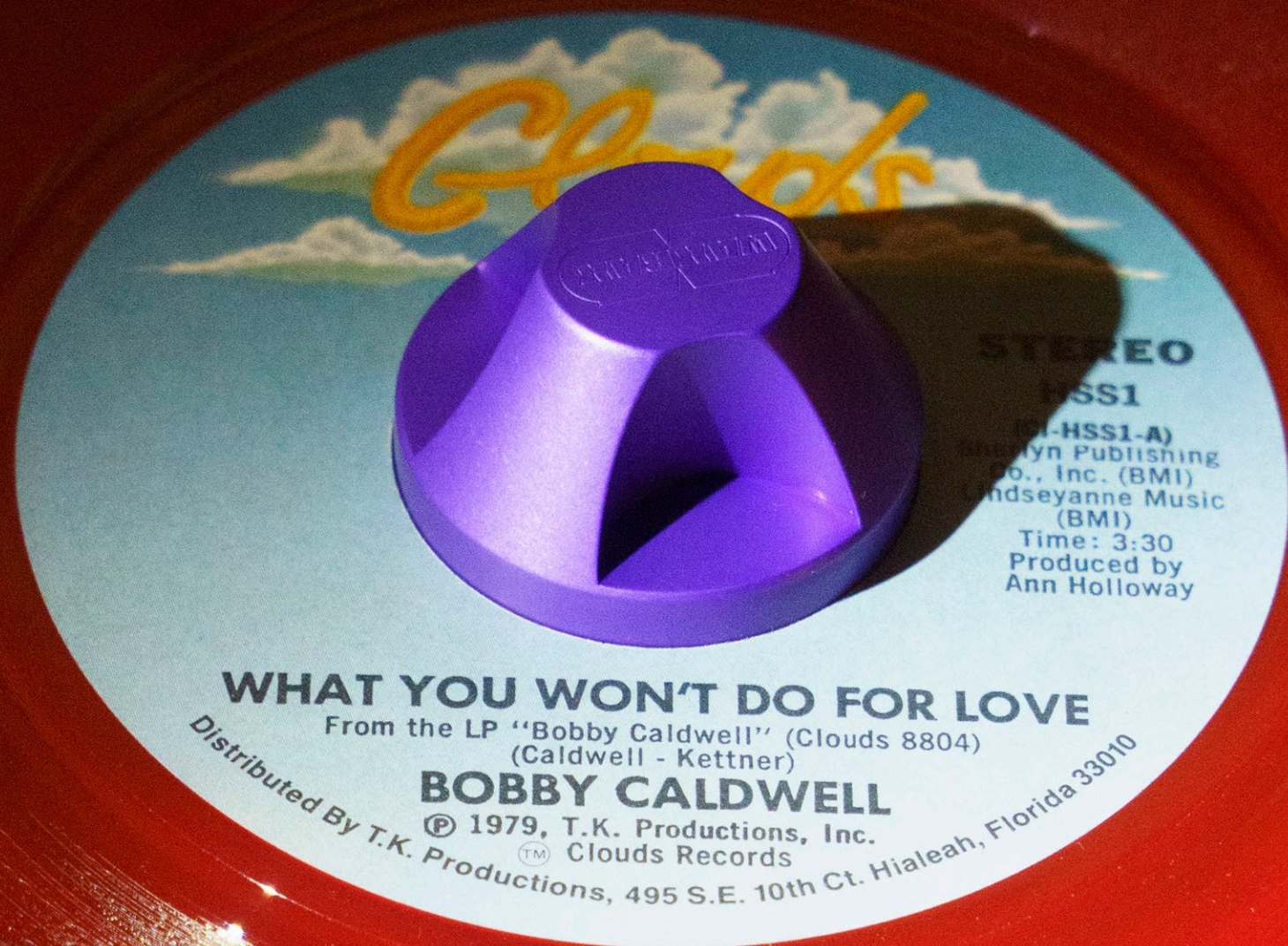
Give those 45s some style...

\$25  
waxrax.com

We've been using the aluminum WaxRax cart for sometime now and it's fantastic.

They've branched to some new accessories - like the 45 adapter you see here.

Made from billet aluminum, they are anodized in black, silver, and the purple you see below.



# Boulder

## 866 Integrated



200 Watts Per Channel

Roon Endpoint

3 Analog Inputs

Digital Inputs and Streaming Capabilities

App Control

Designed & Built In U.S.A.

Renowned and Awarded Throughout the World



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

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

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



**MINE**  
it should be **YOURS**

### Keep that stylus clean...

\$30.00

[sierrasound.com](http://sierrasound.com)

It's so easy to think of every other aspect of vinyl playback, the most important part of the entire interface is the tiny stylus tip that contacts your records. This gets dirty, and all the magic is gone.

No matter how clean you keep your records, that miniscule tip gets gunked up. Sierra Sound's enzymatic cleaner will not affect the stylus to cantilever bond negatively, so no matter what cartridge you're sporting, it's safe.



**PENAUDIO**<sup>®</sup>  
auditional wellbeing<sup>™</sup>

[www.penaudio.fi](http://www.penaudio.fi) & [www.audiomania.fi](http://www.audiomania.fi)



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YOURS



## Cinch With Style

\$189

[filorossostudio.com](http://filorossostudio.com)

All of the Filorosso belts are made by hand, here in the US, from NYFD and LAFD fire hoses that are about to be retired.

What a better way to embrace a sustainable product, and show some major respect for a group of people that put their lives on the line for us every day?



**HIGH END BY OZ**  
THE WIZARD OF SOUND

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



**Thrax Enyo**



North American Importer & Distributor

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

North American Dealers

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NY 11725 USA, (631) 542-2728  
[www.stellarhomeaudio.com](http://www.stellarhomeaudio.com)

**Audio Den**  
105 Desperado Rd, Bailey, Co.  
USA (303) 478-8221  
[www.audioden.net](http://www.audioden.net)

**United Home Audio**  
Stafford, VA  
USA, (540) 295-8313  
[www.unitedhomeproducts.com](http://www.unitedhomeproducts.com)





it should be **MINE**  
**YOURS**

**Always be prepared...**

The Hulkman Sigma 1  
\$40  
hulkman.com

If you have a car or motorbike that you don't use as often as you should, get a Hulkman Sigma 1. This will save your batteries from expiring prematurely, and make sure you are always ready to zoom out the driveway to the record store. No need to get one of those fancy (and expensive) chargers from the dealer. More money for records!

TONE111.073

**W** WHARFEDALE

The reviews are in.



EV04



ELYSIAN



HERITAGE

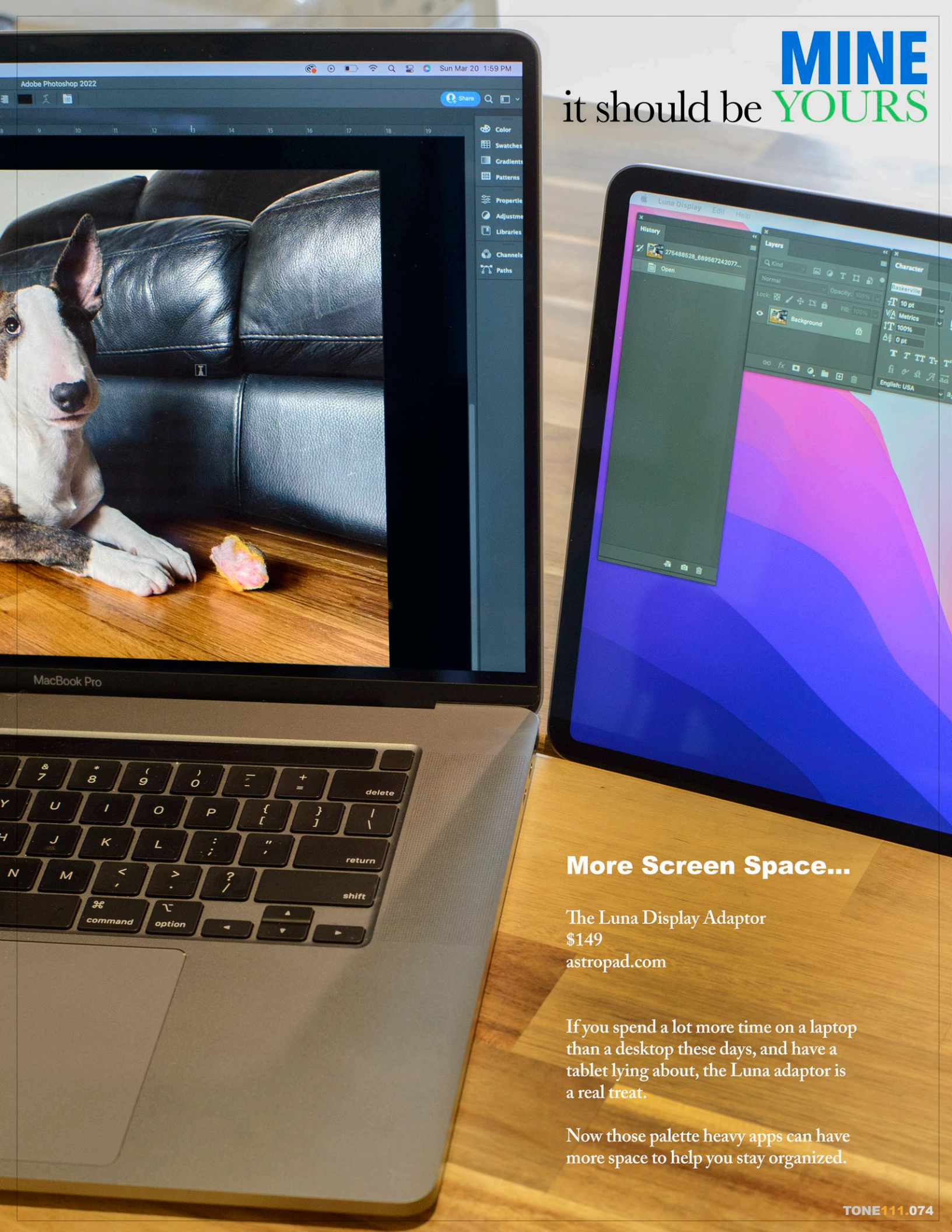


WharfedaleUSA.com

Find a local store. Free Shipping.

Mofi Distribution  
North American Distributor  
info@mofi.com





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**YOURS**

### More Screen Space...

The Luna Display Adaptor  
\$149  
[astropad.com](http://astropad.com)

If you spend a lot more time on a laptop than a desktop these days, and have a tablet lying about, the Luna adaptor is a real treat.

Now those palette heavy apps can have more space to help you stay organized.

TONE111.074

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



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

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



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!



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

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



PATHOS ACOUSTICS  
**Aurium**  
**Hybrid Headphone Amp**  
\$1,295

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



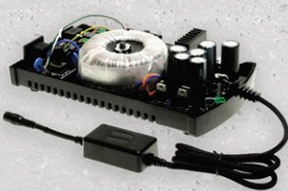
NAIM  
**NAC 152 XS + NAP 155 XS**  
**Pre/Power Bundle**  
\$2,249 (was \$5990!)

62% off! We made your dream of owning Naim come true! Take a peek inside on our YouTube channel.



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

Lumin's secret sauce yields incredible musicality from digital files, Tidal, Qobuz, and more. Call us and do digital right.



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

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



FELIKS AUDIO  
**Euforia**  
**Tube Headphone Amp**  
\$2,599

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

### KIRMUSS ULTRASONIC RECORD CLEANER

Restores THREE LPs  
and ONE 45  
*Simultaneously*



### Upscale Audio Edition

VINYL RESTORATION TAKES TIME

The Upscale Audio Edition processes 50% more LPs per session than the standard Kirmuss Record Cleaner.

Just \$1,335

LIMITED TIME OFFER

**\$999**

Expert advice. Exclusive deals. New & used. [upscaleaudio.com](http://upscaleaudio.com) 909.931.9686





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### Keep that phone handy...

\$36.95  
weathertech.com

If your car's cup holders are in the right spot, the Weather Tech CupFone is a great way to anchor your mobile phone.

These are robustly made, and come in a variety of sizes for different devices. The phone cradle is easy to adjust and is very solid.

TONE111.075



## European Superstars

turning heads, delighting hearts, igniting passion

Distributor in North America:  
matterhornaudio.com  
+1 617-494-1400  
info@matterhornaudio.com





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## Not just for dogs...

\$10-20 (larger ones, more)  
kongcompany.com

Some of my audiophile friends are just as stubborn, yet as easily distracted as my two bull terriers.

Enter the Kong Wubba.

Need to keep your pup busy for a little while? Check. Tired of pesky friends pontificating about stamper numbers, or wanting to pick a fight over cables?

Whip it out and squeeze it. I'll be sure to have one of these at the ready, next audio show I visit.

Trust me...

TONE111.076

## LE PHONO SE

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



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

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

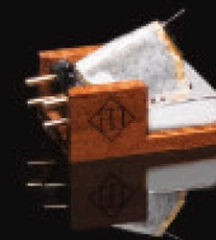
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Ana  
MIGHTY SOUND

# SCULPTURE A



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 phonostage and others.

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

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



## retip

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

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

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

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





MINE  
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## Nothin but flavor...

About \$.79/per bag  
amazon.com

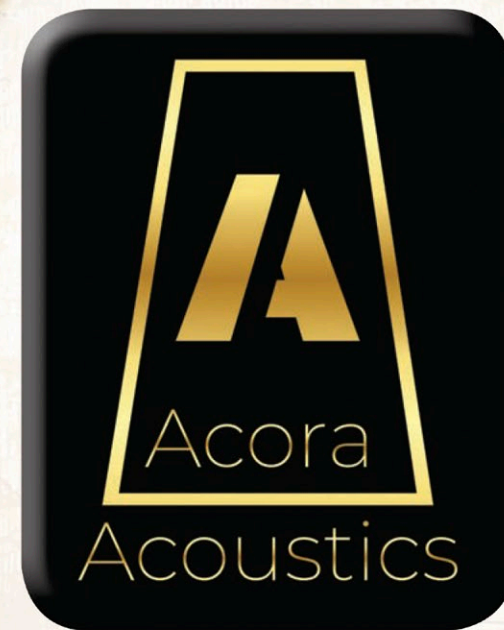
We spread the word when Rap Snacks hit the street years ago. It's great to see that they are going strong, and have added more stars and flavorful combinations.

The new Cheddar Bar-B-Que chips, inspired by Cardi B, are our current favorite.

But there are quite a few more. Go to Amazon and have em sent right to your door.



TONE111.077



-HEAR THE TRUTH-

The speakers with the all granite enclosure.  
Visit an Acora Acoustics dealer soon  
to audition any of the Acora Acoustics  
loudspeakers and....

-HEAR THE TRUTH-



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<https://www.facebook.com/acoraacoustics>

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



**MINE**  
it should be **YOURS**

Not really sneakers, but...

\$225/pair  
adidas.com

The Adidas Terrex Free Hikers are great when you need more than a sneaker but not quite a full fledged boot.

Draped in Gore-Tex, great logos, racing stripes, and cool colors, you'll be in style from Coachella to Costco.



TONE111.078

*Some of us never quit....*

Now available on 7 and 10-inch reels!

Reel to reel isn't the only revolution.

If you've always enjoyed making a mix tape, but are tired of the crazy prices for NOS cassettes, now there's an answer.

Try the new Capture C-60 cassettes, from Splicit.

It's a Type 1 tape, with plenty of range, to capture the nuance on your favorite LPs or CDs.

Hence the name.

[www.splicit.com](http://www.splicit.com)





# But you can't have it...

Well, maybe saying you can't have it in the ultimate sense is a bit too much, but between the current Ukraine crisis, and general unavailability of NOS tubes in general, finding some early Telefunken 12AX7s is tough these days.

Last time we looked a pair of these fetched close to \$1,000 a pair. As SpongeBob likes to say, "That's crazy talk."

Those of you that have a stash of these are probably wondering whether to keep the donuts or sell them at a tidy profit. It's like moving out of Southern California - you might make big money now, but you may never be able to afford to return.

We say smoke em if you've got em. Our editor has four, *somewhere*. It must be those pups hiding things again.



aqua  
acoustic quality



Dominio Digitale

TIMELESS

[www.aquahifi.com](http://www.aquahifi.com)  
[info@aquahifi.com](mailto:info@aquahifi.com)



**Ted Nugent -  
Ted Nugent**

Before The Motor City Madman was politically polarized, this was one of the most hard-rocking debuts ever.

The Analog Productions LP is the one.



**Underwood HiFi**  
VALUE INNOVATION IN HIGH END AUDIO



**NOW SHIPPING FROM STOCK**

**WARP 1 - 150 watts per channel @ 8 ohms – NextGen Class D**

Custom Designed and Developed for LSA  
Class-Leading - TI Pure-Path(tm) Ultra-HD Amp Core  
Breathtaking Performance at a Real World Price

**Sale Price \$1199**

We will let others do the talking for us  
Class D like you've never heard before –  
Unparalleled Sound – Incredible Price



"Consider my attitude changed. The LSA Warp One is a great amp, period. Class D has matured, and very well I might add. For \$1,195, we're definitely awarding this baby an Exceptional Value Award. Job well done".

**Jerold O'Brien – TONEAudio September 2021**

"The Warp One is the best amp I've heard under \$2K dollars."

**Greg Voth – Stereotimes September 2021**



[underwoodhifi.com](http://underwoodhifi.com) | [underwoodwally@aol.com](mailto:underwoodwally@aol.com) | 770.667.5633

**CALL OR EMAIL  
TO ORDER**



# DTMB

## Dealers That Mean Business

**W**e've had this section at the back of TONE for some time now, and actually before we got hit with COVID, and it was easier to just pop in your favorite hifi store for a cursory visit, I was planning on an extended road trip to seek out great audio salons. I'm sorry to say that quest has been on hold for a while.

A few years later, times have changed, the landscape has changed somewhat, but the best dealers have adapted and are still thriving. Innovate or perish, as the saying goes. Most have gone to appointments only, which hasn't been all that much of a stretch, because many hifi shops had adopted this model, or at least a semi-appointment model before the current situation. Of course, stricter anti-cooties protocols have been engaged, and for the most part, customers have stayed in the game.

We've swapped a few people out here, but most of the dealers we were featuring are still doing well – we are truly glad for this. As it becomes easier and easier to travel again, I'll be back on the road seeking out more great dealers and attending events.

In the issues to come, we're also going to be featuring commentary from these dealers, telling their stories on how they've adjusted, and what, if anything they've learned and changed.

As we move into the year 2022 (which still feels weird saying) I still firmly believe the support from a great hifi dealer is essential to help you wade through the ever increasing complexity of audio, whether it be two channel, theater, or something in-between.

To recap what I've said here before: Nearly every audio system that has failed to achieve the greatness expected of it can be traced back to poor component choice and setup. I've heard a lot of systems all over the world, and it always falls back to these two factors.

The top retailers need our support now more than ever.



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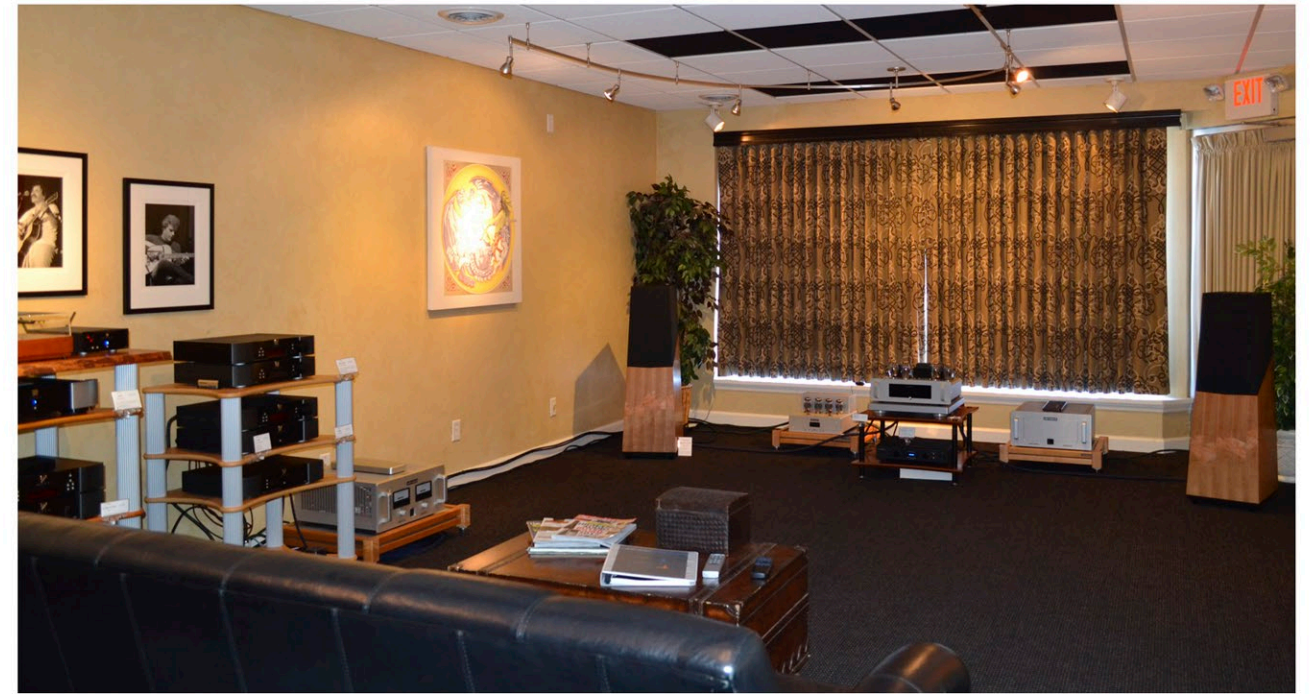
### Wauwatosa, Wisconsin - Ultra Fidelis

[www.ultrafidelis.com](http://www.ultrafidelis.com)

7125 West North Avenue

Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53213

414.221.0200



### Portland, Oregon - Echo Audio

[www.echohifi.com](http://www.echohifi.com)

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Portland, Oregon 97221

888.248.3246





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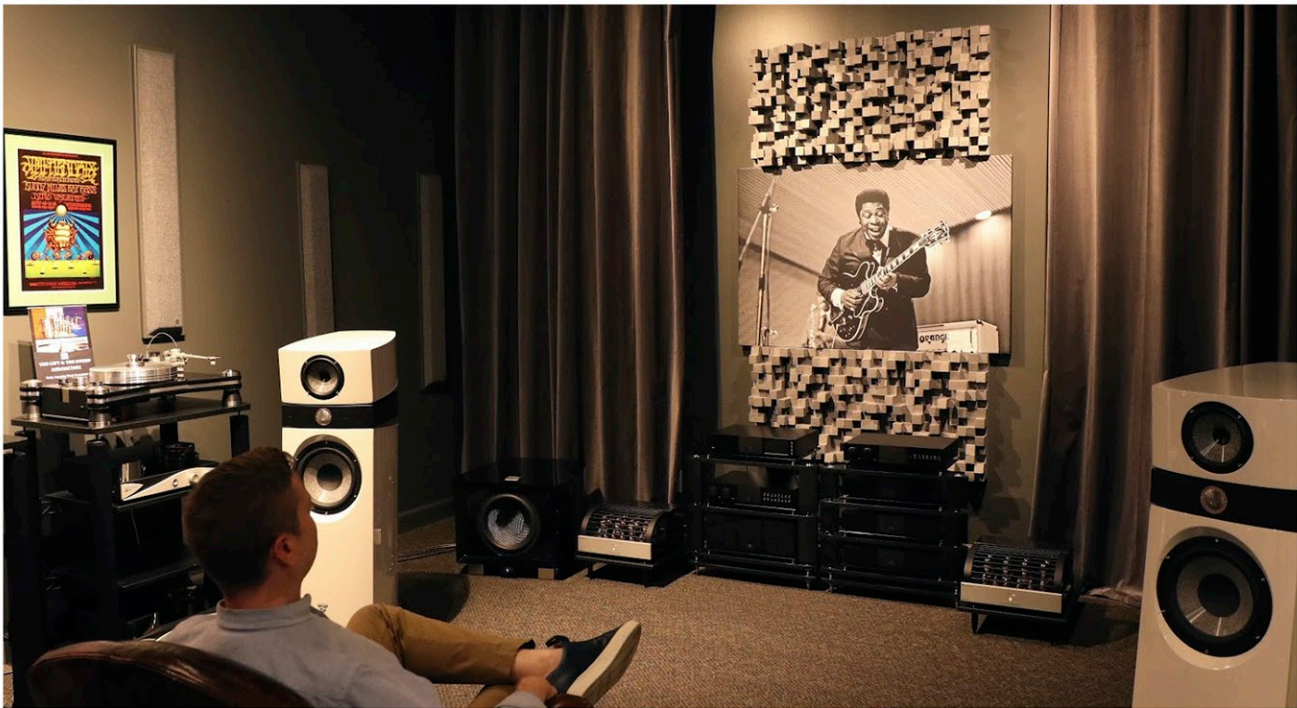


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upscaleaudio.com  
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## Testing

Wireworld Cable Technology was founded with the unique mission of perfecting audio cables through objective listening tests. Far more revealing than normal cable comparisons, these tests compare cables to virtually perfect direct connections between components. Robert Harley, editor of *The Absolute Sound*, described this "Cable Polygraph" as, "illuminating insight into exactly how each cable affects the sound."

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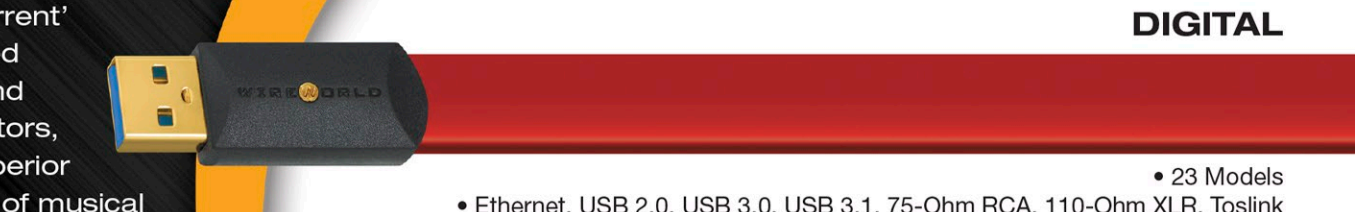
- 13 Models
- Standard and Biwire
- Custom lengths
- Interchangeable spades and banana plugs



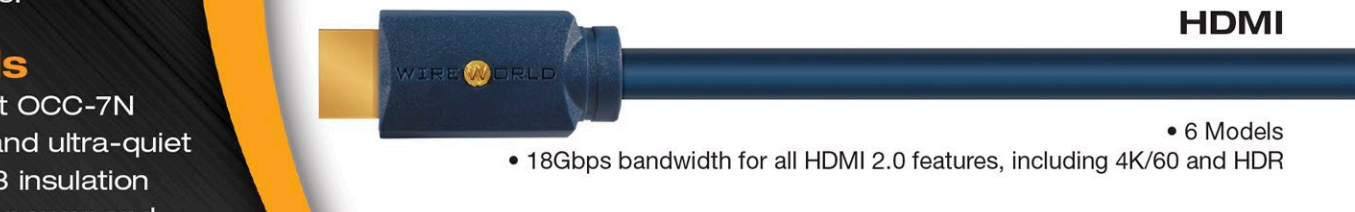
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**Scottsdale, Arizona - LMC Home Entertainment**  
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Scottsdale, Arizona  
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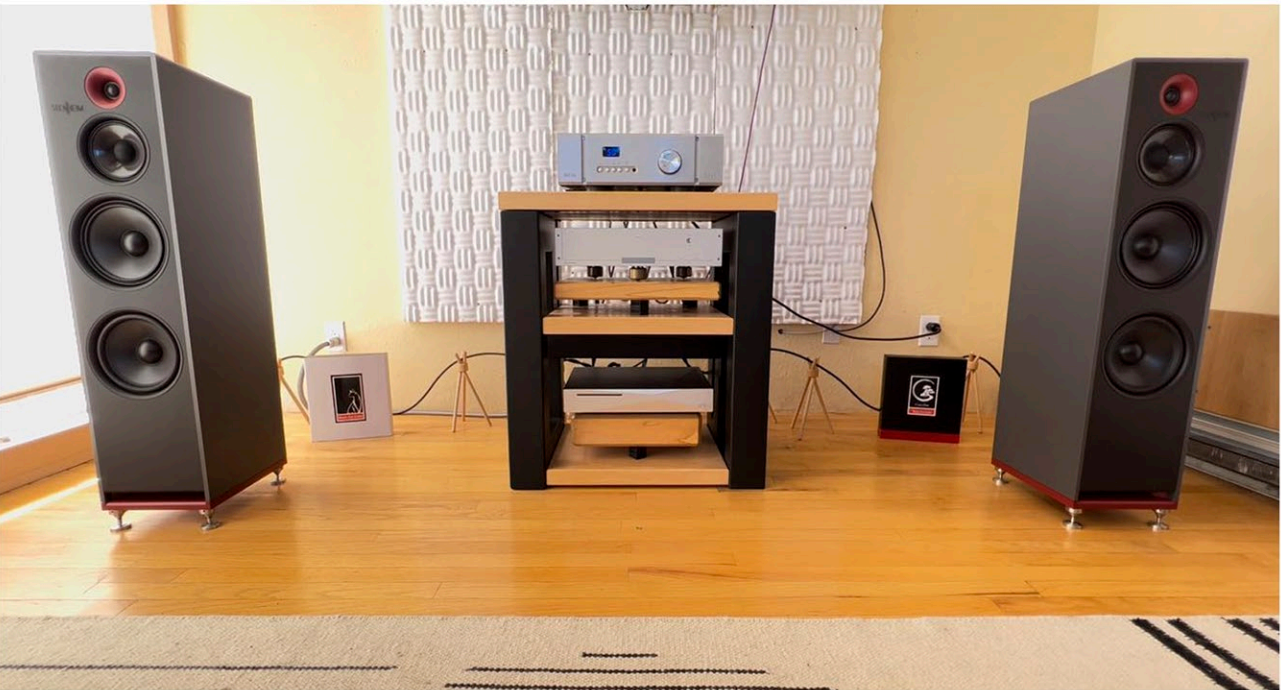


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**Sarasota, Florida - Suncoast Audio**  
www.suncoastaudio.com  
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Sarasota, Florida 34240 941.932.0282



**Santa Fe, New Mexico - Gestalt Audio**  
www.gestalthifi.com  
24 Sunlit Dr. West  
Santa Fe, NM 87508 (by appointment)

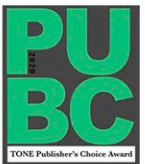


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## San Francisco, California - AudioVision San Francisco

[www.audiovisionsf.com](http://www.audiovisionsf.com)

1628 California Street

San Francisco, California 94109

415.614.1118



## Austin, Texas - Whetstone Audio

[www.whetstoneaudio.com](http://www.whetstoneaudio.com)

2401 E. 6th. Street #1001

Austin, Texas 78702

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

The first track starts out sounding like it's going to go off the rails, but it sets "the tone." A lot of cuts here that are Jazz inspired, and reworks of classics you know.

Enjoy!



**The Dining Rooms** - Do Hipsters Like Sun Ra?

**Guy Monk** - Living the Truth

**Llorca, Nicole Graham** - Indigo Blues

**El Michaels Affair**- C.R.E.A.M.

**Dzihan and Kamien** - Stiff Jazz

**Fieretag, James Alexander Bright** - It's Alright

**Koop** - Summer Sun

**Gare Du Nord** - Beautiful Day

**Ramsay Lewis** - Do What You Wanna (Mr. Scruff's Soul Party Remix)

**Dinah Washington** - Is You Is or Is You Ain't My Baby? (Rae and Christian Remix)

**Nina Simone, Sofi Tukker** - Sinnerman (Sofi Tukker Remix)

**Mel Torme** - Comin' Home Baby

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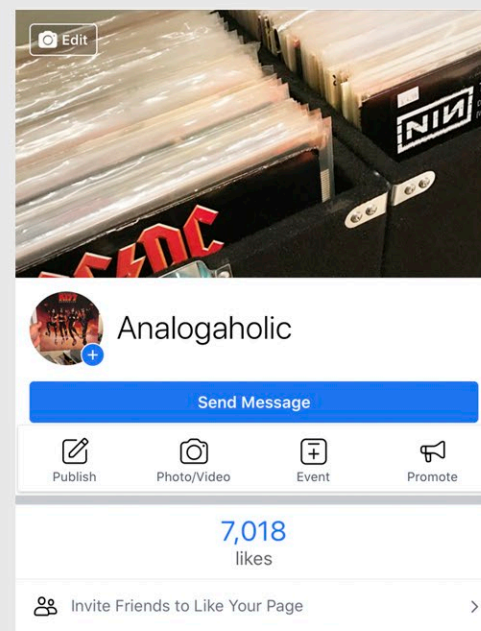
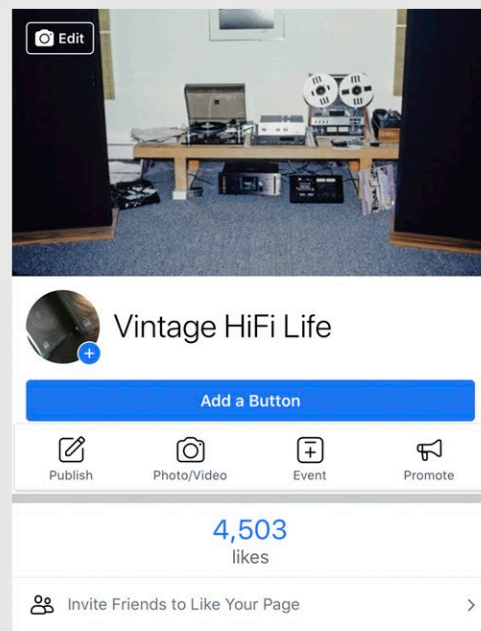
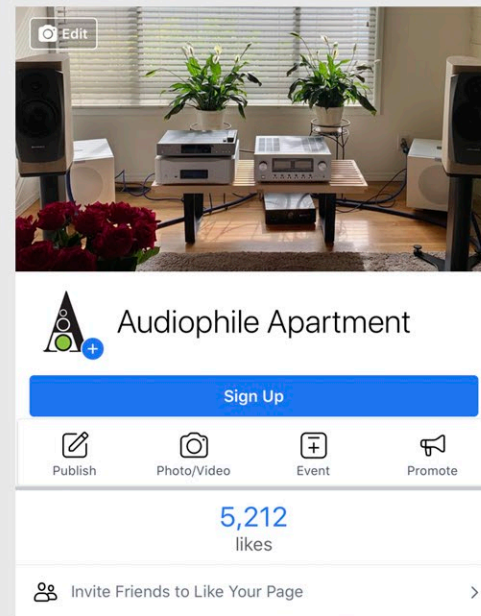
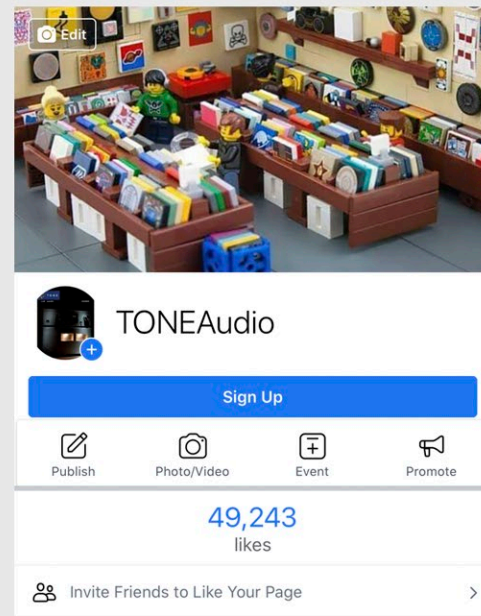
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ProAc	<a href="https://soundorg.com">soundorg.com</a>	Wireworld	<a href="https://wireworldcable.com">wireworldcable.com</a>
Quadratic Audio	<a href="https://quadraticaudio.com">quadraticaudio.com</a>		
REL	<a href="https://rel.net">rel.net</a>		





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

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

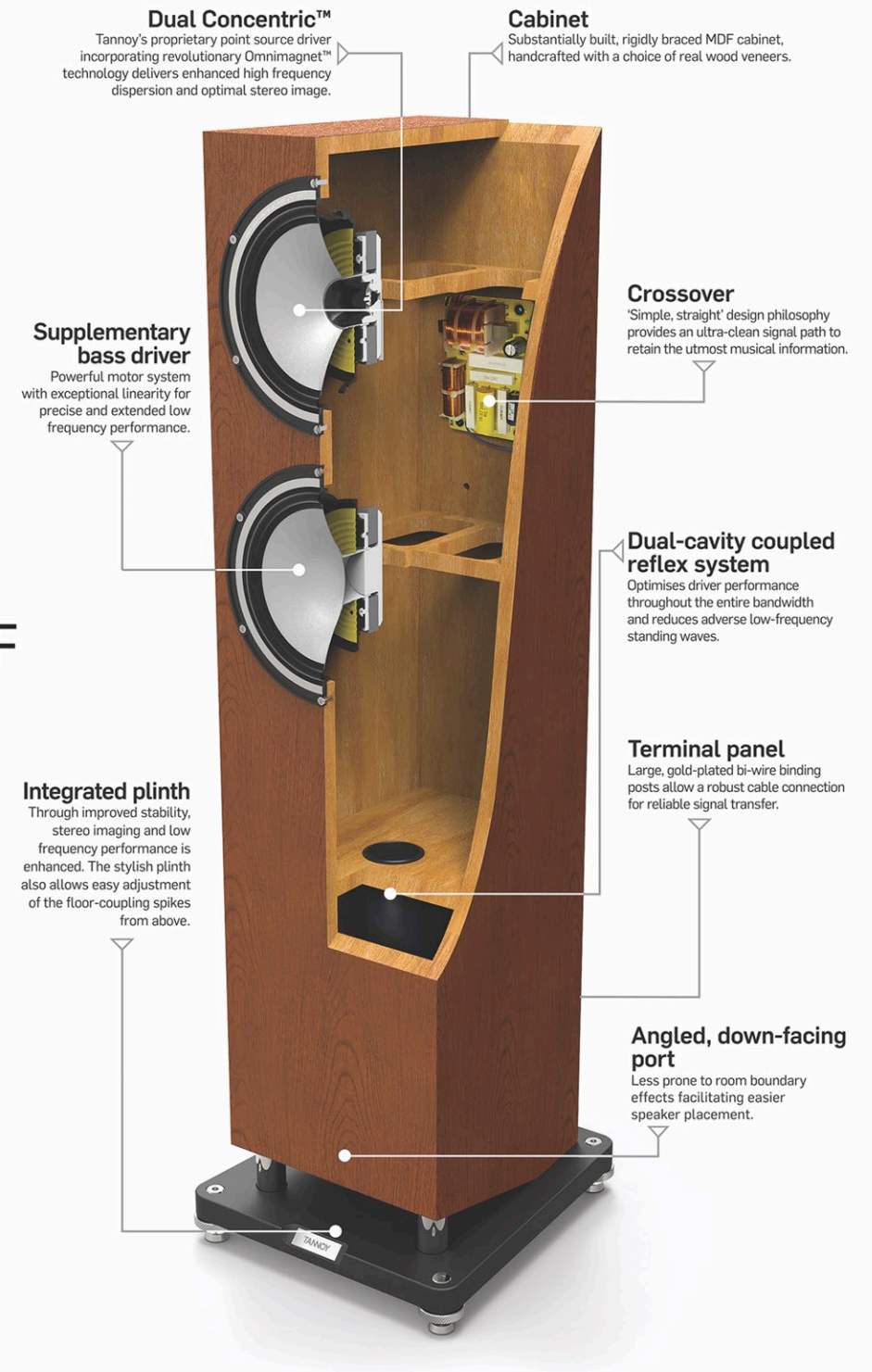


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"The Tannoy Revolution XT 8F was Robert Harley's top discovery at the 2015 Consumer Electronics Show. His first impression was as follows: 'After listening to it and looking at the real wood enclosure, I guessed the price at \$7000 to \$10,000. The 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





## Blast From The Past.

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If by coincidence you follow us on social media, you probably know about the our recent additions to the family. Lucy and Ricki are a pair of very energetic and inquisitive Bull Terriers.

In the midst of all the complexity that is high end audio, they have provided some much needed comic relief. There's nothing like 10 minutes of fetch to break even the worst creative block.

And, it's worth noting that these two are much happier with a \$2 tennis ball, than any of us will ever be with the most expensive speakers on Earth.

There's a lesson there.



## INTRODUCING 212/SX

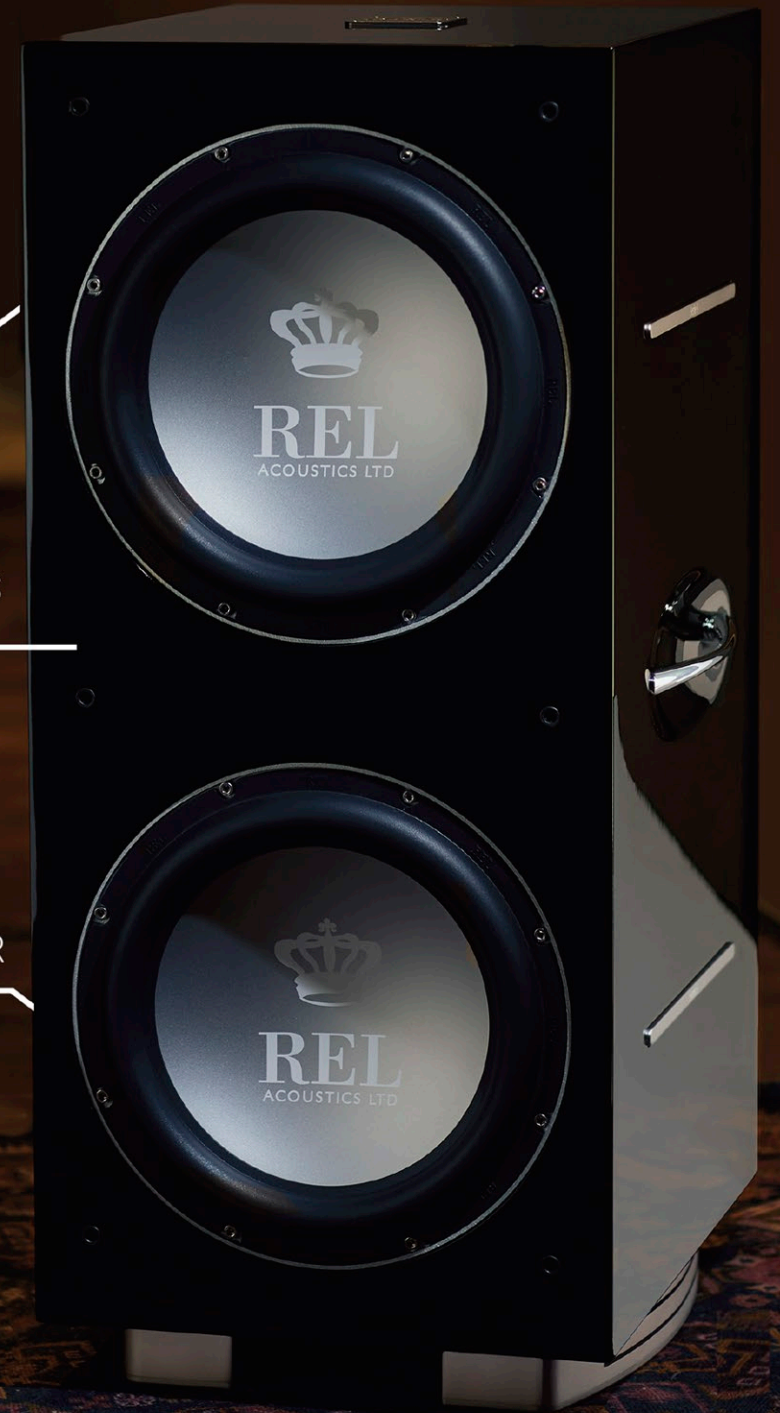
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Next issue, **112:**

Next issue...(mostly) phono stages.

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Hopefully, if you're in the market, we might be  
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