



For Those About To Shop
WE SALUTE YOU!

Bonus Issue!

2009

TONEAudio
★ AWARDS

Exceptional
Value
Awards

Product
of the Year
Awards

Publisher's
Choice
Awards

*Holiday
Gift Guide*

PUBLISHER Jeff Dorgay

EDITOR Bob Golfen

ART DIRECTOR Jean Dorgay

MUSIC EDITOR Ben Fong-Torres

**ASSISTANT
MUSIC EDITOR** Bob Gendron

MUSIC VISIONARY Terry Currier

STYLE EDITOR Scott Tetzlaff

**CONTRIBUTING
WRITERS** Tom Caselli

Kurt Doslou

Lawrence Devoe

Anne Farnsworth

Joe Golfen

Jesse Hamlin

Rich Kent

Ken Kessler

Hood McTiernan

Rick Moore

Jerold O'Brien

Michele Rundgren

Todd Sageser

Richard Simmons

Jaan Uhelszki

Randy Wells

UBER CARTOONIST Liza Donnelly

ADVERTISING Jeff Dorgay

WEBSITE bloodymonster.com



tonepublications.com

Editor Questions and
Comments:

tonepub@yahoo.com

800.432.4569

© 2009 TONE MAGAZINE, LLC

All rights reserved.

verity

verityaudio.com

CONTENTS

6. PUBLISHER'S LETTER

7. TONE TOON
By Liza Donnelly



8



53

features

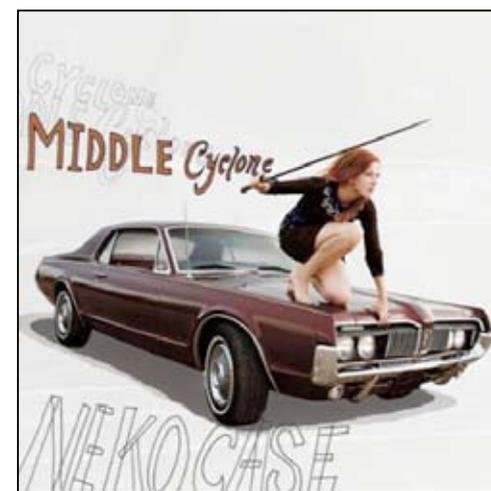
8 **Review:**
The Loiminchay Kandinsky
By Jeff Dorgay

15 **Music:**
2009's Best Rock & Pop Albums
By Bob Gendron

23 **Review:**
The Qsonix Music Server
By Jeff Dorgay and Hood McTieman

53 **Review:**
The GamuT S-7 Speakers
By Jeff Dorgay

60 **Music:**
Recordings of the Year
By Jeff Dorgay



Pg.15 Best Pop & Rock 2009

CONTENTS



Pg. 31. *Holiday
Gift Guide*



Pg. 42 The QSonix Jukebox

CONTENTS

2009

TONEAudio
★AWARDS



- 66. Exceptional Value Awards
- 81. Product of the Year Awards
- 97. Publisher's Choice Awards

2009

PUBLISHER'S LETTER

Though some of you might still be digesting our last issue, we made the decision to add the Holiday Gift Guide and annual awards as its own issue this year, giving you a "bonus" issue of TONEAudio to read. Next year in 2010 (I'm still finding that weird to say out loud), we will expand to an eight-issue schedule, bringing you even more music, gear and related fun things to read about.



While there are many conspiracy theories regarding how and why our awards are given out, our methodology is actually pretty simple. I don't subject anyone on the staff to reviewing gear in which they aren't enthused, so most of the gear you read about in our pages is award-worthy to begin with. We're trying to help you put together a great HiFi system, not argue about whether the red Power Ranger is better than the blue one. Pontificating about whether this amplifier or that speaker is rubbish is just a waste of everyone's time.

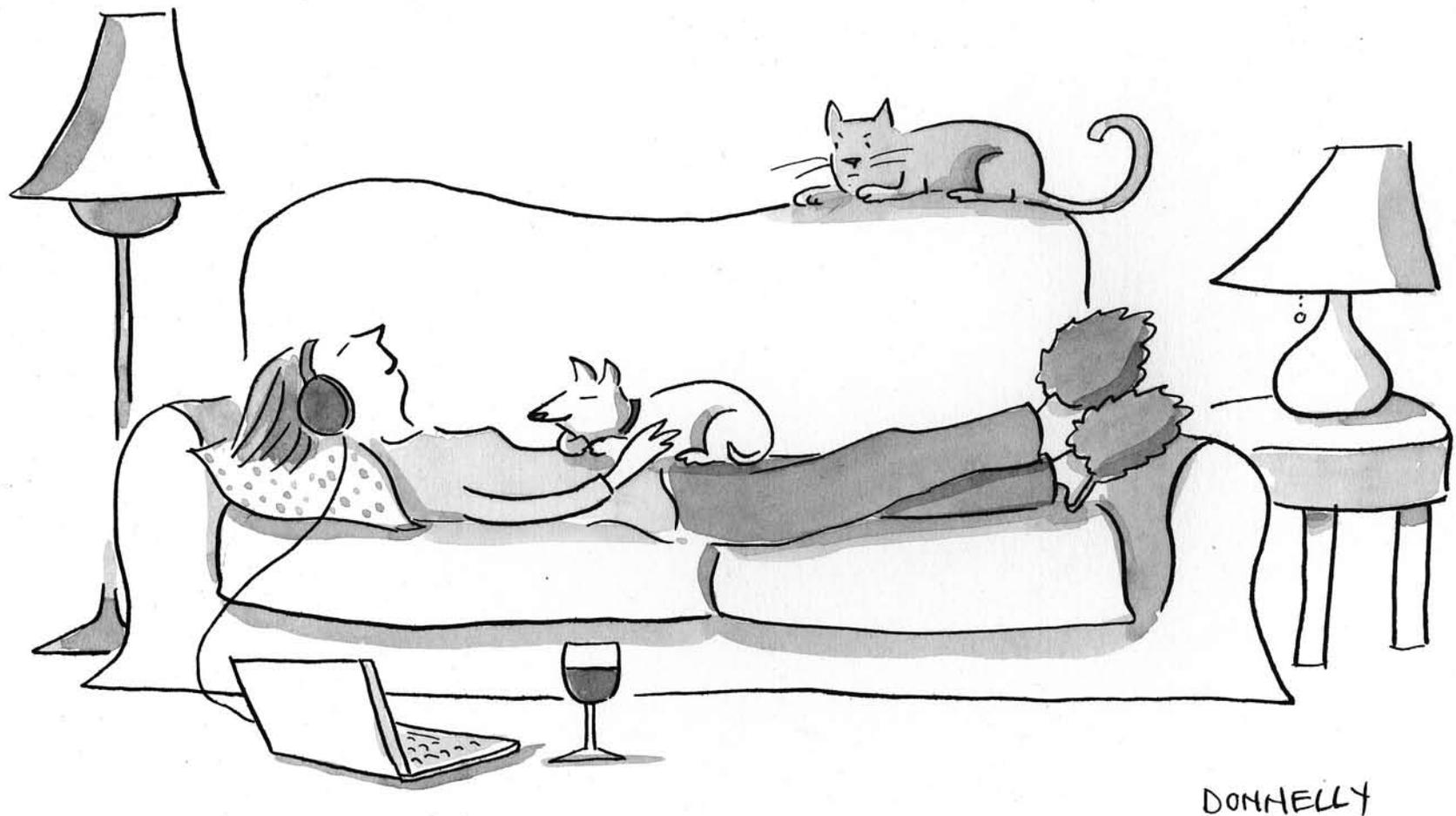
However, we don't want to appear like a kids' soccer team that gives a trophy to every player, either. After five years, our awards have expanded a bit, but some of that is due to our reviewing more gear than we did just two years ago.

So to break it down, our Exceptional Value Awards are just that. While I still feel that there are no short cuts to making great HiFi components, there are some items that do play above what the competition offers at particular price points. The Product of the Year awards go to the products that we felt offered the best combination of performance, build quality and aesthetics in their particular category. The Publisher's Choice award is completely self-indulgent on my part; these are the products that I unilaterally think are super cool and invoke a strong emotional response.

We've rustled up quite a few fun things for the Holiday Gift Guide as well. If you need a hint for your favorite music/audio lover, I hope we can help out with your holiday shopping needs. When all else fails and you're thinking "but I never know what to buy him," call our friends at Music Direct and purchase a big gift certificate. Sometimes, the best presents are the ones you pick out yourself.

Happy holidays, and we'll see you again in late December.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. J. O.' or similar, written in a cursive style.



DONNELLY

Our cartoonist, Liza Donnelly, is taking a much deserved break this issue.

*You can check out her latest book
Cartoon Marriage: Adventures in Love and Matrimony
in our Holiday Gift Guide or online at
www.lizadonnelly.com*

The Loiminchay Kandinsky

The Essence of Musicality

By Jeff Dorgay





All Loiminchay speakers share a cabinet design made of laminated wood, layered up into a large billet with their centers machined out that create the space for the drivers and crossover networks. When this task is complete and the final shape is sanded into place, 16 coats of lacquer are applied, with sanding between them to achieve the deep luster of the final speaker system.

Examining Patrick Chu's (the founder of Loiminchay) pen collection, it becomes easier to see the level of craftsmanship and high art he achieves. This is why his speakers cost slightly upwards of 60 thousand dollars a pair. Yes, there are competent speakers for less money, but if you desire something truly special, a visual as well as an aural work of fine art, then read on. The Kandinsky is fantastic on many levels. Much like an Eames Lounge Chair or a Porsche 911, this is a work of art of which you will never tire, yet performs its function better than most of its contemporaries.



Designed here in America, but built in Chu's factory in China, the Loiminchay speakers put to rest the notion that high quality cannot come from such an arrangement. When you walk around the speakers and run your hand across the cabinets, the quality is instantly apparent, exceeding that of the others in this price range. This level of uniqueness and craftsmanship is why collectors around the world routinely pay six figures for Chu's handmade fountain pens. Fortunately for Loiminchay's competitors, only six pairs of Kandinskys are made per year.

Burmester

ART FOR THE EAR



061 CD Player



035 Pre Amplifier



931 RDS FM Tuner



036 Power Amplifier

Classic Line



Burmester Audiosysteme

I was highly impressed with the Loiminchay Chagalls that we reviewed last year. They were transparent, dynamic and tonally truthful, while highly revealing of minute musical detail. The Kandinsky speakers go a few steps further in all directions. As I have said many times in the pages of this magazine, I love a speaker with an expansive sound, and if combined with a tonally correct midrange, I'll forgo most other parameters in the pursuit of these two.

With the Kandinsky, you can have it all.

This review deviates a bit from our standard reviewing protocol, where the manufacturer sends us the gear; we set it up in our room, etc. etc. Because of the weight and delicacy of the Kandinsky, I did not want to take a chance of having Chu's masterpieces tarnished in any way by shipping them from New York to the state of Washington. As only six pair of Kandinskys are built per year, I didn't want to have a pair reduced to B-stock on my watch.

Chu's reference system consists of gear of which I am intimately familiar: the Nagra PL-P preamplifier, their vacuum tube VPA, the Nagra CD player and a Linn LP-12 with Koetsu Ure-shi cartridge. Not only are they familiar players but personal favorites. As fortune would have it, our travel schedules aligned perfectly with the CEDIA show and I would only be two hours away in Atlanta when Chu had time, so I could spend two solid days listening to the Kandinskys without succumbing to flight fatigue.

(continued)

Setup

Chu's room is slightly larger than mine, about 18 x 30 feet, with hardwood floors counteracted by plenty of acoustic treatment on the ceiling. He also had bits of acoustic treatment strategically placed around the room with care. Walking around the room and doing the informal but effective "hand clap" test of room acoustics revealed it to be just slightly live, with a natural decay that I found very pleasing and similar to my own room, reinforcing the decision to come here for the listening sessions.

The speakers were about 11 feet apart, slightly toed in, and about five feet from the rear wall, with the listening spot about 18 feet back. Van DenHul cable was used throughout, and the components were all plugged directly into the wall. Chu had the system fully warmed up by the time I started listening, and the speakers had more than enough hours for them to be considered "broken in."

The Kandinskys have a sensitivity of about 95 db overall, so the 50 watts per channel that the Nagra amplifiers provided was more than enough to achieve realistic volume levels and the dynamic range to play quite loudly.

(continued)





An Unlikely Horn

My first encounter with the Kandinsky was a paradox. Ignoring the cabinetry, these speakers are a simple (on one level) two-way system, with a horn-loaded tweeter and 12-inch woofer. So my first impression when I sat in the listening chair in Chu's room at CES was that "these speakers could not possibly work..." Fifteen seconds into the demonstration, I was not only proven wrong but spellbound by the naturalness of the sound and the ease of the presentation. There was no "horn-like" feel at all! This 12-inch woofer crosses over to a two-inch beryllium tweeter mated to a 19-inch horn. Chu laughed when he told me, "It took a long time to get this perfect. I discarded quite a few prototypes."

As soon as we started playing records, the sound was just as I had remembered it: full of life. Listening to a wide range of music ranging from Pink Floyd to Maria Callas, everything sounded fantastic. The Kandinsky had such an absence of midrange coloration, yet with a lot of dynamic attack, the sound quality was effortless, no matter what level we were listening.

While I have had to get 20, 30 feet or even further away from other horn speakers that I have auditioned – so the drivers could integrate and get away from the typical "horn squawk" – the Kandinsky exhibited none of this behavior.

Bass response is claimed to go down to 30hz (which I have no reason to doubt after listening), and again, the Kandinsky had a perfect balance. There was enough grunt to play Pink Floyd, yet the delicacy to capture all the subtleties of the standup bass when we listened to acoustic jazz. When listening to a bass string plucked in air, the attack was right there, with the perfect amount of resonance and lingering, neither over damped nor loose. If you listen to a lot of acoustic music, you know how tough this feat is to achieve with most speakers. While some audiophiles prefer an overly damped, "tight" bass sound, this is not correct; the Kandinsky stays true to the music.

Ease and Naturalness

When we switched from jazz to vocals, everything became even more real. As beautiful as the Kandinskys are, when you turn your back to them to have a conversation, they perform the magic that few speakers can: it feels as if there is a jazz quartet or a vocalist with orchestra singing right behind you. I've heard only a handful of speakers at any price that can accomplish this feat, so I would place the Kandinsky up on a pedestal with the world's best speakers. And I've heard most of them. *(continued)*

Driver integration is spot on, and this speaker has no midrange coloration at all. And while it possessed a tremendous amount of low-level detail, it was never the slightest bit harsh regardless of whether we were playing music from analog or digital sources. When listening to the drum kit on Harry Whitaker's *Thoughts (Past and Present)*, the ride cymbals sounded so real that with my eyes closed, I could reach right out and touch them.

What puts a speaker at the top of my list of favorites, though, is that quality that makes you want to keep playing more records and explore more music. The Kandinsky puts you so deeply in a musical trance that you don't want to do anything else! We just kept pulling out more, listening to Patty Page, Sammy Davis Jr. and some Frank Sinatra, too. Awesome.

Also worth noting was the Kandinsky's wide dispersion pattern. The sweet spot was so wide, it was almost nonexistent, sounding very good whether in the center of the listening couch, off to the side, or even down on the floor. This is definitely a speaker system that a large group of people can enjoy in a listening session. *(continued)*



XS SERIES

The XS Series represents so much more than evolution.

Behind their brushed aluminum fascias, **XS Series** products embody radical and innovative audio engineering that builds on Naim's previous slimline X Series to take performance to yet greater heights.

The XS Series comprises a CD Player, FM Tuner, Integrated Amplifier, Preamp, Power Amplifier, and Power Supply, each one refined and polished to offer flawless system matching and matchless performance.

You can buy a dozen pens in a box at Costco for a few dollars and they will sign your checks at the end of the day, or you can invest in one of Patrick Chu's Loiminchay pens and have a treasure that you can hand down to your children. The same is true of speakers. The Kandinskys offer performance commensurate with the price, and I feel their beauty is a bonus. The six lucky people who will purchase a pair of Loiminchay Kandinsky speakers this year will have something much more than a pair of speakers; they will have purchased a true masterpiece. Naming them after famed abstract artist Wassily Kandinsky is highly appropriate. We are awarding the Loiminchay Kandinsky's one of our Publisher's Choice awards for 2009. ●

The Loiminchay Audio Kandinsky
MSRP: \$60,000/pair

MANUFACTURER

Loiminchay Audio
212.941.7488
www.loiminchayaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Digital Source Nagra CDP
Analog Source Linn LP-12 w/ Koestu Ureshi cartridge
Preamplifier Nagra PL-P
Power Amplifier Nagra VPA Monoblocks
Cable VanDenHul

Distributed in the U.S. by:

ASL Group

8709 Castle Park Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46256
(317) 841-4100
www.aslgroup.com

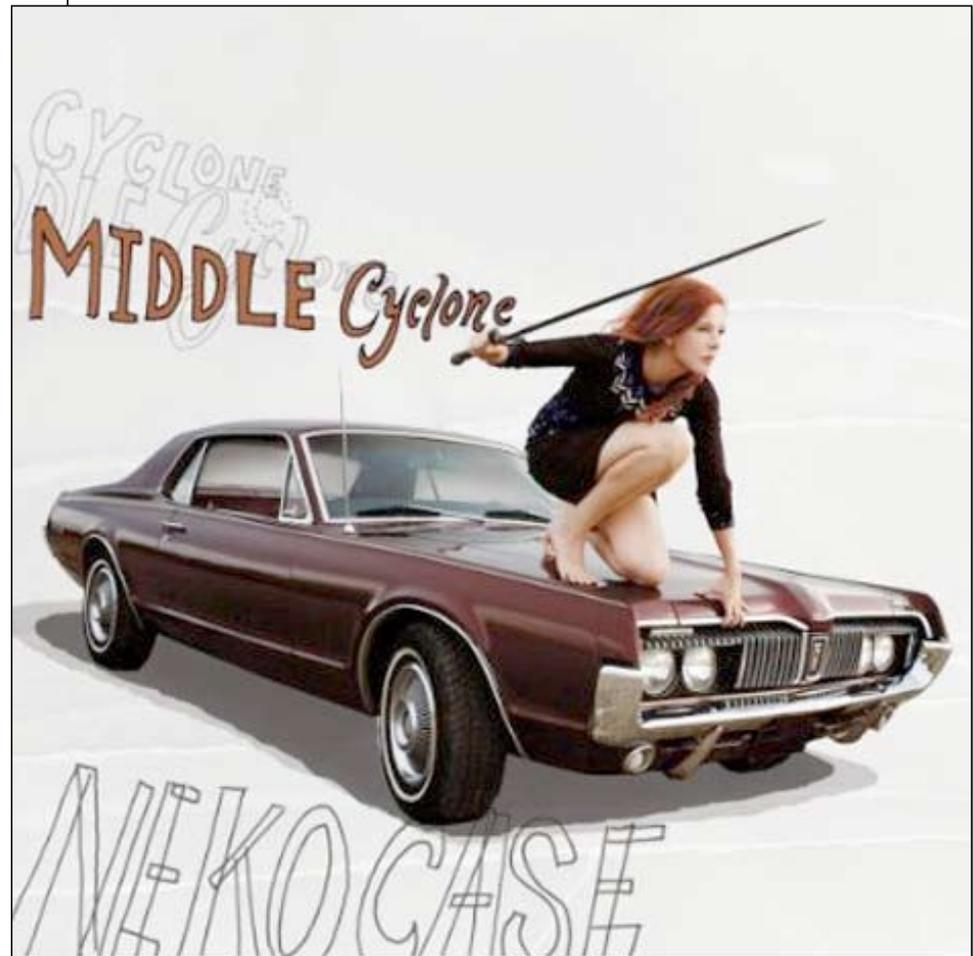


2009's Best Rock and Pop Albums

Despite the continued slide in CD sales, artists released more albums in 2009 than at any other time in history. With more than 10,000 records flooding the market, it was impossible to hear everything—a fact that makes ranking in numerical order the selections for 2009's Best Albums almost impractical. It seemed wiser to group the records as a whole, as all are uniformly excellent. Listeners wanting further guidance can be assured that the 15 other recommended records that didn't survive the Top Ten cut came this/close to being included. Also note that this list refers only to new studio albums, and not reissues, of which there are plenty of choice picks as well. Happy listening.

— Bob Gendron, Assistant Music Editor

ED. Note: If you are in the music buying mood, just click on the album art to purchase...



Neko Case *Middle Cyclone*
Anti (CD and 2LP)

Neko Case moves further away from the limiting “alt-country” tag throughout this front-to-back juggernaut, on which the chanteuse incorporates lush atmospherics, pop accents, and melodic details to balance ruminations on nature, love, disaster, and humankind. Case’s confident, absorbing vocals are replete with rarified passion and beauty, her songs ringing out with an honesty that, no matter the subject matter, compels listeners to peer deeper inside as if looking through a peephole. A sympathetic collective of musicians helps frame the arrangements with equal parts suspense, warmth, and caution.

MS750 DIGITAL MUSIC SERVER

MUSIC



St Vincent

Actor

4AD (CD and LP)

Annie Clark, a.k.a. St. Vincent, builds off the promise of her attractive debut on this sophomore release, loaded with intrigue, intensity, and off-kilter grooves. Clark's subtle albeit commanding guitar playing matches the seemingly delicate temperament of her voice; both characteristics give way to discordant bursts of violence that belie the moody tension that lies underneath many of the songs. Ranging in scope from orchestral pop to indie-rock hymnals, *Actor* is a breakout statement from the most exciting frontwoman to emerge since PJ Harvey.

ORGANIZE AND ENJOY YOUR MUSIC COLLECTION AS NEVER BEFORE

With the McIntosh MS750, your music is always at your finger tips. It can hold, catalog, and sort over 2,000 hours of music at full CD sound quality on its 750 GB hard drive. That is enough storage for more than 2,500 CD's and 120,000 individual songs!



- 750 GB Internal Hard Drive
- Built-In CD, CD-R, CD-RW, MP3, WMA, and ACC Player
- Built-In CD Burner
- High Performance D/A Converters
- Multiple RS232 Data Ports
- Multi Language Support

To experience the legendary performance of McIntosh, please call on us at 1-800-538-6576

McIntosh Laboratory, Inc.
2 Chambers Street, Binghamton, NY 13903-2699
www.mcintoshlabs.com

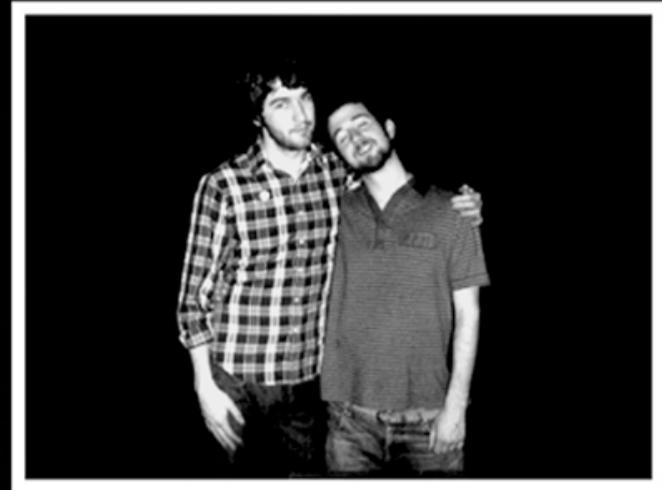
McIntosh®

LEGENDARY™

Baroness

The Blue Record
Relapse (CD and 2LP)

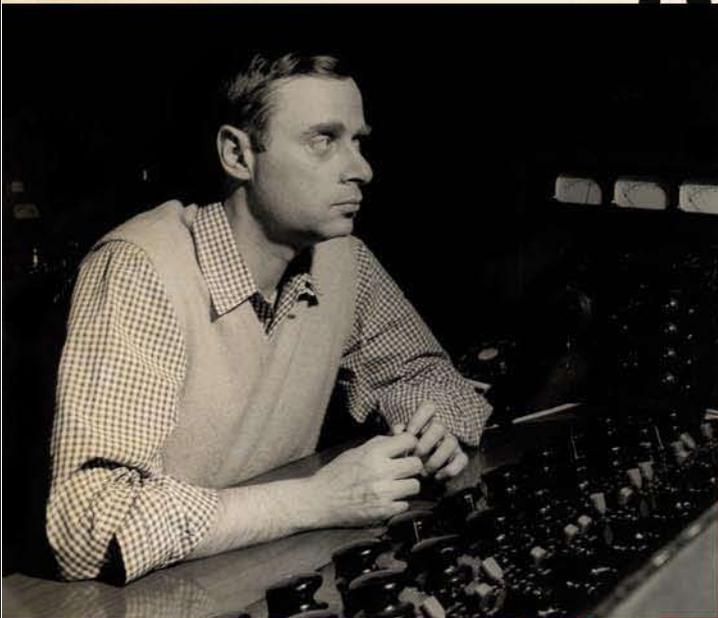
A stained-glass palace of nuanced textures, hallucinogenic tones, and teeth-gnashing riffs, *The Blue Record* unfolds with the kinds of melodic surprises and confident songwriting that defined thrash's golden era. And it overflows with diversity. At its simplest, Baroness utilizes proven metal strategies to set up bold turns. Yet despite the fluid presence of acoustic guitars, pastoral pianos, folk accents, and electronic washes, songs never feel overwhelming or weighed down. A colossal statement.

**JAPANDROIDS****POST-NOTHING****Japandroids**

Post-Nothing
Polyvinyl. (CD and LP)

Brian King and David Prowse utilize a simple, age-old configuration—guitar, drums, vocals—to vent frustrations, desires, and anxieties with the carefree attitude and undiminished energy of two teenagers that don't want to grow up. A catchy cacophony of garage rock, surf, and crescendo-laden pop, *Post-Nothing* is the noisy, jump-around-on-mattress sound of what it's like to be alive. And then some.

THE CATS ARE READY
 RUDY'S READY
 ARE YOU READY?



STEREO
 THE FINEST IN JAZZ SINCE 1939



music matters

You listen / You look / You're there...



Phoenix

Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix
 Glassnote (CD and LP)

The year's breakthrough indie record lives up to the hype. After three albums of varying quality, the French quartet finds its voice on the chic *Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix*, a seamless and fat-free merger of lean dance grooves, ambient pulses, new-wave hooks, and synthesizer punch that splits the difference between 70s glam pop, 80s disco, and 90s rock without breaking a sweat.

music matters presents the definitive 45 RPM reissue series

"If you love jazz, this is the series to own. There's never been a better reissue series than the Music Matters Blue Notes." John Crossett - Soundstage



www.musicmattersjazz.com



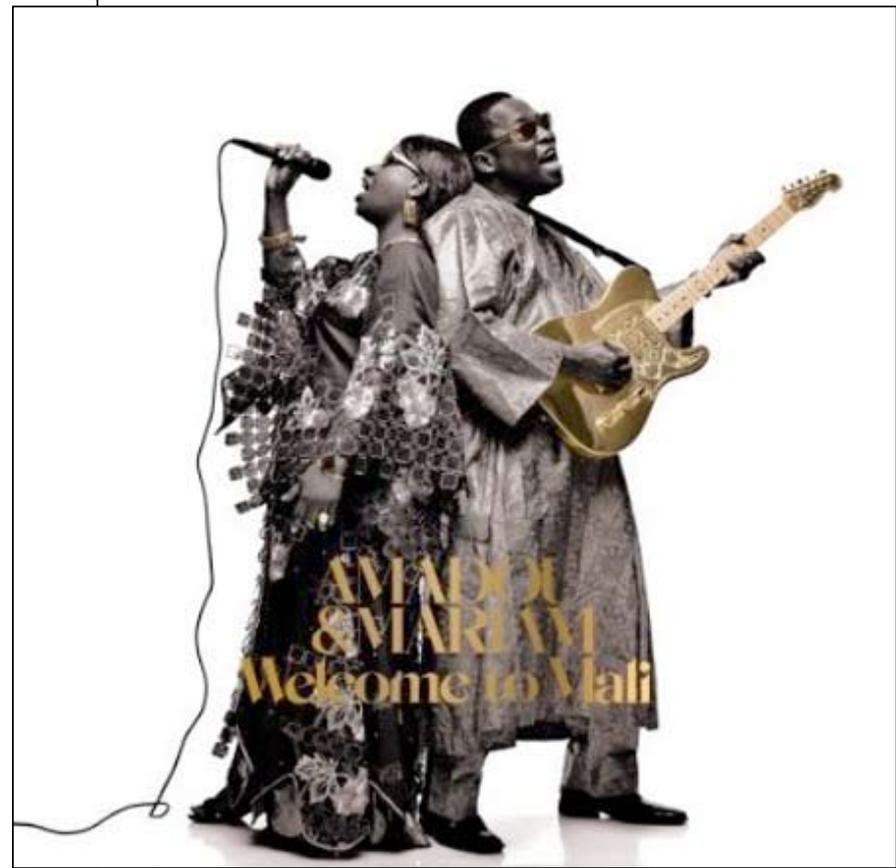
AcousTech
 MASTERING



Maxwell

BLACKsummers'night
Columbia (CD and LP)

Emerging after nearly a decade-long hiatus, Maxwell returns with a deeply personal album—the first of a planned trilogy—inspired by a romantic affair. Naked vulnerability, emotional complexities, and love's contradictions inform the songs. Yet it's the R&B singer's refusal to back away and grittier vocal approach that warrant the most attention, as they serve rather than just highlight the adult-themed material.



Amadou & Mariam

Welcome to Mali
Nonesuch (CD and 2LP)

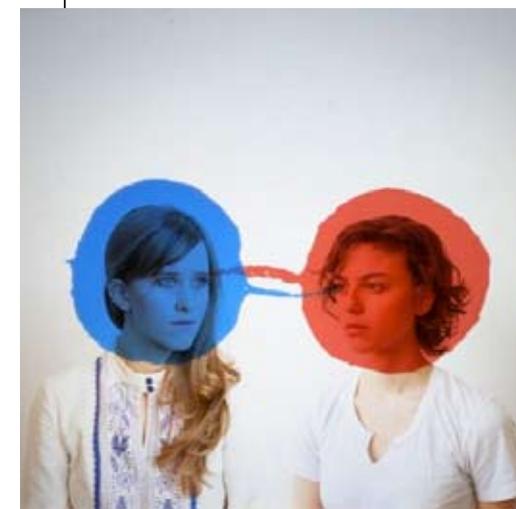
Amadou & Mariam, a blind married couple from Mali, could get by on cuteness alone. But the duo ups the ante of its excellent 2005 release on this globe-trotting set, charged with desert blues, exhilarating funk, hypnotic club beats, and guitar-driven rock. Bridging traditional African styles and modern Western elements, *Welcome to Mali* redefines the vague category known as “world music” by eliminating borders and teaching new vocabularies. A joyous, infectious record of the highest order.



Wild

Wild Series analog and digital cables by AudioQuest
Red Wolf Pack by Carole LaRoche

audioquest



The Dirty Projectors

Bitte Orca

Domino (CD and LP)

On their exotic *Bitte Orca*, the Dirty Projectors create shape-shifting mirages of texture, space, and harmony that appear to float and hover above imaginary cities in the sky. Unique vocals, wiry arrangements, and unpredictable layers of random samples, wily beats, chamber strings, and silence evoke European sensibilities and avant-garde art pop. Eccentricity made accessible—and pleasurable.

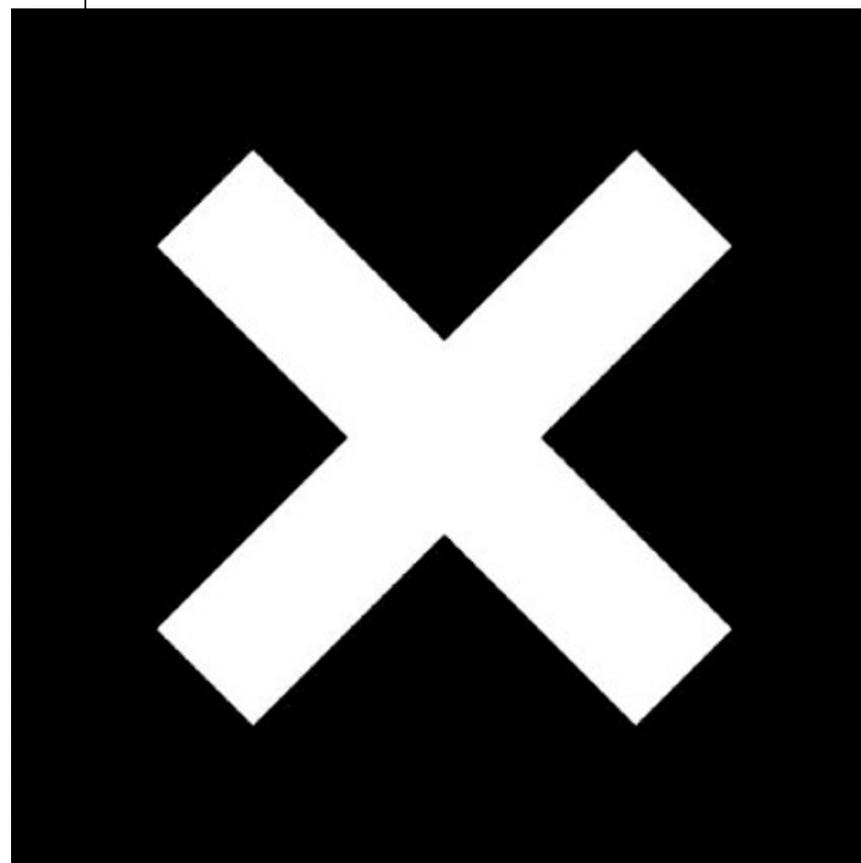


Mastodon

Crack the Skye

Warner Bros. (CD, LP, and 45RPM 2LP)

Contenders for the best hard-rock/metal band going, Mastodon registers its second consecutive masterwork while slightly dialing back the heaviness in favor of drawing upon everything from bluegrass to psychedelia. Informed by prog-rock adventurousness and ambitious dual-guitar interplay, *Crack the Skye*—a complex concept album that involves space travel, Rasputin, and Steven Hawking theories—represents another leap forward for the innovative Atlanta quartet and an non-stop thrill ride for those that choose to get caught up in its web of sound, imagery, and texture.



The XX

The XX

Beggars/XL. (CD and LP)

Debut of the year? Likely so. The U.K. foursome's blend of co-ed vocals, soulful pop, and minimalist melodies hints at a modest sophistication that so many fellow indie bands desire but few achieve. On the surface, the XX's sparse rhythms and sensual phrasing don't seem like much, but the appeal is in how the band manages to do so much with so little. Absolutely charming.

Fifteen more highly recommended albums:

Animal Collective

Merriweather Post Pavilion

The Antlers

Hospice

Built to Spill

There Is No Enemy

The Decemberists

Hazards of Love

Dinosaur Jr.

Farm

Girls

Album

The Felice Brothers

Yonder is the Clock

Isis

Wavering Radiant

Metric

Fantasies

Mos Def

The Ecstatic

Pearl Jam

Backspacer

Slayer

World Painted Blood

Soulsavers

Broken

William Elliott Whitmore

Animals in the Dark

Yeah Yeah Yeahs

It's Blitz



ALO audio

Don't let your interconnects be your weakest link

www.aloaudio.com
ALO - Hand Built in the USA



The Qsonix Music Server

By Jeff Dorgay

In the past couple of years, the music server has gone from a curiosity to a nearly ubiquitous component in many serious HiFi systems. The technical aspects of the music server world vary, but it all boils down to one thing: interface.

At the risk of making some readers grumpy, if you don't have a great interface, a music server is just another computing device that you need to manage. By the time you rip your music properly, find the right album art and ID tags, everyone has fallen asleep. And no one will ever play with a Squeezebox when you have a party at your house.

Sooloos has been the leader in the high-end music server race, with a flawless interface that begs you to explore the music contained within. The big roadblock to the Sooloos has been (and continues to be) the price. At more than \$10,000, this just isn't a sandbox in which a lot of music lovers can afford to play. And with used CD prices at an all-time low, you can buy a substantial amount of music for 10 large. Think of the Sooloos as a BMW M3 and the QSonix as a VW GTI R32. A less-prestigious badge on the bonnet, but very close in performance where it counts.



MAESTRO

UTOPIA™

Vivid colors, subtle nuance,
perfect pace and rhythm;
Perfection only a
Maestro can create.



Culminating 30-years of passion, sweat and hard work expressed in original Focal breakthroughs:

- 25-micron thick Pure Beryllium inverted dome tweeter
- Infinite Acoustic Loading™ (IAL2) tweeter chamber
- Laser cut "W"™ Glass Cones
- Magnetic Damping™ System
- Gamma™ cabinet structure
- Focus Time™ driver alignment

FOCAL
the Spirit of Sound

Enter Q Sonix

At a base price of \$4,450, the entry-level Qsonix comes in at less than half the price of a comparable Sooloos with a 15-inch touch-panel screen and a 500GB hard drive that will allow storage of about 1,500 CD's in WMA lossless format. It can be configured in 750GB (\$150 additional) 1TB (\$300 additional) and 1.5TB (\$600 additional) editions along with a larger, 17-inch touch screen and other interesting options. The full 1.5TB edition will store close to 4,500 CD's in WMA lossless format, which should be enough for most listeners. While the ability to access a larger collection is on the drawing board, for now this is the only limitation of the Qsonix.

Currently, the Qsonix is compatible with WMA Lossless, WAV, MP3 and FLAC files. Hi res files will be addressed soon, so you can mix them into you collection with the next software release.

While there are a number of Qsonix dealers across the country, you can also buy the Qsonix direct from the factory if you do not have a dealer nearby. Using the factory website is as easy as buying a computer from the online Apple store. Choose the configuration you want, pick your accessories and press "buy." It's a snap.

There are two basic models of the Qsonix: the Q105 reviewed here, which will support two separate zones of playback, and the Q110, which supports four zones. Each zone can have its own dedicated touch screen, or it can be controlled via an iPhone/iPod touch device. Both versions have only one digital output for the more demanding audiophile and 1-3 analog outputs that can go to different zones in your home or office. Both machines can also be controlled via a Mac or PC that is on the same network for additional flexibility. *(continued)*



Ease of Setup

The Qsonix is very easy to setup. There is one main box containing all of the electronics and a cable that goes to the touch screen. You should be able to set it up and start ripping discs in less than 15 minutes. The instructions are easy to read and follow, and most of the functionality is self explanatory. Connect the analog or digital output to your preamp or DAC, hook up an internet connection and start it up. It's that easy.

One important thing worth mentioning about the Qsonix is that once you have loaded all of your music to the server, you no longer need an internet connection to access the metadata from your collection. This is a huge plus for someone who has to locate the server where there is no internet connection available.

When you insert a CD into the drawer, the Qsonix directs you through the rip process and gives you options for the quality level in which you would like your music to be stored. You can save

your music as MP3, WMA lossless or uncompressed wav files. You are not locked into one compression scheme as the Qsonix will let you store in all formats, but keep in mind that the less compression you use, the fewer discs you can store. All of the files on the Qsonix for this review were in lossless format, though a few files were imported as .wav to see how much, if any, difference existed in playback quality.

Though debate continues about the validity of lossless compression versus uncompressed files – I can hear just a slight degradation on my reference system – in the interest of convenience, I've had no issues with lossless files. I suspect for all but the .01 percent of the world's pickiest audiophiles with canine hearing, the WMA lossless option will be just fine.

The Qsonix is robustly built and uses a standard CD drive mechanism so it should last through importing thousands of CD's, and should it ever fail, replacement would be easy and inexpensive.

(continued)



Ease of Importing and Exporting Music

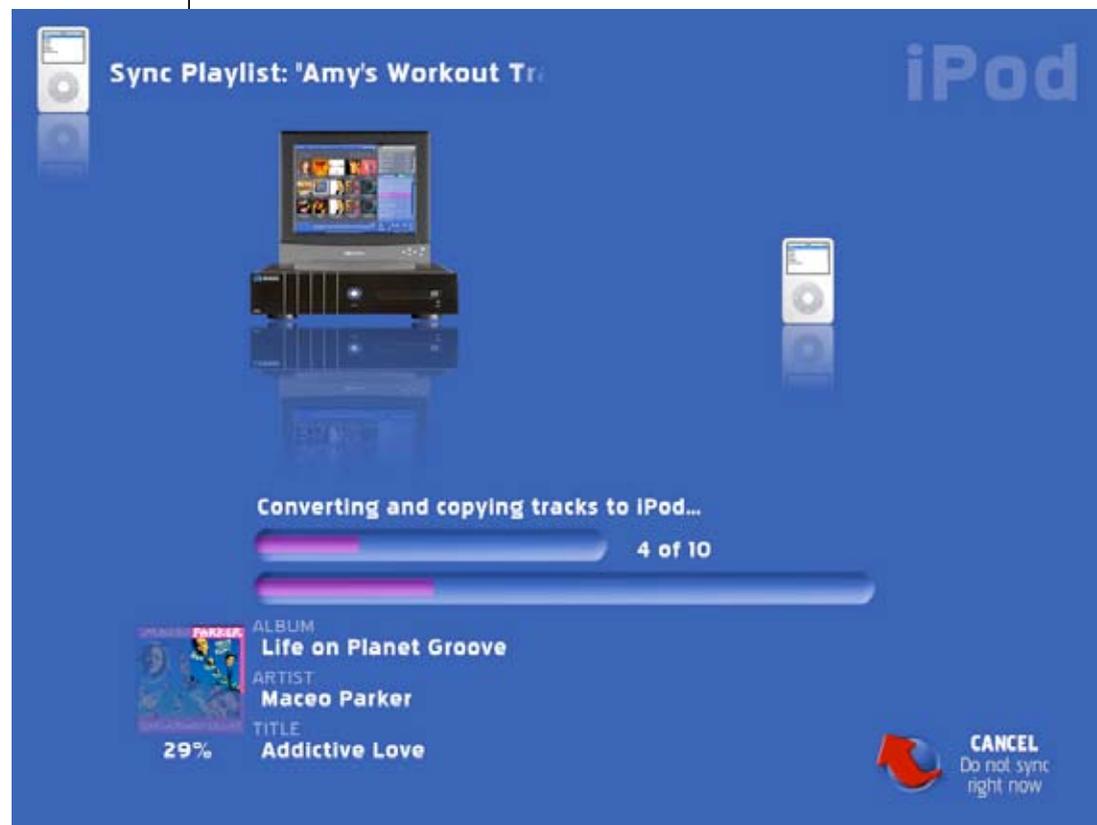
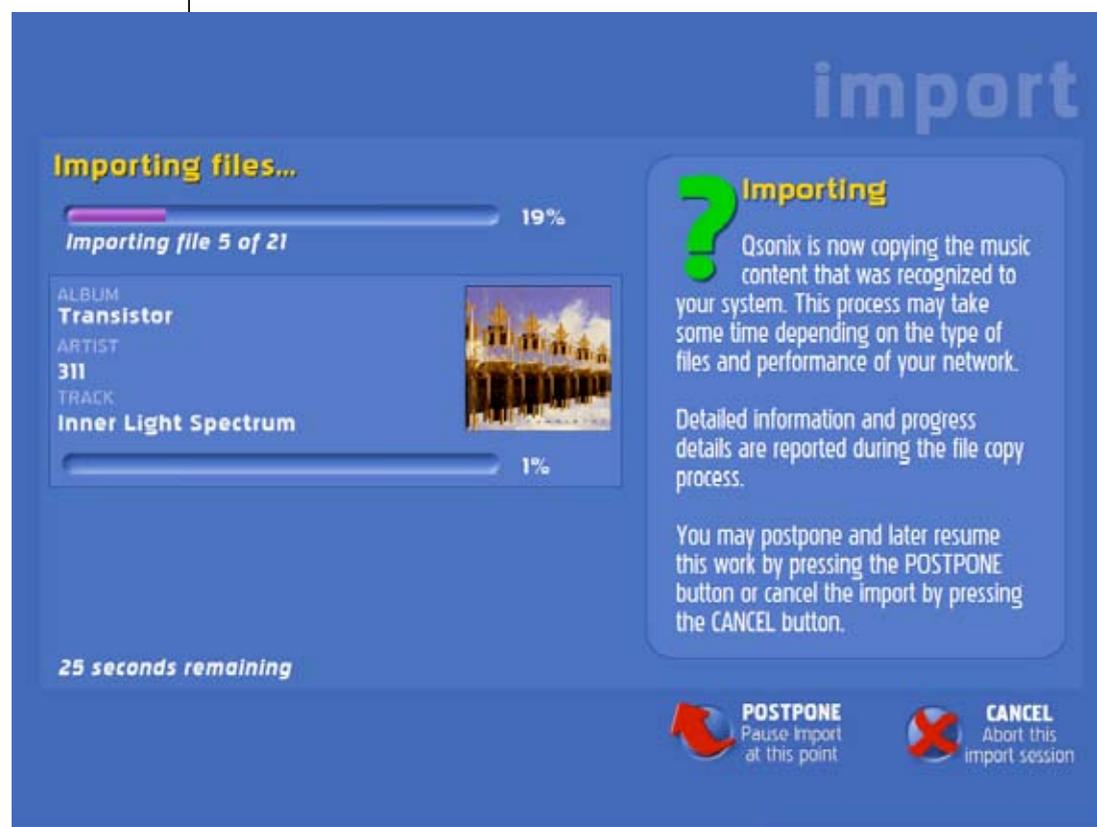
First, I'd like to compliment the Qsonix staff for producing a fantastic owner's manual. While some of you don't like to read manuals, it helps with a product like this because while deceptively simple to use at first, there are a number of additional features that will enhance the user experience. But you have to dig into the manual. The manual stays informative without requiring that you be an IT professional to use the Qsonix.

Like a good doctor, the Qsonix asks you a lot of questions along the way. When you import a CD, a series of menus pop up on the screen that direct you through the process. Should the proper album art and data not be available online, you can add your own. There is a handy USB port on the front panel of the Qsonix so you can load music that way or plug in a keyboard for data entry. This is a useful option if you have a pile of discs that require metadata.

My favorite feature is the Qsonix's ability to burn custom CD's from your music collection. If you're headed out for a road trip and want to burn a few custom CD's or make a quick mix CD for a friend, you can copy a custom playlist to a blank CD at the push of a button. I found this to be a fun feature after a listening session; you can send your friends home with a mix CD of the evening's favorites. Again, the Qsonix walks you through the needed steps quickly. This is impossible to accomplish with the Sooloos, which only allows low-res MP3 files to be exported to iTunes.

Syncing music to your iPod is also a snap, and the Qsonix lets you choose three different quality settings (low, medium and high) right from the touch screen. You can export up to 3,000 songs per playlist.

(continued)





Musical Surroundings

510.547.5006 www.musicalsurrroundings.com

AESTHETIX
BENZ MICRO
CLEARAUDIO



The only feature the Qsonix lacks is a web-based component that will allow you to rip discs from other Macs or PCs on your network. This really comes in handy when you have a large collection to import.

Ease of Backup

The most important aspect of using any music server is also the least fun: backing up your data. If you have a large CD collection, chances are you'll spend a lot of your free time ripping them all to the Qsonix. So this is a task you only want to do once because a data glitch can wipe out all of your hard labor. The Qsonix has the easiest and most cost-effective system available.

Unlike most other music servers that require you to back up over a network, with Qsonix you just plug a hard drive into one of the USB ports and get to it. With 1TB external drives available for about a hundred dollars, this is the other main advantage over the Sooloos, who's TwinStore module is \$2,295 without hard drives installed.

Ease of Use

If you are moving up from all of the other iTunes-based products, the Qsonix will amaze you at the ease of using its touch-screen interface. You can view your music by artist, album title or album cover. My favorite remains the album-cover mode because that is the way most people remember music, by the album art. With everything organized alphabetically, you get two albums on a page with all of the track listings. *(continued)*

There are three distinct zones of activity on the screen: the album browser where you can see the album art and track titles, the playlist control that lists any of the custom playlists you may have created and the now-playing control. Think of the now-playing control as the dynamic playlist to which you are dragging tracks. You can drag the whole album to the now-playing list or individual songs in any order. Once you've programmed a certain list of songs to your mood, you can save it or erase it when you are done the listening session.

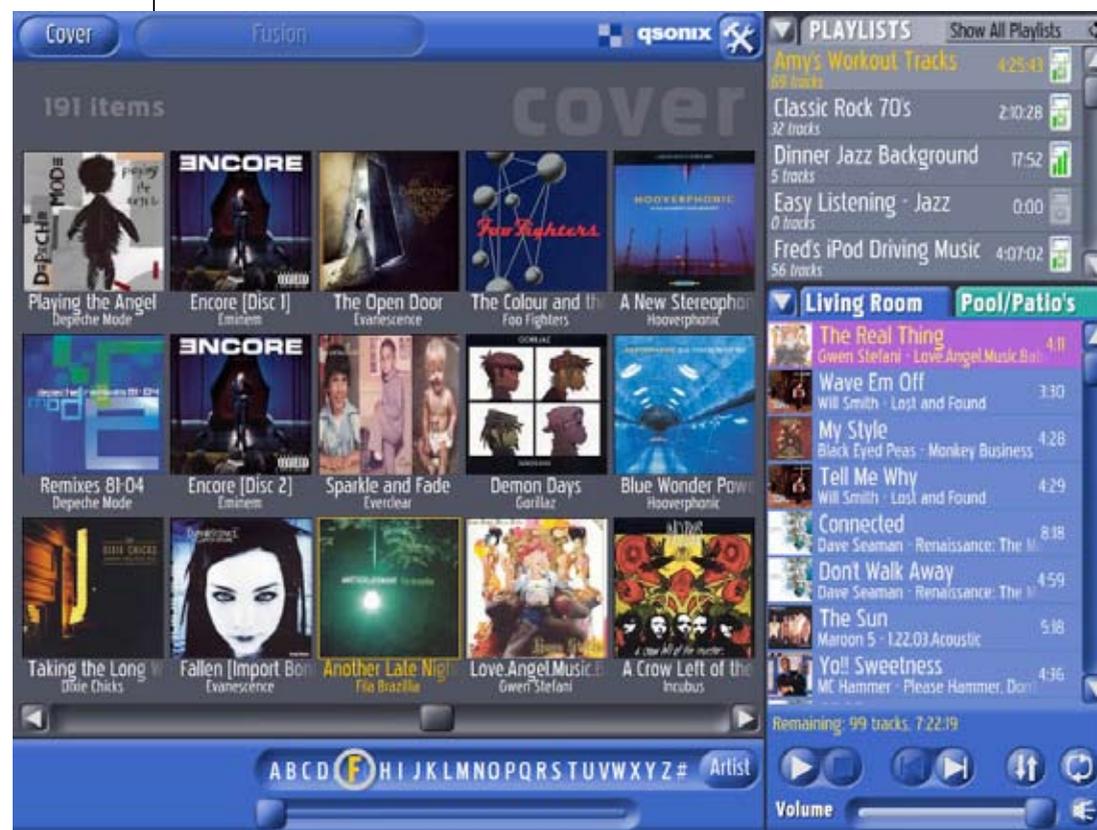
Within this playlist, you can bounce around between the songs you've chosen at will, going up and back incrementally or making the whole playlist loop and repeat at the end. One of the handiest features of the Qsonix is that it features an infrared remote. This is great when you want to pause the server from across the room without resorting to using your iPhone. You can also use the remote to control zone volume (analog outputs only) and advance forward and back on your playlist.

Once you get used to using a touch screen with your music library at your fingertips, you won't want to go back to putting discs in a drawer and fumbling through your CD library.

The Sound

Using the Qsonix through the analog inputs is easy and the sound quality is on par with what you might expect from a CD player in the \$1,000 - \$2,000 range. Not terrible, but not fussy audiophile quality either. But hey, neither is the sound from the analog outputs of my McIntosh MS750 or Sooloos. I think this is a perfect combination because chances are that even in a multi-zone installation, you'll have the high-res digital output going to your main system and feed the analog outs to other zones in your house where peripheral music systems might be.

Fortunately, the SPDIF output with the DAC of your choice *will* satisfy the fussiest audiophiles. *(continued)*





**Extremely Limited-Edition Marantz KI Signature Products:
 The SA-KI Pearl CD/SACD Player and PM-KI Pearl Integrated Amp**



marantz



Get this Special Edition
 Marantz SACD with Purchase
 of KI Signature Product.

**Mobile Fidelity + VPI
 Keep All Your LPs Sounding Their Very Best!**

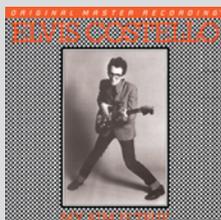
Includes everything you need to immediately start hearing how much music is actually buried in those grooves. Included: one bottle of Mobile Fidelity Super Record Wash, Mobile Fidelity Super Deep Cleaner, one Mobile Fidelity LP Record Brush (for scrubbing), and 100 Mobile Fidelity Original Master Sleeves for your clean LPs.

**SAVE
 \$95**



**The Rega Isis is a
 Real Work Of Art.
 The Last CD Player
 You'll Ever Own!
 Call Us To Learn More.**

Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab—The Premier Audiophile Label for More Than 30 Years



Plugged into my reference Wadia 781 SE, the sound between discs played on the Wadia and those files through the DAC section of the Wadia with the Qsonix as the source were indistinguishable from each other.

As we were going to print with this review, Qsonix announced that they would now be supporting high-resolution audio files (up to 24bit/96kHz), so we will have a follow up shortly. The next generation will also have a high-quality USB output to interface with a number of the latest DAC's that are utilizing this technology.

The only objectionable sound the Qsonix makes is the fan. It's quiet by PC standards, but not silent. To keep your listening room whisper quiet you will need to mount the main control box in a closet or somewhere nearby to eliminate the background noise. Again, this is standard operating procedure for any music server that uses a battery of hard drives.

A Flawless Experience

Our experience with the Qsonix was as good as it gets. I'd love to see the graphic design on the interface tightened up a bit, but that's a personal style thing. Built-in wireless ethernet would be handy and, of course, support for a larger music library than 4,500 CD's would be welcomed by the mega collectors. These are all tiny gripes about an excellent product, none of which interfere with day-to-day operation.

The Qsonix is already one step away from the top of the mountain, but considering the price differential, it is the best value today in a high-capacity music server.

Every time I walked by the black box with its blank touch screen sitting on top, I expected it to start snarling at me in some kind of DOS code.

Additional Listening

(or the curmudgeon perspective) By Hood McTiernan

Aside from the iTunes/iPod thing, computer audio has held virtually no interest for me. Having read various articles about what you have to go through to actually hear anything, I had feelings of great trepidation when our publisher suggested that I take a stab at making the Qsonix Q-105 music server work in my system, or work at all for that matter.

After he dropped it off at my house, it sat on the coffee table for a week as I studiously ignored its presence. Every time I walked by the black box with its blank touch screen sitting on top, I expected it to start snarling at me in some kind of DOS code. And I fully expected that I might have to hit it with a hammer if it tried anything that had anything to do with configuring. You see, I've done my share of introducing my forehead to brick walls when it comes to computers in general, so mating a computer with audio felt wrong: I just *knew* that this enterprise would not turn out well.

But once I fired it up, it settled down after a few moments of cogitation and proceeded to display album art that had been previously loaded in alphabetic order. Then the dreaded moment came. I needed to hook it to my network router. Fully expecting it to start sputtering and throwing Windows-related fits, I was utterly taken aback when nothing happened. Nothing that is until I loaded a CD. Then it dutifully went out and retrieved the album art and song listing in a flash. I proceeded to load about 50 more CD's and took it into my sound room.

Connected to my Bryston DAC via a Transparent Audio digital cable, I was soon listening to the music that I had loaded only moments before. I let it play for about three hours before settling down to a listening/interface session.

To say I was pleasantly surprised is an understatement. I was able to navigate around the touch screen quickly, and retrieving songs or albums was lightning fast. Playlists were a snap to create. As a matter of fact, the more I touched the screen, the more I wanted to just keep exploring. You see, I didn't read the manual.

OK, I'm a guy and such things are beneath me. That kind of behavior usually results in some kind of wound, but in the case of the Qsonix, such was not the case. As a matter of fact, mechanically the only quibble I had with it was the placement of the transport open/close button. It's directly under the tray and is a bit awkward to operate.

Sonically, the Qsonix acquitted itself rather nicely. One thing I noticed right off the bat was the width of the soundstage. It extended well beyond the outside edges of my speakers. The depth of the soundstage was a bit shallow, though. The bottom end was tight and well-controlled if not the ultimate in detail.

The high end was not offensive in the least. Not as extended as a reference-quality CD player, but nice nonetheless. I'd call it comparable to a good \$2,500 CD player. Taking into account the amazing storage capacity, ease of operation and great sound, I'd be hard pressed not to call the Q-105 a great value.

After some contemplation, even a curmudgeon like me must admit that this is the next stage of digital audio playback. Thanks to such a good experience with the Qsonix, I can see one in my future. It took a non believer by surprise in a very convincing manner. ●

The Qsonix Q105 Music Server

MSRP: \$4,600 - \$5,200

www.qsonix.com

PERIPHERALS

Preamp Burmester 011

Power Amplifier Burmester 911 mk. 3

DAC's Wadia 781 SE, Neko Audio D100, PS Audio Perfect Wave

Speakers Gamut S-7

Cable Shunyata Aurora Interconnects, Shunyata Stratos SP speaker cables

Power Running Springs Dmitri and Maxim power conditioners, RSA Mongoose power cords, Shunyata Python CX power cords.



Holiday Gift Guide

By the TONEAudio Staff

Here are a few goodies we think you'll enjoy. Some are too big to fit into a stocking, but almost all will fit under the tree and put a smile of the face of your favorite audiophile. Many of these items are available at Music Direct, so if you are in the mood to shop as you read this, just click on the supplied links and they will take you right to the item on the MD website.

**Leica M-9**

\$5,995 www.leica.com

The quintessential digital Leica now features an 18-megapixel full-frame sensor and can take advantage of the complete line of Leica images. Buy one, take a couple weeks off in France and pretend you're Cartier-Bresson.



The Grateful Dead Scrapbook

Ben Fong-Torres
Chronicle Books, Hardcover
\$40 www.amazon.com

Many people talk about the Grateful Dead and the 60's but Ben Fong-Torres lived it. A native Bay Area resident, he chronicled a major portion of the band's career as editor and writer at *Rolling Stone* from 1969-1980.

The Grateful Dead Scrapbook covers the Grateful Dead from just before its beginning to 1995, when Jerry Garcia died. The book is organized chronologically, with spotlights on significant Dead songs, and the stories behind them. The result is brilliant, and the book features a plethora of photos along with removable reproductions of Dead concert tickets, letters, handbills, posters and other memorabilia.

Slip this under the Christmas tree with a pinch of your favorite chemical amusement aid and take your own strange trip this holiday season.



Power

Emotion

Soul

Reach for the MOON



M O O N

www.simaudio.com

877.980.2400

GIFT GUIDE



Grado SR-60i

\$99 www.gradolabs.com

I'm guessing you or someone in your family needs a decent pair of headphones at a price that won't break the bank. The new "i" version of the Grado SR-60 is a significant upgrade and offers much better sound than the small price tag would suggest. A great upgrade for anyone looking to make that first step away from ibuds.





The Loiminchay Tibetan Goddess Collection

\$45,000 per set
www.loiminchay.com

There will only be 18 sets of these beautiful pens produced by the Loiminchay Studio. The Maki-e artists that produce them take eight months to create their magic. If you are a collector of fine writing instruments, call now to reserve your place in line.





The B&O Book

\$129 www.bang-olufsen.com

From the dream of couple of college kids in the attic to a national treasure of Denmark. You can read the complete history of B&O here with a comprehensive showing of their major products through the years. Put together in impeccable Danish style, of course.



Running Springs Maxim

\$4,995 (without power cord)
www.runningspringsaudio.com

If cleanliness is next to Godliness, than what could be holier for your HiFi system than clean power? RSA's newest generation of PLC's does an even better job than their last, leaving your components to deliver everything of which they are capable.



Shown: LTX 500 Projector



The Devil DAC

\$399 www.onahighernote.com

The Devil DAC does it all. No power cords, interconnects or USB cords necessary. Plug one end into the USB port of your computer and plug the RCA into a line level input on your amplifier or receiver. It's that easy to stream digital music from your computer or Apple TV to your HiFi system, and it runs off the USB bus.



AVM 50v audio/video processor

+



Anthem Room Correction (ARC™)

+



LTX-500 LCOS Projector

= Home Theater Bliss

... that's what you get when Anthem, the #1 Electronics Brand Overall, offers a complete audio/video solution. You get high-end home theater that doesn't get any better ... or any more affordable! Visit your nearest Anthem Dealer today for an amazing demonstration of a complete Anthem Home Theater.

A N T H E M[®]
THE KEY TO HIGH END AUDIO-VIDEO™

#1 Brand Overall, *Inside Track Annual Dealer Survey 2007, 2008, 2009.*
An annual independent nationwide survey of consumer electronics
specialist retailers and custom installers.

**Cartoon Marriage:
Adventures in Love
and Matrimony by
The New Yorker's
Cartooning Couple**

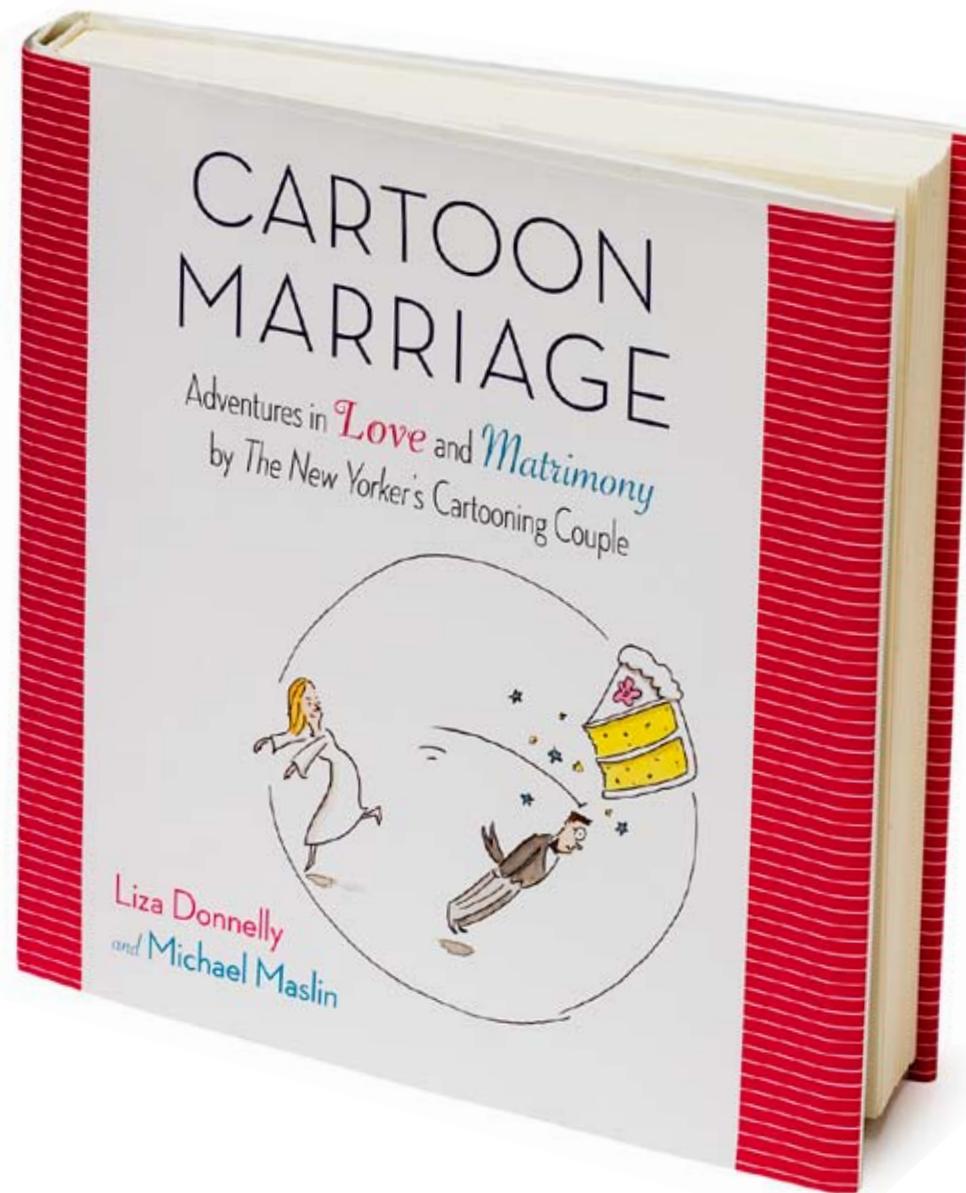
Liza Donnelly and
Michael Maslin

Random House, Hardcover
\$24 www.amazon.com

When Liza Donnelly isn't busy working on the next incredible cartoon for *TONEAudio*, she's working on her next incredible cartoon for *The New Yorker*. Donnelly and her husband, Michael Maslin are both *New Yorker* staff cartoonists and one of a very few husband and wife pairs that have worked together at the magazine.

The book's witty observation of relationship from dating to divorce and their respective mutations will keep you chuckling. The more time you spend with the book, it becomes apparent that Donnelly and Maslin not only have a deep understanding of relationships, but of each other as well.

So skip the next chick flick and do something more clever. Cuddle up with your squeeze and page through *Cartoon Marriage*.



The Beatles Apple

\$249 www.thebeatles.com

Just when you thought we had enough of the Beatles' re-mastered catalog, you can buy them *all over again* in 24 bit/48khz resolution FLAC form on a cute little lime-green USB stick that looks like an apple.



**VPI 16.5 Record
Cleaning Machine**

\$550 www.musicdirect.com

One of the granddaddies of vinyl maintenance. It's big and loud, but it gets the job done. You can purchase additional cleaning wands from MD, so you can keep separate wands for really dirty, not so dirty and new records. Yeah, you'll become obsessed, just like the rest of us.





Marantz KI Pearl Components

\$2,999 CD player, \$3,599 Integrated Amplifier
www.marantz.com

These two limited edition KI Pearl components are beautiful and high performance. The disc player does double duty with CD and SACD discs, while the matching 95-watt-per-channel integrated amplifier has a great phono stage built in. Tweaked by the master, Ken Ishiwata, these are limited to an edition of 500. We have one set.



The QSonix Jukebox

\$8,495 www.qsonix.com

Tired of all those boring music servers that look like a computer geek's nightmare? Here's the ticket for your mancave. Enclosed in a genuine Rock-Ola jukebox, you can have the best of both worlds, 50's style and 21st century functionality.

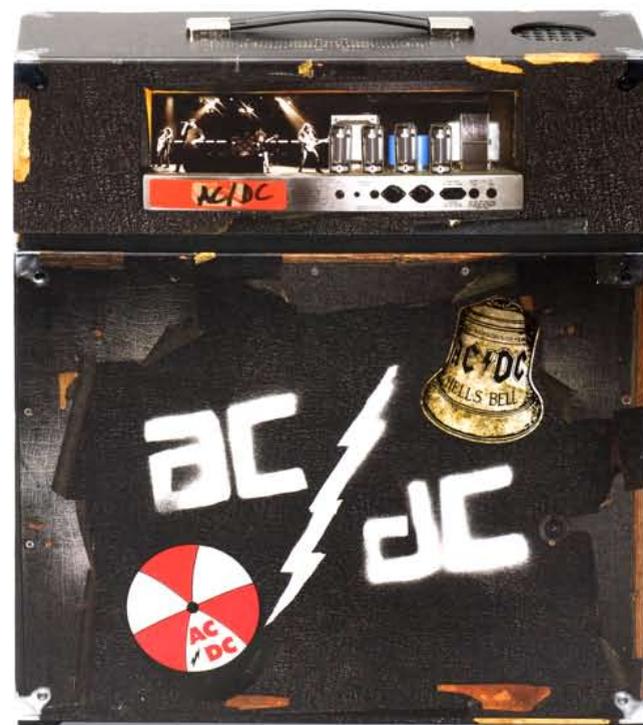




Shunyata Hydra 2

\$399 www.shunyata.com

Shunyata's entry-level line conditioner is just what the doctor ordered for your plasma screen or small integrated amplifier. Pair it up with a couple of their \$125 Venom power cords and you'll be amazed at how much better your system will sound.



AC/DC Backtracks Deluxe Edition

\$199 www.sonymusic.com

You're a wuss if you only buy the cheapo two-CD/one-DVD box set of these rare AC/DC outtakes and live tunes. You want this one, the one we put on our cover, which has an additional disc of music, a 180g. LP of select live tunes and the functioning one-watt practice amp to put proudly on your desk.





McIntosh MXA60

\$7,500 www.mcintoshlabs.com

Don't pass this off as a Mac boom box. This is a purpose-built compact with an AM/FM tuner, SACD/CD player (with 24/192 DAC) and a 75 watt per channel power amplifier. This little powerhouse will rock the house no matter where you put it, and it retains all of the styling cues for which McIntosh is famous.

The perfect entry-level, all-McIntosh system or the perfect second system for the McIntosh aficionado? You decide.

LOIMINCHAY

Kandinsky

Master Engineering & Artistic Execution

Let's
Enjoy
the
Music!

 LOIMINCHAY
The Art of Audio Essence

212.941.7488 www.loiminchayaudio.com info@loiminchayaudio.com

GIFT GUIDE



EAT KT-88 tubes

\$1,495 (matched quad)
www.musicdirect.com

These babies aren't cheap, but they are awesome. If you've got an amplifier that uses 6550's or KT-88 tubes, the newest offering from EAT will make you think the glory days of tubes are back again. They sound like the best NOS tubes you can find, but are brand new, have a warranty and come nicely packaged.

**Snell K7's**

\$1,500 www.snellacoustics.com

If you need a great pair of high-performance, compact speakers, the Snell K-7's are the ticket to ride. Their long-throw 5 1/4-inch woofer generates some hefty bass for such a small speaker, and they can work well as a pair of compact surround speakers.

Frugalicious.

We admit it. We're a frugal company. There's no shame in that. The question is, how does it benefit you?

Our "no frills" attitude is directly reflected in what we make – the finest, affordable line of components in the stereophonic world. Clean design without showy frills.

Our frugal nature makes sure we never lose sight of 'affordability.' For many other companies, that seems to have gotten lost in the pursuit of the perfect component.

At Rega, we have a different pursuit – for the perfect sound. A distinctive, balanced sound. We call it (somewhat immodestly)...the Rega sound.

We're able to create our own sound because we make every component that affects this sound – cartridges, record players, CD players, amplifiers, pre-amplifiers, speakers and more. (Very few companies can say that.)

So if you're looking to upgrade your system in one area (or to replace it entirely), come listen to our affordable, priceless sound. We think you'll agree, it's frugalicious.

For more information, call 972.234.0182, or email steve@soundorg.com



regga

THE SOUND ORGANISATION
MAKES MUSIC

The Sound Organization is the exclusive Rega USA distributor. www.soundorg.com



The Red Wine Audio Black Lightning

\$625 - \$1,000 (depending on capacity and configuration)
www.redwineaudio.com

Red Wine Audio designer Vinnie Rossi has established a solid reputation going off the grid with his 30.2 and 70.2 signature amplifiers and Isabella preamplifier. With his designs based on SLA lead-acid batteries and SMART charging modules, there are no hassles in using DC power.

These can be used with your favorite device that needs a 5-12 volt wall wart, or custom voltages can be configured.



MoFi Record Cleaning Supplies

www.musicdirect.com

Use these with your record-cleaning machine of choice and you'll have records that your friends will swear sound as quiet as CD's. After you've performed the cleaning ritual, slip them into some MoFi archival sleeves to keep them that way.



**Quadraspire QX**

\$39 www.quadraspire.com

Put a set of these between your favorite component and your equipment rack and be pleasantly surprised at the better image focus and bass tightness, without having to take your kids out of soccer this month. A great inexpensive tweak!





Clearaudio Weight Watcher, Speed Strobe and LP

\$250, \$180 and \$60
www.musicdirect.com

If you are an extreme vinyl hobbyist, chances are you change around your front end more than most, or you have a number of cartridges in your arsenal for different records. If you fall into that category, you need these goodies from Clearaudio. These are the ones I use to keep all of our tables set to perfection.





The Porsche Boxster Spyder

\$61,200 (base price) www.porsche.com

Weighing 176 pounds less than a standard Boxster with 310 horsepower on tap, it's the best recipe for fun that I know of. Unfortunately, you can't get the Burmester sound system to go with because you can't get any sound system in this model, which is built specifically for the hard-core sports-car enthusiast.

Keeping with Spyder tradition, the Boxster Spyder has a special lightweight top, and pull straps in the place of door handles. Of course, there is no cupholder, but you'd look cool staring out at your Boxster Spyder from inside Starbucks anyway.





Impeccable Style
and Performance

The GamuT S-7 Speakers

By Jeff Dorgay

I must admit that over the past few months, I've become enamored with a pair of Danish beauties. My love life hasn't gotten kinky or anything, but I have been spending more time lately with the GamuT S-7's than I have with my family. With my regular MartinLogan CLX reference speakers sitting on the sidelines, I've kind of felt as if I've been cheating on my steady girlfriend. But I like these speakers – *a lot*.

It's tough to be objective when you enjoy something this much, but I'll do my best to describe their character. Perhaps if you spend a little time with them, you will enjoy them as much as I do. The GamuT S-7s cost \$42,000 per pair, so this is not a decision to be made lightly.

Personally, I view speakers as works of fine art rather than scientific test equipment. With a statement product like this (GamuT's only more-expensive speaker is the S-9, at \$170k per pair), you don't want to have buyer's remorse. Just like buying a car, my guess is that if you sample a few close competitors, you will respond to one designer's vision of what music should sound like more strongly than any of the others. Some of you may respond to one of the fine speakers from Verity, Focal, Hansen or of the other premium speakers, and I wouldn't criticize your taste if you went down that path. Here's why I like the S-7's:

Impeccable Attention to Detail

The S-7's occupy a very small footprint in your listening room, only 50 inches tall and nine inches wide. They angle back with an eight-degree slope to keep the drivers in proper time alignment, making the front-to-back cabinet depth 21 inches. The enclosure is made of solid, multi-layered Finnish Beech plywood, with a gentle curve much like that of an Eames Lounge Chair. The only MDF used is between the bottom of the speaker enclosure and the stainless-steel base.

Designer Lars Goller feels that the solid wood has a more pleasing harmonic structure than MDF, and it has practical benefits as well. Should the cabinet get a minor nick or scratch, it won't show damage as would a speaker with a thin veneer or automotive finish. That's another nice touch when you are making an investment at this level. With his extensive background in engineering and psychoacoustics, nothing has been left to chance with the S-7's.

Every joint on these speakers is finished flawlessly and even the machined aluminum ports on the rear face of the speakers are threaded into the cabinet to provide a perfect seal and eliminate unnecessary resonances. The protective grilles are acoustically transparent and made of solid stainless rods with woven rubber slats. These were not my favorite part of the speakers, so while auditioning the S-7's, they stayed in the shipping carton, which is also tastefully finished.

This three-way speaker consists of a proprietary version of the Revelator tweeter (which Goller designed for Scan Speak) a seven-inch midrange and a pair of seven-inch woofers. The tweeters are at ear height, with the midrange driver just below, and the woofers are placed above the tweeter and below the midrange. When I met with Goller on my recent trip to Denmark, we discussed this process and he revealed that he coats them individually. "I do it myself on the weekend, when the factory is quiet," he said. "Besides, it's good to keep a few tricks up my sleeve." This typical Danish understatement is a big part of what makes the S-7's a work of art both audibly and visually.

Midrange Magic and More

As someone who holds electrostats in the highest regard, I've always been able to give up that last bit of extension at both ends of the frequency spectrum, or that last bit of dynamic slam for the coherence that you get from a full-range electrostat. While the S-7's do not have that last ounce of "walk through sound" that my CLX's possess, they have more than enough to keep me happy. *(continued)*



Purity

Pure sound • Pure design • Pure Swedish

It has always been Primare's mission to develop products of elegant style, simplicity of use, exceptional value and high performance, providing a wholly pleasurable music and movie experience.

What else do you expect from a country known for pure blondes?

For more information, call 972.234.0182, or email steve@soundorg.com



Partial product list:

- Integrated Amplifiers
- Two Channel, Three Channel and Five Channel Amplifiers
- Two Channel Pre-amplifier
- DVD & CD Players
- Home Theater Processor
- Accessories & more

THE SOUND ORGANISATION
MAKES MUSIC

The Sound Organization is the exclusive Primare USA distributor. www.soundorg.com

Where the CLX offers a row-five presentation, the S-7 feels like moving back a few more rows, but still highly engaging.

The coherence and ultra-lifelike quality of the midrange of these speakers, combined with full-range performance and lifelike dynamics, make the S-7's truly special. While much of this is due to the careful cabinet design and specially optimized drivers, the S-7's crossover network is designed to eliminate phase shift in the midrange. This makes up GamuT's DC coupled midrange system, which has no capacitors in series with the midrange driver. Goller claims that by eliminating this capacitor in the signal path along with where they have connected the midrange driver to the woofer network, it lets the midrange run full range while counteracting the movement of the midrange at bass frequencies.

By utilizing the full cabinet volume and carefully optimizing the damping characteristics of the cabinet, the natural resonant frequency of the midrange driver is minimized, and this approach goes further to eliminate midrange phase shift. As Goller likes to say, "Simple, isn't it?" But it works phenomenally well. Every single one of my non-audiophile friends made the same comment about the S-7's: "These don't sound like a pair of speakers in a room, they just sound like music." And that's what it's all about.

Setup

These speakers weigh around 100 pounds each, so it is a good idea to get some help with unpacking and setup. They did not take long to set up and fell into place within about a foot of where most speakers have worked best in my 16 x 24 foot listening room. *(continued)*



The best balance of bass response and widest soundstage was with the speakers on the long wall, exactly eight feet apart (tweeter center to center) and the center of the front face 42 inches from the rear wall. This puts the speakers about seven feet from the side walls and made for a huge soundstage in all three dimensions, with my ears 10 feet, eight inches from each tweeter.

The S-7's come with very substantial jumpers in place and can be used in single or bi-wired mode. I used Shunyata's Stratos SP speaker cable in single-wire configuration with excellent results, but I also had good luck with Cardas' new Clear cable as well as the Furutech Reference III cable. Even after trying a few other variations on the theme, I found that the S-7's are not too cable-fussy. The speakers possessed more than enough resolution to tell the difference between manufacturers, but nothing was objectionable. If you are playing at this level, I'm sure that you will have your own favorite recipe.

I was impressed at how well the S-7's worked with every amplifier that I moved in and out of my reference system. Just as they were not fussy about cables, they offered up an equally good performance with solid-state and vacuum-tube power amplifiers. Again, there was plenty of resolution on tap and I could easily discern the difference between each amplifier, but there were no incompatibilities. I have experienced a few speakers over the years that would work well with solid-state amplifiers, but when mated to a tube amplifier had serious problems because of impedance or crossover issues. The S-7's should work well with anything from 50 watts per channel on up, no matter what your favorite flavor of amplifier might be.

The Sound

The GamuT S-7's are the most balanced speakers I've ever experienced (other than the S-9's). They do nothing wrong and a lot incredibly well. Their ability to portray spatial cues, especially in the vertical dimension, was what first caught my attention when I heard them at CES two years ago, listening to everything from Pink Floyd to Snoop Dogg. This grabbed me immediately in my listening room. My first choice was The Rascals' "Groovin," and I was intrigued at how well the wood block in the intro just floated in space about five feet in the air, right about where you would be holding it in front of a microphone. *(continued)*

After a lot of careful listening in my reference system, I kept noticing how easily these floorstanding speakers could disappear in my room just like a pair of mini monitors, yet still have the weight of a full-range speaker system. A quick test-tone sweep revealed solid bass down to 30hz, with decent output to about 25hz, cutting off sharply after that with almost no output at 20hz. For all but the most hardcore bassheads, the S-7's should be more than adequate without subwoofers.

The S-7's not only move their fair share of air, they have a lot of bass definition too. I was surprised by how well they would place a bass guitar or standup bass within the space of a recording, which I've only previously been able to achieve with the MartinLogan CLX's and a pair of excellent subwoofers.

Listening to music that has more of an electronic feel was almost eerie within the three-dimensional soundspace created by the S-7's. Zipping through the tracks on The Real Tuesday Weld's *The London Book of the Dead* consistently freaked me out. On "I Loved London," the background vocalists sounded as if one was hiding behind the left and right speakers taunting me while the lead vocalist was singing about six feet in front of me, while the electronic percussion effects floated all around the room as if I had a 7.1 system. *(continued)*



I could hear about three extra layers of Yoko Ono's groaning on "The Sun is Down!" and when I switched to the LP version of *Between My Head and the Sky* to listen to the last track on the album, "I'm alive," it sounded as if Yoko Ono was sitting next to me on the couch whispering in my ear. Not sure if that is cool or not, but definitely freaky. Even freakier was when Issac Freeman of the Fairfield Four sings the opening bass line in "These Bones" from *I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray*. I know you've possibly heard this at your favorite HiFi store, but through the S-7's it was almost supernatural. And of course, all the usual female vocalists sounded great. So if that's your thing, you will be in heaven with these speakers.

While the S-7's achieve a high level of resolution and texture throughout the midrange, they are not performing parlor tricks. Every bit of acoustic music I heard sounded lifelike. Pianos, violins and other stringed instruments all possessed correct timbre. Thanks to the speakers' excellent transient attack, drums and percussion also felt real, yet not exaggerated or overblown. One of my favorite jazz warhorses is *The Three*, a direct-to-disc LP featuring Joe Sample and Shelly Manne. I know you've heard "Satin Doll" a zillion times, but the miking of the drums is particularly clean and provides a good reference. The cymbals had just the right amount of sparkle and decay without being pushed forward. While the S-7's will do a fantastic job with your favorite rock records, they will surprise you at their ability to faithfully reproduce acoustic instruments as well.

That Extra Something

What lifts the GamuT S-7's from great to legendary, though, is their ability to transform your music collection. They have more than enough resolution to do justice to your finest recordings, but they have just a slight bit of extra body that seems to bring out the best in even average recordings without introducing tonal coloration. I must admit that I'm at a loss for words to describe this.

If I were to arbitrarily come up with a recipe for the perfect speaker to suit *my* musical tastes, I'd tell you to take one part Harbeth Monitor 40.1, one part YG Anat II studio and two parts MartinLogan CLX, and mix in a pinch of the JL Audio Gotham. Stir gently and put it all in a stunning cabinet. Simple, isn't it? If this sounds like an interesting combination to you, I suggest auditioning the GamuT S-7. They're Danish beauty at its finest. We are happy to award the S-7's one of our Publisher's Choice awards for 2009. ●



Review the Reviews...

"... excellent compared to anything that I have encountered at any price... the beginning of a new era in audio."

Robert E. Greene - *The Absolute Sound*, Issue 183

"I haven't found a product so instantly and confidence-inspiring in years."

Ken Kessler - *Hifi News*, July 2008

"Thanks to all those inputs, the DAC1 Pre is a digital source lover's dream come true."

Jeff Dorgay - *ToneAudio Review*, 2008

Read all reviews at www.DAC1PRE.com

...Experience the Experience

Experience the DAC1 PRE with a **30 Day In Home Trial***. Order yours at: www.DAC1PRE.com



*30 Day In Home Trial available in US only. Visit website for details.

DAC1 PRE

Stereo Pre-Amplifier / DAC / Headphone Amp

www.benchmarkmedia.com 800-262-4675

Benchmark
...the measure of excellence!™

The GamuT S-7 Speakers
MSRP: \$42,000 USD

MANUFACTURER

GamuT International A/S

Navervej 6

DK 7430 Ikast

Denmark

Phone: (+45) 70 20 22 68

Fax: (+45) 59 43 97 26

E-mail: info@gamutaudio.com

www.gamutaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Analog Sources Spiral Groove SG-2 w/Triplanar arm and Lyra Skala cartridge, TW-Acoustic Raven Two w/SME iV.Vi arm, and SME 309 arm, Clearaudio DaVinci cartridge and Soundsmith "The Voice" Cartridge.

Digital Sources Naim CD555, Wadia 781SE, Rega Isis, PS Audio Perfect Wave Transport and DAC

Preamplifier Burmester 011

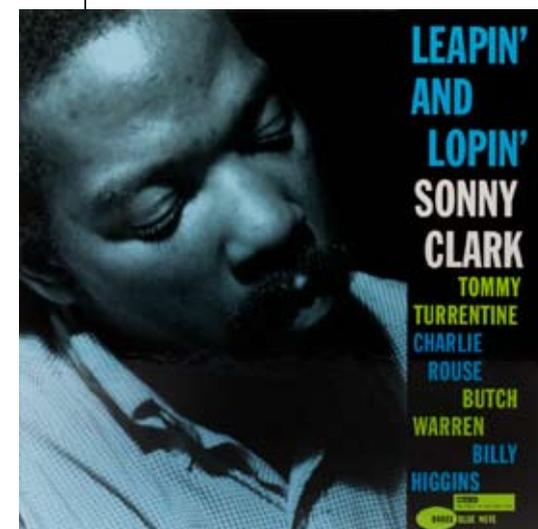
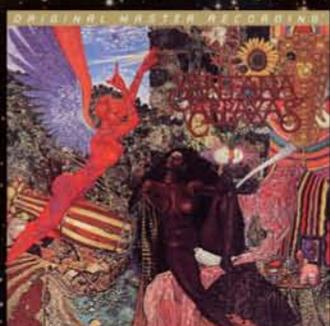
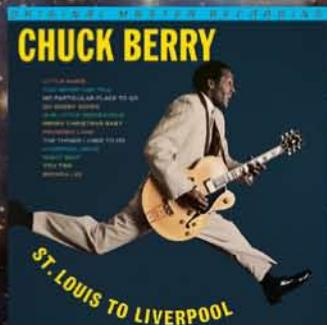
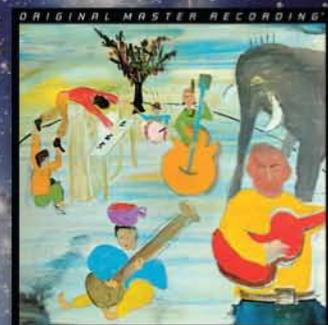
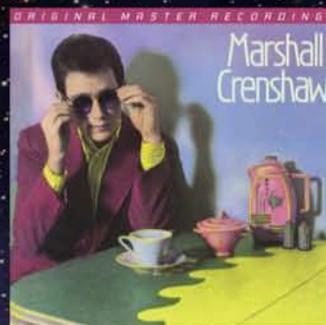
Power Amplifiers Burmester 911mk. 3, Conrad Johnson LP-70S, McIntosh 1.2KW's, SimAudio Moon W-7 monoblocks

Phono Preamplifiers Nagra VPS with VFS platform, Manley Steelhead RC, Naim Superline with HiCap2

Power Running Springs Dmitri and Maxim power conditioners, RSA HZ power cords, Shunyata Python CX power cords

Cable Shunyata Aurora Interconnects, Shunyata Stratos SP speaker cable

Accessories Furutech DeMag, Furutech SP-12 Silver Tonearm cable, Furutech AG-12 Tonearm Cable, Furutech cartridge leads and record clamp, Shunyata Dark Field Cable Elevators



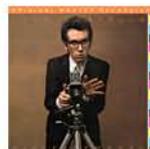
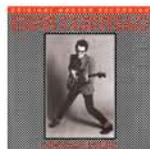
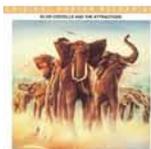
Sonny Clark

Leavin' and Lopin'
Music Matters,
2-45 r.p.m. LP's

This just happens to be my personal favorite of the recent Blue Note Reissues from Joe Harley, Ron Rambach and their crew. The whole series is award winning; the care taken in transferring these jazz classics is impeccable. There's not a stinker in the bunch.

While some Blue Note collectors will gripe that these records are not a 100 percent copy of the originals, in many ways they are *superior*, providing more dynamic range than the originals with more extension on the top and bottom, which take advantage of today's high-performance cartridges.

My money's on the Music Matters LP's.



• Coming Soon: Elvis Costello!

Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab—The Ultimate Listening Experience

- From the Original Master Tapes
- Proprietary Mastering Technology & Techniques
- Limited Audiophile Collectors' Editions

mofi.com

Mofi
MOBILE FIDELITY
SOUND LAB



ORG Recordings Group

Nevermind, In Utero, MTV Unplugged
180 LP and Limited Edition Colored Vinyl

Mastered by Bernie Grundman, these ORG records have been pressed with the same amount of care for which ORG is famous on their jazz releases. If you want the ultimate Nirvana experience, these records are the ticket. It seems a bit wacky to equate the grungy sound of Nirvana with an audiophile pressing, but all of the energy from these performances is captured and thanks to a superlative mastering job, you can hear the complexity that these recordings contained.



RedEye, the **personal** remote.

The RedEye system allows the iPhone and iPod touch to control nearly any TV, stereo, cable box, DVD player, and many other devices that receive standard infrared signals.

Personal.

- Each iPhone or iPod touch acts as a controller
- More than one controller can simultaneously interact with existing home entertainment gear

Simple.

- One touch launches any activity—watch TV, listen to music, play a video
- Custom screen layouts for each activity means no hunting for the right button

Smart.

- Multi-touch gestures for common functions
- Free software upgrades delivered via iTunes
- Control different rooms from anywhere in the house

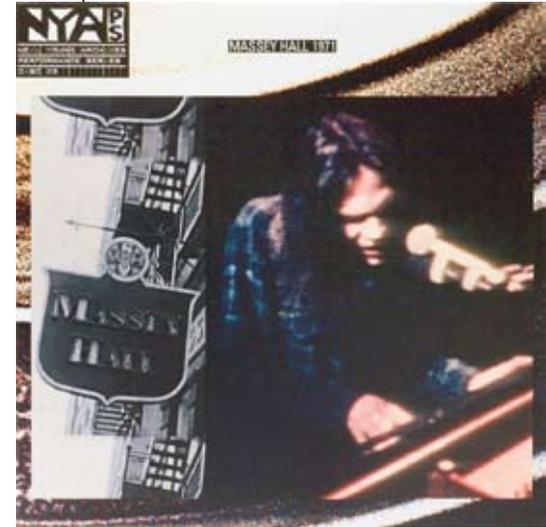


Wi-Fi to Infrared

Communication from iPhone or iPod touch to RedEye device via Wi-Fi, and RedEye device to entertainment gear via infrared



A hardware device and a free App available on iTunes turn the iPhone and iPod touch into a remote control

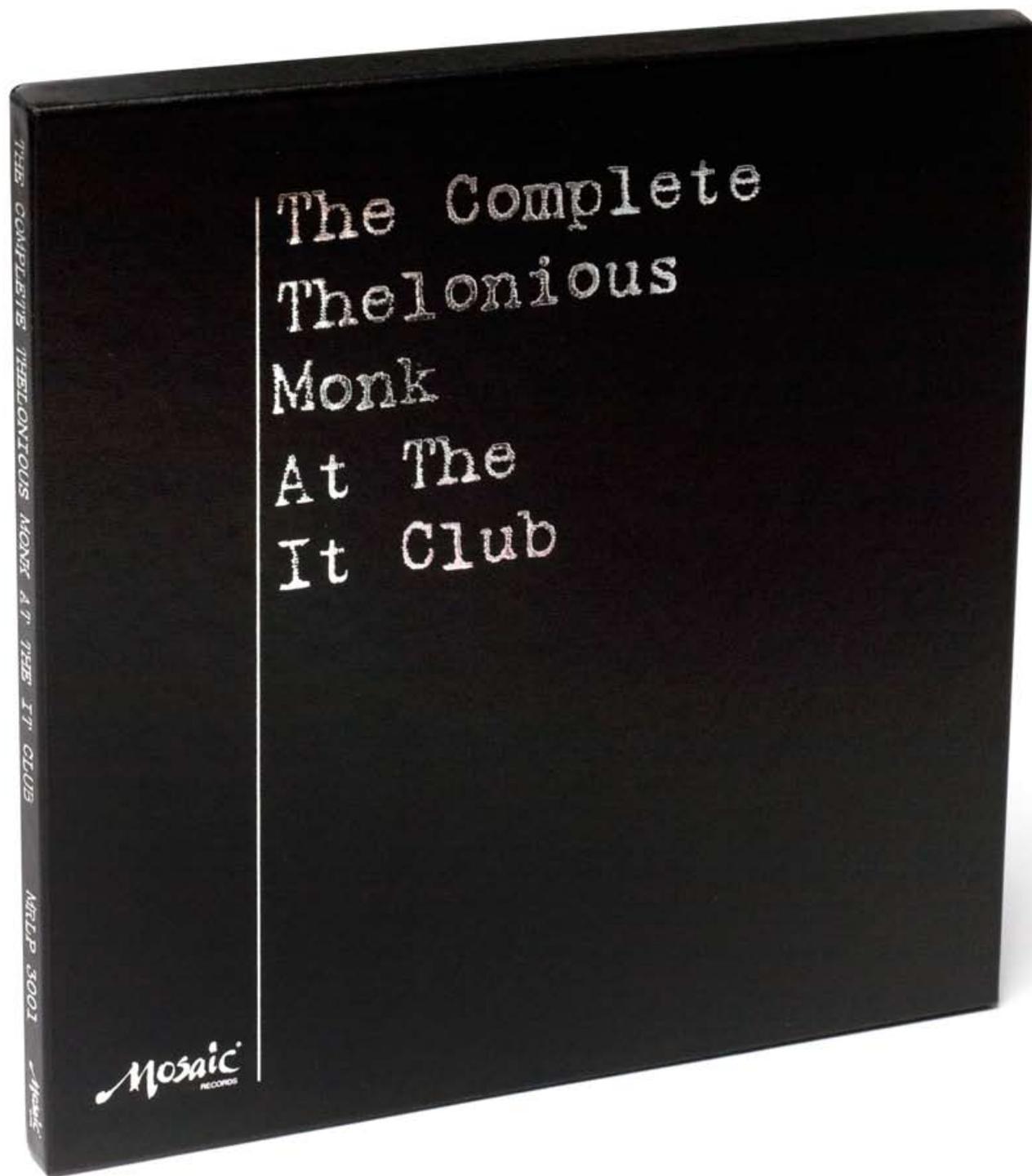


Neil Young

Live At Massey Hall
Classic Records,
2-200g LP's

Even if you aren't a Neil Young fan, this record is a must have. Much like the Monk set, this recording captures a legendary performer giving one of his best performances ever in a stripped down environment. The recording is fantastic and defines the "Unplugged" concept 30 years ahead of it's time.

redeyere.com

**Thelonius Monk**

The Complete Thelonius Monk At The It Club Mosaic, 4-180g. LP Box Set

I raved about this box set in the last issue. The folks at Mosaic did a spectacular job of capturing these rare recordings and getting the essence of Monk at his best. If you ever wondered what it was like to *be there*, this set from Mosaic will transport you. There are only going to be 5,000 copies pressed, so get one before they are gone!

The D100 Stereo DAC

passive transformer output stage

fully balanced dual-mono

24-bit / 192kHz



DISCOVER MUSIC AGAIN

The D100 is the result of our quest for true audio fidelity. Built of the highest quality components on a solid scientific foundation, the D100 creates music free of coloration and true to the source.

“...a stellar performer.”

–Jeff Dorgay, *TONEAudio Magazine*

“The sound? Pure bliss.”

–Peter Davey, *Positive Feedback Online, Issue 42*

“...clean and natural.”

–Nels Ferre, *Enjoy the Music.com, July 2009*

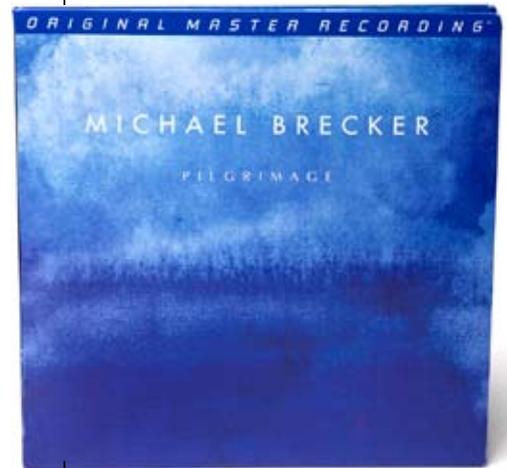
“...the best DAC I’ve used to date.”

–Jake Montzingo, *Affordable\$\$Audio, Issue 42*



*Neko
Audio*

www.nekoaudio.com • 408-476-3276



Michael Brecker

Pilgrimage

MoFi, LP and 2-180g. LP's

With an all-star cast featuring Pat Metheny, Herbie Hancock, Brad Mehldau, Jack DeJohnette and John Pattucci, this was Brecker's last record before he succumbed to leukemia in 2007. The original release won two Grammy's (Best Jazz Instrumental Album and Best Jazz Instrumental Solo for "Anagram"), and the MoFi version strips away all of the compression, leaving just the music. Pressed to two LP's, the grooves are wide, dynamic and free of distortion.

2009

toneAudio
 **AWARDS**



Exceptional Value Awards

As I mentioned in the Publisher's Letter, these components represent not only good sound, but what we feel is top-of-the-price-category performance. The phrase "giant killer" is never used within these pages because there's no free lunch in high-end audio. The best components and most-careful assembly cost a lot of money, and there's no way to really cheat that part of the equation.

However, if sound is your priority and you can live with fewer push buttons, a more simple design aesthetic, or take advantage of a larger company using their resources to produce a great entry-level product, here are the products that we feel offer that little extra something.

2009

Exceptional Value



Audio Research SP-17 with Phono Stage

MSRP: \$3,495

www.audioresearch.com

Reviewed in Issue 24

You can purchase the SP-17 without a phono stage for \$2,995, but if you have any inkling of adding a turntable to your system, the version with the phono pre-installed is definitely the way to go. This is what really makes it a fantastic bargain. You will never find a phono stage this good for \$500, and you'll still have to buy a pair of interconnects and a power cord.

Utilizing the 6H30 tube from their REF series preamplifiers, you can see and hear a distinct lineage to ARC's top preamplifiers. Everything is tastefully packaged with a basic remote enclosed. Nice to see a real preamplifier with this level of build quality *and* a phono stage for less than you'd expect to pay from the garage builders.



2009

Exceptional Value



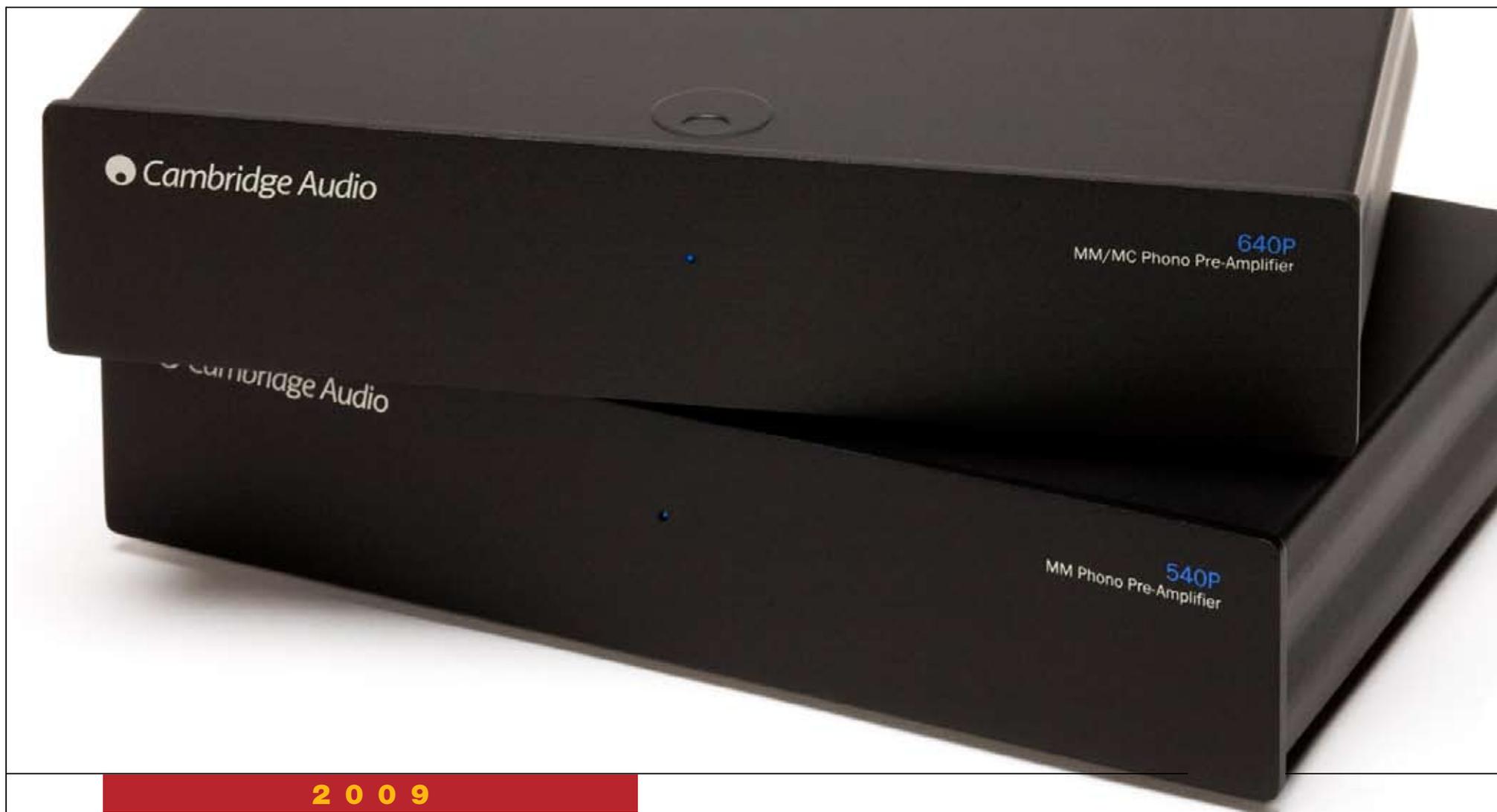
PrimaLuna DiaLogue 7 Monoblocks

MSRP: \$4,995 per pair
www.upscaleaudio.com
 Review: TONEAudio Website

Prima Luna has been around for more than six years, and they continue to refine the breed and expand the model range. The DiaLogue-series amplifiers have bigger power supplies and more robust output transformers than the ProLogue series, with a more-refined version of the AutoBias circuitry that made them famous.

Five grand buys you a pair of beefy amplifiers that feature 2, 4 and 8 ohm output taps. They give you enough versatility to drive even the MartinLogan electrostatic speakers, which typically exhibit rolled-off highs with many other tube amplifiers.

The DiaLogue 7's use four KT88 tubes per channel, but our long-term experience with Prima Luna show they are easy on tubes, thanks to the AutoBias circuitry. Sound is just slightly on the romantic side of neutral. Because you can vary the output tubes with ease, you can easily attain whatever character you'd like your 7's to have.



2009

Exceptional Value



Cambridge Audio 540P and 640P Phono Preamplifiers

MSRP: \$89 and \$179
www.cambridgeaudio.com
 Reviewed in Issue 19

Vinyl newbies often have an amplifier or receiver that lacks a phono preamplifier section and are looking for a decent phono preamplifier to get a taste of the analog magic with. We were all consistently impressed with the sound and the build quality of the two Cambridge products here.

It's nearly impossible to find a phono stage for \$100-200 as it is, but something that sounds this good is a true bargain. The lower priced 540P is MM only, while the 640P offers higher gain and the ability to use an MC cartridge. Sound quality is much better than you'd expect at this price point. Go straight to the 640P and you can probably live through a few cartridge upgrades before you start looking for a better phono preamp.

2009

Exceptional Value



Conrad-Johnson Classic Preamplifier

MSRP: \$2,495 with phono stage

www.conradjohnson.com

Reviewed in issue 22

Much like the ARC SP-17 listed above, C-J's new Classic is reminiscent of their classic PV-12 preamplifier from the mid-90s, with an updated sound that is more extended on both ends of the frequency scale, yet it doesn't lose any of the glorious midrange for which C-J preamplifiers are famous.

You can actually get the Classic in a "low" or "high" gain configuration, so it can be used with your favorite MM or MC cartridge. I found it to be an excellent performer. There's no remote, just a volume control and an input selector; a total purist approach. I can't think of a better choice if you are looking to put together a great system while keeping an eye on the bottom line.

2009

Exceptional Value



Magnepan 1.6 Speakers

MSRP: \$1,695 per pair

www.magnepan.com

Reviewed in issue 22

I began my journey down the path to high-end audio 30 years ago with a pair of Magnepan's, and they have only gotten better. I can't think of a speaker that will get you closer to the big-bucks sound while offering a bigger soundstage or transparency than the Magnepan 1.6's.

They have a doggedly loyal following and rightly so. They are still made by hand in Minnesota. The big flat panel will be something your wife will love or hate, but no one will argue with the big, walk-through sound that these speakers offer. The only caveat is that they need *lots* of power to strut their stuff. But there are plenty of great vintage solid-state amplifiers for sale these days, and some of the newer Class D amplifiers would work well with the 1.6s.



2009

Exceptional Value



MartinLogan Spire Speakers

MSRP: \$8,495 per pair

www.martinlogan.com

Review: TONEAudio Website

The current MartinLogan speakers with their recent updates have taken the hybrid electrostatic speaker to an even higher level of performance than past models, and the flagship full-range CLX is a world-class speaker at any price.

But the sweet spot of the line is definitely the Spire. At \$8,495 per pair, these will give you a huge helping of what the \$14,995 Summit X has to offer for a more reasonable price. Using only one 10-inch woofer per cabinet (the Summit X uses two) and less amplifier power, the Spire still has solid bass output below 30hz. In a small- to medium-size room, they will dispel any notions that panel speakers can't rock out.

I've used the Spire regularly in six-figure systems, and they always hold up their end of the bargain. If you'd like a substantial taste of money-no-object HiFi, the MartinLogan Spire is a speaker around which you should consider building your system.



2009

Exceptional Value



Morel Octave Signature Speakers

MSRP: \$2,495 per pair

www.morel.com

Reviewed in Issue 22

These stylish speakers from Morel play much bigger than their diminutive size would suggest. A six-inch two-way design, they are available in bright red, black or white, fitting into any contemporary space with ease.

They are extremely easy to set up and only need a modest amount of power to drive. Paired with the award-winning Naim Uniti, this makes for an incredibly satisfying music system. Now if they only came in Naim's signature lime green ...



2009

Exceptional Value



Moscode 402au Amplifier

MSRP: \$6,495 (shipping included)

www.moscode.com

Review: [TONEAudio Website](#)

Musician and designer George Kaye has built an outstanding amplifier, combining the best of both worlds. Keeping the legend of the original Moscode amplifiers alive, the 402au is built like a tank, with tubes in the front end and MOSFET's in the output stage. Kaye rounds out the package with Edison Price binding posts and Cardas wiring throughout.

The result is a power amplifier with plenty of power (200 wpc/8 ohms) that has the bass control of solid state and that extra bit of air that the tubes bring to the picture. Even better, you can access the tubes from the fold-down front panel, so tube rollers will be in heaven. The backbone of my second reference system, the Moscode is definitely one of my favorite amplifiers and makes a great combination with the ARC SP-17 preamplifier.



2009

Exceptional Value



Neko Audio D-100 DAC

MSRP: \$1,295, Mk.II version, \$1,395

www.nekoaudio.com

Review: [TONEAudio Website](#)

Newcomer Wesley Miaw has hit a home run with the D-100. Taking a novel approach of eliminating the analog stage entirely and using a pair of custom Jensen transformers, the D-100 is much more musical than its competition.

An upgraded version packing 6db more output than the original model is now available for those requiring a little bit more, but the character remains, which is what made this DAC special. It is the perfect minimalist product, with one TOSLINK input and one SPDIF RCA input.

The D-100 has a slight warmth to its presentation, but we found that inviting; when playing digital at this level, a bit of warmth is always preferable to any harshness masquerading as detail. Yet with this slight warmth, the D-100 has plenty of low-level detail and dynamics. It works with files up to 24 bit/192 khz, so it will accommodate whatever you have in your collection.



2009

Exceptional Value



Peachtree Audio Nova

MSRP: \$1,195

www.signalpath.com

Review: [TONEAudio Website](#)

Building on the success of the original Decco, Peachtree has upped the ante with 80 watts per channel, some additional inputs and a substantial upgrade to the DAC. Instead of the basic DAC that was included on the chassis of the Decco, the Nova uses the latest chipset from Sabre Technology.

With the same good looks and user-friendly layout of the original, the Nova is right at home in any situation and offers far better performance than you might expect at this level. It has a bay for a Sonos music server on the backside, so this is the perfect solution for Sonos owners who would like a great amplifier/DAC combination in a compact package.

No matter what digital source you match up with the Nova, this is high-performance audio made simple. There is also a great headphone amplifier on board, and they've kept the glowing tube on the front panel to warm up the sound a little bit. You can disable it from the circuit if you don't want to fuss with the glowing bottle.



2009

Exceptional Value



Cambridge Audio DacMagic DAC

MSRP: \$429

www.cambridgeaudio.com

Reviewed in Issue 20

With so many people using a laptop as their primary music server, the DAC has made a huge comeback in the last year or so at all price points. The DAC Magic from Cambridge offers a true upsampling DAC that converts everything to 24bit/192khz before analog output to XLR or RCA analog outputs. Inputs are switchable via Toslink or S/PDIF, so you can have two sources connected.

Whether you are using your laptop, an aging CD player or even a game controller as your transport, the DAC Magic will provide a major improvement to your system.



2009

Exceptional Value



Topaz DAC Headphone Amplifier

MSRP: \$449
www.cryo-parts.com
 Reviewed in issue 22

The Topaz is one of the better-sounding headphone amps I've heard, and it includes a 24 bit/192khz DAC that can be pressed into service as a preamplifier with great results. If you are using only your computer or another digital source for your system, plugging it into your favorite power amplifier can be the start of a great system.

The front panel allows you to switch between the optical and the USB inputs, with each offering great sound though this DAC, which is capable of 24bit/192khz resolution.

2009

Exceptional Value



Trends TA 10.2 Amplifier

MSRP: \$179-229

www.trendsaudio.com

Reviewed in issue 23

When I unpacked the Trends Audio TA 10.2 from its box, I thought to myself, "This little thing can't be real." But after unplugging the \$30,000 Burmester 911 mk. 3 and plugging the TA 10.2 into my system, I was highly impressed. The 911 isn't going up for sale any time soon, but the Trends gets the basics right and sounds better than some much more expensive chip-based amplifiers.

The TA 10.2 will work incredibly well with high-efficiency speakers (like the Zu's below). If you don't need concert-hall volume, it will work great as the heart of a compact desktop system.

No matter where you are in the HiFi journey, you should have one of these just because they are so cool. One input, one output and a volume control. Simplicity at its best, and the sound will impress even the most jaded audiophile.



2009

Exceptional Value

ZU Essence Speakers

MSRP: \$3,495

www.zuaudio.com

Reviewed in Issue 21

The guys at Zu have always marched to a different beat. Usually, there's some pretty cool electronica whenever I've walked into their room at a HiFi show! Their sound is big, lively and punchy. The Essence builds on the success of their earlier Druid series and takes that concept further with more high-end extension thanks to a ribbon tweeter and more bass extension due to advances in cabinet design.

But seriously, their speakers are gorgeous, high-efficiency monoliths that can blow you out of the room with your favorite nine-watt SET amplifier yet have the dynamic range to mate with a large solid-state amplifier as well. And you can have them custom finished in whatever color best suits your decor.

Now that Zu has gone back to a factory-direct business model, the Essence has had a price drop to \$3,495, making these a steal.



2009

toneAudio
★ AWARDS



Product of the Year

Because we've reviewed more gear this year, we have a few more awards to hand out. While we feel the year's list of reviews contains a star-studded cast, these 12 shine the brightest.

The Naim Uniti receives our overall award because it does so much in such a small package, eliminating any reasons for not having a great HiFi system!

Our POY picks all share the same ethos, no matter the cost. They represent a commitment to performance, style and fun.

BEST OVERALL

Product of the Year

The Naim Uniti

MSRP: \$3,795

www.naim-audio.com

Review: [TONEAudio Website](#)

I firmly believe that you can't possibly pack more performance into one box than the Naim Uniti. It combines their Nait 5i, and the CD5i on one standard-size chassis along with a very good FM tuner section and wireless internet, which allows you to select internet radio or stream music from your computer-based music server.

If that weren't enough, the DAC is fully addressable with SPDIF and optical inputs, along with a USB port for a thumb drive on the front panel. Still not impressed? There is a great headphone amp, a socket to control your iPod from the front panel and sub-woofer outputs as well. Analog lovers can even plug in a Stageline phono preamplifier and their favorite turntables; there's a handy power socket for that, too.

So shut up and buy one already! Whether you need a great second (or third) system, or you just want a great HiFi that doesn't require the wiring loom from the Space Shuttle, the Uniti is the way to roll. Add your favorite pair of speakers that will work with 50 watts per channel and start enjoying music right now.

ANALOG

Product of the Year

**The SoundSmith "Voice"**

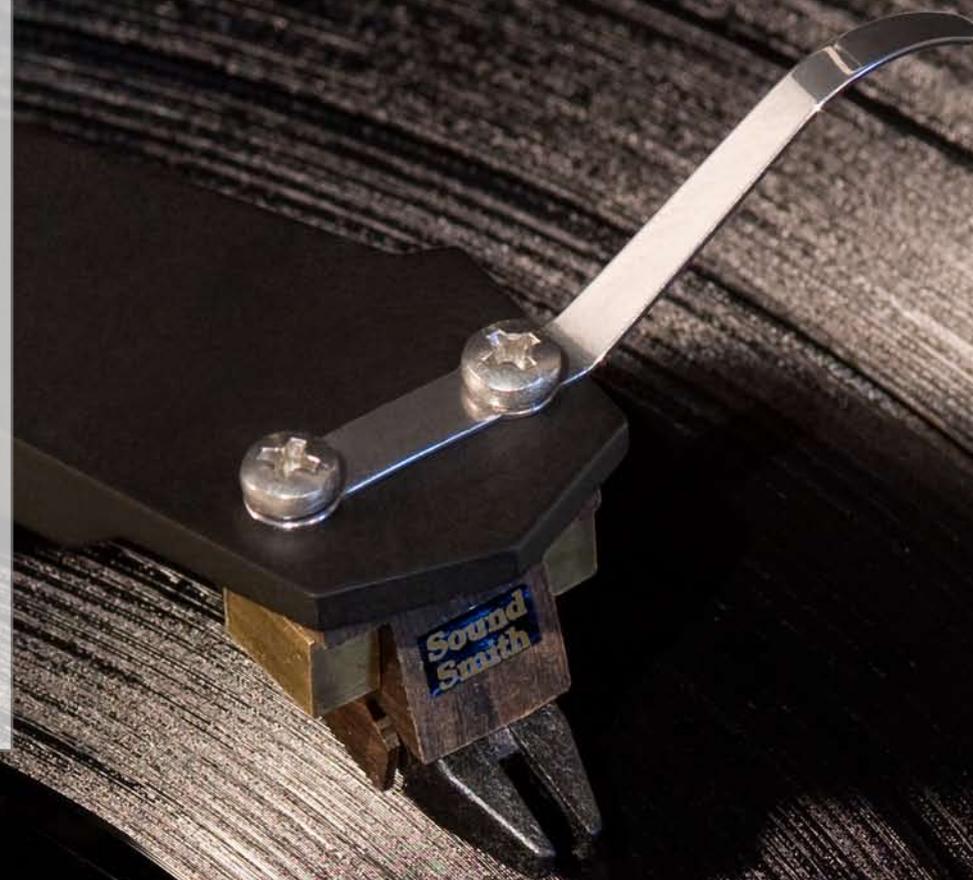
MSRP: \$2,195

www.sound-smith.com

Review: TONEAudio, Issue 24

Until just a few months ago, this was Peter Leder-mann's top-of-the-line moving-iron cartridge. But for many people, this price point is going to be the end of the line. Even compared with some of the world's best (and most expensive) moving-coil cartridges, the Voice stands up.

This cartridge has a very neutral tonal scale combined with big dynamics and excellent low-level detail retrieval. Those three put it at the top of the heap, but when you add its stellar tracking abilities, it's one of the best cartridges money can buy. Definitely one of the most enjoyable cartridges with which I've had the pleasure to spin records.



DIGITAL

Product of the Year



The Rega ISIS CD Player

MSRP: \$8,995

www.rega.co.uk

Review: [TONEAudio Website](#)

What! Nine grand for a Rega CD player? Nine grand for a Rega anything? Don't panic, you heard right. In typical Rega fashion, Roy Gandy doesn't rush to do anything, but when he finally does, the results never disappoint. If anyone has *earned* the right to build a nine thousand dollar CD player, it's Rega. They have always built some of the world's best gear at their respective price points and have helped a lot of us get a lot more system for our money as a result.

After more than 30 years of building to a price point, the ISIS is Rega's idea of building a cost-is-no-object CD player, which tipped the scale at \$9,000. Is it starting to sink in? The ISIS offers not only best-in-class performance, but it's one of the best CD players we've heard at any price. I don't throw that word around lightly. And in typical Rega fashion, it comes smartly packaged, along with a remote control that you'd expect to see on a *thirty* thousand dollar component. A pair of interconnects and a power cord are also included that would set you back another \$1,000 or \$1,500 if purchased somewhere else. If that weren't enough, you can use the ISIS as a USB DAC too.

Everything about the ISIS says "top shelf." It looks, feels and sounds like a \$15,000 CD player, but because it says Rega on the front panel, it only costs \$9,000.



MANLEY
STEELHEAD RC

PHONO PREAMPLIFIER

Product of the Year



Manley Steelhead RC

MSRP: \$7,500

www.manleylabs.com

Review: TONEAudio, Issue 24

The Manley Steelhead has been a perennial favorite of vinyl lovers and the press for some time. The latest update adds a remote control that makes it more useful as a full-function linestage for someone who has a primarily analog system.

The Steelhead is one of the ultimate analog lover's phono stages, with inputs for three turntables. There are two MC phono inputs, a MM phono input and a line-level input. The phono inputs offer variable load impedance as well as capacitance loading and four gain settings, making the Steelhead one of the most versatile phono preamplifiers available.

The Steelhead offers a sound that is very dynamic yet definitely tubey. You won't mistake this one for a Boulder, with its rich tone. This is a music lover's phono stage, offering a nice mix of nirvana with perfect pressings while it adds a touch of warmth that coaxes the best from your less-than-stellar records.

POWER AMPLIFIER

Product of the Year



SimAudio Moon W-7 Monoblocks

MSRP: \$20,000 per pair
www.simaudio.com
Review in process

The full review will be up next month, but for the quick overview: these are stunning power amplifiers. SimAudio has built a solid reputation on world-class engineering, stylish design and ironclad build quality.

Every one of the Moon components we've reviewed in the past few years from their entry level .5 series to the flagship W-7 monoblocks has sounded fantastic, sharing a dynamic, uncolored presentation that is not what you might expect from solid state.

The W-7's take this expression to the ultimate level of refinement. These amplifiers can drive *anything*; with 500 watts per channel into 8 ohms, I never ran out of headroom, no matter how loud I wanted to listen. But don't mistake the W-7's for all muscle and no finesse. These amplifiers have an abundance of both, laying to rest the theory that high-powered amplifiers can't sound great.



CABLE

Product of the Year

**Shunyata Aurora Cable**

MSRP: \$7,500 1m pair

www.shunyata.com

Review: TONEAudio, Issue 24

The Shunyata Aurora interconnects are the icing on the cake for a fantastic system. If you have everything else optimized, the Aurora interconnects offer freedom from grain and a perfect tonal balance. As I mentioned in the review, they do the best job at doing nothing that I've ever heard. My reference system has never sounded better.

Using Shunyata's patented Helix Geometry braid and completely hand-assembled, these cables redefine the description for "premium cable." After they have been built and tested, they undergo Shunyata's Alpha Cryogenic process before packaging.

The Aurora cable will take your system as far as it can go. If you're in the market for premium cables, ignore these at your own peril.



S P E A K E R

Product of the Year

Harbeth Monitor 40.1

MSRP: \$12,995

www.harbeth.co.uk

Review: TONEAudio, Issue 23

While we have two pairs of zootier, more expensive-speakers winning Publisher's Choice awards, I love the Harbeth Monitor 40.1 because it's an awesome combination of music, science and heritage.

It looks the part of the classic British monitor loudspeaker with a simple yet purposeful cabinet. But thanks to principle Alan Shaw's penchant for science and measurement, is a 21st Century speaker under the hood. Taking advantage of their proprietary "Radial" driver technology, the Monitor 40.1 attains a balance of natural midrange while adding extension and dynamics to the mix.

I've lived with the 40.1 for more than a year, and it has become one of my personal favorites. Though they have substantial-size cabinets, the 40.1's are meant to be listened to nearfield for best results. Combining them with a great amplifier and source, they do a better job with musical fundamentals than a lot of six-figure speakers I've experienced.

Harbeth.

40.1



Designed and made in England

SUBWOOFER

Product of the Year

JL Audio Fathom F110

MSRP: \$2,395

www.jlaudio.com

Review: TONEAudio, issue 22

JL Audio initially made their reputation in the world of car audio, winning every award in sight, all over the world and they have been repeating their success in home audio. Best known for their statement product, The Gotham (which will be reviewed in issue 26), Their “entry level” F110 is even more exciting on some levels, because it is more accessible.

The lineage to the Gotham is apparent, the minute you turn it on. The bass response is tight, accurate and powerful. Thanks to JL's on board room correction, with a supplied calibrated microphone, you can set it up in five minutes. I've been using a pair of F110's with my MartinLogan CLX's and they blend perfectly, so there's no worries that the JL subs aren't fast enough for whatever application you might have.

So, if you'd like a substantial helping of what the Gotham has to offer, but on a tighter budget, the F110 is the one to buy.

BUDGET COMPONENT

Product of the Year

**The Mini Watt Amplifier**

MSRP: \$229

www.miniwatt.com

Review: TONEAudio Website

Only two and a half watts per channel, this tiny amplifier will drive almost any speaker, even my MartinLogan CLX's. It's a great headphone amplifier with an adapter cable and just an all around blast to play with.

The sound is very tubey and robust, with excellent dynamics, provided you have efficient speakers. Match the Mini Watt with your favorite pair of 100db speakers (the Zu Essence works perfectly), a CD player and you're rockin.





Burmester

SPECIAL MERIT

Product of the Year



Burmester 911 mk.3 Power Amplifier

MSRP: \$29,995
www.burmester.de
Review in process

I've never said it in five years, but I'll say it now. This is the best power amplifier I've ever heard. It doesn't matter what speakers or linestage I use in my reference system (though I've become pretty attached to the Burmester 011), the Burmester 911 mk. 3 just amplifies music with more clarity, less noise, distortion, coloration and grain than anything I've yet experienced. *(continued)*



GamuT *S5*

Everyone that's heard my system makes the same comment, almost immediately, "It doesn't sound like tubes or transistors ..."

The Burmester gear gave me goosebumps at CES last January, and after a year here, it still never fails to impress. Thanks to its incredibly high level of resolution, the 911mk.3 always gives an accurate read of whatever else is in the system. It's become a highly valuable tool for evaluating speakers because the 911 mk.3 will drive any load without altering its character.

What puts the 911mk.3 above everything else I've experienced is that this high level of information retrieval is not at the expense of musical realism. I've listened to this amplifier for a number of 12-14 hour days without the slightest bit of fatigue.

Like every other Burmester product, the 911 mk.3 is built to last a lifetime. Nothing has been scrimped in any aspect of its mechanical or electrical construction. Evidenced by the mk.3 description, you can rest assured that this amplifier can always be serviced and upgraded to whatever future version Dieter Burmester might someday unveil.

ACCESSORIES

Product of the Year

**Furutech Clamp,
Cable and Phono Leads**

MSRP: \$229-\$1,795
www.furutech.com
Review in process

It's no secret that we're big fans of Furutech around here. Their engineers leave nothing unexamined, nothing to chance. Every one of their accessories that I've had a chance to use has increased the performance of my system. Their AG-12 tonearm cable was one of our award winners last year, and the new Silver Arrows tonearm cable goes much further. *(continued)*



HYDRA MODEL-8 & HYDRA V-RAY

VERSION II

The most critically and professionally heralded products in the history of high-performance Power-Distribution just got a **WHOLE LOT BETTER!!**

Hydra power distribution centers earned unprecedented critical and professional accolades from those at the forefront of the media, film and recording industry through pure engineering, and technical innovation.

- 10 years in research and development
- Custom manufactured buss systems
- Custom manufactured SR-Z1 outlets
- CDA 101 custom manufactured Copper
- ZrCa-2000 noise reduction compounds
- Custom manufactured SR-V2 Filter Array
- Dual chassis design
- Massive three-stage system protection
- 20Amp high current delivery
- On-Site Alpha Cryogenic treatment
- Cohergenic conductor treatment



After eight years as the recognized world references in high-current power distribution, the *Hydra Model-8* and *Hydra V-Ray* models have been improved!

HYDRA MODEL-8 VERSION II / HYDRA V-RAY VERSION II

Shunyata Research's latest developments in patented materials and parts engineering will deliver dramatic improvements in sound and visuals that will startle the most seasoned recording and film engineers, and the toughest audio and home theater critics alike!

SHUNYATA RESEARCH

THE HYDRA 8 VERSION II AND HYDRA V-RAY VERSION II ARE AVAILABLE NOW!

shunyata.com

Think of the AG-12 as one of the best tonearm cables within a reasonable budget, and the Silver Arrows are the way to go for on a top-line turntable/tonearm combination. On recent cartridge reviews, the Silver Arrows always extracts the most information from the cartridge.

The same holds true for their La Source headshell leads. Also using silver wire and Furutech's Cryo process, these will give a touch more detail from top to bottom. I found them to be indispensable while working with the SME 309 headshells, which use inexpensive wiring to go from cartridge to headshell pins. Using the La Source leads in a 309 headshell brought the performance closer to that of the much higher-priced SME V and iV.VI arms.

While the Furutech Monza clamp has a wide range of technology to help damp your LP's on the platter (that our review will explain in detail), I'd buy this stainless-and-carbon-fiber beauty just because it looks so awesome on my turntable! It is truly a work of art, albeit a very functional one.

The best part of the Furutech accessories is that they work well individually and even better as a system. Each one you add gives you a bit more performance, allowing your record-playing system to operate at its highest level.

AUTOSOUND

Product of the Year



Burmester/Porsche Panamera System

MSRP: \$4,900-\$5,900

www.burmester.de

Review in process

I've been fortunate enough to hear some excellent car audio during the past year and a half from B&W, B&O and Naim, but the Burmester system in the new Porsche Panamera is truly a step beyond. The level of dynamics and clarity is unmatched in car audio, and I'm sure this will lead a number of Porsche owners to add Burmester to their home audio systems.

The actual shape of the Panamera is still open for discussion. Some will love it, others will be incensed, but the minute you put a CD in the dash and crank up 1,000 watts of Burmester power through 16 channels, the only argument will be what to listen to more, the 4.8-liter V8 under the hood or Rammstein through the Burmester system.

I'm hoping the line will be expanded to the rest of the Porsche range. I'm a roadster guy...



GADGET

Product of the Year

The Red Eye Remote Control System

MSRP: \$188

www.thinkflood.comReview: [TONEAudio Website](#)

Actually, this Product of the Year is an anti-gadget in a way. The Red Eye allows you to use your iPhone or iPod Touch as a remote for all of the electronics in your house. The TV, cable box, DVD player, surround receiver, you name it. If it has an IR remote, the Red Eye can control it.

Even better, the Red Eye can be programmed by room and function. For example, if you'd like to dim the lights, raise the screen and switch your processor to the Blu Ray input all with one keystroke, you're going to love using the Red Eye. And if your remote isn't listed in the Red Eye database, it will learn the codes of whatever remote you have.

This is a fantastic product, that not only saves clutter and makes your life more organized, it eliminates all those batteries from your remote controls. No more hunting for another set of AA batteries in the middle of the Super Bowl. If they can only make it control my garage door opener, I'll be in heaven! But for now I can live with two remotes.



2009

toneAudio
 **AWARDS**



Publisher's Choice Awards

While the Product of the Year awards are somewhat diplomatic, the Publisher's Choice awards are the shiny things that were my personal favorites for the year.

Both the YG Acoustics Anat's and the Gamut S-7's are two of the world's best-sounding speakers, but for very different reasons. The McIntosh power amplifiers have boundless power and those big blue meters are just intoxicating. The Olympia phono stage is off the chart at \$20k but comes with a power supply that weighs more than my Premier 350 power amplifier, and the Nagra LB squeezes a two-channel digital mastering deck that's housed in a case not much bigger than a Mac Mini. All great toys to add to your collection if your taste leans towards the obsessive.

2009

Publisher's Choice



*The YG
Acoustics
Anat 2 Studio*

The YG Acoustics Anat II Studio

MSRP: \$70,000 per pair
www.ygacoustics.com
 Review In process

I've been listening to the YG Acoustics Anat II Studio's for a solid month and they still fascinate me. Their designer, Yoav Geva, claims that they are "the world's best speakers." I'm not ready to go that far yet, but I'll say this much: The YG Anat's reveal more music than anything I've ever heard without being harsh.

If you have an amazing system and equally great software, the YG's will definitely take you somewhere you've never been before, and that's my main requirement for an expensive piece of HiFi gear. Thanks to powered subwoofers and a 93 db sensitivity rating, you don't need a massive power amplifier to make the YG's sing. Remember, with this speaker, it's always quality first.

Exquisitely built from a combination of ballistic-grade and aircraft aluminum, the enclosures weigh less than 300 pounds each and redefine the term "non-resonant." The rest of the speaker is meticulously built, with everything matched, checked and measured to perfection.

The result is a high-performance speaker that winds up being much like a race car. Out on the track with grippy pavement that is billiard-table smooth, you'd get an E-ticket ride. But driving back and forth to work on bumpy roads would be tougher. Listening to less-than-awesome recordings on the Anat's may not be torture, but the great recordings sound so good that it's harder to listen to the lesser ones. The average records in your collection will sound better than they ever have, but I guarantee you'll keep wanting a fix of the good stuff.

So be prepared. If you have an outstanding record collection, the YG's will spoil you for anything else.



dmitri



The new RSA Dmitri is the ultimate evolution of our work in power line conditioning technology. Utilizing our new RSA platinum series capacitors and proprietary inductors, the Dmitri takes power line conditioning to the next level and beyond.

- All components are designed and manufactured in our ISO 9001:2000 approved facility in Anaheim, California – USA.
- Tolerances on capacitors and inductors meet or exceed 1%.
- 100% passive, non-current limiting topography.
- New carbon fiber resonance vibration control.
- Significantly lower noise floor and improved dynamics.

With meticulous attention to detail, coupled with raw science, the Dmitri allows your components the opportunity to deliver all of the performance that your system has to offer.

The Dmitri can be ordered as a stand alone unit, (without 20A power cord), with our world famous Mongoose power cord or with our new flagship PC, "High Zoot" (HZ) for ultimate performance. Stop by your Running Springs Audio dealer and audition the future of power line conditioning.

"The Dmitri represents the state of the art in power line conditioning."

– Jeff Dorgay, *TONEAudio Magazine*, Issue 18



clean power pure sound

Power Line Conditioners Hand Made in California www.runningspringsaudio.com



running springs audio

2009

Publisher's Choice



*Garnut S-7
Speakers*





extraordinary
+
synergy



Red Wine Audio is proud to be the exclusive
North American Distributor for **WLM Loudspeakers**

Red Wine Audio
battery-powered purist hi-fi



WLM
Loudspeakers

www.redwineaudio.com

GamuT S-7 Speakers

MSRP: \$42,000 per pair
www.gamutaudio.com
Review in Issue 25

If the YG Anat's are a Formula One car, the GamuT S-7's are a Porsche 997 Twin Turbo with sport suspension. Less nimble on the racetrack but a total blast to drive every day, and just as exhilarating when there's a nice stretch of open road.

As I mention in the upcoming review, these are the most balanced speakers I've ever heard (other than GamuT's top speaker, the S-9, which is on its way to us for review). They offer a huge soundstage, big dynamics and spot-on tonality. What puts the S-7's over the top is the touch of body that they add to the presentation that seems to allow the average records in your collection a chance to sound better than you ever expected.

The S-7's are a thing of beauty even when you aren't listening to them. Made from solid Finnish Birch plywood, they are unimposing on your decor and stunningly elegant. Of all the speakers we've ever reviewed, the S-7's received the highest wife-acceptance score. Most of my friends' wives usually say "not in my living room" when it comes to big-bucks speakers, but the S-7's always evoke a warm and friendly response. A big plus when you are trying to justify a purchase at this level.

2009

Publisher's Choice

*Nagra
LB Digital
Recorder*



Bass

How **deep** is your love?

Pushing 3,000 watts of continuous power (7,500 watts Dynamic Peak) SUB 25 unleashes room-pounding bass accurate to a gruelling 9 Hz! In an average listening room, it can reproduce an incredible 125 dB without audible distortion. And there's the rub ... the 'average' listening room. Even when the world's finest subwoofer is perfectly positioned, room dimensions, dead spots, archways, even furniture can turn the room into an additional instrument playing alongside musicians or movie scores with unwanted coloration and resonance. Bass sounds boomy with poor definition. You have the perfect sub, in a less than perfect room.

You can pad the walls, trap the corners, remove the furniture, or you can let Paradigm's optional Perfect Bass Kit (PBK-1) tackle the problem. Based on research conducted by the National Research Council, PBK-1 analyzes the sub's response in your room, then sets about perfecting that response through scientific calculation!

Signature SUB 25 &
Paradigm's Perfect Bass Kit™
The **only** solution for perfect bass



PARADIGM REFERENCE

Signature Series



Optional Paradigm Perfect Bass Kit
for **real** digital room correction

Nagra LB Digital Recorder

MSRP: \$3,500

www.nagra.com

Review in process

The Nagra LB offers the most fun I've had in years. Battery-powered and taking a tiny footprint, it has all of the excellence you'd expect from Nagra, borrowing heavily from the technology inside the legendary Nagra 6 digital recorder. Talk about convenience, you can record to the 2gb of internal memory or the same CF memory cards that your favorite DSLR uses.

Whether you want to buy a couple of mikes and start your own audiophile label or just make pristine copies of your favorite LP's, the Nagra LB will take you where you want to go. When archiving some of my favorite 45 rpm audiophile pressings, I was impressed at how close to the originals the 24bit/96khz digital copies were. Most times, I was straining to hear the difference. While the LB offers an even higher resolution of 24bit/192khz, this is an acquired taste. Some prefer the sound of the higher-resolution setting while others pooh-pooh it. World-famous recording engineer Ken Christianson (of the Naim Label) claims the 24/96 settings are the best, and who am I to argue?

Either way, you end up a winner with the LB. If you've been thinking about archiving some or all of your vinyl, you need one.

For more info on the award winning research behind Paradigm's Perfect Bass Kit (PBK-1) visit www.paradigm.com



METER
WATTS
HOLD

McIntosh
MC1.2KW POWER AMPLIFIER

POWER
REMOTE
OFF ON

2009

Publisher's Choice

★
McIntosh
MC1.2KW
Monoblocks

2009

Publisher's Choice

*Martin Logan
Purity
Speakers*

m y s t è r e

"... a true giant in the world of integrated amplifiers."

— Marc Phillips, **TONEAudio** 2008



the **ia21** \$2999
50 watts per channel

the **ia11** \$1999
40 watts per channel

For more information:
Upscale Audio at 909/931-9686
www.mystere-usa.com

A limited number of dealer and manufacturer's
representative positions are open

The MartinLogan Purity

MSRP: \$3,295 per pair
www.martinlogan.com

Review: **TONEAudio** Website

The MartinLogan Purity is the perfect "non HiFi" speaker. In addition to a pair of 6.5-inch woofers and a small electrostatic panel, the speakers each have built in 200 watt digital amplifiers. All you need to do is connect a source with a volume control, that can be anything from an iPod to a preamplifier. The Purities also work great with the variable line output of a flat screen as well.

The Purity works well anywhere that you would like great sound and *not* a rack full of HiFi gear and a loom of cables. The best news is that you get a more than ample helping of the transparent sound that's made MartinLogan famous. All you need is a pair of interconnects and the supplied power cords and you are rocking.

Light enough for one person to carry, the Purity fit easily in any environment and can be optimized for listening sitting down, or walking around your room. I can't imagine how you could get this level of performance elsewhere in an amplifier, pair of speaker cables and perhaps even speaker stands for this low of a price!

2009

Publisher's Choice



*Loiminchay
Kandinsky*





"The best CD playback under \$5k... for \$1799!"

Robert Harley - The Absolute Sound - 09/07



azur

"For starters, the 840C doesn't sound like anything in its price range. It had a resolution, refinement, ease, grace, and musicality that were instantly recognizable as being different from every other product in the category. (...) Not only is the 840C easily the greatest value in digital sources in my experience, it must be considered one of the greatest bargains in all of high-end audio."

"In fact, I could easily live with the 840C at the front end of my \$100K reference system – it's that good."

Robert Harley - The Absolute Sound - 09/07



Cambridge Audio 840C - \$1799
CD Player with 24bit / 384kHz upsampling
ATF (Adaptive Time Filtering)
Dual-Differential DACs & Balanced Output

 **Cambridge Audio**

Your music + our passion

www.cambridgeaudio.com

The Loiminchay Kandinsky

MSRP: \$60,000 per pair
www.loiminchayaudio.com
Review in this issue, pg.

Like his fountain pens, the Kandinsky speakers are a rare treat. Only seven pairs are built per year with a painstaking process. The cabinets are made from a solid block of wood that is layered together and then CNC bored out to create the cavities for the drivers and crossover. These cabinets are encapsulated with 17 coats of laquer to give them the final finish and then the drivers are installed.

This horn speaker is incredibly musical and does not exhibit any horn-like behavior. As designer Patrick Chu likes to say, "My speakers have no MSG added to the sound, they are natural."

If you want a pair of high performance loudspeakers that are also a rare work of art, look no further.

2009

Publisher's Choice



*Montana
Olympia Phono
Preamplifier*

OLYMPIA-PX
All-FET Phono Pre-Amp

PBN
AUDIO
Custom Shop

POWER



PBN
AUDIO
Custom Shop

POWER



FURUTECH

Pure Transmission Technology

AWARDS

Disc Flattener

DF-2 LP Flattener



"... Those of you with voracious appetites for vinyl will find this little gadget indispensable."

—Jeff Dorgay, Tone Audio.com



DeMag



Furutech's deMag Frees LPs, Optical Disc Media, Cables and Connectors of Magnetically-Induced Distortion — CES 2007 Best of Innovations Award winner

Reference Series



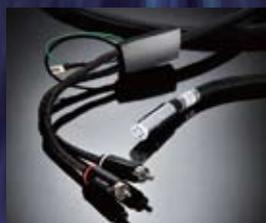
"... Furutech's cables offer great transparency and purity, plus an uncanny ability to block out noise and grunge"

—Chris Martens
The Absolute Sound 2007
Editors Choice Awards

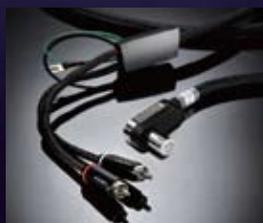
Ag-12 Phono Cable Series

"I don't know if the Furutech Ag-12 is the best phono cable on the market, but it's the best I've heard, a fact made all the more meaningful by its mid-level price. It's one of the phono cables to beat, and it's affordable to boot."

—Marc Mickelson, Soundstage.com Reviews Choice Award



Ag-12 (DIN/RCA)



Ag-12-L (L-DIN/RCA)



Ag-12-R4 (RCA/RCA)

CF Series NEW



CF-102 (R)



CF-201 (R)



CF-202 (R)

"Elegant, lustrous, non-resonant carbon fiber and nonmagnetic stainless steel bodies plus leading-edge technology and materials for enthusiasts seeking musical perfection."

FI-50(R) Piezo Ceramic Series IEC Connectors



Carefully chosen and tested "active" materials mechanically and electrically damp Piezo connectors as they "interconvert" thermal, mechanical, and electrical energy for the finest Furutech Pure Transmission signal imaginable.



Furutech Pure Transmission Technology, improving every element of signal transmission, from the AC to the speaker

Make a More Powerful Connection with Furutech!

Elite Audio Video Distribution

Hollywood USA (800) 457-2577x22
info@eliteavdist.com www.eliteavdist.com



Montana Olympia Phono Preamplifier

MSRP: \$20,000

www.pbnaudio.com

Review in process

While we consider ourselves a stylish bunch of folks here at TONEAudio, the Olympia wins an award on sheer performance. The Olympia has a power supply that weighs almost as much as my Conrad Johnson Premier 350 power amplifier!

A two-box solid-state design, the Olympia is a detail and dynamics powerhouse. Super quiet, this preamp has allowed me to hear further into my favorite recordings than anything else. The Naim Superline/SuperCap (last year's Analog Product of the Year) and the Aesthetix IO with two power supplies each come close, but the Olympia goes the extra mile.

If you're someone who's purchased a mega turntable/cartridge setup and want a preamplifier worthy of your pride and joy, this is the one to audition.