

# TONEAudio

Music.Gear.Style.

No. 41 November 2011

## TOP TONE:

### The Best of the Best in Gear and Accessories

From Superspeakers to Record-Cleaning Solutions, Discerning Recommendations for Discerning Listeners

# 2011 Bonus Issue!

- **The Last Amplifier You'll Ever Want?**  
Decware Zen Torii III
- **No Addition or Subtraction:**  
Simaudio MOON 310 Phono Preamplifier
- **Big Sound, Small Footprint:**  
Dali F5 Fazon Loudspeaker



GOTHAM®



**Stereotypes**

Daytona Beach, FL 32114  
386-253-7093

**Sound Components**

Coral Gables, FL 33146  
305-665-4299

**Audio Advisors**

West Palm Beach, FL 33409  
561-478-3100

**Independence Audio**

Independence, MO 64055  
816-252-9782

**Definitive Audio**

Bellevue, WA 98005  
425-746-3188

**Audio Design**

Fairfield, CT 06825  
203-336-4401

**Sound City**

Denville, NJ 07834  
973-627-0083

**The Sound Concept**

Bedford Hills, NY 10507  
914-244-0900

**Sound Image Audio and Video Design Group**

Carrollton, TX 75006  
972-503-4434

**Advanced Home Theater Systems**

Plano, TX 75075  
972-516-1849

**Speaker Shop**

Amherst, NY 14226  
716-837-1557

**Audio Classics**

Vestal, NY 13850  
607-766-3501

**Home Theater Concepts**

Morton, IL 61550  
309-266-6640

**Global Sight & Sound**

Sussex, WI 53089  
262-820-0600

**Freeman's Stereo**

Charlotte, NC 28216  
704-398-1822

**Hi Fi Buys**

Nashville, TN 37211  
615-832-3121

**Electronic System Consultants**

Aspen, CO 81611  
970-925-1700

**Shelley's Stereo Hi Fi Center**

Woodland Hills, CA 91367  
818-716-8500

**DSS- Dynamic Sound Systems**

Carlsbad, CA 92088  
760-723-2535

**L & M Home Entertainment**

Tempe, AZ 85285  
480-403-0011

**Joseph Cali Systems Design**

Santa Monica, CA 90404  
310-453-3297

**Systems Design Group**

Redondo Beach, CA 90278  
310-370-8575

**Sunny Components**

Covina, CA 91724  
626-966-6259

**Audio Vision S F**

San Francisco, CA 94109  
415-641-1118

**Audio FX**

Sacramento, CA 95825  
916-929-2100

**Media Enviroments**

San Rafael, CA 94901  
415-456-1681

**Pro Home Systems**

Oakland, CA 94609  
510-653-4300

**Overture**

Wilmington, DE 19803  
302-478-6050

**3800 Watts.  
360 lbs.  
Devastating Bass.**

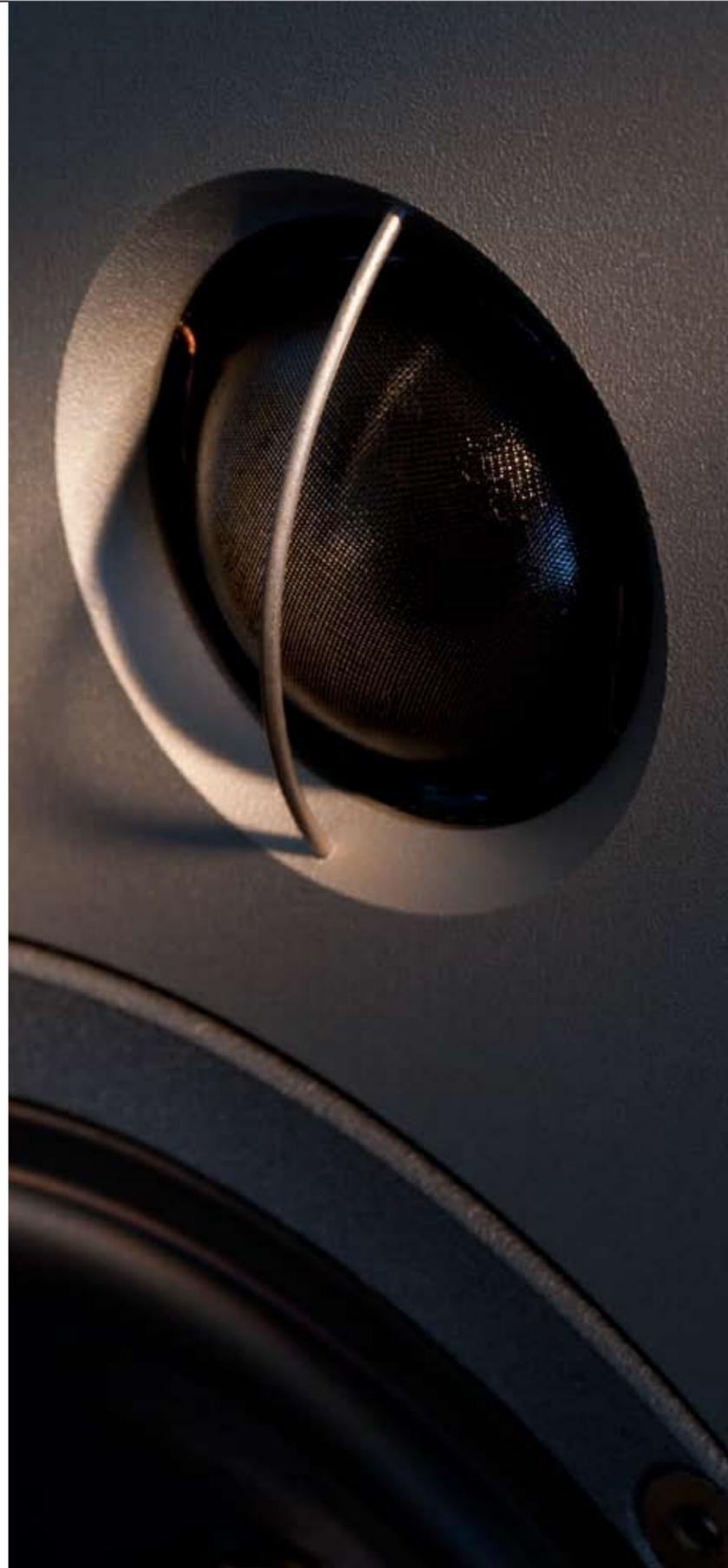
[www.jlaudio.com](http://www.jlaudio.com)

# CONTENTS

- 9. PUBLISHER'S LETTER
- 10. TONE TOON  
*By Liza Donnelly*

## features

- 12 Power Amplifiers
- 24 Preamplifiers
- 32 Integrated Amplifiers
- 40 Superspeakers
- 48 Small Speakers
- 58 Speakers
- 76 Subwoofers
- 82 Analog-**Cartridges**
- 94 Analog-**Turntables**
- 100 Analog-**Phono Preamps**
- 114 Digital
- 128 Accessories



# CONTENTS

## gear previews

- 139. Verity Audio  
Amadis Speakers
- 141. Ortofon Vivo  
Blue Cartridge

## gear reviews

- 142. Dali F5 Fazon  
Loudspeaker  
**Unconventional Shape,  
Unconventional Sound**  
*By Jeff Dorgay*
- 152. Decware Zen Torii  
**Built For Life**  
*By Jeff Dorgay*
- 162. In a Silent Way  
Simaudio Moon 310P  
Phono Preamplifier and  
320S Power Supply  
*By Steve Guttenberg*
- 173. **Manufacturer Info.**





## Beauty, Brains, and Muscle!

I'm really proud of AudioQuest's new series of audio interconnect cable. I consider the essence of good design to be making rational and informed compromises, balancing all ingredients and compatibility requirements. It's not a perfect world ... if one isn't aware of imperfections and degradation, one can't design a superior product. The truly good-news is that the necessity to design cables which accommodate 3.5mm Mini-Phone plugs and 30-pin iPod/iPhone/iPad connectors in addition to RCA plugs, pushed me to create cables which are also significantly higher-performance than the larger cables they replace.

There are no new ingredients, there is no magic ... but I had the freedom to take everything that I have learned about cable and materials and apply it with the perspective I've worked 30+ years to achieve. All the tricks and most refined techniques are here: Superior conducting materials (LGC, PSC, PSC+, PSS Silver), Noise-Dissipation System, Air-Tubes, Double-Balanced Geometry, Dielectric-Bias System, Asymmetrical + & - conductors, Purple Copper and Red Copper Cold-Welded plugs, Direct-Silver Plating, etc.

Presenting for your consideration, seven models from extremely affordable Evergreen to no-holds-barred PSS Silver Angel with the best of every material and technology.

Sincerely, 



# PUBLISHER'S LETTER



**A**ny time a list is made, a proverbial line gets drawn in the sand and arguments ensue. Everyone thinks they would make different (and better) choices if they ran the circus.

We begin our seventh year of publishing with this recommended components issue, which proved difficult, because I believe we don't review anything that sucks. Seriously, I'm guessing you are way too busy to waste your time with mediocre sound, and the truth is that the leading manufacturers don't make junk. Sure, we can always find analogous products from so-called "Fred in a Shed" builders, but these days, the big guys all craft decent product.

While I am confident that you could still buy any of the products we've reviewed during the last six years and be very happy, we feel a few of these models represent the best of the best. Some have earned our Exceptional Value awards or Product of the Year awards. And you might notice that a number of the products spotlighted in this issue are either in one of my reference systems or in those belonging to our contributors.

Of course, when it comes to the producer/consumer relationship, nothing says "I love you" like cash. Granted, as industry members, we tend to get industry pricing on gear we purchase for our own systems. Such arrangements usually result in our buying much better gear rather than saving any money. Then again, it's just as easy for manufacturers to extend long-term loans, an approach with which I have no problem. Yet I hold much more respect for reviewers that purchase a piece of gear for their reference system instead of simply acting as if they'd write a check. We rather put our money where our collective mouth is rather than expect readers to do all of the heavy lifting.

Hence, without further adieu, welcome to this year's Top TONE list, which by definition, needs to remain relatively compact. Best-of lists that include upwards of 1000 products lack meaning and trust. So let the arguments begin. Drop us an email, or better yet, post to our Facebook page and let us know how you would run the big top.



*"That's the one you want, it throws a four dimensional soundstage!"*

- PUBLISHER Jeff Dorgay
- EDITOR Bob Gendron
- ART DIRECTOR Jean Dorgay
- MUSIC VISIONARIES Terry Currier  
Tom Caselli
- RESEARCH Earl Blanton  
Ken Mercereau
- STYLE EDITOR Scott Tetzlaff
- SENIOR CONTRIBUTOR Ben Fong-Torres
- CONTRIBUTING WRITERS Bailey S. Barnard  
Lawrence Devoe  
Andy Downing  
Anne Farnsworth  
Kevin Gallucci  
Steve Guttenberg  
Jacob Heilbrunn  
Ken Kessler  
Jim Macnie  
Mark Marcantonio  
Jerald O'Brien  
Paul Rigby  
Michele Rundgren  
Todd Sageser  
Jaan Uhelszki
- UBER CARTOONIST Liza Donnelly
- ADVERTISING Jeff Dorgay
- WEBSITE [bloodymonster.com](http://bloodymonster.com)

**tonepublications.com**

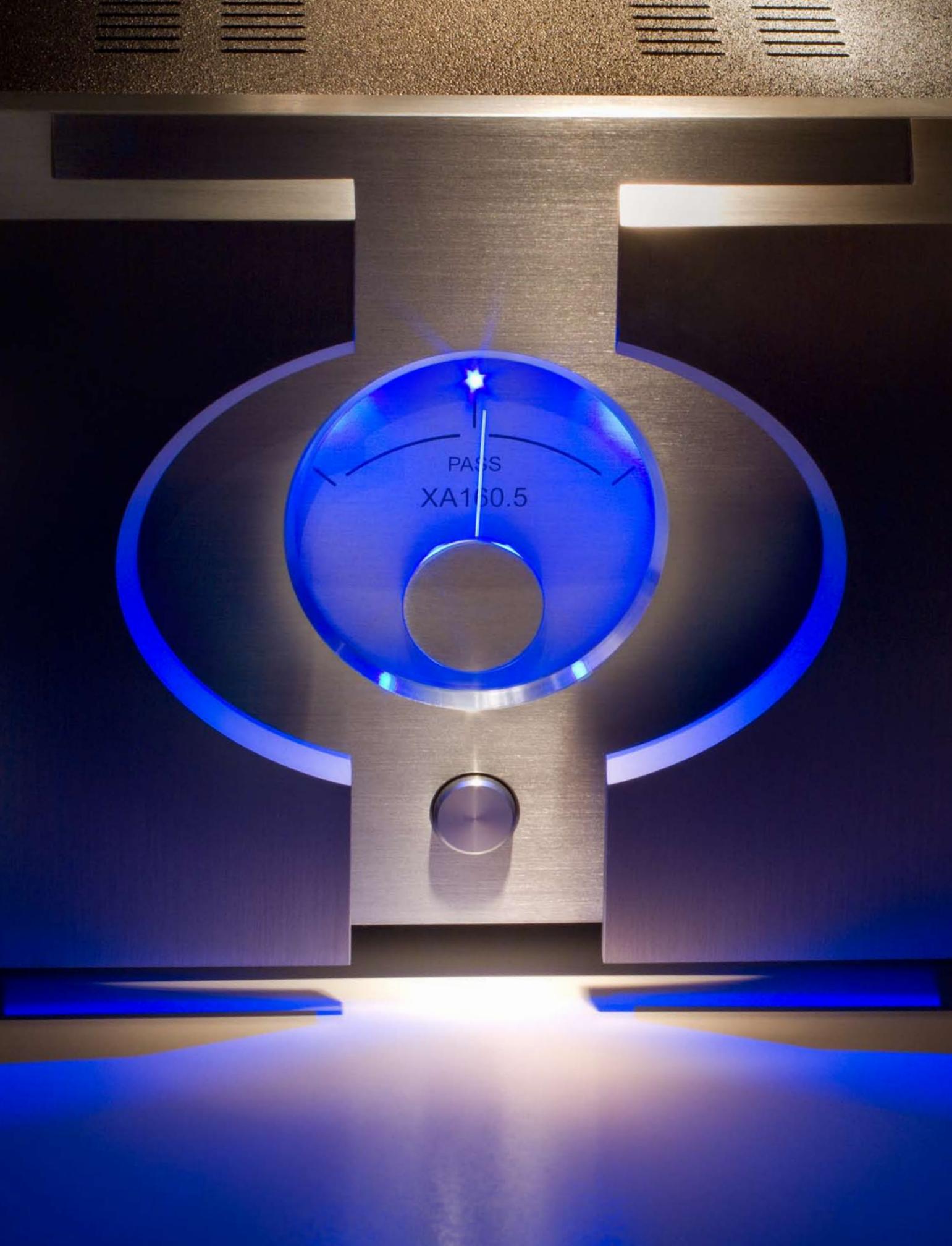
Editor Questions and  
Comments:

[tonepub@yahoo.com](mailto:tonepub@yahoo.com)

800.432.4569

©2011 TONE MAGAZINE, LLC

All rights reserved.



TOP TONE

# Power Amplifiers

P

ower amplifiers usually only have an on/off switch. Despite the simple appearance, never underestimate their importance to a system. Nor how much consideration should be paid to integrating power amps with other components. In addition to sound character, a unit's size, weight, power, connectivity options, and heat output should heavily weigh on your decision.

If you try out myriad speakers as if they were pairs of shoes, consider solid-state amps. They are almost always more speaker-friendly, especially if you've chosen a modest to high-power, high-current design. All the solid-state amplifiers on this list should work with any set of speakers. Moreover, they've all been run through their paces with numerous speakers during reviews.

Much like vinyl, the vacuum tube isn't going away, and audiophiles still crave the elusive qualities that tubes bring to the party. Those that don't appreciate the mighty valve might dismiss such enthusiasm as euphonic distortion at best and something just shy of the occult at its worst. But well-designed tube amplifiers offer something wonderful—provided you are willing to give them the additional attention they require.

Here, we offer great examples of each amplifier type, listed in descending order of MSRP.



# Lohengrin II

Lohengrin was designed in 2001 as a reference from which all other product development at Verity would flow. It became the benchmark for the creation and revision of every member of our growing product family.

Lohengrin II's introduction in 2007 reset the bar, pushing all performance parameters to an unprecedented level. Its proprietary, made-in-house ribbon tweeter is the best high-frequency transducer in the business, and it necessitated significant refinements to the system's other drivers, crossover, and cabinet to take full advantage of its uncanny ability to resolve the finest detail present in the best recordings available today.

The development of Lohengrin II allowed us to see clearly the path we needed to take for our next-generation product family. Joining Parsifal Ovation and Rienzi, the all-new, higher-sensitivity Finn, Leonore, Amadis and Sarastro II are crafted with the same careful attention to detail, each and every loudspeaker benefitting from Lohengrin II's unique DNA.

We welcome you to visit an authorized Verity dealer and experience our new product line for yourself, and we warmly welcome you to the Verity Audio family.



# Power Amplifiers

## BURMESTER 911 MK.3

\$29,995

In our 2009 review of the 911, we proclaim it "the best amplifier made." We stick by that remark. Nothing *TONEAudio* publisher Jeff Dorgay has heard before or since has the 911's ability to effortlessly drive any speaker in addition to boasting zero maintenance, near-perfect tonal balance, and boundless dynamics. Along with prodigious power and control over the audio spectrum, the 911's gorgeous jewel-like casework makes it an object of art on more than one level. The only thing better than a 911? A pair of them.

## SIMAUDIO MOON W-7M MONOBLOCKS

\$25,000/pair

With 500 watts per channel and understated good looks, Sim's W-7 monoblocks come scarily close to the sound quality of cost-no-object amplifiers at a price that is expensive, but not ridiculous. One of the most neutral amplifiers around.



# Power Amplifiers

## PASS LABS XA160.5 MONOBLOCKS

\$24,000/pair

Pass Labs refers to its power amplifiers as “tubes without the trouble,” and after much brainstorming (and listening), that one-liner best describes the XA160.5s. A different animal than the Burmester 911, it is one of the few solid-state amplifiers that defies definition due to its seductiveness and grain-free character. Much like the 911s, even if they are slightly richer in terms of tonality, the Pass units merely sound like music.

Thanks to their Class A design, you’d swear tubes lurk under the hood. The XA160.5s’ only drawback? They are power hungry, drawing 750 watts each. If you are concerned about your carbon footprint, you may need to cut back somewhere else to justify the XA160.5s’ existence.

## MCINTOSH MC1.2KW MONOBLOCKS

\$22,000/pair

Dodge’s new Challenger, even with the optional 525 horsepower Hemi engine, has nowhere near the refinement of a new Porsche 911 GT3. However, the former has more power than you will ever need, and, it’s really fucking cool. The minute you get behind the wheel and put down 200 feet of rubber marks on the street, you’ll be grinning ear to ear.

The McIntosh MC1.2kws deliver similar sensations. The massive monoblocks, with bigger-than-your-thick-skull power meters that read up to 4,800 watts (at +3db), mean business the second you power them up. And, the first time you play *The Dark Side of the Moon* at stadium levels in your living room, you’ll again be grinning ear to ear, even if they may be ringing a little.



# MUSICAL FIDELITY

Introducing the **M6 500i** integrated amplifier



500wpc, Titan output circuit, completely dual-mono, balanced, ultra-precise switched attenuator w/LED display, separate Class-A preamplifier w/ dedicated power supply, 5 inputs, home-theater bypass, preamp outputs, 2 speaker outputs per channel, buttons machined from solid metal.

**Much more than just pure adrenaline.**

Exclusive North American Importer

Tempo Distribution LLC Waltham, MA 02454 (617) 314-9296 tel (617) 336-3496 fax info@tempohighfidelity.com

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

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

# Power Amplifiers

## OCTAVE MRE 130 MONOBLOCKS

\$13,000-\$20,000 (depends on options)

A newcomer to the US, Octave has been in Europe since the mid-90s, with its products reflecting a high level of engineering and build quality. Additional power supply capacitors can be externally added (accounting for the increased cost), allowing for upgrades as budgets permit.

Utilizing KT-88/6550 power tubes, the MRE 130s are fuss-free, with all tubes claiming individual bias adjustments and LEDs that indicate when correct bias is reached. A patented protection circuit does not compromise sound quality and, when activated, merely shuts down the amplifier. Glowing red LEDs indicate defective tubes.

Very similar to the ARC REF 150 in terms of ultimate power output and overall sound character, Octave amplifiers never exaggerate or romanticize. Yet they still manage to have tubes' trademark airiness, which makes them compelling sonic wonders.

## MANLEY 250 MONOBLOCKS

\$12,500/pair

Even with Manley's recent price increase (these amps were a steal at \$9,000 a pair), the 250s still rule. With 250 watts per channel in Triode mode or 125 watts per channel in Tetrode mode, here is a rare tube power amplifier that combines the delicacy of an EL-34 amplifier with the outright slam of a KT-88 amp.

The sound is luscious, warm, and big: You'll never mistake these for anything else but a modern, classic-styled tube amplifier. Yes, with 10 EL-34 power tubes per chassis, these babies are high maintenance. Who said big fun didn't come at a price?



# Power Amplifiers

## CLASSE M-300 AND M-600 MONOBLOCKS

\$11,000 and \$13,000/pair

The top-of-the-line Classe mono amplifiers are the best buy in high-power, high-quality solid-state amplification. Lacking the last bit of refinement the Burmester 911 offers, these Classe units come damn close for a fraction of the price. If you have a pair of speakers that crave power (like the Magnepan 20.1s), you can't go wrong.

Build quality is first-rate, but we'll be watching as Classe will soon start outsourcing production to China. Should you be worried about this development, get to a Classe dealer and buy these future classics right now.

## AUDIO RESEARCH REF 150

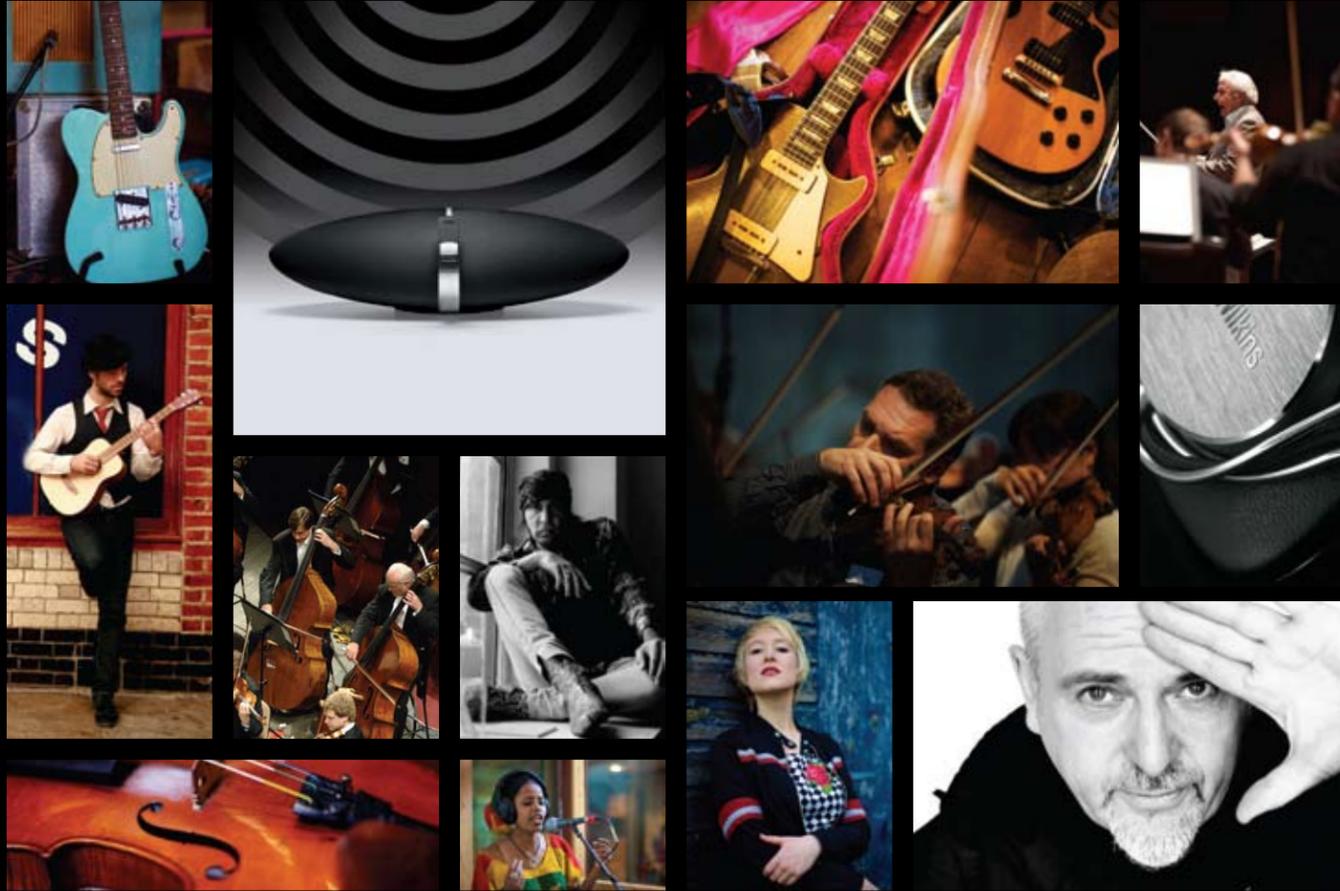
\$12,995

An evolution of the REF 110 and fully optimized to take advantage of the new KT120 power tube, the REF 150 also incorporates details from the designs of the 40th Anniversary REF preamplifier and REF Phono 2. It strikes an ideal balance between dynamic punch and tonal purity.

While the REF 150 is the first amplifier in the company's upgraded lineup, we're confident that the larger monoblocks will be equally satisfying. Producing 150 watts per channel with a one-chassis design, the REF 150 could prove to be the sweet spot in the ARC stable, especially since there are only eight power tubes to replace.



Bowers & Wilkins



For people who care about how things sound

**Society of Sound** From the makers of the world's finest loudspeakers, Society of Sound is a meeting place for people who care about sound. Members receive two albums each month as stunning high-quality downloads curated by Peter Gabriel and Real World Studios, and by the London Symphony Orchestra. You can also read interviews with sound pioneers such as Alfred Brendel and Tod Machover, check out classic album reviews or join in the debates.

Try us out for free  
[www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk](http://www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk)

TOP TONE

## Power Amplifiers

### BAT VK-55/55SE

\$3,995-\$5,995

**B**y no means the biggest or most powerful amplifier in BAT's lineup, this 60-watt-per-channel triode amplifier combines rich tonality, huge dynamics, and substantial bass weight in a small albeit mighty package.

While the amp is also available as a standard non-SE model, the upgraded capacitors and larger power supply are worth the additional \$2,000. They basically take a great amplifier and transform it into a fantastic one. Thanks to a 2-ohm output tap, the VK-55 is one of the few tube amps that can power current MartinLogan electrostatics with ease.

### PRIMALUNA DIALOGUE 6 & 7 MONOBLOCKS

\$4,699 and \$5,499/pair

**P**rima Luna just keeps quietly improving. Its DiaLogue monoblocks provide 70 watts per channel, with the higher-priced 7 accomplishing the feat with KT-88 tubes and the 6 doing so with EL-34s. The 7 also features upgraded capacitors and fast recovery diodes in the power supply. Like all PrimaLuna amplifiers, these use patented "Adaptive Auto Bias" circuitry, so worrying about tubes is a thing of the past.

The arrangement also means that both amplifiers maintain the ability to use 6L6, EL-34, or KT-88/6550 power tubes. Hence, they take on the sonic character of the options you choose, and as such, stand as two of the most fun amplifiers around. Bulletproof construction—and brand loyalty—complements the great sound. Just try to find a used pair on the market.



# Power Amplifiers

## MCINTOSH MC275

\$4,995

Now in its sixth generation of production, the MC275 has received constant refinement since its initial rollout in the 1950s. The tube complement has since changed, and the amps are now assembled with a printed circuit board instead of point-to-point wiring. But every bit of trademark McIntosh quality remains.

Yes, the chassis are still hand-bent in the upstate New York factory, a few feet away from the shop floor where the transformers are hand-wound by the same ladies that have been at the task since the 80s. The MC275 is a solid value, yielding great sound that tilts to the romantic side (as with most Mc gear) and always seems to make even the worst recordings come across better than they should. Such aural metamorphosis is one reason why this amplifier is so special. Best of all, you'll be able to pass it on to your grandkids.



# Power Amplifiers

## FIRST WATT M2

\$3,995

Honestly, we could list every First Watt amplifier in this feature. We've sampled most of them over the last few years and, as creator Nelson Pass says, "There is no such thing as a perfect amplifier. But there is a best amplifier for each type of speaker, music, and listener." Each First Watt unit follows a slightly different topology. The M2 is a Class A design that incorporates JFETs and MOSFETs operating in Class A mode with an interstage transformer.

The M2 not only provides a near-nirvanic "first watt," but 25-40 of the most musical watts (depending on whether you have 4- or 8-ohm speakers) we've heard at any price.

## DECWARE ZEN TORII

\$2,975-\$4,875 (depends on options)

DecWare founder Steve Deckert proudly proclaims the Zen Torii is "the last amp you'll ever want." And if you agree with Nelson Pass' theory that there is a best amplifier for each type of speaker, the Zen Torii could be just "the best" if you have the right speakers. *TONEAudio* publisher Jeff Dorgay was smitten enough to purchase the Torii for his reference fleet of amplifiers. For an EL-34-based amplifier, the bass grip is nothing short of breathtaking, and the Torii renders musical detail like Kodachrome 25.

Indeed, there's never been a better example of specs not telling the whole story. The Torii plays louder and interfaces with a much wider range of speakers than suggested by its modest 26-watt-per-channel rating. Showcasing old-school style, the Torii is hand-wired in Illinois by the DecWare staff and guaranteed for life. American craftsmanship at its finest.

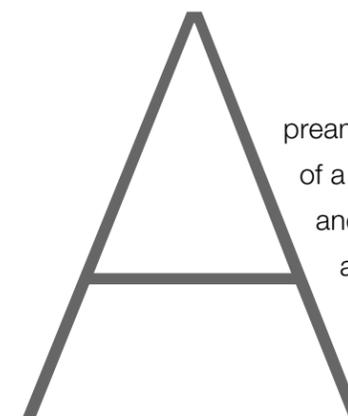
Burmester

088



TOP TONE

# Preamplifiers



A preamplifier constitutes the heart and soul of a hi-fi system, controlling low-level signals and organizing inputs and outputs. Some argue that a preamplifier is unnecessary, but we feel that a truly great unit always takes a fine stereo to an even higher level. Here are a few of our favorites.

## **Burmester 088**

\$29,995

**B**urmester 088 continues the company's tradition of precision build-quality and impeccable sound—all wrapped in casework you'd expect to find on a Faberge egg. Ultimately versatile, the 088 can be configured with an onboard phono preamplifier, 24/192 DAC, or additional line-level input. Fully balanced like all previous Burmester preamplifiers, the 088 does not feature RCA input or output jacks but, instead, offers high-quality XLR>RCA adaptors.

Incorporating X-AMP 2 modules from Burmester's flagship 808 and 077 preamplifiers, the 088 nears the performance of its higher-priced brethren. With massive dynamics and subtle tonal contrast, this preamplifier epitomizes definition.



gr...ve  
thysel...



You listen, you look, you're there...

**MUSIC MATTERS**  
presents **BLUE NOTE** LIMITED EDITION 2500 BLUE NOTE

musicmattersjazz.com

TOP TONE

# Preamplifiers

## Audio Research REF 40

\$25,000

The production cycle on this 40th Anniversary preamplifier has ended, and all the available units have reached their destinations. While *TONEAudio* did not formally review this model, publisher Jeff Dorgay spent enough time listening to the REF 40 to know that it's a fantastic piece—one of the best he's ever heard.

Think of the REF 40 as a bigger REF 5. The former's tonal character follows that of the latter: Very neutral, relaxed, and effortless, but possessing more weight and grip in the lower register, as well as a superior ability to see further into recordings than you thought possible.

If you missed your initial chance at this landmark unit, get ready to spend time on the phone just in case you get lucky and find a dealer that still has one. Otherwise, keep your eyes on the used market: Audiophiles with ADHD tend to be common.



## Preamplifiers

**McIntosh C500**

\$11,995

One step beneath the flagship C1000, the C500 offers comparable performance—and the versatility to be configured as either a solid-state or vacuum-tube preamplifier.

True to McIntosh heritage, it sports gorgeous casework, with an LED-backlit front panel and pair of blue output meters. Mac preamps are all about flexibility, and the C500 does not disappoint. It's outfitted with two sets of XLR and RCA line-level outputs as well as seven inputs. Analog lovers will appreciate the onboard phono stage that claims both MM and MC inputs, each featuring adjustable impedance loading and capacitance. This preamplifier promises treats for every music lover, no matter what their preferred source material.

While we love both versions, our staff prefers the tube version—in part for the slightly romantic sound and in part for the thrill of tube rolling and custom-tuning the sound.



All the coughing there is. Beethoven's 6th, 1st movement, on the new Focus 260.

**The new Focus 260. A perfect symbiosis. Now.**

Cohesively balanced like a compact monitor. Exhibiting the substance and power of a floor-standing loudspeaker. The Focus 260 features the legendary Dynaudio soft dome tweeter, now with new Precision Coating. A dual mid/bass driver complement featuring the advanced new Black Kapton® voice coil formers. And our famous die-cast aluminum driver baskets, in a relatively large cabinet volume. The Focus 260 brings you homogenous balance, excellent speed and incredibly natural musicality with added low-bass dynamics and presence. Soon at your Dynaudio dealer. Read more at [www.dynaudio.com/new\\_focus](http://www.dynaudio.com/new_focus)

# Preamplifiers

## Nagra PL-L

\$8,995

Keeping with Nagra's compact-design legacy, and honed from years of building high-quality tape recorders for location recording, the PL-L packs peak performance in a tiny box. Built like a Swiss watch, it showcases balanced and RCA inputs and two sets of outputs (one XLR and one RCA). The PL-L can also be fitted with custom-balanced output transformers.

With matched 12AX7 and 12AT7 tubes, the PL-L features a quick, punchy sound that matches high resolution with jet-black backgrounds. Please note: This is one of the few preamplifiers we've used that does not benefit from NOS tubes; the factory-issued tubes are hand-picked for lowest noise and microphonics. Vintage tubes only slow the unit's pace. And, thanks to their meticulous design, the factory tubes should last 10,000 hours before needing replacement. Swiss precision to the very end.



# Preamplifiers

## Conrad Johnson Classic

\$2,495

Befitting the model's name, Lew Johnson and Bill Conrad returned to their roots with the Classic. Reminiscent of the PV-12 preamplifier (still a staple in our publisher's reference-component library), and seizing upon 30 years of circuit-design refinements, the Classic is a fantastic option for those wanting solid performance without any bells and whistles. It's also available with a built-in phonostage. Clad in CJ's trademark champagne finish, the Classic strikes a beautiful balance of tonal richness and sonic contrast.



## Croft Micro 25

\$1,495

There's no better way to get back to basics. Hand-built, and featuring point-to-point wiring and a very simple circuit, the Croft Micro 25 furnishes incredible sound to listeners willing to forgo fancy casework and a remote control.

Three 12AX7s make it easy to fine-tune the sonics (the stock JJs aren't bad), and the design exudes quietness. The MM phonostage is alone worth the cost of the preamplifier, so view the Micro 25 as a terrific phono preamplifier with a linestage thrown in to seal the deal.

# Integrated Amplifiers



For the longest time, integrated amplifiers have been pooch-pooched by serious audiophiles that often feel that top-shelf components must be placed on separate chassis, optimized for a sole task, and have a dedicated power supply to provide maximum performance.

However, large racks of components don't suit everyone. Moreover, power-supply design improvements, along with enhanced circuit design and chassis layout, have resulted in integrated amplifiers that offer separates' performance in single boxes. Thanks to vinyl's resurgence, phono inputs have also returned to today's integrated models. And DACs have started to become an onboard feature, making new integrated units more powerful than ever.

Fewer boxes in the listening room can work well on so many levels. Less cables and clutter means that style-conscious music devotees no longer need to choose between performance and functionality. Money saved purchasing fewer power cords and interconnects can be utilized elsewhere in the system, or perhaps, on concert tickets. Best of all, the integrated approach assures perfect system synergy, removing any worries of impedance or cable mismatch between amplifier and preamp.



## Hear More Music.

Meridian Sooloos' powerful media server system makes any digital music collection a joy to explore. Not only do you have instant access to your entire library with an intuitive touch-screen interface: you'll also rediscover forgotten albums as the system finds music for you based on what you want to hear. Meridian's DSP Active Loudspeakers combine 30 years of high performance digital loudspeaker excellence in a simple, elegant design. Bring them together, and you have an astonishing listening experience.

The Meridian Sooloos Control 10 connects quickly and easily to your Meridian DSP Active Loudspeakers to form a complete digital audio system in a single room – or throughout your entire home.

It's the ultimate music system for simplicity and elegance, power and performance, enjoyment and discovery.

Call 404-344-7111 to arrange for a personal demonstration of Meridian's distributed audio, home theatre and music server systems, or visit [www.meridian-audio.com](http://www.meridian-audio.com) to learn more about Meridian products.

*"A complete reinvention of how we relate to music"* —ESQUIRE

*"Arguably the most intuitive and rewarding piece of audio technology ever conceived"* —WHAT HI FI

*"The Sooloos system gave us a musical epiphany... it's sheer genius"* —STEREOPHILE

*"Sooloos' ability to instantly sort through your library and present to you exactly the music you might want to hear at any particular moment borders on the magical..."*

—THE ABSOLUTE SOUND

## TOP TONE

# Integrated Amplifiers

### **Burmester 082**

\$16,995

While not a budget-minded integrated, the 082 is a bargain in the sense that it includes a 140 watt-per-channel Burmester power amplifier and full-function preamplifier on a chassis that's about the size of the company's 911 power amplifier.

A brief listen confirms that no sonic or aesthetic corners are cut. Pound for pound, the 082 comes very close to the 011 preamplifier/911 Mk. 3 power amplifier in publisher Jeff Dorgay's reference system. If you didn't think you could afford Burmester quality, or just don't need the 350 watts per channel provided by the 911, the 082 is an excellent solution. The amplifier possesses the same delicacy and resolution of equivalent Burmester separates, and even features bass and treble controls.

### **Simaudio Moon 700i**

\$11,995

The Moon 700i is the latest evolution of Simaudio's earlier i7 integrated amplifier, a reference component for *TONEAudio* contributor Mark Marcantonio. While some may argue that the older amplifier possesses a warmer tonal balance, the 700i boasts more ultimate resolution and bass slam.

While 25 watts doesn't sound like much on a spec sheet, the 700i claims an authority the i7 lacks, especially when driving tough loads. Utilizing Simaudio's LYNX circuit, which mounts the power amplifier's circuit boards on each output's heat sink, confirms this is a dual mono amplifier in every sense. Separates, meet your match.





## TOP TONE

# Integrated Amplifiers

### Luxman L-590A II

\$9,995

**A**kin to the Mini Cooper or Fiat 500, the Luxman L-590A II combines old-school 70s styling with a 21st-century update. Its performance equals that of any separate component.

Tipping the scale at nearly 100 pounds, the L-590A II features a 30 watt-per-channel, full Class A power amplifier and incredible preamplifier that will convince even the most cantankerous audiophile that one box gets the job done. There's also a discrete headphone amplifier, MM and MC phono inputs, and a pair of gold, backlit power meters. And no, you're not dreaming: A bass and treble control lurks behind the retractable front panel. Sweet.

### Luxman SQ-38u

\$5,995

**A**esthetically similar to the L-590A II, the SQ-38u takes a different technological approach. In production since the early 60s, this vacuum-tube amplifier has been honed to perfection.

This EL-34-outfitted unit also offers an excellent MM and MC phonostage that plays nicely with a wide range of phono cartridges. Like other Luxman integrations, the SQ-38u boasts highly effective tone controls (but no power meters) and a top-shelf headphone amplifier. If you want the best of both worlds in a tube amplifier—i.e., rich sound without the trouble of rebuilding a classic amplifier—your ship has arrived.



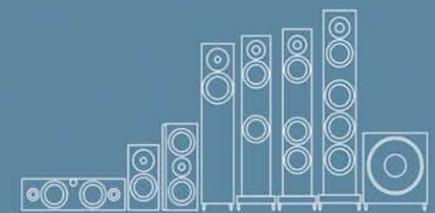
product: Mozart Grand - Symphony Edition



## CONCERT GRAND SERIES - SYMPHONY EDITION

Our passion for music is derived from the ambience of our city Vienna – the concert halls, jazz clubs, dance clubs and especially the famous Großer Musikvereinsaal. While music is the object that inspires us, attaining the sonic results present in all Vienna Acoustics loudspeakers is the result of painstaking technical research. For twenty years, Vienna Acoustics has been hand crafting our speakers in Austria with only the finest components.

Within the entire Concert Grand Series, we have utilized our own patented technologies combined with fine European craftsmanship. With this attention to detail, after one look and listen it is obvious that each model is unique and special. Nothing is more important for us than the recognition of our commitment in the sound, innovation and the quality of our speakers. Vienna Acoustics - The Art of Natural Sound.



[www.vienna-acoustics.com](http://www.vienna-acoustics.com)

Vienna Acoustics - North America

728 Third Street, Unit C  
Mukilteo, WA 98275 USA

Telephone: (425) 374-4015  
sales@vienna-acoustics.com

# Integrated Amplifiers

## Naim SuperNait

\$4,995

Searching for a top DAC that will anchor a system? The SuperNait is a tremendous bargain and performer, and adds a plethora of digital inputs to five analog inputs. Its compact chassis and understated elegance blend with practically any decor.

The opportunity to add an additional power supply, in grand Naim tradition, makes this baby obsolescence-proof: You can use it in standard form, or fiddle to your heart's content. Of the three available external power supplies, the \$7,000 top-of-the-range SuperCap is the one that morphs the SuperNait into an amplifier that sings and remains limited only by the speakers and source components to which it's connected. Mate a \$7,000 power supply to a \$4,995 amplifier? Sounds crazy, but the sublime results make this combination be the best value of all available options.

## PrimaLuna ProLogue Premium

\$1,995

Continuing a trend started with the ProLogue One, PrimaLuna has built one of the best and easiest ways to enter the vacuum-tube world via an integrated that eliminates the hassle factor. Thanks to patented adaptive auto bias, there are no adjustments to make and no fussy tubes to hunt down. You don't even have to use four of the same output tubes!

While equipped with a set of EL-34 output tubes, the ProLogue Premium works equally well with 6550, KT88, or 6L6 tubes, meaning that you can tailor the sound as you wish, from warm and groovy to modern and punchy. Still bitchin' after all these years.



# Integrated Amplifiers

## Anthem Integrated 225

\$1,495

This aptly named integrated offers a whopping 225 watts per channel, multiple inputs, and an onboard phono stage for \$1,495. Removing the top cover reveals dual mono design and a serious power supply (with an enormous power transformer and capacitor banks) feeding both the amplifier and preamp stages. An excellent MM phono stage and headphone amplifier are also part of the package, making the Anthem a splendid value for beginner audiophiles that don't want to go the Class D route.

Quality parts, an excellent remote, and understated casework ensure the hits keep on coming. The plentiful, on-tap power allows for a wide range of speaker choices. While rated power is not quoted into a four ohm load, Anthem's website lists the Integrated 225 as "four ohm compatible." It has no problem driving Magneplan speakers, which crave power.



## REGA Brio-R

\$995

If we gave a "sleeper" award, the Brio-R would win it. Rega's engineers always provide excellent value, but they've outdone themselves with this amplifier. Don't be fooled by the small size. With 50 watts per channel and an onboard MM phono stage, the Brio-R exhibits major dynamic swing, along with wonderful tonal contrast and musicality.

Part of a new range of "half-sized" components, Brio-R supplies incredible performance without breaking your back or pocketbook. This little gem is never out-classed, even when paired with speakers and source components. If you need high-quality sound on a tight budget, this Rega should be at the top of your list.



TOP TONE

# Superspeakers

In the automotive world, cars that epitomize performance from the likes of Aston Martin, Ferrari, and Bentley are often described as supercars. Made in limited quantities from exotic materials, and lavished with extra care during the building and fine-tuning process, they cost a small fortune in comparison to standard offerings from Porsche, Audi, and BMW. Yet they deliver inimitable experiences.

So it is with the three superspeakers below. You won't see the Kia hamsters chilling out with these babies. The cost of admission, especially when factoring in an equivalent system needed to drive them, would buy a very nice home. Like their automotive equivalents, they are made in small numbers and represent the pinnacle of their respective manufacturers' capabilities.

And just as the trio of supercars offers distinctly different driving experiences, the same applies to these speakers hailing from France, America, and Denmark, respectively. Three different companies with three highly distinct approaches—all featuring unique approaches to design and tonal signature, all possessing the ability to deliver an aural *tour de force* like no others publisher Jeff Dorgay has heard. When properly set up in the right room, and augmented with the world's best electronics, they spoil the listener.

Ralph Lauren once said, "Every man should own a 12-cylinder sports car at least once in his life." On a related note, we propose that every music lover should experience these three speakers.

# Superspeakers

## Focal Grande Utopia EM

\$185,000/pair

While *TONE* has not formally reviewed the Grande Utopias, publisher Jeff Dorgay spent extensive time with them in various non-hi-fi-show systems and deems them worthy of making this list. A 16-inch field-coil woofer (the EM in the moniker stands for electromagnet) and the latest iteration of Focal's award-winning beryllium tweeter—along with a cabinet derived from extensive computer modeling—are among the long list of technical innovations gracing this speaker.

The Grande Utopias are the most adjustable and, arguably, most technically advanced of the three speakers here. They are also the most misunderstood. I've heard these speakers sound outright dreadful in the wrong room and with the wrong electronics. But you wouldn't drive your F430 with under-inflated bald tires, would you?

When set up with care, the Grande Utopia is a very visceral speaker that yields a staggering degree of tonal and dynamic contrast, along with transparency that rivals the best electrostatics. If you have enough amplifier power, the Grande Utopias will play at concert-hall levels regardless of whether your taste leans more towards Deadmau5 or the LA Philharmonic. And they present beautiful musical renditions even at modest levels, a feat few speakers match. Available in a number of colors, the Grande Utopia also boasts an unparalleled level of construction. If you want to find out where art and science perfectly converge, look no further.



# Listen. Don't just hear.

You've collected hundreds — even thousands — of songs on your computer and iPod. But, you haven't really experienced the music until you play it through Wadia's proven iTransports and PowerDAC integrated amplifier.

The first truly superior way to listen to your music.



Wadia series 1 171iTransport and 151PowerDAC mini [www.wadia.com](http://www.wadia.com)



## e.One C5i DAC Integrated Amplifier

Why choose different components for your music downloads, computer, CD player, turntable, cable/satellite box or game consoles? Keep it simple with Bel Canto's compact, powerful **e.One C5i DAC Integrated Amplifier** that powers it all!

The C5i features **2 SPDIF** and **2 TOSLINK** inputs at 24/192, a **USB** input at 24/96, plus **analog MM Phono** and **line level inputs on RCAs**. Outputs include speaker binding posts, line level outputs on RCAs, and a front panel headphone jack. It's a powerful, energy efficient multimedia analog and digital media center. Just add speakers and the C5i's **versatility, performance and dynamic sound** puts you in total system control.

For More Information Call (612) 317-4550 (9 AM to 5 PM CST M-F). © 2011 Bel Canto Design, Ltd.

### TOP TONE

## Superspeakers

### Wilson Audio Alexandria X-2

\$158,000/pair

The Alexandria's design looks somewhat long in the tooth, reminiscent of the Cylon robots in the first generation of *Battlestar Galactica*. But these speakers deliver in spades—and can be painted in any custom shade of automotive finish, provided you can furnish the paint code. Seriously, if owner Dave Wilson ever became bored with making speakers, he could easily put his paint department to work doing multimillion-dollar automotive restorations. Wilson's art is on par with any *piece de resistance* that comes across on the lawn at the Pebble Beach Concours de Elegance, and a cool color goes a long way towards minimizing a big box.

The monstrous X-2's ability to reproduce the full weight and scale of a musical performance exceeds that of any other speaker publisher Jeff Dorgay has heard. Listeners often complain about a hi-fi system's inability to recreate a live musical event within the listening space, and while many pin this trait on various factors, a speaker's ease of effortlessly reproducing massive dynamic swing with virtually instant acceleration goes a long way to fooling the brain into wondering if it's real or if it's Memorex. Moreover, Wilson's flagship excels at providing horn-like dynamics with a high level of coherence. Audiophiles searching for the promised land of "pinpoint imaging" will be amazed.

While the X-2 won't play as quiet as the Grande Utopia or GamuT S9, it plays louder—and with less fatigue. So if you've ever wondered what Metallica would sound like in a big living room playing through a wall of Marshalls, here's your answer. If such ear-numbing music isn't to your liking, don't worry. The X-2s handle anything else with equal aplomb.



# Superspeakers

## GamuT S9

\$150,000/pair

The S9 goes against the grain of traditional speaker-enclosure design, utilizing the cabinet's various resonances to work with the drivers. It easily fails the standard audiophile "knuckle rap test," and reveals a lively cabinet. But, as designer Lars Goller likes to say, "sound is all about resonance."

Goller put into the S9 everything he learned from his time designing drivers for ScanSpeak. The speaker features a full complement of custom drivers, along with cutting-edge driver optimization technology employed by no other company. In search of perfection, he examines every minute detail—right down to how many twists are on the cables that connect the drivers and exact port length, down to the tenth of a millimeter.

The S9's high level of musicality makes it stand out amidst the elite plateau of speaker exotica; it is truly the Tone Master. A pair of S9s disappear in a room as easily as a pair of mini monitors—no small feat for a six-foot tall pair of speakers that weigh more than 500 pounds each. They consistently fool diehard music lovers into thinking a piano is playing in the room, yet are still capable of large dynamic swings on heavier music.

Think of the S9 as the Aston Martin DBS of this distinguished group. While it lacks the razor's edge of a Ferrari or brute force of a Bugatti Veyron, it proves the most capable in a wide range of musical situations. Indeed, in the same way that a long, high-speed journey in the DBS will leave you unruffled, the GamuT S9 can play all day long and still cause you to want to reach for another record.

Unlike the Focal's futuristic aesthetic or Wilson's retro look, the GamuT S9 finely expresses the appearance of modern Danish furniture. The cabinet's outer layer starts as a 10mm sheet of the specified wood before being pressure-molded into the final curved shape.

The result? Visual and sonic glory.



Power • Emotion • Soul



Reach for the MOON ... why settle for anything less ?

- Passionately designed & handcrafted in North America since 1980
  - The most refined & complete product line
  - A Comprehensive 10 year warranty
  - An unprecedented 2 year trade-up program
- The most reviewed & acclaimed high-performance audio brand

Visit an authorized MOON retailer for an "out of this world" experience



MOON

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

877.980.2400



TOP TONE

# Small Speakers

Since today's speakers incorporate much better driver, cabinet, and crossover technology, the old "mini monitor" category doesn't really apply anymore. While mini monitor traditionally meant great imaging and zero bass, many current small speakers produce ample output well into the 50hz region—and in a small space, that's often all you need for highly satisfying musical experiences.



**Focal Diablo Utopia**  
\$12,995/pr.

The Diablo Utopia illustrates technology's trickle-down theory. Taking full advantage of everything incorporated in Focal's \$180,000 Grande Utopia EM, the Diablos utilize a 6.5-inch woofer along with the beryllium tweeter used throughout the Utopia range. They defy physics; these are essentially big speakers in small cabinets.

And, as they produce the most prodigious bass and possess the most refined sound of all the small speakers on our list, they are priced accordingly.

TOP TONE

## Small Speakers

### **B&W 805 Diamond**

\$5,500/pair

The smallest speaker system in the Diamond range is an excellent choice for those wanting the larger Diamond speakers' performance in a small room. The 6.5-inch woofer produces useable bass energy down to about 45hz. But the diamond tweeter is the star, as it offers a stunning level of resolution that mates with the world's best components.

### **Penaudio Cenya**

\$4,500/pair

The small two-way Cenya system serves as Penaudio's first foray back into the US market, and it's fantastic. Featuring the company's trademark laminated wood cabinets, the understated speakers deliver a much bigger sound than suggested by their diminutive size.

Cenyas throw an enormous soundfield in all directions, complete with surprising bass extension. Listeners that don't play full-scale symphonic music or electronica may not even require a subwoofer. A match with tubes or solid-state electronics, the Cenyas really sing when careful attention is paid to placement and matched solid, mass-enhanced stands.

### **Harbeth P3ESR**

\$2,095/pair

Harbeth's smallest speaker takes full advantage of the company's latest Radial cone drive technology and extensive development in the BBC's anechoic chamber. The P3ESR sounds remarkably like the limited-production Monitor 40.1, albeit with less low-frequency output.

The P3ESR is voiced with Harbeth's sonic priority, a natural midband, yet it possesses requisite frequency extension and clarity that might persuade even the most diehard LS3/5a owners to have a change of heart.

# REFERENCE 150

The best reality show  
isn't on television.

**audio research**  
HIGH DEFINITION®

REFERENCE 150  
HIGH DEFINITION®



## CM-IW2000

The iPad has become the face of the modern home, with Apps for anything and everything. So doesn't it make sense to have a central location to check emails, post notes, update social networks, or even work out what to wear and which route to take to work.

With iPort, the iPad is neatly installed into the wall, fully charged, and always ready to use.

 iPort®



WWW.IPORTMUSIC.COM | 949.283.0738 | SAN CLEMENTE, CA

TOP TONE

## Small Speakers

### PMC TB2i

\$1,995/pair

PMC is known around the world for studio monitor speakers. And that's where the TB2is ended up after our review. *TONE* contributor Todd Sageser purchased the pair for his studio, where they spend their days on top of the mixing board.

All the attributes PMC deems essential in a studio monitor (wide dispersion, linear power response, a natural midband) make for a great home speaker that you can enjoy without being constrained to a tiny sweet spot. The TB2is produce ample bass and are tube-amplifier friendly. A wonderful choice for small rooms and desktop systems.



### Paradigm Reference Signature S1

\$1,895/pair

Paradigm always exudes value, and the S1 doesn't disappoint. The S1s excel at throwing massive soundstages and delivering imaging that might expect from a pair of panel speakers. These are ideal matches for a high-performance system in a small room. Need multichannel options? Not to worry. Paradigm has you covered in both the subwoofer and center-channel departments.



TOP TONE

## Small Speakers

### Focal XS speaker system

\$599

Focal's XS satellites include their own powered subwoofer and integral iPod dock. Intended for use at the computer or with a laptop, they take advantage of the same technology contained in the mighty Focal Grande Utopia EM.

The XS is the king of the desktop world. Its single-driver satellites provide not only a high level of coherency but great tonality and, of course, seamless integration with the subwoofer. If you think you can't have great sound on your desktop, you haven't experienced the XS.



### Dali Lektor 2

\$395/pair

These little 5-inch two-way speakers will surprise even the most jaded audiophile. Chalk it up to Dali's extensive manufacturing abilities and the fact that all of its drivers are designed and built in-house in Denmark.

Thanks to the pulp-infused woofer cone and soft dome tweeter, the Lektor 2 gets the musical fundamentals right. And as long as you don't call on them to play Metallica at bone-crushing levels, you will love just how much performance is had for the price.

UNLIMITED ENJOYMENT. LIMITED PRODUCTION.

The ART amplifier

with its seemingly

unbounded power

reserves places

no limits on your

enjoyment of

recorded music.

But only 250 units

(125 pairs) will be

available to

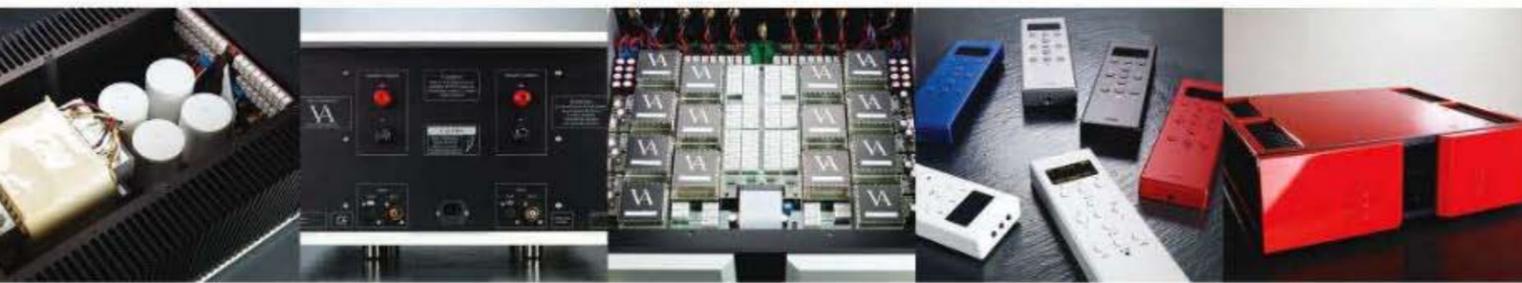
audiophiles

world-wide.

conrad-johnson

conrad-johnson It just sounds right.

2733 Merrilee Dr • Fairfax, VA 22031 • phone: 703-698-8581, fax: 703-560-5360 • www.conradjohnson.com



TOP TONE

# Small Speakers

## Polk Audio Blackstone

- TL-1 (\$79.95 ea)
- TL-2 (\$99.95 ea)
- TL-3 (\$149.95 ea)

Whether you choose them for a desktop, two-channel, or surround system, the smallest speakers in our small-speaker category do need a subwoofer. No worries. Polk manufactures a number of excellent, compact powered subs (both wired and wireless). And that's no surprise, considering Polk practically invented the sub/satellite category with its original Blackstone series 25 years ago.

While they look similar, each model in the TL series uses different components and crossovers to achieve a progressively wider frequency response. The TL-3 employs a ring radiator tweeter related to that utilized in Polk's top-of-the-line LSiM707. Whichever model you choose, prepare to be impressed.



**manufacturer**

Vitus Audio, Denmark  
+45 9626 8046  
[www.vitusaudio.com](http://www.vitusaudio.com)

**distributor**

For details of your nearest  
Distributor/Dealer, please  
visit [www.vitusaudio.com](http://www.vitusaudio.com)

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



TOP TONE

# Speakers

**N**o component in the audio chain causes as much controversy as loudspeakers. And no other component makes it so easy to make the

*wrong* choice. Many audiophiles adopting the “bigger is better” philosophy often change their minds as they acquire more setup and room acoustics knowledge. And that’s what makes this fun, right?

For those itching for a shortcut to audio bliss, consider long-term goals when choosing speakers for your listening room. What is your number-one priority: Performance, integration with your environment, or something else? If possible, try and demo your potential purchase with your own amplification and cable. Even better, attempt such trials in your listening room. System synergy and room compatibility are key, and sensitivity specs aren’t the last word on performance. Some speakers are tougher to drive, even if they have a similar sensitivity rating as other models.

With so many options, finding speakers that work with your room, budget, and vision of can take a while. But time spent doing homework pays off. And don’t forget to lean on your dealer for expertise.

TOP TONE

## Speakers

### **GamuT S7**

\$44,000/pair

A considerable step down from the GamuT's S9 in price, the S7 yields much of the S9's performance from about 30hz on up, especially in moderate-sized rooms. With transparency and top-to-bottom seamlessness that rival the best panels, the S7 has a punch that can only be achieved with a cone speaker. Inside the gorgeous cabinets lurks a set of custom-built and hand-tuned (along with the crossover network) drivers exclusively made for GamuT's S series speakers. At only 51 inches tall, the S7 is also somewhat less imposing than the gigantic S9. Not a bad compromise.

### **Verity Audio Sarastro II**

\$42,995/pair (optional finishes at higher cost)

Verity Audio's beautiful speakers showcase an economy of design. What appears outwardly simple reveals a lack of parallel surfaces and meticulous attention to detail. The finished product comes delivered in padded aluminum road cases, ensuring the speaker arrives in pristine condition—an insightful touch that guarantees your speakers will still look factory fresh should you ever decide to move.

The Sarastro II is a three-way design featuring all proprietary drivers, including a rear-firing 11-inch woofer, 6-inch midrange, and ribbon tweeter. Thanks to its 93db sensitivity rating, the model remains incredibly easy to drive with any amplifier. Listeners with large power amplifiers can realize music with a lifelike dynamic scale via the Sarastro II.



## THE WORLD CLASS HEADPHONE SYSTEM WES ELECTROSTATIC AMPLIFIER AND STAX SR-009 EARSPEAKERS



*“The WES is one of those break through products that leaves you wondering about the future of high-end audio.”*

*“best headphone ever made”*

*“never have I experienced a more complete and satisfying experience”*

# WOO AUDIO

WWW.WOOAUDIO.COM  
follow us on Twitter @WooAudio

Stay tune to our upcoming new products:  
the world first mono-block headphone amplifiers  
24/192k DAC, and CD transport.

Woo Audio is a designer and manufacturer of WES. We are an authorized Stax reseller .

TOP TONE

## Speakers

### Meridian DSP7200

\$35,000/pair

**A**t first glimpse, the DSP7200's price might seem high. But when you consider you're getting a pair of full-range speaker systems, a 600-watt-per-channel power amplifier (each one of the four drivers has a dedicated 150-watt discrete amplifier), and a Meridian DAC, these are quite a bargain. And, you won't need a rack full of gear. A Sooloos music server and/or Meridian disc player is all that's required to complete a system.

Oh, and no fancy cables enter the mix, either. While you can purchase Meridian's Speaker Link cables (inexpensive by audiophile standards), a few lengths of CAT 5 cable from Radio Shack do the trick. The system is so easy to set up, a five-year old can do it. The ultimate music lover/anti-audiophile system.

### Verity Audio Amadis

\$29,995/pair

**S**hould you find the tonal balance of Verity's Sarastro II faintly forward and thus desire to sit back a few rows, the Amadis might be your ticket. The speaker's 10-inch woofer and 5-inch midrange driver, coupled to a soft dome tweeter, provide a slightly mellower perspective. View the Sarastro II as a Porsche GT3 and the Amadis as a standard-issue twin turbo. Either is capable of outstanding performance.



TOP TONE  
Speakers

**MartinLogan CLX**

\$24,995/pair

**A** lack of bass extension is the one trait that keeps MartinLogan's mighty CLX from the superspeaker category. Throughout the rest of the range, these speakers excel, producing a soundfield that on many levels seems larger than life.

In addition, the CLX's lively, well-defined midrange could very well be the best in the business and, when combined with a great pair of subwoofers, leaves nothing to be desired. The major drawback? The CLX requires plenty of space to give its all. Placed too close to the sidewalls, and the speaker's expansive soundstage collapses. Yet if this shortcoming can be addressed, the CLX's sole limitation is the quality of electronics with which it's paired.

**Dynaudio C4 Confidence II**

\$22,000/pair

**S**lightly more than six feet tall, the C4 occupies a tiny footprint, so it can even be placed in small rooms. Featuring Dynaudio's latest crossover upgrades, the C4s sport a mirrored array of two woofers, tweeters, and midrange drivers that supply bass down to 27hz. Imaging is precise albeit natural. And while these babies possess an average sensitivity of 88db, they're easy to drive.

Looking for a synergistic combination? Mate the C4s with Octave tubed monoblock amplifiers, distributed by Dynaudio North America.





MOBILE FIDELITY  
SOUND LAB

The Original Audiophile Record Label.  
Still Producing the World's Finest  
LPs, SACDs and 24K Gold CDs.

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



TOP TONE

# Speakers

## B&W 802 Diamond

\$15,000/pair

One model down from the legendary 800 Diamond that resides in Abbey Road Studios, the 802 Diamond is nearly identical, save for a slightly smaller cabinet and pair of eight-inch woofers. The Kevlar midrange and diamond tweeter are the same.

The ability to play loud and clean with a very linear response is the 802D's strongest suit. Yet the 802 D remains both resolving and highly musical. Combine these positives with beautiful cabinetry, and you have a speaker that only a company as large as B&W can build at this price point.

## MartinLogan Summit X

\$14,995/pair

Lack the space for a pair of CLXs? The Summit X represents a novel solution. It's a more compact speaker, with a pair of built-in 10-inch woofers. And 25hz and 50hz level controls make it incredibly easy to tailor to room dimensions.

Unlike past models, the company's current ESLs feature MicroPerf technology that boasts a dramatic improvement both in dynamic contrast and maximum SPL. Provided you have enough clean amplifier power, you can play rock, hip hop, and electronic music as if you had command of a mid-sized venue's amplification system.





## TOP TONE

# Speakers

### Harbeth Monitor 40.1

\$12,995/pair

**P**roduced in limited quantities, Harbeth's top speaker utilizes every advantage designer Alan Shaw has at his disposal. Considerably larger than the rest of the company's portfolio, the 40.1 is a full-range speaker meant to be listened to nearfield.

The 40.1's large box defies the current trend of making the front baffle as narrow as possible. Yet, once the music begins, the 40.1 remains as inconspicuous as the tiny P3ESR. It also ignores the "British sound" stereotype, which suggests tonal richness equals a lack of resolution. Chameleon-like in nature, the big Harbeths take on the character of the electronics that feed them. To wit, high-current solid-state amplifiers provide a dramatically different experience than vintage valves.

### Verity Audio Rienzi

\$9,995/pair

**T**he smallest of Verity speakers with a two-cabinet design, the Rienzi offers the ability to use its woofer in a forward- or rear-firing configuration, making the model easy to optimize—especially in smaller rooms.

Requiring minimal floor space and amplifier power, the Rienzis are another great choice for listeners seeking in a compact form the sheer musical ability of a large floorstanding speaker. With solid bass output to around 35hz, they work well with all musical tastes.



TOP TONE  
Speakers

**Dali Fazon F5**  
\$4,495/pair

**K**nown for its gorgeous wood cabinetry, Dali achieves museum-quality beauty with the Fazon F5—a speaker machined from aluminum and coated with a high-gloss red, white, or black finish. Akin to the rest of the Dali range, the compact 2 1/2-way design is room friendly and easy to set up.

The F5's wide dynamic range and linearity allow engaging playback at the lowest levels. Yet the speaker can play much louder than that suggested by its compact size. This marriage of natural sound and sleek design defines the "form meets function" aesthetic.

**DeVore Gibbon Super 8**  
\$4,495/pair

**T**he Gibbon Super 8's rectangular shape implies a traditional design ethic, but its sound is entirely 21st century. While worth the effort, these highly resolving speakers require spot-on placement and rake-angle adjustment. The resulting tonal balance will still be slightly forward and, given the Super 8's 90db sensitivity, demands warmer tube amplification for an optimal match. Mr. DeVore follows such a formula, demonstrating his speakers with Shindo electronics, known for their sultry sonic character.



# Cypher Labs®



## AlgoRhythm Solo®

The AlgoRhythm Solo® delivers uncompressed, high quality audio from an iPod, iPhone or iPad to portable or home audio DACs and amplifiers, via both digital and analog outputs.

- Asynchronous mode USB to SPDIF conversion for low-jitter coaxial digital output
- Li-Ion battery with intelligent charging for pure, reliable power
- Premium audiophile-grade Wolfson Microelectronics™ digital-to-analog converter for 1/8" stereo analog output
- Portable design with short and clean signal paths



www.cypherlabs.com



iPad, iPhone, iPod, iPod classic, iPod nano, iPod shuffle, and iPod touch are trademarks of Apple Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries.



TOP TONE

## Speakers

### Polk Audio LSiM707

\$3,990/pair

**T**hat's right, Polk Audio. If we bestowed an "extra achievement" award, the LSiM707s would get it. These speakers push all the right buttons for audiophiles and music lovers. Natural timbre, wide-range frequency response, and big dynamics add up to a winning and cost-conscious combination. Those that check their audio snobbery at the door will be rewarded.

### Zu Soul Superfly

\$3,000/pair

**P**art single-driver speaker, part motocross-bike exhaust system, Zu's Soul Superfly packs enormous technology into a small, user-friendly enclosure. Costs are kept low by limiting to two the finish options.

Zu designer Sean Casey admits that the 16-ohm Superfly is "best matched with tube amplifiers." Courtesy of the 99db sensitivity, five watts might get you evicted. One of the most unconventional speakers we've reviewed, and certainly, one of the most fun.

### MartinLogan Electromotion ESL

\$2,195/pair

**M**artinLogan's Electromotion ESL brings award-winning performance to budget-minded audiophiles. The company's latest creation pays homage to its popular Aerius model.

The Electromotion has a high sensitivity (91db) and higher overall impedance (6 ohms, only dipping to 1.6 ohms at worst) than the remainder of the ESL lineup. Hence, it's more forgiving with amplification and can be successfully paired with tubes. A wonderful entrance into the ESL field.

TOP TONE

## Speakers

### Magnepan 1.7

\$2,100/pair

**M**agnepan never does anything quickly. The 1.7 is the latest upgrade to its highly successful 1.6, which claimed an approximately 15-year shelf life. The new speaker looks virtually identical to its predecessor, but underneath the speaker cloth, it's completely different.

While the crossover network is updated with better components, a majority of the 1.7's performance edge stems from Magnepan's incorporating its quasi-ribbon technology to the woofer and midrange panels (the 1.6 only used it for the tweeter). Similar changes are made to the 3.7, an update of the 3.6. You get a more coherent blend of speaker elements and a more electrostatic-like sound.

### Klipsch Heresy III

\$1,700/pair

**A**pple Pie, Chevrolet, and Klipsch—forget about baseball. If you want to rock the house without breaking the bank, these speakers will make your day. Due to the Heresy III's 99db sensitivity rating, all you need is low-powered tube amplifier. Don't let the specs fool you. These 12-inch three-ways are designed to work close to the wall to take full advantage of room gain and deliver great bass that accompanies their smooth highs. Hand-made in a variety of finishes. Owning an American classic has seldom been easier.



## TOP TONE

# Speakers

### Vandersteen 1C

\$1,195/pair

It's easy to overlook a speaker that has been around for decades and sold tens of thousands of pairs. That's the story of the Vandersteen 1, now in its third iteration. This two-way floorstander remains one of the audio industry's most popular loudspeakers.

While a few competitors offer more performance in certain areas—and the basic black cabinet with wood top and bottom caps seems a bit plain—no other speaker at this cost nails musical fundamentals like the 1C.

### Magnepan MMG

\$600/pair

Magnepan is so confident you'll love the MMGs that it promises a 60-day, money-back guarantee in addition to a full, one-year trade-in allowance towards one of its larger models. Wendell Diller, head of sales at Magnepan, repeatedly says few people return the MMG, but customers do move up the ladder.

Yes, even Magnepan's smallest speaker provide spacious sound that, in the fields of stringed instruments and vocals, is tough to match unless you spend serious money. The MMGs' only handicap? The elevated performance they offer at this price; the speakers benefit from high-quality, high-performance amplification.

Quirks aside, the Magnepan MMG remains the most intriguing \$600 purchase in high-end audio.

# Where Have all the Good Stereos Gone?



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

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

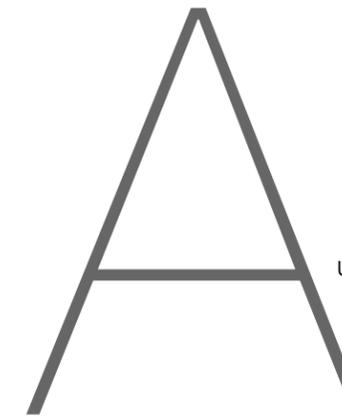
While we will certainly ship any of our gently used classics directly to your door, we invite you to stop by our shop in beautiful downtown Portland, Oregon to browse our inventory in person. Thanks to an in-house service department, we not only service everything we sell, but every piece of used gear is thoroughly checked before being put on display. Consider our white-gloves treatment your guarantee against potential problems.

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

echo)))  
audio

www.echohifi.com 888.248.echo

# Subwoofers



udiophiles love to argue about whether or not it's valid to use a subwoofer to reproduce the lowest bass frequencies.

In theory, doing so makes perfect sense: You can optimize the placement of your main speakers for the best midrange/HF response and imaging performance, while locating the subwoofers where they are least affected by the room. Unless you have true full-range speakers, chances are excellent that your system will benefit from a great subwoofer.

## **JL Audio Gotham** \$12,000

**N**othing handles low frequencies like the JL Gotham, the pinnacle of subwoofer design. With a pair of 13.5-inch drivers that have three inches of excursion and almost 4000 watts of peak power driving them, there is nothing they can't handle. The only thing better? Two Gothams—and seriously, that's what you really need to do the job right. A pair provides smooth bass response that seamlessly couples with anything from the smallest mini monitors to the most prodigious floorstanding speakers.

As the Gothams weigh in at almost 400 pounds each, be sure your floor and your back can handle these monsters. Better yet, make the dealer set 'em up.





### C50 Stereo Control Center:

- For the first time 4 assignable digital and one dedicated USB input are offered
- New eight band tone controls are programmable by input selection
- Two dedicated phono sections, one moving magnet and one moving coil are supported
- Multiple amplifiers, headphones or signal processors are all controlled

# PERFECT PAIR

### MC452 Stereo Power Amplifier:

- The most powerful McIntosh stereo amplifier, MC452 is the master of the most delicate or demanding musical passages
- The latest advancements in transistor technology and circuit design result in cooler operation and longer life
- Larger, easier to read power meters monitor the power delivered while protecting one's speaker investment
- New McIntosh designed output binding posts guarantee the best connection with all speaker cable types



**McIntosh**  
LEGENDARY PERFORMANCE™

www.mcintoshlabs.com

Handcrafted in America since 1949, McIntosh's unwavering commitment to performance, innovation and quality brings an elevated music and film experience.

## TOP TONE Subwoofers

### JL Audio IWS

\$5,000 (1 driver)

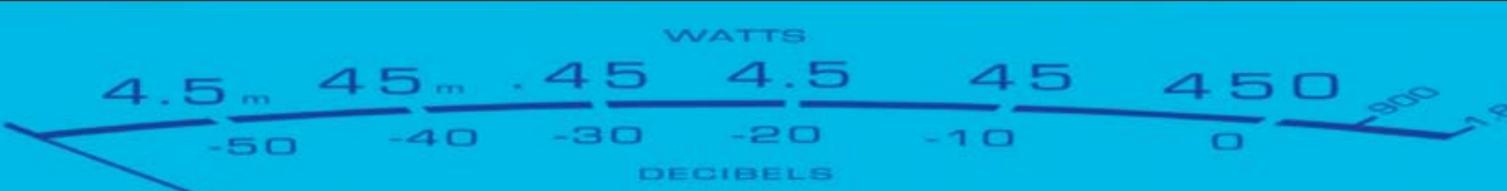
\$7,500 (2 drivers)

**D**on't have room for a pair of Gothams, but still want the ultimate bass experience? Consider the JL IWS (in-wall subwoofer). Featuring Gotham technology in a mounting system that completely isolates the woofer from your wall, the IWS neatly fits in between the studs in your listening room to provide stealth subs that won't crack the plaster. Hidden bass at its best.

### REL G-1

\$3,995

**E**qually at home in a state-of-the-art music or theater system, REL's latest G series subwoofers offer high fashion and high performance. The G-1's ultra cool, circular remote control lets you adjust all of its parameters (hi/low frequency adjustment, level, crossover point, and phase) from your listening position, making the task of optimizing the subwoofer that much easier.



# Subwoofers

## MartinLogan Descent i

\$3,495

Who better to make great subwoofers than a company known for lightning-fast electrostatic speakers? MartinLogan has been crafting a matching line of subwoofers for some time, and each model we've reviewed is excellent. The Descent i represents the top of the range and utilizes three aluminum cone woofers similar to those used in the Summit X system. Each unit is powered by its own 250-watt amplifier, so you'll never run out of juice whether listening to Deadmau5 or watching an action movie.

## JL Audio Fathom F110

\$2,100 (satin black) \$2,200 (gloss black)

The smallest model in the Fathom series, the F110 still moves a prodigious amount of air. Thanks to its long-throw, proprietary-designed 10-inch driver and built-in room correction, the F110 easily tailors to your room—even if you don't have the best placement options.

JL's A.R.O. (automatic room optimization) makes it easy to add additional JL subwoofers and set them up as slaves to the master subwoofer, sharing room correction information. This approach helps flawlessly integrate the F110 with your main speakers, regardless of type.

## MartinLogan Grotto i

\$1,495

The Grotto i is the consummate match for ML's smaller ESL series. It's just the thing that will add a bit of low-end grunt to a pair of Magnepans or mini monitors. Thanks to its versatile crossover and level controls, the Grotto i can be quickly integrated into your room and system. The compact size allows for placement just about anywhere.



CLEAR Light  
cardas.com



TOP TONE

# Analog

CARTRIDGES

The phono cartridge is the most difficult element in any hi-fi system because it's almost always the one component you can't audition prior to purchase. Due to cartridges' high price and fragility, there's no choice but to base a decision on reviews, past experience, and suggestions from other owners. It's an often-unnerving experience, especially given that such purchases can mean five-figure expenses.

Of course, also keep in mind that this is the one area easiest to get wrong in a system. And don't be tempted to overspend. No matter the cost, a poorly set-up uber-deluxe cartridge will always be a disappointment. If you're feeling wacky with your 401k funds, heavily invest in the Feickert suite of tools mentioned in this issue's Accessories section and then, master the art of turntable setup.

In the end, it all comes down to setup and cartridge/toner/preamp synergy—making the cartridge the most vexing albeit most rewarding part of any system. It can drive you crazy. But when you nail it, bliss ensues.



# Blade

the future has landed

As the world's first Single Apparent Source loudspeaker, KEF's original Concept Blade was hailed as a masterpiece of innovative engineering and design excellence. Now after years of painstaking development, it's been refined into a loudspeaker that achieves the ideal in sound reproduction: the perfect clarity and emotional depth of live performance. Prepare to be astonished...

CALIFORNIA  
 Audio Vision SF - [www.audiovisionsf.com](http://www.audiovisionsf.com)  
 1603 Pine Street, San Francisco, CA 94109

COLORADO  
 Hear No Evil - [www.denver-audio-video.com](http://www.denver-audio-video.com)  
 10855 Dover Street #1200, Westminster CO, 80021

INDIANA  
 Redfi - [www.redfi.com](http://www.redfi.com)  
 6427 Georgetown N. Blvd., Fort Wayne IN, 46815

NEW YORK / METRO  
 Audio Doctor - [www.audiodoctor.com](http://www.audiodoctor.com)  
 Jersey City, NJ : Appointment - 877.428.2873

Woodbridge Stereo - [www.woodbridgestereo.com](http://www.woodbridgestereo.com)  
 751 Amboy Avenue, Woodbridge NJ, 07095

## TOP TONE

# Analog

## CARTRIDGES

### Air Tight PC-1 Supreme

\$9,000

**T**ONE contributor Jacob Heilbrunn calls the PC-1 a revelation, saying it produces "a relaxed and luxurious sound, complete with ravishing tone colors." He's made the PC-1 part of his reference system (mated to the mighty Continuum Caliburn) and puts it in a very small group of stratospheric cartridges that take listeners well beyond what they expect can be extracted from a record's grooves.

All this performance does not sacrifice one segment of the audio spectrum. The PC-1 excels in all areas, making it a fantastic performer.

### Dynavector XV-1S

\$5,450

**N**o longer at the top of the Dynavector range, the XV-1S still represents a solid value in the field of top-shelf phono cartridges, claiming levels of delicacy and resolution that you just can't get from lower-priced models. Near-perfect balance makes the XV-1S special. Akin to the Air Tight PC-1, the Dynavector barely resides on the warm side of neutral, with a tonal richness that keeps you glued to the listening chair. It just does everything right.

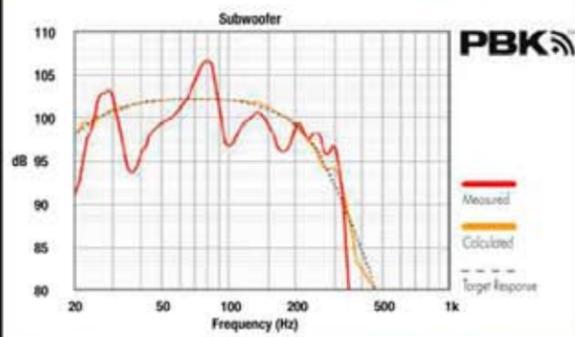


# SUB 2: THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL SUBWOOFER\*

From Paradigm, the #1 Speaker Brand†



PARADIGM REFERENCE  
*Signature Series*



**Physics trumps mechanics, with help from Paradigm**  
Signature SUB 2 is a mover not a shaker. Massive air movement, massive output, vibration free. Six identical, perfectly balanced state-of-the-art drivers radially aligned (two on each side) inside the cabinet in a **Vibration Canceling Design Architecture**. As powerful opposing forces of equal magnitude, the vibration-reaction forces effectively cancel each other out. Barely a ripple disturbs the contents of the glass placed on top of the cabinet, such is the degree to which unwanted, distortion-inducing vibrations are reduced.

**"Audibly better bass through science"**

— Chris Martens, AV Guide

Room dimensions, dead spots, archways, furniture placement have a negative effect on bass performance. Until now. In a process that takes just a few minutes, Paradigm's **Perfect Bass Kit** puts the sub through a frequency sweep to highlight problem areas, determines necessary adjustments and saves configurations to your connected PC. Optimized solutions are uploaded to the sub. A scientific approach to perfect bass.

**10" drivers handle the amazing 9,000 watts Peak Power and 4,500 watts Continuous Power the amp delivers through its unique Power Factor Correction feature.**



www.paradigm.com

TOP TONE

## Analog

CARTRIDGES

### Clearaudio DaVinci V2

\$5,000

Most choose to lavish attention on the thrice as expensive Goldfinger. And yes, Clearaudio's DaVinci will still set you back more than the cost of a year's tuition at a community college. However, for those not requiring a 24kt gold body (and cut diamond placed in said body), the DaVinci V2 utilizes gold coils and a boron cantilever that's very similar to that in the \$15k Goldfinger.

The result? A highly detailed and dynamic cartridge that nonetheless lacks harshness, one of the toughest balancing acts in the biz.

### SoundSmith Susurro Paua

\$4,000

We're big fans of SoundSmith's Peter Ledermann, an industry veteran known for his ability to repair and/or retip just about any phono cartridge in existence. So it came as no surprise that, when Ledermann designed his own series of phono cartridges several years ago, they were first-class.

The Susurro Paua builds on the success of the "Voice" series of cartridges, utilizing a moving-iron design with extremely low moving mass. The approach yields excellent tracking abilities and superb dynamic contrast. The Paua is a sleeper. When properly set up, it enters the realm of five-figure cartridge performance.



\*Connected to a 240-volt line

Check out the video of SUB 2 in action on Paradigm's Blog or our Facebook page

† The only company to be #1 in Price/Value twenty times! Inside Track annual independent nationwide survey of consumer electronics specialist retailers and custom installers.

TOP TONE

# Analog

## CARTRIDGES

### Sumiko Palo Santos Presentation \$3,999

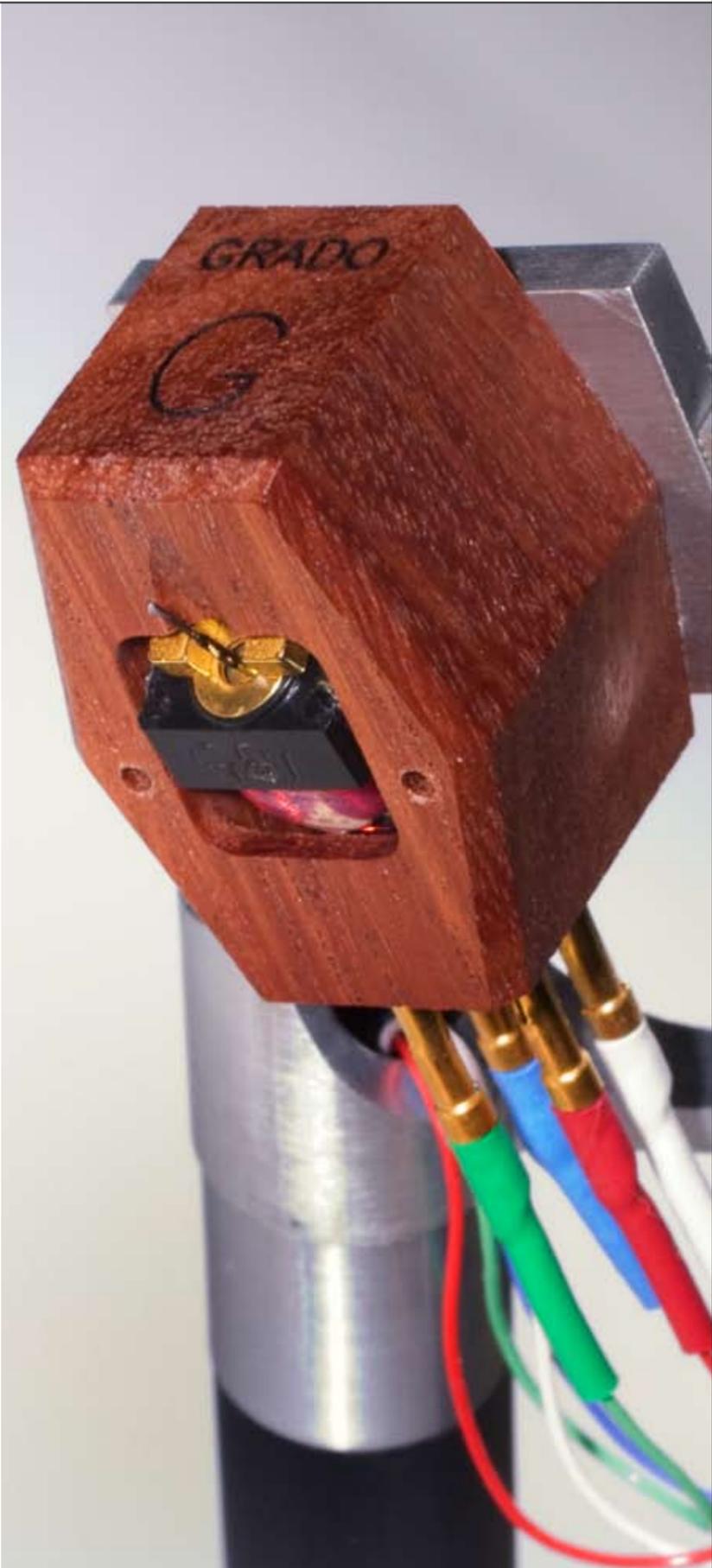
Sumiko's top cartridge is an aural *tour de force*. For audiophiles lusting over exotic Koetsus with five-figure price tags, the Sumiko Palo Santos Presentation accomplishes the same goals—namely, a wonderfully natural midband and an expansive soundstage. And, on a number of levels, the Sumiko outperforms the much more expensive Koetsus, offering an ideal balance of sweetness, transparency, and dynamics, along with a much more reasonable output of .5mv. (Most higher-end Koetsus are in the .2-.3mv range.)

Extra time spent with setup yields fantastic results, with low surface noise, in part due to the small stylus profile. No detail is left to chance. The boron cantilever, suspended in a synthetic rubber to extend cartridge life, is particularly impressive.

### Grado Statement 1 \$3,000

An excellent moving iron-design, Grado's latest iteration of its famed Statement represents a massive improvement—especially considering the modest \$500 price increase over the previous model. Where the original Statement is notable for a warm, mellow mid-range and luscious tonality, it falls somewhat short in tracking ability and frequency extension.

The Statement 1 keeps its predecessor's seductive tonality while adding extension at both ends of the frequency spectrum as well as far greater tracking abilities. Its moderate output (.5mv) and 47k loading doesn't place great demand on your phonostage, either.



# PASS



XP-30:

Refined

Balanced

Detailed

Hypnotic

Defined Bass

Natural

Engaging

Flexible



GamuT  
*S7*

Main Office:  
GamuT International A/S  
gamutaudio.com

U.S. Distributor:  
KT Audio Imports  
ktaudioimports.com

Experience the “El Superiores” Speakers

TOP TONE

# Analog

CARTRIDGES

## Lyra Kleos

\$2,995

The Kleos is one of the latest Lyra creations, further improving on progress made with the Skala and Argo-i models. Each successive generation seemingly achieves better balance, combining Lyras’ exalted ability for detail retrieval with extremely musical tonality.

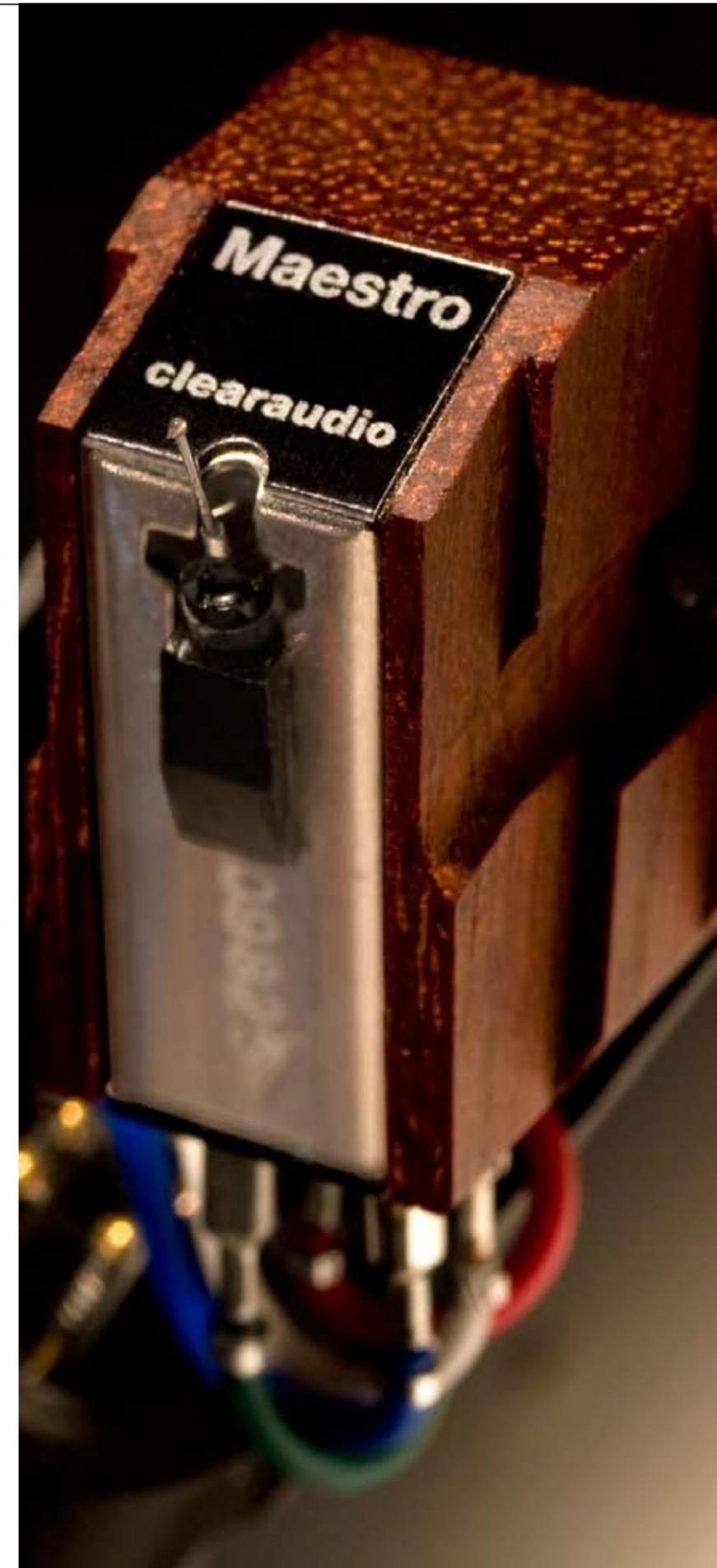
In many ways, Kleos bests the Skala, with more tonal richness and, thanks to Lyra’s “New Angle” suspension system—a process that centers the cantilever between the generating coils—possesses better transient attack to say nothing of decreased distortion when tracking high-level passages.

## Clearaudio Maestro Wood

\$1,195

As you approach the \$1,000 level, the question of whether to choose a MM or MC cartridge can be tough. The Maestro Wood is the best example of a high-priced MM design, as it balances the weight and dynamics craved by many MM lovers as well as a rare level of finesse.

The Maestro Wood has a somewhat warmer tonal balance than Clearaudio’s MC cartridges, so it appeals to a different user. With an uncannily high amount of low-level detail for a MM design, this is the one you might fool your friends into thinking is an MC.



## Analog

## CARTRIDGES

**Sumiko Blackbird**

\$1,099

**Y**es, the Blackbird absorbed a slight price increase, but it remains a key performer. Its high-output (2.5mv) MC design and suggested 47k loading (instead of the usual 100-to-500-ohm loading afforded most low-output MC cartridges) make it a perfect choice for journeyman audiophiles that want to step up to the delicacy of MC sound without having to invest in a costly MC preamplifier.

**Rega Exact 2**

\$595

**T**hanks to its three-point mounting system, the Exact 2 (or any other Rega cartridge) equates to the quickest way to start spinning records on a Rega 'table. Yet they work equally well on other 'tables, and the Exact 2's high output (7mv) MM design means compatibility with any phono stage.

While past Rega cartridges tend to have a darker overall tonal balance, the new Exact 2 is very neutral and possesses a surfeit of inner detail. Hand-built by an elite group of technicians, it performs beyond what its modest price suggests—just like Rega's turntables.



## Analog

## CARTRIDGES

**Denon DL-103R**

\$379

**O**riginally designed in the 60s as a broadcast cartridge, the DL-103R has experienced decades of improvement. Even as it sports a conical stylus and requires a somewhat high tracking force, (2.5g) the DL-103R is today's best-value moving coil cartridge. Many audiophiles with mega-expensive turntables swear by it, regardless of price.

**Grado Red**

\$140

**N**ew to vinyl? Recently buy a great budget 'table and want to get rolling without spending a small fortune? The Grado Red is an excellent way to begin any analog journey. With low-stylus tip mass and great trackability, the Red offers a slightly warm tonal presentation that makes budget discs sound better than they should.

TOP TONE

# Analog

TURNTABLES



**G**iven the analog enthusiasm amongst new (and veteran) music lovers, demand for turntables won't be slowing anytime soon. These days, many choices exist, and yet, several rise to the top of the wish list.

### **AVID Acutus Reference SP**

\$19,995 (without arm)

**A**ll AVID decks are built on a similar platform and based on a heavy-duty power supply, high-torque motor, and highly effective suspension system to drain vibration away from the platter and, ultimately, the record. The Acutus Reference SP serves as the ultimate expression of AVID's design concept.

Utilizing a relatively high-mass platter without falling victim to overdamping, the Acutus succeeds brilliantly in three major areas: its ability to dig deep into a recording and retrieve minute inner detail; an extremely low noise floor; and the gigantic soundstage it throws. Once set up, it stays as such—a big plus for music lovers that don't want to moonlight as suspension mechanics. To top it off, the Acutus Reference SP exhibits a finish commensurate with the price. A reference in every way.

## Analog

## TURNTABLES

**SME 20/3**

\$18,000 (w/SME V tonearm)

**A** legendary British 'table, the SME 20/3 oozes battleship-like build quality and musical capability. A natural match with SME tonearms (and why would you use any less than the SME V?), this component remains the preferred choice of *TONE* contributor Ken Kessler, who boasts decades of experience with the marque. Like many other SME fans, he cites the 20 as the manufacturer's sweet spot—and more refined than the 20/2 it replaces.

**Clearaudio Innovation**

\$14,999 (without arm)

**T**he Innovation takes a unique approach, with a 2.75-inch-thick POM platter and Clearaudio's CMB magnetic bearing. The result? An involving, highly detailed and dynamic presentation when paired with the TT-2 linear tracking tonearm. The TT-2 offers zero tracking error and, with perfectly flat records, yields a substantial decrease in tracking distortion. All these benefits give the Clearaudio combination a sound akin to that of open reel tape.

For those that like to mix it up, the Innovation allows for the use of a second tonearm, making it much more inviting to analog lovers that like to use more than one cartridge—be it a mono version or something with a different tonal balance. As engaging to view as it is to use, the Innovation is nothing less than a highly functional piece of industrial art.



## Analog

## TURNTABLES

**Rega P9**

\$4,995

**W**hen Rega introduced the P9 in the late 90s, many audiophiles freaked at the thought of the company selling a \$3,000 turntable. Yet the P9 has always been a technology exercise, combining a tonearm that requires twenty times the labor of the firm's standard model with a ceramic composite platter (it costs more to produce than Rega's mid-level P5 turntable) and a power supply the size of a power amplifier.

In 2011, it's amazing that all this still carries a price of only \$4,995. The P9 remains the pinnacle of high performance and zero fuss.

**AVID Diva II SP**

\$3,995 (without arm)

**N**ext to the Acutus Reference SP, the Diva II SP is certainly more diminutive in size yet offers the same "family" sound. While the Diva II SP lacks the weight and low-level detail of the \$20k model, its interaction with record grooves is similar. Tonal shadings, pace, and timing are exemplary. And the convenience of being able to add your choice of tonearm makes this a 'table with expansion potential.

As with the other AVID turntables, the Diva II SP's motor is hand-wound to mate with its own bespoke power supply.

Imagine a store for music lovers by music lovers

who share your passion for exquisite recordings and

world-renowned brands. Traveling to your home or

consulting in our low-pressure store, our sole purpose

is to bring you the thrill of a live performance.

Imagine...

**fidelis**   
MUSIC FOR LIFE

603/437-4769 fidelisav.com info@fidelisav.com  
14 east broadway, derry new hampshire 03038



Analysis Plus Ayre Bricasti Bryston Cambridge Audio Cardas  
Clearaudio Conrad-Johnson Croft Dali Grado Harbeth HRS  
Katsikas Technologies Kudos LFD Music Vault Naim Palmer  
Peachtree Perreaux Pro-ject PS Audio Quad Rega REL  
Resolution Audio Resonant Woods Shunyata Stein Music Tellurium Q  
Triangle Unison Vienna Acoustics Vivid Wilson Audio

## “Harbeth Monitors – the Choice of Music Professionals”

Harbeth speakers have the clarity, imaging, dynamics and fatigue-free character that I demand of speakers in my work. I highly recommend them! – Kevin Gray

*Coherent Audio owner, Kevin has mastered music for every major label. He has more than a hundred top ten and Grammy award winning records, and dozens of RIAA certified gold and platinum albums and singles.*



**fidelis**   
MUSIC FOR LIFE

603/437-4769 fidelisav.com info@fidelisav.com

TOP TONE

# Analog

T U R N T A B L E S

### Clearaudio Concept

\$1,495 (with Clearaudio Concept MM cartridge)

\$1,995 (with Clearaudio Concept MC cartridge)

A challenger to the Rega P3/P5 dynasty, the Concept is priced right and, like the Rega models, boasts a similar plug-and-play ethos. While a handful of great cartridges mate well with the Concept, the factory-installed MC is tough to beat. It arrives pre-mounted, only requiring the user to mount the counterweight and set the tracking force.

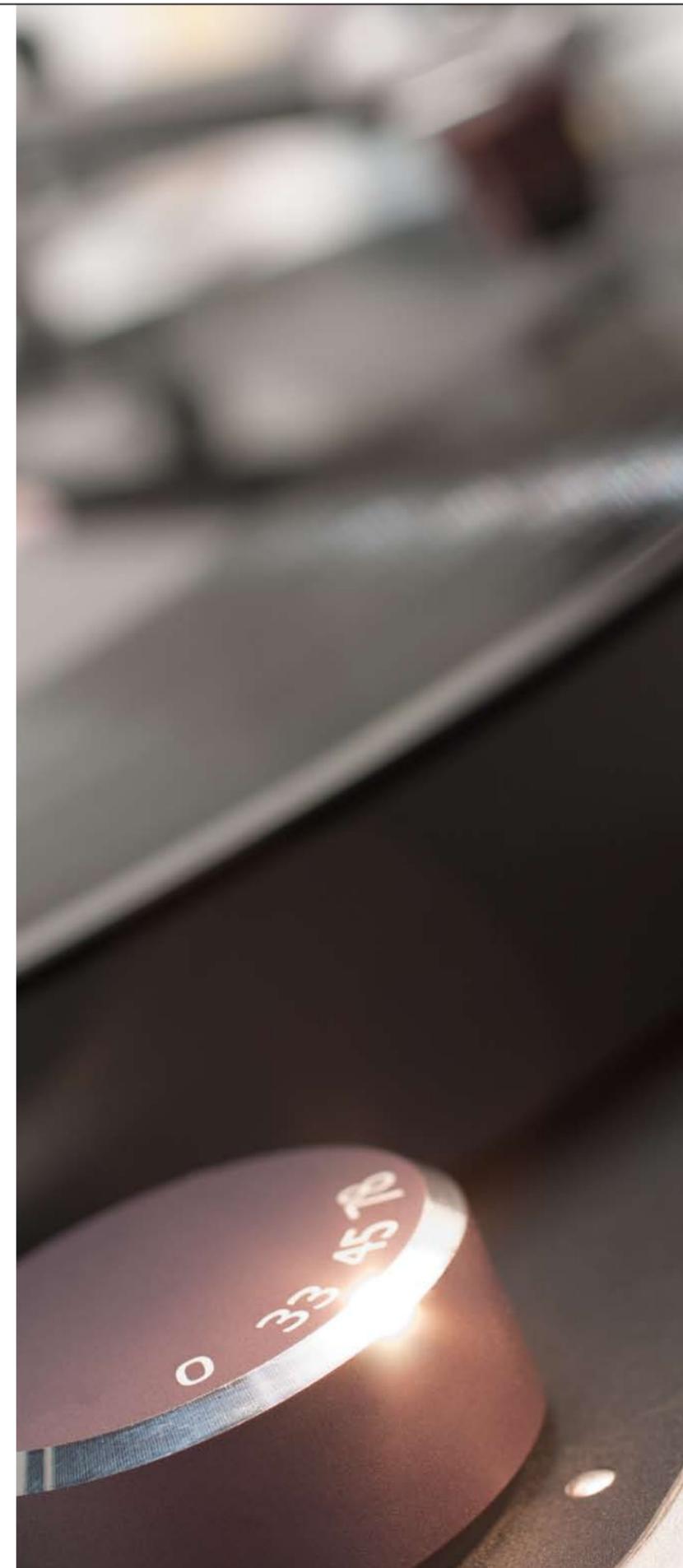
In practice, the Concept offers great sound in a compact footprint. It even offers 33, 45, and 78RPM speeds. So if you find great 78s at a rummage sale, take advantage.

### Rega RP3

\$1,095

Rega's newest model began life as the Planar 3 in the late 70s, transformed into the P3 around the turn of the century, and recently underwent a brief upgrade as the P3-24. The current RP3 incorporates design elements from Rega's latest research, such as utilizing a brace between the tonearm mount and turntable bearing for increased stiffness. There's also a completely redesigned tonearm, the RB 303.

While keeping the price steady, Rega again moves performance forward. Everything listeners liked about the P3 is improved. Of course, it's evolution and not revolution at Rega. Bits and pieces here and there add up to a new 'table that is more musical. For those needing even more performance, an optional TT-PSU power supply fits the bill for an additional cost of \$345.

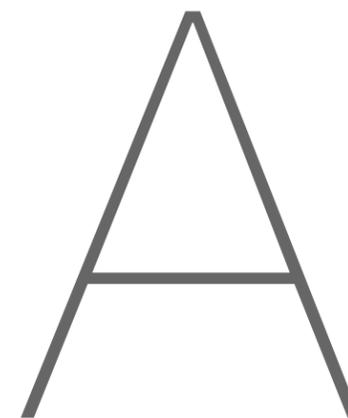




TOP TONE

# Analog

PHONO PREAMPS



As the compact disc started to dominate during the 80s, the phono stage moved from the main chassis and became an outboard box, catering to the few listeners that still worshipped the black disc. Little did any of us know that the vinyl obsession would help drive a market that, today, overflows with \$100,000 turntables and \$10,000 phono cartridges.

Whether you are just getting started with an inexpensive 'table or have unlimited purchasing power, there's a phono preamplifier to suit your needs and budget. The 21st century hosts the widest range of circuit designs in history, with some offering multiple inputs and loading options, allowing vinyl enthusiasts infinite ways to fine-tune their analog experience.

## Analog

## PHONO PREAMPS

**Burmester Phono 100**

\$16,995-\$22,995 (depends on configuration)

**B**urmester's first phonestage in nearly two decades reinforces the company's commitment to analog's renaissance. With two inputs that can be configured as MM or MC, and an optional analog-to-digital converter to digitize vinyl, the Phono 100 ravishes. Base price includes one phono input. A second adds \$4,495 to the price, while the A/D converter costs \$2,995 and Burlink adaptor tacks on another \$495 to the bill. Or, you can save a few bucks and get a fully configured unit for \$22,995.

Removing the exquisitely machined top cover reveals major circuit density. All sections are electrically and mechanically isolated, and show fanatical attention to detail. A finely polished and chrome-plated front panel offers gain, loading, capacitance, subsonic filter, and a VU meter to assist with the output signal to the ADC. This makes the Phono 100 a perfect phonestage for vinyl enthusiasts that utilize multiple turntables.

Compared to the other top phonestages reviewed by *TONE*, the Burmester lands amidst the ARC REF Phono and Boulder 1008 by combining the virtues of each. A solid-state design, the Phono 100 resolves inner detail with a delicacy usually associated with tube design—and still possesses the lower-register slam and control that tubed units often struggle to achieve.



## Analog

## PHONO PREAMPS

**Audio Research REF Phono 2**

\$12,999

**B**uilding on the success of past ARC REF components, the REF Phono 2's hybrid design goes a major step beyond the last all-tube REF Phono. Based around the 6H30 tube, a staple of all current ARC gear, the REF Phono 2 takes advantage of a low-noise FET input stage and epic power supply to produce a big sound that will never be mistaken for high-resolution digital.

A great option for hardcore vinyl enthusiasts with several tables and/or cartridges, the REF Phono 2 boasts two phono inputs that can be configured to low (45db SE/51db BAL) or high (68db SE/74db BAL) gain—as well as multiple loading options and EQ settings for Columbia or Decca. Nope, there is no hardware or software this preamplifier won't handle. Best of all, adjustments can be made from the comfort of a listening chair via the supplied remote.

The REF Phono 2 impresses with a peerless balance of excellent sound, robust build quality, and 21st-century feature set. It remains the most user-friendly, high-performance phonestage we've experienced.



## Analog

## PHONO PREAMPS

**Boulder 1008**

\$12,000

Slightly different in sound than the aforementioned ARC and Burmester, the Boulder 1008 remains on the same plateau. The quietest phono stage *TONE* has enjoyed, it incorporates technology from Boulder's 2008 phono stage into a single-chassis design.

While not quite as mellifluous in the mids as the ARC, the Boulder is the king of dynamic contrast and low-level detail retrieval. Think of it as a Porsche GT3 and not the standard 911. Even those in possession of the finest playback systems will discover new musical information when spinning vinyl through this component.

With two fully balanced inputs and outputs, the 1008 handles myriad MC cartridges via "personality cards" that require users to solder in place the correct loading value. Two factory modules are set for 100 ohms but can easily be changed; additional modules are available for listeners with large cartridge collections. The 1008 also offers front-panel EQ adjustments and a very useful subsonic filter that hasn't any discernable effect on low-frequency performance. It even affords listening at head-banging volume levels thanks to its reducing of acoustic feedback from slightly warped records.



## Analog

## PHONO PREAMPS

**Naim Superline  
w/SuperCap Power Supply**

\$11,000

Sure, the Naim Superline is available for \$4,000, albeit without a power supply. And while you can certainly get by with the inexpensive FlatCap or middle-of-the-range HiCap, real excitement ensues when the SuperCap enters the equation. How? The Superline goes from being a nice phono stage that you can take home to mother to a top-of-the-class unit cool enough to skip dinner with the in-laws.

No matter how much time you've spent with the Superline, you'll freak out when the SuperCap fuels it. Think of the Maxell dude, hair being blown back, in his chair: the combination is that good. When paired with its intended mate, the already quiet Superline redefines "inky black backgrounds" and transmits a weightiness that rivals anything on the market.

While available with 64db or 58db of gain, opt for the higher-gain model as to accommodate a wider range of cartridges. Since it requires plugs to be exchanged on the rear panel, the Superline is behind the curve when it comes to adjustability and loading convenience. And it does not offer loading beyond 10k ohms, meaning that it works with SoundSmith moving-iron cartridges but not the Grado Statement 1.

Pub. note: The Superline is shown here with the HiCap 2 for illustration only.



## INTRODUCING THE NEW TOTEM ELEMENT SERIES

The Totem Element Series is in perfect balance between art and science. Streamlined for all musical genre, it conveys conviction and honesty, while offering enormous scale and presence. Revolutionary in its conception, the Totem Element Series is a true evolutionary step in sound design.

Discover yours at [totemacoustic.com](http://totemacoustic.com)



TOTEM  METAL  
ELEMENT SERIES

TOP TONE

# Analog

## PHONO PREAMPS

### Audio Research PH8

\$7,995

Heavily based on the REF Phono 2 circuit, the PH8 is a logical choice for music lovers with turntables that don't require balanced outputs. With a fixed gain of 58db, the PH8 lacks the cartridge flexibility promised by REF Phono 2. But, thanks to a low-noise FET hybrid design, it comes close.

Sporting an identical tonal fingerprint to ARC's flagship model, the PH8 features a tube-regulated power supply as well as the REF Phone 2's teflon capacitors, remote-controlled loading, and mute and mono functions. There's no "sweet spot" in ARC's turntable stable. Performance progression remains linear, affording listeners substantial increases in performance as they move up the line.

### Nagra VPS

\$7,995

Nagra's diminutive two-input VPS packs a larger punch than its casework might suggest. Armed with an external power supply that keeps onboard noise to a minimum, the VPS follows the stylistic aesthetics belonging to Nagra's preamplifiers and tape recorders—sans their famous Modulometer.

A 12AX7/12AU7 design, the VPS possesses near-nirvanic neutral tonal balance while supplying substantial bass weight and enviable dynamic range. The VPS has a switchable solid-state output stage that operates courtesy of standard bipolar transistors. With the stage switched out, it claims a maximum output of 400mv—enough to drive to full output some high-gain linestages.

Loading is set via individual input cards; the MC phono card utilizes low-noise step up transformers, specifically built for Nagra. In addition to balanced and unbalanced outputs, an available Nagra VFS (vibration free support) platform, which adds approximately \$1,400 to the price, justifies its expense via increased low-level detail.



# Analog

## PHONO PREAMPS

### AVID Pulsare

\$5,995

The Pulsare cost \$5,000 when *TONE* reviewed it at the beginning of the year. If you took our advice and bought it then, you got an even better bargain. But even with the price increase, the Pulsare remains a phenomenal solid-state phonostage well worth its price.

The Pulsare takes a while to reach its stride. High-frequency stiffness evaporates after about 300 hours of playing time, and the relatively low current draw means you can leave it on all the time without feeling guilty.

Thanks to a separate power supply that weighs more than some power amplifiers, the Pulsare delivers massive dynamic swings with tremendous authority. Gain and loading are located on the front panel, and if you use a balanced phono cable and an RCA (or adaptors), you can utilize the Pulsare as a two-input phono preamplifier. How's that for versatility?

### Rega IOS

\$3,195

A purpose-built MC phono preamplifier, IOS offers two gain settings (64db and 70db) using a 10:1 step-up transformer as the first stage.

The IOS works extremely well with MC cartridges. In typical Rega fashion, it performs well beyond its price class and, thanks in part to its all-discrete design and enormous power supply, surprises with well-rounded capabilities. Publisher Jeff Dorgay sent his \$9,000 ASR Basis packing after spending two weeks with the IOS.



Shown: LTX 500 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.

**ANHEM**  
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.

**polk**audio®

the speaker specialists®

## Serious Fun For Serious Listeners

For 40 years we've made it our mission to make high performance audio more accessible. In the early aughts, we introduced the LSi Series, a true high performance loudspeaker that anyone could afford. Everyone flipped over their engaging sound, detail, and audacious realism. Now we're back to change the paradigm again with the next generation of these legendary performers, re-engineered from the ground up for a superior sonic experience.

The new LSiM Series is packed with our newly designed, next generation components like dynamic Cassini oval woofers and super-accurate ring radiator tweeters and

presented in boldly sculpted wood enclosures. Whether you're seriously into music on vinyl or MP3, or movies on BluRay or DVD, the LSiM is capable of astonishing realism at lifelike volume levels.

The LSiM Series is the loudspeaker for the serious listener, but it's also seriously fun to listen to. If you've always wanted to hear your favorite song in a way you've never heard it before, we encourage you to experience the surprising, new LSiM Series from Polk Audio.

Visit [www.polkaudio.com](http://www.polkaudio.com) for a dealer near you.

Polk Audio is a DEI Holdings, Inc. Company. Polk Audio, Polk and The Speaker Specialists are registered trademarks of Polk Audio, Inc.

TOP TONE

## Analog

### PHONO PREAMPS

#### Parasound JC-3

\$2,295

A direct descendant of the Vendetta Research phono preamplifier, John Curl's latest design for Paradigm retains many of its predecessor's qualities—primarily, an eerily low noise floor.

While the JC-3 is only optimized for 100 ohms in the MC input (however, it does feature switchable 47k setting for moving-iron designs), it comes with an MM option. Factor in bulletproof build quality and balanced outputs, and the JC-3 epitomizes high-value operation. If you have a cartridge that work wells at the 100-ohm setting, the JC-3 is the ticket. You'll need to spend a lot more to get a significant jump in performance.

#### EAR 834P

\$1,799

A perennial favorite of audiophiles and reviewers alike, the 834P is incredibly musical. While lacking the Audion Premier's resolution, it superbly handles MM and MC cartridges via a built-in step-up transformer. If the 834P has a fault, it's a slightly warm overall tonal balance that can actually be mitigated by careful tube choice. Not that this trait is always unwelcome.

This slightly warm tonal balance works wonders at making \$400-\$1,000 cartridges sound incredibly better.

For the many vinyl lovers looking to step up from \$200-\$500 phonostages to a model that won't break the bank, the 834P should be at the top of the list.



## Analog

## PHONO PREAMPS

**Audion Premier**

\$1,900

If you have a fantastic MM cartridge and don't require MC capability, the Audion Premier will be revelatory. Hand-built in France, the Premier uses a pair of Russian 6H23n tubes (similar to the 6922) to produce a simple, yet highly effective circuit.

The Premier's refinement proves most impressive. This phono stage has it all: extension at both ends of the frequency range, solid and weighty bass performance, and an abundance of low-level detail. You won't mistake it for a solid-state piece, and it doesn't sacrifice pace and timing for tonal richness.

**Icon Audio PS2**

\$699

TONE contributor Paul Rigby turned us on to the PS2, one of the best-kept secrets in high-end audio—particularly in the United States, where it suffers from limited distribution. A simple three-tube MM design, the PS2 features a small chassis, point-to-point wiring, hardwired power cord, and stunning sound.

Auditioned with a large array of MM cartridges, the PS2 consistently provides a huge three-dimensional soundstage, with a striking balance of tube-like palpability and unexpected degree of price-defying resolution. While it slightly embellishes music, it's all done in a good way. If a more enjoyable phono stage exists at this price, we haven't heard it.



## Analog

## PHONO PREAMPS

**Cambridge Audio 640P**

\$199

A TONE 2009 Exceptional Value Award winner, the 640P is an ideal way to become immersed in the world of analog. A solid-state design powered by a wall wart, it offers MM and MC inputs in a compact package.

Volunteering decent dynamics, a musical midrange, and extremely low noise floor, the unit sounds better than anyone could expect from a \$200 sum. A great match with practically any MM cartridge, the 640P works miracles when paired with Denon's DL-103R.





TOP TONE

# Digital

With all the attention lavished on vinyl, many may have not noticed the progress shown in digital during the last five years. It's safe to say that digital is now as exciting as analog. Between the plethora of high-resolution software and great hardware at both ends of the price spectrum, music lovers no longer have to "settle" while listening to digital.

## **dCS Paganini**

\$55,900 (full four-box stack)

The Paganini can be acquired piecemeal, starting only with the DAC (should you not require disc-spinning). However, after the disc player spent a year in his reference system, *TONE* publisher Jeff Dorgay feels that it provides the ultimate in sound quality.

Moreover, the Paganini gets more liquid as you add devices. The upsampler features multiple resolutions by taking advantage of dCS' proprietary 5-bit DSD processing, which allows 128kb/sec MP3 files to be upsampled to DSD. Even Rhapsody files sound awesome via the Paganini—and so they should, given the deck's price.

## Digital

**Naim CD555/PS555**

\$30,495

According to Naim, CD players account for 20% of its sales, and the company believes that a dedicated player is still the way to roll—even if it makes a few cracking devices that stream digital information. The CD555 represents the pinnacle of Naim's digital expertise, and eschews the traditional arrangement of separating the transport and DAC on respective chassis. Naim prefers to give the power supply its own chunk of real estate.

The approach succeeds brilliantly, offering a level of sound quality matched by very few players and proving that, just like analog, the best digital reproduction will still set you back more than a few quid.



## Digital

**TAD S600**

\$28,600

While the S600 is primarily intended as a high-end disc player for audiophiles that haven't abandoned physical media, it offers RCA SPDIF and XLR AES/EBU digital inputs for additional versatility. However, you're out of luck if you want a USB input. Thanks to parent company Pioneer's tremendous manufacturing and engineering depth, no detail is left to chance. It says "quality" in a distinct albeit refined way.

Of course, beauty is meaningless without performance, and the S600 makes good on its lofty price tag. One of the world's finest-sounding digital players.

**Naim DAC/PS555**

\$12,995 (DAC separately, \$3,645)

The Naim DAC offers an outstanding DAC with three power-supply options, even though it can be used alone with its own internal supply. Future-proof, with the ability to decode 24 bit/768kHz files, it features BNC, RCA, and optical SPDIF inputs as well as two USB inputs that accommodate memory devices but not a computer's USB output.

Sure, the standalone DAC is a great place to begin. Yet the optimal configuration finds it paired with the PS555. The combo takes the DAC within striking distance of the revered CD555 on 16/44.1 source material—and a bit beyond with high-res tracks.



estelon X

from Alfred + Partners



Model XA

Pushing the boundaries of style and engineering – an amorphous shape resulting from the latest manufacturing technologies with a healthy dose of handmade craftsmanship.

estelon.com



TOP TONE

# Digital

## Simaudio Moon 750D

\$12,995

The powers that be at Simaudio make it clear that the 750D is meant as a high-quality DAC that just happens to have a phenomenal onboard CD transport. Made in the company's Canadian factory, the 750D experienced a recent price increase because of its new high-resolution USB board. Initially, the 750D was limited to 16 bit/48khz, but now handles 24 bit/192khz.

Whether you use the 750D as a DAC or a player, the sound quality is both neutral and expansive, with spot-on tonality. Peeking at the rear panel reveals a socket for an external power supply (in the works) that promises to take the 750D to an even loftier level of performance.

## dCS Debussy

\$11,995

dCS' first single-box product, Debussy provides much of the company's four-box stacks' functionality in a more compact rendition aimed at disc-phobic audiophiles. You can, however, add a transport via one of the many digital inputs. (A word clock input rests on the rear panel and offers a noticeable sonic upgrade.)

While current dCS stacks (Paganini and Scarlatti) still lack 24 bit/192khz USB capability, the Debussy is fully functional at this resolution, making it a fine match for computer-audio use with the music-player software of your choice.



TOP TONE

## Digital

### Wadia 381

\$10,000

Wadia's 381 touts technological advances gleaned from its 581se player in a more affordable component that still features SPDIF, AES/EBU and USB connectivity as a DAC. Utilizing the company's patented DigiMaster 2.5 software, a massive power supply, and a stout chassis that thoroughly addresses vibration, the 381 is truly a world-class digital front end.

Thanks to its variable RCA and XLR outputs, the 381 can also be employed as a digital preamplifier thanks to the best digital volume control in the industry.

### McIntosh MCD 500

\$6,495

Utilizing ESS/Sabre's latest DAC chipset, the MCD500 offers peerless CD and SACD playback along with an RCA and optical SPDIF input. The MCD 500 also features a variable line output with analog volume control. Essentially, it can act as a linestage for an all-digital system, which is how *TONE* used it, and to great effect. If that isn't enough, the MCD 500 includes a serious onboard headphone stage that's ideal for private listening sessions.

# A REVOLUTION IN AMERICAN HIFI-FI



## The New OMEN DEF 3.0

package pricing starting at \$3,400

U.S. price only - Call for International pricing

PROUDLY BUILT IN THE U.S.A.

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



McIntosh  
MCD500 SACD/CD PLAYER





“In Admiration of Music is the very foundation on which we develop and produce speakers.”

- Lars Worre, CEO, DALI A/S

It starts with a vision.

Ours is a relection of life: that what's on the inside is more important than what you see on the outside. Music engages every sense, it makes us laugh and cry, tap our toes, and ignites a fire in our hearts.

Music is our reality.



IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC



Helicon 600 MK2

TOP TONE

# Digital

## Ayre C-5 XEmp

\$5,995

The current version of Ayre's legendary C-5 remains an excellent choice for music lovers that prefer physical media and own substantial collections of DVD-A and SACD discs. Few of today's players will play *everything*, and you can't rip SACDs to your computer or music server.

Sound quality is excellent, and the C-5 is one of the rare universal disc players that plays each format equally well. Considering Ayre's commitment to updates, this is a player you'll live with for a long time.

## PS Audio PerfectWave DAC

\$3,995

For those that don't remember, PS Audio started the DAC revolution in 1986 with its Digital Link—the world's first outboard DAC, which sold for \$995. For roughly the same cost in 2011 dollars, the PerfectWave offers a lot more. With multiple SPDIF and USB inputs, the PerfectWave also has an I2S/HDMI bus to accept data from PS Audio's PerfectWave Transport, which the company claims is superior to traditional SPDIF.

With multiple filters and sample rates easily selected from a front-panel touch screen, the Perfect Wave is the user-friendliest DAC in its price category. You can even take advantage of PS Audio's Perfect Wave Bridge add-on card and turn this DAC into a music server.



TOP TONE

# Digital

## Naim CD5i

\$1,795

It's amazing just how much of the trademark Naim sound is available in its entry-level player. With a unique drawer mechanism that does not require a motor, these players are built to last and, like the top-of-the-line CD555, do not have a digital output. Just keep an eye on the puck.

## Rega DAC

\$995

The year's biggest digital surprise, the Rega DAC shares ingredients—the main bits being a pair of premium Wolfson DAC chips connected in parallel—with Rega's \$9,000 ISIS CD player. Removing the cover reveals a beefy power supply and painstaking attention to detail, both aspects almost non-existent in other units at this price point.

The Rega DAC can handle files up to 24bit/192khz (however, the USB input is limited to 16 bit/48khz resolution) and boasts five distinct digital filter choices. Top to bottom, a highly musical DAC that sounds remarkably analog-like in presentation.



Bowers & Wilkins

## The origin of true sound



One material sums up our uncompromising quest for perfection in sound reproduction more than any other. Diamond. A unique combination of lightness and rigidity, it's the ultimate tweeter dome material. So when we were designing our flagship 800 Series Diamond reference speakers, we knew

that nothing else would do. Now, for the first time ever, you can experience the unparalleled clarity of diamond in every speaker in the range. True sound. Made for recording studios. And now available everywhere else.

[www.bowers-wilkins.com](http://www.bowers-wilkins.com)

# Fall in love



*all over again.*

You've shared countless hours.

Enjoyed thousands of albums.

For nearly 40 years, Rega have been hand-crafting fine turntables in their Essex, England factory. Now we introduce a product that will make listening to your Rega turntable a whole new experience.

## 24V Motor Upgrade Kit

For: P1 • RP1 • P2 • P25 • Planar 2 • Planar 3 • P2 2000 • P3 2000

- Tighter bass, clean mids and highs
- Hand-tuned for minimized vibration
- Direct mounting means greater speed stability
- More musical accuracy and articulation
- Richer sound for only \$225



### Bring out the best in your 24V motor-equipped turntable:

Add the Rega **TT-PSU** external power supply (\$375) and **Reference Drive Belt** (\$59).

The TT-PSU's advanced anti-vibration circuit offers even greater stability and a lower noise floor. Plus, it has the added convenience of electronic speed change, eliminating the need to manually adjust the drive belt between 33 and 45 rpm.

Please see your local Rega retailer for details

For information on your nearest retailer, please contact us at [info@soundorg.com](mailto:info@soundorg.com)



**regal**



Exceptional Hi-Fi, designed and built in England

TOP TONE

# Digital

## Benchmark DAC-1

\$995-\$1,895

Before everyone started buzzing about computer audio, Benchmark was quietly shipping hundreds of its original DAC-1s to music lovers and studio engineers all over the world. At a time when many manufacturers went the one-box route for CD players, these guys practically put the DAC back on the map.

All four models in the DAC-1 range are basically the same. But for increased cost, you get more functionality, extra inputs, and a remote. The DAC-1 also makes a great line-level preamplifier and includes an excellent headphone amplifier, too. More than a DAC, it's a first-rate anchor of a system.

## Channel Islands VDA•2 DAC

\$599

If you want great digital on a shoestring budget, the VDA•2 should be at the top of your list. While it only offers Optical and RCA SPDIF inputs, this little DAC uses the legendary Burr Brown PCM1794 (under the hood of some serious players) to decode the bits. The optional \$199 VAC•1 external power supply takes the performance even further.

These miniscule boxes take up virtually no rack space and will breathe new life into your aging player.



# Accessories

The all-encompassing accessories category covers an array of products that aren't components but, nonetheless, play valuable roles in high-end systems. After you address set-up basics to the best of your ability, investigate these tweaks that will take your system as far as it can go.

## SRA Scuttle Rack

Starting at \$6,600

Once you achieved maximum system synergy and tackled room acoustics, it's time to move on to vibration control. If you think your system is delivering all it can, you'll be in for a treat once you acquire Scuttle. Another level of clarity awaits.

## Manley Massive Passive EQ— Studio Mastering Version

\$6,300

Most audiophiles would rather listen to an 8-track tape deck than put an equalizer in their system. But if you haven't tried Manley's Massive, you don't know what you are missing. Used in pro recording studios the world over, Massive offers the ability to surgically alter sound in ways you never dreamed. Whether you are digitizing vinyl or trying to cut the glare on your totally favorite 80s CDs, Massive astounds—once, of course, you figure out how to properly use it.





## TOP TONE

# Accessories

### **Loricraft PRC-3 Record Cleaning Machine**

\$1,995

Utilizing a tonearm-type vacuum pickup that gets deeper into the groove than standard brush cleaners from the likes of VPI, Clearaudio, and Nitty Gritty, the Loricraft PRC-3 is also more thorough and quieter than the competition. Its bi-directional cleaning eradicates the most debris from LPs. Nothing does a better job.

### **SRA Ohio Class XL Plus Equipment Platform**

\$1,800 and up

These big black things look like they're cut from the Monolith in 2001, but they work wonders on solid-state and vacuum-tube gear. Custom-made to your components' sizes and weights, Ohio Class XL Plus annihilates whatever vibration plagues your components, resulting in bigger, more open sound.

### **Running Springs Audio Dmitri and Elgar Power Line Conditioners**

\$999 and \$4,499

Elgar and Dmitri serve as the bookends of Running Springs Audio's power line conditioners roster. The company's efforts are the best we've used in their respective fields and do what great power-conditioning products are meant to achieve: filter the noise from the power line and nothing more.





# The new gateway for Audiophiles

After the first drum hit, you'll be hooked. But don't worry, at these prices, Junior's college fund is safe...for now.

**Never Settle.** That's the driving philosophy behind every product our distinguished in-house design and engineering team creates, and the Motion Series is no exception. Voice matched with MartinLogan's ultra-high-end electrostatic speakers, Motion speakers features exotic Folded Motion tweeters that will have your ears lusting for more alone time with your music collection.

**Meet the family**  
Starting at only \$199.95\* each.  
\*Suggested US retail



Motion  
MARTIN LOGAN

The Great American Speaker Company  
[www.martinlogan.com/motion](http://www.martinlogan.com/motion)

TOP TONE

## Accessories

**IsoTek EVO 3 Sirius Power Line Conditioner**  
\$999

An excellent line conditioner that does not alter tonality, IsoTek's EVO 3 Sirius takes a different approach than RSA products. IsoTek utilizes a form factor that's akin to a gigantic power strip but still achieves clean power that allows you to hear further into your music. As you go up the line, IsoTek offers a higher degree of filtration. None of its models limit dynamics or alter tonality—praise we can't lavish on most power products we've tried.

**VPI 16.5 Record Cleaning Machine**  
\$550

VPI's 16.5 is a longtime mainstay of record collectors. Simple, basic, classic—even if a little noisy and grumpy if you try to clean too many records in too short a period of time, as the motor temporarily overheats—the machine is easy to use and easier to maintain. If you've got more than a handful of records, you owe it to yourself to get a 16.5, particularly if you hunt for bargains in the used bins.

**EAT Vacuum Tubes**  
\$225 and up (price varies with type)

EAT tubes are the cream of the crop. Yes, they are among the most expensive, but worth the investment, with sound that rivals if not exceeds that of the finest NOS tubes. Best of all, they have a 90-day warranty.



TOP TONE

# Accessories

## Quadraspire EVO 4 Rack

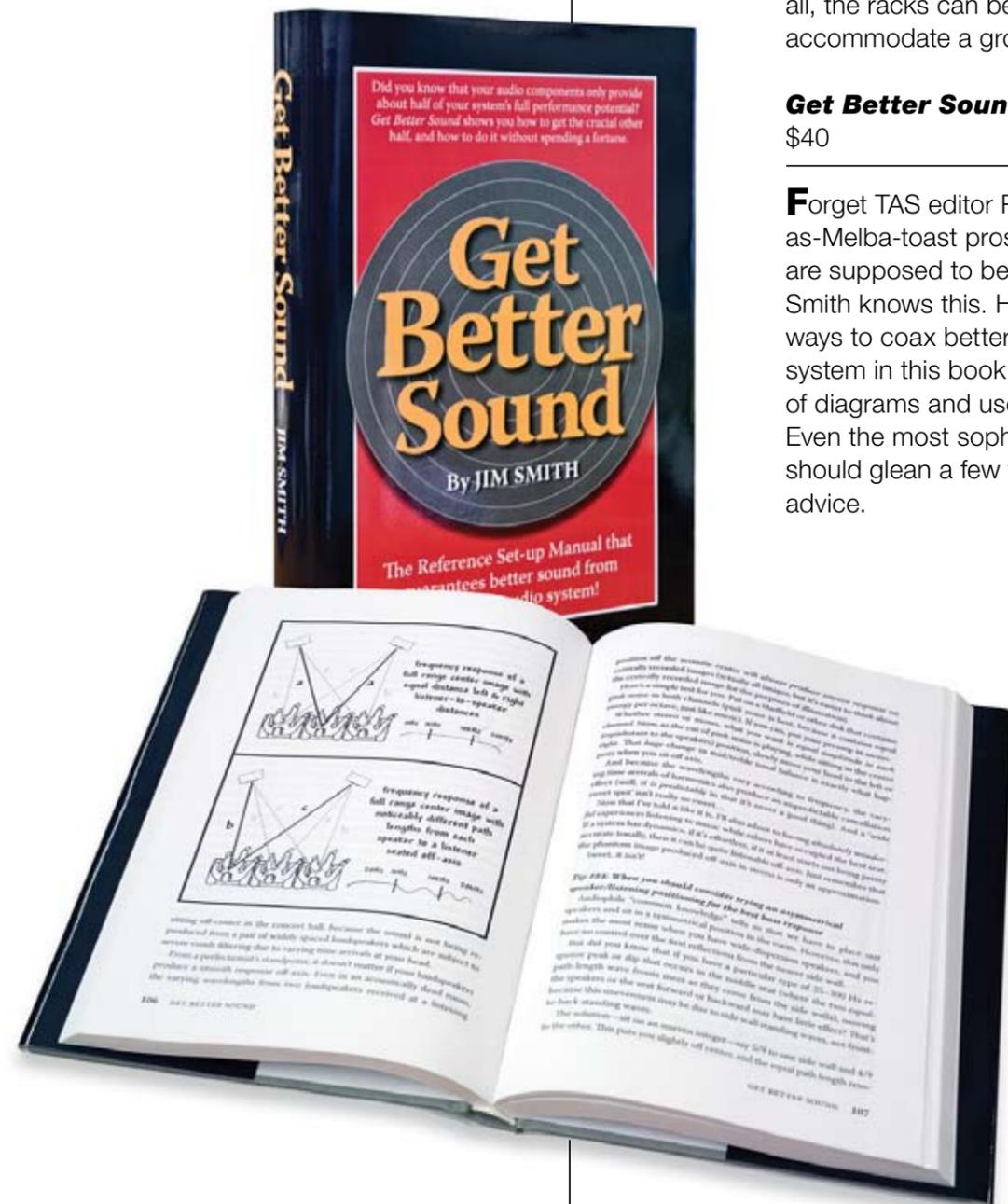
\$275 per shelf

While lacking the sophistication of SRA racks, Quadraspire's EVO 4 model improves low-level detail in even modest systems and looks great, to boot. Best of all, the racks can be easily customized to accommodate a growing system.

## Get Better Sound

\$40

Forget TAS editor Robert Harley's dry-as-Melba-toast prose. Audio and music are supposed to be fun. Industry vet Jim Smith knows this. He offers a number of ways to coax better sound from your hi-fi system in this book, outfitted with plenty of diagrams and useful explanations. Even the most sophisticated end users should glean a few tips from his sage advice.



# Benchmark



**DAC1 HDR**  
Stereo Pre-Amp with Remote Control  
DAC / Headphone Amp / USB

"...a great all around piece."  
Tone Audio

"Damn close to a perfect piece of equipment."  
The Audio Critic

Nagra MSA amplifiers  
**Power is nothing without refinement!**



- The finest engineering focused on truthful musicality
- Advanced Nagra PFC power supply for unwavering performance under all conditions
- Highly configurable 60 wpc stereo, 60 wpc mono bi-amp or 120 wpc parallel-bridged mono
- Compact chassis with integral heatsink milled from a solid block of aluminum



swiss made  
 www.nagraaudio.com

Nagra USA, more than 30 years at your service Tel. 800 813-1663

TOP TONE

# Accessories



**Spin Clean  
 Record Cleaning Machine**

\$125

Sheepish about spending big bucks on a record-cleaning machine? Let Spin Clean set you free. Bundled with a 4oz. bottle of cleaning solution concentrate (enough to clean about 200 albums) and lint-free cloths to blot records dry, Spin Clean does a fantastic job for the price.

**Mobile Fidelity Cleaning Solutions**

(Price varies per bottle)



Want to start an argument with audiophiles? Discuss cleaning solutions. However, Mobile Fidelity's products are the last word on the subject and work well in a variety of situations. The standout reissue label makes something for every need—from the Super Deep Cleaner for the filthiest records to the Plus Enzyme Cleaner for everyday use. Complete your cleaning regimen with the company's MFSL Inner Sleeves, the same sleeves that house all MoFi Original Master Recordings. One-stop shopping at Music Direct makes it easy to keep your analog treasures in pristine shape.

# From Source To Sound



**Intent is everything.** TAD knows that only by respecting the original artistic intent of the musical performance can our designs successfully achieve that elusive standard known as *reference*.

When it comes to loudspeakers, our TAD Compact Reference and TAD Reference One—the monitor selected by world-renowned AIR Studios—are acclaimed by sound professionals as simply the finest available. The same philosophy that inspires audiophile leadership continues with a series of electronics, creating a TAD Total Experience with systems that

are sonically, structurally and aesthetically synergistic from “source to sound.”

Your digital source is our TAD-D600 Disc Player, a CD/SACD transport with incomparably accurate D/A conversion. For those requiring a dedicated master control, our new TAD-C2000 Preamp includes state-of-the-art D/A conversion circuitry that flawlessly renders disc or

file-based music libraries. Reference-standard amplification for stereo and multi-channel systems is achieved with our new TAD-M4300 stereo and TAD-M2500 four-channel power amplifiers, with the monaural TAD-M600 our most powerful statement. Each is a sonic masterpiece worthy of driving the world’s finest loudspeakers—ours.

**TAD**  
TECHNICAL AUDIO DEVICES

If your demands for a reference system are as uncompromising as our own, learn more about the TAD Total Experience. Pure intentions. Pure sound. Pure TAD. [tad-labs.com](http://tad-labs.com)

Specifications and design subject to modification without notice. ©2011 Pioneer Electronics (USA) Inc. TAD and the TAD logo are registered trademarks of Pioneer Corporation.

PREVIEW

## Verity Audio Amadis Speakers

\$29,995/pair  
[www.verityaudio.com](http://www.verityaudio.com)

One step down from the Sarastro II speakers we reviewed earlier this year, the Amadis use Verity’s two-box design that individually optimizes the woofer and midrange/tweeter cabinets. Separating the cabinets also makes for easier setup—your back will thank you for this after you begin listening.

Thanks to their 93db sensitivity, the Amadis can be driven with anything above three watts per channel. Yet their high power-handling capacity also makes for a wide dynamic range. With neutral tonality and excellent low-level detail, consider the Amadis the super-size version of Verity’s award-winning Parsifal.



# “The Truth, nothing more, nothing less...”

“Ridiculously good in every  
aspect of vinyl playback” -  
Michael Fremer, *Stereophile*



 **AVIDHIFI**



The Diva II SP edition reveals a genuine insight into the performance standards of high-end audio.

Precision control of turntable speed is achieved with our DSP engine. Variations in the mains supplies are ironed out to create a pure supply of power to the motor. This can be calibrated to achieve perfect platter speeds.

Motor noise, vibration and control are class-leading with a 'twin belt' drive controlling platter dynamics and stability under load. The result? A smooth, yet dynamic sound quality, improved bass and treble definition.

[www.avidhifi.co.uk](http://www.avidhifi.co.uk)

**AVID HIFI LIMITED**, Bicton Industrial Park, Kimbolton, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE28 0LW  
Tel: +44(0)1480 869 900 Fax: +44(0)1480 869 909  
Website: [www.avidhifi.co.uk](http://www.avidhifi.co.uk), Email: [info@avidhifi.co.uk](mailto:info@avidhifi.co.uk)

“It revealed an incredible wealth of genuine low-level detail... If times got tough and I had to sell my big rig, I could listen happily ever after to the Diva II SP. That's how well balanced and robust its overall sound was.”

- Michael Fremer, *Stereophile* (January 2011)



Phono Stage

PREVIEW



## Ortofon Vivo Blue Cartridge

\$399

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

Ortofon's latest low-output MC cartridge is reasonably priced and should flawlessly integrate into most systems with a moderate .5mv output. Utilizing an elliptical diamond on aluminum cantilever, this medium-compliance unit proves an excellent tracker, as well. Review in progress.

# Unconventional Shape, Unbelievable Sound

## Dali F5 Fazon Loudspeakers

By Jeff Dorgay

**H**igh-end audio products are often subcategorized by a single factor. For instance, in the mid-70s, many speakers built in California had a “West Coast Sound” characterized by a forward treble and somewhat forceful bass. Meanwhile, speakers from the other side of the country were said to possess an “East Coast Sound” favoring midrange accuracy.

While it’s tough to pigeonhole modern speakers according to such parameters, speakers from Denmark seem to share a natural tonality and an ability to capture the essence of instrumental texture without calling attention to their presence. Dali excels at these aspects. Its new F5 Fazon loudspeaker takes prior achievements two steps further by combining timeless styling with great sound and a small footprint.

Available in gloss black, white, or red, the Dali F5 is gorgeous to behold and will look right at home in the most fashionable of abodes. Best of all, at \$4,495, the F5s are affordable works of art.



**Throwing a wrinkle into traditionalism, the curvy F5s are machined from a block of aluminum. The speaker features an absence of parallel surfaces in order to keep to a minimum any cabinet resonance.**



### Details, Details

Beautiful woodwork is a Danish hallmark, and Dali has always offered great cabinets. Throwing a wrinkle into traditionalism, the curvy F5s are machined from a block of aluminum. The speaker features an absence of parallel surfaces in order to keep to a minimum any cabinet resonance.

The three-driver complement works in a 2 1/2-way configuration, with the crossover points set at 800 and 3200Hz, respectively. Dali maintains that its incorporation of wood fibre mixed into the pulp cones utilized in the dual 5-inch woofers is a significant contributor to the model's natural sound, adding increased cone stiffness and a more randomized structure. It also helps with the inner damping of the cone, a claim that only a few minutes of listening confirms as true. I have a personal preference for soft-dome tweeters; I'm always willing to forgo a smidge of ultimate resolution in the service of timbre. And here, the F5 delivers with a 1-inch soft-dome tweeter that, as Ice-T would've said before he became a "Law and Order" mainstay, keeps it real. *(continued)*

A pair of banana jacks flush-mounted in the silver bases, and a tiny compartment that allows you to completely conceal your speaker cables, round out the form-and-function factor. Acoustically transparent speaker grilles magnetically attach; your décor and offspring will decide whether they should be left on or off.

Grilles aside, you should have the F5s playing music in a few minutes. Thanks to fairly wide dispersion, they will not suffer terribly if not aligned just right. If you are in the position to fuss over speaker placement, the F5s yield a bit more bass extension if you can keep them about 18 inches from the rear wall. Since the tweeters rise only 29 inches from the floor, lower seating grants the best imaging performance.

Finally, don't let the 87db sensitivity frighten you: These speakers are incredibly easy to drive and work equally well with tube, transistor, or Class D amplification. Anything from 25 watts per channel and above should get the job done.

#### The F5's Evaporative Nature

The F5's bass response is solid but not overbearing. At first blush, one might think the speakers slightly thin because the upper-mid bass response isn't goosed to provide a false sense of thickness. However, when called upon to move air, the pair of 5-inch woofers is mightier than the spec sheet suggests. Sampling Peter Gabriel music, old and new—via Genesis' *Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* and his more recent *Scratch My Back*, respectively—the speakers dispense ample impact. Via the F5s, there's more than enough oomph on "Back in NYC" to sound convincing and hold at bay any thoughts of a subwoofer. Moreover, textures present in the acoustic bass line of "Heroes" on Gabriel's latest record affirms what is sonically conveyed is anything but one-note bass. *(continued)*



DEVIALET



“Once in a generation a company will emerge with a concept so original and innovative that it has the capacity to re-define the expectations of a product genre. That company is Devialet.”

**Paul Miller**  
Hi-Fi News

“Forget everything you know about high-end audio (...) The D-Premier is more than the sum of its parts in concept, performance and value.”

**Jeff Dorgay**  
Tone Audio

*For those who still believe in progress*

## D-Premier, The Audiophile Hub

NEW HYBRID AMPLIFICATION TECHNOLOGY - PATENTED ADH® CORE  
REVOLUTIONARY 24/192 DAC - PATENTED ZERO PROCESSING I/V CONVERSION  
EXCLUSIVE PFC PLANAR POWER SUPPLY  
FULLY CONFIGURABLE AND UPGRADABLE PLATFORM

Devialet is distributed by:

USA - Audio Plus Services - [www.audioplusservices.com](http://www.audioplusservices.com) - 800 663 9352 / Canada - Plurison - [www.plurison.com](http://www.plurison.com) - 866 271 5869

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

dCS  
ONLY THE MUSIC

WHEN THE WORLD STOPS

AND THERE IS...

# ONLY THE MUSIC

**Scarlatti.** The Ultimate Digital Playback System.



"The dCS Scarlatti is the best sounding, most satisfying digital playback system I've heard." **Stereophile**



Our design philosophy in building **Scarlatti** was to use our 21 years of experience to deliver the best digital playback system in the business. For people who are serious about their music, Scarlatti sets new standards in both measured performance and musicality. CD or Computer Audio, Scarlatti delivers a life enhancing performance every time.

Imported by **dCS North America**

[www.dcsLtd.co.uk](http://www.dcsLtd.co.uk) | [info@dcsLtd.co.uk](mailto:info@dcsLtd.co.uk) | +1 617 314 9296

Manufactured in the UK by Data Conversion Systems Ltd, Unit 1, Buckingham Business Park, Anderson Road, Swavesey, Cambridge, CB24 4AE

## REVIEW

The F5s often remind me of my favorite mini monitors' midrange clarity. Yet the former take up a smaller footprint than my Harbeth P3ESRs on Sound Anchors stands. Tracking through Pat Metheny's new *What's It All About?* demonstrates how well these speakers keep pace with the guitar icon's fretwork and harmonics without becoming lifeless and flat.

Of course, enthralling midrange and ample bass alone don't make for a fantastic speaker. Thanks to the small woofers, the F5s offer the degree of coherence required to effortlessly disappear in a room. The resolution will convince you that something very special is happening—an experience that allows you to ease back in the chair and focus on the musical event. Vide, "I'm a King Bee" from Grateful Dead's *Fillmore East: April 1971*. The record boasts a wide range of texture and complexity that challenges the best speakers. Answering the bell, the F5s create a wide soundstage that mimics the Fillmore's hall ambience.

### Fatigue-free Finesse

Many speakers make impressive showings during a 10-minute demo. You know the drill: A salesperson plays some plucky guitar bits, runs through some female vocals, and even spruces it up with a touch of classical music or piano fare. It's often all presented at high decibel levels. Still, you walk away impressed, perhaps so smitten that you reach for your wallet. But somehow, after a few extended listening sessions, those new speakers lose their luster and you're right back to where you started.

A natural feel, which might initially make the F5s slightly less exciting, is what will keep you enthralled with them down the road. Even after full-day sessions with the F5s, they never become tiring. As much as a crammed Sooloos music server gnaws at my inner DJ and tempts me to spin singles, I find myself listening to many records all the way through with the F5s—truly the mark of a great speaker. *(continued)*



I just want to stay in the groove, whether it's with yet another version of Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* or Girls' *Father, Son, Holy Ghost*.

No, the F5s do not present the finite level of "pinpoint imaging" that some more decidedly audiophile speakers possess. However, they throw a full-bodied and three-dimensional soundfield. The wood blocks and triangle in Serge Gainsbourg's "Douze Belles Dans la Peau" from *Chant a la Une* illustrate this strength. The triangle sporadically pops in all around the room, while the wood blocks are distinctly left of center and somewhat diffused, sounding just like a pair of wood blocks when I strike the latter in my listening room.

Dynamics are equally impressive. Although small woofers can only move a finite amount of air, these speakers' woofers give a gold-ribbon performance when faced with heavier fare. Led Zeppelin, AC/DC, and the Who present no problem. But, if your tastes tend towards the heaviest metal, I suggest adding one of Dali's subwoofers. AC/DC's "Back in Black" comes across just fine, but Danzig's "Am I Demon" requires a stronger push over the cliff. Just as important as dynamics, the F5s retain their open character at low volume levels—not always an easy trick and, perhaps, even more telling of a given speaker's linearity.

Well? Hello, Dali. ●

**Dali F5 Loudspeakers**  
MSRP \$4,495/pair

**MANUFACTURER**

Dali Speakers

**CONTACT**

www.dali-speakers.com  
(factory)

www.soundorg.com  
(US importer)

**PERIPHERALS**

**Digital Source**  
Sooloos Control 15 with  
dCS Paganini stack

**Analog Source**  
Avid Diva SPII/SME  
3009/Ortofon SPU

**Phono Preamplifier**  
ARC PH6

**Preamplifier**  
Burmester 011

**Power Amplifier**  
Conrad-Johnson  
MV-50C1, Channel  
Islands D500 Mk.II,  
McIntosh MC 452

**Cable** Cardas Clear



## POWER TRIO

The latest additions to Burmester's Top Line offer award winning fidelity and tremendous versatility. The 088 preamplifier features X-Amp 2 modules and can be configured with an on-board phono stage or DAC. The 089 CD player uses an advanced Belt Drive system to keep digital jitter to a minimum, while also featuring a preamplifier stage with volume control and a pair of analog inputs. The 100 phono preamplifier combines two phono inputs and an optional 24-bit/192kHz analog to digital converter, so that you can capture your favorite vinyl treasures at the highest quality possible.

*Burmester*

ART FOR THE EAR

Top Line  
HANDMADE IN GERMANY

# Built For Life

## Decware Zen Torii Mk.3 Amplifier

By Jeff Dorgay

**H**yundai covers its engines for 100,000 miles. Bryston guarantees its amplifiers for 20 years. Decware guarantees its amplifiers for life. Any way you look at it, offering long warranties takes guts. It also means you better make a damn good product, or you're going to go broke servicing warranty repairs.

The Decware Zen Torii Mk.3 is a damn good amplifier.

While I hate to use the "b" word (best), the Torii is my *favorite* power amplifier based on the EL-34 tube, and that's saying a lot. I've always had a major affection for such amplifiers, which possess many characteristics of great single-ended triode amplifiers and yet, have more power and control than an SET can muster.

Think of the Torii as an SET with benefits—namely, increased bass control and dynamics. Unless you have extraordinarily efficient speakers, a few watts per channel just won't rock your world. But 25 watts per channel dramatically changes the game, and is more than enough to power the Verity Audio Amadis speakers (93db/1-watt sensitivity) to a sufficiently high level on music of any kind. The Mk.3 does a fine job with the Verity Rienzis (87db/1 watt) and B&W 802 Diamonds (90db/1 watt). Still, the Amadis' added sensitivity is just what's needed to push the envelope.

Decware owner and chief engineer Steve Deckert claims his amplifier is "the last one you'll ever want" and should only be used with a preamplifier if you happen to have a world-class unit at your disposal. Fortunately, I have two: An ARC REF 5 (vacuum tubes) and Burmester 011 (solid-state), each reference components, and both excellent matches for the Torii. At the end of the day, with the Verity speakers, I was willing to relinquish the last bit of the ARC preamp's front-to-back-image depth for the additional bass grip and slam the Burmester provides. With the GamuT S9s, the ARC has the edge.

An optional \$150 stepped attenuator on the Torii makes it easy to keep the preamplifiers used within their respective sweet spot, balancing dynamics and the lowest noise floor in the presentation. While the sound remains excellent when using the dCS Paganini straight into the Torii, via the Paganini's digital volume control, I feel that a killer linestage brings maximum dynamics to the table.

Deckert warned me that the Torii would require a long break-in period. Yet it sounded good right out of its supplied Pelican Case—another nice option, and one that certainly beats a cheesy cardboard box. *(continued)*

**An optional \$150 stepped attenuator on the Torii makes it easy to keep the preamplifiers used within their respective sweet spot, balancing dynamics and the lowest noise floor in the presentation.**

## REVIEW

Moreover, it keeps improving over time and, if I had to guess even after 700 hours of listening time, still sounds as if it is advancing. Where the tonal character of many amplifiers sounds grainy and two-dimensional after only a few hours on the clock, that of the Torii just keeps ameliorating as the hours rack up.

My review sample has the optional V-Cap upgrade, which adds \$500 to the window sticker. It's well worth the price. A custom wood base is also available, meaning that a completely tweaked-out version fetches about \$3,600. Each Torii is hand-built by one person and given plenty of attention from start to finish, not unlike a master engine constructed at Ferrari or Aston Martin. Such care becomes obvious the minute you take your Torii out of the carton; it's truly a product to cherish. (Decware products are all built to order and only available factory-direct.)

### Rolling, Rolling, Rolling

The only aspect that might drive you nuts with the Torii? The amount of customization you can bring to its sound by swapping various tubes. This amplifier is what a tennis ball is to a Jack Russell terrier; you can chase it forever and you'll collapse in exhaustion by the time you're done. If that's your idea of fun, you'll never get bored with the Torii. While every tube makes a difference, the output tubes seemingly make the least amount of difference. I tried several combinations, but the input tubes and voltage regulators provide more sonic variance than swapping output tubes.

Deckert attributes this characteristic to his "Hazen grid modification" that involves substituting a non-polarized film capacitor for the piece of wire that normally connects between the suppressor grid and cathode in the output stage. Deckert also touts another benefit of his modification: The basic push-pull output stage makes it less sensitive to tube type. I must concur. This is great news—especially considering that the price of vintage NOS EL-34 tubes can soar as high as \$300 each.

The Torii comes with the most informative owners manual I've ever seen. Rather than bore you with paragraphs of tube rolling escapades, click here for the manual:

[www.decware.com/newsite/TORIIIMK3Manual.pdf](http://www.decware.com/newsite/TORIIIMK3Manual.pdf)

(continued)



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](http://www.redwineaudio.com)



From spinning vinyl...  
to streaming a library  
of thousands of albums.

The medium may change...but some songs  
will always remain the same.



Creators of high-quality audio equipment for the enjoyment of music.  
Designed, tested, and hand-built in Salisbury, UK since 1974.



And the adjustments don't stop with the tubes. You can choose one of two bias settings, and there is a bass and treble control. Not traditional tone controls, mind you, but two more ways to optimize the speaker/amplifier interface. The treble control rolls off the high-frequency response of the amplifier, but simply shunts to ground so it is not in the signal path. Deckert says the "bass control" actually impacts how the amplifier interacts with the speakers, and that there is no fixed "flat" position for these controls. Hence, they must be adjusted with each speaker. Finally, a 4/8-ohm impedance switch is present and, as with any tube amplifier with multiple output taps, should also be sampled, as often times the best match is not what you might think.

Those who stay focused and have the Zen-like patience to settle on a combination (or two) will be rewarded with a presentation that transports them to a special place. Even if you stick with the supplied tubes, the bass, treble, bias, and impedance controls are worth five minutes of your time. Consider: the Torii might actually save you money if you've got a pair of speakers that are too forward or a touch boomy. There's a good chance that making small adjustments will dial in a speaker you may have considered selling. More money for concert tickets never came easier.

#### Unlike Any Other EL-34 Amplifier

Whereas a Shindo or vintage Marantz amplifier embellishes the sound in a way in which the music tends to sound warm, romantic, and even a bit slow regarding pace and timing (not that this is always a bad thing for many digital and other less-than-stellar recordings), ultimately laying resolution on a sacrificial altar, the Torii strikes a perfect balance of rendering additional tonal richness without altering the music's fundamental character.

Via the Torii, Moraine's "Uncle Tang's Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" from *Metamorphic Rock* is an absolute prog freak-out, with layer upon layer of maniacal synthesizers and overdubbed guitars all kept in order with larger-than-life drums. Whatever your taste in complex tunes—be it prog, metal, or full-scale orchestral music—you will find intoxicating the Torii's ability to maintain musical pace. *(continued)*



**The trick the Torii plays better than most vacuum-tube amplifiers stems from its ability to achieve an astonishing balance between tonal richness and tonal purity.**

Without fail, the Torii consistently digs deep into recordings, uncovering morsels of information you may have never heard before. Montrose's "Rock Candy" is a classic example of a slightly flat recording that comes alive with this amplifier. Usually devoid of any soundstage depth, drums and guitar became invigorated, assuming their own space while lead singer Sam Hagar's voice remains front and center. And a phenomenal recording like The Band's *Music From Big Pink* takes on a life of its own, feeling as if it's mixed in surround.

The trick the Torii plays better than most vacuum-tube amplifiers stems from its ability to achieve an astonishing balance between tonal richness

and tonal purity. And it does so without sliding down the slippery slope of coloration and euphonic distortion. Acoustic instruments retain correct timbre, complete with a fine-grained decay that seems to fade out forever.

Moreover, while most pure tube amplifiers exhibit tube rush when no signal is present, the Torii has none. Chalk it up to the unique utilization of the voltage regulator tubes. The Torii uses them in series, working as active filters rather than in parallel to regulate voltage. This approach also puts almost no stress on the tubes. Unsurprisingly, Deckert claims the latter should practically last the life of the amplifier. While I still notice modest improvements when

plugging in to my Running Springs Maxim power line conditioner, the Torii exhibits less improvement than any other vacuum-tube amplifier I've plugged into the Maxim. It's another test that further confirms Deckert's assertions.

Sure. Watts are watts. But thanks to its robust power supply and proprietary output transformers, the Torii has an abundance of headroom and very gently extends past its peak power output, with barely a hint of clipping. Even when playing the heaviest metal, the amplifier always feels bigger than its modest power rating suggests.

All of this adds up to sound reproduction that is rare with most

amplifiers, no matter the price, and a practical miracle at \$3,600. Granted, 26 watts per channel won't be optimum for every speaker and room combination. But within this realm, I can't think of a more enjoyable amplifier than the Decware Zen Torii Mk.3. I bought the review sample and plan on keeping it long enough to see if it will ever break.

One last word to the wise: Those wanting to put a Torii under a Christmas tree should get on the phone now. Orders are currently subject to a 10-week wait. Deckert currently has a 90-unit backlog. He hopes to supply models within the standard 4-6 week time frame by next spring. ●

**Decware Zen Torii Mk. 3**  
MSRP: \$2,945-\$3,700  
(depending on options)

#### MANUFACTURER

Decware

#### CONTACT

www.decware.com

#### PERIPHERALS

**Analog Source** AVID Acutus Reference SP/SME V/Koetsu Urushi Blue

**Digital Source** dCS Paganini stack, Wadia 581i, Sooloos Control 15

**Preamplifiers** ARC REF 5, Burmester 011

**Speakers** B&W 802 Diamonds, Verity Rienzi, Verity Amadis, GamuT S9, MartinLogan ElectroMotion ESL

**Cable** Cardas Clear

**Power** Running Springs Maxim PLC, Running Springs Mongoose cords

# In a Silent Way

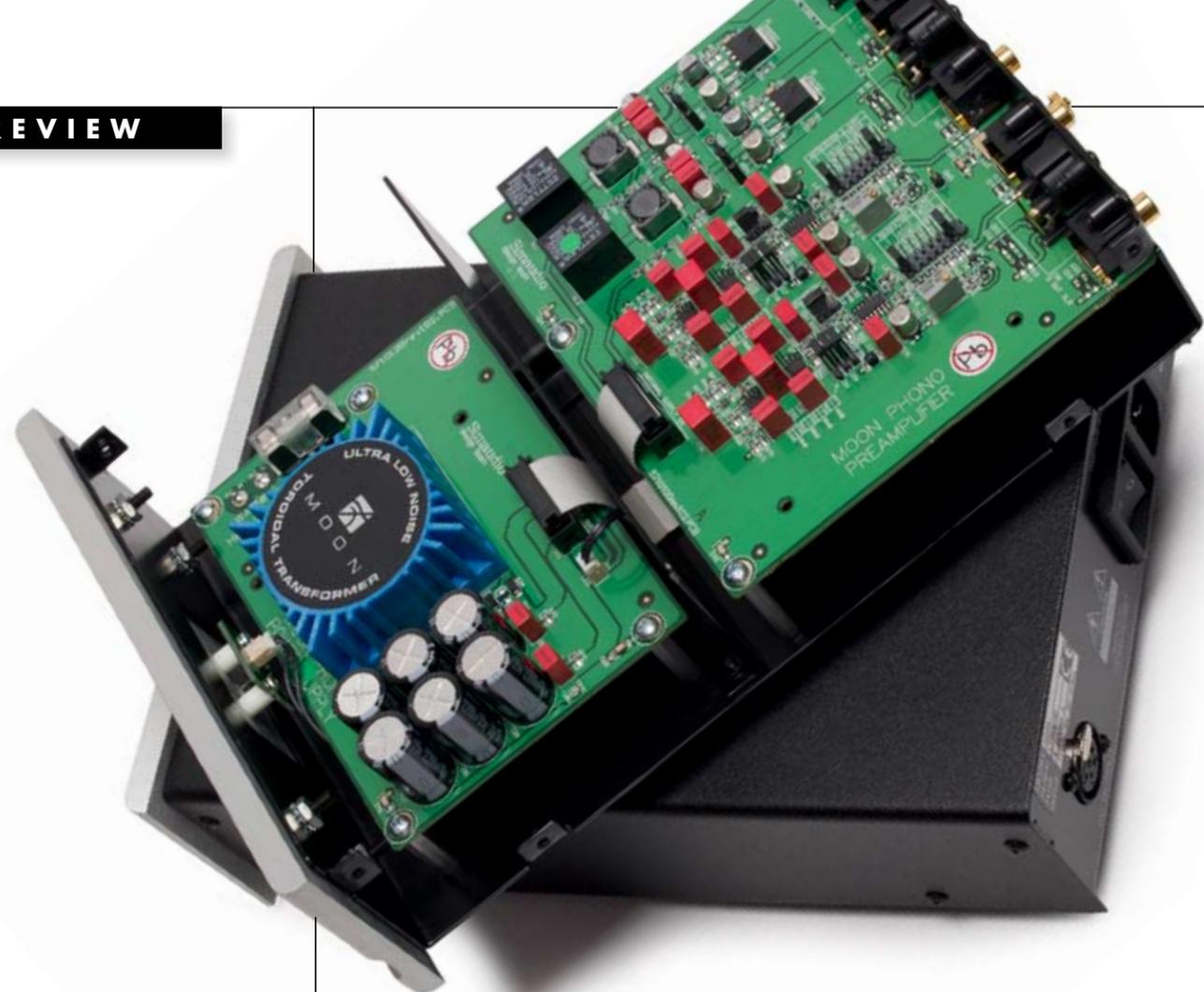
Simaudio MOON 310LP Phono Preamp and 320S Power Supply

By Steve Guttenberg

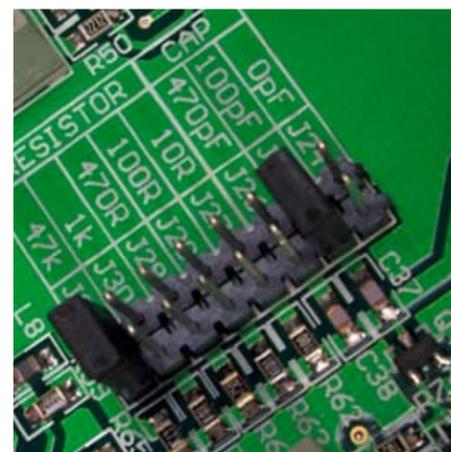
Since even the very best hi-fi systems rarely sound like real live music, the first question one might ask about the sound of any component immediately becomes: What does it add and what does it take away from the music?

Creating the perfect recreation of live music in the home may have yet to happen, but it's not totally the fault of the hi-fi. Few recordings are made with the intention of capturing reality; artists, producers, and engineers are usually searching for the sound they think best suits the music. And since music is recorded in an endless variety of venues and recording chains, it's no wonder that recordings all sound very different from each other.





**Five impedance settings are available for both MM and MC, meaning those with a Grado or SoundSmith moving-iron cartridge can take advantage of the higher-gain settings.**



That said, my favorite systems are those that reveal such differences between recordings every time you change a disc. The less a system adds or subtracts from the sound, the easier it is to really hear what's going on in the recording. By this standard, Simaudio's MOON 310LP phono preamp is a winner.

**Surprises on the Inside**

The MOON 310LP replaces Simaudio's MOON LP5.3 phono preamp. The new model isn't a radical rethink of the previous design, but it combines superior parts and a refined circuit to achieve better performance. And for those that invest for the long haul, the MOON 310LP comes with a 10-year warranty.

Taking off the easily removable case cover reveals the MM and MC settings. MC gain has three options: 54, 60, and 66db through RCA outputs, with an additional 6db available through XLR outputs. Five impedance settings (10, 100, 470, 1K, and 47kΩ) are available for both MM and MC, meaning those with a Grado or SoundSmith moving-iron cartridge can take advantage of the higher-gain settings. Capacitive loading can be set at 0, 100, and 470pf—a bonus for MM users, as it offers more flexibility. The 310LP even offers a jumper setting for RIAA or IEC equalization. While not terribly convenient to access, such functionality isn't often seen at this price point. *(continued)*



**Hand Crafted Premium Hi-Fi Interconnects and Cables**

Hand-crafting each of our cables allows us to pay close attention to every detail of construction. From the custom conductor and jacket materials to the specially modified terminations, you can rest assured that your ALO audio cables will give you countless hours of listening enjoyment.

971.279.4357  
info@alofaudio.com





# 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, the HZ Crown Jewel, for ultimate performance. Stop by your Running Springs Audio dealer and audition the future of power line conditioning.



"...my new reference in AC conditioners."  
 - Robert Harley,  
 The Absolute Sound,  
 Issue 193



"The Dmitri represents the state of the art in power line conditioning."  
 - Jeff Dorgay,  
 TONEAudio Magazine,  
 Issue 18



running springs audio

**CLEANPOWER PURESOUND**  
 Power Line Conditioners Hand Made in California . Tel: 714.765.8246 . www.runningspringsaudio.com



The unit's rear panel hosts single-ended RCA inputs and outputs, plus balanced XLR outputs. The 310LP is nice and compact, just 7.5" x 3.2" x 11.2" and weighing in at 7 pounds.

## Redefines Quiet

Usually, on most phonostages, associated noise occurs when lifting the stylus from the groove at a high volume level. I can often hear such noise from my listening position, which is about ten feet from my Magnepan 3.7 speakers. However, with the 310LP, I only detected the faintest of noise, and only when my ears were pressed right against the speakers—a good sign. Even more importantly, the 310LP sounds cleaner when the music is cranked up, meaning that the contrast between quiet and loud instruments is more apparent than what I've experienced from other phonostages in this range.

Richard Barone's *Cool Blue Halo* was recorded live at the Bottom Line on May 31, 1987. I was at the show, so listening to the LP is like traveling back through time. I loved that club, and saw hundreds of shows there. Plus, the Bottom Line always had an above-average sound system. However, Barone's live sound that late spring night wasn't very good, and it comes through on the LP. Just like the actual concert, there's too much reverb. But Barone's vocals sound great, and the Bottom Line's vibe is there. The 310LP brings it all back to life just as I remembered. *(continued)*

**The unit's rear panel hosts single-ended RCA inputs and outputs, plus balanced XLR outputs. The 310LP is nice and compact, weighing in at 7 pounds.**

*Emotional Rescue*, one of the Rolling Stones' last all-analog efforts, also lit up my speakers. On the title track, drummer Charlie Watts, bassist Bill Wyman, and singer Mick Jagger dominate the mix. Via the 310LP, their pounding groove instantly grabs my attention and connects me to the music. Similarly, "She's So Cold" transfixes, as I love the way Keith Richards' rhythm-guitar licks punctuate the beat. I've never enjoyed this record more than I do with the 310LP. Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers' debut possesses even more analog richness than *Emotional Rescue*. Again, the 310LP helps portray the big soundstage present on this record with ease.

In the female vocal field, Linda Rondstadt's *Don't Cry Now* sounds tighter and more produced—like a recording where every musician is recorded in total isolation from one other. Her take on Neil Young's "I Believe In You" is simply gorgeous on the 310LP. The latter is undoubtedly a high-resolution design, but one that doesn't throw detail at you in a way that becomes fatiguing.

On the LP310, some of the better 1950s-era jazz recordings sound more natural to me, perhaps because they have little equalization or studio processing. Clarinetist Jimmy

Giuffre's LPs are so present and tonally accurate that the instruments seemingly appear in the room with me. I didn't even notice at first that they're mono recordings!

### Back to Basics

Initially, I used the 310LP with the optional 320S power supply, which looks nearly identical to the 310LP. A dedicated and optimized design that only works with the 310LP, it features four stages of DC voltage regulation in a dual-action configuration and a special "pi-type" filter in conjunction with a dual-voltage regulation system to further reduce the 310LP's already low-noise level.

Fully acclimated to the sound of the 310LP/320S combo, I unhitched the power supply, a change that involves moving a couple of internal jumpers. Listening to the 310LP a la carte, the sound becomes a tad softer. And, in comparison to hearing them via the Simaudio duo, dynamics are blunted, with low-level resolution and air also somewhat diminished.

Those with fairly resolving systems will have a tough time living without the 320S. The device is well worth the money, yet it's also nice that Simaudio gives you the option to buy into its phonostage one step at a time. *(continued)*





**Turn Me On**

A few months ago, I had the pleasure of reviewing the Red Wine Audio Ginevra LFP-V Edition phono preamp. It's a battery-powered, hybrid tube/solid-state design. Yet, it's very tubey in the sense that the sound is rich and velvety smooth, albeit never lacking in detail. It proved a great experience, but the 310LP turns me on in a very different way. The Ginevra's beguiling sweetness softens the top- and bottom-end response, whereas in these areas, the 310LP is more neutral.

Dr John's *In the Right Place*, arranged and produced by the great Allen Toussaint in 1979, yields pure thrills through the 310LP. The Doctor's mojo fires on all cylinders, and the Sim unit simply lets be the yummy, bold, 3D, and oh-so funky sound. Sure, some of the better and vastly more expensive phono preamps can get you even closer to the music embedded in the grooves, but in its price class, the 310LP is as colorless a device as you're going to find.

The *TONEAudio* staff agrees, and hails the 310LP/320S as a recipient of one of the magazine's 2011 Exceptional Value Awards. ●

**Simaudio MOON 310LP and MOON 320S**  
MSRP: \$1,800/\$1,400

**MANUFACTURER**

Simaudio

**CONTACT**

www.simaudio.com

**PERIPHERALS**

**Analog Source** VPI Classic turntable with a van den Hul Frog cartridge

**Digital Sources** PS Audio PerfectWave Transpost and DAC; MSB Technology Platinum Data CD IV Transport and Platinum Signature DAC IV; Oppo BDP-95 Special Edition

**Electronics** Pass XP-20 preamp; Whest 2.0 phono preamp; Pass Labs XA100.5 and First Watt J2 power amps

**Speakers** Dynaudio C-1; Mangepan 3.7

**Cable** XLO Signature 3 interconnects; Analysis Plus Silver Oval interconnects and speaker cables; Audioquest Sky interconnects

AudioVision  
san francisco

sound choices

END OF SUMMER  
SALE!

Take an Additional 10% off already discounted Floor Sample/Used/Demo/Sale items!

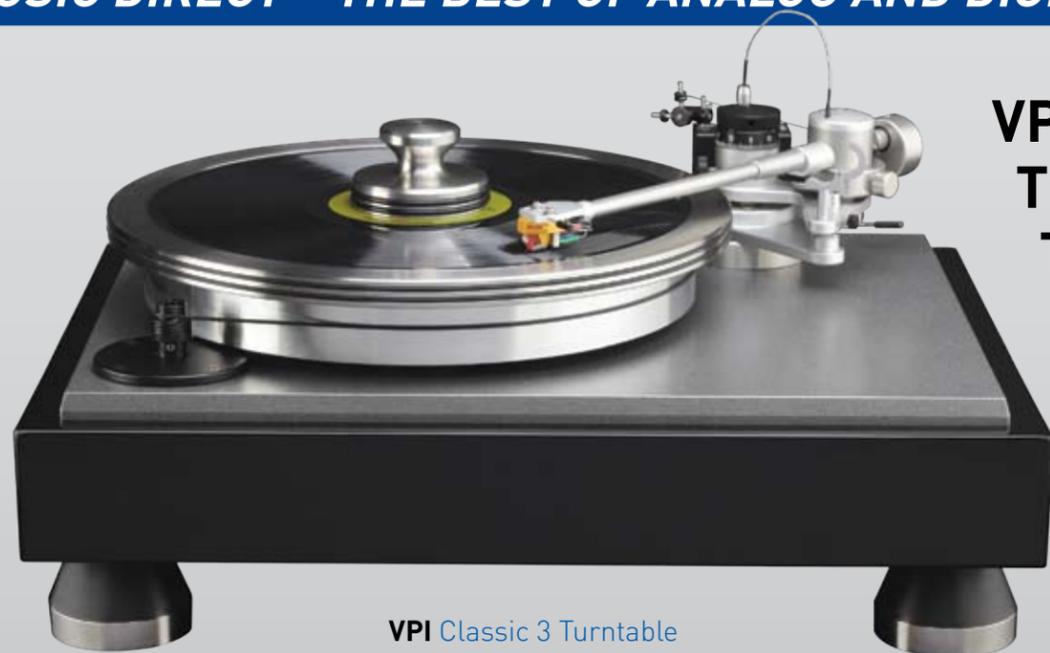


Check our *Specials* section of our website for a list of items..

1603 pine street san francisco ca. 94109  
ph:415-614-1118  
www.audiovisionsf.com

dali  
dynaudio  
gallo  
jl audio  
kef  
nola  
psb  
quad  
raidho  
rel acoustics  
rockport  
thiel  
triangle  
ultrasone  
wilson benesch

arcam  
audio research  
audioquest  
bat  
bel canto  
benz  
cambridge  
cardas  
cary audio  
chord  
clearaudio  
crystal cable  
devialet  
finite elemente  
hrs  
integra  
lyngdorf audio  
lyra  
marantz  
micromega  
naim audio  
nordost  
nuforce  
primaluna  
pro-ject  
ps audio  
quadraspire  
rega  
richard gray  
runco  
shunyata research  
simaudio moon  
sonos  
soundsmith  
spiral groove  
vpi  
wadia



VPI Classic 3 Turntable

### VPI Classic 3: The Hottest Turntable of 2011



“Every detail is there, rock-solid, immovable, and alive within the soundstage. The VPI Classic 3 is an exceptional effort by a company that knows the analog landscape like few others. With each spin it invites you to become reacquainted with every record in your collection. A class-leading product by any yardstick, and, simply put, a class act!”

—Neil Gader, *The Absolute Sound*, October 2011

“The Classic 3 is the fastest, most coherent-sounding VPI turntable I’ve ever heard. Most significant, the Classic 3 played on the same field as the Continuum Caliburn (\$149,995) and it costs \$6,000...one of today’s great values in analog audio. I don’t hear how you can go wrong buying one!”

—Michael Fremer, *Stereophile*, October 2011

## Oppo—The Audiophile’s Blu-ray Universal Disc Player



### OPPO BDP-95 Universal Blu-ray Player

Oppo Digital is an extremely successful manufacturer that, despite its relatively small size, keeps raising the bar. Since its inception, Oppo has elevated the standards for reference-level video performance, audiophile sound quality, and disc-loading speed. Guaranteed to give you astounding video performance, the new BDP-95 is the very best transport Oppo has developed. On the audio side, it is built to a degree we’ve never seen in a sub-\$1000 product. The Oppo BDP-95 comes with our highest recommendation.

\$999

- SACD, DVD-Audio, HDCD, WAV, and FLAC
- Dual ES9018 SABRE 32bit Reference DACs
- New Toroidal Transformer and Balanced Outputs
- 2nd Generation Qdeo Video Processing
- 3D, Streaming, Wireless, eSATA, and USB
- Simply the Best Video Performance



## Where to find what you have seen in **TONE**Audio Magazine.

ALO Audio: [www.aloaudio.co](http://www.aloaudio.co)

Anthem: [www.anthemav.com](http://www.anthemav.com)

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

Audio Research: [www.audioresearch.com](http://www.audioresearch.com)

AudioQuest: [www.audioquest.com](http://www.audioquest.com)

AVID: [www.avidhifi.co.uk](http://www.avidhifi.co.uk)

B&W Music Club: [www.bowersandwilkins.com](http://www.bowersandwilkins.com)

B&W Loudspeakers: [www.bowersandwilkins.com](http://www.bowersandwilkins.com)

BelCanto: [www.belcantodesign.com](http://www.belcantodesign.com)

Benchmark: [www.benchmarkmedia.com](http://www.benchmarkmedia.com)

Burmester: [www.burmester.de](http://www.burmester.de)

Cardas Audio: [www.cardas.com](http://www.cardas.com)

Conrad Johnson: [www.conradjohnson.com](http://www.conradjohnson.com)

Cypher Labs: [www.cypherlabs.com](http://www.cypherlabs.com)

dCS: [www.dcsLtd.co.uk](http://www.dcsLtd.co.uk)

Dynaudio: [www.dynaudio.com](http://www.dynaudio.com)

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

Estelon: [www.estelon.com](http://www.estelon.com)

GamuT: [www.gamutaudio.com](http://www.gamutaudio.com)

iPort: [www.iportmusic.com](http://www.iportmusic.com)

JM Labs/Focal: [www.audioplusservices.com](http://www.audioplusservices.com)

JL Audio: [www.jlaudio.com](http://www.jlaudio.com)

MartinLogan: [www.martinlogan.com](http://www.martinlogan.com)

McIntosh: [www.mcintoshlabs.com](http://www.mcintoshlabs.com)

Meridian: [www.meridian-audio.com](http://www.meridian-audio.com)

MICS: [www.mics.mc](http://www.mics.mc)

Mobile Fidelity: [www.mofi.com](http://www.mofi.com)

Mystere: [www.mystere-usa.com](http://www.mystere-usa.com)

Musical Fidelity: [www.musicalfidelity.com](http://www.musicalfidelity.com)

Music Direct: [www.musicdirect.com](http://www.musicdirect.com)

Music Instrument Museum: [www.themim.org](http://www.themim.org)

Music Matters: [www.musicmattersjazz.com](http://www.musicmattersjazz.com)

Music Millennium: [www.musicmillennium.com](http://www.musicmillennium.com)

Nagra: [www.nagraaudio.com](http://www.nagraaudio.com)

Naim: [www.naimusa.com](http://www.naimusa.com)

Paradigm: [www.paradigm.com](http://www.paradigm.com)

Polk Audio: [www.polkaudio.com](http://www.polkaudio.com)

Primare: [www.soundorg.com](http://www.soundorg.com)

Red Wine Audio: [www.redwineaudio.com](http://www.redwineaudio.com)

Rega: [www.soundorg.com](http://www.soundorg.com)

Running Springs Audio: [www.runningspringsaudio.com](http://www.runningspringsaudio.com)

Save the Music: [www.vh1.com](http://www.vh1.com)

Simaudio: [www.simaudio.com](http://www.simaudio.com)

Totem: [www.totemacoustic.com](http://www.totemacoustic.com)

Upscale Audio: [www.upscaleaudio.com](http://www.upscaleaudio.com)

Vitus Audio: [www.vitusaudio.com](http://www.vitusaudio.com)

Wadia: [www.wadia.com](http://www.wadia.com)

Woo Audio: [www.woaudio.com](http://www.woaudio.com)

Zu Audio: [www.zuaudio.com](http://www.zuaudio.com)