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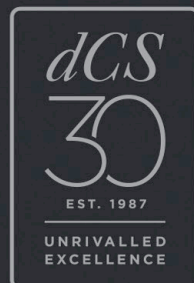
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its timeless physical and electronic design  
along with an architecture that will be  
easily upgraded in the years to come”

Jeff Dorgay, Tone Audio Magazine



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# TONE2.0

Audio



B&W Meets BMW - Mobile Diamond

no.87

feb. 2018



# “GoldenEar’s New Triton Reference Redefines Ultra High-End Performance and Value!”

*CES 2017: All four Absolute Sound writers (N. Gader, R. Harley, J. Mullins and J. Valin) honored Triton Reference as “Best Sound (for the money)”!*

*“The Triton Reference presents a serious challenge to speakers in the multi \$10K range”*

– Robert Deutsch, *Stereophile*

GoldenEar’s Triton One is one of the best selling high-end loudspeakers ever, consistently thrilling listeners and reviewers alike and winning an enviable and unmatched collection of the industry’s most prestigious awards, including “Loudspeaker-of-the-Year” and “Product-of-the-Year” from key publications all around the world.

Clearly, we knew that the One would be a very hard act to follow. There was a spirited discussion within our product development group about an all-out assault on the ultimate, cost-no-object, state-of-the-art, to produce a six-figure loudspeaker to do battle with the most esoteric and expensive loudspeakers on the planet. However, after much soul-searching, rational minds won out, and the decision was made to create a new GoldenEar flagship, positioned above the Triton One (of course still current and available), that would joust with the best, but still stick to our trademarked slogan, “We Make High-End Affordable.” We are pleased and proud to introduce the new Triton Reference. The Reference has begun gathering its own collection of honors, winning the prestigious and coveted CES Innovations Design and Engineering Award, Digital Trends Best Home Audio Tech at CES, HD GURU Best High Fidelity Loudspeaker at CES and What HiFi Stars of CES!

*“Undeniably stellar ... Yes, it does deliver the sort of performance previously delivered only by cost-no-object speakers.”* – Dennis Burger, *Home Theater Review*

The Triton Reference is an evolution of everything that we have achieved with the Triton One, but taken to a stunning new level of sonic performance and sophisticated visual design. All the components in the T Ref: including larger, more powerful, active sub-bass drivers with huge “Focused Field” magnet structures, upper-bass/midrange drivers with “Focused Field” magnet structures, and High-Velocity Folded Ribbon tweeter with 50% more rare earth neodymium magnet material, are brand new, and have been specifically developed for use in the Reference. The powerful 1800 watt subwoofer amplifier, with level control to fine tune the bass to your room, and 56-bit DSP control unit are a significant evolution of those in the Triton One and our SuperSubs.

There are a myriad of other significant upgrades and refinements, including: new internal wiring with a specially developed twist, further development of our signature balanced crossover including film capacitors bridged across the high-pass section on the upper-

bass/midrange drivers, a unique proprietary mix of long-fiber lamb’s wool and Dacron for more effective internal damping, intensive work with a high-resolution accelerometer to determine the most effective implementation of complex internal bracing, a 3/32”-thick steel plate built into the medite base to further stiffen it for increased stability, new stainless steel floor spikes and cups, all of which results in higher resolution of subtle details ... and the list goes on and on.

*“GoldenEar is taking on the stratospherically priced five figure super-systems that define high-end audio.”*

– Mark Henninger, *AVS*

Visually, the Reference offers a strikingly beautiful upgrade to the classic Triton styling, with a gorgeous hand-rubbed piano gloss-black lacquer finished one-piece monocoque cabinet. Sleek, statuesque and refined, the Reference is simply an elegantly gorgeous statement piece that will excite listeners with its dynamic visual presence, as well as its extraordinary sonic performance.

Sonically, the Reference has been engineered to perform with a dramatic and authoritative voice, comparable to speakers that sell for ten and more times its surprisingly affordable price. T Refs completely disappear, with superb three-dimensional imaging that will open up your room, stretching from wall to wall and beyond, and depth that makes the wall behind them seem to vanish. The astonishing bass is rock-solid, with low-frequency performance that is tight, quick, highly impactful and musical with extension flat to 20Hz and below. Another GoldenEar signature is a silky smooth high end that extends to 35 kHz with a lifelike sheen but no trace of fatiguing hardness, sibilance or stridency so common with lesser tweeters. Tremendous time and energy has been put into the voicing of the speaker and the seamless blending of the drivers, for unmatched musicality with all types of music, and home theater perfection. Rarely do speakers excel at both, but with their world-class neutrality, the Reference absolutely does. A special bonus is the Reference’s extremely high 93.25 dB sensitivity, which gives them tremendous dynamic range and allows use with almost any high-quality amplifier. You must experience T Ref for yourself!

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We Make High-End Affordable!™

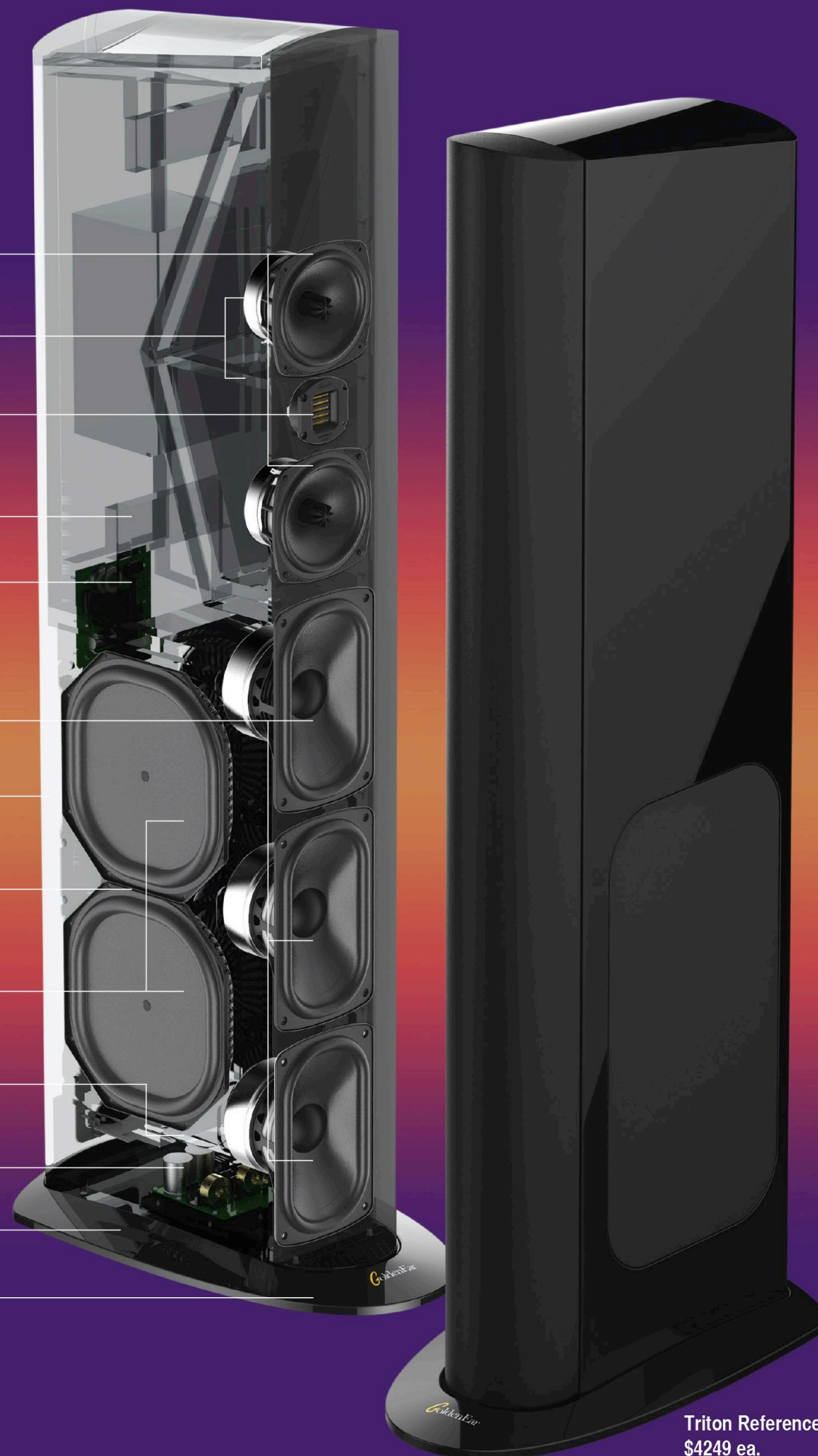
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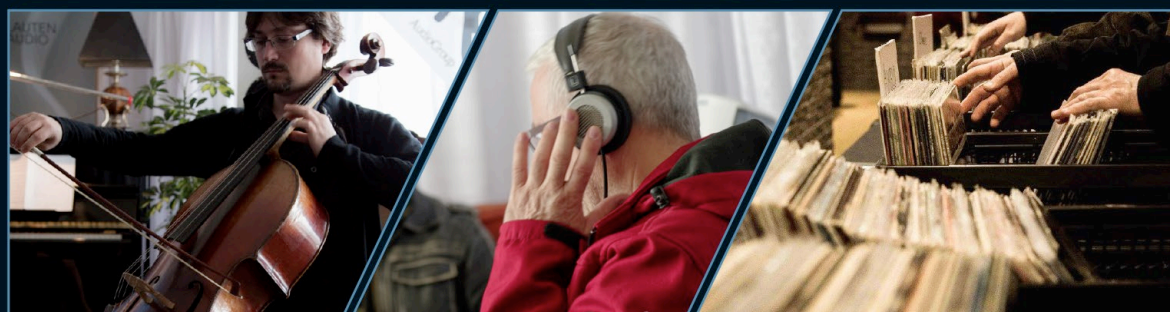
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Audio

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# In House

The soundtrack of assembling the issue...

## *Something/Anything?* - Todd Rundgren

What better way to start a new issue, than revisiting this classic.  
Well worn, but as good as the day it was bought.



# EAT

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Jeff Dorgay  
Tone Audio

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a winner and a wonderful  
component. Combine such  
elegance with high-tech  
materials and exemplary  
finishing -- as EAT has in  
the C-Major -- and you've  
got a winner."

Highly recommended.

\*Jason Thorpe  
SoundStage Hi-Fi!



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**DEALERS THAT MEAN BUSINESS:**  
We begin our list of TONEAudio approved hifi dealers.

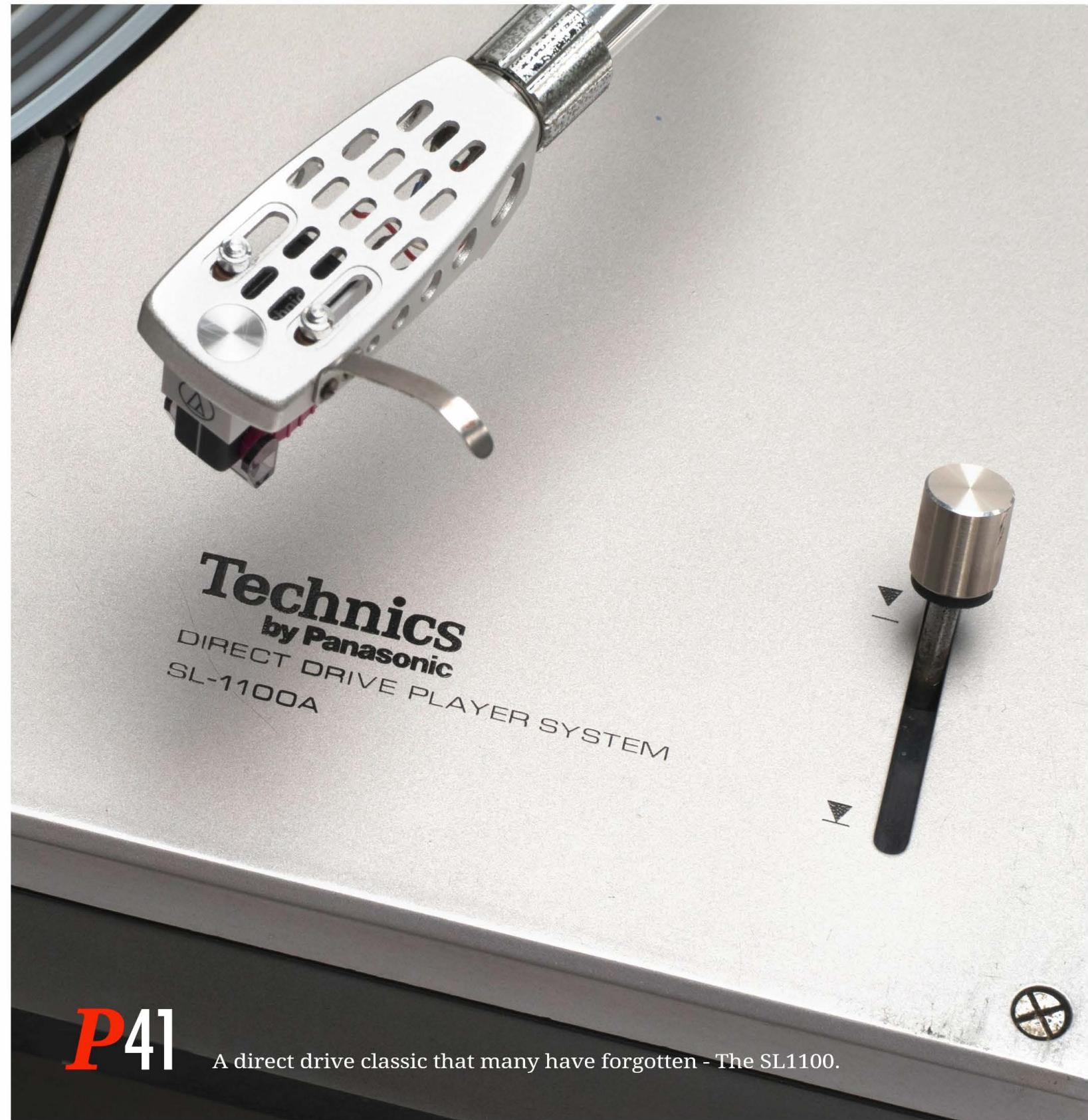
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# TONE2.0

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**P41**

A direct drive classic that many have forgotten - The SL1100.



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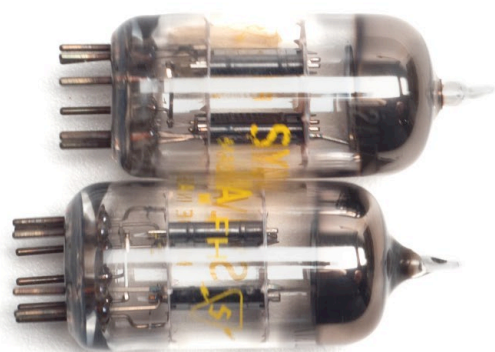
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We were so impressed with the Golden Ear Trident Reference speaker, that a simple review just wasn't enough. When we found out that they were in three places at once, it made sense for everyone to get in the act. One of us even bought the pair...

By Michael Corsentino, Gregory Petan  
and Jeff Dorgay



# AudioTONE2.0



P82

Aren't they lovely? Raidho's X-1 Minimonitors





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### SOUND VISION

"Subterranean bass shook my room on its foundation. Hit with such force that I could feel the impact. Response is taut; notes don't linger and their natural resonance is reproduced faithfully. Highly recommended."

### home theater review.com

"I was so impressed by the low-frequency output that I kept cranking up the volume to see which of us (me or the sub) would cry uncle first. In the end, I lost. SVS has another undeniable winner on its hands here."

### CNET

"Reference-grade subwoofer that doesn't merely dish out room-rattling home theater effects, it's also very musical. I've never heard bass like this in the CNET listening room! I highly recommend it."



Learn more at [SVSound.com](http://SVSound.com)

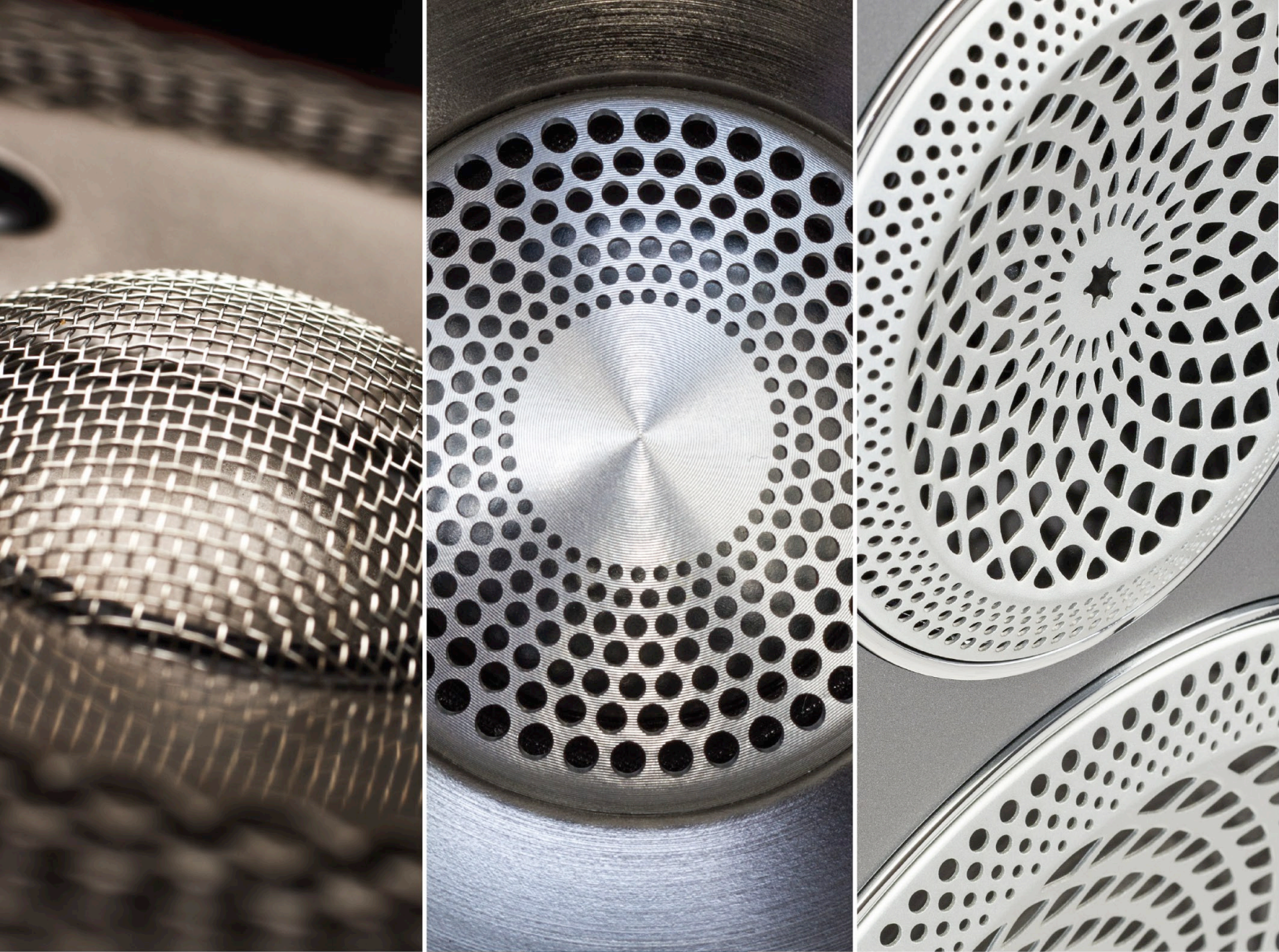
# STONE2.0

Audio

If you missed this big mouth in Las Vegas, it will be making a brief stop in Nashville before going on to Europe. Stay tuned for a full report.







## The Evolution of Perfect Sound



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# no.87

## P u b l i s h e r s   L e t t e r

I hope you all had a happy new year, flourishing or at least surviving the holiday season and CES if you had to attend without that nasty flu that's going around. Mid way through an incredibly mild winter here in the Pacific Northwest, we're firing on all cylinders and are cleaning out the closet, so to speak with this issue of TONE.

There are a few themed issues on the way, along with a full index of everything we've done to make it easier for those of you wanting to find something specific, or download back issues. This is our "random" issue, with a range of gear, that we've been meaning to wind up the reviews on. But as you know, life can get in the way of getting things accomplished in an orderly fashion! So, those of you looking for a central theme, there isn't one this time around.

In response to our format change, the cards and letters have been positive, with a few nastygrams to punctuate things. I can only answer that it will be a work in progress for a few issues, just as TONE was when we launched almost 13 years ago. We're trying to make our format a bit more contemporary and in tune to our audience, though I'm not sure I can completely put my finger on exactly what that is anymore.

That's where you come in. We're reaching out, trying to make TONEmore of a communal project (I hate the word "tribe.") This issue, we've added a user perspective to our Golden Ear Trident Reference review. And the playlists continue to pour in. Keep telling us what you like!

It seems people are listening to more music than ever, but in more places, more formats and in more ways than ever. We remain dedicated and enthusiastic as ever to dedicated two channel listening, but again, those lines are being blurred daily. You might have a main system, but many of you also have portable, wireless, or connected audio elsewhere in your environment. If you're like me, you probably enjoy listening everywhere, so we are going to start mixing our reviews up more, both here and in the Audiophile Apartment section of the site.

On top of that, we will be starting a new publication, HA! (Headphone Arts) shortly, catering specifically to portable listening. Long time readers know we took a stab at this years ago, with our Headphone Planet column, but I think we've finally found our groove with HA! This will be my wife Pamela's pet project to showcase her passion for headphones and personal listening. Those of you on our newsletter feed, will see announcements for HA! when it is ready for download, so I hope you enjoy it.

Finally, after nearly 13 years, we bid adieu to our "Slummin" column. The only reason for its retirement is the serious lack of super cheap audio finds. In the same way that the vinyl resurgence has bid up records (and don't get me started about reel to reel tapes!) the same is true for vintage hifi gear. The deals are so slim, it's just getting too tough to find anything fun to share with you anymore. Fear not, our dedication to vintage audio is just as strong as ever, there just aren't any dumpster dog finds left.

As always, thank you again for reading, and thank you for your patience as we evolve. Happy listening,



# Playlist:

What Our Readers Are Into

Hatfield and the North-  
The Yes No Interlude

Yes-  
Starship Trooper

Camel-  
Rhayader Goes to Town

Secret Machines -  
Nowhere Again

King Crimson- Fracture

Greenslade - Melange

Gentle Giant-  
Knots

The Soft Machine-  
The Moon in June

Rush- Xanadu

Genesis-  
Firth of Fifth

Porcupine Tree-  
The Start of Something Beautiful

In addition to being my neighbor and fellow car enthusiast, Bluebird Music's Richard Colburn is a major prog lover.

So, when I wanted some great tracks, I knew who to turn to!

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## Welcome to MINE:

We're not just crazy about music and hi-fi here at TONE. While we can put many labels on our ethos, claiming to be music lovers, audiophiles, or perhaps even qualityphiles, that doesn't even cover it. Having me so many of our readers from all over the globe, as we are well into our 13th year, I'd say our readers are playful and inquisitive to say the least.

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

So, let's call it what it is - MINE! And we'll be sharing more of our favorite stuff as we go.

## Tinnson Chelsea Boots

Mens, starting at €249, Womens starting at €229  
[www.tinnson.com](http://www.tinnson.com)

Founder and designer Martin Tinnson is a man who professes to have loved shoes since he was a teenager, and for him the shape of the classic Chelsea boot, worn by no less than The Beatles, The Stones, Jimi Hendrix and countless other legends of rock, his favorite.

Embroidered into every heel is a guitar, and on the bottom of the blue soles, (Tinnson chooses blue because it symbolizes infinity, depth, dream, peace, serenity) a punk band is engraved. He says that a punk band illustrates his brand's spirit and every shoe is named after one of his favorite musicians.

The quality is high - the pictures do not truly reveal the hand made luxury of these boots. A small family owned shop in Portugal brings Tinnson's dreams to life.

Coolness aside, they fit perfectly and feel absolutely lovely on your feet. The only question that remains now, is what color?

Tinnson's website shows every model, tells a bit of his story, and features some great photos of the factory. The man loves his work.





MINE: it should be yours

## Steady as She Goes: The Smove Stabilizer

\$149

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



With everyone's smartphone now having the ability to make Star Wars, you still need a steady hand to make your footage look pro. The Smove works as an image stabilizer and an additional battery for your phone or Go-Pro.

Watch the tutorial on the Smove website to get the lowdown, and you'll be on your way to shake free video on no time at all.

## The Classic SB VINTAGE DESIGN MEETS MODERN TECHNOLOGY



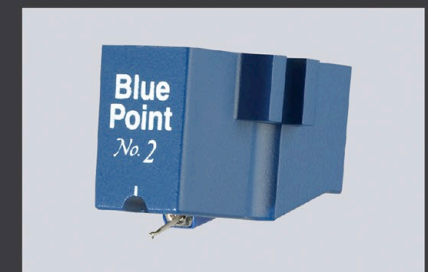
We have turbocharged our EISA Award-winning "the Classic" to bring you this upgraded package - The Classic SB. It includes key new features:

- Electronic speedcontrol
- Sumiko Blue Point No.2 cartridge
- Top grade Clamp It
- Leather It mat

ELECTRONIC SPEEDCONTROL



SUMIKO BLUE POINT NO.2 CARTRIDGE



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MINE: it should be yours

RxBars:  
First Grade Friends Create Snack Greatness.

\$25.99/box of 12  
[www.rxbar.com](http://www.rxbar.com)

Always excited about a new snack treat, and a healthy one at that, (with bonus points for bright colored packaging, our scooby snack sense was tingling upon seeing these at Target's checkout counter.

Founders Peter Rahal and Jared Smith began their quest for a better protein bar in their Mom's basement in 2013 and they never looked back.

Their formula for success? Keep it simple, keep it awesome and work incredibly hard. They started out on the crossfit circuit going door to door selling RX Bars.

Their diligence paid off. Now distributed at Target, Whole Foods and other stores, they were recently acquired by Kellogg for \$600 million. Proof that in 2018, hard work and a great product is still a formula for success.

Devoid of preservatives and the like, the RX Bars taste great. Our publisher's favorite is the Mixed Berry you see here, but he says, "they're all good." They offer kid sized versions too.

And what became of mom? "We had to fire her because she couldn't put the labels on straight."



## "Nyquist Streamer/DAC..."

*Digital So Good, Only an Analog Expert Could have built it"*

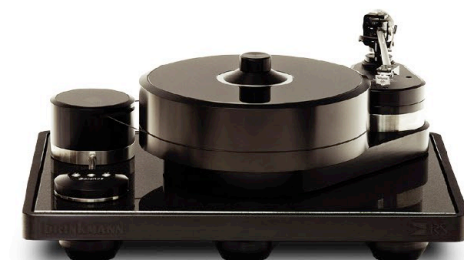


*„But best of all, the Nyquist is extremely compelling musically..."*

Robert Harley, The Absolute Sound, December 2017

*MQA streaming and playback, PCM up to 384kHz, DSD up to 4x  
Supports Roon Music Management and Tidal, Qobuz and Deezer Streaming Services  
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*...and tomorrow!*



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## VMR Wheels: Spruce up Your Ride.

Price varies with size.  
[www.vmrwheels.com](http://www.vmrwheels.com)

Once in a while, it's good to shut off the hifi, get a little fresh air (and fresh perspective) and do something else. Like put a cool set of wheels on your car.

The crew at VMR has a number of contemporary styles that will highlight your car, and they offer a variety of finishes as well.

If you don't have a preferred installer, or just feel like getting your hands dirty for an hour or two, VMR works with The Tire Rack, so your wheels can arrive with your favorite set of high performance tires already mounted, balanced, and TPMS sensors installed.

Get out the floor jack, a frosty adult beverage and get to it. Step back, admire your handiwork, and go for a drive.

There, wasn't that easier than arguing about cables, VTA, or DSD?

**MINE: it should be yours**



## Yeah, They Are Really here: The Tesla Model 3

Starting at \$35k (car as shown, about 55k)  
[www.tesla.com](http://www.tesla.com)

By Jeff Dorgay

Sure, we love cars here, just as much as we love music and hifi, but we also love technology. It seems like only yesterday that our web guy Nate and I were sitting around the lunch table discussing electric cars. I had just bought a Smart Electric Drive and he said, "dude, I just put in an order on a Tesla Model 3."

He figured it would take about two years to finally get the damn thing, and actually ordered two of them. But fate smiled and the ability to pick up the higher capacity, 310 mile range model arrived sooner than expected.

Like all EV's, the Model 3 is spookily quiet, not even making the gentle whirring noise my BMW i3 makes as it takes off. While our test drive was confined to a parking lot by a nearby park (with our high speed blasts angering everyone) and blitzing the streets of downtown Portland, enough feedback was attained to judge the Model 3's character.

The verdict? It's very cool for what it is. Tesla has definitely outdone the other EV manufacturers, both in performance and range. Fit and finish on this model is high, though some of the first Model 3s were criticized.

It's comfy, quiet and has a damn good audio system, which you access by the giant touch pad that feels like the biggest iPad ever. Viewing it from the front, it almost looks like a Ferrari 360, now if it only came in a wider range of colors.

Just as we love to argue about analog vs. digital, this debate won't go away quietly. But the future is here to stay.





MINE: it should be yours

## Keep Those Grooves Pristine: The Levin Design Brush

Starting at \$99  
[www.levindesign.de](http://www.levindesign.de)

TONE's newest contributor, Michael Corsentino is a fanatic when it comes to record care. That's good, he fits right in with the rest of us.

Turns out the Levin Design record and stylus brush he's been raving about is distributed here in the US by Michael Vamos, the same gentleman that brings us GamuT speakers and the Pear Audio Turntable. So it is a small world after all.

While they might seem a little expensive on the front end, the fact that they are washable and possess anti-static properties, means that these are the last record and stylus cleaning brushes you will ever have to buy.

Available in a wide range of finishes, they should fit in any design scheme, though Michael's choice of stainless steel and birch is indeed timeless. (Did we mention he's a great photographer too?) According to the manufacturer, all of their brushes are "made by traditional methods, with the natural hair pulled in by hand."

Read Michael's full report on the Levin Design brushes on the TONEAudio site here, in the Analogaholic section.

Photo by Michael Corstentino



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**MINE: it should be yours**

## The Bassocontinuo EOS 2.0 Amplifier Stands: Italian Flare Makes the Ordinary Extraordinary.

By Gregory Petan

\$1,380 and up...  
[www.bassocontinuo.biz](http://www.bassocontinuo.biz)

What's Italian, made of carbon fiber, wrapped in hand stitched leather, offered in a variety of colors and finishes and downright sexy to boot? A Ferrari 488GTB? A Lamborghini Hurican? Yes and yes. So are the new EOS 2.0 amplifier stands by Bassocontinuo, the Italian manufacturer of custom audio racks and amplifier stands. While this may seem like a stretch of a comparison, it's really not. Upon close examination of the fabrication, fit, finish and the refined design of the fully customizable Bassocontinuo EOS 2.0 amplifier stands, you will see far more in common with the prancing horse and charging bull's approach than not.

In 2008, with eight years in the fashion industry in Bergamo, Italy already under his belt, Mr. Lorenzo Belloli, (the founder of Bassocontinuo) applied his design sensibility, taking on the challenge of manufacturing component stands, where he felt there were no good looking and sounding options. A decade later there are five lines within the Bassocontinuo range each with subsets of available products and options. Ranging in price from \$1,380 - \$16,000 and beyond, there is something for nearly any system, limited only by your imagination.

Used exclusively at the World Of McIntosh townhouse, the striking design of the B line racks captivates with its stainless steel support pillars and contrasting hand stitching and colored leather coverings. Again, everything is customizable to your taste.

Read the rest of Greg's evaluation and an interview with the company's founder here, on the TONEAudio Website.





# Playlist:

What Our Readers Are Into

The Staple Singers-  
I'll Take you there

Lucinda Williams-  
The Night's Too Long

Steve Earle-  
The Other Kind

The Slits -  
Heard It Through The  
Grapevine

Wilson Pickett-  
Engine no.9

Smokey Robinson -  
Tears of a Clown

Stevie Wright-  
Black Eyed Bruiser

Emmylou Harris-  
Where Will I Be

Pretenders- Kid

Elvis Costello - Veronica

Singer/Songwriter Emily Duff is going to start blogging for us on music, so we thought a great way to introduce her to you is a slice of some of her musical tastes.

This is a great list of tracks with a lot of soul. Check her out below:

<https://emilyduff.bandcamp.com>

no. 2 New York City

# GRAND PRIX AUDIO Monaco Turntable v2.0

A new achievement in analog



*"Let the record state that this is the finest turntable I've experienced, at any price."*

*-Jeff Dorgay, Tone Publications*

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# Future Tense

Reviews in our immediate future...

## Triangle Theta Speakers

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Stylish French Minimonitors that pack a lot of sound into small cabinets.



## Sonus faber Guareri Tradition Speakers

\$15,900/pair

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

There's a lot of Aida technology in these babies...



## McIntosh MAC7200 Reciever

\$7,000

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

Yes, you heard right - reciever! Famous McIntosh FM tuner, phono preamp, DAC, headphone amp and 200wpc. And a pair of those big, blue meters!

## Naim Unity Core

\$2,599

[www.naimaudio.com/product/uniti-core](http://www.naimaudio.com/product/uniti-core)

Rumor has it that this device makes the best CD rips, ever. We'll find out and get back to you.

## REL T7i Subwoofer

\$999

[www.rel.net](http://www.rel.net)

Need LF extension that doesn't break the bank or the floorboards? The REL T7i is the answer.



## Anthem

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

200wpc, on-board DAC, phono and Anthem's legendary ARC room correction. Very interesting.





# Future Tense

Reviews in our immediate future...

## Audiophile Speaker Set Up virtual disc

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

Speaker and system set-up tool

If you've been to any of the hifi shows around the world in the last couple of years and have listened to the incredible sound Rene LaFlamme and Nagra have been achieving, you'll agree that they know how to set an audio system to perfection.

LaFlamme has put together a suite of tracks to help you achieve his results in your room. You can download it at HD Tracks in a wide range of file formats from 24/96 to 2XDSD.



## Clarity by Design

Transparent Uncolored Accurate.

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Drawn from many years of BBC research, and through the engineering genius of Derek Hughes, these speakers have been recreated using state of the art materials and technology under license from the BBC. A new addition to this series is the Chartwell Sub 3, a bespoke compact, passive sub-woofer designed to be used in conjunction with the LS3/5 monitors.

Graham Audio are also proud to announce the VOTU, their flagship 1000 watts per channel, high-end monitor for large studios and listening rooms. Effortless dynamics and vast detail come as standard.

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# Future Tense

Reviews in our immediate future...

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## Grand Prix Audio Parabolica

\$16,500 (sans tonearm)

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# PASS



*"In the end, everything is subjective, but in my humble opinion there is no better brand out there for innovative design, military spec like build quality and outstanding sound performance. In this case, if you also consider the astonishing value realized when compared to the best, we have something very very special."*

Robert S. Youman

INT-60 Review  
Positive-Feedback Issue 79

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# Future Tense

Reviews in our immediate future...

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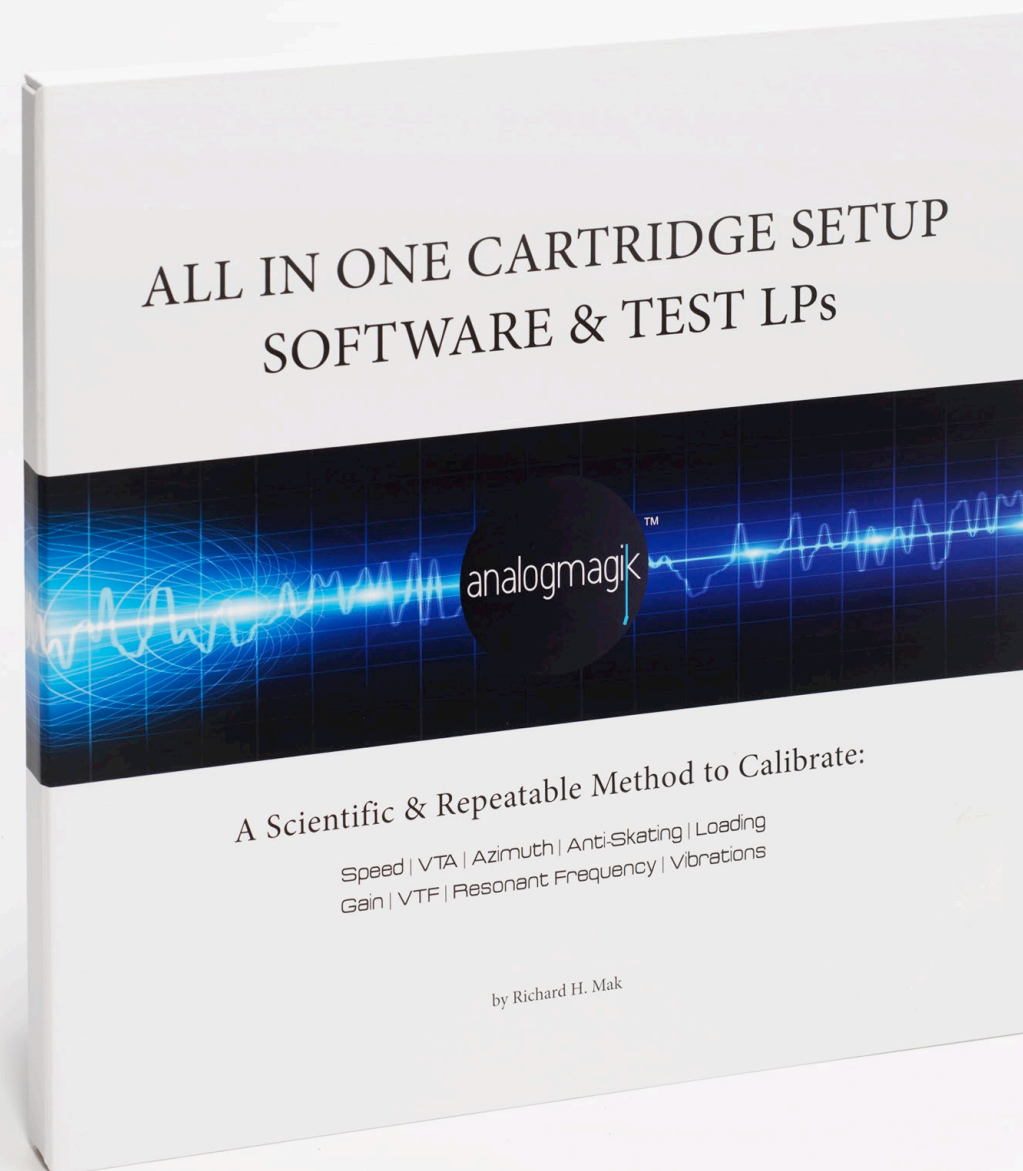
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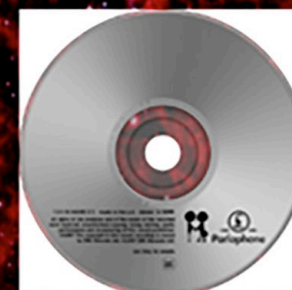
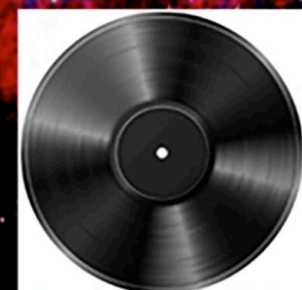
Cartridge Calibration Software

When it comes to bringing down the bad guys, nobody does it better than James Bond, but when it comes to aligning a cartridge to perfection, nobody does it better than Richard Mak. They are both gentlemen, but you can only learn one's secrets.

If you truly want all the "magic" your cartridge is capable of delivering, this is the way to get it. There's nothing better.



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# Old School

Respecting Audio's Past!

## SL-1100: The Forgotten Technics

By Jerold O'Brien

Our publisher and I have known each other since the days of saving paper route money to buy our first turntables - Technics SL1200s. Always the argumentative pair, he got the Stanton 681EEE, and I got the Shure V15 cartridge, but we started spinning records there, as did many people of a certain generation. Even Mrs. TONE had a 1200 back in the 70s. You gotta love that.

Technics started the direct drive revolution with their SP-10 in 1969; it was a massively built broadcast table. The consumer grade SL-1100 followed closely behind in 1971. Both tables share a direct drive motor, and some say the motor in the 1100 is the same as the one beneath the platter of the original SP-10 mk. 1: both are servo controlled. This did not provide the superior speed accuracy of the Quartz locked drive system that would come a few years later, in the SP-10 mk.2 and quite possibly the most famous turntable of all time, the SL-1200 mk.2.

Mk. 2 lovers will immediately notice the ubiquitous speed control slider that has launched the career of many a DJ is absent on the 1100. Also present here is the decidedly mediocre EPA-110 tonearm - not to be confused with the nearly unobtainable EPA-100 which is still revered by many. Even in the 70s, it was common practice for this arm to be replaced with the SME 3009. When the table you see here moves on to the TONE mothership, our publisher has big plans. Stay tuned for a future episode of "The Technics Project."



Another part missing from the 1100, is the hinged acrylic dust cover with the raised bubble for the tonearm gimbal. There are no hinges around back, as the 1100 had a dust cover that was just set on top of the table. An original is as rare as Bigfoot, but you can find repro models for about \$150 on eBay. Wacky tonearm notwithstanding, the SL-1100 sounds pretty good.

We found the example you see here from our pals at Gig Harbor Audio, with an Audio Technica cartridge already mounted for a few bucks shy of \$300 about a year ago. As with everything vintage, prices are on the rise and clean SL-1200s are starting to go for double this with regularity, even triple on occasion with the original dustcover and a wood base, instead of the black one which was much more common.

You won't notice the lesser speed stability until you play it side by side with a 1200mk.2, and even then, the diff is minor. The 1100 comes out ahead in its use of a standard RCA cord to convey the tonearm signal. Stock 1200s are notably dark, so with a zippy pair of interconnects, you can achieve a bigger sound than the 1200s. But that's an argument for a bunch of crabby dudes lurking in their mom's basements on a Sunday evening.

While most will go for the more obvious choice with a 1200, there's still something fun about the SL-1100. If you stumble on a nice used one for a reasonable price, it is a formidable vintage deck. And if you happen to have a spare SME arm to match, even more so.

When not complaining about VTA settings, Mr. O'Brien can usually be found under the hood of his 1973 BMW 2002 Tii, complaining about setting it's mechanical fuel injection...

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**These speakers sounded almost magical...It was quite uncanny.They are high-end speakers... that out perform many speakers in their size class."**

**Mel Martin**

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## Old School

Respecting Audio's Past!

### The SL-1100/1100A: At a Glance

Built: 1971 - 1975

Cost Then: \$299

What to Pay Now: Prices going up, pristine ones now fetching \$500. "A" models have the cool speed strobe.

Strength: Many available, not as spendy as a 1200.

Weakness: That goofy tonearm, speed not as accurate as a 1200.







# Cover Story: BMW Meets B&W - The Diamond Surround System

By Jeff Dorgay

Bowers and Wilkin's Andy Kerr is a clever guy. As their senior product engineer, he always delivers the message on a new product with an excellent combination of tech and common sense. They've been producing home speakers with their patented diamond dome for some time now, yet their engineering team continues to update their offerings.

Except this time, it's not for your home - it's for your home away from home, i.e. your car. The only catch is it has to be a McLaren 570 or a BMW: 5 or 7 series to be precise.

During a recent visit to B&W's US headquarters, Kerr and co. managed to have both McLaren and BMW on hand for us to listen to, though no test drives were offered. Honestly, the sound of a McLaren would be enough music for me, and I personally wouldn't waste the money. The technology merger is very cool and all, but if you're driving a McLaren quietly and calmly enough to hear the hifi system, you're not my kind of car enthusiast.

Harsh personal attitude aside, the McLaren system is well - implemented, but a luxury sedan is the proper place to be distracted by great sound. Interestingly, the B&W Diamond Surround system is a \$4,200 upcharge in a 5-series, but only a \$3,400 upcharge in the 7-series. Percentage of car speaking, this is a real bargain in the context of a \$100k-plus automobile.

I've had the good fortune to audition most of the premium factory audio systems now. Naim in the Bentley, Meridian in the Jaguar and Range Rover, as well as the Burmester system in Porsche and Mercedes cars.

And I must admit bias, that even though I am a BMW owner, the 7 has never been my favorite BMW by a long shot, though an Alpina B7 will always catch my eye. However, eyes closed (though not while driving) the Diamond Surround system in the 750i that graces our cover is not only my favorite automotive audio system, it's my favorite Bowers & Wilkins system.

Perhaps it's just the way the system is optimized to the car's environment. This is a major benefit, because as more than one car audio designer has explained, the car environment may be somewhat harsh, due to the different surfaces and the reflectivity of the glass, it is consistent. When engineers build a home speaker, they have no idea what wacky environment it might end up in, or what electronics might be called upon to power said speakers.





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PH-10 offers 4 different GAIN levels -3dB, 0dB, +3dB, +6dB to find the best output level for MM and MC cartridges.

## TFT DISPLAY & SKC - SINGLE KNOB CONTROL

SKC is a unique technology that matched with TFT display allows quick control of the unit's functions through the single knob joggle.

## 3 EQUALIZATION CURVES

To get the best out of any record it's crucial to use correct EQ curve: PH-10 offers the RIAA, the DECCA-LONDON and the AMERICAN-COLUMBIA, as well as the "enhanced" curves to enjoy the best vinyl experience ever.

## CHOOSE BETWEEN 9 LOADS

Perfect matching is easy and quick with 9 different loads: 10Ω, 22Ω, 47Ω, 100Ω, 220Ω, 470Ω, 1000Ω, 22KΩ, 47KΩ.

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Made of solid machined aluminium, the shell body guarantees low frequency resonance, feedback vibrational control and low magnetic inertial field.

**GOLD NOTE**  
Italian Music Experience

## BMW Meets B&W - The Diamond Surround System

(Continued.)

In a car system, speaker placement and electronics are fixed parameters. The necessary amount of equalization and crossover points can all be optimized in DSP, making for a repeatable experience. If you read my latest B&W home speaker review don't have exactly the same room and ancillary components that I do, you're only getting part of my review experience. But you can march right down to your BMW dealer and hear exactly what I'm hearing right now as I'm cranking up Kruder and Dorfmeister via my iPhone via the Aux jack.

Streaming via Tidal comes awfully close in terms of fidelity, and spinning a shiny silver disc if you've got it is still the best way to go. If you have a 7 series and a driver, you not only can have them do it, but you can bask in the luxury of the 7's rear seat experience. B&Ws engineers took great pain to optimize the sound from all seats, and it is heavenly in the rear seat.

Quiet is another thing you don't get in a high performance sports car and this is where the 7 excels. The 5 is nice, but the 7 is better in terms of an audiophile environment. To my BMW buddies that still revere the 2002Tii and the E30 M3, I know this sounds heretic, but it's 2018.

The system is all controlled by BMW's i-Drive. Hated by some and loved by others, this generation is pretty good, and what used to be quirky, isn't that strange anymore in the day of tablets and smartphones. Those new to BMW will probably pick it up faster than legacy owners.

The main manu lets you select F-R and L-R balance and provides global bass and treble controls combined with a seven band equalizer. It did not require much touch up to be exactly to my personal taste.

Immersed in Bass Communion's Headwind/Tailwind. the only negative thing I can say about the system, is that it might pull you too far in. I've heard a lot of home systems that don't sound half this good.

With 16 speakers strategically placed, the three-dimensional sounstage created in my 750 test vehicle is incredible. The illusion of width and sounstage depth in a car is exciting, and good as the vocals come through on my favorite singer/songwriter test tracks, I'm continually drawn back to EDM, electronica, and hip hop.

This is by far the most FUN car to listen to music in I've ever experienced. I can only dream of driving coast to coast in the 750i, and if the 12-cylinder 760i were available, it would be tough to choose between the symphony under the hood and the one in the cabin.

First world problems, eh? But what problems to have for those that can play in this arena. There's no better upgrade box to check in the BMW option list than the Bowers & Wilkins Diamond Surround System.

My only complaint? I know \$3-4k is a fair amount of money, and while BMW probably doesn't think that those of us driving 2,3, and 4 series rides would pony up, I think they would be surprised. I know I would.

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





# Playlist:

What Our Readers Are Into

Gov't Mule -  
Stone Cold Rage

The Magpie Salute -  
Omission

The Shelters -  
Rebel Heart

Pat Travers -  
Green Eyed Lady

JD McPherson -  
Desparte Love

Tyler Bryant - Heartland

Neurotic Outsiders -  
Better Way

Greta Van Fleet -  
Black Smoke Rising

The Kills -  
Doing it to Death

Afghan Whigs -  
Birdland

Our newest staff member, Michael Corsentino is a New Yorker, currently residing in Florida. He's got a passion for music and vinyl that is off the chart.

Here's a few of his favorites, enjoy!

no. 3 Florida



**FOCAL**  
LISTEN BEYOND

## KANTA

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SERIES OF LOUDSPEAKERS

### THE NEW BERYLLIUM TWEETER

The IAL3 tweeter combines the principles of IAL (Infinite Acoustic Loading) and IHL (Infinite Horn Loading) tweeters, both of which help with the absorption of waves, thus lowering the tweeter frequency.

### THE TMD TECHNOLOGY

The midrange speaker uses TMD (Tuned Mass Damping) suspension, and every Kanta speaker is also equipped with an NIC (Neutral Inductance Circuit) driver, which stabilises the magnetic field for perfectly defined sound and better controlled bass.

### THE PORTS

Kanta also features Power Flow technology, with two ports on the front panel and at the rear which limit any dynamic compression of the bass.

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# 995

Great sound for less than a G!

## Vanatoo Transparent Zero

By Todd Sageser

As a music lover and audiophile for over 45 years, and recording engineer almost that long, I always look for a system revealing every detail. My journey began with a pair of AR7s, soon leading to a pair of Magneplanar Tympani 1Ds in the late 70s, ultimately leading to electrostatic speakers. Now you know where I'm coming from. Since 2008 I've been using a pair of MartinLogan Summit's. Life has been good.

My interest in Vanatoo paralleled our publisher's and I was shocked seeing just how small they really were upon unboxing. In this case, size certainly is misleading. I was fooled before when reviewing the PMC DB1's which I purchased after the review and still use as console-top monitors in my studio. Good as the tiny PMCs are, the big system still beckons.

Three months after installing the Vanatoos at home, I'm in the midst of downsizing a bit, and these speakers reveal enough of the heart of the music to leave the big system in mothballs – maybe for good. Granted, small speakers still have limitations, and if you really need sheer volume, the T0s can only muster about 85db. (C weighted, slow) For many that will be just fine, but you know where I'm going with this – those small cones can only move so much air.

### A quick run through

The T0 consists of one active speaker and one slave. They are just 7.5 inches tall and less than 5 inches wide. The active monitor weighs 4.5 pounds, and the passive one slightly less. The small handles remind me of kickstands on a motorcycle. Using them on a desktop, put them down on the supplied rubber pads, so they angle up at you for best results.

The active speaker is powered by a small brick power supply and feeds the passive speaker through a 3-meter, proprietary cable with RJ50 connections on each end. There are two digital (TOSLINK and USB) inputs and a single 3.5mm stereo analog input. USB and 3.5mm cables are supplied, but if you need TOSLINK, you will have to supply your own. Built in Bluetooth is there for streaming from a laptop or portable device and, most importantly an RCA output to feed to a subwoofer.

A single knob mounted on the top of the master speaker adjusts volume, bass, and treble, switched by a 3-position switch, along with a small pushbutton for pairing or programming. The T0 is a master of ergonomic efficiency. An orange LED acknowledges commands from the remote and a blue LED indicates power on. Black cloth grilles attached via magnets are supplied, but admittedly the T0s look pretty cool without them.



Todd Sageser has been an occasional contributor to TONE and is the person responsible for our publisher's interest in high end audio. Should one of our competitors develop a terminator in 2047, Todd will be their target.

## THE COMPONENTS OF EXCELLENCE: LASTING VALUE

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



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

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# 995

Great sound for less than a G!

In default mode, the T0s are meant to have the master on the right, with the DSP EQ set for “desktop.” Limiting is on, auto source select is on, as well as auto shut-off. You can change these to your taste, and the Vanatoo website has the manual to download, if you’d like to view the options before purchase.

The small, black, trapezoidal cabinets each feature a 4-inch aluminum cone woofer, a 1-inch soft dome tweeter on the front panel and a 4-inch passive radiator on the top face. Vantoo’s ClearBass™ technology does a great job extending the bass response via DSP. A 48 watt x 4 channel amplifier in the main cabinet powers all four drivers. Frequency response is stated as 56-20KHz+/- 3db in Shelf mode or down to 52Hz in Flat mode. The TOSLINK digital input will decode files up to 96K/24 bit, while the USB input is only capable of decoding 48K/16 bit files. Should you have a mixed batch of digital files, you may need to go back to iTunes to downsample, otherwise your high res tracks will not play back properly via the USB input. With serious competition on every corner, this is the only thing that should be addressed in the next Vanatoo release. But not at the expense of the fidelity offered!



## Straight to listening

After years of complicated and ever changing component setups, it was nice to spend only about 10 minutes, relax and enjoy some of my favorite music! Leaving the T0s in factory mode means no more than pushing play on your source. I was immediately taken back playing Steely Dan’s *Royal Scam* (at 44k) noticing an extra voice jumping out of the chorus of “Sign in Stranger,” something I haven’t been able to discern in decades of listening to this track.

Coupling a MacBook Pro with Amarra 4 and iTunes through an AudioQuest Cinnamon USB cable to the T0s proved a perfect fit for most listening. The analog and Bluetooth inputs deliver equally satisfying results, as did the TOSLINK input, connected to my Samsung TV. Now, I can’t even deal with the internal speakers. Those looking for an alternative to a sound bar need look no further than the T0s.

Auditioning an incredibly wide range of tracks both high and standard resolution reveals the T0s to be incredibly musical. Whether listening to classical, jazz or rock, the image painted by the T0s always extended well beyond the speakers boundaries. The level of detail revealed in multilayered recordings left me astonished at just how much these speakers are capable of delivering.

It would be an insult to say, “They sound great for their size.” Let’s just leave it at, “They sound great.” Oh, and did I mention that the system sells for \$359?

As mentioned earlier, these small speakers do have some limitations. I did notice a touch of brightness creeping in compared to my reference setup, but nothing terribly harsh. The vocals in John Mayer’s “Neon” definitely had a bit less air, but again, amazing for this price point.

Approaching the 86db peaks, compression starts to creep in but easing the levels back a bit, brings the clarity back. The bass line in Mali Music’s “No Fun Alone” defies what my brain is telling me these tiny boxes should be able to produce.

## THE PROGRESSION SYSTEM.



MEET PROGRESSION, a new series of audio components from Dan D’Agostino Master Audio Systems designed to bring the transformative sound quality of Dan’s Momentum Series even closer within reach. Their elegant design and impeccable craftsmanship make them as beautiful to see and use as they are to hear, and in a world of transient things, Progression is made to last. The Progression Preamplifier is available with an optional DAC module, and the Progression Amplifier is available in 500-watt mono and 300-watt stereo versions. Together, they are the centerpieces of a state-of-the-art music system. Paired with your preferred loudspeakers, Dan D’Agostino Master Audio Systems’ Progression Series opens the window to the very best sound in the world.

Dan D’Agostino  
MASTER AUDIO SYSTEMS

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Fully Balanced Headphone Amp / Preamplifier

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# 995

Great sound for less than a G!

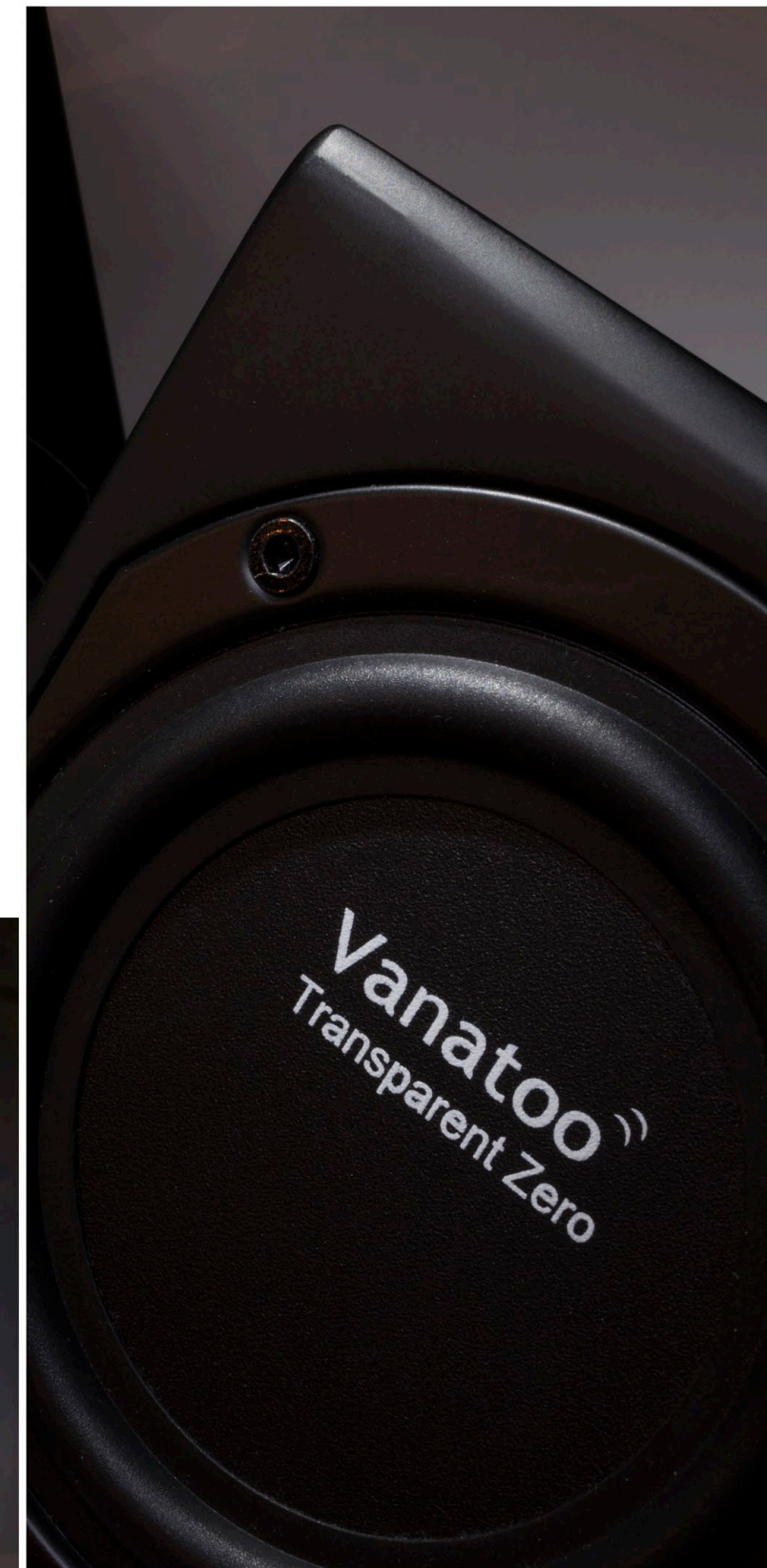
## Final thoughts

Near the end of the review period, I caved and added a small subwoofer – a MartinLogan Dynamo 300, rated down to 32hz (+3db). This allows the T0s to play significantly louder, with the whole system able to hit 89db peaks. With the combination now more full range, it is easier to work with in a room setting, rather than just on your desktop or in an extremely nearfield situation.

The T0 system has enough gain for nearly every musical situation that I encountered, but on rare occasion iTunes was again brought into play to get addition gain from its preamp function. In the end, this was an incredibly minor infraction.

I've always cherished the systems in my life and my prior sweet spot has always been in the \$10k - \$25k range. A justifiable expense for me, to be sure, but the Vanatoo T0s do so much right, this is a system I can suggest wholeheartedly to you and all of my friends that love music, but don't have a ton of spare cash. This level of value and performance is hard to find, and easily earns the T0s an Exceptional Value Award for 2018.

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





# In House

The soundtrack of assembling the issue...

## *Ambient 2 - Eno*

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Our thanks to the dCS Rossini DAC and clock for handling all things digital.



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# The Journeyman Audiophile

Sound for a bit more than a G...

## AVA DAC Mk5: Subtle Outside, Stunning Inside

By Rob Johnson

While the name Frank Van Alstine may be new to some, he has a 50-year legacy of designing components which sonically exceed the expectations of their reasonable price tags. Audio by Van Alstine (AVA) sells their products direct-to-customer from their factory in Woodbury, Minnesota, keeping the costs down and passing that savings along to buyers. The AVA DAC Mk 5 retails for \$1,899. A traditional dealer model would require a significantly higher cost.

### Face-to-face

We've reviewed a few AVA products over the years and their designs focus on a "what's inside counts" philosophy rather than investment in clever features, or eye-catching chassis design. The DAC appears somewhat utilitarian and minimalist on the outside, but AVA demonstrates its primary mission of offering the most carefully-designed internals for the best sonics. While the Mk 5 may not be the king of aesthetics, the AVA DAC is substantially built, reflecting the quality of its construction.

The DAC chassis is 17" wide, 12" deep, 3.57" high, weighing in at 16 pounds. The black powder coated body contrasts a double-anodized silver faceplate on the front, a model of practical simplicity. The left side has a selector knob for source selection, with four blue LEDs indicating sample rate. A rocker switch on the back of the Mk 5 activates the component from a cold start, and after that, a user toggles the unit on and off with an LED-lit power button on the right side of the front panel. When the front-facing power button is turned off, placing the component in standby mode, the DAC sips just enough electricity to keep internal circuits warm and at the ready for the next listening session.

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# The Journeyman Audiophile

Sound for a bit more than a G...

The top surface offers an attractive pattern of vents for heat dissipation. However, the DAC never gets physically warm even after days of constant use. To be on the safe side though, owners should make sure the DAC has at least a couple of inches of clearance above it for proper ventilation.

The Mk 5 offers single-ended RCA outputs only, so users preferring balanced connections are out of luck. However, five inputs on the rear panel will accommodate digital signals from dedicated streamers, computers, transports, or disk players, thank to two S/PDIF RCA Coaxial, two TOSLINK optical, and one USB port. The Mk 5 decodes PCM up to 192kHz, DSD 64, and DSD 128 meeting the needs of a music-loving majority, and rewarding those listening to higher-resolution. Behind all the decoding is the AK4490EQ D/A chip, with class A circuitry renowned for smooth sound coupled with well-rendered bass.

## Smooth setup

The Mk.5 takes more time to unpack from its shipping box than it does to ready it for audio playback. After connecting sources and depressing the power button, the Mk 5's sample rate indicator lights flash in sequence a few times as the system boots up, ready for use. For those using an Apple computer as their digital hub, MacOS recognizes the DAC immediately and is ready to rock. If you use the Roon player, a quick stop in Roon's Audio Preferences is needed to enable the Van Alstine DAC and set it for default playback. AVA notes the Mk 5 is also tested to work with Linux and Windows-based systems. For Windows users, a free driver must be downloaded to enable the higher resolution formats.



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# The Journeyman Audiophile

Sound for a bit more than a G...



The AVA DAC automatically senses the music input format and sample rate, so a user needs to do little else except sit back and listen. While the DAC sounds very good out of the box, it does benefit from longer-term break-in. After about 50 hours of listening, the time from power up to full stability comes a lot quicker. That time is well worth the wait since the listener is rewarded with increased tonal saturation.

## Treat for the ears

When incorporated into my reference system, this AVA component offers a wonderfully natural, and ever-so-slightly warm sound. If one's existing system has an overriding degree of sibilance and stridency from downstream gear, I do not see the Van Alstine as a one-stop remedy, but the Mk 5 will not exacerbate that characteristic.

Rather than an over-emphasis on the details which some components to do, the Mk 5 seeks to deliver

the best possible interpretation of a musical performance. A listener may not be in the rhetorical front row at a concert hearing every finger touch of a nylon guitar string but seated a few rows back soaking up the more important "big picture" within each song. AVA does a stellar job voicing this piece. It is easy, actually too easy, to settle in for a long listening session where time evaporates, yielding to audio joy.

Just as Van Alstine's website claims, the Mk 5's bass performance is solid. While it digs deep, revealing the lowest frequencies of human hearing, it never accentuates bass unnaturally. Bass drums render with a hefty punch when the music dictates it. Similarly, bass notes on songs like "Special Cases" by Massive Attack through the Mk 5 have the raw oomph to satisfy a bass-lover, but never over-emphasize it as part of a larger musical picture.

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# The Journeyman Audiophile

Sound for a bit more than a G...

Even processed vocals like those on Portishead's "Cowboys," where a harsher edge accompanies an otherwise beautiful melody, the Van Alstine remains true to its voicing. In my system, rather than accentuating that edginess, the Van Alstine takes digital streams under its wing and shares it out to the listener in a more palatable way. Of course, the Mk 5 is not only great with Trip-Hop music. It performs similar magic with every track thrown at it. Keep in mind that AVA DAC does not diminish the impact of Rock, or the subtleties of jazz. These performances keep all the power and nuance in which a listener expects to revel.

From a soundstaging standpoint, the Mk 5 also demonstrates its mettle. While music does not project an image in front of the speakers to a degree which DACs many times the Mk 5's price can, the soundstage thrown by it is impressive nevertheless. Great components regularly have ability to pass the "closed eye test." That is, with eyes closed it is difficult for a listener to point at the speaker from which sound is emitting. The AVA DAC projects music left, right, above, below, and behind the speakers, laying out a convincing, layered simulation of the musicians and vocalists. Center stage imaging between the speakers is rock-solid. Ambient cues around individual instruments and vocals are detailed enough to discern which albums were multi-tracked during the recording process, with reverb added to some elements, versus those albums recorded live with all musicians playing together simultaneously. It is always fun to encounter gear that gives insights into the way talented sound engineers assembled a band's songs out of incredible individual performances. For example, Michael Hutchence's voice and percussive instruments in "Never Tear Us Apart" by INXS render with additional echo compared against guitar and saxophone parts. The distinctions enabled through the Van Alstine auditorily confirm the song – like most – was engineered after the recording of each element individually.

In my experience, the Van Alstine DAC offers an incredible level of musical enjoyment with an ideal balance of warmth, detail, and punch, making its sonic signature beguiling.

## Summing up

Frank Van Alstine has produced another winner. Simply put, the Mk 5 offers marvelous sonics at its price point. While DACs many times its price provide a little more resolution, refinement, and ambient information, the AVA DAC is one to live with happily for many years to come. While it does not accommodate DSD 512, 384kHz signals or MQA the formats, it does support offer plenty of future-proofing options. According to Van Alstine, their equipment designs come to life with upgradability in mind. So who knows what the future might bring. What's already there, though, is more than compelling enough.

While high-resolutions offer titillating performance in a marvelous digital system, most audiophiles I know have an extensive collection of music comprised CD-quality 44.1kHz files. From there, many rip those tracks from their native WAV file format to a less space-consuming format like FLAC, to maximize available drive space. Even with these lower-resolution files, AVA DAC never skimps on musicality.

Since AVA sells direct to customers without a dealer network offering potential customers the possibility of hearing the DAC before buying it, AVA offers a 30-day home audition satisfaction guarantee. Prospective owners have little to lose in the unlikely event the DAC is not to their liking. When you decide your AVA component is a keeper, they offer a three year warranty. All service is done at their Minnesota headquarters, and a cursory look on the internet reveals no unhappy long term customers. The AVA team prides themselves on customer responsiveness.

For those seeking a fantastic DAC in the sub-\$2,000 range, the musically-marvelous AVA Mk 5 deserves a place on a short list of stellar components deserving earnest consideration. It handily earns a 2018 TONEAudio Exceptional Value Award.

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# Playlist:

What Our Readers Are Into

Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds -  
The Mercy Seat

The Byrds -  
Hickory Wind

David Bowie -  
Seven Years in Tibet

Chris Bell -  
I Am The Cosmos

Cross Canadian Ragweed -  
Alabama

Bertling Noise Laboratories -  
Baby Talk

Bette Midler -  
The Rose

Gary Moore -  
Perisienne Walkways (Live)

Love - Alone Again

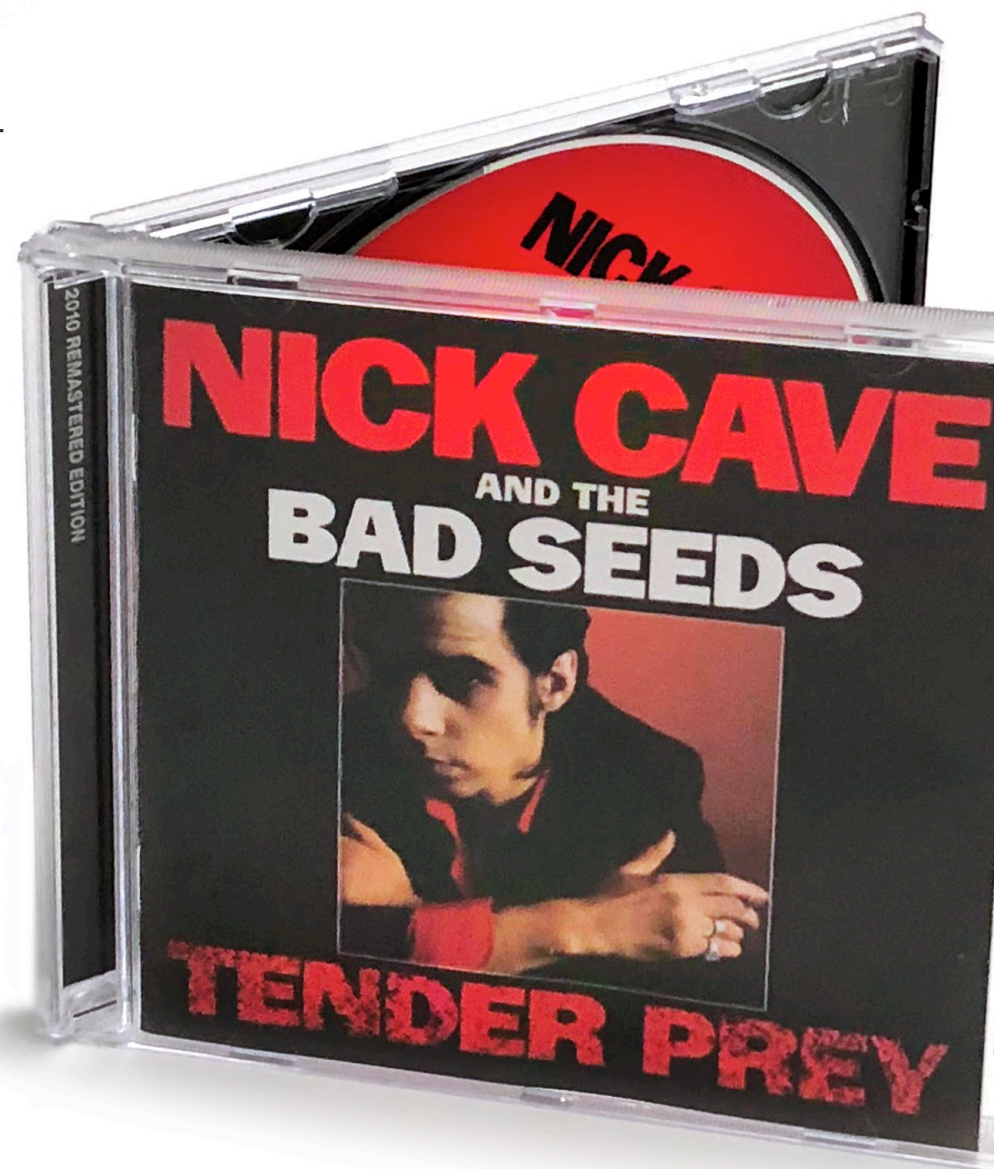
Roberta Flack -  
Killing Me Softly

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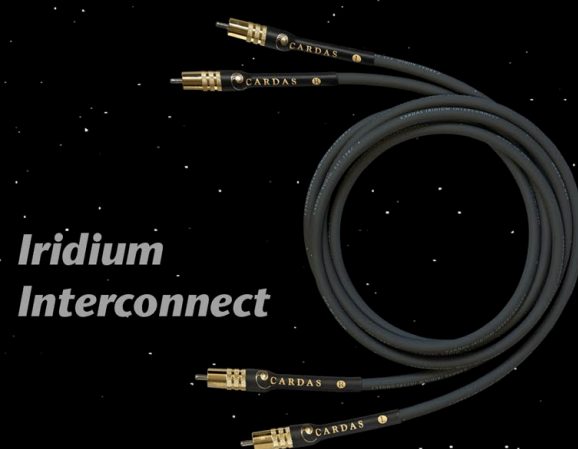
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[Read the full review here.](#)

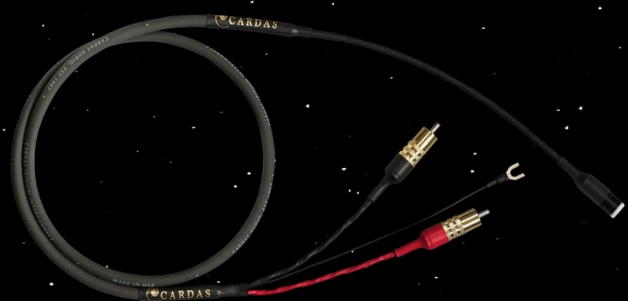




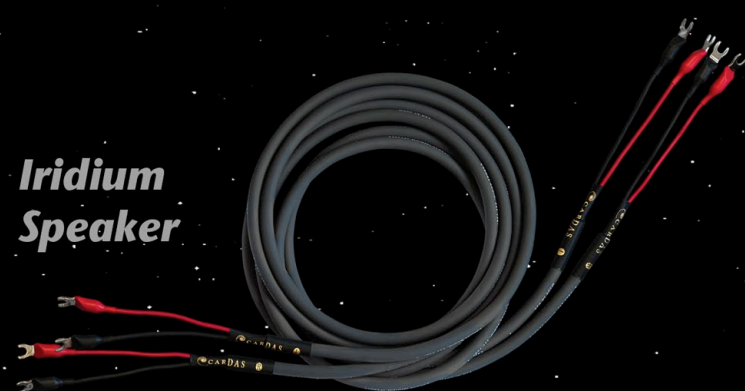
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## FEATURE REVIEW

### Golden Ear Triton Reference

**Maximizing  
Music, Performance,  
and Value.**

*By Greg Petan,  
Michael Corsentino  
and  
Jeff Dorgay*

Lately, telling stories in a non-linear fashion seems to be the norm, so we'll do the same here. Hang with me, it all makes sense. While this review started out being somewhat linear, half way through the process, I found out our New York columnist, Greg Petan, scored a pair of Triton References for evaluation and planned on using them for sound reinforcement at his annual holiday party. Greg's place is huge, with incredibly high ceilings, so if the Tritons could fill *that* space, it would be a torture test indeed. If his non-audiophile guests would dig the Tritons, that would be more powerful than specs, charts and measurements could ever convey. Fast forward the clock a little further and

I find out during the vetting process that our newest reviewer, Michael Corsentino has a pair of Tritons that he's purchased (sans industry discount) for his system. Once you all get to know Michael, you'll find his enthusiasm infectious, but when someone pays retail for a product and is still bubbling over it, there's no greater endorsement. As we were discussing his first few reviews for TONE, he happily agreed to share his perspective on living with these speakers for a few months now, linked to a Schiit DAC, VPI Prime turntable and PrimaLuna DiaLogue HP Premium integrated amplifier. All components I'm very familiar with.





# *How often do two audio enthusiasts agree on anything? How often do three?*

I've always been a huge fan of Golden Ear's Sandy Gross, and his ability to produce speakers offering tremendous performance and value. It only took about 90 seconds at last year's Rocky Mountain Audio Fest with his masterpiece, the \$8,500/pair Triton Reference to get my attention.

So with both of these guys, on opposite ends of the country, with completely different systems arriving at the same conclusion I did – i.e. the Triton Reference is one of the top speakers we've all heard for anything near this price. That's something to celebrate. As a result, this is possibly one of the longest reviews we've ever done; expect to see more end users chiming in in the future.

### First take

Even in the small RMAF room, Gross was getting an expansive soundstage and some serious low frequency energy. He tells me "I like to keep the speakers somewhat widely spaced, with a bit more than normal toe-in. That's the secret to setting these up." Those visiting Golden Ear at shows, know they usually exhibit with Pass electronics, but this time, it happened to be an integrated from Hegel. No matter, this was great sound, and the buzz in the hallways was excellent. This was some of the most enjoyable sound I experienced at RMAF.

Following Sandy's lead, this is exactly how I set the Triton Reference speakers up in my 16 x 26 foot listening room – on the long wall. Finally placing the speakers about 12 feet apart, more than usual in this room, with that "extra toe-in," the Golden Ear speakers are stunning.

All of my initial listening was done with my usual trio of Pass Labs components: the XS Pre, XS Phono and the XA200.8 monoblocks. As any veteran hifi salesperson will tell you, there's no better way to make a modestly pair of speaker light up than to connect them to a couple hundred thousand dollars worth of reference components. Not exactly a fair fight, but this combination certainly shows off just how capable the Triton Reference speakers are.

Combining the power of the XA200.8s with the 93db/1-watt sensitivity and built-in powered woofers, this system offers staggering dynamic range. I couldn't play it loud enough to break up without doing serious ear damage; that box is easily ticked.

### Back to the real world

Knowing Michael had the HP Premium, it made sense to double check that perspective in room two with the HP Premium/KT150 combination. Double check. The new guy's system not only sounds great, he is achieving similar results. Again, how often does that happen? A good sign, indeed. Talking to both Michael and Greg on the phone, not only does their enthusiasm shine through, they are both hearing the same things I'm hearing: great dynamic range, excellent detail retrieval, massive soundstage and of course killer bass response.

Keeping this in context, a suite of real-world, budget appropriate amplifiers were used with the Tritons to see what a music enthusiast that isn't going to take a second mortgage can expect.

I'll always tell you to fall in love with a pair of speakers and build a system around them for three reasons. It doesn't matter what electronics you love if they won't work with your speakers, and it doesn't matter how much you love a pair of speakers if they won't work with your room.

The slender profile of the Tritons and their ability to blend together easily in a room makes them easy to cuddle up to. And they only come in one color – black. (Not that I wouldn't love to see these in white, but that's personal. Black goes with everything and makes it easy to keep costs down – always a Golden Ear priority)

Finally, if you invest heavily in a pair of speakers you love, every time you make an upgrade to your electronics, it's like you bought a new system again. Because the Triton Reference is so efficient and the powered woofers take the LF demand away from your power amplifier, you can explore a range of low to moderate tube amplifiers and achieve excellent results. The first amp on the list is the \$899 Rega Brio, with 50 watts per channel.

If I were starting over in the audio game, this would be at the top of the list for beginning on my Golden Ear journey on a budget. The Brio offers up high resolution and drive, along with an excellent MM phono section. Add your favorite turntable/cartridge combo and you can get a ton of musical enjoyment until you can afford the amp of your dreams. Another excellent option if you can find a clean one is a vintage tube amp from HH Scott, or Dynaco.



FEATURE REVIEW: Golden Ear Triton Reference

Borrowing Mr. O'Brien's recently restored 15 watt per channel Dynaco HCA-35 was a revelation. Though it lacks the LF grip the Rega offers, it brings a high level of tonal saturation, albeit slightly warm in character. Finally, my original EL-34 based PrimaLuna ProLogue One with about 25 watts per channel is a thoroughly modern tube amp with more resolution than the vintage stuff. The best news is neither of these amplifiers will set you back more than a thousand bucks, offering a high level of enjoyment.

Further up the food chain, the Simaudio Ace also proves an excellent combo, as does the new Anthem integrated. (review in process) with a built in DAC, MM/MC phono stage and Anthem Room Correction, this is a 100 watt per channel that could offer you an excellent system anchor that you might never need to replace. Ever.

Needless to say, we tried about 20 amplifiers, from 3 watt per channel SET's to the magnificent Pass monoblocks. (The recently reviewed \$4,900 Pass XA 25 makes a particularly sweet combination)

The Tritons are more than resolving enough to allow you to discern the individual sonic footprint of each amplifier, yet proved easy to drive with any source.

Common characteristics

Regardless of amplifier chosen, the feel of the Tritons always comes through. Their latest generation HVFR (high velocity folded ribbon) tweeter is both more efficient and more refined, along with improvements to the crossover network makes for an even smoother transition from the midrange than past Golden Ear designs. They've always been incredible, but the current iteration is on a completely new level of excellence. Impressive as the bass performance of these speakers is, this refined coherence was what pulled me into the Golden Ear demo in the first place. This excitement did not fade after hundreds of hours of listening.

The combination of three 6 x 10 inch woofers and four 10.5 x 9.5 inch passive bass radiators (two on each side of the cabinet) powered by an 1800 watt amplifier and DSP crossover per channel makes for a speaker that moves tremendous air. Running a set of test tones shows linear, solid bass down to 20hz, and the LF spec is 12hz. The last speakers I've listened to in my room extending that far have been the \$125k/pair Sonus faber Aida, The \$80k/pair MartinLogan Neolith and the \$70k/pair Focal Stella Utopia, so this is indeed impressive.

The only thing required is to set the bass level with care. Just like with a subwoofer, you don't want the woofer to overpower the speakers, and similarly, when you have it set right, the Tritons feel like mini monitors with killer bass. Follow "Sandy's Tips" on the website, and as he mentions, the woofers will tighten up after the first 100 hours or so, requiring only slight fine tuning after.



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# FEATURE REVIEW: Golden Ear Triton Reference

A suite of bass heavy tracks from Pink Floyd, Snoop Dogg and Sbttrkt served double duty; first, breaking in the woofer surrounds, and then fine tuning the bass to rest of speaker balance. After that it was just fun to bass out on the Tritons. Near the end of the review, I did fire up my Epson projector in the listening room, using the Tritons as a stereo only system for movie sound, galloping though all the race cars, gun shots and explosions I could muster. Suffice that these speakers will make an awesome anchor for a multichannel or theater system. Staffer Ken Mercereau has done just that, (combining Golden Ear satellites and in ceiling models) with fantastic effect.

Thanks to that ribbon tweeter, these speakers have a clarity and resolving power, providing a vivid and enveloping musical experience. The massive front to back soundfield they generate feels almost like a surround system, whether listening to classic rock with a lot of built – in separation, like Santana’s *Abraxas*, or modern atmospheric pieces, like Brian Eno’s *Small Craft on a Milk Sea*.

## Precious little they won’t do

Every speaker has compromises, and the Tritons are no exception. The recently reviewed \$10k/pair Focal Kanta no.2 renders finer detail than the Tritons and the \$7k/pair MartinLogan ESP9s offer slightly more transparency. The virtue of the Tritons is that they serve up incredibly compelling midrange, HF detail/smoothness, coherence that closely rivals ESL designs (Mr. Gross has a huge pair of Sound Labs ESLs in his home as one of his reference speakers) and mega bass performance. No speaker we’ve reviewed at the \$10k price point does as much overall as the Triton Reference and that’s their magic.

This is a complete speaker solution that will not leave you in the listening chair wishing for what’s lacking. Of course, everyone has different taste when it comes to choosing their speaker. However, if you’re the person looking to spend \$7k - \$12k and wants speakers that do everything well, I can think of no better choice than Golden Ear’s Triton Reference.

As Marti DeBergi said in *Spinal Tap*, “Enough of my yapping.” Here’s what Greg and Michael have to add.

## A funny thing happened on the way to reviewing the GoldenEar Triton Reference.

By Greg Petan

Every year my wife and I host a big holiday party. Delivered a week prior, the arrival of the GoldenEar Triton Reference speakers coincided perfectly with our event. Once installed and tweaked, the Tritons were fed a steady diet of ambient music as we transformed our loft into party central for 75 guests and a band – the Tixier Brothers.

Day to day work on a commissioned painting and holiday madness left no time for any initial critical listening, and little did I know I was about to discover an entirely fresh perspective on a speaker review. In no time, the party was upon us and after a scorching set from the evening’s headliner, accompanied by yours truly on guitar for Buddy Guy’s “Damn Right I got the Blues,” and “I Got My Eyes on You,” we moved to phase two of the evening; the dance party featuring my wife, Diane’s playlists.



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| Avantgarde Acoustics  | Kronos        | Rega              | VAC Signature              |
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## FEATURE REVIEW: Golden Ear Triton Reference

Parliament's "Brick House" got things started, and though this is a track that can get even the most timid out on the dance floor, regardless of music system, the Tritons took charge of the room, launching a rush to the dance floor that I haven't seen in 25 years of parties at the Petan residence.

That live sound, that certain something we had just experienced with the band was still there. These speakers excite the air, offering a full, extended frequency response, with no distortion, thanks in part to the massive Pass Labs XA200.5 amplifiers. Watching our guests faces, song after song brought more insight, taking the experience to a feeling deep in my feet and soul, forgetting about the gear. These speakers have the ability to connect the listener on a visceral, emotional level – even in a huge space like my listening/living room.

The Triton Reference speakers deliver so much music for under \$10K that it's silly to find pause. I'd certainly love to own a pair. Very well done Sandy Gross and team at Golden Ear. Thanks for helping make this year's party by far, the best we have ever had.

### Buyer Perspective

By Michael Corsentino

It's been 6 months since I purchased my pair of Golden Ear Triton Reference speakers and I'm happy to report that they continue to deliver an incredible musical experience – every day. Replaced were a set of KEF R700's and a Rythmik Audio F12 Direct Servo subwoofer which had served me well.

Purchasing a new set of speakers is an exciting yet potentially daunting experience. There are so many brands worthy of consideration and so many opinions. Add to that finding speakers compatible with your budget, the size of your listening room, the kinds of music you listen to, and a local dealer who can demo your candidates and the process can be downright dizzying.

## FEATURE REVIEW: Golden Ear Triton Reference

I'd been considering Focal Aria's 948's, Magnapan 1.7i's, Sonus Faber Venere 3.0's, and Golden Ear Triton One's. The fabric sock covering the entire enclosure of the Triton One was a deal breaker for me so I ruled them out early on. When the Triton Reference was released to wide acclaim and sporting a sexy new piano black finish, my interest was renewed. Initially I considered the Triton REF's out of my price range, hoping the demo wouldn't live up to the buzz, letting me off the hook. But it didn't work that way.

I have a wide range of musical taste. Cinemascope wide. The Triton Reference immediately grabbed me with their ability to play everything well. And it's a rare bird that can pull this off. These speakers produce an expansive soundstage with precise imaging that clearly defines instruments in three-dimensional space. The powered woofers offer prodigious bass without getting loose.





## FEATURE REVIEW: Golden Ear Triton Reference

The newly improved tweeter is detailed, yet devoid of fatigue. The midrange and the blend with the other drivers is spot on, allowing vocal performances to come alive.

The powered woofers offer an extra bonus – no more subwoofers cluttering the listening area. Whether space is at a premium, or you just like a minimalist configuration, it's like having bi-amped speakers at your disposal.

Finally, because of my expansive music collection, I value wide dynamic range so I can enjoy music at the volume level the piece demands - low or mind bendingly loud. Whether listening at everyday levels or approaching arena rock raucousness, my PrimaLuna HP DiaLogue Integrated with KT150 tubes fills the bill, and in my room, the sweet spot is usually between one half to two thirds of maximum volume.

Measuring 54 inches tall the Tritons are tall but not domineering in a 14 x 20 foot listening room. The piano black finish is sexy as hell, but also a dust magnet. Be prepared to dust them often if that bothers you. Alcohol free Windex blotted on a lint free cloth is great way to keep piano black finishes looking polished. A little tip I picked up from the folks at KEF, thank you!

At the end of the day I was so impressed with the demo I dug deep, adjusted my budget, and purchased the Triton Reference. No regrets.

### The Golden Ear Triton Reference

MSRP: \$4,249.99 ea

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

### Peripherals

Analog Source    Grand Prix Audio Monaco 2.0

Digital Source    dCS Rossini player/clock

Amplification    Pass Labs XS Pre/Power/Phono

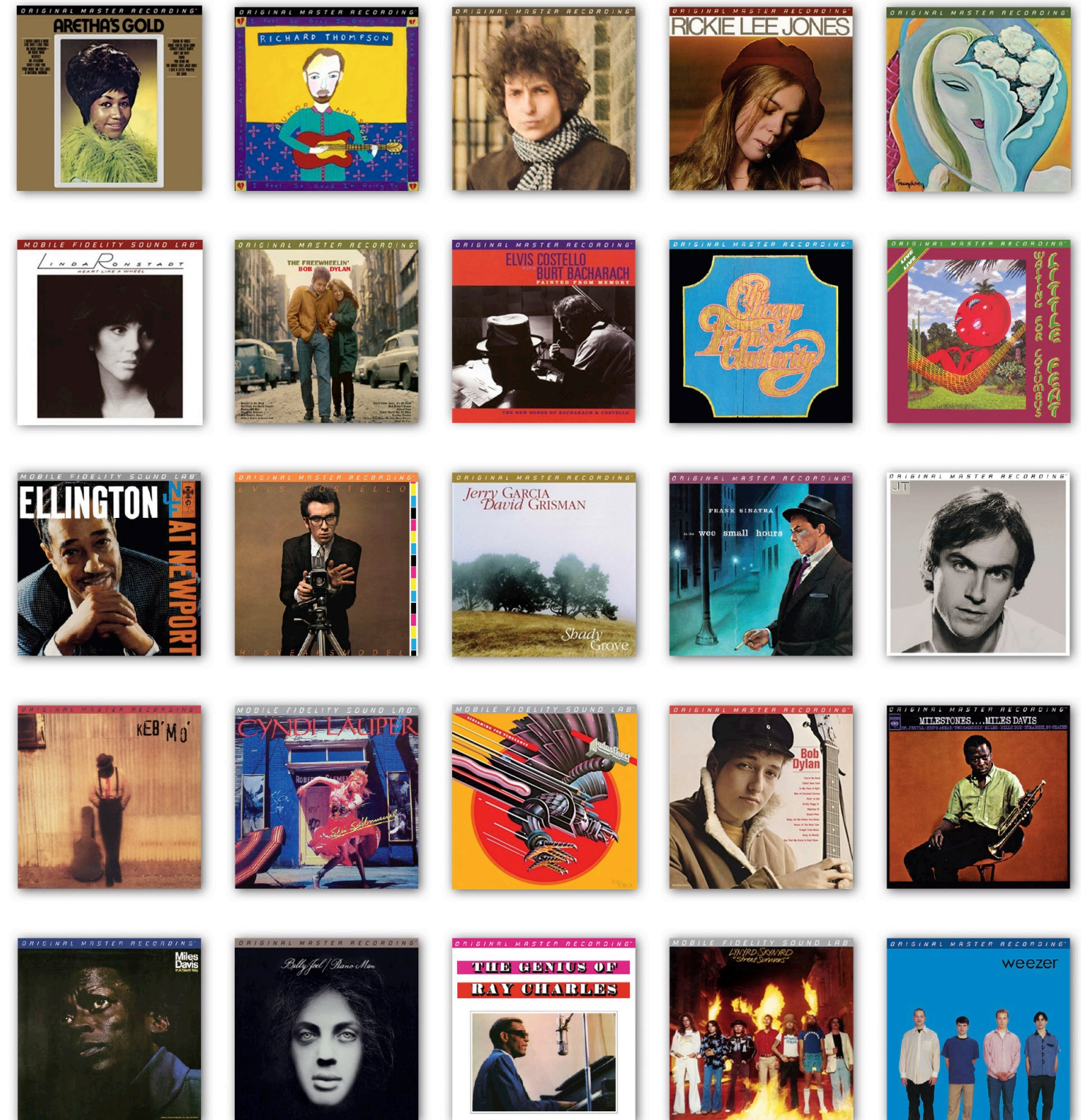
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## REVIEW

### Raidho's X-1

**A small helping of  
sonic perfection.**

**We listen to  
Raidho's  
smallest speaker.**

*By Jeff Dorgay*

If you've never heard a pair of Raidho speakers, there's one thing they all share, from the \$6,000 pair of X-1s you see here, to their top of the line speakers that tip the scales at just over \$220k a pair; their awesome ribbon tweeter. Let's get reviewer bias out of the way right now – I've never been a fan of the ribbon because as extended and transparent as they are, precious few designers have gotten it even close to right. (Though Sandy Greene at Golden Ear has done a damn good job with his latest flagship) Yet, at the best of times, the ribbon tweeter still has that ribbon sound.

A slightly bright, slightly mechanical, not quite right thing, that after about 45 minutes has you looking for something else to do.

Not the Raidho ribbon. Maybe it's their Viking heritage of conquering things. Perhaps it's all the cold, dark weather that leads to more introspection – less time driving around in sports cars with the top down means more time pondering how to make the perfect tweeter. All kidding aside, there's a lot of really brainy speaker designers in Denmark, probably more per capita than anywhere else in the world.





## REVIEW: Raidho X-1

Whatever the reason, this tweeter and its integration with the 4-inch ceramic woofer is sonic perfection. The only disadvantage with the X-1 is that they only go down to about 70hz, making them fantastic for nearfield listening in a small room or in the context of a mega desktop system. Their front port design means you can place them close to the walls without bass anomalies, yet they beg for nearfield listening so you can bask in the spatial abilities of this diminutive masterpiece. Or you can add a subwoofer. More about that later.

### Ready, set, go

Our review samples arrive in gloss white, which seems to appeal more to European audiences (but I am a huge fan of) and matching white stands that are very stylish. If you want beauty, go for the Raidho stands (\$750 extra), and the X-1s are also available in gloss black. If you want to wring every last bit of bass extension out of them, head towards something like the heaviest Sound Anchor stands, using Blu-Tak or something similar to assist the mechanical interface between speaker and stand.

A single pair of banana jacks makes cabling easier, but if you have spades, you may need to purchase a high-quality pair of banana adaptors (we suggest these, from Cardas) or consider getting your present cables re-terminated. It will make things a lot easier. Raidho's Rune Skov mentions that if you do need binding posts, they can add their own, high quality posts instead of the banana jacks. Just let your dealer know when ordering and it is a \$200 upcharge.

In the context of a 13 x 15-foot room, with the speakers on the long wall, the ultimate balance arrives with the speakers about 6 feet out from the back wall, 4 feet apart, about ten degrees of toe-in and the listening chair about 6 feet back. This makes for a listening experience that is beyond holographic in nature. Is there a fourth dimension to sound?

### An Easy Pairing

The specifications list sensitivity at 85db/1-watt, and Raidho hints "we've seen excellent results with small tube amplifiers," the X-1s are easy to drive. With a number of small tube amplifiers at our disposal, they all work well with the X-1. Even with the basic PrimaLuna Prologue One, featuring about 25 watts per channel from EL-34 tubes, the sound is clear and deep. Stepping the game up to the current PrimaLuna DiaLogue HP, with almost 100 wpc of KT150 power is a different world altogether. More power brings a more expansive soundstage in all dimensions as well as more bass grip.

In the context of the Robert Koda K-10 preamplifier, Audio Research REF 75SE amplifier, and Gryphon Kalliope DAC, the X-1s dig deeper than I thought capable, or what their specs reveal. You still won't rattle the walls with your favorite house or EDM tracks, but on most music, there is more than adequate bass content. Another fantastic match with the X-1s is the Pass Labs INT-60 integrated. With 60 watts per channel and high current reserves, it drives them with authority.





## REVIEW: Raidho X-1

Running through a series of tracks from Steve Earle, Lucinda Williams and the last release from Robert Plant brings the X-1s strength front and center. The way these speakers paint a musical image in the room is fantastic. Tonal accuracy, character and contrast is stunning, as is low level detail. Yes, this is a pair of speakers that lets you hear every breath a vocalist takes, and every minute bit of string plucking, but does not torture you with hyper detail – a very tough act to accomplish. In a modest room, at reasonable volume levels, you'd swear you were listening to much larger speakers.

As with all ribbon speakers, transient attack, decay and lack of overhang is incredible. When you hear drums and percussion, it almost feels like you are hearing them for the first time, the level of clarity is so inviting. Should you take my advice and get a demo with any set of Raidho speakers, be sure to take five tracks you know intimately. I guarantee you will hear nuance that you never have before. That's what makes hifi exciting for me! The X-1s dig so deep into your favorite recordings, they will keep you up late. The best news is that while they reveal so much detail, they never sound harsh, strident, or overbearing. They merely render what is on the recording.

### A bit more bass, if you desire

We've outlined the LF limitations of the X-1, but should you love these speakers so much that you just want a bit more bass, we did pair the X-1s with a pair of REL T7i subs (\$999/each). The result was so astonishing, I purchased the X-1s and the REL subs to make this our permanent reference in room two with the Pass INT-60. A bit of experimenting placing the two small REL's makes for an \$8,000 speaker system that is truly full range, opening up a much wider range of



***“I can’t think of a better digital disc player than the PS Audio DirectStream Memory Player and DAC. If I had more than two thumbs to raise I would offer them, it’s that good. The only remaining choice is whether you want silver or black.”***

***---Jeff Dorgay, TONE Audio***



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## REVIEW: Raidho X-1

musical possibilities. Now you can play your favorite bass heavy recordings without issue. And you can get a pair in gloss white or gloss black to match.

The only other limitation of the X-1 is slightly limited horizontal dispersion. This is not a problem under normal listening conditions, but you will have to pay close attention during setup, or you might find the highs a little less than pristine. Fine tune the speaker rake angle with the spikes on the stands and all is good. From your couch or chair, the X-1s are just fine, but your overall coherence suffers, should you sit on the floor and listen. You can't squeeze everything out of a tiny box, remember!

### Stunningly realistic

Rather than make a speaker that is everything to everyone, Raidho has concentrated on delivering what they do with the X-1 world class. From about 70hz on up, these speakers have a level of nuance, clarity, and musicality that you'd expect from a pair of \$100k speakers, and I don't say that lightly. You don't get the last bit of bass and they won't fill a large room like the big Raidho speakers do. But that's it.

Keep them in the range of what they are capable of, and you are listening to the world's finest. Even more so, should you add a subwoofer, or better yet, a pair of smaller subs.

If this is the kind of speaker you are looking for, I truly hope you will visit a Raidho dealer and see if you enjoy the X-1s as much as I do. We look forward to bringing you more information when we visit the Raidho factory later this year and review a few more models. To think, this is their smallest speaker!

**The Raidho X-1 Speakers**  
\$6,000/pair

[www.raidho.dk](http://www.raidho.dk)

### Peripherals

**Analog Source:** Grand Prix Audio  
Parabolica w/TriPlanar  
arm/Grado Statement 1

**Digital Source:** Gryphon Kalliope DAC

**Preamplifier:** Robert Koda K-10

**Power Amplifier:** Audio Research REF 75SE

**Cable:** Cardas Clear





# Playlist: What Our Readers Are Into

Opeth -  
To Bid You Farewll

Petra Magoni -  
Roxanne

The Eden House -  
Verdades (I have  
Chosen You)

HVOB -  
The Blame Game

Agnes Obel - Familiar

Austra - The Beat and  
The Pulse

The Veils -  
Vicious Traditions

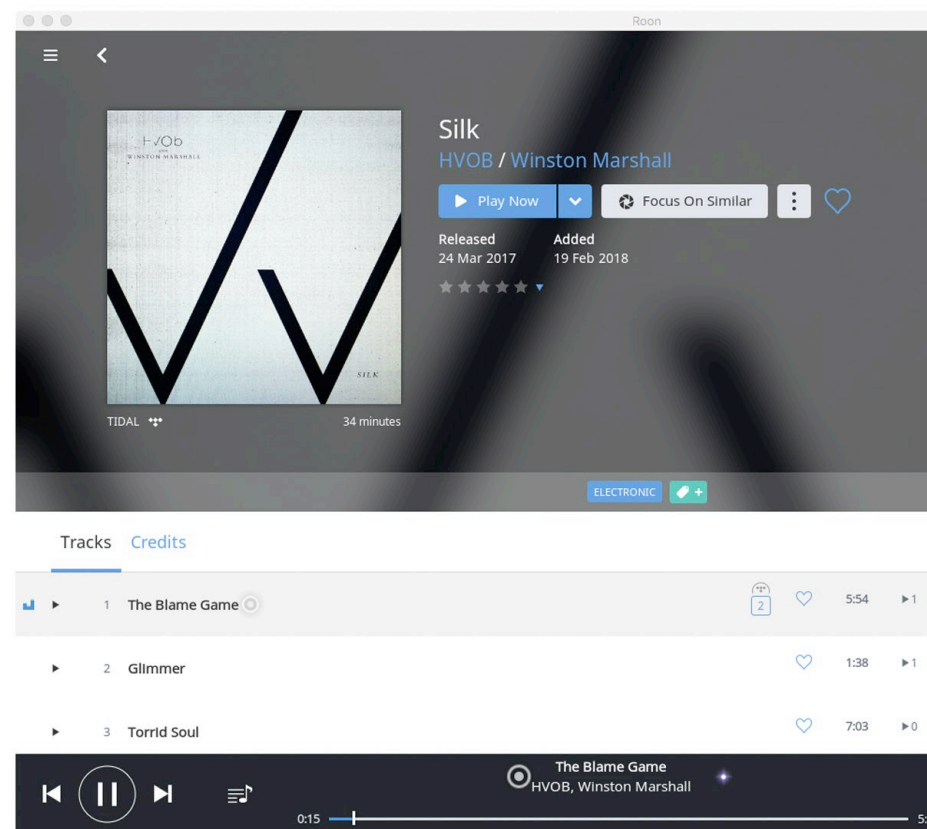
Phantogram -  
Funeral Pyre

Nathan Fake - The Sky  
Was Pink (Icelandic Version)

Baby Alpaca -  
Sea of Dreams

When he's not busy setting land speed records, Alex Roy and his partners run a pretty cool hifi store in Manhattan.

Here's a quick cross-section of a few of his recent faves.



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'Outstanding Product' Paul Miller - Hi-Fi News UK – March 2018



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## REVIEW

### The XP-17 Phonostage

**Solid-State silence  
makes for  
vinyl bliss.**

**Another precision  
phono instrument  
from Pass Labs.**

*By Rob Johnson*

Pass Labs produces an incredibly deep line of power amplifiers and source components. Though the founders name graces the front panel, Mr. Pass only designs the power amplifiers. Preamplifiers and phonostages fall to the talented mind of Wayne Colburn.

The XP-17 is Pass Labs entry-level phonostage, replacing the outgoing XP-15. There is only a slight price increase between the two, with the XP-15 having an MSRP of \$3,800, and the new XP-17 now \$4,300.

In Pass world, the higher model (in their preamplifiers) number translates to greater sonics and less noise. Like the XP-15, the XP-17 is a one-chassis component.

The XP-25, like Pass's flagship Xs Phono, comes in two parts: one enclosure dedicated to the power supply, and another for the delicate phonostage circuitry. The Xs Phono represents the pinnacle of their phonostage achievement to date. Pass Labs proudly refers to it as an "all-out assault on the state-of-the-art in vinyl." That's a tall order indeed!

Regardless which phonostage fits your audio budget, much trickle-down technology benefits all the designs. Pass Labs describes several internal improvements which provide the XP-17 with greater capability than its predecessor. A shielded, low noise toroid and input filter module combined with an extra level of RC filtering reduces potential noise





## REVIEW: Pass XP-17

A new input circuit reduces distortion and further squelches noise. These advancements combined create greater dynamics and resolution. A short listen confirms they have indeed done their homework.

### Lookin' good

As with the rest of Pass's component lineup, the XP-17 sports an elegant, yet unassuming appearance, that matches the aesthetic of their other pieces. A thick, silver-anodized aluminum plate graces the front. Aside from its beveled top and bottom edges, a left-to-right, precision-routed "feature stripe" about a quarter inch deep accentuates the otherwise-smooth metal façade. Centered within is a tiny blue LED indicating power up.

With close-up inspection, no one will ever accuse Pass Labs of "underbuilding" a product. Like all other offerings in their component lineup, nothing about the XP-17 appears flimsy. The substantially built 19 - pound phono pre has a 17-inch width, a four-inch height, and a depth of 12.5 inches.

Don't let the XP-17's spartan front plate fool you, all the adjustments on the rear panel. After checking their cartridge's impedance, a user can manually set gain, loading, and capacitance (if using an MM cart vs. MC) via a tiny set of DIP switches on the back panel. The XP-17 accommodates both moving magnet and moving coil cartridges, offering a wide range of cartridge loading, from 10 Ohms to a maximum of 47kOhms. Depending on the load parallel capacitance ranges from 10 pF to 750 pF. With the first set of switches optimized, the second group adjusts the XP-17's output gain. Most MM carts will only need the 56db setting. Most MCs should be just fine with the 66db setting and there is a 76db option for the lowest output MC cartridges. The optimum setting will depend on the overall gain of your system. Too much and you risk distortion on the loudest passages; too little and the phono signal lacks dynamics. Unlike most vacuum tube phonostages, the XP-17 is dead quiet no matter which setting you choose, so let dynamics be your guide.

For more details, you can download the XP-17 manual [here](#), from the Pass website. This will also further explain the circuit and design of this model.

The XP-17 offers balanced XLR and single ended RCA outputs, with an output impedance of 220 and 110 ohms respectively. Thanks to the high output drive of the XP-17 either set of outputs will drive 20-30 foot interconnects with ease, handy if you'd like to have your turntable located somewhat remotely from the rest of your system. A sole pair of single ended RCA inputs accommodate a single turntable. A flick of the rear panel power switch is all that is needed to turn the XP-17 up and because of its low power draw, it can be left on continuously.

### Let's Spin!

While the XP-17 benefits from a few days of break-in time, it sounds quite good from initial power up. It will open up in terms of tonal ease and dynamics a bit after the first 50 hours. Because the XP-17 sips power, it does not generate any significant heat. Added to my reference system, the Pass delivers the goods. While it is a solid-state design, lush and smooth sound pours forth, with no hint of edge or stridency. Vocal performances like "Sixth Sense" from Imelda May's *Life. Love. Flesh. Blood.* reveal all the subtleties which make her voice beguiling. At the same time, the powerful crescendos render with beauty and grace, without a trace of sibilance, delivering a stunning performance. Rarely do I halt a record to hear a track a second time, but with the XP-17, the musical enjoyment demanded an instant reprise - more than once. LP's centered around male vocals, like those on *Roman Candle* by Elliott Smith, offer a stunning portrayal of his soft-spoken style.





## REVIEW: Pass XP-17

The XP-17 never truncates the soundstage presented in a recording. Music surrounds the speakers in all directions without bunching up at the speaker bodies themselves. Minute ambient cues on fantastic pressings appear to extend beyond the rear wall of the listening space, wrapping forward into the room. Musically-speaking, this means instruments and vocals never compete for attention in the flat plane between the speakers. On tracks like Pink Martini's "Let's Never Stop Falling in Love" the XP-17 proves its ability to layer elaborate soundstages including piano, strings, horns, several percussive instruments, and more with clear definition between all the tracks.

Beloved albums like *Copper Blue* by Bob Mould-led Sugar may not offer an "audiophile" level of sonic perfection captured in the recording and resulting vinyl pressing. However, through the XP-17 the audio chain takes "If I Can't Change Your Mind" a significant step closer to what I would expect from a high quality remaster.

At \$4300, the XP-17 represents an investment. However, its build quality, marvelous sonics, and extreme adjustability make it a component likely to reside on its owner's component rack for many years to come. It offers much to love for the serious analog enthusiast.



### Additional listening – Jeff Dorgay

Having had the good fortune to borrow a friend's XP-15 back to refresh the sonic memory cells, the XP-17 shows, like with other Pass products their evolution. As their own Desmond Harrington is fond of saying, "you know we're always trying to make things better..."

If you already own an XP-15, it doesn't suck. The XP-17 is a few clicks better than what you have now. It's a little quieter, a little more dynamic, a bit more revealing. Much like the new .8 series of XA power amplifiers, Pass has gotten closer to the XS series with this new model, applying what they've learned. Comparing the XP-17 to the reference XS Phono raises an eyebrow or two. If you are looking for a statement phonostage and only require one input, the XP-17 is a tremendous value for \$4,300. Swapping my Brinkmann Bardo/Koetsu Jade Platinum reference table between the XP-17 and the XS Phono, shows the flagship still having more dynamic swing, ultimate LF grunt, and HF resolution.

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# REVIEW: Pass XP-17

Don't forget, the \$45,000 XS Phono has three separate phono preamplifiers on one chassis with a massive power supply. Killer stuff if you have three turntables or tonearms. However, if you're that analog lover with a great table/arm/cart in the \$10k-\$20k range (or thereabouts) you'll never need anything more than the XP-17. And, you'll never have to hunt for NOS tubes, either.

Auditioning the XP-17 with everything from a Shure M97 up to the Lyra Etna, and the Grado Statement 1, the synergy is flawless, regardless of choice. And the Grado is a tough one to get right, because its moving iron design puts out 1mv, yet requires 47k loading. The XP-17 plays well with others way better than I do.

Should you be a car nut, think of the XP-17 as an Audi S3 or BMW M240i. It doesn't command the presence of the big, two box models, but the level of performance for the dollar eclipses everything close. This one was an easy choice to give one of our Exceptional Value Awards to for 2018. Job well done.



## Pass Labs XP-17

MSRP: \$4,300  
passlabs.com

## PERIPHERALS

Analog Source: SME Model 10 with SME V and Model 10 tonearms.  
Dynavector 17D3 and Denon DL-103R cartridges

Amplification: Conrad-Johnson ART150

Preamplification: Coffman Labs G1-B

Speakers: GamuT RS3i, JL Audio Dominion Subwoofers

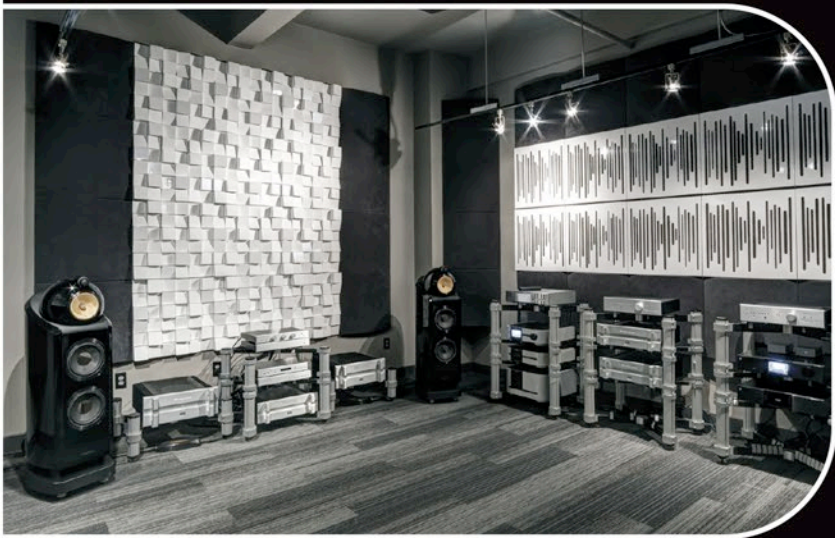
Cables: Jena Labs

Power: Torus AVR 15 Plus, RSA Mongoose, and Cardas Clear power cords

50 BRANDS

8 DEMO ROOMS

1 LOCATION





## Appearances can be deceptive.

Rega products are elegantly simple in appearance. Deceptively so, in fact. Everything is straightforward to setup, easy to use and utterly consistent in performance. Yet underneath that apparent simplicity lies some of the most radical thinking, advanced engineering and innovative materials development you'll find anywhere.



Based on 40 years of continuous research and unwavering commitment to UK manufacturing, everything Rega does is there for one reason alone. Quite simply, if it doesn't sound better, it doesn't happen. (If it does sound better, but is considered 'impossible,' they'll figure out how to do it anyway. There's a very good reason the company's named Rega Research). Rega's view is that hifi's simply a tool for listening to your music. So we think you'll quickly forget all about the technology. But we're 100% sure you'll remember the performance.

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## REVIEW

### PS Audio's Stellar S300

#### A Wallet (and Back) Friendly Amplifier

*By Rob Johnson*

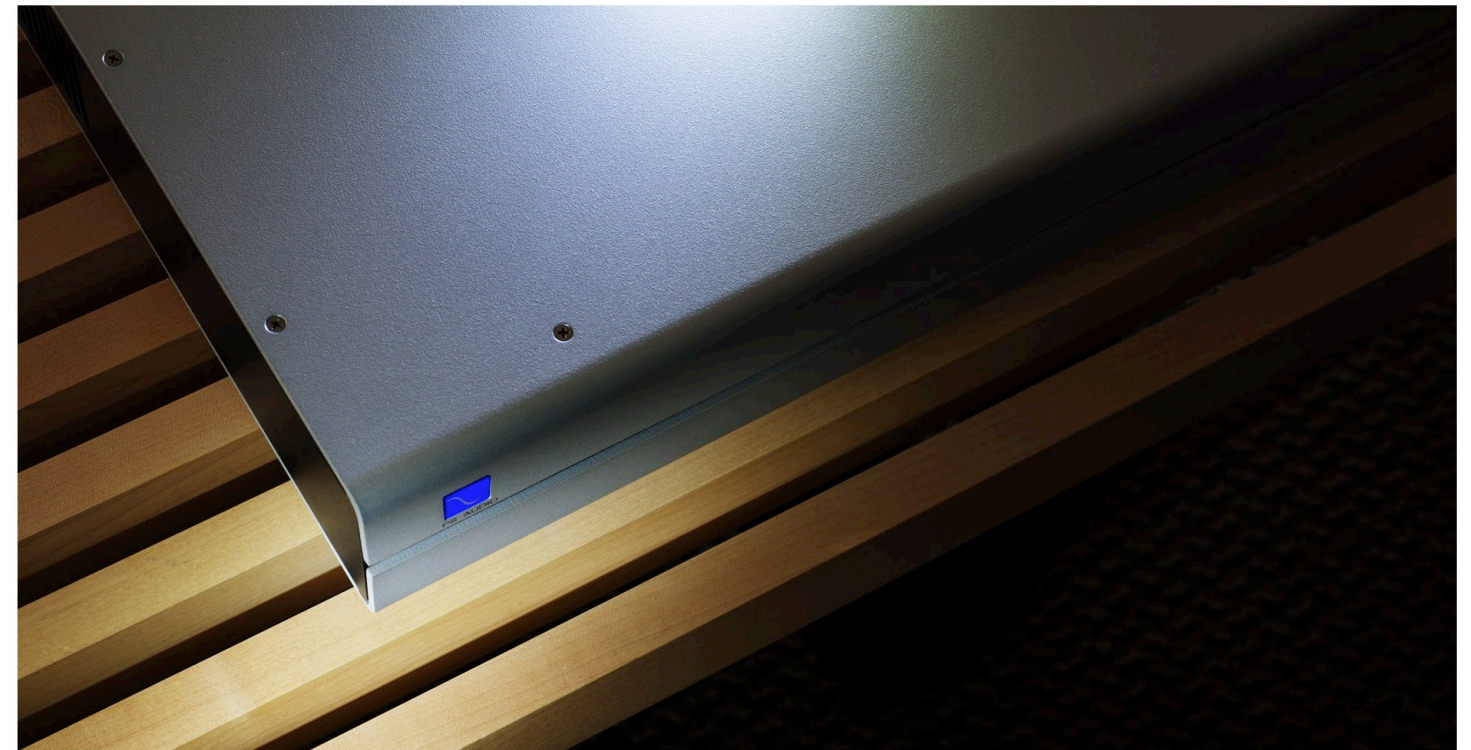
Over the course of 40 years, the team at Colorado-based PS Audio has been extremely busy. The number and type of PS Audio's component offerings constantly evolving over those four decades as new design ideas, approaches, and technologies led to an ever-increasing line of high value components. Today, PS Audio offers preamps, digital audio components, various accessories, and much more. Their latest addition to the stable, the Stellar S300 stereo amplifier, provides terrific audio performance that exceeds expectation of its \$1,499 bargain price.

#### Starting with innovation

The new amp offers a unique circuit design marrying class D and class A circuitry within a single chassis.

PS Audio's takes full advantage of class D circuitry's efficient, high current potential for the output stage, coupling that with the warmer musicality of a class A, MOSFET-based input stage. After significant research and development, PS Audio's Darren Myers engineered the all-new circuitry which the company dubs an "Analog Cell." The result of this challenge is an energy-efficient component without the immense heat and substantial heatsinks which most class A designs require.

As a dual-mono design, each channel of the Stellar S300 has its own amplification stage and power supply.





# In House

The soundtrack of assembling the issue...

## Van Halen - *Van Halen*

Just over the hump, mid issue. Nothing like some classic Van Halen, spinning on the new Cliffwood turntable from VPI.

# Optimized or Compromised?



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**OCTAVE**  
MODERN CLASSIC



Crafted from the highest grade components



Audiophile tone control option



Perfectly optimized optional input modules



## REVIEW: PS Audio Stellar S300

While this approach requires a more complex build with two very distinct signal paths, there are some benefits a listener can expect. First, left and right channels are isolated to avoid potential cross-talk. Secondly, neither side wrestles for its food from a single power supply. Ultimately, the extra effort and cost of a dual-mono design like this has potential to offer more distinct soundstaging and an overall improvement in sonics. The PS Audio amp provides 140 watts per channel into eight-ohm speaker loads, and 300 into four-ohm scenarios, so there's plenty of juice on tap. Those needing added power should consider PS Audio's M700 monoblocks that feature similar electronic topology, but with extra power for more demanding speaker loads.

Unlike many of today's pure class A amplifiers featuring back-straining weight and a multitude of pointy heat sinks, the Stellar and its specialized internals weigh in at a scant 16.5 pounds. The amplifier sports a simplistic and streamlined aluminum body, interrupted only by a few vent holes for cooling on the top and sides. Other than a black "feature stripe" on the front panel created by a carefully and purposefully engineered gap between top and bottom wrap-around panels, the smooth facade is interrupted only by a small, square button on the top left corner to power up the unit from standby. The S300 is modest in overall size, measuring 17" wide by 3" high by 13" deep including connectors protruding from the rear panel.

### Setup

On the back of the amp, users have the option to use either the RCA or XLR inputs for connection to an upstream preamplifier or a digital source with variable output. For speaker connection, a double set of five-way binding posts offers additional flexibility in setup. With the extra posts, you can potentially drive two sets of speakers or bi-wire the Stellar to a single set of speakers.

With speaker wires, interconnects, and a power cord attached snugly to the amp, just flip the power switch on the back and you are almost ready to rock. The last step is pushing the front panel's square, blue LED-illuminated button which brings the amp out of standby. From initial cold start the amp's sound improves a bit once it comes up to full operating temperature, but thanks to the standby mode capability, which keeps the circuitry warm and ready for action, Stellar is prepared to sing in a matter of seconds.

### Listening

At first listen, a few things stand out sonically. While the amp has a seemingly neutral sound, there is a touch of forgiving warmth, slightly taming edgy artifacts residing in music sources or upstream components. However, the S300 will never be accused of a syrupy, or slow presentation. Across the frequency spectrum, it lends the appropriate emphasis without adding to or detracting from the music.

Bass proves another strong point for the Stellar. Ample power reserves keep a firm grip on lower frequency information. While bass is ample, it is not accentuated to an unnatural degree. The S300 exhibits excellent balance of depth, tightness, and punchiness, without an aggravating sensation of the eardrums getting used like tiny punching bags.

## REVIEW: PS Audio Stellar S300

Songs like "Bulls on Parade" by Rage Against the Machine render with the energy of the performance. The S300 is at its best when the music demands more aggressive sonics.

The S300 also handles vocal presentations with grace. Male singers like Lyle Lovett, Beck, Leonard Cohen and Robert Plant are heard with convincing presence and the nuances that define each of their musical styles. During powerful passages from female soprano vocalists, the S300 does never loses its composure. Each singer's voice exhibits with poise, whether the song demands an unbridled crescendo or delicate subtleties, without hard edges.

The S300 handles soundstaging exceptionally well. Its voice offers a sense of spaciousness helping to promote the illusion of your speakers dissapearing. Musical elements drift all around the room but do not bunch up around the speaker bodies, so the musical illusion of a live performance remains preserved.



# REVIEW: PS Audio Stellar S300

As the music dictates it, the amp empowers sound to extend well into the room, and recede beyond the rear wall of the listening space. Even when playing songs with many instruments and vocals distributed across the sound-engineered stage, each element has a well-defined presence both left-to-right and forward-to-rear.

The result of all these strengths gives the S300 a beautiful voice which mates well with the variety of upstream gear we had on hand for testing. For those who plan to spend significantly more than \$1,500 on an amp, yes, considerably more money can buy a higher level of refinement and detail retrieval enabling a more revealing and realistic sound. Heck, some people spend more than \$1,500 on interconnects. Given all of its capability, I am hard-pressed to think of other amplifiers in the S300's price range that do so much, so well. It holds its own among components that exceed its price tag. This PS Audio component deserves a spot on a short list of bargain amps that perform beyond what one should expect for the money.

## Conclusions

After a few weeks with the S300 amplifier in my reference system, I must admit I am smitten with it. I applaud PS Audio's new approach to circuit design bringing together the benefits of both class A and class D technology.

My past frustrations with class D amplification, which never sounded quite natural to me, are diminishing with each passing year thanks to the brilliant engineers and designers who make our audio hobby possible. Companies like PS Audio keep improving ways to marry the lightweight, compact, energy-efficient and linear performance of class D topology with additional innovations that complement it for greater musical enjoyment.



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Very highly recommended”  
SoundStage! Simplifi

“[...] a level of sonic sophistication that so many of the Atom’s competitors lack [...] the Atom is a killer choice!”  
Home theater Review

“The Atom’s sound is reminiscent of Naim’s lineage---smooth and refined.”  
Audiophilia

“The Uniti Atom was worth the wait.”  
Tone Audio





REVIEW: PS Audio Stellar S300

At \$1,499 the PS Audio S300 stereo amplifier offers shockingly good price-performance, quickly earning it the recognition of a 2018 TONEAudio Exceptional Value Award. It is a bargain for all it provides. As with all PS Audio gear, the equipment is designed, built, and tested in their Colorado facility.

They also offer a trade-up program, accepting all kinds of gear. If an older piece of gear is eligible, owners can complete an online form on PSAudio.com, and the team in Colorado will determine a trade in value against a new piece of PS Audio gear. This is an exceptional opportunity which few manufacturers offer. Plus, with a 30-day in-home audition for new equipment from PS Audio, you have very little to lose, and many watts-per-channel to gain!

PS Audio Stellar S300 Amplifier

MSRP: \$1,499  
www.psaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

- Analog SourceSME Model 10 with SME V and Model 10 tonearms.  
Dynavector 17D3 and Denon DL-103R cartridges
- Digital SourcesMac Mini, Roon Music Service, Simaudio MOON 780D DAC, Oppo BDP-103, Van Alstine AVA DAC Mk5
- AmplificationConrad-Johnson ART150
- PreamplifierCoffman Labs G1-B, Oppo HA-1
- SpeakersGamut RS3i, JL Audio Dominion Subwoofers
- CablesJena Labs
- PowerTorus AVR 15 Plus, RSA Mongoose power cords



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# Setlist:

Photo by De Ann Troen

Ms Troen looks back fondly on Keith Urban's extensive performance in the summer of 2016, at the Veterans United Home Loans Amphitheater, in Virginia Beach, VA:

1. Gone Tomorrow (Here Today)
2. Long Hot Summer
3. Break on Me
4. Where the Blacktop Ends
5. Somewhere in My Car
6. Making Memories of Us
7. Blue Ain't Your Color
8. Gettin' In the Way
9. You Gonna Fly
10. Days Go By
11. We Were Us
12. Cop Car
13. Unintended
14. One Call Away
15. Sun Don't Let Me Down
16. The Fighter
17. Put You In a Song
18. You Look Good in My Shirt
19. Somebody Like You
20. Who Wouldn't Wanna Be Me
21. Little Bit of Everything
22. John Cougar, John Deere, John 3:16
23. Wasted Time

encore:

24. Stupid Boy
25. Raise 'Em Up

Watch for more of De Ann's work in future issues...



# Setlist:

Photo by Jeff Dorgay

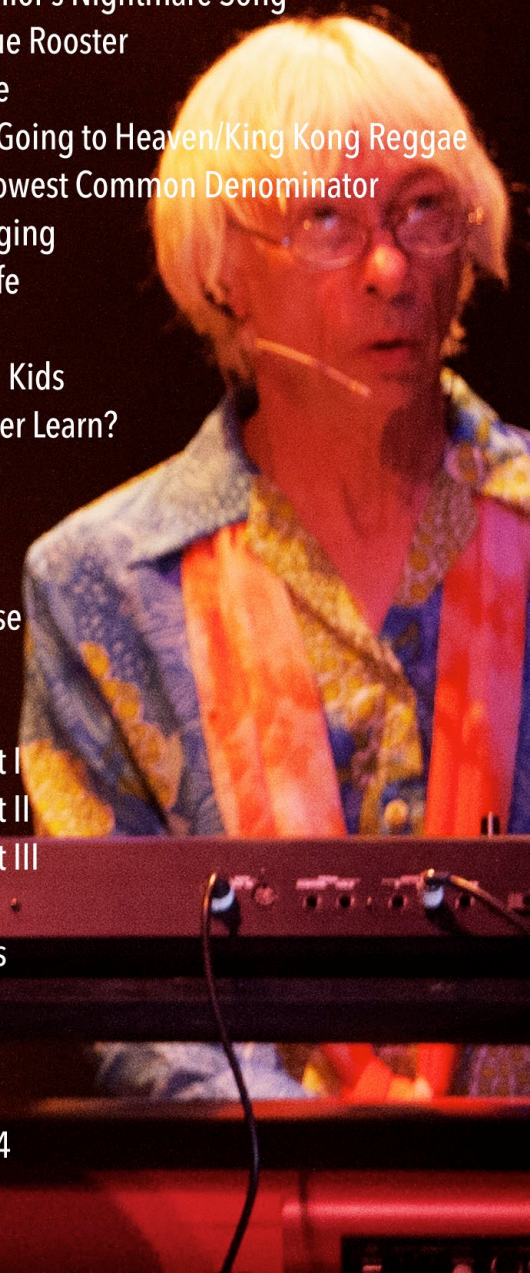


Kasim Sulton and Bobby Strickland share a psychedelic moment during Todd Rundgren's 2011 Todd/Healing tour, with the Cars' Greg Hawkes on keyboards at the Stranahan Theater in Toledo, Ohio.

1. How About a Little Fanfare?
2. I Think You Know
3. The Spark of Life
4. An Elpee's Worth of Toons
5. A Dream Goes on Forever
6. Lord Chancellor's Nightmare Song
7. Drunken Blue Rooster
8. The Last Ride
9. Everybody's Going to Heaven/King Kong Reggae
10. Number 1 Lowest Common Denominator
11. Useless Begging
12. Sidewalk Cafe
13. Izzat Love?
14. Heavy Metal Kids
15. Don't You Ever Learn?
16. Healer
17. Pulse
18. Flesh
19. Golden Goose
20. Compassion
21. Shine
22. Healing, Part I
23. Healing, Part II
24. Healing, Part III
25. Time Heals
26. Tiny Demons

encore:

27. Sons of 1984





# Playlist:

What Our Readers Are Into

Blotted Science -  
Activation Synthesis Theory

Sons of Apollo -  
Alive

Aphex Twin - #9

Spastic Ink -  
Eights is Enough

The Chemical Brothers -  
Setting Son

Massive Attack -  
Voodoo in my Blood

Brian Jones Massacre -  
Acid to Me is no Worse  
Than War

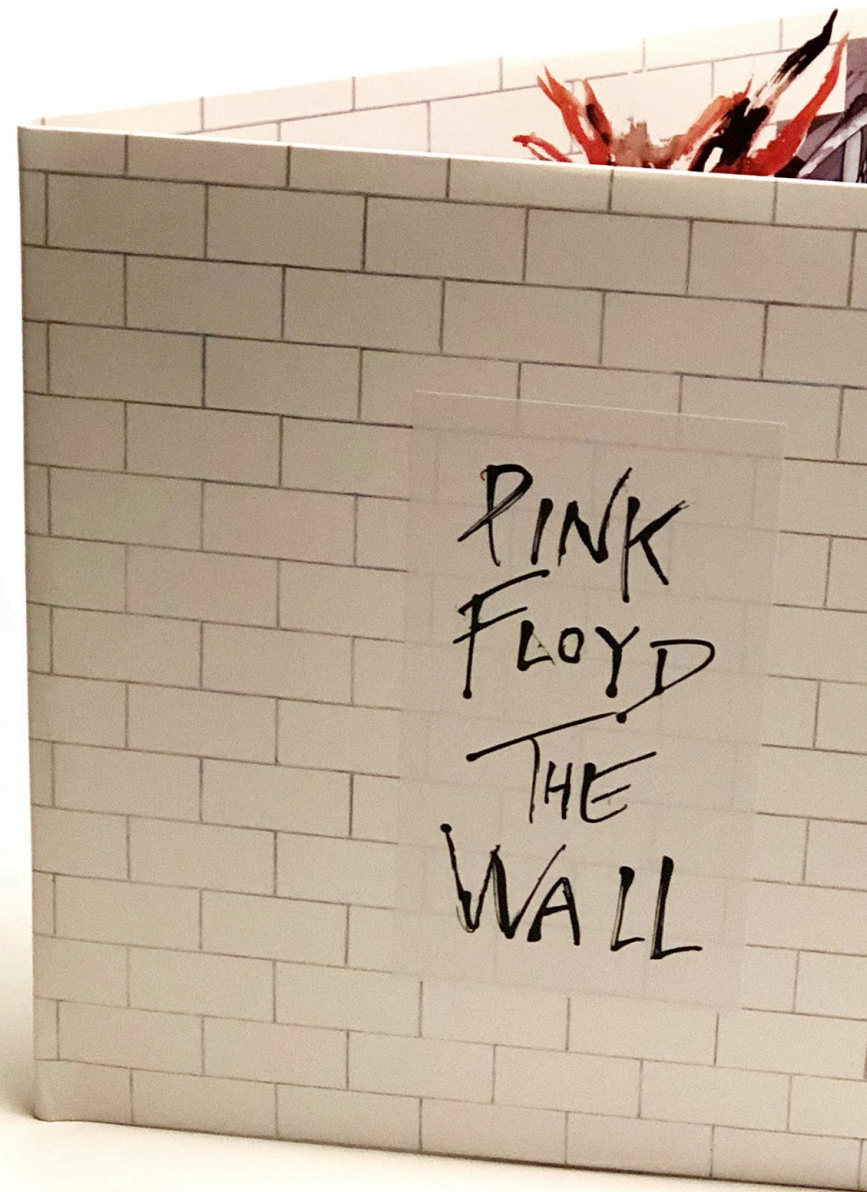
Grimes - Flesh Without  
Blood/Life in the Vivid Dream

Hawkwind - Silver Machine

Pink Floyd - Another Brick  
in The Wall Part Two

Reader Megan Maki has an incredibly wide range of musical taste, and a major vinyl collection as well.

She organizes her record collection by album cover color, claiming she has a photographic memory - impressive!



no. 6 Michigan

## The Gamut Hi-Fi Lobster Chair



The Gamut HI-FI Lobster Chair, designed by Eva Paarmann & Oluf Lund is available to all Gamut, Raidho and Scansonic distributors and dealers.

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## REVIEW

### Moon by Simaudio 240i

A Frank, Dapper, Moon Unit.

By Gautam Raja

"Oh, the volume goes in point-five increments!"

Anyone whose spouse is not a fellow audiophile will recognize the terrifying unpredictability of what will appeal and what will repulse about a new product. My household follows the gendered trope of audiophilia: the husband is the equipment nut, the wife the long-suffering innocent, but secretly nearly as emotionally invested in the gear, and blessed with superior, and far more unbiased hearing.

After 13 years of marriage everything is subtext, so I knew it wasn't literally the half-stop jumps of the gain display; I understood that my wife was enjoying interacting with new MOON by Simaudio

product in our living room. It had passed the hardest test of all.

It's fashionable now for high-end products to have large, clear front displays that are readable from across the room, a reversal of the self-dug branding grave of arcaneness and inaccessibility. Guess what, it works. Those big numbers on the OLED display of the 240i integrated amplifier appeal to non-enthusiasts, as well as to enthusiasts in denial about needing reading glasses.

The inputs have helpful little icons as you switch, whether an image of a TOSLINK connector for Optical, or an RCA pair for Analog. Like its full-chassis siblings from Simaudio, the fascia is bookended by two chunky metal corners like biceps, with a big silver MOON logo on the smooth metal front plate. This is a product that's ruggedly handsome without giving you the sense that its Instagram feed is full of selfies.

(The remote, though, follows that other recurring audiophile theme of being good-looking and well built, but totally unintuitive—asking you to peer at the buttons every time you use it. This first-world problem is of course the fault of television manufacturers whose remotes fall to hand so easily that you can use them blind the first time you pick one up.)





## REVIEW: MOON By Simaudio 240i

As you play with the inputs, a neat little turntable icon appears, and behold, it's Phono! The 240i is very much a product of Today, with a phono stage, a mini-RCA front input for personal audio players, and a phalanx of digital inputs. My vinyl-only buddy shook his head and laughed in a "we've come full circle" manner when I told him that more and more integrated amps come with phono on board. Of no interest to him, but certainly noteworthy to me was that this product has an on-board DAC, presented with so little fanfare. It's instructive to watch the definitions of "preamplifier" and "integrated amplifier" get blurrier as we see units that go well beyond pure line stages with some even able to stream music, wired or wirelessly.

With two optical digital inputs, two RCA S/PDIF, two USB, and an HT bypass, the 240i would be as at home in an entertainment console, as in a stripped down two-channel set up. When I first unpacked it, I connected just my Rega P3-24 turntable, a clean two-unit system happily playing vinyl, while leaving room around it to put down a laptop to play via USB. Once I located an RCA digital cable, I served the 240i a digital stream from a Naim Audio Unitique using Tidal Hi-Fi, Radio Paradise (this internet station plays so much at home it's like the soundtrack to our lives), and music on my NAS which includes Red Book rips and high-resolution PCM files, up to 192-24.

The 240i's DAC can handle a maximum of 24-bit, 192 kHz on all inputs except USB which can process up to 32-bit, 352.8 and 384 kHz. The USB input handles all the bitstream formats, DSD64, 128, and 256. There's no streamer on board, so you can't connect a NAS or hard disk.

As I let the system settle in, I remembered how someone in the car industry once said to me, "There are no more bad cars—just pick the one that talks to you."

Similarly, when dealing with true audio companies such as Simaudio, founded in 1980 in Canada (where it still does all manufacturing), and run by audiophile engineers, there are no bad products. It's really all about "who" the product is, and whether you and the unit in question can be friends.

I hope this doesn't sound like damning with faint praise, because that's not the intention, but the 240i is an utterly inoffensive amplifier to bring home. I suspect Simaudio must be tired of seeing the word "laidback" in reviews, but that is how it presents itself initially. After a while it's clear that the amp is not any less detailed or fast or musical for it. It's just that it has an ease and balance that lets it come in and find a home for itself, like the houseguest whose stories are just risque enough to be hugely entertaining, but won't cause Grandma June to choke on her dumplings. During early listening sessions it's tempting to plan jokes about "polite Canadians", but on deeper acquaintance with the 240i, a reviewer can't, in good conscience, continue with this line of thought.

And so, music with the 240i is easy to listen to, with the space, detail, and low-end depth and control expected from a high-end product, but also with the energy and propulsiveness so many of us enjoy about good hi-fi. The highs especially have a beguiling, liquid quality without being overly warm. Long-time Simaudio fans describe the brand's sound as "lightning fast", and it's amazing how the 240i carries that legacy without the sonic sounding like it's being rushed along on a knife edge, as many "fast" entry-level electronics do. It's the sort of system you can leave playing all day—it works beautifully in the background—and is more than capable of serving up the involvement needed for critical listening.

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## REVIEW: MOON By Simaudio 240i

In a two-channel home theatre set up, I found it easy to forget about the sound, and become immersed in the action—this is good, solid work with no showboating. The source was a cheap Sony Blu-ray player, with two old Naim Intro 2 floorstanders. When I did something I haven't done in a long time, which is pull out my storage folders and put on some CDs, I was pleasantly surprised enough to keep this set-up playing for a few evenings. It delivered enough PRaT for even older Naim fans.

For more critical listening on the main system, I've become used to the 170W or so my T+A Elektroakustik power amp can swing (rated very conservatively), and how well it plays with my T+A TCD 210 S loudspeakers. So while the 240i's 50 W into 8 Ohms sounds a little light with these largish floorstanders, this "Little Integrated That Could" left me with a keen desire to listen to its bigger relatives, notably Simaudio's power amps from its Evolution series, ideally the 860A, but more realistically, the 760A.

Having said that, I know so many people who would find the 240i more than amplifier enough. It's for convivial living rooms that are designed for human beings first, and draped cables, audio treatments, and racks a distant tenth. I can picture exactly which friends I would unhesitatingly recommend this product to.

## REVIEW: MOON By Simaudio 240i

We all have them—the music fans who would love a good system, but seem to never get round to graduating from a dock, or who keep switching their way through generations of big-brand multi-channel receivers.

I'd be especially interested to see this amp in a crowded space with a turntable, TV, gaming console, video disc player, streaming media player, laptop with USB, and occasional houseguests' phones or portable players. This is the kind of family-room hustle the MOON seems to be designed to fit into, and then hold its own with "proper" sound. The 240i may be no-nonsense and easy to use, but you could never bestow upon it that damning audiophile adjective: "lifestyle."

The MOON by Simaudio 240i offers you the sense that instead of merely whittling away at more expensive products in the line to descend to entry level, Simaudio has made "entry level" a design goal to aspire to.

### The MOON By Simaudio 240i

MSRP: \$2,100

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





# In House

The soundtrack of assembling the issue...

## DEVO - *Freedom of Choice*

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# Technics

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Hi-Fi Heaven, WI	Glenn Poor's Audio/Video, IL	Absolute Audio, NM	Audio Center, FL
Fidelis A/V, NH	J-Corder, WA	USA Tube Audio, AZ	
Value Electronics, NY	Sunny Components, CA	AVWORX, UT	

technics.com

## REVIEW

### Wharfedale's Reva 2

**Monitors that  
make for great  
fun.**

*By Mark Marcantonio*

It's a great time to be part of the budget speaker experience. The past five years has seen a waterfall effect of speaker advances making it into entry-level offerings. Bang for the buck has never been better, with upstarts and legendary companies an equal part of this wave. Wharfedale's Reva series is right in the middle of this movement.

The Reva-2 at 14"h x 8"w x 10"d, is a mid-size bookshelf in a teardrop shape similar to the ERA/Peachtree D5. The two-way, bass reflex design includes an uncommon bottom-firing bass port. A base "plate" is mounted with a quarter inch gap in all directions that allows for the low frequencies to escape. Pushing the air is a 4.5"

glass fiber driver mated with a 1.25" cloth dome tweeter, crossed over at 2khz. The dual, side angle, 5-way binding posts make for easy tightening, especially those of us with sausage fingers. The review pair came in a stunning low-luster light walnut veneer. Other finishes include rosewood, piano black, and white.

Give the Reva-2's a good fifty hours to fully break in the woofer surrounds; the wait will be worth it, with the bass going a bit deeper and firmer than when they first were unpackaged. Nominally rated at 8 Ohms, the 86db sensitivity rating is telling; you'll want a bit of power to get the Reva-2's really moving.





## REVIEW: Wharfedale Reva 2

The PS Audio Sprout in for review lacked the necessary grunt, yet the PrimaLuna DiaLogue Premium HP integrated proves a first rate match, as was a vintage Adcom GFA-535ii amplifier, and Peachtree nova150 class D integrated. Probably count on needing about 70wpc minimum to really rock.

The impact of the bottom-firing port comes quick and hard with John Moreland's balls to the wall bar room sound in "Sallisaw Blue". The driving bass is matched with the forward growling, close-to-the-mic vocals. "Old Wounds" with its Springsteen-esque arrangement the Reva-2's avoids muddying the sound, though the tambourine is missing its ringing decay. The entire *Big, Bad Luv* album really dishes up all the Reva-2's strengths, good news for those that enjoy solid, driving rock, club, and country music. As this review started during Christmas break, I began acoustic listening with George

Winston's classic album December. The Reva-2's recreate very clear piano tones with only a hint of ring. Decay is a bit limited, though not blatantly flat. What the Reva-2's capture so well is the intensity level of keystrokes, and "Color/Dance" shows proper tonal energy. As a result, you may find the most musical match with tube amplification, or a solid state amplifier slightly on the warm side tonally.

The Reva-2's prove easy to place in my 9'x12' listening room, and I found harmony at 34" out from the back wall, and 21" inches from the sides on sand-filled Celestion si stands with slight toe-in. The imaging from Dire Straits "Making Movies" expands about a foot beyond the outside of the speakers.



Hearing Mark Knopfler counting for the lead drop-in at the beginning of "Espresso Love" demonstrates how clear the midrange sounds.

Digging into Tidal's classical library, the duet of Andras Schiff and Yuuko Shiokawa's performance of Bach Sonata #3 on the Reva-2's treats the listener to the intimate sound of the violin and piano in the concert hall.

For a sub-thousand dollar pair of speakers to have this level of nuance is indeed special. The violin is nicely detailed with a hint of glow. Once again the Reva-2's reflect both the soft as well as the muscular moments of the piece.

At \$999 a pair, some compromises are always made, but the tiny Wharfedales have few. If the Reva-2's have one shortcoming, it's the slight bump in the midrange, causing vocals to project a bit forward. I found them a bit shouty on certain tracks, with the occurrences noticeable more often with female vocals. I'll happily take this limitation over the soupy vocal mess that many budget speakers offer.

All said and done, the Wharfedale Reva-2s provide a wide frequency response and excellent detail retrieval, though not the last word. They will fill the room if fed with enough power, they are a ton of fun.

**The Wharfedale Reva-2**  
\$999/pair

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





# Playlist:

## What Our Readers Are Into

Art of Noise-  
The James Bond Theme

Alice Cooper- Burning Our Bed

Don Henley-  
The Last Worthless Evening

Joni Mitchell - Ladies Man

Tom Petty- The Apartment Song

Roachford - Cuddly Toy

David Lee Roth-  
Just Like Paradise

Run D.M.C-  
You Talk Too Much

Whitesnake- Love Ain't no Stranger

XTC- Earn Enough for Us

Yes- It Can Happen



And for our last playlist, we come back to the TONE studio... While many consider the 80s to be a dark period in popular music, it was one of my favorites!

Here's a few quirky, totally (and not so totally) 80s tracks.

no. 7 Washington

## When super size won't do.

Getting great sound in a smaller space requires extra placement and planning. Large speakers usually won't do, components often need to be stealthier and neighbors in close proximity might not appreciate your need to rock out at all hours of the day and night.

We're here to help those living in smaller spaces find solutions that will keep smiles on everyone's faces.

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AudiophileApartment.com Facebook.com/AudiophileApartment



The new 800 Series Diamond didn't get better by chance. It got better by change. 868 changes to be precise.

**Bowers & Wilkins**

bowers-wilkins.com



## REVIEW

### Exogal ION PowerDAC

**Removing the  
barrier between  
you and the  
music**

*By Jeff Dorgay*

It's been said that first impressions are often telling. Listening to Miles Davis' *Tutu*, through the Exogal Ion/Comet for the first time, is breathtaking. Audio manufacturers are famous (or maybe infamous?) for claiming they've built a different mousetrap. Their website claims an amplifier "that's the fastest on the market, revealing detail you've never heard before." While their technology is new, the result is not only excellent, but it reminds me of the \$225,000/pair Boulder 3000 series monoblocks: open, honest, neutral (or natural if you prefer) and yes, fast. They are in good company. The Exogal PowerDAC is one of the most intriguing power amplifiers I've yet heard, but there's only one way you can get it - by using their Comet DAC as a front end. Not that it's a bad thing. The Comet DAC will set you back about \$3,500

and the ION, about the same. Together, this mighty pair occupies a tiny footprint (the stack is only about 5" x 7" x 11") yet decode any kind of digital file you have in your library, offer an analog input and produces 100 watts of power per channel into an 8-ohm load, doubling into 4 ohms.

In case you missed it, we reviewed the Comet here, with enthusiastic results. According to Exogal's Jeff Haagenstad, when using the Comet only, it acts like a regular DAC with analog inputs, but when pairing it with the ION, "The Comet takes the digital data, calculates how high or low to drive the ION's speaker power supplies and this controls the volume. The Comet processes digital audio data in the time and frequency domain, leaving the ION to process it in the power domain."





## REVIEW: Exogal ION PowerDAC

### Is it a fit?

100 watts per channel will power most speakers, and after trying a gaggle of speakers from vintage Acoustat ESLs to the incredibly efficient Klipsch Forte IIIs. Every speaker passed with flying colors and no change in amplification character. Unless you have dreadfully inefficient speakers, the ION should be up to the task.

The pressing question is, do you want to switch DACs from what you're using now, and are you a primarily digital listener? The Comet does have an analog input; however, it does convert the analog signal to digital before sending it through the amplification chain the way Devialet does.

(This is only meant as a comparison for process - Devialet uses a completely different architecture than Exogal) The most maniacal analog enthusiasts will freak out at this, but those with a modest to reasonable analog front end probably won't notice.

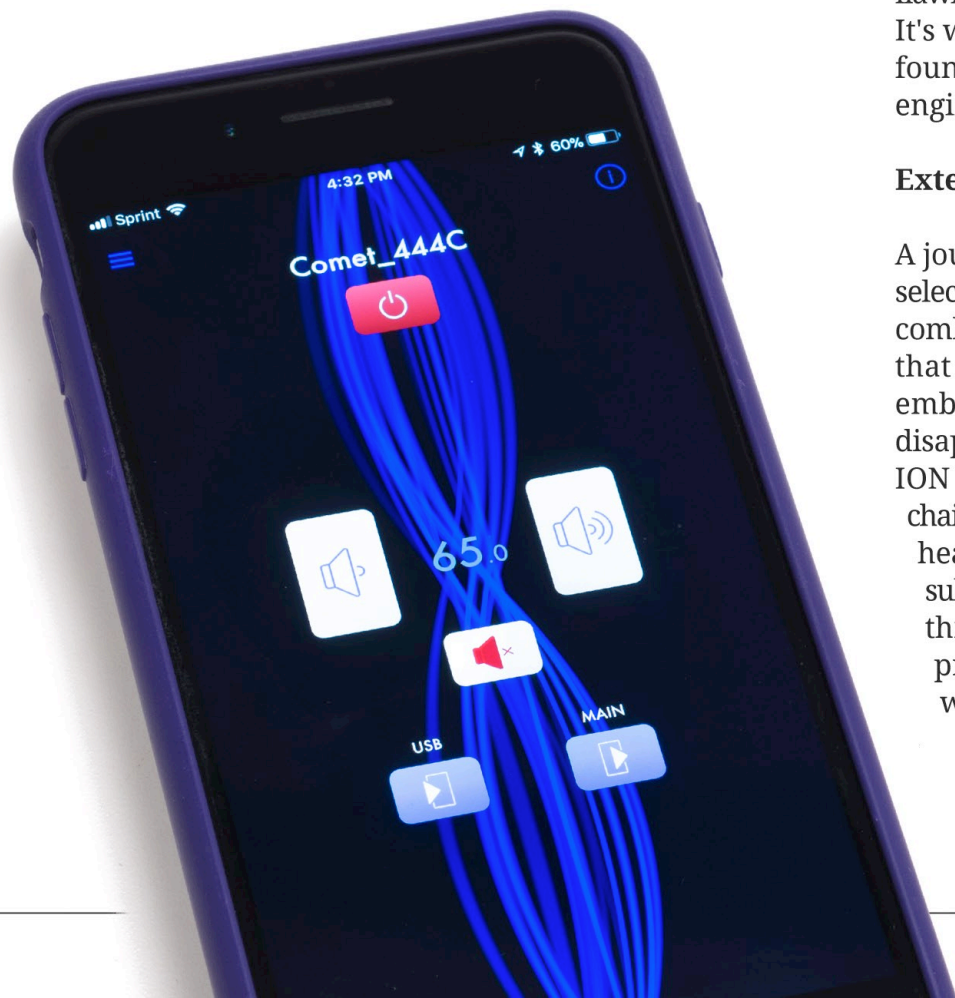
With four different digital inputs, the Comet/ION pair is 99% perfect for those using only digital as a source. That last 1% would come from being a Roon end point, but that's a minor detail.

Setup couldn't be easier. Plug the Comet into the ION via the supplied short HDMI cable, turn it on, install the app on your smartphone and roll. The HDMI cables are only used as a way to connect the boxes; this is not an HDMI audio input, so proceed accordingly.

The Exo remote app starts with the volume level at 65 out of a maximum of 100, to save you from yourself, and most of the action happens between about 75 and 100, in half number increments. The mute button is super cool, as it just takes you to a muted sound level, not all the way to zero. Volume is controlled in the digital domain, and works flawlessly, with no loss of detail at low volume. It's worth noting that Exogal engineer and founder Jim Kinne was one of the early engineers at Wadia digital.

### Extended listening

A journey through a wide range of musical selections reveals no anomalies in the Exogal combo. If you're on board with the concept that this pair will neither subtract nor embellish your collection, you'll find no disappointments, and the level of detail the ION offers will keep you in the listening chair for hours on end. We certainly haven't heard everything, yet we haven't heard a sub-\$8,000 DAC/Amp combination revealing this much musical detail. If that's the presentation you're after, the ION will woo you in short order.



# D-4.1

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aesthetic  
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# REVIEW: Exogal ION PowerDAC

From the growling synth bass in Neneh Cherry's *Raw Like Sushi* to the lightening fast licks in Stanley Clark's *If This Bass Could Only Talk*, this amplifier delivers plenty of fast, clean, powerful LF response. The aforementioned Stanley Clark track is an excellent showcase of the ION because it keeps the bass line anchored in place, full of detail, while keeping the footfalls of the tap dancing going on in the background full of life and action. This is a pretty incredible little amplifier.

Though this is a digital amplifier, it is not another chip-based, class D design with all of their tonal downfalls. Upper registers are clean, clear and unfatiguing. Acoustic instruments are reproduced properly, and those loving densely packed vocal records will be excited as well. Falling back on our favorite Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young tracks proves helpful as these guys all sing at a similar volume level, making it tougher to discern their individuality played through a lesser component.

Finally, the three-dimensional sound field created by this amplifier is immersive, another area that digital amplification usually falls flat. Piano and violins feel right, feel alive, full of attack and decay, with the necessary amount of texture. Moving the Exogal pair to the main listening room while finishing a review of the \$45k/pair Sonus faber Il Cremonese speakers made for a room-filling sound that extends well beyond the speaker boundaries.

## A problem solver

The only downside to the Exogal ION is that you have to use it with their DAC, so that may or may not be a fit for you. But if you are looking to upgrade your current system, or build a new one offering high power and a minimal footprint that won't break the bank or your back, the Exogal ION/Comet pair is fantastic. Pair it with your favorite pair of speakers and digital music device and call it good. \$7,800 never sounded so good.

Though Exogal is relatively new to the scene as a company, their backbone is blue chip, with nearly 100 years of combined experience.

Their products are made in Minnesota, and the quality is first rate. Haagenstad hints that "there is more to come" from the ION, so don't be surprised if this little amp than can, ends up able to do even more. Stay tuned.

Even if the Exogal folks are just teasing us, based on what's available right now, we give the ION/Comet our highest recommendation. This is an excellent product.

## The Exogal ION PowerDAC

MSRP: \$3,800

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

## Peripherals

Digital Sources	dCS Rossini Transport, OPPO 205 transport, Mac Mini
Analog Source	VPI Classic 1, Audio Research PH3SE, Hana SL cartridge
Speakers	Focal Sopra no.2, Klipsch Forte III, Magnepan .7, Quad 2812, Sonus faber Il Cremonese

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# Dealers That Mean Business:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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# NAGRA

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Canada dealers: Audio Eden, Toronto ON | Element Acoustics, Vancouver BC | Filtronique, Montreal QC



# Dealers That Mean Business - Listings

**Sarasota, Florida - Suncoast Audio**  
www.suncoastaudio.com  
7353 International Place, Unit 309  
Sarasota, Florida 34240      941.932.0282



**New York City, New York - Noho Sound & Stereo**  
www.nohosound.com  
62 Cooper Square  
New York, New York 10003



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**Wauwatosa, Wisconsin - Ultra Fidelis**  
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**Portland, Oregon - Echo Audio**  
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1015 SW Washington Street  
Portland, Oregon 97205      888.248.3246



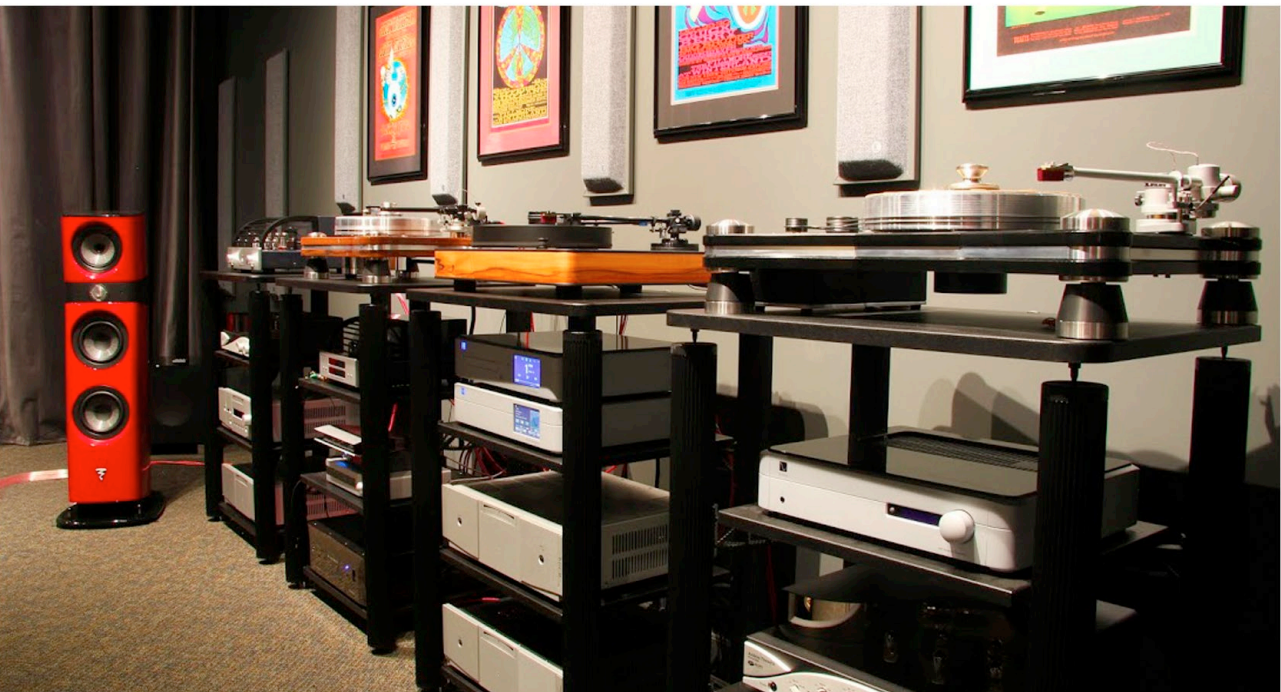


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San Francisco, California 415.614.1118



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2058 Wright Avenue  
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**Vancouver ,Canada - HiFi Centre**  
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433 Carrall Street  
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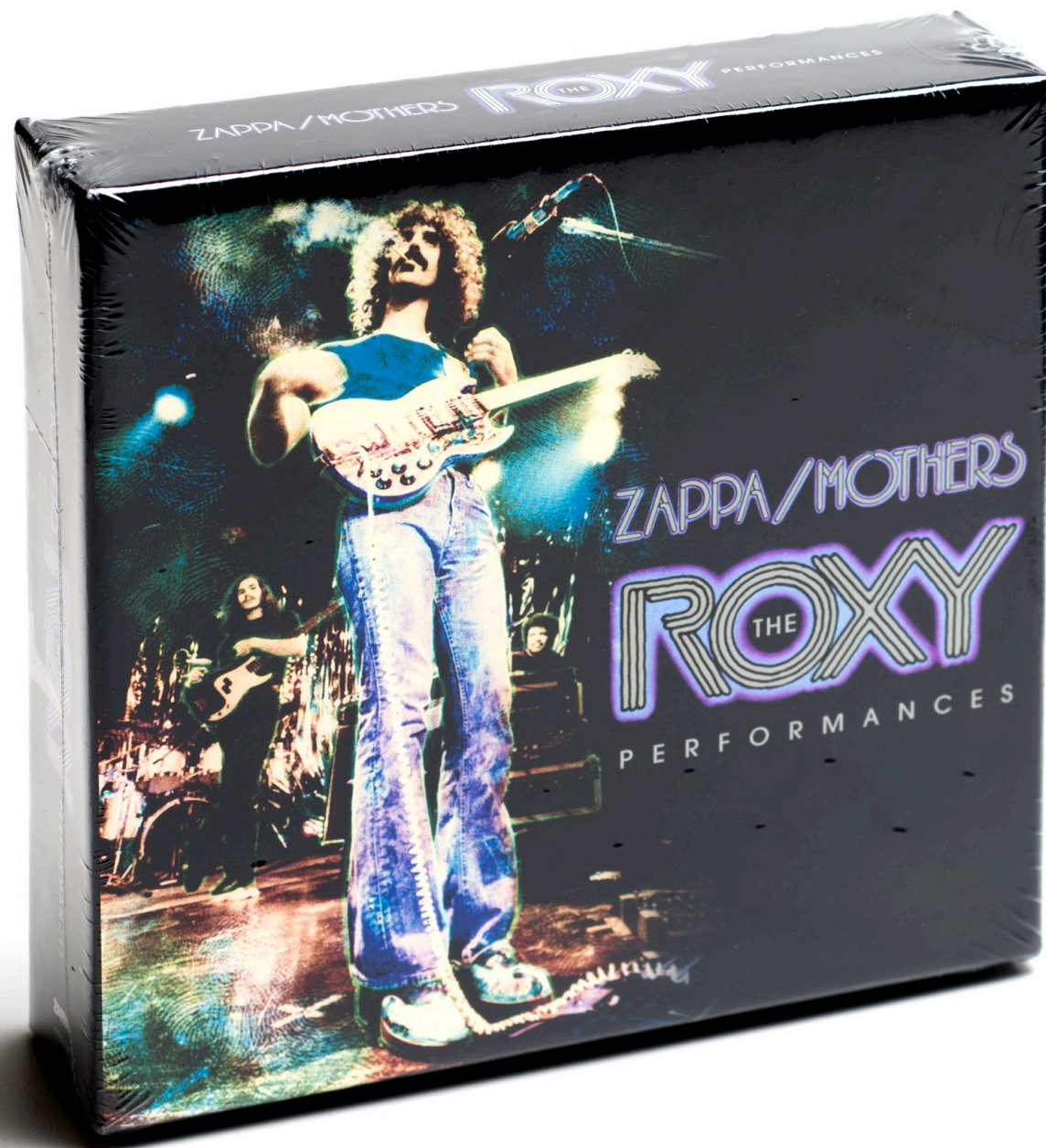
# In House

The soundtrack of assembling the issue...

## Frank Zappa - *The Roxy Performances*

Ok, that's a wrap. I hope you enjoyed the issue. I'm finally going to peel the shrink wrap off of this Zappa box set and chill - till we start the next issue!

Peace.



*Sonus faber*

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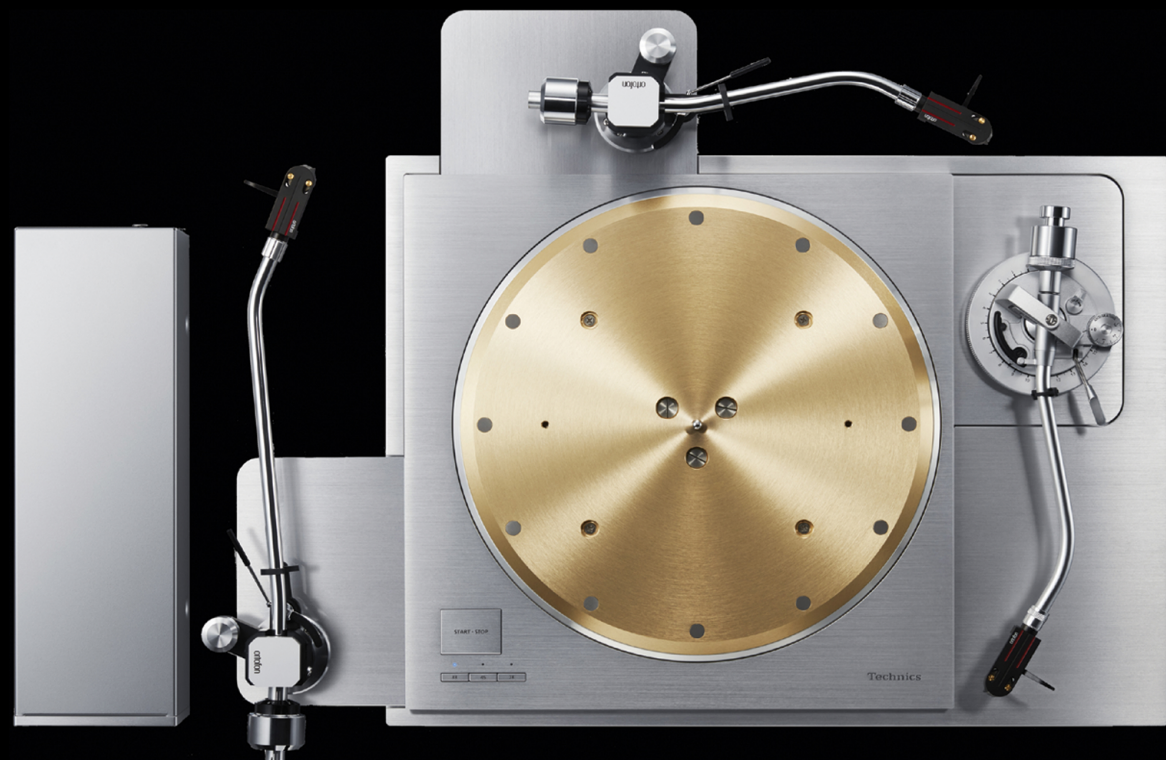
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