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Kula Shaker

Clare Teal Performs a Tribute to Ella Fitzgerald John Coltrane - Blue Train Reel-to-Reel Miles Davis - Kind of Blue **HiFi REVIEWS**

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INTRODUCTION AND MANIFESTO FOR CHANGE

When we launched HiFi PiG eleven years ago we never expected, or even intended it to be quite the phenomenon that it has become. Without blowing our own collective trumpet, we think we shook up the world of audio (just a bit) in our own inimitable and somewhat disruptive little way.

Of course, others have followed and when that happens the need to differentiate becomes ever more important for us – we have never wanted to be "just another" or a pastiche of something else that has gone before.

We don't want to try too hard to create a phony identity, we want HiFi PiG to have its own authentic "voice", and for it to have our personality stamped all over it.

Sure, we have our detractors – we know this very well - and we are well aware that we upset a few of the old guard and those that plough the same tired furrow simply by being here and doing what we do. And, when we looked back over the last few years of HiFi PiG, we saw that we were becoming a little bit like the institutions that we disliked so much in the first place...and like Groucho Marx said "Who wants to live in an institution?".

Over the lockdown period we launched a monthly newsletter called "The HiFi PiG Selection Box" filled with links to movies, art, exhibitions, music, and more that we found interesting and thought others would find stimulating. It's proved to be very popular with readers!

ENTER "NOT BORING BY HIFI PIG".

HiFi and audio are and always will be the core of what we do, but there is more to life than reviews and news about audio equipment and we want to introduce new content to this publication that we personally want to read about and that we hope YOU will find invigorating and interesting.

We have invested in new writers that aren't from the audio-world, but do have a great love of music and we hope that you will find their articles over the coming years interesting and, importantly, we'd like to think that they will take you somewhat out of your comfort zone.

Yes, of course we still have all the usual stuff that you would have previously expected to find in the HiFi PiG Magazine, but there's now more...much more. And more to come in the weeks to follow with more announcements from HiFi PiG.

Our other aim with this slight departure from the norm is to attract new readers to HiFi PiG that may have an interest in culture and music but not in audio. The hope is that these new readers will pick up their virtual copy of Not Boring By HiFi PiG for the broad range of articles on offer and take more of an interest in the HiFi.

This new audience is what the industry repeatedly talks about wanting to attract, and we believe that this is how we can best do it!

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Stuart and Linette Smith

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DIGITAL TRANSFORMER TO POWERFUL PERFORMER





THIS ISSUE'S TEAM



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LINETTE SMITH is a self-confessed Old Skool raver who still shakes a glo stick to banging house and techno, though these days she goes to bed a lot earlier.

She has a penchant for bright colours and large loudspeakers, and if the loudspeakers are brightly coloured then so much the better.

She is a firm believer that life is way too short for boring HiFi.

Can often be found dancing in the kitchen while Stu is DJing, or chilling with the cats at HiFi PiG Towers. Lin loves travel, the beach in the winter and going to HiFi Shows around the world. She dislikes mansplainers and coconut. SARA VALLE-MARTINEZ is a London-based writer and journalist. She was born in Spain, where she started writing fiction when she was a kid. That somehow evolved into writing about real life and people. Sara's love for music started when she was a teen and she couldn't get enough of emo and pop punk.

You can probably find her at a live show, writing the next chapter of one of her novels while jamming to her favourite songs, or travelling (most of the time to catch a gig). She also loves dogs, supermarkets, the sea, tattoos, and how people's eyes light up when they talk about their passions.

JANINE ELLIOT is HiFi journalist but has also written on subjects as diverse as cars to tropical fish.

She has worked in the HiFi industry for a number of companies in research, design and writing of product manuals.

She spent 25 years at the BBC as a sound engineer and now teaches music in schools. As a musician she has played keyboards and guitar with a number of famous musicians and produced her own albums and music for film.

She is a keen collector of reel to reel machines and has an excellent knowledge of classic audio and HiFi.

THIS ISSUE'S TEAM







BAI IBRAHIM CHAM aka Rahim is a hip-hop head from The Gambia, smiling coast of west Africa.. Born and raised in the tropics, Rahim started his journey with music in the early 1990s. Inspired by the likes of Coolio, Snoop Dogg, Salt & Pepper and Method Man, Rahim formed his 1st rap group in 2001 called Cali Deep Roots before quitting rap and co-founding the Cypher in 2012, a hip hop platform that showcases young talents through its 5 elements.

Rahim served as the president of the cypher for 5 years while hosting the popular entertainment talk show TopNotch Convo on national television of The Gambia for six years. Rahim now lives in Edinburgh UK aiming to broaden his networks in the entertainment industry.

ALAN McINTOSH has been a fan of music for over 40 years and with a couple of decades behind the decks and more fiddling in a home studio, Alan is a self-confessed jazz addict, lover of electronica, prog rock and all in between as long as it's good!

Based in Glasgow , working in the global technology sector, Alan is passionate about travel, HiFi, vinyl, mountaineering and great single malt.

Over the last 5 years he's fallen hard in love with open reel tape and is increasingly immersed in splicing and rewinding tails out tape! When not writing about music he also blogs about mountaineering and the great outdoors.

JOHN SCOTT has had an interest in music and the things that play music for literally as long as he can remember.

Even at an early age he showed a precocious knack for HiFi tweakery, warming one of his mother's records (Walk Tall by Val Doonican, if you must know) in front of the fire before playing it. He remembers this well as it was on the same day that he learned that vinyl warps quite badly when subjected to heat.

John combines his love of music and HiFi with another life-long passion, photography and has thousands of blurry photos of people playing music in the dark to prove it. His less-blurry, better-lit photos often accompany his live music reviews for HiFi PiG and can also be seen on his Upstage Photography Facebook page.

THIS ISSUE'S TEAM







OSCAR STEWART was born to a former punk and music has been in Oscar's life since he left the womb.

A 2000's emo kid at heart with a love for post-hardcore and pop-punk, Oscar can be found at gigs when not working or writing reviews

Working in customer service within the audio industry, he has over 12 years experience reviewing headphones and portable audio.

At home his system consists of streaming, vinyl and CD through headphones and HiFi.

Based in Worthing and born in Brighton, he can also be found tinkering with vintage HiFii, mountain biking or behind the lens of a camera DAN WORTH (Affectionally known as Cider PiG) got his first HiFi when he was 12 when his Dad found a Technics receiver in a skip, repaired it and gave it to Dan.

Dan's always been a great fan of art and spent his teens painting, drawing, and listening to 90s pop. He later went on to study fine art and graphic design, after which he worked for local newspapers and magazines.

Dan's music tastes are hugely varied but he says he has a passion for acoustic and vocals and after a busy day he loves to unwind with the simplest of music, stripped down to its very essentials.

Dan was an early adopter of computer audio and continues to delve into getting the best he can from any system he has. **STUART SMITH** is the founder of HiFi PiG and has a long and chequered history in music.

Once a radio DJ on the Sony Radio Station of the Year (1992) Wear FM hositng the world-infamous Midnight Train To Doomsville show, he's put on loads of parties, played loads of clubs, owned a record shop, and played in dub reggae band Roughneck Sounds.

He's fairly consumed by music and the things he plays it on.

When not reviewing kit for HiFi
PiG, he can be seen and heard
behind the decks of his home
DJ setup playing a wide range of
house and techno.



















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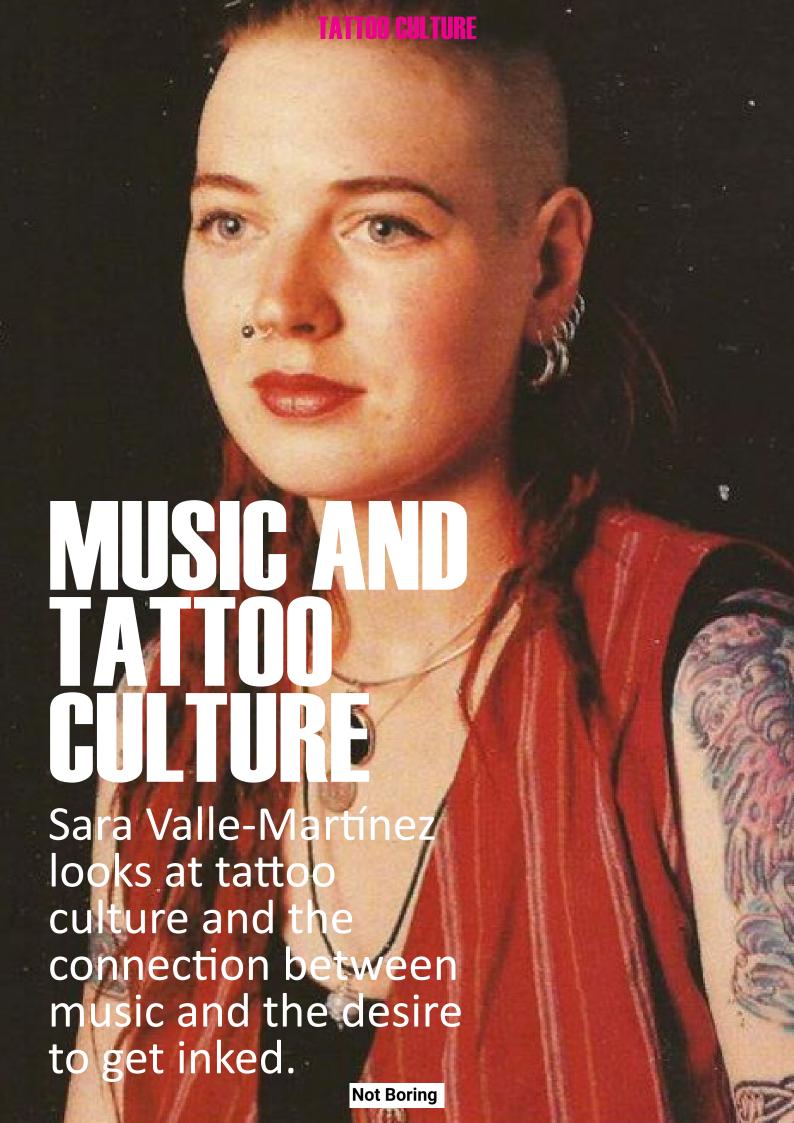
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DIVIDING AUDIOPHILES SINCE 1982







bet if you close your eyes and picture a rock star, some of the first things that come to mind are tussled hair, drugs, booze, fags, and worn-out jeans or leather trousers. You probably also visualised a bunch of tattoos — maybe a skull, roses, or some kind of female looking all dangerous and sultry. Well, let me tell you a lot has changed but tattoos and music still very much go hand in hand.

When we think about tattoos and music, it's not easy to pinpoint who the pioneer was. Janis Joplin got a wrist piece by legendary artist Lyle Tuttle in 1970, a few months before her passing, and she was pretty candid about it when she said she "just wanted some decoration". The tattoo has been replicated a million times since then and probably that's where the fad was born – that is, getting replicas of your favourite musicians' tats.

Obviously, Joplin wasn't the only one and Axl Rose, Ozzy Osbourne, and James Hetfield are a few other examples. You've probably seen a tattoo of Johnny Cash's or Keith Richards's face on someone's arm. See? It was there even before you knew it. Musicians get tattooed and music fans itch to do the same, although there's still some pushback from society that might scare a few. For musicians it may very well be a commitment to their craft and for fans to their love for it.

But tattoos are not reserved to a specific music style or urban tribe. Hip hop artists and the much frowned upon (by music purists) reggaeton artists are covered in tattoos from head to toe. One thing rappers Nas, Lil Wayne, and Tupac have in common is their love for ink. They share the same love with reggaeton superstar Maluma, even though their track lists are quite different. So why is this connection between music and tattoos almost symbiotic?

For me tattoos have always been intrinsically linked to music. I don't remember exactly where my love for music started. Maybe it was when my uncle gave me his small red Casio keyboard, or the afternoons that I spent watching MTV, or when I became obsessed with a famous singer from Venezuela called Carlos Baute when I was twelve. Maybe it started much earlier, but I know for sure it went in full bloom when I discovered Green Day. I was sitting in a pizza parlour, staring up at the TV, watching these men covered in green goo. While Billie Joe strummed his guitar to the rhythm of American Idiot

I just sat there, gawping, thinking to myself: "Who are these men covered in ink and wearing eyeliner and orthopaedic-looking shoes? I want to be like them."

Tattoos were something I was meant to dislike. My uncle had his initials tattooed in a quite manky fashion and my father had a nautical star tattoo that he got removed in the early stages of laser removal. The smell of burning flesh and disinfectant – not a jolly picture. Definitely not in my plans. But this trio changed the way I saw ink.

"A few friends and I had a small boat and we all decided to get a tattoo to symbolise our friendship," said my dad when I called him. He drew the design on his arm with a biro and one of his friends handpoked it with a needle. "I regretted it as soon as I got it. Back then people who had tattoos were kind of thugs. So was I, I guess," he chuckled.

For most people, tattoos are a form of self-expression or little souvenirs to remember someone, a place, or a memory. Mostly it all boils down to expressing yourself and sharing who you are with the world. Some claim it's a little bit narcissistic, but others see it as an anarchic move; a way of reclaiming your own body.

"I suppose everyone has their own reasons, some superficial, fashion-led; others deeper and more personal. When I got my first, tattoos were much less commonplace than they are today and still had real resonances of 'outsiderdom'. I knew I didn't want to fit back into the life I had had before and so the symbolism of the act of getting tattooed was important. It was a sign (to me, more than anyone else) that there was no way back," said Mike Chopra-Gant, who works as a Senior Lecturer in Media, Culture and Communications in a university in London. He's also a photographer and has a past that makes it obvious that the connection between music and tattoos is there, as he played in bands that made Reading and Leeds Festival.

He got his first tat at Sunset Strip Tattoo in Hollywood in 1989 by the legendary British inksmith Dennis Cockell, who passed away in late 2022. In his time, Cockell tattooed Steve Jones of the Sex Pistols, English punk rock band 999, Adam Ant, Bananarama, rockabilly legends The Stray Cats and many other icons of the rock n roll fraternity who came through his studio doors.

Chopra-Gant decided to get tattooed by Cockell because of his clear relationship with music. Back then Cockell was well-stablished in the music scene, as he had begun to attract his rock-star-crowd when he opened his 265A Finchley Road studio in the late 1960s. Chopra-Gant was in California trying to start a new life and exploring what the music industry could offer.

"Suffice to say, I made some very big mistakes when I was still very young, the upshot of which were that — in 1989 — I found myself at the age of 27, divorced, completely alone in the world and in a job I hated. I'd started to have some contact with a guy I had been in school with. He'd chosen the path of 'sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll' right from the start and by this time had achieved a certain level of success: among other things he'd been bass player for The Cult and had guested on bass for part of a Guns N' Roses tour. At the time he was living in LA recording with his new band. On an impulse one day I called him up and asked if I could go and stay with him.

"I don't really know what I expected from the trip, but I suppose there was a sense of casting off a life I'd lived that didn't fit any more. Something changed inside me on that trip and on the final day I went with my friend to Sunset Strip Tattoo and got my first tattoo, an indelible outward sign that I was no longer the same person I had been. People told me that tattoos were addictive, and I certainly found that to be the case," he said.

When I started researching for this article, I thought I would find loads of features and news stories about the obvious connection between music and tattoos. There are stories about Cockell's undeniable connection with music, as he's even been credited on bands' record sleeves; listicles of what celebrity musicians have the best and worst tattoos; in-depth studies of its origins... But not a lot to do with music as an emotion. I soon realised that, even if I know a lot of people get their favourite band's lyrics tattooed, the face of a singer, or even some music-inspired designs, there's not a lot about this on the world wide web.

Tattoos have been around pretty much forever.
There were already people getting ink jobs done in ancient Greek and Roman times. A quick Google search will tell you all about how it was associated with barbarians and that the Greeks learned tattooing from the Persians and used it to mark slaves

and criminals to identify them if they dared trying to escape. The Romans adopted the practice from the Greeks.

Tattoos are an 8,000-year-old tradition. In fact, the world's oldest tattoo dates back to 3250 BC – Ötzi, an iceman who was buried beneath an Alpine glacier, had 61 tattoos across his body and limbs. There're even some 1800 BC mummies rocking tattoos. Archaeologists found a mummy of the ancient Chinchorro culture of Chile with a tattooed "moustache". But it's impossible to write an article about the origin of tattoos without mentioning Tahiti and James Cook's arrival in 1769. The English sailors saw a bunch of tattooed people and the captain's crew got tattooed for the first time. They took their ink skin souvenirs with them and the word "tattoo" originated, as an anglophonic modification of the Polynesian word "tatau", which replicated the tapping sounds of the handpoke tools. Back then tattoos were a sign of wealth, of strength, and of the ability to endure pain. So, when did this change?

The Victorians were not mad about them, but they didn't spend all their time fanning themselves and powdering their faces. Behind closed doors, they were getting quite intricate pieces. Although tattoos were associated with criminals, hooligans, and sailors, the latter were also often the wealthiest and the only ones who could afford to travel abroad. So, tattoos became a way of showing off how rich and lucky sailors were. This idea triggered an explosion in the popularity of ink in Britain. It's even rumoured that Queen Victoria had a tattoo of a tiger or an eagle fighting a python.

The first electro-magnetic needle was invented in 1891 by a chap called Samuel F. O'Reilly in New York. It replaced traditional tapping techniques. O'Reilly adapted Thomas Edison's 1876 rotary operated stencil pen and added multiple needles and an ink reservoir to revolutionise the trade of tattooing. Let's say that this New Yorker made tattooing easier for the upper classes across the pond, since it's estimated than one in five members of the gentry were tattooed in the 19th century. Even Churchill's mother had an ouroboros (the serpent chasing its own tail) design or so they say.

Basically, tattoos have been a thing for centuries, but it was probably in the '80s when their connection with music blossomed. It's easy to see that heavy metal, rock 'n' roll, and punk most probably



propelled the trend of permanent body art. Tribal tattoos were a thing and it continued to be trendy well beyond the '90s, but the '80s also saw a boost in new-school tattoos, which implemented lots of colour and even cartoonish designs.

Almost everyone will be able to picture tattooed guys if they think about '80s bands like Mötley Crüe, Guns N' Roses, or Ozzy Osbourne. But it was the punks who took it a step further and chose to tattoo their faces for the sole reason of social disruption. These anti-social subcultures turned their feelings to society's rejection into physical representations.

So there, punks created mayhem and marvelled in it with their mohawks, chequered patterns, and the Sex Pistols singing God Save the Queen and their laissez-faire attitude in the infamous The Grundy Show interview in the '70s. Even if they were untattooed preppy boys on Lambrettas and Vespas, the mods and also the rockers had already stirred the pot in the '50s and '60s, when music symbolised drama and danger in the UK almost more than ever. Maybe it's because both music and tattoos are rebellious self-expression tools that the connection is impossible to ignore.

Hence, Churchill's mum's ouroboros tattoo becomes relevant to me, as everything comes full circle if we go back to the late '90s and early noughties when bands like Green Day, Sum 41, and blink-182 made tattooing visible for younger generations. Now people in their twenties were considering getting inked. But the reputation was already there. If punks did it and prisoners had them, it had to be something bad, right?

"When I look at the reaction of people when they find out I'm tattooed it's quite scary and weird, as if all of a sudden you become an outcast and contagious," said Vivien Falize, who has worked for many years in the field of HiFi and currently holds the position of sales manager for Audio 9, a company that manufactures and distributes high-end cables from the ESPRIT brand. "I just think that there is still a lack of open-mindedness but, more importantly, a lack of knowledge and culture among many that tattooing is not just a delinquent or hysterical fan thing."

Falize's left arm's ink is totally related to music, with a design of a vinyl record, a cassette, a gramophone, and even a snare drum. He also has in progress a portrait of Lemmy Kilmister from Motörhead, who he considers "the musical dad" of the community. Falize says he got tattooed because of music. This subconscious desire started growing when his dad planted the seed when he played Deep Purple to him for the first time, so he kept "bathing daily in the rock culture and everything that was grafted around" and his teenage years saw plenty of subscriptions to rock magazines that encouraged the seed to germinate.

"Music is the main cause of [my tattooing]. And then, as with every discovery, I'm interested and I dig tattooing and its culture – very underground at the time (unfortunately, freer today to the detriment of quality) – attracts me."

Falize agreed that being different and rebelling against what society expects from you were some of the main reasons he started getting tattooed. But "being on the fringe and not looking like everyone else" is a form of standing out that not everyone's so keen on. There's a reason tattoos have been kept hidden and frowned upon for so long.

"Youth cultures will always link their fashion to their music and whether people admit it or not, we all want to belong. So, clothes, tattoos, and music are a great way of bonding with your chosen tribe," said Fiona Duncan the singer of Slalom D, who joined the band when she was 49. She's been an artist most of her life and she admits she communicates through her artwork be it painting, drawing, printing making, writing lyrics, or singing. "I think it's a really important way to express your own individuality, even if everyone around you is doing the same and all of a sudden you're not that much of an individual anymore to the outside world. Let's face it, having a tattoo isn't that original these days but it was never that original if you were a sailor or a biker either. It's all about context. Find your tribe and do your thing."

Jean Le Roux, a South African tattoo artists based in London, has his own memories of tattoo's history and view in society. He co-owns Good Fortune Studio near King's Cross with his wife, Lianne Le Roux.

"I remember seeing surfers, and people in gangs in South Africa. Back in the '80s and '90s, tattoo culture mostly stemmed from gangs, skaters and surfers," he said. "I grew up in a small town called Bredasdorp in the Western Cape, so there wasn't a great deal of tattooed people in the area. But every

now and then you would see one peak out from under a T-shirt sleeve or on a neck and be taken back a bit and think 'wow, that's awesome, that guy's got a tattoo'. It wasn't really that socially acceptable in small-town South Africa. There was definitely a stigma against tattoos and tattooed people."

For Le Roux, the biggest thing was the art, so he started drawing at a very early age, using "how to draw" books and copying illustrations from comic books and magazines. "The subject matter of tattoos like skulls, snakes, and eagles interested me, so I was drawn to it." he said.

"I feel like tattoos and music go hand in hand.
They're both really creative outlets and you can usually associate certain styles of tattooing with

Le Roux thinks there are many reasons people get tattooed. The symbolism behind the specific design might be unclear, but all seems to be linked to certain kind of creative and revolutionary freedom of stating what's important to the person being jabbed. It's your money, your body, and your future and you want to substantiate it.

genres of music.

He said: "Some people want a new start or just a change and putting something new on their skin might give them that feeling. There's definitely something strange about altering your body permanently. A lot of people like having a meaningful tattoo that either reminds them of something or someone. Others just like cool images. For me the meanings behind tattoos don't matter too much. I feel like it's quite subjective in the way that you can

make anything mean anything."

For some a small outline of a flamingo on their ankle, a rudimental anchor on their wrist, or a paper plane on their forearm is ideal to symbolise their passions, remind them where they come from, or as permanent memorabilia of a specific moment. Others prefer intricate designs that take hours, but have no personal meaning at all besides showing their love for art. You could say some ink-lovers are modern-day art dealers since they do the part as a mobile billboard. It's a good icebreaker to ask who

designed your arm piece and nowadays you just need to tap your phone a couple times to open the artist's Instagram page and marvel in their creations, follow them, and thumb likes to the photos of the designs before you get an appointment.

You don't necessarily have to be a big music fan to get a tattoo, but there's something that's as true as daylight: have you realised how every time you enter a tattoo parlour or studio there's always music playing? This is true for most shops, as it's a great tactic to lure people in – at the end of the day, who doesn't like music?

But most tattoo studios are specialist in curating the most complex and hardcore playlists ever. Cue the person laying still, enduring the pain of the pokes of the tattoo machine as they try to fish their phone out their pocket to Shazam whatever the heck is playing.

"It's that idea of creatives being the outsiders and wanting to almost advertise that fact. Image, fashion, and all that stuff isn't necessary for good music to exist, but it's intrinsically linked. Listen to any song and you'll be able to picture in your mind how the person singing or playing presents themselves (mostly, anyway), Tattoos are just another form of decoration that we can express ourselves through" said Duncan, whose tattoos are bold and colourful. Duncan started going to gigs and following bands

around on tour in her teens. For her, "certain songs will always trigger memories, specific moments in time or life events". She has a treasured collection of mixtapes and bootlegs from the '80s that link her back to past friendships and experiences. For some people, tattoos can be like their own personal mixtapes.

"Artists in bands also play a big part in what their fans end up getting tattooed, be it similar subject matter or even designs inspired by their lyrics or even the lyrics themselves."

Jean Le Roux said: "I feel like tattoos and music go hand in hand. They're both really creative outlets and you can usually associate certain styles of tattooing with genres of music. Alternative and hardcore music usually attracts people with quite traditional tattoo, bold designs with skulls, snakes, roses, etc. – 'sailor' tattoos.

"Artists in bands also play a big part in what their fans end up getting tattooed, be it similar subject matter or even designs inspired by their lyrics or even the lyrics themselves. I've tattooed quite a lot of song lyrics and designs based on someone's favourite songs. So, there's definitely a relationship between the two."

Lianne Le Roux, Jean's wife and the other half of Good Fortune Studio, is also a tattoo enthusiast. The couple met when she booked an appointment at the studio in Central London where Jean used to work. Like for most tattoo aficionados, it was love at first sight, but this time that included the artist, too. They've been happily married for four years – their relationship goes beyond love, as the opening of their tattoo studio, Good Fortune Studio, in 2018 made them business partners too.

Lianne is a permanent makeup artist and spends her days surrounded by pigments and a music-and-tat-too-machine soundtrack. The couple meets hundreds of tattoo lovers every month and the number is due to increase, as they've recently expanded the studio. Both agree the view of tattoos in society is shifting but there's still a long road of change ahead.

"I think they've become socially more acceptable to all generations. I realise that some older generations and cultures still aren't massive fans, as they associate them with gang or sailor culture... But in general, I haven't met anyone particularly offended by their existence on me. Other than a particularly rude, obnoxious, snobby Marketing Manager that I used to have when I worked in a corporate job," Lianne said. "From conversations with customers, I'm aware that there are some jobs which still make people cover their tattoos that are on display while in their uniforms (we hear this a lot from flight attendants), but as long as it's not offensive, I don't see any reason for it."

"It's more socially acceptable and fashionable [now]. You have doctors, bankers, police officers, schoolteachers, scientists who have tattoos – sometimes complete bodysuits. People in professions that you would usually think wouldn't have any tattoos are now tattooed," Jean added. "I feel like social media and celebrities play a big part in nor-





malising tattoos now as well. You now see tattooed people in television adverts and in magazines promoting brands you would never have thought would want to be associated with tattoo culture. So, I think it definitely has changed for the majority, but I'm sure you will still find people here and there who don't like it. Luckily, we don't care too much about those people and their opinions," he joked.

Some industries are more forgiving when it comes to displaying body art. Take Virgin Atlantic, who changed their policy that forbad employees from showing their tattoos while in uniform to encouraging their staff to "bring their true selves to work and

to the skies, and to take pride in what makes them special" last year.

There are currently no specific employment laws in the UK that deal with tattoos and, to be

more precise, the Equality Act 2010 doesn't prohibit organisations from asking staff to cover up their tattoos. Basically, you can get rejected for a role based on having a visible tattoo and your employer is allowed to impose a blanket ban if they wish. So, we're relying here on people's taste and point of view to decide if your ink job is okay at work.

Some countries are more lenient than others, but in the UK 40% of people are tattooed and one in every nine have visible tattoos. Maybe that's why the country is at number eight in the top ten most inclusive countries when it comes to tattooing.

"I think nowadays there's less prejudice because it's seen as something 'cool', but there's still people out there how are judgemental and snobby towards tattooed people. Older people, maybe those who were raised in a more conservative environment, still see tattoos as something marginalised people do," said Deva Fernández, who works in the film industry on the other side of the globe, in Mexico. She started getting tattoos because her idols, musicians from rock and pop punk bands, were walking artworks.

She's also been to over 40 concerts of her favourite band, All Time Low.

"I've never been discriminated at work because of my tattoos, but I'm aware I'm lucky because I work in an industry in which your appearance is not that important. Maybe if I were a lawyer and I'd want to get a position in a prestigious firm, I'd be screwed because I have a hand tattoo that's impossible to hide," she added.

Or maybe it just simply comes down to the industry you're in. In my own personal experience, my tattoos were only an issue when I decided to join the

"It's an aesthetics thing. Whoever says they just get meaningful tattoos is lying. I know there's a lot of tattoos with deeper meaning"

corporate world. My boss approached me without even looking me in the eye and he muttered: "Well, you know... We work in a building with bankers. Some of them are from other countries where tattoos are not that well-accepted. You need to cover those up." In all honesty, that's what I wish he'd said. The truth is he never explained to me why he asked me to buy an undershirt long enough to cover my seemingly innocuous floral tattoos that suddenly seemed so offensive for a crowd that barely looked at me when they entered the building.

That's not why I changed my job, but it's one of the reasons why I left the industry. Hospitality was kinder to me in that aspect, although there's myriad of reasons why I also left that industry and decided to do what I like the most. And here I am in a place where my individualism is valued. Maybe that's why I'm always going back to writing and to music. There's a reason all kinds of art embody freedom.

The Madden twins from Good Charlotte are probably the heaviest tattooed people I got to admire as a teen. The knuckle inscriptions, the characteristi-

cally emo early 2000s-2010s star designs, and the neck tattoos were appealing enough to hook you in. The guitars, the angsty songs, and the Burtonesque videoclips were what made you stay. Benji Madden was probably the subconscious reason why I suddenly was aching to get my skin poked. Perhaps it was Bert McCraken from The Used, who knows? The fact is that, like me, millions of teenagers across the globe were getting knees deep in the emo subworld.

It would be wrong to deny credit where it's due. The era of stars, skulls, red/pink and black combinations, swoop fringes, and permanent-marker-personalised Chuck Taylors fostered a crowd of misunderstood teenagers who loved music and had a penchant for tattoos. Just imagine for a second you feel like nobody gets you and the walls around you are caving in. You live in a city you hate, your favourite music never plays on the radio, school and your parents are suffocating you... But suddenly someone shines a green light across the pond and it's luring you in. "Hey, we do understand on this side."

Back in your room, walls plastered with faces of your idols, all you have to do is hit play and there's a melodic voice talking back and, for the first time, you feel someone understands. That sentiment is kind of a Barnum effect. Half of the times it's a marketing strategy used to propel some musician's career. Basically, you're a target and you're falling for the fallacy of personal validation. But the other half of the time it's truly a shared feeling. Because, who hasn't felt out of place in their teens? It's nothing new, but it feels fresh. What matters is that you have something to relate to.

For a person that hasn't felt connected to their surroundings for a while, it's ideal to be able to express themselves without words, with a shield in the form of a drawn-on-skin armour. It's kind of a way of sending a message to the world: This is who I am, and I want you to know without words. This is where I've been; this is who I've loved; this is dear and important to me; this is my story; or, simply, this is my body and I want to decorate it because it's mine. Maybe the latter is why the finger-moustache tattoo made its way to the top ten tattoos ten years ago.

"It's an aesthetics thing. Whoever says they just get meaningful tattoos is lying. I know there's a lot of tattoos with deeper meaning, I have tattoos that are meaningful, but that aside, you're not going to get a meaningful tattoo that's terrible because it's going to be on your skin forever," said Fernández.

"Before my first tattoo I remember I used to think: 'it has to be small and meaningful because it's for life'... But I think after the third tattoo, that doesn't matter. Especially now that's common for tattoo artists to offer flashes that you can choose from. They're not going to tattoo them on anyone else, but it's like buying a T-shirt online, but with much more thought and way more expensive. And now there's laser and cover-ups, so you don't have to worry about it being forever."

Some blame David Beckham or shows like Miami Ink for making tattooing so fashionable it's lost its deeper meaning. Obviously, Miami Ink is nothing like a studio – it started on kind of a good foot, but it deteriorated when producers made it seem like the different artists were assembled and coaxed to start drama. LA Ink was even worse and I've still yet to find a good tattoo competition show.

But blaming a TV show for making tattoos popular is as incongruent as blaming pop music for bringing in fans in hoards. Angry ink fans say these shows are entertainment for the masses and degrading the art of tattooing and the speech very much reminds me of music purists blaming pop for making music accessible and brining crowds in.

I'm no tattoo expert but I do understand the ill will of some against Kat Von D. At the end of the day, she's stirred enough drama online to have to sell her makeup brand and she's famous enough to get the first-ever tattoo copyright infringement lawsuit. Long story short: she used a copyrighted image of jazz artist Miles Davis as a basis for a tattoo for a friend and the copyright holder was not happy. But it's undeniably true that her persona brought a lot of attention to the tattoo industry and even those who never thought of getting inked where avidly watching her drama unfold on TV.

LA Ink brought celebs from all different realms to Von D's studio chair and the crowds watched as they flinched and contorted their faces in pain. Music was involved again with the likes of Lady Gaga, Jason Mraz, actor and musician Jared Leto from 30 Seconds to Mars, Frank Iero from My Chemical Romance, Phil Collen from Def Leppard, Wes Borland from Limp Bizkit, Matt Skiba from Alkaline Trio (and blink-182), Jeph Howard from The Used, Nikki Sixx

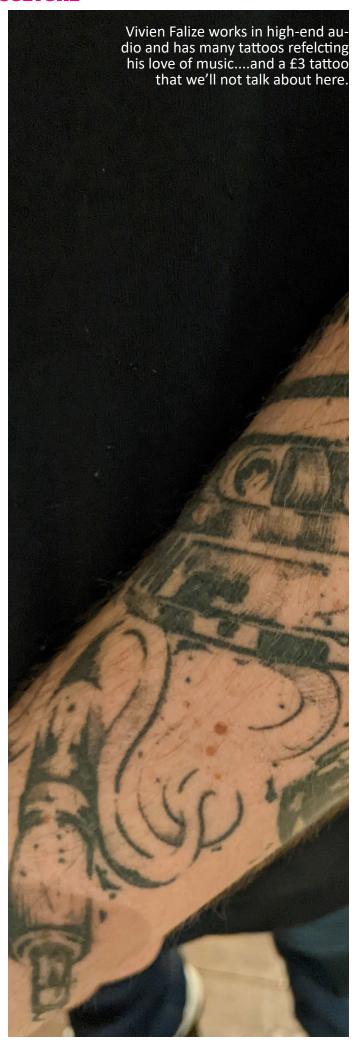
from Mötley Crüe and so many more that I could fill the rest of the article with names. She would have probably tattooed Ed Sheeran, Miley Cyrus or Justin Bieber on screen had she kept her goddess status until now.

She was an idol and you either wanted to get tattooed by her, be her, or both. For impressionable young audiences to those who had no further pretentions with tattoos, this was the perfect show. And maybe, even those who resent her have to be humble enough to admit that she made tattoos enjoyable for crowds who went from a "no" to a "well..." when it came to ink and those inked.

For me, the connection's always been there but the 2000s were key for my passion. Tattoos were on TV, Kat Von D was the woman of my crush's dreams, my idols and heroes were tattooed, and I just wanted to close my bedroom's door and type my stories away while jamming to Simple Plan, Green Day, The All-American Rejects, The Used, My Chemical Romance, Paramore, Boys Like Girls and a plethora of bands that all emulated the same feeling. I certainly felt misunderstood, even though I have a wonderful family, just because I was a developing adult. Maybe I was a very impressionable little human, but I decided back then that I wanted to look and be a certain way and I started working towards it.

Maybe I'm just trying to explain an emotional concept in a very complex way when the scientific answer is actually very simple. Scientist at McGill University in Canada discovered a direct connection between the elation generated by music and the release of dopamine in the brain. We also release dopamine to fight pain of the tattoo gun. So, when you get tattooed, same as when you listen to music, you release dopamine – and this little neurotransmitter makes you feel really happy. Both things together are the perfect combo for some to hack it. Basically, we just like being happy.

Whatever it is, it's come to a time where tattoos have stopped dividing people. There're still specific designs that will make you able to spot who shares your hobbies in a crowd, but most of the people you'll find are probably just sporting whatever they fancy. And it's okay. The tattoo and music industries and cultures will still be there for some, and the good thing is that you're free to enjoy both either separately or at the same time.







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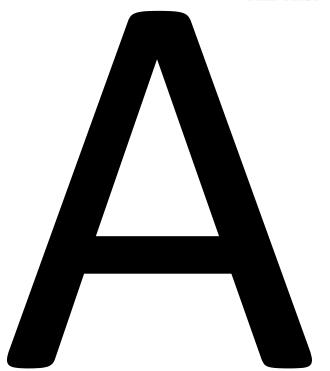
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ndrew Oattes is Fine Sounds UK's Country Manager) and I've know him for quite some time. However, at the recent ISE and Bristol events Andrew touched on, although if somewhat briefly (which is ironic in itself), the concept of The Art Of Slowdown and whilst he hadn't gone into any detail about what he meant by SLOW MUSIC something clicked with me on a personal level and I immediately began to formulate my own concepts of what this could be and how a more general campaign for slowdown could transform the way we currently interact with our day to day relationships with people, the way we presently wolf down our daily nourishment, the way we now devour "literature" (or not) and, which is the relevant point here, the way in which we interact and consume music. Look at the words I've used there in describing our relationship with things that are inherently sensual in their nature; the words are high-speed and fleeting.

Life, it would seem, has become an ever increasing case of us seeking and demanding instant gratification in every aspect of our existence. Instead of sitting quietly and reading a novel we flick through a thousand and one memes on social media. Rather than sitting and taking time to enjoy a leisurely meal with friends we have become used to grabbing a burger or a pre-packaged sandwich. In place of seeking a meaningful conversation we interact with people on social media in a series of back and forth soundbites. And, yes, I am as guilty as the next person in doing all these things.

Something struck me!

I have a close friend I will call Swim. I've known Swim for every single second of my life and I've been intrinsically involved in every single aspect of Swim's life. When considering Andy's passing mention of him wanting to create a movement for slowness in music it struck me of a time in Swim's life when Cocaine was a big thing. Cocaine is a terrible drug Swim tells me. It's fun and it offers that instant hit of chemicals to the brain that human beings really like, but after a year of constantly hitting that little sealybag of instant gratification, what is left is a feeling of spiritual (with a very small s) emptiness. Nothing fulfilling is gained by hitting line after line of cocaine! Yes, things get done and things are achieved, but those things tend to be transitory and ticked off our To Do List...and then it's onto the next thing on the list to tick off, another line of the white stuff and round and round that hamster wheel we go. And the wheel gets faster and faster until we hit a point where we look back on that time and realise that it has left us with no real and lasting feeling of having accomplished anything meaningful. This is what Swim told me, anyway.

Our lives, like Swim's year of heavy cocaine use, have become a relentless round of hitting that instant gratification button. Like hitting the racks of white lines, hitting that button is easy and we are surrounded by advertising telling us we need to eat faster, to consume more, to drive a faster car...in short, at every turn we are being told to pack more into our daily lives and to live our lives at a pace that is neither sustainable nor, in the grand scheme of things, ultimately satisfying. There is, it seems, a severe lack of nutriment for the soul. Life, it seems, has built in obsolescence.

There's nothing inherently wrong with hitting that big red button of instant gratification every once in a while, it's when we find ourselves hitting that button constantly and it becomes the norm to hit it that we need to sit back and take notice of our lives and what they are fast becoming...or have become. Let's take time away from our places of work to sit with friends and enjoy a meal that has been cooked slowly and with love. A meal that can be savoured and not gulped down in three or four mouthfuls. Let's take time to appreciate the things around us, be that nature, a work of art, a photograph...whatever it is, take time to notice and savour it!

And this brings me onto music. We have at our



Not Boring

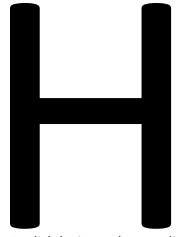
finger tips the means of access to a million and one tunes and I've written about finding myself flicking from one tune to the next without really sitting and appreciating the tunes I've listened to many times. I may have nodded my head, I may have tapped my foot, but so many times I've come away from a session of listening to music and rather than getting a feeling of having being nourished by the music, I have had the feeling that I have done little more than consume a whole load of noise, much in the way that we consume a burger, a shot of drink, social media...the list goes on...and on.

We have a Slow Food movement and perhaps the time has come for a general slow down in other aspects of our lives, including the way we enjoy our music.

That somewhat extended ramble is meant by way of an introduction to Andrew Oattes and what he means by The Art Of Slowdown. I have no idea of what he is going to write about and I wrote the above after having exchanged (ironically) a quick message on social media explaining that I wanted him to expand on what he had touched on a ISE and the Bristol HiFi Show when he spoke of SLOW MU-SIC and his desire to create a movement.

Anyway, I'll hand over to Andy...





ave you had the feeling recently, and certainly since the word "Covid" became a part of the modern

English lexicon, that our lives are becoming increasingly busy, your mind is overloaded with information and sometimes, seemingly out of nowhere, you feel anxious for no reason, tired and frazzled? Do you get that nagging feeling, that although you insist to friends and family that you aren't, you may, just possibly, be addicted to scrolling endlessly on your phone, aimlessly seeking something that you can't quite put your finger on that's missing? But still you sneak another peek at the latest reel on Instagram or just another meme on Tik-Tok. Is this a MUST?! That feeling of being overloaded, drained, and anxious is literally us burning out our dopamine receptors, by the way... and we probably need to do something about. But just to reassure you, you're not alone. It seems that EVERYONE I meet these days feels very similar, at least some, if not most of the time. Let's call this a digital overdose.

And we're in need of a serious antidote!

You see, in the current era of digitalization; we are living through one of the greatest paradoxes of my life. We have an unlimited amount of data to at our fingertips. An unlimited amount of "distilled" knowledge, music, movies, memes, and other digital "treasures". If you look at some studies around that talk about how much digital data we will create and consume globally, we are now talking about 94 zet-tabytes - 94 billion terabytes - of data in 2022. That is staggering!

With the advance towards the 4th industrial revolution and continued growth of AI, Chat GPT and connected devices, we're set to see this rise at a staggering rate, up to a predicted 463 zettabytes by 2025. And yet we have little or no means of synthesising all this information, and an awful lot of companies make an awful lot of money out of us browsing this stuff (or doom scrolling as it's so affectionately known these days).

We, as individuals, are going to have to face a choice of how we want to participate in this!

If we're not careful, we're going to find that our minds become increasingly busy places while we wait for technology to catch-up and give us back some way of approaching and synthesising this much information. (Or maybe technology is moving too far ahead of our ability to process and managed all this data).

Now, something interesting happened since that awful and tragic few years of C19 that cost us all so much. Out of that chaos, we went home in our millions, and we slowed down. We spent more time with our families, many of us aimed to get healthier, we taught ourselves how to cook again, we read to our children, we took on home projects, and our homes once again became our castles, our domains of safety for our families, our friends (when finally allowed), and ourselves.

Importantly, through this uncertainty, we reac-

entertainment, but also fitness equipment brands such as Peloton.

But were you aware of what happened in 2022 as the world came back out of its imposed hiding "and back to the office"? The data shows that a lot of these numbers went into reverse, and there were many fears that the magic had worn off. Peloton's share value fell dramatically, and a lot of the trends proved to be just that...Trends. But our relationship with music lasted. Our relationship with our friends and families persisted. Our focus on food, health and wellbeing persisted. A very many of us continued with a lot of the positive habits that we cultivated in those dark days of Covid lockdowns. It is my belief that in some almost unconscious manner, we once again prioritised the things that matter and reject the by commoditised, high volume, low quality, low emotional ROI purchase decisions of the past.

"Our minds are so full of data and decisions that we are naturally craving simpler ways to spend our out of work priority of spendhours and to de-stress from our busy lives_"

quainted ourselves with MUSIC. I have spoken a lot about what I think happened back in 2020/21, but fundamentally I believe that out of all the uncertainty, we instinctively found our way back to the things that really matter. And through this we started to realign and reprioritise Music playback. And through the curiosity, vinyl became a real mainstream thing again, as did (dare I say it) CD's...and for some Reelto-Reel tape and cassettes!

If you look at the stats behind music listening and streamed video content over that period, it's impressive and, of course, the big winners were the video content platforms such as Disney + and Netflix. The other immediate benefactors from our enforced time at home were the DIY suppliers and solutions; the garden improvements and outdoor

If I go back to my days with Ivor Tiefenbrun, I recall vividly that he used to say religiously the different; that in the 1960's it was a car, a house, and a HiFi. It's a huge regret that I wasn't around to bathe in the sonic glory of

those days, but I'm convinced that that statement is true. If you look at the halcyon days of Woodstock and the huge number of bands and iconic greats it created, it seems logical to suggest that we/our parents/grandparents were all hooked on music in a way that many of us have forgotten that we can be but to be fair, they probably had less distractions. It seems to be that they/we knew the power that music had to transcended boundaries, politics, race and global issues. I'm thinking John Lennon, Yoko ono and the huge movements that sprang up in protest of war as I write this.

To get to the point, I think that C19 created a moment in time that has allowed us to, in-essence, complete the circle. We are back to prioritising music and the things that matter. And hopefully the

things that are good for us too. But also, I think we have taken a move back towards high quality music playback.

And that's the secret sauce!

Did you that know music is incredibly good for us? Studies show that at a neurological level, music has

genuine transformative powers. If you look at the auditory complex parts of the brain called the Heschl's gyrus and the superior temporal gyrus, scientists can see in their studies that it lights up like fairy lights on a Xmas tree, while our hearts change pace, our brains telling our bodies to adjust our emotions and our bodies in time with the beat, or in response to a shift in dynamics or timbre.

people entirely outside of my industry, the same is now true of many other areas of life. We are seeing control become simpler – and we are rejecting voice control in a manner that I never thought we would – and instead lovely control switches for lighting are making a comeback and remote controls with buttons are once again cool.

Did you that know music is incredibly good for us?

This is what artists want to happen. They want to tell us stories – if you listen, and if your equipment is good enough to reveal these mysteries – music and HiFi will change your life if you let it!

I'm going to make a judgement call that if you weren't the owner of a turntable or perhaps had one stored away in the attic, a great many of you have since pre C19 days, purchased, or brought the deck back out and plugged it into your system. Record buying stats show that a great many of you are doing exactly that. I have also seen huge focus on CDs - many called me slightly crazy for suggesting that a comeback of that format was on the horizon. To me it's deductive logic: if curiosity for HiFi is beginning again, a great many people want to get back on-board, and CDs and vinyl are an excellent – and often – lower cost way of doing this! I speak to a lot of HiFi dealers, friends, peers and passionate people in the industry, and a lot of people are reporting a genuine renaissance in HiFi.

So, what is really happening right now? I believe that we are seeing not only a re-prioritising of music. We are also seeing a re-prioritising TOWARDS high-quality playback and away from commoditised music consumption. Our minds are so full of data and decisions that we are naturally craving simpler ways to spend our out of work hours and to destress from our busy lives. In fact, speaking to many

If you look at interior design, we are seeing increased demand for wellness at the heart of designs. An increasing number of people are interested in how to incorporate circadian lighting and want to source building materials and furniture and products that are ecologically sound and with provenance. There is a renaissance in all things vintage. Trends in yoga and other ancient wisdoms are on the rise. People are becoming more conscious of waste and mother earth and are more prepared to 'buy less, choose well and make it last' as the late great Vivien Westood once said.

It feels like a great many people are taking that, "my home is my castle" reaction from Covid 19 and the increasing number of armed conflicts around the world, and they are turning their minds towards health and wellbeing and are returning to what is important.

I call this the Art of Slowdown, and it's a movement. Do you want to start one together?

There is a whole lot more that we can explore and learn together.

Watch this space for more information on the ART OF SLOWDOWN!



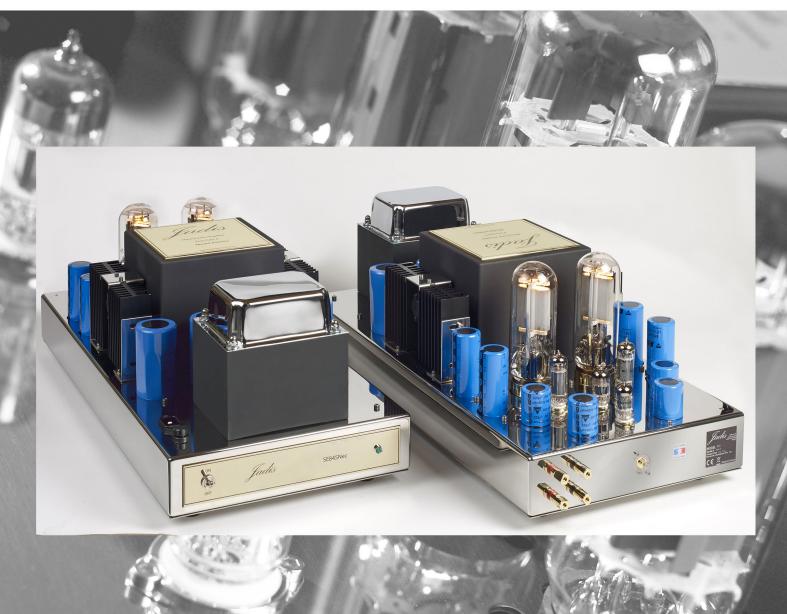


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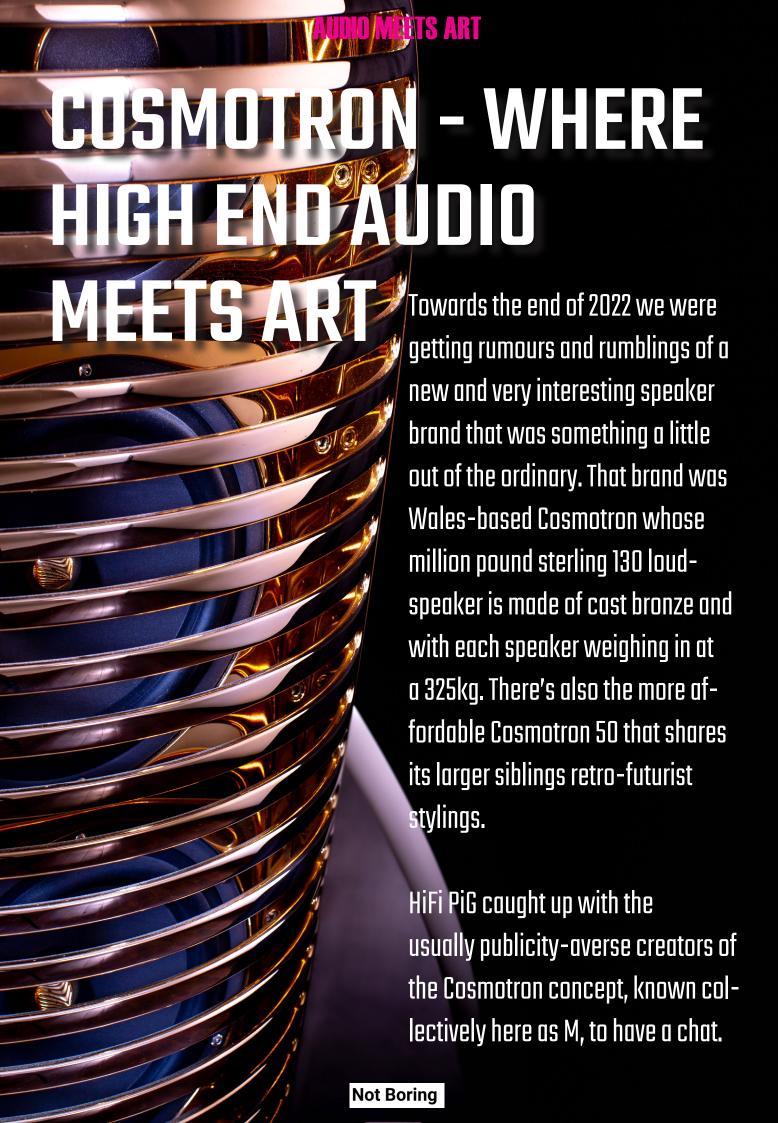


MADE IN FRANCE









AUDIO MEETS ART

HiFi PiG: Where did the idea for the Cosmotron concept originally come from?

M: The idea for a speaker that looked like a rocket ship came from a gentleman by the name of Roel de Groet, , who is a renowned yacht interior designer, in 2005. He was commissioned to design the interior of a classic motor yacht, with the brief that the interior of the main salon should have the feel of a Victorian Gentlemen's London Club, with accents of the Orient, and a flavour of Ming the Merciless. One of the requirements was that the salon should house a good sound system. Roel proposed that having rocket ship shaped loudspeakers would provide a unifying theme. He did a brilliant sketch on a napkin in a pub where we met:

The idea brought to my mind the steam rocket ships in the Flash Gordon matinees that I used to see when I was a child, and I could roughly visualise the shape that I would like to achieve. The fact that the speakers were originally intended for marine use led me to want to use bronze for the bodies. The fins were originally made of nickel plated steel, as I visualised the fins as having a similar lustre to the lights on vintage cars. The problem with this approach would be that nickel plate can chip, and plating is something that was not in keeping with the engineering purity that was being sought. WW, who is the engineer in this collaboration, tried 316 stainless, which was a superior solution, and which is the stainless steel used in high end yachts, as it is extremely corrosion resistant. It also polished to a mirror finish.

All of the engineering development, both the audio engineering and the engineering of the housing, and most of the aesthetic development, has been carried out by WW, who is an incredibly talented self-taught engineer. To produce the speakers he had to master acoustic engineering, SolidWorks, precision machining using CNC milling machines and a CNC lathe, aspects of metallurgy and metal finishing, all of which are demanding subjects. The finish achieved, for example, on the flat surfaces of the 316 stainless fins, is extraordinary. They are so reflective that there is sometimes the illusion that they are made of glass.

My role has been primarily that of a facilitator, with a few relatively minor ideas.

HiFi PiG: Bronze isn't the most standard of choices,

is it?

M: I liked the fact that bronze is a classic sculptural material and that it is also very durable, corrosion resistant, and strong. Obtaining high quality castings for the bodies remains a challenge. All bronze castings have porosity. The challenge is to minimise this porosity so that we can obtain, after the castings have been machined and polished, a mirror finish on the speakers. One of our redundant old shape 130 bodies was beaten with a sledgehammer to test its strength. It was dented, but not broken.

HiFi PiG: The design of the Cosmotron speakers is what I would call retro-futurist, what is the inspiration and background to this aesthetic?

M: Ming the Merciless, whom I have admired for a long time... and I do have a mate called Ming. He always had the best lines, great dress sense, and a sense of humour...the Flash Gordon character, not my mate. Flash Gordon, in contrast, wore dreadful shorts, and was boring.

HiFi PiG: Does form follow function with the Cosmotron loudspeakers or was the shape and aesthetic the prime motivation behind the project?

M: The aesthetic. When a prototype was built, the sound was better than I had anticipated. Explanations were then sought for why this should be the case. One candidate is that the cabinet is so rigid, with no measurable deflection in the cabinet itself. Conventional cuboid speakers sometimes have internal bracing to attempt to limit flexion, that produces distortion. We do not have that problem.

Another hypothesis for why the speakers sounded so good is the shape of the cabinet, that has no parallel internal surfaces, so that no self-reinforcing standing waves can be generated. This hypothesis arose due to the fact that vintage valves, and some modern valves, are designed so that they do not have internal parallel surfaces, presumably to prevent internal standing waves being generated within the valve. I have an old Radiotronic radio valve where the shape is surprisingly similar to that of the Cosmotrons.

This hypothesis had less credence in my mind than the first, the supreme rigidity of the cabinet, but I do not dismiss it. WW thinks that this hypothesis



AUDIO MEETS ART

is wrong, and gives more weight to the sheer mass of the speakers. It could be that we started in the wrong place with the shape, as regards producing the highest possible quality of sound. 911s have the engine in the wrong place, but are still wonderful cars.

The quality of sound from the prototype led us to decide to do some serious development of the speakers, to see if we could produce something worthy of production. This involved a great deal of research, and experimentation. I decided to buy a small factory and all of the machinery necessary to machine the parts for the speakers in house. All of the audio engineering design, and the refining of the aesthetic design, was carried out by WW. The appearance of the original body was improved by tweaking the proportions and making the shape a pure conic curve, which is why the shape is so archetypically correct. Other archetypal features are the cathedral window shape of the opening in the cabinet that holds the baffle board, the mediaeval knight's helmet visor appearance of the speaker grill, the shark fin fins, and the spire at the top of the speaker.

The base was added, fittingly, to extend the bass response, as the bases house the sub-woofers for the speakers. This also improved the look of the speakers. Much work was done on the audio engineering. It was an extremely laborious process, as was the production engineering. Originally the 50s did not have the Levitron stand, which is a work of art in its own right. Another of WW's inventions. It improved the look of the 50s, and, perhaps, improved the sound quality.

HiFi PiG: Another feature of the Cosmotron speakers is their mirror-like finish. I assume this isn't easy to achieve?

M: That is an understatement. My idea was that we would leave the bronze to naturally patinate over time, in the same way that bronze sculptures patinate. WW wanted to try polishing the speakers to a mirror finish. We agreed on this approach. Hundreds of man hours go into achieving the polished finish we end up with at the factory. It is extraordinarily difficult to get right. The recent change in profile of the body of the speakers to a pure conic curve, has rendered the most remarkable, unbroken line of reflection from top to bottom. Owners of the speakers can now choose between maintaining

the mirror finish or allowing the bronze parts of the speakers to patinate. Both have their own charm.

HiFi PiG: The Cosmotron 130 are a million quid, do you think you will sell many and is selling them the prime objective here?

M: We made them to see if we could. They are as close to perfection as we can achieve, and we are satisfied that we have done our best. Our thoughts are that:

If it is not Art, what is the point?

We do not know if we will sell any, but we do know that we will not sell many, as we have only made a few. We could probably make one, maybe two pairs of 130s a year, should we sell the ones that we have already made. The prime objective was to produce excellent speakers that are also works of art in their own right, where the quality is the very best that we could achieve, all the way through, down to the finest detail. No compromises, either aesthetically or in the engineering. One of the briefs that I gave was that every component must be beautiful in its own right. I watched a documentary on Pagani cars after I had made this statement, and Mr Pagani said the same thing about his cars, which made me like his cars even more. The primary motivation was thus artistic. We are happy to have created what we consider works of art. The prime motivation was not monetary. We think, however, that these speakers will become, in time, sought after, collectable, and even more expensive than they are today. The exquisite engineering, the materials used, the huge amount of time that goes into making each one is proof of work, a store of real value, and very limited numbers all contribute to this possibility. All of the speakers are serial numbered. With the 130s, every part that is large enough carries the serial number of the speaker. With the 50s only the speaker bodies are serial numbered.

HiFi PiG: Your production methods are clearly very different to most manufacturers - tell me about something unusual about your process.

M: The use of bronze castings for the main body parts. The fact that the making of the speaker parts involves a huge amount of machining. The hand polishing that takes hundreds of hours per speaker. As examples of attention to detail: WW designed



AUDIO MEETS ART

special retractable wheels for the 130s to smoothly move a 325kg Cosmotron over a hard floor. The wheels can easily be raised and lowered with a small but weighty Cosmotron key, where the handle is the shape of a Cosmotron body. The key itself is like a piece of jewellery. The mechanism is hidden within the base, and the key hole under removable shoulders on the base.

There was much thought about putting badges on the speakers. One does not badge sculptures, but it is necessary to brand a speaker. I thought of the film The Treasure of Sierra Nevada, and the classic scene with the Mexican outlaws confronting the gold miners:

Badges? We ain't got no badges, we don't need no badges, I don't have to show you any stinking badges ...

I connected this with the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, which were written in mirror writing, and the solution appeared. The badges are in mirror writing in the nozzles of the speakers, and are only visible as reflections in the bases.

HiFi PiG: I'm sure you will say they sound incredible, but what do they really sound like?

M: HiFi PiG have an invitation to come and listen to them, and to make up their own minds. I think that the smaller speakers are astonishingly good for their size. The larger speakers can be sweet and demure as one likes, or devastating. I have a pair of each in my own home, and listen to the small pair every day, using a streamer. The larger pair are in a dedicated listening room, where the audio source is always vinyl.

I conducted an experiment where I would put on a record, playing through the smaller speakers, that were placed next to the larger ones, and then invite someone into the room, and ask them which speakers were playing. Everyone said that it was the larger ones. So far so good. What was strange is that I could hear the music coming out of the larger speakers, even though I knew that it was not. My mind must have been telling me that it was impossible for such a sound to come from the smaller speakers. An odd but pleasing illusion.

HiFi PiG: What speakers did you have before? Tell us a little about your system.

M: For twenty years prior to Cosmotron I used an array of six Quad ESL 57s electrostatic loudspeakers, that produced a wonderful listening experience. Using such an array is not uncommon for audiophiles. One pair of 57s is great for chamber music, possibly still the best speaker in the world in the mid-range, but lacking somewhat in the higher frequencies and especially in the bass frequencies. Having six ESL 57s solved the bass problem. I loved this speaker system, and it hurt to part with it. I changed to the Cosmotrons because they sounded a lot better. As good in the mid range, and far superior in the high frequencies and bass. They were also far more beautiful.

The cartridge that I use at home is the Kondo IO-J, sadly no longer in production. I have never heard any cartridge as good as this one. It even plays mono records better than dedicated mono cartridges. The arm is an SME 3009. The deck a Thorens Reference, number 2 of 100 made. Not the best deck in the world, but very good, and I find the Art Deco style of the design to be to my taste. The phono stage and line stage are proper Kondo, fitted with carefully chosen vintage valves, following a long process of trial and error trying different types and brands. The main amplifier is an eight block Jadis JA 800, fitted with vintage Tung Sol Black Plate 6550s, that are superb valves. The original new valves fitted to the amplifiers (KT 90s) were disappointing, and made the amplifier sound too clinical. The speakers are bi-amped, with the subwoofers having their own power supply and amplifier. The control that the amps have over the cones is such that the bass is very fast and clean. I prefer valve amplifiers myself, although the D'Agostino Relentless in the Demo Room is a very good solid state amplifier. We wanted to be able to recommend a solid state amplifier should customers want the relative convenience of solid state, so bought the Relentlessto test it, so that we could recommend it in good faith. It looks good too, with the design inspiration, according to Mr D'Agostino, coming from The Nautilus submarine. They sit well, stylistically, with the Cosmotrons, and have enough power and resolution to drive them well.

The Jadis eight block, valved correctly, is a phenomenal amplifier. The transformers are monsters. Grip, grip, and more grip.

I use a Jadis Defy-7 for the 50s. This is a great little



AUDIO MEETS ART



amplifier. Incredible value for money. This also has Tung Sol 6550 Black Plates as the output valves.

HiFi PiG: Where do you have your personal Cosmotron 130s set up?

M: In a dedicated listening room at my home.

HiFi PiG: Tell readers about the Cosmotron 50s. Are they Cosmotron 130 light, a diffusion range, what?

M: The 130s are Dreadnoughts and the 50s are Cruisers. Both fit their roles well. Recently a pair of the 50s were fitted into the main saloon of a classic Royal Huisman schooner, where the 130s would have been too large for the application. They are used for the AV system, placed either side of a large screen. They work perfectly in this role, providing a cinema like experience. They are also used, naturally, for music, connected to the yacht networked sound system. A pair of an earlier iteration of the

130swere installed in the main salon of a 52 metre classic Feadship, and circumnavigated the globe. The engineering involved in safely installing speakers of this mass in a yacht was interesting.

HiFi PiG: Who do you see as being the market for Cosmotron loudspeakers?

M: That is a good question. The reactions from people who see them has been very positive, and even more so when they hear them. A limiting factor will, of course, be their cost. I would speculate, therefore, that the market might be for wealthy people who want a work of art that is also a very good speaker, or the converse.

HiFi PiG: You have the speakers, what next?

M: We do not have any other plans at the moment.



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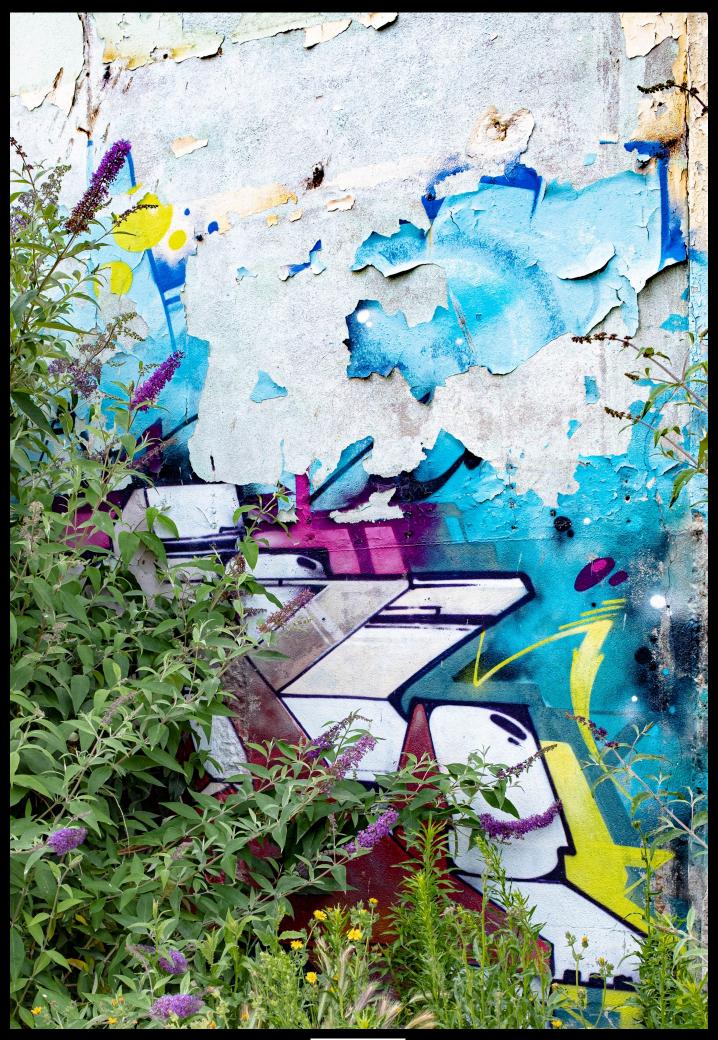


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Bai Ibrahim Cham looks at the hip-hop scene and its effects in West Africa

Image taken from a poster promiting a festival featuring Myk Jayda (Pictu promoted by Afrikan Rebel, UTA Elephar

HIP-HOP - THE AFRICAN CONNECTION

his year marks
50 years since
the invention of
one of the most
prolific and influential genres
and subcultures
in modern
times: Hip-hop

The rhythmic vibrations, ego-tripping and break dancing of hiphop embody a modern version of native west African music and culture. The tongue-twisting flow of rap music can be traced back to chants by the traditional poets and storytellers of West Africa: the "Griots". The praise singing of the same Griots is a replica of ego-tripping common in hiphop. Colourful coordinated group break dancing is synonymous with the "Mbalax" dance from the Senegambia region (made up of Senegal and The Gambia).

Well, thanks and no thanks to the Atlantic slave trade, these genres were shipped to the Americas and there many slaves found refuge in their fireside chants to connect with their ancestors. Sadly this tradition, with its indigenous language and practices was systematically erased by the enforced change of culture, language, and names by the slave masters.

Fast forward to 1970 inner city New York, where poverty, gang violence, and drugs gave birth to a new form of expression. Through DJs playing percussive breaks of popular songs using two turntables and a DJ mixer, from the "boogie-down" Bronx, a new sound was created: Hip-hop. The rhythm and rhymes swiftly followed, which then morphed into the early years of rap. Since the 1970s, hip-hop has grown to become one of the most influential genres of music of our time, accompanied by a whole subculture of fashion, attitude, and mindset.

THE RECONNECTION

Thanks to the large-scale commercialisation of hip-hop, it

found its way back to its ancestral home, the very shores its ancestors were shipped from as slaves - Senegambia, West Africa.

Despite having had different colonial masters, Senegal and The Gambia are almost the same country in terms of culture and indigenous languages. They also had a similar reaction to the new funky genre of hip-hop which went against its norms, culture and religion.

DAKAR DISCOVERS

Unlike the Bronx where hip-hop emerged from the struggles of underprivileged communities, hip-hop in Senegal was popularised by middle-class communities who were able to travel abroad and bring back cassette players, magazines and fashion. Hip-hop really made its mark in Senegal through television, when the first homegrown hip-hop groups, such as Positive Black Soul, King & Kool, and Matador hit the airwaves in 1992. Positive Black Soul dropped their debut album "Bul Fale" that same year which marked the dawn of a new era officially launching Senegalese hip-hop. Even though the Senegalese acts rapped in their native tongue of Wollof, they spread the same message of pro-black, pan-Africanism and the unification of black people.

The communication method was perfect in the early stages, locals understood the songs and were enthusiastic about this new experiment of rapping in their own native language. However, in the long run this worked against them. As hip-hop grew to become a global symbol of not only black unity but a global struggle, Senegal's hip-hop was stuck only within the confines of its borders due to the language barrier.

HIP-HOP AND POLITICS

Hip-hop served another purpose in Senegal: it became a driving force for calling out injustice. In the 2012 elections, hip-hop played a pivotal role in ending President Wade's regime, when rappers formed a unified front called "Y'En A Marre" ("enough!"). They organised mass protests across the streets of Dakar demanding better living conditions and political change. President Wade lost the elections and a new Senegal was born, thanks to hip-hop.

FRUITS OF OUR LABOUR

Today mainstream Senegalese artists are way more commercial and less political than their predecessors. Rappers like Dip Doundou Guis, Ngaka blende, Ahlul Bricks, and One Lyrical's craft is mostly centred on ego-tripping songs, flashy lifestyles and beautiful women, just like the majority of their American counterparts. Rappers are signing record-breaking endorsement deals with companies. Social media is also playing a role in helping the large Senegalese diaspora communities reconnect with their roots.

THE GAMBIAN CHAPTER

With the launch of Gambia's first television station in 1996, Gambia had a platform to showcase its own hip-hop, inspired by the Senegalese and American music scene. As the new TV station struggled to fill its programme schedule, almost anything made it onto TV. Neighbourhood rap group who performed at "furals" - neighbourhood talent shows made it onto live television. One group stood out from the lot, and, just like in Senegal's scene, they came from high-class urban neighbourhoods. Da Fugitives was their name, they could afford the baggy jeans, headbands, American football jerseys, and Nike sneakers of their American idols. Their debut album "Fu 4 Life" is

HIP-HOP - THE AFRICAN CONNECTION

ranked amongst the most influential albums in Gambian music history.

HOMEGROWN GAMBIAN HIP-HOP

With the emergence of different Gambian rap groups in the mid 2000's, two music promoters formed an alliance called Black Lynx. This gave the scene a wider platform for artists to showcase their talent. This has since evolved to become Open Mic Festival - The Gambia's biggest music platform, which has now been running for thirteen years.

THE GAMBIAN SOUND EVOLVES

Around this time (the mid-2000s) an innovation emerged. Gambian producers were adding African drums (Sabar) to their beats and it sounded almost like "Mbalax" traditional instrumental music with someone rapping on it. The crowd loved it, but to some, it wasn't hip-hop anymore. It was given a name called "Rap Mbalax" and the Gambian music scene found its own sound. This was the most commercially successful era in Gambian music history and was embraced and popularised by artists like Tam 50, Gee, T Smallz, and Bai Babou. Only one rapper stuck to his guns and rejected the transition, Killa Ace.

THE LAST OF A DYING BREED

Birth name Ali Cham, Killa Ace was born in The Gambia but migrated to the Bronx, New York when he was six years old. "I was introduced to rap music by my big brother Mattar, who was murdered in the Bronx in his early 20s" says Ace. Ace grew to become the prodigy of his brother by partaking in street corner rap battles and by lyrically assassinat-

ing his contemporaries. His local fans used to say "Ace is a killer." This gave him the name Killa Ace. Ace couldn't escape the gang violence of the Bronx and caught his first police arrest at the age of 13. For African parents this was alarming and Killa Ace was sent back to The Gambia on a oneway ticket. Hip-hop was not just a hobby for Killa Ace, it was an oath he took to fulfil the legacy of his late brother Mattar.

Artists like Myk
Jayda - amongst
the most respected artists
in Gambia - put
his neighbourhood on the
map!

In 2012, during the height of the Rap Mbalax era, Ace was sidelined from most concerts and labelled as an outcast who hated his own culture because he refused to adopt the "Rap Mbalax" style. One of Killa Ace's band members Gee switched to the Rap Mbalax genre which created the biggest beef in Gambian music history. Rap Mbalax artists, DJs, and promoters all teamed up against Killa Ace to finally flush him out of the music scene. Ace wasn't given a seat at the table so he had to create his own table and in June 2012, The Cypher was born.

THE CYPHER

The Cypher showcased the five elements of hip-hop: rap, break dancing, DJing, beatboxing, and graffiti. "I never thought that all these talents existed in the Gambia, they just never had a platform to showcase it," says Ace.

Rappers emerged from every corner and today over a dozen locally successful rappers have made a name for themselves

through the platform. Artists like Myk Jayda - amongst the most respected artists in Gambia - put his neighbourhood on the map by creating the Latville music festival, which also promotes artists from his neighbourhood. Izzy T, Binzzy, P Thugga, Kandalit and Qibla are all rappers that took rap music to the next level by creating a homegrown Gambian hip-hop industry.

EXILE

In 2014 Killa Ace reclaimed hiphop's political roots in The Gambia. He joined the fight to topple the brutal President Jammeh, 22 years in power. Ace boldly addressed the situation through a song called "Ku Buka Si Getta Gi" meaning "if you are part of the herd". Ace spoke about police brutality, forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and rampant corruption. As a result, he was forced into exile to Dakar Senegal until the fall of former president Jammeh in 2016.

Today Killa Ace runs an NGO called "Gom Sa Bopa" - Believe in Yourself - which works for social justice and organised the first protest in The Gambia since the fall of the Jammeh. Ace today is amongst the most respected artists and activists in The Gambia for his bold and consistent actions in addressing injustice.

HIP-HOP: A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

No matter the country, region or continent, hip-hop has always served the purpose of showcasing underground talent. It has risen to become a political force: pushing for social justice and political reform. It has maximised and commercialised every aspect of its artform: from fashion, to its sound and mind set. Hip-hop has risen from the rags of the underground Bronx basements to the riches of a multi-billion dollar global industry.

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BARCELONA, THE BBC, AND A BLUETOOTH

SPEAKER

et's be honest, if we think of a HiFi-buff we usually think of them as being surrounded by all manner of boxes of electronics, speakers, and enough cables to rewire the Golden Gate suspension bridge. And, let's also face facts, this is usually a pretty close approximation to the truth of the matter. So given that I'm an all-out, self-confessed, fully paid up, and card-carrying audiophile what am I doing writing an article in praise of the lowly Bluetooth speaker. Stay with me

on this one!

Last summer we had a week or so I the wonderful Catalan city of Barcelona and stayed in a very nice hotel whose breakfast room was on another floor to the block of apartments the "hotel" was located in -it sounds a weird setup, but in truth it worked very well. Anyway, I'm not here to talk about the relative merits and quirks of Catalonian hospitality, and so I will get on with what I am here to bang on about. In this breakfast room we were treated to piped in tunes via w JBL Flip Bluetooth speaker and I thought it sounded pretty decent for a tiny little one-box doodad. I think the staff and other guests may well have thought me a but of a nutjob standing and gawping at this little speaker perched atop a cabinet of crockery.

We live in France and whilst I'm sure the natives find the local FM radio station's steady output of 80's pop and Breton music utterly enthralling, we found ourselves unable to participate in this aural smorgasbord for any period of

...we found ourselves unable to participate in this aural smorgasbord...

time whilst driving about - the only time we really listen to the radio. The other option was BBC Radio 4 (talk, politics, culture, plays) on Long Wave and the reception on that was sporadic at best!

So, having heard the little Flip and having the issue with our in-car entertainment system, my tiny little brain began to slowly connect the dots and suggest that in this glorious age of technological wonder we had options available

to us. Really, why this solution hadn't somehow manifested itself to us previously is one of life's great mysteries...minor "great" mysteries. If we bought one of these new-fangled Bluetooth speakers we could, by the power of the Bluetooths, beam BBC radio from the BBC Music app on one of our phones to the speaker and we would have in-car entertainment a go-go. Happy days!

Being "of an age" connecting these dots took us a bit of time,

but apparently younger and more switched-on folk had been aware of the Bluetooths for sometime and had been using them in a

similar way for yonks. Anyway, we now had all the Bluetooths we could use and we also had music in the car – and what a revelation this was!

Say what you will about Auntie
Beeb, but the content available
on the variety of stations they
curate is pretty wonderful – and
it has actually got us listening
to new and varied music once
again...which can only be a good
thing. Traveling in the car is pretty
much the only way of getting

BANGING ON

around in rural France and so we do spend a lot of time on the highways and byways and we do now consume an awful lot of music via the BBC Sounds app. It's brilliant; you can listen live, listen to shows from weeks ago and if one show doesn't suit you can switch channels. If the internet connection on the phone drops out (regular occurrence) the app will even pick up where it left off – the marvels of technology!

This access to new music on, predominantly, 6 Music has opened up a whole new world of music for us and has given us the opportunity to experience artists that we would never have encountered had I not been for the BBC, their app and a speaker that cost significantly less than a set of speaker jumper cables. For sheer value for money and enjoyment factor this little set up has no comparison when put alongside the tens of thousands of pounds worth of kit that have. Yes, the sound from the Flip is a bit pants when put alongside our, for example, Avantgarde Duos, but that's sort of missing the point. The point is that we now have music and DJs and producers whose taste we trust to bring us into contact with exciting new bands whilst also throwing in the odd familiar tune to keep us singing along.

This all got me thinking about whether HiFi buffs still use radios in their setups, but that's a story and discussion for another time. For now, I'd like to sing the praises of the lowly Bluetooth speaker and how the BBC manages to continue to engage people (even old duffers like us) with new and exciting artists we would have otherwise been blissfully unaware of. John Peel would be proud!



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STU: As a 55 year old male coming from the UK I found that during my teen years and beyond people grouped together in clans based around the kind of music they and their friends enjoyed. This was marked by the kind of clothes they wore and how they looked. Is this still the case in the United Kingdom.

CB: While the UK may still have some subcultures based around musical preferences, the influence of music on youth culture has changed since the 1980s and 1990s. While music still plays a role in the formation of youth identity and subculture, social media and the internet have broadened the range of cultural influences and sources of identity formation.

Today, it is common for young people to draw influences from a variety of sources, including fashion, art, social media, and online communities. This means that while music still plays a role in the formation of youth identity, it is not necessarily the primary driver.

Furthermore, there has been a blurring of the lines between different subcultures and a general trend towards individualism and personal expression.

Many young people today are less interested in fitting into a specific subculture and instead seek to express themselves in unique ways.

Overall, while the UK may still have some subcultures based around musical preferences, the influence of music on youth culture has evolved and diversified since the 1980s and 1990s.

Stu: What are the prevalent youth subcultures in the UK and what identifies a person as coming from the various subcultures you mention?

CB: There are a number of youth subcultures that exist in the UK today. Here are some of the most prevalent:

Hip Hop - Characterized by baggy clothing, sneakers, and baseball caps worn backwards. Influences include rap music and urban street culture.

Indie - Characterized by skinny jeans, band t-shirts, and Converse shoes. Influences include alternative rock music and DIY culture.

Goth - Characterized by black clothing, pale skin,

and heavy eyeliner. Influences include gothic rock music and horror films.

Emo - Characterized by dark clothing, dyed hair, and emotional lyrics. Influences include emo music and pop punk.

Grime - Characterized by tracksuits, caps, and trainers. Influences include grime music and UK urban culture.

Mod - Characterized by sharp suits, skinny ties, and Vespa scooters. Influences include 1960s mod culture and soul music.

These subcultures are often identified by the clothing and accessories worn by members, as well as their musical preferences and interests. However, it's important to note that these are just generalizations, and individuals may identify with multiple subcultures or express themselves in unique ways.

Stu: What percentage of young people belong to the subcultures you mention?

CB: It is difficult to estimate the exact percentage of young people in the UK who belong to the subcultures mentioned, as there are no official statistics or surveys available on this topic. Furthermore, the prevalence of different subcultures may vary depending on the region, city or even the specific community.

It's important to note that subcultures are often fluid and can change over time, with some becoming less popular and new ones emerging. Additionally, many young people may not identify strongly with any particular subculture, but instead express themselves through individual style and interests.

Overall, while subcultures continue to exist and evolve in the UK, it's difficult to provide an accurate estimate of their prevalence without more specific data.

Stu: At what age do people tend to stop identifying with these subcultures and what do they then do?

CB: The age at which individuals stop identifying with subcultures can vary depending on personal preferences and life circumstances. Some people may continue to identify with a subculture well into adulthood, while others may move on as they grow



older.

For some individuals, the subculture may have been a passing phase that they outgrow as they develop new interests and tastes. Others may continue to hold onto the subculture as part of their identity, but may adapt their style and preferences to suit their changing lifestyle and personal circumstances.

It's also important to note that subcultures themselves may change over time, with new influences and trends emerging that may appeal to different age groups. For example, some subcultures that were popular in the 1980s and 1990s have continued to evolve and attract new followers.

Overall, there is no one-size-fits-all answer to when people stop identifying with subcultures, as this can vary greatly depending on individual preferences and life circumstances. However, it's important to recognize that personal growth and change is a natural part of life, and that people may explore new interests and identities as they move through different stages of life.

Stu: In the media, Japan always seems to have youth subcultures that are diverse, often based on western norms and are at odds with traditional Japanese values, what are the most popular subcultures in Japan and are they loosely based around musical preferences?

CB: Japan has a rich and diverse youth subculture scene, with many subcultures that have emerged over the years. While some of these subcultures may draw inspiration from Western norms and aesthetics, they often have their own unique Japanese twist.

Here are some of the most popular subcultures in Japan:

Harajuku fashion - This subculture is characterized by bold and colorful fashion, often incorporating elements of cosplay and anime culture. It originated in the Harajuku district of Tokyo and has since spread throughout Japan and beyond.

Visual kei - This subculture is characterized by flamboyant and theatrical fashion, often inspired by rock and metal music. It includes both male and female performers who often wear heavy makeup, elaborate costumes, and elaborate hairstyles.

Gyaru - This subculture is characterized by a highly feminine and glamorous fashion style, often featuring tanned skin, blonde hair, and heavily stylized makeup.

Lolita fashion - This subculture is characterized by a highly feminine and modest fashion style, often featuring Victorian-era inspired dresses, lace, and ruffles.

Otaku culture - This subculture is characterized by a fascination with anime, manga, and video games. It includes a wide range of interests and hobbies, including cosplay, fan fiction, and collecting merchandise.

While many of these subcultures may have musical preferences associated with them, they are often more broadly defined by their fashion and aesthetic choices, as well as their interests and hobbies. It's also worth noting that these subcultures are not necessarily at odds with traditional Japanese values, but rather represent a unique aspect of Japanese culture and identity.

Stu: It's interesting you say that the subcultures you mention are not at odds with traditional Japanese culture, how do older generations react to these subcultures in Japan and are any of these subcultures frowned upon by older generations?

CB: The reaction of older generations in Japan to youth subcultures can vary, with some embracing the creativity and individuality of these subcultures, while others may be more conservative and view them as a threat to traditional values.

In general, there is often a degree of generational conflict in Japan, with older generations sometimes struggling to understand or relate to the tastes and values of younger generations. This can lead to some friction and criticism of youth subcultures, particularly those that are seen as being more extreme or unconventional.

For example, some older Japanese people may view the Harajuku fashion subculture as being overly

flashy or attention-seeking, while others may view otaku culture as being too focused on fantasy and escapism.

However, it's worth noting that not all older Japanese people hold negative views towards youth subcultures. Some may appreciate the creativity and self-expression that these subcultures represent, while others may simply view them as harmless and part of the natural evolution of youth culture.

Overall, while there may be some generational tensions surrounding youth subcultures in Japan, it's important to recognize that these subcultures are a reflection of the changing values and tastes of younger generations, and play an important role in shaping the cultural landscape of Japan.

Stu: What do you think (worldwide) is the most extreme youth subculture that has its roots in music, or the fashion associated with a particular genre of music?

CB: It's difficult to determine the "most extreme" youth subculture worldwide, as different subcultures may be considered extreme or unconventional for different reasons. However, some subcultures that have been known for their extreme or controversial elements include:

Black metal - This subculture is associated with the extreme metal music genre, and is often characterized by its aggressive and nihilistic themes. Some black metal fans have been known to engage in controversial or even criminal activities, such as church burnings and acts of violence.

Punk - The punk subculture originated in the late 1970s and is associated with loud, aggressive music and anti-establishment politics. Punks often reject mainstream fashion and values, and may engage in political activism or DIY culture.

Gabber - This subculture is associated with the gabber music genre, which originated in the Netherlands in the early 1990s. Gabber music is known for its fast and aggressive beats, and the subculture is often associated with hardcore dance parties and extreme fashion, including shaved heads and baggy clothing.

Goth - The goth subculture emerged in the 1980s and is associated with dark and macabre themes, as well as music genres such as post-punk, darkwave,

and industrial. Goths often wear black clothing and makeup, and may be associated with a fascination with death and the occult.

It's worth noting that while some aspects of these subcultures may be considered extreme or controversial, they also have positive aspects such as promoting self-expression, individuality, and community. As with any subculture, it's important to approach with an open mind and respect for others' beliefs and preferences.

Stu: I recall the controversy about the church burnings in Scandinavian countries by fans of Black Metal, what do you think motivated these people to engage in such violent acts? Was it the influence of the subculture, the music, or something else?

CB: The motivations behind the church burnings carried out by black metal fans in Scandinavian countries during the 1990s are complex and multifaceted. While it's difficult to generalize about the motivations of individuals involved in these acts, some possible factors include:

Anti-Christian sentiment: Many black metal fans were openly hostile towards Christianity and viewed the church burnings as a way to express their opposition to what they saw as a dominant and oppressive religious institution.

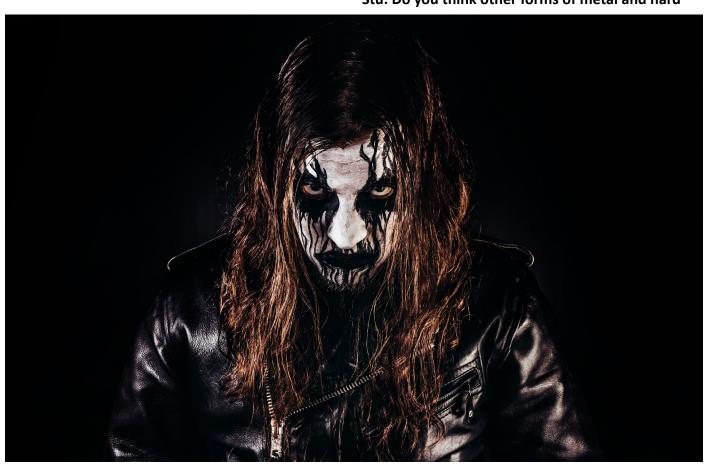
A desire for attention: Some black metal fans may have carried out these acts as a way to gain attention and notoriety within the subculture, which at the time was relatively underground and unknown outside of Scandinavia.

Political ideology: Some black metal fans were associated with far-right and neo-Nazi groups, and may have viewed the church burnings as a way to promote their extremist views and intimidate those who did not share them.

Youthful rebellion: Like many youth subcultures, black metal was characterized by a sense of rebellion and nonconformity. Some fans may have carried out the church burnings as a way to express their anger and frustration with society and mainstream culture.

It's important to note that while the church burnings were undoubtedly a controversial and destructive aspect of the black metal subculture, they were carried out by a relatively small number of individuals and do not represent the views or actions of the vast majority of black metal fans. Many black metal musicians and fans have since condemned the church burnings and distanced themselves from the extremist elements of the subculture.

Stu: Do you think other forms of metal and hard



rock were unduly tarnished by the actions of a relatively small group of people from the Black Metal subculture?

CB: It's possible that other forms of metal and hard rock may have been unduly tarnished by the actions of a small group of people from the Black Metal subculture. The church burnings and other criminal activities associated with Black Metal were widely reported in the media at the time, which may have led to a general perception that all forms of metal and hard rock music were associated with violence and extremism.

However, it's important to note that the vast majority of metal and hard rock fans are not involved in criminal or extremist activities, and the genre as a whole has a long history of promoting positive values such as self-expression, creativity, and community. In recent years, many metal and hard rock musicians and fans have spoken out against the negative stereotypes associated with the genre, and have worked to promote a more inclusive and positive image.

Ultimately, it's up to each individual to decide for themselves whether they want to engage with a particular subculture or genre of music. It's important to approach any subculture or community with an open mind and a willingness to learn, and to remember that the actions of a small group of individuals do not represent the beliefs or values of an entire subculture or genre.

Stu: One of the most widely adopted youth cultures in the last 40 years has been Rave culture. Like the hippy movement in the 60's and the use of LSD, the Rave movement seemed to have grown around the use of MDMA (Ecstasy). How do you think that the use of particular drugs by a subgroup influenced their social and political opinions? Or were young people just out for a good time and liked to enjoy music whilst high on these drugs?

CB: The relationship between drug use and social/political beliefs among young people is complex and multifaceted, and can vary widely depending on a number of factors such as individual attitudes and experiences, cultural context, and historical circumstances.

In the case of the Rave culture and the use of MDMA (Ecstasy), it's likely that the drug played a

significant role in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of some young people involved in the subculture. MDMA is known to produce feelings of empathy, openness, and connectedness, and many users have reported that the drug has helped them to feel more connected to others and more aware of social and political issues.

At the same time, it's important to recognize that not all young people involved in the Rave culture were motivated by social or political concerns, and that many were simply looking for a good time and a way to connect with others. Additionally, the use of drugs like MDMA can also have negative consequences, both for individual health and well-being and for the wider social and political context in which they are used.

Overall, it's important to approach any youth subculture with a nuanced and open-minded perspective, recognizing that young people's attitudes and beliefs are shaped by a wide range of factors, including but not limited to drug use. By doing so, we can gain a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives of young people and work to create a more inclusive and supportive society for all.

Stu: And what about the hippies and the use of LSD?

CB: Similar to the Rave culture and the use of MDMA, the relationship between the hippie movement and the use of LSD was complex and multifaceted. Many young people involved in the hippie movement viewed LSD as a tool for personal and spiritual growth, and believed that it could help to expand their consciousness and promote feelings of peace, love, and interconnectedness.

At the same time, the use of LSD and other psychedelic drugs was also associated with a number of negative consequences, including health risks, legal problems, and social stigma. Additionally, not all young people involved in the hippie movement were motivated by a desire for personal or spiritual growth, and many were simply looking for a way to rebel against mainstream society and to connect with others who shared their values and beliefs. Overall, the relationship between drug use and social/political attitudes among young people is complex and multifaceted, and can vary widely depending on a number of factors. While drugs like LSD and MDMA may play a significant role in shaping the



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attitudes and beliefs of some young people involved in subcultures like the hippie movement and the Rave culture, it's important to recognize that these attitudes and beliefs are also influenced by a wide range of other factors, including social and political context, personal experiences, and cultural values.

Stu: Are any of the Japanese subcultures you mentioned earlier influenced or characterised by the consumption of particular illicit substances or drugs?

CB: It's important to note that the use of illicit substances is generally frowned upon in Japanese society, and drug use is relatively rare compared to many other countries. That being said, there are some subcultures in Japan that are associated with the use of certain drugs, though these subcultures are typically small and relatively underground.

One example is the "techno tribe" subculture, which emerged in the 1990s and is associated with the use of MDMA and other party drugs. The techno tribe is characterized by its focus on electronic music, dancing, and a sense of community and shared experience. The use of drugs like MDMA is seen as a way to enhance the experience of the music and to deepen the sense of connection and empathy among members of the subculture.

Another example is the "yankii" subculture, which is associated with working-class youth and is characterized by a rebellious attitude and a distinctive fashion sense. While drug use is not a defining characteristic of the yankii subculture, it is sometimes associated with the use of stimulants like amphetamines.

Overall, it's important to note that drug use is relatively uncommon in Japan, and that subcultures associated with drug use are typically small and relatively underground. Additionally, it's important to approach any subculture with a nuanced and open-minded perspective, recognizing that young people's attitudes and behaviors are shaped by a wide range of factors, including but not limited to drug use.

Stu: What do you think will be the next global youth movement or phenomenon? And what will influence its growth and direction?

CB: It's difficult to predict with certainty what the

next global youth movement or phenomenon will be, as these movements often emerge in response to complex social, political, and cultural factors that can be difficult to predict or anticipate. That being said, there are some trends and developments that may influence the growth and direction of future youth movements.

One important factor is the ongoing globalization of culture and communication, which has made it easier for young people to connect with others around the world who share their interests and beliefs. This has led to the emergence of many subcultures that are global in scope and are not tied to any specific geographic location.

Another important factor is the ongoing social and political changes that are taking place around the world, including growing concerns about climate change, inequality, and the role of technology in society. These issues are likely to influence the attitudes and behaviors of young people, and may lead to the emergence of new youth movements focused on addressing these and other pressing issues.

Finally, the ongoing evolution of technology and social media is likely to continue to play a significant role in shaping the growth and direction of future youth movements. As new platforms and technologies emerge, they will provide new opportunities for young people to connect with others and to amplify their voices and messages.

Overall, the next global youth movement or phenomenon is likely to emerge in response to a complex interplay of social, political, and cultural factors, and will be influenced by ongoing trends in globalization, technology, and social change.

Stu: How has the internet influenced youth culture in the last ten years?

CB: The internet has had a significant impact on youth culture in the last ten years, transforming the way that young people interact with each other, consume media, and express themselves. Some of the ways in which the internet has influenced youth culture include:

Social media: Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have become a central part of youth culture, providing young people with new ways to connect with each other and share informa-

tion and experiences.

Online activism: The internet has provided a platform for young people to organize and engage in political and social activism on a global scale, allowing them to connect with like-minded individuals and build communities around shared causes.

Online communities and subcultures: The internet has allowed young people to connect with others who share niche interests and hobbies, leading to the emergence of new online communities and subcultures.

Access to information and education: The internet has made it easier for young people to access information and educational resources, helping to democratize knowledge and provide new opportunities for learning and self-improvement.

Online entertainment: The internet has transformed the way that young people consume entertainment, providing them with a vast array of streaming services, online games, and other digital content.

Overall, the internet has had a profound impact on youth culture in the last ten years, providing young people with new opportunities for connection, expression, and self-discovery.

Stu: What negative impacts has the internet had on youth culture and in specific the subcultures based around specific musical genres?

CB: While the internet has had many positive impacts on youth culture, it has also had some negative effects, particularly on subcultures based around specific musical genres. Some of the negative impacts include:

Homogenization of subcultures: The internet has made it easier for people to access information and connect with others who share their interests, but it has also led to the homogenization of subcultures. As more people participate in online communities and consume digital content, subcultures may become more mainstream and lose some of their distinctiveness.

Cyberbullying: The anonymity of the internet can lead to cyberbullying, which can be particularly damaging to young people. Cyberbullying can take many forms, including harassment, threats, and the spread of false rumors, and it can have a seri-

ous impact on young people's mental health and well-being.

Overexposure to negative content: The internet can expose young people to a wide range of negative and harmful content, including violent and pornographic material. This can have a desensitizing effect on young people, making them more accepting of behaviors and attitudes that are harmful to themselves and others.

Online addiction: The constant stimulation and access to digital content can lead to addiction, with some young people spending excessive amounts of time online to the detriment of their physical and mental health.

Disconnection from real-life communities: While the internet has made it easier for young people to connect with others who share their interests, it can also lead to a disconnection from real-life communities. This can have a negative impact on young people's social skills and ability to form meaningful relationships outside of the digital realm.

Overall, while the internet has had many positive impacts on youth culture, it is important to recognize and address the negative impacts it can have, particularly on subcultures based around specific musical genres.

Stu: What about the role of television programs and their influence on the homogenisation of music that young people are exposed to on television, radio, and online?

CB: Television programs can play a significant role in the homogenization of music that young people are exposed to on television, radio, and online. Many popular television programs feature a limited range of musical genres, often focused on the mainstream pop, hip-hop, or rock genres. This can limit the exposure that young people have to more niche or alternative musical genres and subcultures.

In addition, television programs often focus on the most commercially successful and marketable musicians, leading to a narrowing of the musical landscape and a preference for homogenous, mass-produced music. This can make it more difficult for musicians and subcultures outside of the mainstream to gain exposure and build a following.

However, the rise of streaming platforms and the internet has made it easier for young people to access a wider range of music, including more niche and alternative genres. This has challenged the dominance of mainstream media and given a platform for more diverse musical voices and subcultures to emerge and thrive.

Overall, while television programs and other forms of mainstream media can contribute to the homogenization of music that young people are exposed to, the rise of digital platforms has also created opportunities for greater diversity and more alternative subcultures to emerge.

Stu: What are the most popular platforms for younger people to access new music that is away from the mainstream music we have mentioned?

CB: The most popular platforms for younger people to access new music that is away from the main-stream can vary, but some popular options include:

Streaming services: Platforms like Spotify, Apple Music, and Tidal allow users to access a vast library of music from a wide range of genres, including underground and independent artists.

SoundCloud: SoundCloud is a popular platform for independent musicians to share their music and connect with listeners. The platform allows users to discover new and emerging artists and explore a diverse range of genres.

Bandcamp: Bandcamp is an online marketplace for independent musicians to sell and share their music directly with fans. The platform allows users to discover new artists and genres and support independent music.

YouTube: YouTube is a popular platform for music discovery, particularly for younger audiences. The platform allows users to access a wide range of music videos and live performances, as well as discover new and emerging artists.

Social media: Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram have become popular for music discovery, with many artists using these platforms to promote their music and connect with fans.

Overall, there are many platforms available for younger people to access new and diverse music

outside of mainstream channels. These platforms allow for greater access to underground and independent music and can contribute to the formation of new and diverse youth subcultures.

Stu: Is there a danger that the musical content on the platforms you mention will, over time, become homogenised by the influence of small groups of people who control their content, or will the content continue to be diverse and ever-changing?

CB: There is a potential danger that the musical content on the platforms I mentioned could become homogenized over time, particularly if a small group of people or companies control the platform's content. However, the nature of these platforms and their user-generated content model means that they are generally more diverse and ever-changing compared to traditional mainstream media channels.

For example, streaming services like Spotify and SoundCloud use algorithms and user data to recommend music to users, which can expose listeners to new and diverse music outside of mainstream channels. Similarly, Bandcamp and social media platforms allow independent artists to promote their music directly to fans, without the need for major label support. This means that there is a greater potential for diverse and unique musical content to thrive on these platforms.

That being said, it's important to acknowledge that these platforms are not immune to external factors that could influence their content. For example, record labels and major artists could potentially use their influence and resources to promote their music on these platforms, potentially crowding out independent and diverse content. Additionally, algorithms and data-driven recommendations could reinforce existing biases and filter bubbles, limiting exposure to new and diverse music.

Overall, while there is a potential for homogenization, the user-generated content model of many online platforms means that there is a greater potential for diverse and ever-changing musical content compared to traditional mainstream media channels. However, it's important to remain vigilant and aware of potential external influences that could limit the diversity and uniqueness of musical content on these platforms.

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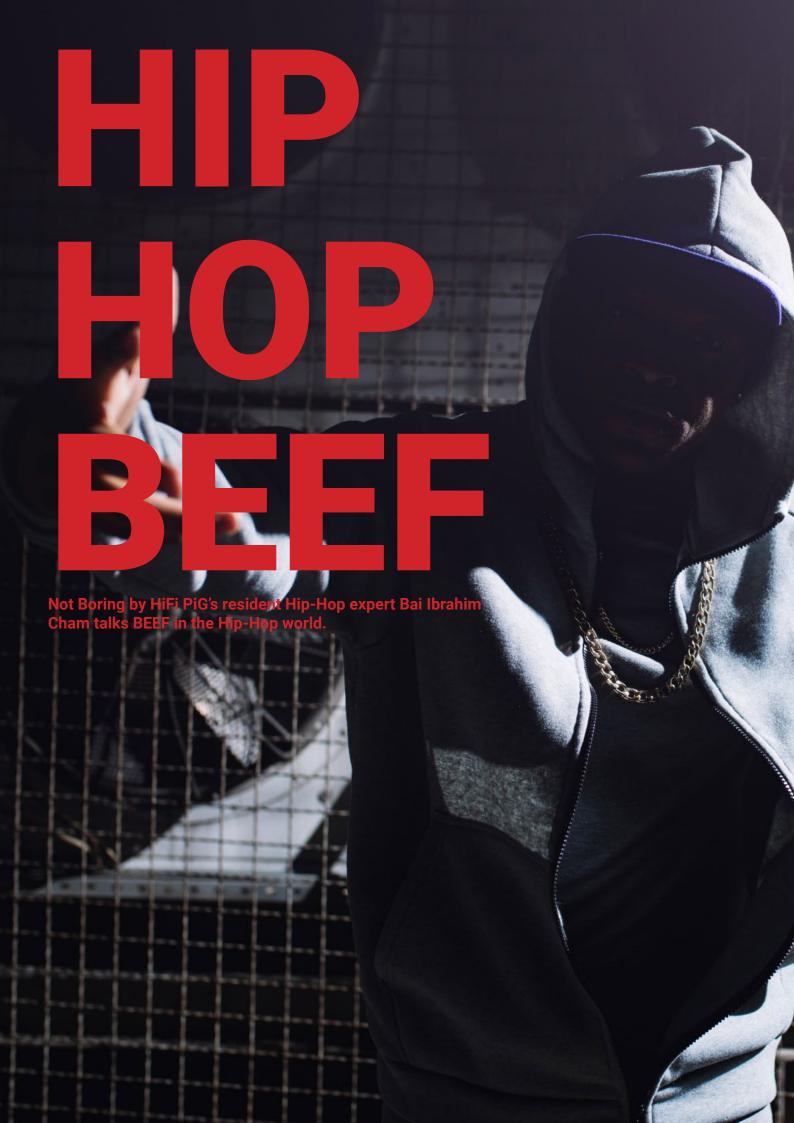
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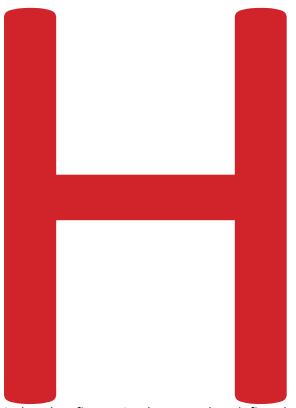
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BEEF IN HIP HOP



ip-hop has five main elements that define the genre: Rap, breakdancing, graffiti, deejay-ing and beatboxing. These have been the central pillars of hip-hop since its inception in the 1970s. The most popular is rapping, now commonly known as MCing, which has seen an outburst of talent. Even producers and CEOs of record labels haven't been able to resist the temptations of the ego-tripping, flossing, and the larger-than-life persona that comes with being a rapper. Producers and CEOs like Dr Dre, Master P aka Percy Miller, Jermaine Dupri, Pharell Williams, Birdman aka Bryan Williams of Cash Money Records and Mannie Fresh the producer have all succumbed to the seductive glamour of being a rapper.

There are different types of rapping techniques: Ego tripping is more of a subliminal "diss". It is not necessarily aimed at anyone, but if decoded properly it may be a subtle criticism of someone in particular. So most rappers use this technique in their songs to not "rock the boat" too much and to send a subtle message to their contemporaries that they are coming for that number one spot.

Hip-hop has evolved so much over the years that ego-tripping itself has changed from its original nature of punchline, metaphors and wordplay to celebrating material wealth. Rappers now mostly ego-trip about money, women and property. Music videos have turned into a circus of materialism instead of creativity, inspiration and art. Of course, this breeds jealousy and envy. Considering the culture that surrounds hip-hop this can turn violent or deadly if taken to the streets. In some cases, it stays professional and opposing MCs get at each other lyrically.

Even though hip-hop is a musical genre, beef may not start off in music. It can start with something as petty as one rapper seeing a contemporary dating a female celebrity that he has a crush on. Sometimes it may be two rappers being affiliated with two rival gangs. It can also start in the studio, by throwing an ego-tripping verse that a fellow rapper may feel is aimed at him. One thing that a rapper would ever want compromised is the level of respect they have in the public sphere.

As early as the 1960s, beef was happening through music. An early example is "You Keep Her" a diss track by Joe Tex in 1962. He wrote the song after his wife left him for soul singer James Brown, who then broke up with her and wrote Tex a letter saying he could have her back. Tex refused and ridiculed this offer in his song.

Since then, beef and dis tracks have spread across many other genres. For example, Dancehall express grievances through what they call "clash'. Even present-day Afrobeats, which is more of an upbeat dance genre, has its own version of beef. For hip-hop, it has grown to become a money-making strategy, with opposing teams raking in millions of dollars from the attention and record sales that follow beef. On the flip side, it has cost the genre the lives of its most prolific MCs - hip-hop is now one of the most dangerous genres of music to start a beef.

THE BIGGEST BEEF: TUPAC AND BIGGIE

We can't speak about beef and not mention the most historic beef of all time: between the rappers Tupac and Biggie Smalls. This beef morphed from being between two record labels - Bad Boy Records and Death Row Records - to a whole coast-to-coast battle between East and West coast North America. Music promoters on the West coast couldn't book artists from the East coast due to security threats and likewise for promoters on the East coast.

Tupac was headquartered in Los Angeles and Biggie Smalls was from Brooklyn, New York. They met in 1993 and became close acquaintances during the early stages of their careers. It all took a u-turn in 1994 when Tupac was shot 5 times in New York in the lobby of Quad Record studios. Tupac blamed the incident on Biggie and his music producer P Diddy, claiming that they set him up and wanted to kill him. Biggie and Bad Boy records deny this, claiming that they were in the studio waiting for Tupac to record with them when the shooting happened. Later that year Biggie released a song called "Who Shot Ya", a song many claim to be a diss directed at Tupac.

Soon after the incident, Tupac was found guilty of rape and was sentenced to a 4 year prison sentence. After serving one year, Tupac was out on a historic \$1 million bail paid by Death Row record's label CEO Surge Knight. Fresh out of jail, Tupac went for Biggie's head with the most historic diss track in hip-hop history "Hit 'Em Up" where he claimed to have had sex with Biggie's then wife Faith Evans and threatened to kill everyone affiliated with Bad Boy

records.

The beef then took to the streets, where it became deadly. In 1996 after a Mike Tyson fight, Tupac was tragically shot dead in Las Vegas on his way to an after-party. Months later Biggie Smalls was shot dead in Los Angeles during his album promotion tour. Beef robbed hip-hop of two of its greatest artists and the murders remain unsolved to this day.

King of London's Grime scene, Stormzy, hit back with a diss track called "Disappointed" where he called Wiley a proval from his own mother. crackhead

UK BEEF: STORMZY AND WILEY

Founded in the UK, Grime has all the attributes of its parent genre, hip-hop. It added some of its own twists, with different instrumentals and the distinctive London accents of its artists. Following in the footsteps of hip-hop, beef has become a feature of Grime. With a flourishing industry, two of the UK's biggest Grime artists - Stormzy and Wiley - locked horns and gone for each other's heads.

The beef between these two Grime greats stemmed from a separate conflict. In 2019 Dot Rotten, Aitch, Jay1, and Skepta exchanged insults based on accusations of flow stealing. Wiley was also involved and pulled Stormzy into it by mentioning him and Ed Sheeran in his two 2020 diss tracks "Ediyat Skengman 1" and "Ediyat Skengman 2".

King of London's Grime scene, Stormzy, hit back with a diss track called "Disappointed" where he called Wiley a crackhead. This was followed with "Still Disappointed", a second jab from the reigning king of Grime.

US BEEF, THE SECOND GENERATION: NAS vs JAY-Z

Following the passing of Tupac and Biggie, many thought the beef between Jay-Z and Nas was leading towards the same lethal outcome. The seeds of their animosity were planted in 1996 when Nas failed to appear for a recording session for Jay-Z's

debut album, "Reasonable Doubt". Nas released his second album weeks after Jay-z's debut and it included at least one line "inspired" by his rival.

Following the death of Biggie Smalls, Jay-Z claimed he was now New York's best MC and used his music to exert his perceived dominance over Nas. In 1999 Jay-Z's prodigy, Memphis Bleek took aim at Nas in his music, and in the year 2000, in Jay-Z's sixth studio album "The Blueprint", Jay-Z took a direct shot

at Nas with the diss song "Take

Nas's response is probably one of the greatest diss track of all time, up there with Tupac's "Hit 'Em Up". The track, "Ether" was a vicious attack on Jay-Z and the full Roca-A-Fella crew and on the streets was widely seen as a knockout blow. To water down the embarrassment, Jay-Z responded with "Supa Ugly", a deeply personal response that earned Jigga (Jay-Z) public disap-

The hype of the beef then died down, however, there were still subliminal jabs thrown at each other but it seemed as if both rappers had fired their best

shots. In 2005, peace was declared when Nas appeared on stage with Jay-Z during Jay-Z's "I Declare War". The duo performed "Dead Presidents" and " The World Is Yours", setting everything right in the hip-hop universe.

THE MINDSET

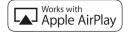
The dark days of beef in the 1990s cost the genre its most reputable emcees and will always be regretted. It has wreaked havoc on the minds of upcoming MCs by making them believe that they must make a mark on the streets in order to be respected as a rapper. Over the years, especially since the 2000's, this has drastically changed. Respected rappers such as Kanye West, J Cole, Eminem, Pharrell Williams and Kendrick Lamar use rap as a vehicle for social commentary, not just bragging about guns, drugs and violence.

Former rappers or gangsters are now educating the younger generation that there is more to hip-hop music than misogyny, death threats and gang violence. Podcasts are a particularly powerful tool in spreading this message. Hip-hop may still be experiencing beefs but they have turned less violent. Rappers have shifted their focus from earning street respect to becoming business moguls in the industries that surround music. Nowadays rappers don't just rap, they invest and give back to the streets that they came from rather than feeding them poisonous lyrics of violence and crime.

















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HiFiPiG (HP): Tell us a little about how you became interested in HiFi, is this something that developed when you were young?

Lars Kristensen (LK): Yeah, I think when I was around ten years old, my dad was running a radio store also selling bicycles but ending up to be one of the first high end audio dealers in Denmark. I remember my first system was actually a Bang & Olufsen Beocord - reel to reel tape recorder with built-in phono stage.

That was mine - I got it from my dad and a Beogram 1000 from Bang Olufsen which was a very famous turntable and then I had some Danish speakers. I still remember the sound because I have my entire life listened to music in pictures. I still remember how it sounded. That was my first stereo. Then, I guess I was around 15 or 16 maybe, my dad started to import in his shop the brands Fisher and Marantz from the US. At that time, they didn't have any distribution worldwide, so my dad had to buy it from American dealers and of course you had an issue because it was 110 Volts equipment in Denmark, So we had to put a transformer (110/220V) between it. Also, I think my dad was amongst the very first who imported McIntosh to Denmark. To be honest, my dad, he loved McIntosh. So, you can say from when I was a kid, I got the got the virus then into my veins. That's actually what started it all. When I was starting my career, I helped my dad and some of his guys to set up systems – I was 17 years old, so you can say I have more than 50 years of experience doing this job.

HP: How did music influence you when you were young?

LK: The real interest for live music I got at the age of 15 years old. Already at that time, I had experienced rock music - not festivals because it didn't exist at that time, but in clubs, but, when I was studying, one of my friends, Peter, came to me and said Lars, there's a new British band coming to town. And I had no clue about who he was talking about, but I know that the tickets were around more than \$10 at that time, and I didn't have the money, to be honest. This was back in 1967 and at that time, \$10 was a lot of money, especially for a young student without any income like me - except what I got paid when I did a job for my dad. So, I asked my dad, "can of borrow these \$10 from you". "To what" – "he asked – "I have to listen to this rock concert"

- "Rock concert, what the hell are you talking about ? -for that kind of money you can have a membership in the local jazz club for a whole year at least, maybe two years". But I had to go to see them - it was in a small concert hall in here in Aaborg, called "Vejgaard hallen". There was space for 200 people maximum. That is maybe the best musical experience I have ever got in my life – also because I was standing two meters from the stage and in front of me we have the band Cream with Jack Bruce on bass which I realized over the years is one of my favourites and maybe the best bass guitarist ever. Behind the drums there was a another extremely talented guy called Ginger Baker and then of course, we have Mr. Slowhand, Clapton on the stage – what a band. They were supposed to play two times 45 minutes, but they played from around 10:30 in the evening to 3 o'clock in the morning. Ginger Baker did a drum solo for more than half an hour. I still remember it as was it yesterday. It is really where my deep interest in music comes from.

I have been lucky most of my life, except for a few years I have managed to make my income out of my hobby, which is music. At that time, I really got the virus when I heard that concert. When we have some of the best musicians on stage in the one band, I said, wow, what an experience, you know. I'm very curious about music and for quite a few years I loved opera. I had no clue about opera until I went to Kiev in Ukraine and they have a small, beautiful opera house where there's no really amplification of the orchestra or the singers. So, you have them almost in front of you. At that time, I got shocked how powerful the human voice is, the most powerful instrument, no doubt. More powerful than any other instrument I know of. When you have an opera singer, maybe 20 or 30 meters from you and you feel the energy from the voice, then you are shocked, you know.

HP: How did you get into the HiFi Industry? Tell us about you career and how it led to the present day at Audio Group Denmark?

LK: That is when I started my career. I helped my dad when I finished studying a few years, but my dad wanted me to take over his business. I was only 18 or 19 years old and have no clue running business. So he closed his shop when he was most successful. Guess that's, it's not normal to close your shop when it's running on top. What happened then, was that I was quite a few years in different HiFi shops

until around 1982.

When I was 23 years old (1975) I worked for a big Danish music store, Fona They called me and said: we need a guy running our shop Here in Aalborg and my first job was to fire half of the crew because the shop was not doing too well, but ended up to increase the business nearly eight times during a five and a half year.

I started to work at one of my friends' shops, a HiFi shop called KT Radio. I was running this for eight and half years. At that time I was contacted by Nordost from US – they asked me if I want to promote and sell their cables and that must have been by the early 90's. I worked for these guys for 20 years and I got a lot of experience.

When I worked at Nordost, I ran into a old client of mine. His name is Michael Børresen. My current business partner. We met in the hot dog stand and he said, oh, I have made a ribbon tweeter, it could maybe have your interest. That was a real ribbon tweeter, not the ribbon planar used in our speakers today. The tweeter sounded really good and you could put on top of any speaker and increase the performance quite dramatically. I sold a few hundred pairs of the ribbon tweeter at that time. Then a few years later Michael came and said - "Hmm -Lars I have made a new tweeter. I think you should have a listen to it. I did a big mistake listening to it because the Raidho ribbon planar tweeter was the first time in my entire life it was not a panel speaker, I couldn't hear treble. I hear the instrument going out in a natural way. And I said, Wow, Michael said "Yeah, then we start to make speakers". I said "No, Mike, there's plenty of manufactured speakers out there already". Though, after a year or two, Michael came back and said that he has found some investors and that led to the foundation of Raidho – that is almost 20 years ago.

Michael and I took the decision to leave Nordost, that was in 2012, where we started first of our current companies, Ansuz, which was celebrating its ten years anniversary last year. So, time is running fast, you see.

So, where are we today? I've been following Michael, like soul brothers, because we are. - yes we are different, very different from each other, but we work as a fantastic team. Michael and I have a few things in common, and one really important is

that we can taste or smell potential in things, not only in products but also in people. that's why I still love traveling. I love people. And most of our clients around the world are very intelligent, very clever people. And it gives me a kick.

HP: Who would you say is the biggest influence on your life and work? (This could be more than one person)

LK: Of course, my wife, my kids and grandkids. They are priority number one. The second is that the team we have today with, you know, we have increased business quite a lot. In 2020 we were 15 people and now we are 30 people more, we are 45 people employed today. So, we have had a nice growth, but it's still something Michael and I have in common and that's why Michael is an important part of my life that we have the passion. And I think the passion is the key word for the level we work when we make decisions as we did from the very beginning to be a Formula One team. And I also think it's exciting to be a member of a Formula One team, which most people have not even close to have that experience because there's only a few out there. So, I think my family and Michael.

My wife always tell me that I'm travelling half of my life. That's not quite true, maybe a third of my life. People means a lot to me because, the people you meet out there is ending up to be what I call business friends or even closer and some of them showed up to my 70th birthday last year, even though there was a lot of restrictions. I fell into tears and the said "We're coming Lars" and that means you have some business friends as close as you would call close friends. That made my 70 years anniversary into a fantastic experience.

They (family) stabilize your life and you also feel that you are loved and people are taking care of you. And that's important. Otherwise, I couldn't travel, if I don't have that freedom, that was impossible. Iben (Lars' wife) and I, we have been knowing each other only for 42 years and the last 30 years I've been traveling So there's nothing new into it.

HP: We found when we visited Audio Group Denmark that the atmosphere at your HQ feels very friendly and like a family, there seems to be close ties between you all, how importance is friendship to you in your work?





Lars and his wife Iben

LK: That's the most important thing when it comes to your business. I mean, without very skilled people in any position to have in a company, you have to feel the passion, to feel the energy. And for me, everything is about the energy. So, I agree totally with Einstein: everything is energy.

HP: You are a very energetic person, where does all this energy come from?

LK: I have no clue (Laughing). To be honest. I have had this my entire life. My life is black and white. Either we do things hundred percent, or we don't. My dad told me several times: "Lars, don't spend time with the grey people. They will only absorb your energy". That's why I love it when I meet people, their energy level and maybe even higher than mine or even more intelligent than I am. It gives me a kick. People are giving me a kick every day. The grey people thing is good advice: don't spend time with them because they don't give you anything. They're draining your energy. And I think I have had that in mind since my dad taught me this many years ago. I don't spend time with grey people. They don't offer you anything.

HP: What is the most enjoyable aspect about working in the HiFi Industry?

LK: I love us (Audio Group Denmark) being a "Formula One team". We are amongst the very best in the world. If that doesn't give you a kick, you are half dead. You know when you visited us, then you know what everything is about. So, you're always welcome at any time.

HP: And is there anything in particular that you don't like?

LK: There is. I have concerns. It's not about liking, but I'm concerned. I have a good friend of mine who went to the recent show in Aarhus (DK). I talked to the guy, and he said: "You know what? I was disappointed. I don't think the industry has moved the last 30 years". And that concerns me. When you see how quick other parts of industry moves — if you look at your mobile phones, there is an update almost every half year. And when we look at electronics in our industry — especially amplifiers, more or less all at the designs was developed in the eighties and the tube amps are even worse they were developed with in the fifties and sixties - so if you compare with other industries, we look like fucking

amateurs. I mean it, seriously, that is my biggest concern. I don't like that our whole industry is so conservative. One of the most conservative industries in in the whole world of any industry. We're not moving.

HP: If you were not working in the HiFi Industry now, what would you be doing?

LK: I would not be around anymore. I would be nine feet down. You know, we got Flemming Erik Rasmussen on board, former Gryphon. He called me up to Christmas and said: "Lars, you have extended my life". And the same here. I couldn't just go at home, I would be bored to death and I would die of it. And there is no second choice.

HP: You must have met some famous people during your time in the industry, who were you most excited about meeting? Tell us a bit about meeting them.

LK: There's one guy sticking out of anyone I have ever met in the industry. And that's Mr. High End. There's only one who can have that title, because he invented it. And his name was Harry Person of the Absolute Sound. There's a reason why he's magazine was called The Absolute Sound because it means the best of the best. We got a very close relationship simply because there was a lot of respect in both directions. I know a lot of manufacturers was scared of him because he would tell them that this is a piece of shit of a speaker, or this is a bad awful amplifier you have. He told you the truth or the way he looked at it at least. We have always been talking about the Golden Ear. Harry didn't have the Golden Ear, me neither, but Harry developed himself over the years – he is the most intelligent guy I have met in the industry. Maybe also out of the industry. Anyhow, he was lightning sharp. I remember we had a discussion about a Nordost Cable called Red Dawn and I said "why would not make a review of Red Dawn?" and he told me: "I don't like it, Lars" But if you could do a better review yourself, please, You're welcome. So, he was straightforward: "I don't like that part". It's fair enough. As a manufacturer you have to respect that you and your products cannot be loved by everyone. I miss him. He passed away some years ago. He was a fantastic person. Quite a few people didn't know he existed because he never really showed his face in public, but he was a warm-hearted guy and he loved the Aalborg Aquavit. I had to carry a bottle of Aquavit every time I

went to see him. If I didn't, he was so disappointed and shouted at me: "why in the hell have you not brought that bottle or Aquavit or Snaps, Lars". He was a very, very unusual person and I think he is by far the best writer and a lot of people learned from him.

HP: What is your favourite HiFi product that you have been involved in creating and why?

LK:I have to go back in time. You know, I worked for Nordost for 20 years and, it's very rarely happening that you have an absolute reference product. When it comes to cars, any high performing cars are always measured up against a Porsche 911 of some kind or Porsche at least.

So, when it comes to cars, there's no doubt about that there's an absolute reference. But we achieved the same and I'm very proud to be a member of that crew who came up with the Valhalla product. The whole competition were measuring up against the Valhalla. Some are saying that: "it's nearly as good as for half the price" and others are saying : "even better than the Valhalla" and so on.

And I'm sure that there were better cables – this is not the issue, but the whole competition and the reviewers were measuring cables up against Valhalla. So I'm very proud to be a part of that and it could only happen because we had a fantastic team at that time and we really had.

There's another product - I think when we came out with the iron free motor system (Børresen), it was a revolution in the industry, and I find it by far the product I'm most proud of. It is a revolution in driver technology. As you know there was a Dane, Peter Jensen, that 102 years ago created the dynamic driver — and of course the driver has been refined with better magnets and so on, but this is the first real revolution on a dynamic driver and I'm proud to be a part of that.

HP: And what HiFi product, not made by your brand, do you wish you had been involved with creating and why?

LK: When I was in High End Audio retailing, a guy from Linn, Scotland popped up in my shop and said, "we have a different point of view how to demo stuff - but we also have something extraordinary to offer". And I think if there is any absolute reference

product in the industry, it's for sure the Linn Sondek LP12. Do I find it still an amazing turntable - Yes, I do, I think it's an amazing turntable. I think it's maybe the second product in the industry who has been in absolute reference for many years. Are there better turntables of today. Yes, but a very well-adjusted LP 12 with the right tonearm and the right cartridge is still a killer turntable. That turntable was far ahead of the competition at that time and I still find this an outstanding product.

You know that we, in our three companies, work with the phrase: "claim and prove". When you tell people to spend more money, you get more. When people buy an Ansuz cable or whatever, we don't want to change the fact that they actually like their speakers, we just want to give more of what they already have and that I in fact what Neil from Linn taught me at that time. He showed the differences in quality for the clients. I think I had six or seven Linn turntables in my shop from the cheapest in basic with the same tonearm and then I showed all the upgrades. Did, I get a special experience in setting up LP12 turntables or any other turntable? Yes, I did – and together with the three guys in my shop we managed to sell 172 turntables in one year. I don't say it too often. I really learned my lesson here – claim and proof.

HP: Audio Group Denmark has some very different approaches to HiFi technology, how do you deal with people that are disbelievers? Have you ever 'converted' someone that previously didn't believe your products could work as claimed? Tell us about that...

LK: A couple of weeks ago we are at the Florida Auto Show in Tampa and there was quite a few who said, how can you ask for \$100,000 for a monitor called M1 of Børresen? And there was quite a few who said came afterwards and said: "when I hear what technology you put in them, and I hear the performance of them I realize that they are the minimum one hundred thousand dollars' worth definitely". The same happened at the shop we went to see in Atlanta, Evolution Audio. The Atlanta HiFi Club came to see us Saturday, I think there were 30 or 40 people, quite a few. And there was the same question: "How can you ask for that kind of money for a M1". The guy was sitting in the middle and first he saw the zirconium basket, the silver supreme magnet motor system, the membrane on the tweeter, The cone material driver and so on. And then he heard



three or four pieces of music of his own choice and then he said: "Lars you're selling it too cheap for what it is. So there's no doubt about that we have pushed the envelope when it comes to the speakers. We do the same on our electronics and we do the same on our cables or whatever. We are also humble – and we know that our products can't be loved by all people. And there's different preferences about what's good and bad. We know that we have to shine – it's our only chance – in the high end audio business where American companies are totally dominating the whole industry. If we don't shine, we have no chances.

HP: What do you see as the future of the HiFi In-

dustry?

LK: I see a great future, because if you see the younger generations, they are listening to two channel music every day on their head - Headphones. And of course, you can't share when you have a headphone on, but you figure out if maybe it's a good idea when you're looking at YouTube to share good music, whatever with the rest of your family and your friends. So maybe I don't see a huge growth in our business, but I see that the new generation is keeping the interest in listening to and therefore buying High End HiFi products so we can stay in the business.

HP: If you have some time off, completely away from work and the industry, where would you like to be and who would you be with?

LK: I love a lot of places in Asia. I love a lot of places in South America. I love a lot of places in America and in Canada. There's beautiful people, beautiful nature, good food, good wine and so on. When I'm on vacation, in the summertime, we always stay in Denmark. we stay near by the beach, 5 minutes walk by, in a beach house. We have a nice swimming pool. We have what we need there. But when we are traveling, Iben and I and maybe our kids and grandkids, I have a weak spot for the great people in Greece, personally. I think of the hospitality. If you show a Greek guy just a little bit of interest you are in in family. There's only a few places on this planet where you feel as much home. I have to say I have the same feeling in Russia. I know it's very controversial right now - but also when you are accepted by Russian people, they are the same. They have the Orthodox Church there and it shines through the Czech and Ukraine as well. Ukraine and that the Orthodox Church and hospitality which means a lot to them. But, especially in Greece. The most beautiful spot or at least one of them on this planet, which is Lago de Como in Italy. Iben and I have a weak spot for that place. They have wonderful nature. It's facing up to the Italian, the Swiss Alps and the French Alps, so you have all in within a few miles. In former times the rich people built their summer residences there, and some of the buildings are so integrated in the nature – the concentration of the beautiful buildings and the most beautiful nature, makes it an amazing place.

HP: What is your favourite meal or dish and favourite drink?

LK: I love the Asian kitchen. But also, I have a weak spot for the Italian kitchen. And then, you know, there's something about burgers. When they the put together the highest quality of a burger, then they are fucking special like they are in America and sometimes there's nothing like a juicy burger. In fact my favourite is meatballs in curry sauce, a traditional Danish dish and also meat balls fried on a pan with sauce and onion, finally there's Carbonader (Cutlets). That's in fact my three favourite dishes. Normally I'm take care eating, but when I get these three dishes, there's no limitation.

I think I have a very close relationship to gin and

tonics. In our company here, we have 25 different gins, but in my beach house I have 40 different gins, and I think twelve different tonic waters. Besides this I am a fanatic lover of Pinot Noir in high quality, it's like a pinot noir is the purity. Sometimes you have so many layers in it. It's unbelievable.

HP: Give us three songs or pieces of music that you love, that represent your past, present and future... where you came from, where you are and where you are going.

LK: I love the Beatles. There's not only one song, there's many. It is the greatest band ever. No doubt about that. Beatles, they were so magic and have in mind how many copies songs of Beatles you have heard over the years. I guess, the most well-known song of all is of course Yesterday and it has to be my favourite as well. Great. Then we have something which I think is one of the most beautiful pieces of music I know of and that's Miles Davis. from the album Live Around the World and it is "Time after time". I fall into tears because it's so beautiful. When you have one of the absolutely best jazz musicians playing live for you with a fantastic band and you have a system that really performs well, then you're there. Also, when we talked about the Beatles, we played one of the Beatles songs for a reviewer at the Florida show in Tampa, the song was "And I love her". He said and wrote in his article: "I have never heard Beatles like this". And he fell into tears and said wow. I think that one of the big limitations we have when it comes to what kind of music we like, is the quality of our system, is it able to play them?

Then I'm 100% sure that the if the old composers lived today, they would make techno music, because a lot of the new techno music, it performs in pictures, which I love about it - It's like classical music. So, I think techno of today is modern classic music because it speaks to in pictures. I have to say that we have a guy here in Aalborg, Hedegaard, we have to invite him here one day because he is so talented. One of his tracks is played more than 100000 times on a daily basis in China. I actually love this music, there's a lot of the new techno which is now and here, but alot will also be played in the future, there's no doubt about it. I love the rhythm and the pace, but they also have a message to you.

HP: Thank you Lars, we look forward to seeing you again very soon!





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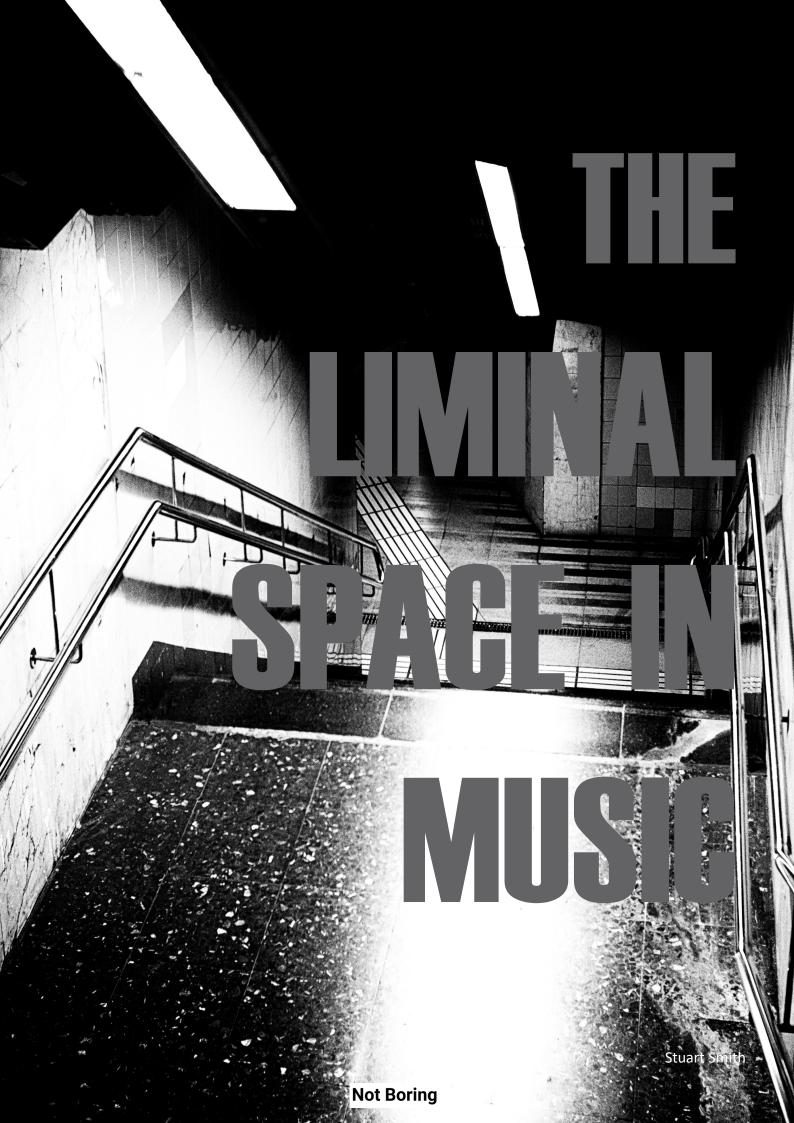






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THE LIMINAL SPACE IN MUSIC

little background is in order for what is a pretty esoteric subject for us to be yaddering about on the virtual pages of HiFi PiG. I'm quite a keen photographer and had been taking shots and enjoying shots that I thought had a certain style to them and which when viewed gave a slightly uneasy feel. The photographs I was "enjoying" (despite this uneasiness) were apparently a bit of a "thing" and the aesthetic even had a name - "Liminal Space". These Liminal Spaces were, in the main, photographs of places

that were commonplace (a waiting room, a corridor, or where we would normally **We know that there** important to put in front of you, dear reader, as it expect to find them. It's hard to describe an image that depicts Liminal Space but you know when you see it and it does elicit an emotional response.

The root of the word Liminal is from the Latin word Limen meaning "Threshold" and is defined by Merriam Webster as; of, relating to, or situated at a sensory threshold: barely perceptible or capable of eliciting a response. Or, relating to, or being an intermediate state, phase, or condition.

In anthropological terms, the state of Liminality is (Wiki tells us) "the quality

of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stages of a rite of passage, when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet begun the transition to the status they will hold when the rite is complete. During the rite's liminal stage, participants "stand at the threshold" between their previous way of structuring their identity, time, or community, and a new way (which the completing of the rite establishes)." It is this Wiki explanation that really interests me in that it seems to describe the feeling which I am sure all of us have experienced as certain times of our life when confronted with a new state of being. For me this Liminal feeling is one of uncertainty, but without

really knowing where that uncertainty lies; that pivotal split second when we are neither in one state or another but are unsure of the state we are in – a split second later and the mental state resolves itself and we find ourselves in a new state and without the feelings of the "unknown". It's that very specific point on a roller-coaster when you reach the top of the initial drag to the top of the first drop and hang motionless, neither ascending but not yet in freefall at the threshold betwixt rising and falling. Again, it is something that is difficult to describe but you

> know when you experience it.

All this preamble is, I think, important to put in front gives you, I hope, an idea of where I am coming from in this, the main part of the article.

Let me at this point stress that I am in no way a musical scholar and I do not read music beyond the very basics and so my comments here are based purely on my

is something coming during that hanging period of tension, but we don't own thoughts on connecting the liminal to music. quite know what it

So, we know that the liminal experience, liminal space, or liminality are related to the transition from one state to another and in music we also see transitions from one part to another. The obvious time to experience

and look for liminality in traditional musical terms would be during the bridge or middle eight - the composer's tool for transitioning us from one part of the composition to the next. It's a tool used in pretty much every pop song you will have heard. I looked up the musical use of "the bridge" (IconCollective. edu) and one of the things that really leapt from the screen was that as well as using the bridge to add variety and variation to a song, it could also be used to create tension and release, or to build energy and anticipation. Now here we are getting somewhere and it is here that I think we find the liminal experience being elicited in a sensory or emotional sense. The bridge is the threshold, the point in the song



THE LIMINAL SPACE IN MUSIC

where we as listeners are neither in one emotional state or the other – we are at the top of the musical roller coaster and anticipating freefall but are not yet in that state.

Many of you reading this will have been to raves and will have experienced the way a DJ builds a tune, creates a period of tension and then releases it with the "drop". It is that period of tension and anticipation of what is to come that I believe is a very similar emotional experience to viewing a photograph of liminal space – we have been built up to a state of euphoria, left to hang, and finally allowed to let go. We know that there is something coming during that hanging period of tension, but we don't quite know what it is - we are between states. In a rave situation where many will be intoxicated on mildly psychedelic drugs, this period of tension creates a rush through the body and mind of the participant and lifts them to a liminal state of being - it's that three in the morning arms in the air moment where the music washes over you and you experience a state of slight apprehension but total bliss. The clever DJs will extend this liminal state for a little longer than would seem correct and this further builds tension and extends the state before that split second (which I suppose is the exact moment of Liminality) and the next tune drops.

I looked to find a liminal experience in a single piece of music and they are there, but where a photograph is a snapshot (literally) of a specific moment in time, a piece of music tends to evolve throughout it is not a snapshot and has a time element incorporated within it. Coil were mentioned in an aticle I read as having mentioned the liminal in their work and so I spent a good afternoon listening to several of their albums on Qobuz and I get the liminal reference. There's tension and a feeling in much of their work that suggests you are in a space and waiting, indeed anxious to move on. And the glitchy nature of some of their music adds to the somewhat nervy and uncomfortable sensation you get when looking at images that use and reflect minimal space. I get the reference!

So there you have it. I'm sure this short introduction to the Liminal Space and how I think it can be related to music only scratches the surface of what some more scholarly than I could relate to you, but I hope that it perhaps sparks a smidgen of interest in the more esoteric of sensory experience and that you enjoyed my thoughts on it.



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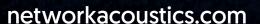
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Bai Ibrahim Cham looks at the phenomenal rise of Afrobeats and its origins.

Sarkodie performing at the Accra Mall in Ghana Photo credit: <u>Owula Kpakpo</u>

AFROBEATS

here has never been a time in global music history where African artists have so dominated the international music scene. Afrobeats is now the fastest-growing music genre in

the world, with artists rising to stardom at breakneck speed. In 2022 Burna Boy sold out Madison Square Garden and Wizkid recently sold out London's O2 Arena 3 nights in a row, twelve minutes after tickets went on sale. Davido has also headlined and sold out the London O2 arena on several occasions as did Yousou N'Dour in 2019. P Square is listed as part of the hundred million dollar group on Forbes, breaking the record for the highest-earning Nigerian artist in the world. In 2021 Naira Marley was banned from staging shows due to his skyrocketing popularity in Nigeria, which had caused several stampedes during his concerts. He is only allowed a certain capacity to stage a show due to the high risks involved.

Today there are dozens of young Afrobeats artists ready for global stardom. But how did Afrobeat grow so big globally? What other genres influenced it? What role did the UK play in it? Has Afrobeats overthrown the previous biggest black musical genre in the UK?

THE ORIGINS OF DANCEHALL

The roots of Dancehall are in Reggae music. Reggae originated from a type of music called Ska, an earlier form of Jamaican popular music. Ska employs a heavy four-beat rhythm driven by drums, bass guitar, electric guitar and the scrapper, a corrugated stick that is scrubbed by a plain stick. In the mid-1960s, producers like Duke Reid and Coxsone Dodd slowed the tempo of ska. This morphed into the musical style, Rock Steady.

Reggae emerged from these roots and put politicised messages at its core, addressing social and economic injustices. With a faster beat driven by the bass, bands like Toots and the Maytals pioneered the new Reggae sound, followed by Bunny Wailer, Peter Tosh and Reggae's biggest star Bob Marley and then reggae artist Jimmy Cliff rose to international stardom through the 1972 movie "The Harder They Come". This film was a major cultural force contributing to the international spread of the genre. The Jamaican-made film depicted how Reggae became a voice for the poor and dispossessed. The soundtrack by Jimmy Cliff was a celebration of a defiant human spirit that refuses to be suppressed.

THE WINDRUSH GENERATION

The Windrush generation's exodus from Caribbean countries to the UK to fill worker shortages helped to create a strong Caribbean diaspora community in the UK. Reggae music has represented, promoted and uplifted black culture in the UK and America since the 1970s. It gave the Jamaican Windrush generation a voice and a fierce form of representation through music. This put the Caribbean artists, particularly the Jamaicans, ten steps ahead of their African counterparts.

Punk music and fashion were the main opposition of Reggae music during the seventies, dominated by white Britain. It took almost 29 years since the coming of the Windrush generation before we saw a cross-pollination of Reggae acts sharing the same stage with punk artists. So, yes, Reggae music paved the way by fighting against the forces of racism when rock and roll and punk were the order of the day for white Britain.

THE FATHER OF AFROBEAT

Afrobeat didn't go through this

struggle of overt racism. It did, however, have to contend with the institutionalised racism of biased charts and award shows that consistently side-lined black artists in general. As the saying goes "Reggae music took the ass whooping for us." Afrobeat evolved organically in Africa, the motherland, and was founded by Nigeria's most controversial and iconic musical figure Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. Kuti is widely recognised as the father of Afrobeat. He carved out the sound of Afrobeat in his early days with his band Africa 70 which fused African Highlife and Jazz bands. Drawn from the sounds of Jazz, Rhythm and Blues, and Soca, he unleashed Afrobeat to the world during his tours in America and the UK during the early 1970s.

Fela switched his style up a notch and developed the core sound of Afrobeat in the 1970s with his Africa 70 band. This West African orchestra, with its wide range of instruments including the conga, akuba, claves, shekere, and gbedu (literally Big Durm), as well as the saxophone, trumpet, guitar, drums, trombone, and mouth organ can all be heard. Their debut album Zombie was epic, it fused Jazz and Highlife with the mystical funk of James Brown, Reggae and Caribbean rhythm, and psychedelic rock. Kuti performed in English and Yoruba, sending a strong political message of change to the military regimes of Nigeria.

Kuti also touched on world issues, especially the human rights struggles in the United States during the civil rights movement and the Nigerian brutal military regime. At some point, he was branded as an outlaw by the Nigerian government due to his stance against the status quo. In 1977 the Nigerian military made a brutal raid in his self-proclaimed independent land of the Kalakuta Republic. The Nigerian musician claimed that this so-called republic wasn't in the jurisdiction of Nigeria and would not adhere to its laws. The military also accused him of kidnapping women against their will an accusation Fela denied. Fela had multiple wives, smoked mar-



AFROBEATS

ijuana on stage, and sometimes performed half-naked. In 1978 he married 27 women in one day, all of whom were his band members. He was nicknamed Abami Eda (Strange Creature).

Fela's legacy was continued by his son Femi Kuti and his lead drummer Tony Allen who both held the torch of Afrobeat and evolved its sound and message to resonate with modern times.

FORMATION AND STARDOM – FROM REGGAE TO DANCEHALL

Like all other musical genres, the origins of Reggae have been diluted by other contemporary sounds. Fusing different instruments or genres of music together gave birth to many other sub-genres, and both Dancehall and Afrobeat are no exceptions.

Dancehall fully morphed into a genre of its own in the 1980s thanks to DJ sound systems. Sound systems such as Kilimanjaro, Black Hawk, Silver Hawk, Gemini Disco, Virgo Hi-Fi, Volcano Hi-Power and Aces International capitalised on the new sound and introduced a new wave of DJs. These DJs were known as the "toasters". They chanted over the music and beats initially to kickstart their sound systems. The older toasters were overtaken by new stars such as Captain Sinbad, Ranking Joe, Clint Eastwood, Lone Ranger, Josey Wales, Charlie Chaplin, General Echo and Yellowman. Many suggest that during the Yellowman era, Dancehall was born as a genre of its own.

Shooting up from 1980 to the early 1990s Dancehall experienced probably its most competitive era. Yellowman was the first DJ to be signed to an international label. Frankie Dancehall Paul, Beenie Man, Shaggy, Shabba Ranks, Super Cat, Buju Banton, Ninja Man, and Mad Cobra all reached international stardom and Dancehall

became Jamaica's biggest musical export.

From the early 1990s up to the 2000s, Dancehall really skyrocketed due to the wave of artists coming through. Thanks to Beenie Man's 30-year career, and the likes of Mavado, Sean Paul, Vybz Cartel, Popcaan, Lady Shaw, Tanya Stephens, Shaggy, Gyptian and the short-lived life of Garnet Silk, Dancehall made it into the mainstream international charts. They stuck to their roots by singing in patios and representing the tough struggle of the ghetto life they came from.

Dancehall is danceable, the fashion is funky, and the lyrics are sexually provocative: a potent combination. Its biggest hits include Beenie Man and Carlene Smith's record "Dancehall Queen", Chaka Demus and Plier's "Murder She Wrote", Sister Nancy's "Bam Bam", and Tenor Saw's "Ring the Alarm".

AFROBEAT AND AFROBEATS

Fela Kuti is widely honoured as the father of Afrobeat and NOT Afrobeats. There's a difference between the two, not just the 'S' at the end of the latter. The former is a mix of African music (predominantly West African) with a mix of American Soul and Jazz, with strong political lyrics. Afrobeat sought to inspire listeners to activism by pointing out societal ills. Afrobeats is a fusion of West African pop music with Rap, Bashment, Dancehall, R&B and electronic dance music. Originating from Nigeria and Ghana it has energetic upbeat, cocky, and fun melodies tailored to make your whole body move.

AFROBEATS BREAKTHROUGH

The launch of MTV Base Africa in 2005 played a significant role in launching Afrobeats to the

world. This paved the way for the first wave of Afrobeats artists, including M.I Abaga, Naeto C, and Sarkodie to reach a global audience. In a similar role to that played by the Windrush generation in popularising Reggae music, the large Nigerian and African diaspora in Europe and America did the same for Afrobeats.

In an interview with The Breakfast Club, Nigerian superstar Davido explained how wealthy Nigerians in Atlanta went to the clubs and paid DJs to play their favourite Afrobeats artists. Nigerians in the diaspora aggressively promoted their culture and this played a huge role in the multimillion-dollar Afrobeats industry.

On the home front, Nigerian and Ghanaian DJs, TV presenters, and music industry players all helped to create a home-based industry by playing only Afrobeats artists in the clubs, on TV and on all social media platforms.

As a result, many superstars have emerged from the African continent. Since 2010 artists like Wizkid, Davido, Burna Boy, Zlatan, Tems, Tiwa Savage, Shatta Wale, Black Sheriff, Reema, Mr Eazi, Tekno, Yemi Alade, Ayra Star, and Stone Boy, have enjoyed unimaginable success in their careers, especially on the international stage.

Now Dancehall and hip-hop artists all want a flavour of Afrobeats. Davido has collaborated with Chris Brown, Burna Boy also did with Ed Sheran, Beyonce and Shatta Wale, Koffe made a cover song of Burna boy's hit single "Ye", and one of the most successful collaborations is that between Wizkid and Drake, on the massive hit "One Dance."

With its phenomenal global success, it is fair to say that Afrobeats has surpassed the popularity of its big brother, Dancehall. But both genres show the consistent power of black music in moving a global audience, from the roots of Reggae to the body-shaking rhythms of Afrobeats.







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FUTURE RETRO

was inspired to write this article flowing a couple of interactions, the first of which happened at the Bristol HiFi Show in February and about which you can read a bit about in this very publication. I was sat having a listen to the Von Gaylord (yes, what a fantastic name) system when I overheard a woman lean over to her (presumably) husband and say "Look how modern and futuristic that is!" Now, the system she was talking about, and the specific bit of it she was talking about was the amplifier that used valves, or tubes as they are known across the pond. If you are a HiFi person you will be familiar with the concept of valves in equipment and know that whilst valves are used in lots of modern equipment (mostly that aimed at enthusiasts) they are not what you would consider to

be modern...and certainly not futuristic. The second interaction was whilst doing a bit of research for another article in this publication where I spoke to the people behind the fabulous Cosmotron speakers, which have a touch of the Flash Gordons about them.

I think the two examples I've cited in the introduction to this article demonstrate pretty well what I would consider to be the aesthetic of "Future Retro", with the Cosmotron speakers being the more obvious of the two. I also think the term "Future Retro" sums up the design aesthetic or trend pretty well – it combines design elements of the past and reinterprets them with a somewhat futuristic twist. In broader terms, examples of this "Future Retro" style may incorporate design elements such as geometric shapes, bright colours, and older and bolder typography, with the futuristic "twist" being the use of supposedly futuristic materials. Retro Futurism also draws its inspiration from science fiction from the past, such as 1950s and 1960s comics and, as mentioned, this is clearly visible in the styling of Cosmotron's loudspeakers.

The term "Future Retro" can also refer to music that combines elements of classic or vintage sounds with modern production techniques. This genre can include remixes or covers of classic songs, or original tunes that incorporate vintage instruments or musical styles into modern works. Bands that loosely fall into this category would be the likes of Daft Punk, The Weekend, and Kavinsky, all of whose music draws on the rich history of pop music, but uses modern production techniques to create a style that is at once nostalgic and familiar, but also cutting-edge and forward looking. With regards to Daft Punk, the use of the vocoder (which itself hails back to 1938 if we take it to its origins) is hardly a new thing and it had been used in the 60s and 70s and also extensively on Neil Young's somewhat infamous Trans album – check Trans out and then go listen to some Daft Punk. However, what Daft Punk did with the vocoder was to give it a modern twist and incorporate it into what can broadly be called electro music. And I suppose the early 80s electro sound itself could have been described as being Future-Retro with its use of old synths and drum machines and a style that drew heavily on the Disco and Funk sound but with its own futuristic elements. And then Funk and in particular Funkadelic could well be seen as being a part of the overall aesthetic I'm talking about here. Getting even more up to date, the Detroit-based DJ Stingray is definitely a part of the broader theme I would consider being Future-Retro. If you don't know the whole story of DJ Stingray and his association with Drexciya then you ought to check it out, it's wild. Drexciya themselves are really fascinating and built a remarkable mythology around themselves - they claimed to be the descendants of an underwater race of slaves who had been thrown overboard during the transatlantic slave trade. Their music and imagery explored themes of African diaspora, Afrofuturism, and science fiction...AfroRetroFuturism?

The first example of what I considered to be "Future Retro" when I started to think about what the woman at the show said was the Steampunk movement and its harking back to Victorian themed clothes that are embellished with more futuristic elements, along with the "steampunk" look of steam-powered and clockwork contraptions and technology. And I suppose this she was perhaps referencing; a piece of modern technology that works properly and does all the things that its modern looking counterparts can do, only with what would appear to the layman to be outdated and outmoded technology.

As I was researching this article it became pretty clear that the Retro Futurist label and styling is

FUTURE RETRO



nothing new (no pun intended) and examples, as seen above, can be drawn from yesteryear as well as today. It's a fascinating topic and the more I look around the more I see older elements of design being used in modern day settings. And I suppose the whole aesthetic, be that in the design of a pair of loudspeakers, an amplifier, or in fashion and music,



is the juxtaposition of retro items within a modern context and as I look around our house I see that the RF vibe is alive and kicking both on the HiFi rack, on the walls by way of the art we collect and in some of the lamps and ornaments we have adorning our living space.









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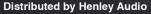


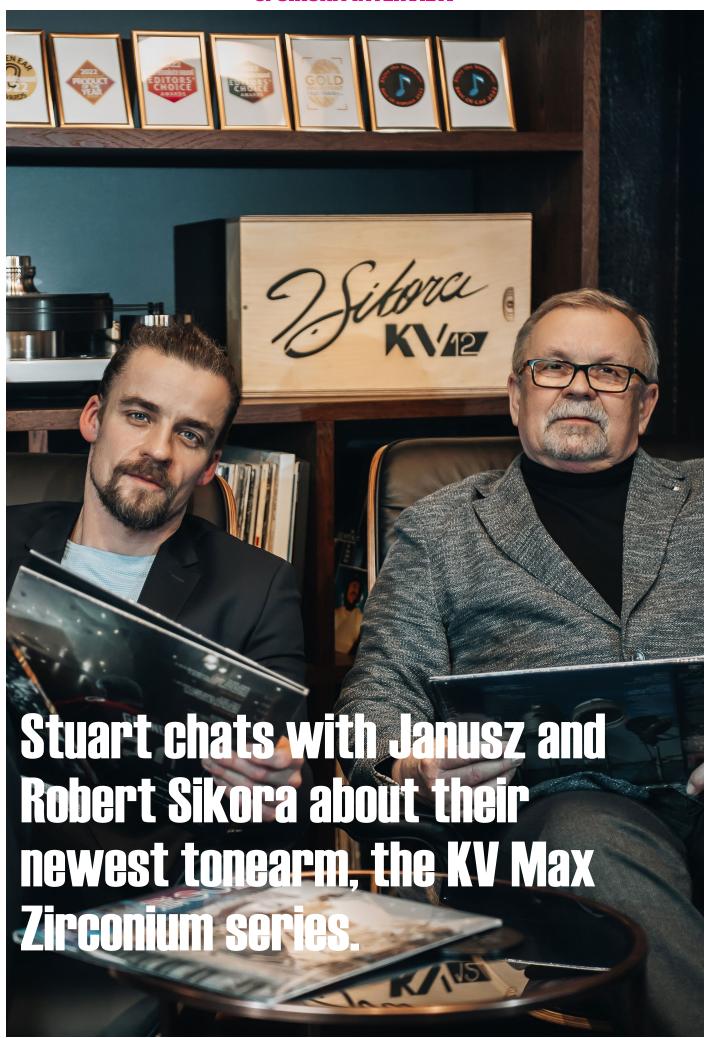












HP: For readers who haven't heard of J.Sikora, tell us a bit about its history and your philosophy.

J.S. The beginnings of the company's activity date back to 2007. Then I bought a turntable, the sound of which disappointed me completely. The disappointment was so big that I started thinking about building my own turntable. With a metalworking company and my many years of experience in metallurgy and my passion for listening to music, as well as my audiophile interests, I did not hesitate long. I built my first turntable for myself. The basis was to obtain the best possible analog sound source in home conditions. By design, it was a construction based on various metals (among others: aluminum, bronze, brass, cast iron), which I knew a lot about, and finally it became the main philosophy of all J. Sikora's designs. A new experience at that time was the influence of different metals and their proportions on the sound reproduced from a vinyl record. The design of the turntable evolved over several years, and my audiophile friends who visited me very positively assessed its sound qualities. Finally, they started asking about the possibility of having a turntable built by me in their homes. For the needs of my friends, I developed two turntables: Standard and Reference. At the urging of satisfied turntable owners, in 2014 we showed the J. Sikora turntable at the Audio Show in Warsaw.

R.S. These two dates mentioned by my father are crucial for the J.Sikora brand. 2007 is the first turntable, 2014 the first audio exhibition. However, the history of the company as such, in which we dealt with metalworking, dates back to 1982. Throughout this time, my father was passionate about audio equipment and produced various devices as a hobby. Some, such as Burdjak & Sikora tube amplifiers, appeared in the 90s on the Polish market, others, such as proprietary transistor amplifiers, line preamplifiers or cables, were intended only for friends. Then my father became fascinated by turntables and built the first one. In 2014 we went to the Audio Show in Warsaw. I don't think we had any idea at the time that things would turn out like this. Dad simply let his friends persuade him to show the effects of his hobby, and I went to Warsaw to accompany him. The rest is history we continue to write. Over the last 8 years, we have gradually moved away from what the company had been doing so far, in favor of manufacturing only turntables and turntable arms. In retrospect, the decision to devote ourselves 100% to the audio industry, both from

my father's and my perspective, seems simple and obvious. In fact, it was not like that at all, and the final closure 3 years ago of the current business that my father built and which I continued for the last 10 years was difficult and associated with a certain amount of uncertainty. Today, fortunately, I can say that we have no regrets.

HP: You are best known for your turntables. When did you start making the arms and what are your design criteria?

J.S. At the beginning, J. Sikora turntables were sold with tonearms from various companies. However, all the time I was thinking about building my own tonearm, which would be a natural extension of the offer and would perfectly complement the turntables we manufacture. That is why the KV12 arm was created, first presented to the general public about 5 years ago, and the work took almost 2 years from initial ideas to the creation of the final product. I was based on the following design assumptions:

- unipivot (in my opinion the best design);
- arm tube made of kevlar;
- the highest stiffness with the lowest possible weight;
- oil damping;
- the use of materials with different physical properties for the construction of the arm (among others: aluminum, bronze, cast iron).

R.S. There are quite a lot of arms on the market. It's really hard to find revolutionary solutions in this audio segment. Presenting our first arm, we really wanted to stand out from the rest, to create something unique. However, it is much easier to think about it than to do it. Well, unless the designer and inventor in your company is someone like my father. As a rule, he does not make any compromises, and instilled with a specific vision, he strives to implement it at all costs. When he first told me about the idea of using Kevlar for the arm tube, I thought, "Yeah! That's it!" From a technical point of view it seemed quite crazy, from a sonic point of view, at least in theory, it was brilliant.

HP: This is claimed to be the first and only arm in the world that uses Kevlar. Why this particular material?

J.S. First of all, because in theory it seems to be a perfect material for this purpose. Light, stiff, energy absorbing. After all, not only bulletproof vests are

made of it, but also loudspeaker diaphragms.

R.S. So if all these properties predispose Kevlar to be used in the production of arm tubes, why didn't anyone but us think of it. Well, the whole problem lies in the technological process of creating such a conical tube, after all, Kevlar is a fabric. It's very easy to just buy an aluminum, carbon or whatever material or competitor is using. One made of Kevlar has to be made by oneself and it is an extremely complicated process, time-consuming and requiring watchmaker precision.

HP: How did those first arms come about?

J.S. As I mentioned, the choice of Kevlar was certainly not obvious, because so far no one has used it in mass production of arms. I knew perfectly well the properties of Kevlar, which I have already mentioned, but I did not know how this fabric would be processed, what its real effect on the sound would be and how it would behave over time. Design work on the arm lasted almost 2 years. As a supporter of the unipivot construction, which despite its apparent simplicity (the devil is in the details), I consider to be the most perfect, so I knew from the beginning that it was what I wanted to base on. The rest of the construction and materials obviously had to follow our philosophy of combining alloys and metals with different sonic properties into one perfect composition.

R.S. Yes, J. Sikora's philosophy is extremely important here. None of our products were created in isolation from it. Of course, it's about striving for sonic perfection, but also about using my father's vast knowledge in the field of metals and alloys, which he gained during many years of work in the metallurgical industry. There is no ready recipe for the perfect composition of e.g. bronze, brass, aluminum, or their proportions. There is also no clear and precise information on the impact of these materials on the sound. Everything is based on many hours of experimentation and a tedious, but also fascinating, pursuit of perfection.

HP: And how were these arms received?

J.S. The first reactions were extremely positive and probably even exceeded our wildest expectations. The initial distance to the innovative use of Kevlar very quickly turned into an avalanche of positive reviews and prestigious awards that Robert probably

remembers and can name.

R.S. There were actually a lot of them. I will not list them all here, but it started off strong as the tonearm was nominated for the International HiFi Press Award in the "Best Arm in the World" category at the Rocky Mountain Audiofest in the USA, then others followed.

HP: What are the end-user benefits of your design decisions?

J.S. Thanks to the assumptions adopted at the beginning, the user receives an arm that, due to its exceptional design simplicity, is very easy to calibrate and extremely user-friendly in everyday use. The user can easily change all the necessary settings, i.e. attenuation, anti-skating, azimuth or VTA, which can be easily adjusted while listening to music. Unipivot bearing and the materials used (kevlar, bronze and other metals), unlike bearing arms or made of wood, make the parameters of our turntable arms unchanged over time. The user will enjoy reliability and great sound for many years.

R.S. To what my father said, I would like to add, or maybe emphasize, the role of those, in my opinion, the most characteristic design decisions that determine the uniqueness of the KV12 tonearms. The first is, of course, the use of Kevlar and what it offers to the arm tube construction: lightness, stiffness and at the same time internal damping in a range that no other material simply can offer. The second is the proprietary VTA smooth adjustment mechanism, built on the model of a photographic lens with two trapezoidal threads, whose precision and ease of use during listening will be invaluable for users who value the impact of this parameter on sound regulation.

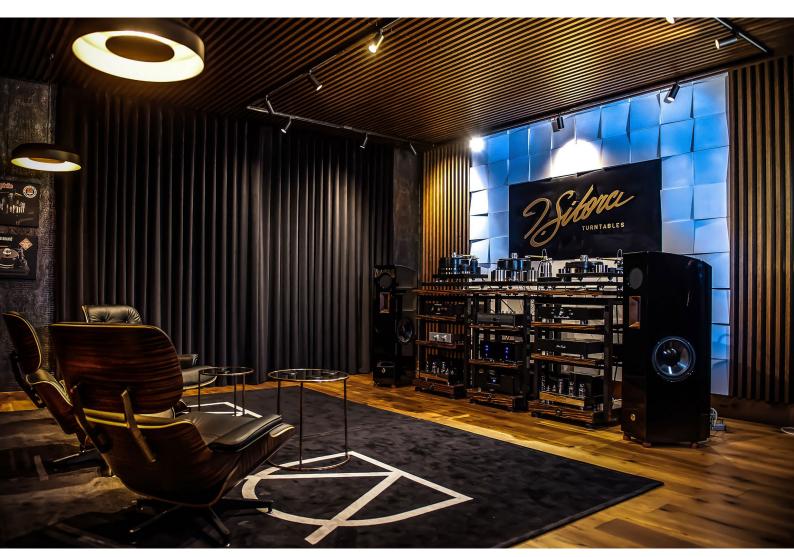
HP: How is the construction of the new KV Max Zirconium series different from the KV12?

J.S. If I had to say in short, I'd say almost everything. We took the best of the KV12 tonearm design and introduced many improvements. An important element of the arm has changed. We have a new, lighter and at the same time stiffer Kevlar tube, improved tube filling, new zirconia-based bearing. Aluminum elements have been replaced with two types of bronze. We've also improved the VTA and the accuracy of the azimuth adjustment, even the counterweight has been improved, making the ad-

The J. Sikora KV Max Zirconium



J. SIKORA INTERVIEW



A look inside the newly finished showroom of J. Sikora

J. SIKORA INTERVIEW

justment even more precise. The wiring of the arm has also changed.

R.S. To all the technical aspects that my father mentioned, I will add only purely practical issues. Due to its technical solutions, the standard KV12 arm was slightly higher than most arms on the market. In the case of mounting this tonearm on any J.Sikora turntable, it was not a problem. However, it was a bit of a hassle to adapt to some turntables from other manufacturers. While working on the new project, the father managed to keep all the most important assumptions of the KV12 class, improve them, and at the same time reduce the mounting height and make the KV Max a universal tonearm that can be mounted in virtually any turntable available on the market.

HP: What is the biggest advantage of the KV Max Zirconium arms in your opinion?

J.S. As the KV Max is my "child", I cannot point to one of its greatest advantages. It is the whole set of features, technological solutions and nuances that make the KV Max what it is, that is, in my opinion, a finished work and an audio component that will give its users a lot of pleasure and satisfaction.

R.S. Yes I agree. Let reviewers and users themselves indicate the greatest advantage of this arm. For each of them, it may concern a completely different aspect - sonic, visual or usable.

HP: Your previous arm was only available as a 12". Are the new arms also only available in the 12" version and what are the advantages of this length?

J.S. Yes, the previous arm was only twelve inches. In the new series, we assumed that the arms will be available as 9- and 12-inch. In my opinion, these two lengths are optimal, although who knows, maybe in the future there will also be a 14-inch arm. Both arms, thanks to the use of Kevlar and a special filling, are extremely stiff and light. The 9" tonearm reproduces exceptionally fast and contoured bass with lots of detail in all ranges of sound, and the 12" (apart from the obvious advantages of less stylus tracking errors) brings precision to the next level and allows extraordinary insight into the nuances of recordings.

R.S. I will add just as a curiosity, with the original

assumption was to simply add the KV9 tonearm to our existing catalog. Despite the very high recognition and popularity of the regular KV twelve, some markets (especially the American one) demanded a Kevlar nine. My father, however, was as ambitious as ever and couldn't "just" make a nine-inch arm based on an existing twelve-inch arm. He decided to do everything from scratch, refine every aspect better, squeeze the maximum potential out of this arm. When he finished, it turned out that we could not introduce the new nine to the existing catalog, because in literally every element it surpasses the existing KV12. We decided to create, based on these solutions, also a completely new 12-inch tonearm. This is how a new tonearms line was created, and calling it KV Max seemed obvious in this situation.

HP: What are the disadvantages of longer arms from a design perspective?

J.S. The Kevlar tubes in our arms are cone-shaped, so the problem is to make a longer tube of the right diameter, without losing stiffness, and to properly dampen it. In the case of other arms, this problem does not occur, because the longer arm is just a longer aluminum, wood or carbon fiber tube.

R.S. Yes exactly. For other manufacturers, it's just a bit more or less aluminum tube or wood to cut. For us, it was a completely new technological process to be implemented.

HP: What were the challenges of the new project?

J.S. The biggest problems are caused by Kevlar, from which the arm tube is made. Contrary to appearances, Kevlar is quite a difficult material in terms of processing - the fabric frays during cutting. We had to develop special machining procedures. Although we draw on the experience gained during the production of KV12 arms, we had to make new dies for rolling and cutting the aramid fabric adapted to the production of the latest arms, we also had to choose the resins, their temperature and the method of application. We had to develop a new filling of the tubes and a way of filling them. Unfortunately, despite the careful development of technology, a significant percentage of products that do not meet very high requirements and do not pass strict quality controls is still a problem. In short, we have a lot of waste. Another element in the Zirconium Series tonearms, with which we had a lot of work and problems, is the bearing - we make it from very hard

J. SIKORA INTERVIEW



zirconium oxide. Its processing is complicated, and an additional difficulty is that it is not electrically conductive, so the new arms had to develop a method of mass conduction. Another challenge was the selection of materials for the production of arms. In order to obtain the best sound qualities, we used, among others, two types of bronze.

R.S. From my more general perspective, the biggest challenge was trying to create a tonearm better than the regular KV12, which turned out to be such a market success. The arm that, in the unanimous opinion of the reviewers, knocked on the door with the inscription "the best arms in the world", crossed this door and settled in good company. "A class " rating from Stereophile, product of the year according to several other industry magazines, awards, nominations and, above all, very satisfied customers... How to make a better product? Do not tell people that it is new, so it is better, but realistically distance the perfect predecessor. This, in my opinion, was the biggest challenge. However, with each day of the implementation of this project, new ideas, implementation and numerous auditions, we became more and more sure that we succeeded. Today, no one has any doubts about it.

HP: Finally, tell us something about your newly opened showroom

J.S. Our showroom was built for two years. For various reasons, we could not or did not want to speed up this process, but it was worth the wait. A unique place was created, designed and created in every detail so that you can enjoy 100% pleasure from communing with music, our turntables and, in general, high-end audio equipment. With the rest, the feedback from people who had the opportunity to participate in the meetings opening this place is only positive. Everyone feels at home here and everyone emphasizes that they will be happy to come back here.

R.S. Yes, we have managed to create a place where you want to be and to which you want to come back, and this is very important. The atmosphere of the place, comfort and not distracting the senses during listening are extremely important. Anyone who loves to listen to music will attest to that. We want the J.Sikora showroom to be, above all, a place of regular meetings with representatives of renowned audio producers from around the world, as well as purely musical meetings with artists, audio editors and people from the world of culture. It's not really a place you can enter from the street. Besides, the schedule of meetings and intimate events is already full for the next few months.





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e love to travel to have a look (nosey) around manufacturers' facilities and so when Audio Group Denmark asked us if we could visit them in, you guessed it, Denmark, at the start of 2023 we were more than happy to hop on the couple of planes it takes to get there and oblige.

AUDIO GROUP DENMARK: AAVIK, ANSUZ AND BØRRESEN

If you don't know who Audio Group Denmark is then you will be forgiven, but whether you know the group name or not, I'm pretty sure you will recognise the brands that make up the group and you may well have even had the chance to listen to some of their products at one of the many shows around the world that they regularly attend. For those that aren't aware, the brands represented by AGD are Ansuz, Aavik, and Børresen Acoustics. Broadly speaking, Ansuz deals with cables and tuning products, Aavik the electronics, and Børresen are in charge of the loudspeakers. There's also a new brand about to be announced that will allow those looking to enter the AGD ecosystem to do so at a lower price of admission, though we were sworn to secrecy as to what this would be exactly. However, we did get to listen to one of the new brand's products...we can't wait to reveal more when the time is right!

BØRRESEN X SPEAKER SERIES

Those who attended the High End Munich event last year will be aware of the X3 loudspeakers, the first model in the Børresen X Speaker Series. and due to start shipping any time soon, costing around the ten thousand euro mark. Having listened to the X3s and another (yet to be announced) product in this range I can tell you now that these are going to be hugely popular and are likely to fly off the shelves – keep an eye on these pages for a review as soon as we can get our trotters on them!

LARS KRISTENSEN AND MICHAEL BØRRESEN

Lars Kristensen and Michael Børresen are the founders of Ansuz, Aavik, and Børresen and more recently Flemming E. Rasmussen, who many will remember as being the founder of Gryphon Audio, has joined the team. It's probably better if I copy the company's history from their website so as not to cock it up...

"As his father was one of the first high-end audio dealers in Denmark, Lars Kristensen encountered HiFi at an early age and has been pas-

HiFi PiG put on their big coats and fly up North to visit Audio Group Denmark, the home of Danish HiFi brands Aavik, Ansuz and Børresen, for a couple of eye-opening days in Aalborg.

Words: Stuart Smith Photos: Linette Smith



Michael Børresen, Lars Kristensen and Flemming E. Rasmussen

sionately dedicated to the world of HiFi for most of his life ever since, including 20 years of service as a worldwide sales manager at Nordost from 1992 to 2012.

In the late 80s, when Lars was managing a high-end audio store in Aalborg, he met Michael Børresen who was a frequent guest there. At that time, Michael Børresen was studying to become an engineer. It was his love and passion for music that brought him to the store. Since his youth, Michael has had a strong desire to create and redesign things, and in that context, one of his favourites has always been to analyze individual audio components and seek ways to improve them significantly.

When Lars and Michael met by chance at a hotdog stand some years later, in 2003, a passionate conversation developed about Hi-Fi music and the completely untapped enormous acoustic potentials of audio components waiting to be unleashed. Michael also told Lars about his ideas of an innovative ribbon tweeter design, which Lars found highly interesting. Shortly after, Michael had manufactured a prototype and invited Lars for an auditioning. As a result, they jointly established Raidho, their own loudspeaker company. Lars and Michael's determination to design and build audio equipment from scratch formed a strong foundation for future innovative and successful collaboration.

When the financial crisis hit the world in 2008, Lars and Michael decided it would be better to sell off the company to a financial partner. Three years later, in 2011, Michael presented his groundbreaking ideas for audio cables and, although Lars had actually sworn at the time never to enter the cable business again, he was absolutely thrilled with the

audio cables Michael had developed. Lars immediately saw the potential of these innovative and groundbreaking audio cables, and with that, Ansuz Acoustics was born.

Michael's extensive knowledge in the field of audio engineering combined with his pioneering spirit and passion for HiFi equipment drove his innovative quest to create newly designed audio electronics. He soon began to immerse himself in the development of new amplifiers. Of course, it wasn't long before the Aavik U-300 unity amplifier was launched in 2015 paving the way for the foundation of Aavik Acoustics.

With the desire to take on new challenges, Lars and Michael left Raidho in 2017. They decided to fully commit themselves to further advancing their own two brands, Ansuz-, and Aavik Acoustics. In 2018, they complemented their range of audio products by launching a new series of speakers and established another company by the name Børresen Acoustics for this new brand.

Since then, they have continued to further develop all three brands and have been expanding their range of audio products which now includes cables, resonance control devices, audio-electronics and loudspeakers. At the end of 2020, Audio Group Denmark was established as the umbrella company for all three brands, Ansuz-, Aavik- and Børresen Acoustics.

In May 2021, the founder, chief-designer and former owner of Gryphon, Flemming E. Rasmussen became the newest member of Audio Group Denmark's design and development team. Flemming E. Rasmussen is a perfect fit for the company not only because of his constant drive and curiosity to delve into new areas of acoustics to create outstanding Hi-Fi equipment but also because of his untiring creative potential, and his 35 years of in-depth experience in the Hi-Fi industry. His mission is to pioneer into so far untapped areas of audio technology, design, and innovation for Audio Group Denmark".

So, there you have it.

AALBORG THE HOME OF AUDIO GROUP DENMARK

The company are based in Aalborg in Denmark and their facilities are impressive. There are several listening rooms that have been properly treated, the usual production facilities, staff dining area, distribution areas, and an Irish pub.

THE TOUR

Upon entering the building we got to meet the forty-strong team and there was an immediate sense that everyone is happy and content – I like this and it's also clear that the team are well looked after.

My main takeaway from our initial tour of the facilities was that there's a lot of attention to detail and that the company aren't afraid to invest in the machinery to get the products they want, and nor are they afraid to invest in their people. With regards to machinery, I was especially taken aback by the machine used to cut and strip wires that will later be used in constructing audio cables etc. Lars that was showing us around at this point did tell us the accuracy of the machine and how it could cut a cable to a very specific length and strip it remarkably accurately too. This attention to detail was also carried through the rest of the tour and we hear the phrase "length matters" several times during our visit. I'll no doubt mention this again later but it would seem to me that the core values of AGD are that materials matter, innovation is encouraged and that the whole team are wildly enthusiastic about the company and the products they produce.

Anyway, tours of facilities are always a bit of a blur - there's so much to take in and it's difficult to get much more than a "feel" for the company and its philosophy – it's only over the course of the remainder of our time with the people and products of AGD that we are able to get a better grasp of what they see as being important to sound and the things they make that allow us to enjoy our music.

HiFi DEMOS

Over the course of our visit we were given several demonstrations of what I considered to be pretty out-there concepts and I want to say a little about my thoughts and how I personally approached these presentations. As always, my go-to attitude about most things that are a bit esoteric is to regard them as a "load of bollocks" until my ears either confirm or contradict this starting position. I'm also a previous sales trainer and so I tend to purposefully turn off from the sales pitch introduction to products, particularly when a person doing the demonstration starts to try to suggest the things that we may or may not want to be listening for. However, my mind is open, but I guess I would describe myself as an interested "sceptic" when confronted with stuff that I either don't have the knowledge to understand or which flies in the face of common sense. I'm not interested in measurements that purport to either prove or disprove a concept and I'm not interested in whether folk think me a nutjob for my opinions.

In short, I trust what my ears tell me, though I'm well aware that there are a good few folk out there that believe measurements are the panacea for audio and tell us everything we need to know.

So, the first demonstration we went into was with Frits Dalmose who is the sales director for the group.

DAY ONE. DEMO ONE

Hellos and introductions over we were led into a room at the top of the AGD building with a sofa where we sat, and in front of us there was a curtain. Music played and we were asked to guess the kind of system and room that lay beyond the curtain. I went for the lowest common denominator (not wanting to make a tit of myself) and guessed Sonos speakers and a pair of subs...or a soundbar...or a pair of standmounts and a pair of subs. Curtains opened and my guess was, as you would expect, perfectly accurate - if perfectly accurate is shooting at the opposition's goal and actually scoring an own goal. For those interested, it was a pair of compact Børresen Acoustics floorstanders, Ansuz products and cables...and a Primare amp. We were a little surprised too but AGD often use their competitors' products for a couple of reasons, first to show how especially the Ansuz products and cables can benefit other brands' components, and to show how the Audio Group Denmark brands compare to others. The team have a healthy respect for other brands and good relationships with many of them.

Ansuz refers to the power distribution block they use as being the "heart of the system" which I found pretty interesting and, to a large degree, a bit counter-intuitive...at first. Anyway, the ANSUZ X3 power block was changed for one that used aluminium in its construction. The theory here is that aluminium is in itself a problem product. They tell us that aluminium is avoided in all their boxes and instead they use composite materials with strong grounding included. Anyway, some music got played and the music did become flatter and less lively. The same happened when Frits changed out the ANSUZ cable for a different cable. Naysayers are likely jumping around their rooms and pulling out their hair at reading this. Then went in a power conditioner and my notes say that the bass is "really fu%^ed up" and the sound "even flatter". This is an interesting point for me as up until getting our Torus Power trans-









former, I always suggested folk put their (specifically) amplifiers directly into the wall and try to avoid mains blocks or conditioners...for amps. Overall, in this system, the benefits of the ANSUZ X3 power block and their own cabling were clear!

Frits then went on to demonstrate the company's SPARKZ AC HAROMIZERS which, for me, is where the voodoo started on our visit. These are essentially a shucko plug within which are the company's Tesla coils. They are designed to plug into unused mains sockets and into unused sockets on power distribution blocks. Something happens when one is added to a free mains socket and I thought the system seemed a little more focused. Adding more increased this focus. I asked Frits about what was supposed to be going on here as I was a bit dumbfounded that I actually heard anything at all - as I say, I take all this kind of thing with a generous pinch of sodium chloride - and I was told that the idea here is to remove high frequency "noise" from the mains. Then a SPARKZ TC 3 (bigger and with more Tesla coils inside) was added and the effects I heard in this system were pretty obvious over and above without their use. The effect to me was a more relaxed presentations, though I was told that this is due to a reduction in the noise-floor of the overall system.

A bigger and "better" mains block, the XT3, was added to the system in place of the X3 and again there was a perceived improvement in focus and ease in the music.

At this point I need to stress that these are not reviews of these products, they are merely my observations of what we were shown in conditions and systems that were new to us. My belief is that valuable reviews of any product can only be done in your own system and in your own home environment. With that said, something is definitely happening with this stuff and whilst I would have loved to have confirmed my initial thoughts on this all been voodoo-bollocks, I'm afraid I can't do that. I'm also well aware that there are many out there in audiophile land that will be reading this and will scoff, claiming foul and that we were somehow duped...so be it, I am merely reporting in language as simple as I can make it, what I experienced during these demonstrations.

We now had a demonstration of the ANSUZ DARKZ which are "resonance control" blocks that go under

your kit or under your speaker cables. They come in different materials and even with different coatings. If you want to read more about these then you can do so here.

The first dem of the DARKZ was to have a listen with some C2T DARKZ fitted underneath the amplifier and then to remove them. I didn't hear as big a difference here as to with the whole changing of the mains blocks and whatnot outlined above, but there was a small effect of some kind going on. Frits moved up the range of DARKZ that all use different materials and different coatings and this is where I did experience bigger effects. The biggest effect for me was when moving from the stainless steel S2T DARKZ to the Titanium T2T DARKZ, with the effect being a definite focusing of the sound and the spaces around the sound – spatial cues were more apparent to me. There were two other DARKZ added in the form of the T2 SUPREME (Zirconium and Diamond coating) and Z2 SIGNATURE (Zirconium) and there was an effect, but the biggest effect remained the jump from S2T to the T2T DARKZ.

This is interesting stuff, in my opinion. It may fly in the face of accepted logic and, as I say, there will be those who say I was duped, but for me there was an effect and that effect was a positive effect.

We then got a demonstration of the ANZUS SORTS which are designed to be placed in empty RCA, USB, XLR, and LAN sockets. Again, something is going on with all of these being added but for me the really big jump in sound, and it wasn't subtle, was when inserting one of these doodads into the spare XLR socket on the amp. I have no explanation why and don't offer one as to why there is an effect at all and why that effect should be most noticeable when used into an empty XLR socket!

All that was a bit of a shock to the system and it was clear at this point that this was not going to be your standard visit to a manufacturer's HQ. Hold onto your seats because this gets odder and odder by turn.

DAY ONE. DEM TWO

Around the AGD HQ are a number of demonstration rooms and in this particular dem room we were greeted by a pair of (nearly) €70K Børresen 02 Silver Supreme speakers, an AAVIK I-180 amp (€6K) and

associate AAVIK streamers etc. All cables in this system were the ANZUS D2 level which sits around the middle of the company's offerings. The power block was the MAINZ 8 A3 (€3700) and there were T2S DARKZ grounding blocks in the system too, both under kit and under the cables.

It's probably easiest if I describe what was done to the system and what we heard as it was done.

First of all the DARKZ were removed from underneath the power cable going to the mains block and whilst the sound didn't collapse (this I found is a cables with the plastic "blocks" on the cables got brought out. These blocks use "Anti Arial" coils and other "technology" but their effect is pretty obvious and again not very subtle. The really ridiculous effect came when adding the D-TC GOLD SIGNATURE power cable. This is outrageously expensive and I looked at the price afterwards with a good degree of incredulity, but the thing works and it works very dramatically. I struggled to describe the sound I was hearing but there was a good deal of arms waving about and hands grasping a non-existent ball in the air in the space where the music was. To me, and the best way I can describe this, was as if

The whole concept here is to attract a younger buyer and I really do think that, given the performance of this as sound. This cable is unobtainable for all but the most wealthy of people and as such, I have no qualms in saying that it is the most incredibly baffling thing I have heard (up to this point in our tour) ever. My thoughts are that as I can't afford it and not many people.

the lack of noise in the recording had been compressed into a ball and that something was actively affecting the sound. This cable is unobtainable for all but the most wealthy of people and as such, I have no qualms in saying that it is the most incredibly (up to this point in our tour) ever. My thoughts are that as I can't afford it, and not many people can, there is no reason n for me to hold back on my enthusiasm for what I was hearing. It's an incredible experience and one you

favourite buzz word used by the folk carrying out the dems, in this case Frits again) it did lose a degree of focus. Then Frits changed the power cord between a 2m cord and a 4m cord – the 4m cord sounded better. Yes, this sounds ridiculous, but this is an effect.

Then the X2 power cable that was in use was changed to a D2 power cable (a considerable jump in price) with the latter having more conductors and a lower inductance and my notes tell me that with Jeff Becks "Space For the Papa" (I heard today he died - RIP) I was able to hear more into the recording and hear spatial information and details with the D2 in place.

We then compared more cables and each time there were audible differences in presentation with the really dramatic effects coming in when the should try to experience if you are able, safe in the knowledge that you are very unlikely to ever be in a position to go out and spend this kind of money on a cable for your system, let alone a set to power each component. The jump from the already expensive cable we had in immediately before this switch was the biggest jump in perceived performance for me.

What I found interesting here is that we were not doing anything else to the system, and the amp we were using was relatively inexpensive, other than changing the cable going to the power block. I don't believe anything unless I have the opportunity to experience it for myself and, again, I entered this demonstration fully believing that I would hear very little over and above the use of slightly better power cables and the (mostly) subtle effects these changes can have.

DAY TWO. DEM ONE

Here we got to listen to a pair of speakers that we first saw at Munich last year and that will see the official light of day sometime in Q2 of this year. The X3s are a relatively budget offering when compared to the other Børresen speakers and they are a floorstanding 2.5 way speaker with in-house drivers and tweeter. For their €10K asking price I can see them being a bit of a worry for some brands and their speakers at this kind of price.

These speakers were being driven by a one-box system that, again, is a bit hush-hush at this point in time and that, like the speakers, is going to be at a price that is at an entry-level point to the AGD ecosystem.

The whole concept here is to attract a younger buyer and I really do think that, given the performance of this as a system, AGD will succeed in this. I can also see the system as being an endgame for many in that it will offer a performance that will satisfy most people who will need only add a Qobuz account and be done.

The speakers with the all-in-one box and its Pascal Class D modules offered up a big and fast system sound that, it has to be said, was right up my street and sounded fabulous with the electronic music that we got to listen to and I cannot wait to have this system to play with at home at some point in the future, though I'm guessing that demand will outstrip supply in the first instance!

DAY TWO. DEM TWO

This was an interesting demonstration and essentially started us off listening to a well-known and very popular amplifier from another brand and then moving through and up the AAVIK range of amplifiers using the same Børresen speakers and the same AAVIK AC and streamer with the same D2 level cables throughout.

What is interesting about this demonstration is that the amps are essentially the same. They have precisely the same boards and whatnot in there and differ only in the number of Tesla coils and "anti-dither" technology they have onboard.

The first amp plumbed into the system was the I 180

retailing at around €6K which was a little bit, but not much, more than the competitor's amplifier. However, in this system and on this day, the AAVIK was the better of the amplifiers and majored in speed and control through the bass and a more spacious and airy mid and mid-upper band. Overall my notes tell me that this amp was a more "coherent" sounding amplifier and for me that coherency was manifest in a sound where no one frequency band dominated or took centre stage.

The I 280 amp was up next and this adds more Tesla coils and tech and costs an extra €4K at €10K. This is a clear step up in performance from the I 180 and to me it indicates that the noise reduction systems and tech (Tesla) in the amps are obviously doing something and have an overall positive effect. I've reviewed this amp on the past and when I read about the only differences in the range being (predominantly) the number of Tesla coils each amp had my initial reaction was to mentally suggest to myself that this was a bit of spin on behalf of AAVIK and my thoughts were along the lines of "Come on, guys, we aren't that daft to fall for this!". I was wrong!

The I 580 gets rolled out next and we get told about the volume control on each of these amplifiers being a resistor-ladder controlling a processor where the resistor-ladder is connected to the feedback loop and uses LDRs for connection — essentially there is no physical connection. Yes, this is a better sounding amp than the previous. What strikes me at this point is also the really sensible LED display. The red LED display looks a bit antiquated and old-fashioned when compared to a lovely looking LCD screen that displays the album artwork and whatnot. When the title of the tune which I don't know scrolls across the screen it is clear for me to read from the other end of the room and I now think this is actually a pretty sensible approach — YMMV.

Next up the ethernet switch gets played with. This is an interesting product and one of which I am hugely sceptical....or was. ANSUZ don't claim to do anything with the zeros and ones that travel down the ethernet cables and through the switch. What they do claim is that their products remove high-frequency noise from the analogue signal that carries the digital information. Inside the switch is the Tesla and Dither technology which we have mentioned earlier and throughout this write up. As we move through the range of switches (that go up in price considerably) there are improvements to the sound at every

step. Things get somehow cleaner and instruments and noises in the music stand more on their own... it's difficult to describe but it's absolutely obvious when you hear it. The biggest step up for me was between the A2 switch (€3200) and the D2 switch (€5360), though the D-TC Supreme was marginally better sounding than the D2 and more than double its price.

I ended up turning to Linette at the end of this demonstration and telling her I was thinking of ordering one of the D2 ethernet switches on the back of this dem and I got zero resistance!

Then we had a play with ethernet cables that range from the X2 at €640 through to the D-TC GOLD Signature at €11 000. From the X2 to the A2 there was an improvement in spatial cues. From the A2 to the D2 there is something bigger going on that is hard to put our finger on but is definitely there. The D2 again is the sweet spot in the range for me!

Look, I know full well I'm talking about ethernet cables and ethernet switches here and they are something I have personally steered very clear of getting involved with reviewing, but slap my ass, call me Nigel, and colour me converted – there is something happening here, that is for sure! I do not know if this is happening in other brands' products as I don't really have a great deal of experience other than trying an audiophile ethernet switch and feeling it had some effect to the point it remained in the system. What I do know is that in these dems and in these systems, the switches and the ethernet cables used had an effect!

DAY TWO. DEM THREE

This demonstration was hosted by Lars Kristensen who is the founder and CSO/CMO of Audio Group Denmark. He is as an enthusiastic a person as you could ever wish to meet.

The system we listened to was a pair of large floorstanders that we can't talk about but were right up our street and which will be available sometime mid-2023, and the company's I880 amplifier.

The following information about the I880 amplifier is lifted from when HiFi PiG ran the news about its launch and I include it here as it gives some of the thinking behind the whole philosophy of these

companies which I think is both useful and interesting to you, dear reader:

AAVIK say that the primary development goal of this series was to create a powerful non-switching pure Class A amplifier with the lowest possible output impedance that would contribute to a better signal and less noise, thus improving speaker performance, resulting in a much more organic sound and more musicality.

In mid-2021, Flemming Erik Rasmussen, founder and former owner of Gryphon Audio, became a full-time member of Audio Group Denmark's design and development team. With more than 35 years of experience in creating and realizing "dreams" and his artistic passion for designing HiFi equipment, he was the perfect fit for Aavik. This was the beginning of a dynamic, and productive collaboration between Michael Børresen with his innovative approach, and Flemming Erik Rasmussen's artistic and aesthetic design touch. He and Michael Børresen embarked on designing and developing a new innovative Aavik amplifier that would elevate the quality of musical authenticity into a new dimension. The result is the new Aavik 880 amplifier flagship series.

Through a long and intensive research and development process, Aavik's engineering team identified several characteristic elements in the traditional Class A amplifier design that they believed could definitely be improved.

To avoid switching, Class A amplifiers typically apply a high constant current to the output devices. This approach is not only associated with high power consumption but also can adversely affect sound quality. The traditional Class A power supply consists of a large transformer and large capacitor banks. Aavik says that a large transformer has two downsides. First, the many windings create undue induction, which in turn means transient delay. Second, these many windings create stray capacitances, which cause high-frequency noise from the mains to enter the amplifier. Michael Børresen and his team of engineers took on the challenge and found another way to prevent the power amplifier from switching over.

They designed a circuitry that constantly keeps the bias spread 0,63 V above the required current, no matter where it is in the cycle. So, no matter how much current the power amp requires to perform, it



always stays in Class A up to 2×200 W into 8 ohms, while at the same time not consuming unnecessary power.

This significant reduction in the power requirements of the amplifier allowed Aavik to design the capacitors as smaller units and place them locally, so that essentially each of the eight pairs of output transistors has its own capacitor bank right next to it. This means that the current does not have to flow through long wire harnesses and long circuit boards. The current is always directly at the output transistor, which means a shorter signal path and therefore less noise. In addition, this innovative Aavik design also means that the 880 amplifiers do not get as hot as conventional Class A amplifiers, resulting in higher efficiency.

The power supply for Aavik's 880 series amplifiers is designed with Aavik's resonant-mode power supplies, which ensure sufficient power resources with extremely low noise. The noise floor in the raw power supply is extremely low, but is further reduced by the ultra-low noise regulators that power the various parts of the circuit. The smaller size of the power supply also means fewer windings and therefore less induction and lower transient delay.

To create the best and most effective control section, Aavik's engineering department has carefully tested and evaluated each electronic component to ensure both the lowest possible noise floor and further refinement of the signal.

The Aavik 880 amplifier features a unique inverted amplifier topology with virtual ground for maximum stability. Feedback becomes so strong that the signal can be attenuated to a gain of less than 1. This maintains the full signal with the lowest signal-to-noise ratio, whether the volume is turned up or down. This provides the speakers with a clear and distinct flow of information.

The LDR (Light Dependent Resistor) is extremely quiet thanks to its switchless principle. This significantly reduces the noise floor and ensures a natural sound without suppressing subtle sound details. Aavik says that traditional MOS-FET switch arrays and relays create much more noise. The 880 series includes the following components, Switchless optical input board – LDR-based and Switchless optical gain selection.

The separate power supply in the Aavik 880 amplifier ensures sufficient power resources with low noise. The result is more control and seemingly unlimited dynamic headroom. When more power is needed, the operating frequency increases, which in turn has the advantage of also increasing power density, allowing for higher peak power when the music demands it. The noise floor of the raw power supply is extremely low and is further reduced by the ultra-low noise regulators that power the various parts of the circuit.

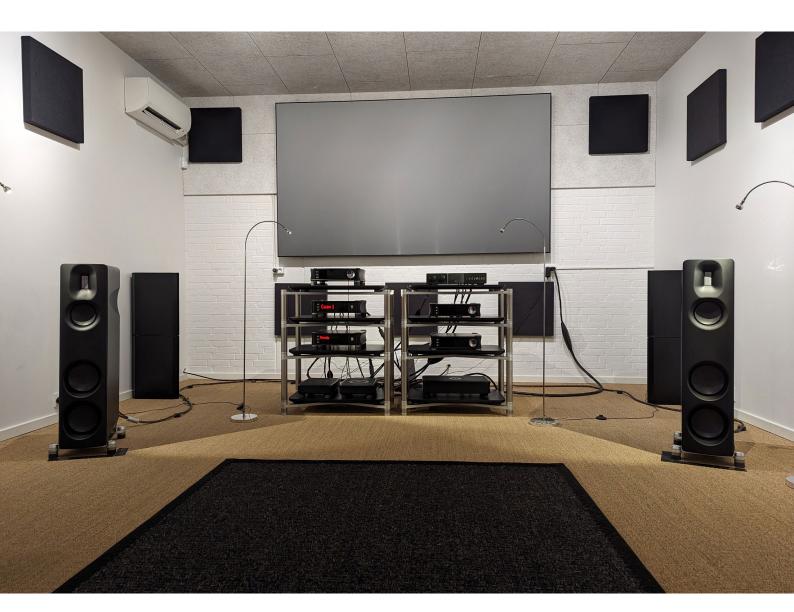
Aavik's analogue crossover is designed to ensure precise timing when routing audio signals to the receiving components. This is important to avoid harsh and compressed sound. The Aavik crossover is designed to either drive a subwoofer very precisely or to drive a 2.1 home theatre system with the integrated low and high pass filter. Alternatively, the Aavik analogue crossover can also serve as an analogue room correction control.

The exterior design of the Aavik 880 amplifier is the result of Flemming Erik Rasmussen's artistic and aesthetic work. However, his design philosophy is and always has been that design must serve a purpose.

The cabinet of the Aavik 880 amplifier was designed primarily with the goal of maintaining the best audio characteristics of the electrical design, i.e. the lowest inductance, reducing hysteresis to an absolute minimum, and ensuring excellent resonance control. In addition, since this was a Class A amplifier that was to be developed, there were some predefined premises for the design. With these goals in mind, the design process became a study of shapes and materials that opened up a unique and constructive synergy between Flemming Erik Rasmussen and Michael Børresen.

Based on Flemming Erik Rasmussen's fascination with copper for its visual appearance and feel, and Michael Børresen's insight into the sonic properties of copper, this material was chosen as a fundamental component of the design. As a result, the Aavik 880 amplifiers feature a solid copper enclosure. This results in a further reduction in hysteresis, lower output impedance, lower inductance, a positive effect on the damping factor, and cooler operation of the amplifier.

In addition, the amplifier features cooling elements



Just one of the demonstration rooms at Audio Group Denmark's HQ

on the sides and top that clearly bear Flemming's design signature. The volume button is covered with a rubber layer, and the control panel was designed as a large LCD touchscreen display. The bottom plate is designed as a sandwich construction with a copper plate, a heavy compact laminate plate, and a titanium layer on the bottom.

When Aavik designs new audio equipment, one of the main tasks is always to eliminate as much unwanted noise as possible to provide uncompromising musical authenticity. This, of course, also applies to Aavik's

new 880 series. In pursuing this goal, **Audio Group** Denmark has technologically groundbreaking advances in product development of its three individual brands, Ansuz, Aavik and Børresen, can often be leveraged across

signals with precisely defined frequencies. These signals are sent in anti-phase. Many Ansuz audio products are equipped with this analogue dither technology. Recently, Ansuz has introduced a 3rd generation of this Ansuz analogue dither technology. An even more advanced and sophisticated version that reflects Ansuz's recent research efforts to refine this technology by calibrating the pulsating frequencies even more accurately. Each of the Aavik 880s four feet is designed to accommodate an Ansuz Darkz resonance control device. Four Ansuz Darkz Z2s are therefore always

Lars went through a whole load of stuff that learned that many made little or no sense to me from a logical or rational perspective but there is something happening and things do change when things are added to and taken away from the system.

brands. Audio Group Denmark has integrated its most effective Tesla coil technologies from the most advanced products of their three brands into the Aavik 880 series. For example the active Tesla coil technology, which is by far the most effective Ansuz technology for noise reduction.

Tesla coil technology aims to remove as much unwanted noise as possible from any musical performance to ensure uncompromised musical authenticity. The principle of Tesla coil technology is based on two coils wound against each other: a coil and a counter coil. In Ansuz's words, "a double inverted coil" – the two coils both carry voltage. When the Tesla coil encounters a voltage spike, a counter coil is activated to eliminate the noise. Since noise spikes are pure voltage and carry virtually no charge, cancellation is quite good, but still not 100%. However, when multiple P-TC coils are connected in parallel, their ability to cancel noise increases significantly.

Analogue dither technology originates from radar, where it provides a stronger signal and thus a much greater range. Active Tesla coils emit pulsating

included when you buy an Aavik 880 model. Ansuz Darkz resonance control devices absorb vibrations that are not directly related to the signal path.

Price is \$70.000 or: €67.000

This is a very good sounding system but the main point of Lars' demonstration is to show off some more of what I've been calling the AAVIK VOODOO, though when I told them I was calling it voodoo they countered with "it's not voodoo if it's real!" which is a fair point!

Anyway, there was a Titanium rod on top of the amp and this is there (it's an extra cost, of course) to change the resonances of the amp and the system. This rod is taken way and also replaced by a Zirconium rod and there are changes in the sound and it is repeatable in these conditions – yes, I am well aware that this is not double-blind testing and so you either accept my word for the changes or not, it is of no consequence to me as I can only report what I heard on the day, suffice to say I went into this with eyes open and with a healthy dose of scepticism in tow. In honesty, the taking away and

adding of these rods wasn't anywhere near as profound an experience as with some of the other products and doodads that had gone before and were to follow.

Lars went through a whole load of stuff that made little or no sense to me from a logical or rational perspective but there is something happening and Both Lin and I are so pleased we took Audio Group Denmark up on this trip to visit their HQ and we enjoyed my time with them thoroughly. It was both eye-opening and challenging, and very entertaining...and we loved the fact that we listened to some seriously great music and got time to really talk with the people behind the brands in a way that you just don't get time for at shows.

Yes, as I have stressed several times throughout my write up of our visit, I am well aware that some of the concepts and products put out by this group of people seem to make little or no sense if you look at them with a closed mind.

The people involved in this business from the top to the bottom are incredibly enthusiastic about their brand and all are clearly well looked after! I got the impression that for the people involved in coming up with some of these, let's face it crazy concepts, are like children given free rein to explore and develop whatever takes their fancy, however far-fetched or off the wall.

One or two of the products (the Titaium and Zirconium bars in the last demonstration we had) don't/didn't work as effectively as some of the others, but overall there is something going on with the more far-out products that we got to listen to and they build on the already strong

foundations of the excellent sounding amplifiers and speakers that Audio Group Denmark are responsible for.

Yes, as I have stressed several times throughout my write up of our visit, I am well aware that some of the concepts and products put out by this group of people seem to make little or no sense if you look at them with a closed mind. Personally, I approached our visit, as I have said, with an open and yet highly sceptical outlook and I suggest that if you have the opportunity to experience any of the ANSUZ, AAVIK or Børresen products at a show or at a dealer, then you do the same.

things do change when things are added to and taken away from the system. Adding a pair of SPARKZ AC HARMONIZERS (I know) to a couple of unused sockets had an effect (repeatedly, as I asked them to be removed and replaced several times). Putting a pair of DARKZ on the edge of the speakers had a small effect! Putting three Titanium ball-bearings (yes, I know!!) onto a DARKZ that was sat on the edge of the amp had a big effect – yes, as I said, I know!!!

CONCLUSIONS AND TAKEAWAYS



ECI 80D

A brand-new entry level integrated amplifier Electrocompaniet ECI 80D offers 2 x 80 Watts in 8 Ohms using a proprietary class A / B amplifier. The ECI 80D has a built-in RIAA amplifier for your turntable, 2-way Bluetooth HD support for streaming from your iOS, Android, Mac or PC, as well as HD streaming to your high-end headphones. 5 digital inputs and 2 analog inputs completes this brand new release from Electrocompaniet.



beautifully honest





Argon

Powerful precision

Speaker manufacturers tend to strive for a certain 'sound'. The target for Argon's is what we hear live. Nothing more. Nothing less. Only the highest quality components, an electrically simple and elegant crossover, and innovative acoustical engineering are used in our quest to perfection.

AUDIO SHOWS WE VISITED IN Q1

OF 2023

he scale of our reports from the numerous shows we attend each

quarter dictates that we cannot put them in this publication in their entirety. Instead we thought a fab idea was to give you a taster and include a link back to the HiFi PiG site where you can read the full report and enjoy the hundreds of photographs we have taken.



Not Boring





HiFi PiG's Lin and Stu report from the much-welcomed return of the Bristol HiFi Show, join them as they have a look at and listen to a huge array of the finest HiFi at this hugely popular and busy UK HiFi Show.







ISE Barcelona 2023, or to give it its full title Integrated Systems Europe 2023, is an annual event where "the global AV community once again descends on Barcelona for four days of exhibits, education sessions, meetings and events...".



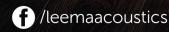




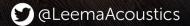
STELLAR SOUND

Discover the 5-star Tucana II Anniversary Edition amplifier and the new Quasar streaming amplifier with DAC and Bluetooth, available now.













So, it would seem that there is a new kid on the block with regards to the high-end and luxury audio show scene in the UK and despite this being this particular new kid's first outing, we can take it that they are well-rounded and sophisticated.



HiFi PiG's resident tape-head Alan Mc Intosh talks all things open reel-2-reel.



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equipment only, without any possibility of digital contamination in every single phase described for the you have bought. In the case we have acquired masters produced by third parties, we have directly verified and

Date 11'01'8023



t did seem almost impossible – highly unlikely at least – to me that, even with recent expansions of Master copy tapes entering the market, the "holy grail" works of Coltrane, Davis, and Mingus would see the light of day on this format.

Astoundingly – and truly wonderfully – the seemingly impossible has happened and the Hemiolia Records company of Italy has clearly used some sort of arcane knowledge and struck some deals with dark deities to gain the license and access to produce Blue Train, Kind of Blue, and Ah Umm on Master copy, 15ips, 2 track reels! Even as I write this I still I can't quite believe it.

For any jazz fan, and for many who are not, John Coltrane's name stands 1000 feet tall as a master of the saxophone in the modern jazz era of the mid and late fifties and through the Bop and Modal periods of the 60's before his sad passing in 1967. Blue Train stands as the go-to Coltrane album for many who want to know "what all the fuss is about" or as audiophiles have heard that he is a must-listen and choose it for its renown as a superb recording (while other recordings like Giant Steps and a Love Supreme tend to follow soon after to truly understand Coltrane's method)

Blue Train has had many pressings, repressing's, re-mastering and special editions including only recently the special editions of mono and stereo vinyl released as part of Blue Notes Tone Poet series, mastered at RTI by the highly skilled Kevin Gray. I have a few copies including this latest Mono remaster which is wonderful (I use a very capable Miyajima Kotetu true mono cartridge mounted on an Origin live Zephyr arm and Calypso Mk IV turntable for playback). Why tell you all this? Well.. really it's for comparison I guess, but also it's because I have to remind myself to not buy any more versions... it is getting silly!

Before we get into how it sounds I

would be doing Hemiolia a distinct disservice if I didn't comment (at length) about how this recording is presented. If you think a glossy gatefold Blue Note vinyl cover or a Mofi One Step box is nice, then you're going to have to reset your benchmark

I hovered over the buy button for a few days trying to convince myself before hitting it and I'm very glad I did

somewhat with this.

Arriving via DHL I open the well-protected shipping box to find the thick, heavy cardboard cover box. The iconic Blue Train artwork as expected is on the front with a Hemiolia records banner and a note that this Stereo edition has been mastered by their resident Creative Director and Sound Engineer Pietro Benini. Each box also carries a hologram authenticity tag including a unique serial number. This authenticity is further documented inside the box in a lovely certificate describing the 4 all analogue phases of mastering (Duplication

of the original master, mixing/ editing where required, mastering, final duplication), a statement that the original master tape was verified, date of purchase and hand signed by a Hemiola signatory.

I pause here – all of the above, along with information on their website, the press coverage, and quality of the package are important – why? Well.. a lot of tapes are floating around these days, but it's very hard to know what is genuine and what is not. "Provenance" matters! Especially with this material and at the costs to procure it. There is a number (but not many) of reputable production houses and certifications, and serial numbers go a long way to satisfying me of the genuine nature of these productions. Confident this is the real deal I can enjoy it to the full.

Blue Train is supplied across two 10.5" 1/4", 2 Track reels, to accommodate (without cut) the almost 43 mins running time. Each reel is from what I can tell high quality aluminium and beautifully finished in burnt orange, with the album lettering, Hemiolia branding, and tape number applied on top to give a slightly raised profile. This extra detail of colour and embossed lettering does certainly set them apart from most productions who often use standard silver reels with a sticker affixed by the label/producer. Handling these tapes does feel rather special. The media itself is RTM (Recording The Masters) SM900 tape and these are CCIR EQ.

Internally the super quality finish continues with each reel held on a separate hub made from (it appears) a light wood, carved with the Hemiolia logo. Cover artwork and liner notes (as you would see on the LP) are provided on a lovely gatefold card as well as a detailed technical sheet covering information about the recording medium itself including the leader tape labels and the machines used for playback and recording (Otari MTR-15's). This card also carries the reminder that the tapes are supplied "Tails Out" as

you would expect, but if you are new to reels this means you load on the right and rewind to the left before playing.

When you add together the price of the physical media (tape itself is roughly €80 per tape), the coating, embossing, wooden carved hubs, box, artwork, seals, and certification never mind the (let's not forget) incredible and costly to license (I'm sure) music, it's not hard to see why these tapes are approaching €700 to purchase.

But what about the music, Alan? I'm getting to that never fear!

Recorded in 1957, in Rudy Van Gelder's Hackensack NJ studio and then released in January 1958, Blue Train sees Coltrane (tenor Sax) bring together an absolutely stellar group of modern jazz players. My favourite Trumpet man Lee Morgan, Curtis Fuller on Trombone, the wonderful Kenny Drew on piano (Undercurrent is one of my favourite Drew albums and a must-hear if vou have not), the master of bass Paul Chambers, and Philly Joe Jones on Drums. The latter two are also well known for work with Mile Davis.

4 of the tracks are originals by Coltrane with I'm Old Fashioned being an older track penned by Jerome Kern in '42 for the film You Were Never Lovelier and suggested to Coltrane by a friend. From the very off, the title track Blue Train reminds us all why he, and this work, is so revered.

A deep, moody, bluesy sax opening, handled with the grace and control that only Coltrane can muster just envelopes you – and immediately it's clear just how special this recording on tape is. The "realness" – the immediacy, depth, and clarity of what I'm hearing, the sheer presence is just astounding. Sublime is a word lots use (albeit few understand its origins) but it's a great word to sum up this experience. I'm now on my third or fourth play through and every time is like the first. As the track journeys Morgan enters with trademark energy

and punch, and I'm just rapt.

By the next track Moments
Notice, I'm already disconnected
from "listening" to the tape and
am just immersed in the music
and sit, I'm sure, with a rather
goofy grin just enjoying every
note and phrase, every solo break
and call, every percussive element – not only is this a seminal
album, but Hemiolia has offered
up a seminal sonic experience in
my opinion. The transparency and
honesty of the recording is incredible. The energy is infectious.

Onto tape 2 and Locomotion crashes into the room with Jones quickly followed by the fully up-tempo riffs of Coltrane, percussion, and bass driving us along at pace this is no sit back and drift off track this is a foot thumping finger clicking classic presented as if it was yesterday and not over half a century ago! Morgan and Fuller doing their darndest to get us up and moving!

By the time we are through I'm Old Fashioned with its bluesy ballad style, Coltrane taking it in hand and guiding it to its conclusion with feeling and a deft, if delicate, command of his sax, Chambers, Drew, and Jones playing undercurrent and Morgan and Fuller adding romance and impact the openness and freedom of the music to breathe is presented in spades. What becomes evident the more you listen (and re-listen as I have done) is how much space is provided for the players. As soft ballad notes decay it's akin to snow melting away – gradual, organic as if there is no limit to the dynamics - nothing is "quantized" or truncated here.

Lazy Bird brings us to an all too soon close but does so with witty up-tempo playfulness across percussion and bass, balanced with Fuller's soulfulness, Morgan's energy and assertive command on Trumpet, and, of course, John's traversing, slashing at time times, frenetic Saxophone, all taking us to the end of what has been an incredible audio journey... but not before Kenny Drew reminds everyone just how incredible a

piano man he is and Chambers bowing hard and dark on that bass!

I can really only sum this tape up by saying this - Blue Train is an incredible album that can be overlooked when choosing what to listen to at home simply because it is so "common" but it's one that needs to be heard often in my opinion. This tape of it by Hemiolia takes it to new heights. Personally, I feel it opens the door to the past more than any recording I own (that said the Tone Poet is frankly superb and it's no "also ran"). I am not going to make any grand definitive statements acclaiming one format as the "be all and end all", every listener will choose that for themselves (and rightly so), but emotionally this work, on this format has hit me harder and stayed with me longer than any other.

The cost, of course, has to be factored in – Master copy tapes are, unless you are a hedge fund manager or an energy company exec, pretty eye-watering to buy, but on balance and when materials and packaging are considered, the care and skill used to create an all-analogue copy, and of course and perhaps most importantly the base music itself – for me it's a fair price. I hovered over the buy button for a few days trying to convince myself before hitting it and I'm very glad I did. So glad in fact, I have just hit the buy button on Mile Davis's Kind Of Blue from Hemiolia (talk about lots of versions!).

If you love John Coltrane, Jazz, or simply want to hear an incredibly well-recorded, mastered, and produced piece of music in all its naked glory – and have the capability to play 15" IPS, 2 Track – this is one that has to be on your wish list!

John Coltrane – Blue Train 15ip-s/38cms is available direct from Hemiolia records on either CCIR or NAB (7 days preparation time) equalisation for €696 + shipping. At this time Hemiolia is unable to ship this product to the US.

MILES DAVIS KIND OF BLUE HEMIOLIA RECORDS

MILES DAVIS

REEL TWO



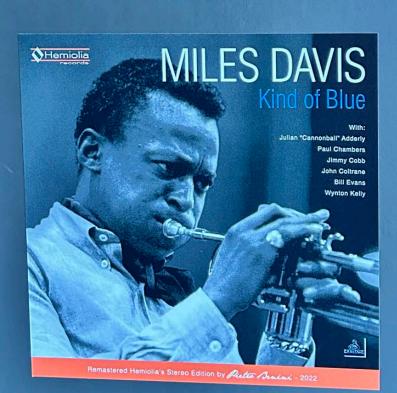
Miles Davis "Kind of Blue" on Hemiolia Records, 15ips 10.5" 2 track reel



Remastered Stereo Edition 2022 by

Mietro Benini

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solidsteel



s Bill Evans
writes in the
original liner
notes (I paraphrase), Miles
had only provided the outline
for what was
to be played
mere hours
before they were
recorded, the
players had never played them

prior and each recording that made it to the album was delivered pretty much as a "take" ...and in that lies the spontaneity, the rawness and the utterly beautiful simplicity for what we hear today.

Kind of Blue hopefully needs no introduction, and I'm sure if you are reading this you have heard, if not own, at least one version – possibly multiple versions and perhaps on different media. Personally, I have a few including the Analogue Productions UHQR Vinyl – which I am using here to some extent as a reference and comparison. I want to be very clear before we proceed, however, this is purely to allow you as a reader to have a frame of reference - I will not offer definitive of which is best - I never do in my reviews and only ever my preferences at times. "Best" can to some be a simple matter of data and measurement (but versus what?), to others, let's face it, it can be highly subjective and based on taste, hearing, room, system, and what mood you are in – unless you were at the recording or have heard the original master in your own system, it's almost impossible to say with certainty how they merit (in my humble opinion of course).

Originally recorded at Columbia's 30th street studio in New York (on 3-track tape, as was common at the time), across 2 sessions in spring 1959 and then released in August of that year, it's easy to see why many regard it as one of the best Jazz album ever recorded – it is certainly Miles's "opus" work. Regardless of where it ranks in your own personal list, it's inarguably a phenomenal price of work – not least due to the sextet of players that reads like a "who's who" of modern jazz. With Miles leading, we have the dual giants of the saxophone – both John Coltrane and Julian "Cannonball" Adderley – we have wonderous piano work and also the obvious broad influence of Bill Evans (barring one track

Freddie Freeloader– where Wynton Kelly is a very competent stand-in), Billy Cobb on drums and Paul Chambers in fine fettle on bass.

Leaving behind his trademark Hard Bop style and following his successful Milestone in 1958, Miles takes a fully modal approach to Kind of Blue, where each player is provided a scale to work within when taking their own solo or improvisation sojourns rather than providing exclusively a repeated chord base for the soloist to make progressive use of. This allows for great experimentation and a freer style for each player, but hangs the whole piece together within that modal range. This delivers a fresh and exciting experience for Davis' fans, and Coltrane later adopts a more Modal approach in his own works (see his quartet works from 1960 to 65) while Bill Evans has already become comfortable in Modal composition with "Peace Piece" on his 1958 Everybody Digs Bill Evans.

To be able then to get my grubby mitts on a 2 track, 15ips Master Copy (fully licensed) of the jazz behemoth Kind of Blue is just phenomenal. (I paid for this pleasure out of my own pocket). Packaged as with Blue Train in a lovely sturdy double thickness 10" reel box, Kind Of Blue cover art, and Hemiolia branding on the front, sealed in robust cellophane with a warranty sticker affixed. Opening the box is like diving into that artisanal box of chocolates you've been savouring, or bottle of high-end Single Malt whisky you've been saving for a special occasion — you slide the lid off gingerly, both eager to get in amongst it, but also tentative and reluctant to rush the experience.

Inside, atop the reels themselves, are lovely reprinted card inserts like mini LP covers (one for each tape/side of Kind of Blue), a technical certificate and a Certificate of Authenticity signed by Hemiolia. As with Blue Train, there are 2 beautiful burnt orange anodised aluminium reels secured on a rather lovely carved wooded "hub". Adding to the already wonderful tactility of the tapes is the raised lettering on each reel bearing the title, tape number (1 and 2), and Hemiolia brand.

As with the Blue Train release, Hemiolia has (incredibly) licensed Kind of Blue to create this Master Copy release. Now, "Master Copy" is one of those terms that can be quite divisive among audiophiles so let me give my tuppence worth. For tape fans, Master Copy is an understood term to mean a range of spe-

THF I FANFR TAPF

cifics – it's a tight range but its fluid to some extent. Master tapes in the context of remasters, reissues, and master copy tapes is (to me and others I know) an accepted and comfortable "catch-all" phrase to represent, interchangeably, the genuine studio master, safety copies, 1st gen remaster available copies and even session tapes or "takes". Of course, we'd all love to feel we are hearing the "real thing" as it was recorded with only a few feet of microphone cable in the way, but it's an accepted fact that you cannot offer

the live studio master out willy-nilly to have loads of runs or of course it will deteriorate, or, god-forbid, get lost. There are out only to be lost in transit!

For anyone who works with and understands professional tape reproduction (I'm learning every day!) - using only very high-quality recorders, calibrated regularly to very specific tolerances, equalisations, and flux', and using only brand new high-quality studio-grade, 2-track media

Frankly, it's incredible. this...) - we all know suppliers For me, It's immediately obvious cases of master that this remaster and be one of them. tapes being sent that this remaster and which "master this format is offering something sonically above and beyond; the impact, transparency, and emotional "grab" just

exceeds any version

I've heard before

will be very comfortable with 1st generation copy tapes - neither you, me or your pet bat will hear the difference (verbose and probably inaccurate in the most technical of senses, but you know what I mean... it's as close as is practically possible).

Therefore when a tape-head (sic) hears "Master Tape" they don't get all hot and bothered with the semantics of "But that tape isn't the REAL master,

or "those tapes were lost in the Warner fire so this is b*llshit". The reality of that particular case is that no one actually knows which specific tapes (studio, safety, session, takes, unreleased material) by which particular artists actually got lost or damaged (and I doubt we ever will – however if you do, dear reader, please share). Therefore if all master tape producers were all lying, and with the amount of scrutiny in the tape market today I would posit companies would get found out pretty fast (I can

> hear the cries of "DSD" as I type know suppliers of tape who are a little "questionable" but Hemiolia does not appear to tape" was used here is unknown to me, but it has to be assumed to be at least very close to the original, as they are noted as being "Verified Masters". Given its 3 -track origin, if Wikipedia is to be believed, at some point the Master was bounced down to 2 track. Hemiola's process from there is all analogue - as certified in their documentation.

Kind Of Blue's 5 tracks are provided in this release by Hemiolia across two ¼", 10" tapes running at 15ips(38cm/s). To best fit all 5 tracks Tape 1 has the March 2nd recordings of So What (9:26), Freddie Freeloader (9:49) and Blue in Green (5:38) with Tape 2 is the April 22nd All Blues (11:36), and Flamenco Sketches (9:26) totaling the nearly 46 minutes running time. Splitting across 2 tapes is the only way

to achieve this length of album without cuts when running at this speed, but it does mean a lot of empty tape on reel 2. The tapes as usual are provided tails-out, so remember to load to the right and rewind before playing.

This 2022 Stereo remaster is by Pietro Benini of Hemiolia.

Rather than deep dive into each track and its musical merits, instead, let me share my thoughts on the overarching sonic attributes across the piece. Over the last couple of weeks I've been listening to single tracks and the album in full, across a number of formats, and across a couple of my systems, to build a good level of familiarity before applying a more critical listening in the last week or so on my main system of Tascam 32 and amplification shared between my Hegel 190 amplifier and Prima Luna Prologue 1 and both feeding my Amphion Argon3s's. Listening to the UHQR vinyl is via my reference Origin Live and Gold Note chain into the Hegel 190/ Prima Luna as before, so of course there is some variance, just as there is with the digital version via the Auralic Aries G1.

Putting the unavoidable variables aside, the UHQR is a truly wonderful production for me (as with previous UHQR work). The dynamics are wonderful, the music is incredibly vibrant and refined, and there is a strong, deep, but well-managed bass presence throughout. Out of the gate with So What you are transported to the late 50s. Chamber's bass bobbing keenly along with Evans tiptoeing across the edges while Miles does what only he does - and so it goes for all 5 tracks with each player stepping forward at solo, but all the time anchored by the constructs assigned by Davis. Evans is up now, with Davis punctuating the modal river he's navigating down, Chambers keeping the rudder centred all the way. Throughout the remainder of the work, we are enthralled in that head noddingly wonderful journey we listeners have embarked on and it is why this album stands tall to this day.

Now for the tape. Frankly, it's incredible. For me, It's immediately obvious that this remaster and this format is offering something sonically above and beyond; the impact, transparency, and emotional "grab" just exceeds any version I've heard before. One obvious difference between this and the UHQR version (system chain notwithstanding) is the bass. On the vinyl, there is a wonderful, deep, full, and

warm bed of bass throughout and it's incredible to listen to when listening in isolation to the vinyl. The bottom end overall feels weightier, and it allows horns to really register low and wide, and Paul Chambers Bass to get you in the guts...and then some.

The tape for me stands that bass down a notch, which in concert opens up the rest of the instruments to have increased presence and space, the whole album feels more focused and confident in the mid-range and with less weight in the bass to weigh it down so that it seems horns and piano notes soar around the room, the bass is tighter and just a little more foot-tappingly rhythmic. The dimensionality and staging are more expressed it seems, and the sense of temporal transportation back to 1959 seems all that more achieved. Brass, of both a trumpet and sax variety, just feels a bit more, well, real – less like I'm listening to my HiFi and more like I'm listing to Messrs Davis and co. in the spring of '59. (One can dream!)

What Hemiolia has done with Kind of Blue, where a few have already delivered incredible remasters, is just exceptional to my ears. Going back to the UHQR, it almost feels like the bass is a little overblown at times, a bit too weighty for the era, and lacking that aching clarity of brass – something I had never registered prior to hearing this version.

I'll close on this; whichever version of Kind of Blue you listen to or own, you are listening to a one-in-a-million recording that brings together 6 of the best players in Jazz – period. The work is stunning, the Modal approach is breathtaking, and the music is a joy. There are no bad versions of this album – the music is just that good. What Hemiolia have done however, is take that diamond, breathe on it and give it a polish, and sit it "just so" in the sun at that magical golden hour allowing it to shine just right, have just that bit more transparency and with that, they have elevated it just that little (important) bit more.

Bravo! I really do hope more follow! I will be first in line – once I've saved up my pennies!

Miles Davis – Kind Of Blue 15ips/38cms is available direct from Hemiolia records on either CCIR or NAB EQ (7 days preparation time) equalisation for €696 + shipping (plus any required import fee). Currently, Hemiolia are unable to ship this product to the US.



Clare Teal performs a tribute to Ella Fitzgerald (Chasing the Dragon), ¼", 15ips, CCIR

MASTER TAPE

Ma Fitzgerald are Teal

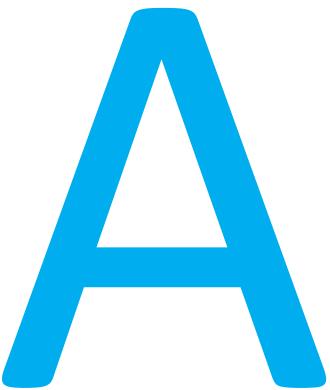
ward The Syd Lawrence Orchestra LEADER Chris Dean

PRODUCED BY Mike & Françoise Valentine 6 Anything Goes 8 Too Dam Hot

1 I've Got You Under My Skin
2 Begin The Beguine
3 I Get A Kick Out Of You
4 Ding Dong The Witch Is Dead

nning copy of this many vintage numany viritoguitar and Fleanor's guitar and Which ice of Eleanu

THE LEADER TAPE



s more and more people are embracing (many never left of course) the wonders, labours and sonic delights of open reel tape, the market for pre-recorded master copy tapes (the naming convention can mean many things of course) is, from what I can see, receiving a new breath of air with established companies such as Horsch House, The Tape Project, 2xHD and Analogue Productions continuing to extend their catalogues to feed the appetite of audiophiles.

Chasing the Dragon Audiophile recordings, produced by the unquestionably talented and largerthan-life Mike Valentine and his wife Francoise, are well known to many for their Direct Cut to vinyl recordings (where the recording desk is fed live and direct to a lathe to produce some of the most dynamic and vivid recordings around) and also their well regarded open reel tape recordings. Mike himself is an incredible orator, demonstrator, and raconteur and I highly recommend you check out his seminars at shows like the UK's North West Audio Show or Audio Show Deluxe in Whittlebury, UK, where his trademark Hawaiian shirts are likely to be almost as vivid as his presentations! Mike's career also spans many years in cinematic camera work for some very well-known movie titles – he's somewhat of a creative polymath it seems.

Having enjoyed some of the Direct Cut vinyl catalogue and with a passion for open reel that has only grown in the last few years since acquiring (and subsequently investing in servicing/repairing) a good condition Tascam 32, I have both enjoyed recording for my own pleasure and also building, albeit slowly, a collection of pre-recorded audiophile master copy tapes from various recording houses who have acquired the necessary licenses (that said there are suppliers who's licensing is less transparent it seems – caveat emptor!). This has led me to finally

get around to acquiring one of Chasing the Dragon's recordings – in this case Clare Teal's "A Tribute to Ella Fitzgerald".

Clare Teal is a phenomenal talent, with an incredible jazz vocalist who is recognised globally, with many British and Boisdale Jazz singer of the year awards to her name, as well as a raft of highly regarded jazz, swing, and big band albums. She has received numerous critical reviews and has worked with the likes of Gregory Porter and Van Morrison. Here she is partnering with the Syd Lawrence Orchestra led by Chris Dunn to deliver a big band jazz album of some of Ella's greats.

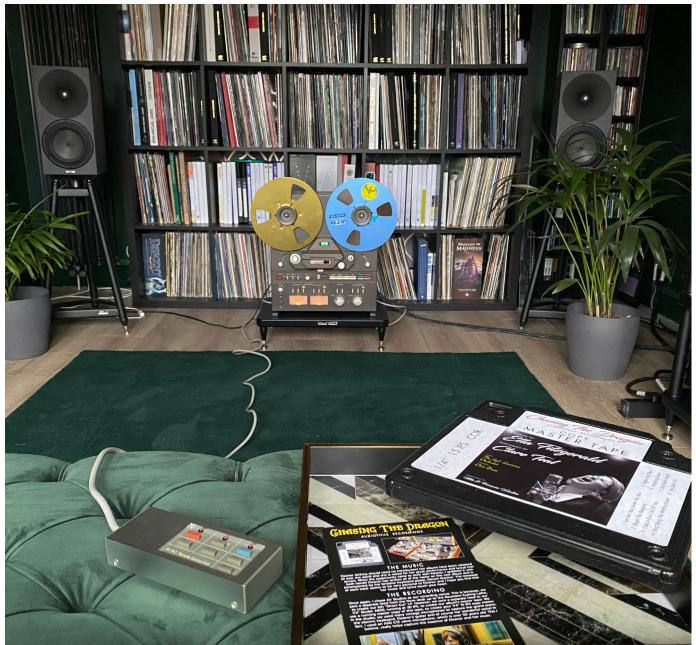
The music (according to Chasing the Dragon) is recorded directly from the Neve desk to a Studer A820 at 30ips (inches per second) onto 1/2" studio master tape, before then being copied down to a "running master". It's from this that the production tapes are made in your chosen format, in my case the preferred 10.15" reel, 2 track, 15ips (the equalization is the usual European CCIR). Playing at 15ip and 2 track provides the best dynamic range achievable in semi-pro/consumer decks and tends to reduce unwanted noise floor.

The media itself is a blue aluminium ATR Magnetics 10'5" reel (the exact formulation is not listed) and is packaged in their usual plastic transport cases decorated with a large front sticker of the album cover and tracklist (8 tracks in all). The reel has a nice Dragon sticker on it reminding you that it is shipped (and should be stored) tails out, meaning of course you rewind first before playing. This is the norm for me anyway, so after splicing leader tape to both ends, I was ready to sit down and listen.

Threading of the tape done, I sit back, put my feet (and volume) up, hit play on the Teac remote, and after a few moments of lead in tape I'm transported back in time. From the first few bars, it's obvious why Clare (and the band) is so highly regarded. Mike's clever use of microphones (both type and positioning) and that combination of Neve desk and Studer recorder is clear in just how wonderful the sound produced is. There is a dreamy, otherworldly nostalgia to this as and I sit in my dark green speakeasy-inspired listening room I'm quite rapt. That is not to say sonically this is some Vaseline-smeared lens of a production – far from it! Clare's voice doesn't attempt to parody Ella's, this is no pastiche, but instead her own stamp on incredible classics.

The whole band is there in front of me, horns, brush on drums, bass... It's less a musical recording, rather almost a cinematic big band feel – it's like you can almost picture each player, in their seat and around the space. Dynamically, when the Hegel 190 is given some volume, it is broad and weighty. Bass is deep, textured, and natural and has great "oomph"! The drums, rather than being hidden back or off to one side are provided their own dedicated middle-stage space and the result is every stroke, hit, and kick is

THE LEADER TAPE



fully expressed and it's evident how tightly timed these folks are playing together as a big band – tight as a drum (pun intended!). The mic'ing is genius work. As we move through classics like "I've Got You Under My Skin", "I Get a Kick Out Of You" and the whimsical and energetic "Ding Dong the Witch is Dead" it dawns on you just how good Clare (and the recording) is.

Her voice grabs you by the gut and doesn't pull any punches. It is powerful, emphatic, vibrant, controlled, and yet somehow effortless (I'm sure it's not to Clare but to the listener it's a delight!). Watching the VU meters on reel to reel is great fun and when you see the dynamic range from near whisper to BOOM drums bangs register across the dial it's another nail in compressions coffin, this is music as it should sound – open, free, unrestrained, and just wonderfully alive! The clarity and resolution is fantastic. Between songs, I crank the volume – but nope, no hint of hiss, the noise floor is incredibly low. I, of course, was not present at the recording, but it feels like little if anything, beyond temporal separation, is between me and the band! Clare is

mic'd close and is vivid in the mind's eye, the centre point of a musical extravaganza.

In this, the real world and its increasing pressures, many people grind teeth and tut at the price of audiophile recordings – especially on tape. For myself as well this is far from a cheap, everyday offering, but as I stopped chasing constant tweaks and upgrades to my system and instead tried to pivot that investment into great music, be it high-quality vinyl or in this case great tape, I reckon I'm spending a little less but getting a lot more for it. As we close out of "Old Black Magic" with its call-and-answer swing horn work" and then finally "Too Damn Hot" sees us come to the curtain fall, I am left thinking I will be looking at more of Chasing the Dragons tape catalogue in future – until then I'm on my 4th straight listen through in 24 hours.

A Tribute to Ella Fitzgerald by Clare Teal (with the Syd Lawrence orchestra) is available in the UK for £400 via MCRU, or Direct from Chasing the Dragon in the UK.



MÉTRONOME LE PLAYER 4 AND LE DAC 2



étronome is a French company founded in 1987, headed up by Jean-Marie Clauzel and based in the town of Montans, just North East of Toulouse in Southern France. All their products are handcrafted in France which, as with JADIS and others, is a big deal.

The two Métronome products we have here at HiFi PiG Towers to play with are both from the Classica range, which is Métronome's entry-level, in the form of the Le Player 4 and the Le DAC 2. Le Player 4 is 8,100€ and the streaming option + 2,000€ and Le DAC is €7,340 giving a combined price of €17, 440. Both are available in Black or Silver and packaging for both products was excellent.

Stuart takes a listen to French brand Metronome's latest CD/streamer and DAC combination.

LE PLAYER 4

Le Player 4 is a top-loading CD player and combined streamer in one rather lovely looking box. Personally, I really like the idea of a CD player that has streaming capabilities as it allows for just one box (other than a DAC) to deal with all your digital music sources. There is a Player 4 available which is a CD transport without the streaming option and 4+ with an onboard DAC and again, the streaming option. Our Le Player came with three Delrin cones for placing under the unit, and a remote.

This is a very nicely put-together bit of kit and the whole is housed in a 2mm steel housing with a 10mm solid alloy front plate into which there's a blue display.

Reviewed by Stuart Smith

The top-loading CD mechanism is a SUOS-HiFi affair that has been customised by Metronome. I love the toploader. There's a sliding door that covers the actual mechanism and when you place your CD on the spindle you secure it with an included puck and then slide the door closed. It's tactile and somehow it's a very satisfying experience to put on a CD. In front of the mechanism itself are a series of touch-sensitive buttons (very cool) that deal with the usual play, stop, pause etc.

Around the back you have a range of digital outputs that in. lude S/PDIF (RCA), AES (XLR), Optical, and a I2S via HMDI connector. These









Le DAC and Le PLayer frrom Métronome are a beautiful looking pair of components





connections will allow connection to pretty much any DAC you fancy using, but for the purposes of this review we are going to use Le DAC. There are inputs for LAN and USB for connecting to your network and to external storage.

Inside Le Player you have a couple of toroidal transformers, with both having Schaffner filters for EMI and RFI protection.

LE DAC 2

Le DAC 2 is built, not unsurprisingly, to match Le Player and has the same stylish and minimalistic aesthetic. From the front it looks pretty much identical to Le Player and shares the same 2mm steel housing and 10mm alloy front plate. You also get the same sized display on the front and this has cool touch buttons to scroll through the menu options.

Inside the box you have an ESS ES9026Pro Stereo converter, a power supply with EMI and RFI filters and ten independent regulation lines for power.

The DAC will decode up to 32bits/768kHz (dual mono) and outputs to either RCA or balanced XLR analogue outs.

Digital inputs include all the usual suspects of S/PDIF, AES/EBU, USB type B (for PCM and DSD signals from 44.1 to 384kHz), and the less common I2S input via HDMI for SACD.

Both Le Player and Le DAC have a USB port for servicing.

Delrin cones and a remote are options as per above.

Overall Le DAC and Le Player look rather splendid on the rack and have a minimalist and sleek look that will appeal to those that appreciate good looks but without the need for going down Le Rue Du Bling. Personally, I think they look fab and that they look like proper HiFi, though obviously pretty high-end HiFi.

SET UP OF MÉTRONOME LE DAC AND LE PLAYER

Set up is pretty obvious but instructions are includ-

ed in the packaging.

I plugged our router switch into the back of Le Player, XLR outputs from Le DAC in to our Music First Preamplfier, and then the two units were interconnected by USB and AES/EBU cables.

Le Player is not Roon ready as yet and Métronome recommend you use Audirvāna on your Windows or iOS machine of choice. I'm a big fan of Roon and it has been my go-to interface for ages now and we are assured accreditation is under way. You can also run the streamer on Le Player using uPnP players of your choice.

SOUND OF THE MÉTRO-NOMES

The system used for the duration of the review was our Music First Preamp (review to follow shortly), Total DAC AMP 1 power amplifier, and Audiovector R6 Arreté loudspeakers. Cables were from Chord Cables, Atlas, and Tellurium Q. Power conditioning was the usual Torus Power unit. All units were powered through the Torus Power and all ethernet connections were through a Russ Andrews ethernet switch. I used a variety of Red Book CDs and streamed from locally stored (ripped) files and Qobuz.

First of all let me say that the CD transport on the Metronome is, like the other Metronome CDs I've had the pleasure of testing, an absolute pleasure to use. There is a certain satisfaction to pushing back the solid cover to reveal the mechanism, popping your CD on the spindle and then placing the pick on top of the CD. Everything feels exceptional right and damped in a way that a nice car' doors shut satisfyingly. It feels expensive and it feels luxurious, which, let's face it, this CD player is. The soft-touch buttons are also nice to use and being on the top panel, don't spoil the look of the front panel of the CD player.

This mechanical solidity is carried through to the sonic presentation, with Ship Of Fools' excellent Let's Get This Mother Outta Here being underpinned by a solid but not overblown bass throughout. Sound effects rumble at the start of L=SD2 before the rock solid drum track comes through. Here the solid feel to the rhythm section is empha-







Le Player from the top and showing the top-loading mechanism and magnetic puck







Lovely styling and understated looks are the order of the day with Le Player





sised by a speed that really plays to the strengths of the Audiovector R6 Aretté speakers and lays a foundation on which the space rock guitars and synths play over. Nothing seems to get confused here despite there being a whole lot going on with this album and it feels that the Metronome kit is presenting the pre/amp combo with a clean and uncoloured signal with excellent dynamics and speed. Comparing the sound to our Lampizator Big 7 with the Stack Audio streamer in place, I would suggest that the Lampizator has the edge on a more "pleasing" sound, but the Metronome, I would suggest, is a smidge less coloured – which you prefer is going to come down to which you prefer personally, though the Metronome would be considered more HiFi in its sonic signature. The amount of detail getting through to the speakers is in no doubt with the Metronome pairing, and small details in this record were easy to pick out and with good spatial presentation of sounds in the mix. Nothing dominates the presentation and sounds pretty flat – not flat as in boring, flat as in nothing in the frequency range is being over-emphasised.

Playing Bruce Cockburn's If I Had A Rocket Launcher on the 2 Meter Sessies (check it out) label is a track that is simply but beautifully recorded with just two microphones. What I'm listening for here is the small details like movement across the strings of the guitar and the "steeliness" of the strings. And the Metronome duo captures it all and presents it in a fashion that is what I would describe as being natural sounding. I've spoken about this before, but it's quite "easy" to give the impression of detail by pushing the higher frequencies which leads to a presentation that soon becomes tiresome. The Metronome doesn't do this and the effect is one of being able to dig deep into listening to a recording without it feeling overblown or too much for your ears/brain to comprehend. There is what I think to be the right amount of steeliness to the strings and you hear (and can almost visualize) when he is bending the strings – it's a very life-like presentation that doesn't sound like it is being embellished to add bells and whistles that aren't there in the recording. Cockburn is a very accomplished guitar player and I'm sure that those more versed with this level of play will be able to appreciate what he is doing on this set up. There's also a deathly quiet between songs and this exceptionally low noise floor allows things like the fading sounds at the end of this tune disappear to absolute silence. What I also got with the Metronome pairing in the system

was an impression that the sound stage was a little more extended down the sides of the room that had me once or twice look up to see where the sounds were coming from – another small detail but an important one that many will appreciate.

Killing Joke's Wardance sounds incredibly well produced with the Metronomes in the system and there is excellent separation and layering to the sounds in the mix. The effect on Jaz Coleman's vocal that gives it a slight metallic edge is very clear to hear, but it's also very easy to discern the vocal itself beneath/with the effect. Feedback noise over to the left of the mix is heard as a separate entity too, where it could have become a homogenous mush that gets lost with the rest of the track – or worse the rest of the track gets lost within the feedback. And this is something I like about Le Player and Le DAC, they allow you, as I've said before, to listen into a recording and hear what is going on in the mix over and above it just being another record to listen to.

When I hit play on Dre's 2001 album there's that sense of dynamics and speed, cleanliness and detail to the presentation which echoes what I've spoken about before in this review. Precise placement in the left to right mix is solid and unmoving, which again leads to a sense of overall solidity to the tunes you are listening to. That sturdiness is from top to bottom (hats down to the bass kick) and gives a sense of the metronomic (pun intended), locked-in beats having a feel that draws you in and emphasises the groove on which the tunes are built. There is nothing sloppy here with the way the Metronomes play tunes and it's certainly something you are going to listen to and know you are listening to a piece of high-end equipment. Now, that latter point may be misconstrued as I have found that some so called high-end systems seem to concentrate on the mids and upper-mids that sound great with relatively unchallenging tunes but sound lacking at the bottom and top end – that's not what the Metronomes are about!

QUIBBLES

Le Player is not Roon Ready yet.

A remote is included and it's functional rather than in-keeping with the electronics' boxes, but it's a long way from the worst I've seen.





CONCLUSION

On the face of it (and if you believe all the negative hype) it would seem that introducing a new CD player in this day and age is a pretty brave move on the part of Métronome, but whenever I've asked or seen questions on social media asking if people are still using and buying CDs there still seems to be a lot of love and a lot of support for this format. However, I do think it is a sensible move for this French brand to include streaming option onboard to allow people the best of both worlds — I know that I have many more CDs than rips from CDs, if that makes sense. What will make this an almost ideal solution is when Le Player gets full Roon accreditation as it has been my UI of choice for the last couple of years or so.

Sonically, Le Player and Le DAC are a dynamic and clean sounding partnership. The levels of detail from top to bottom in the mix is excellent and presentation is uncoloured and meticulous. Basically, I'd suggest that what you hear is what is on the CD you are playing. This detail and dynamics are carried through to the pair when you switch to streaming, though some may well prefer presentation that has a little more flavour than the Metronome DAC brings to the party.

One of the key features of the sound of the Metronomes for me was how the mix was presented left to right with individual elements remaining exactly where they should be but with panned elements moving cleanly and without smear across the soundstage – speed again.

Personally, I really enjoyed this French CD player and DAC but for me the current lack of Roon on the streaming front would have me hesitate to a degree as my main sources are streaming and vinyl. However, to those who still love to play their CDs with streaming being a bit of a sideshow then I can certainly see how the Metronomes would be a very strong contender for their hard-earned. Once Roon certified I'd have the pair in a heartbeat!

Fit and finish can't be faulted in any way with these two boxes and they look fabulous in a classy and understated way.

I'm giving this pairing our 5 Hearts award based on

the sonic excellence, fit and finish. They would almost certainly have got our top award had the remote been better and Roon accreditation had been in place.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality:

Top-notch build quality throughout with the casework certainly being a step-up from many others

Remote is not in-keeping with the quality of the electronics

Top loading mechanism is a joy to use

Blue LED display is clear but some may find it a bit much or out of date

Easy to set up and use

No Roon as yet

Sound Quality:

Clean, clear and precise are my takeaways from this pairing

Very detailed without becoming forced at certain frequencies

Balanced and engaging sound devoid of bells and whistles

Value For Money:

It's not a cheap pairing at €17,440 but the pair perform exceptionally well and have the kind of high-end finish you would expect at this price

We Loved:

The effortless and yet detailed sound matched with an equally classy build

We Didn't Love So Much:

No Roon and the remote is a bit lacking

Elevator Pitch Review: French brand Metronome present their mid-market CD/Streamer and match-







Le DAC carries the same styling as Le Player and is the obvious and perfect match







Around the back of Le DAC



REVIEW



ing DAC for a combined price of €17,440. They are beautifully finished and should be bought as a pair as they complement each other so well. Sonically they are an easy to listen to pairing with the sonic signature being one of fine detail presented in a relaxed, solid and engaging manner.

Price:

Le Player 4 (with streaming option) - €10,100

Le DAC - €7,340

Combined price - €17, 440

SUPPLIED BY METRONOME





JADIS 1300 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

was dreading this amplifier arriving from the very moment we agreed to review it, which if I recall was way back in May of 2022. Now, when I say I was dreading it, that's a bit unfair on JADIS because I was actually really looking forward to placing this 300B tube integrated amplifier into one of our review systems, though I with the power tubes in strongly suspected that there would be a strong likelihood that I'd never want it to leave, despite not needing another amplifier and, further, an integrated amplifier not being really all that useful for our specific (review) purposes at this moment in time. So, here and now, I declare that my preconceived ideas (expectation bias ahoy, mateys) around this amplifier were that it would be right up my particular street; my favourite tube is the 300B and my previous experience with JADIS amplifiers had been spectacularly positive - I loved the I70 amp I reviewed back in April 2022. However, my job is to put my excitement and expectation bias to one side and assess a product without prejudice and without any predetermined ideas about its performance, but I'm human and, of course, I get excited about products that I think are going to press all my personal aural buttons.

The Jadis 1300 is a 300R integrated amplifier a push-pull configuration.

WHO ARE JADIS

JADIS is a French valve amplifier manufacturer based in Villedubert, South East of Toulouse in France. The company launched in 1983 following the success of prototypes built by André Calmettes and a desire to build amplifiers based on his philosophy for a wider audience. JADIS are best known for their amplifiers but they also produce CD players, DACs, and even turntables. Their signature colour is gold and whilst this may not appeal to everyone, it certainly sets JADIS products apart from the herd.

JADIS 1300 INTEGRATED AMPLIFI-**ER BUILD AND FEATURES**

There are two 300B valves per channel in the I300 and are mounted in a push-pull configuration without feedback. Given 300B specificities, Jadis says that they took particular care in creating the amplifier

Reviewed by Stuart Smith









The JADIS I300 is a 10W per channel integrated using twe 300B tubes per channel in push-pull configuration.





stating specifically that there was a need for a highly stable power supply for the heaters and adding that this design feature "allows the I300 to appear much more powerful than its 10W (a channel) may suggest!".

"TEN WATTS?" I hear you scream "That's not going to be much use with regular modern speakers" but let's not discount this amplifier before we start because in my experience the whole concept of needing mega-power amplifiers is somewhat overstated and in the real world (we aren't all trying to drive rooms with Royal Albert Hall proportions to ear-damaging volumes) the actual requirement of power (watts) is not actually all that high, particularly if you have reasonably sensitive speakers. These ten watts are however all in Class A!

The full valve complement is the four 300B tubes (2 per channel) a couple of 6SN7s (drive tubes) and three ECC82s (preamplification).

Every stage in the amp has its own power supply, and JADIS tells us that "particular care has been taken with the 300Bs themselves." As directly heated triodes, the heater is the cathode and JADIS says that this requires a very "clean" power supply with them giving seven separate power circuits in this design. The one dedicated to the power supply uses a magnetic circuit (EI M6X) in a design that they say gives a very stable operation, without noise and with reduced overheating. The output transformer uses a double CV38 magnetic circuit built according to JADIS' standards, and JADIS tells us that the I300 is the only integrated amplifier with an output transformer of this specific type.

Arriving in a huge flight case, the I300 maintains the JADIS family look and it is pretty blingtastic... and this may not appeal to everyone with current tastes for home decoration erring on the side of understated simplicity. But, the argument may well be that if you are spending €13,500 on an integrated amplifier, or any bit of audio kit, then you will want to show it off. At the expense of promoting conspicuous consumption, I fall in this latter category of audiophile. The amp is reassuringly heavy at a hernia-inducing 40kg, a pretty much standard kind of size (40 x 40 x 25.5 cm) and I think it looks fab.

On the front of the I300 amp you have, from left to right, an on-off toggle switch, an on-off LED, the volume knob, a balance knob, and finally the source

selector. A balance control may appear to be a bit anachronistic but I am a fan of them and would encourage their inclusion on many more amplifiers than they are currently found on; balance controls allow for vagaries in-room balance and for imbalanced hearing.

The I300 is a line-level only preamplifier and there's no onboard phonostage or DAC. This purist approach will appeal to most but may be seen as being a bit lacking on a modern-day integrated. I think, given the likely audience for this amplifier, that an onboard phono would have been a mistake and, given the rate at which DACs are developing/changing, a DAC would have been a bit daft too. Long story short, the I300 addresses the needs of its intended audience.

There are five inputs on RCA, a bypass output meaning that the amp could be used as a preamplifier, and a pair of speaker binding posts.

A remote control is included in the package and whilst it's pretty basic, it does its job. I'd have loved to see a remote that was similar in design to the amplifier itself.

Everything on this amplifier suggests it is a high-quality product and that it is built to last! Longevity, or the lack of it, in some products from some brands is a bit of a bugbear of mine. If you are spending this kind of money on an amplifier (or anything, for that matter) then you would expect it to last pretty much a lifetime, with the caveat that an amplifier like this will probably need a service after ten years or so and, depending on how much use it gets, valves will need to be changed. Look, if you buy a decent automatic watch, you expect it to last forever, but you also factor in that it is going to last longer and work more accurately if it is serviced regularly. Whatever, the JADIS I300 is built to endure!

SOUND OF THE JADIS 1300 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

For the purposes of this review, I used the I300 with a Lampizator BIG7 DAC (hugely upgraded) and a variety of speakers ranging from our Avantgarde



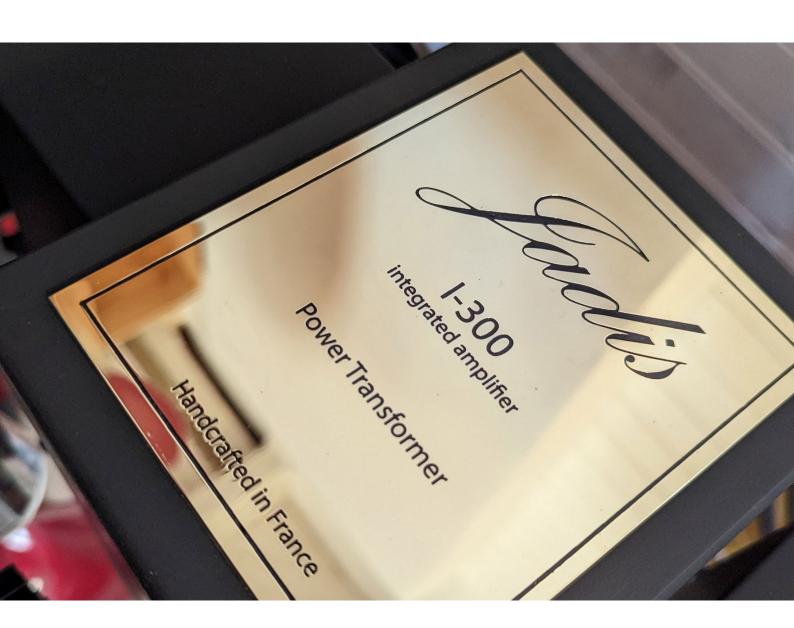




The I300 looks good from any angle you care to look at it from.







As it says atop the main transformer, Handcrafted in France





DUO XD, TOTAL DAC D100 and our Audiovector R6 Areté. The streamer was from Stack Audio and this was accompanied by a switch from Russ Andrews and various other "enhancements". Cables were from Cardas, WAY, Tellurium Q, and Atlas with all powered components going through a Torus Power toroidal transformer-based "conditioner".

I spent a fair old bit of time with the JADIS I300 hooked up to the Avantgarde Duo XDs and it's a real treat to hear that wonderful mid-band tone and sweet lower tops that the 300B tube does so well. But I also played a whole load of house and techno through them and this was a bit of an indulgence – to the point of the Duos staying on the end of the amp much longer than they should have given the time I'd allotted to this review. Night after night I mixed through this setup, but these speakers are not ideal for review purposes given they have active bass modules and so, although a wonderful experience (both whilst mixing and whilst listening to tunes for pleasure), it wasn't really giving me anything I could usefully convey to you, dear reader. What you do get is a delightfully smooth and yet articulate mid-band presentation that is fantastic with pretty much whatever music you throw at the pairing and the tops just integrate SO well with this amplifier in place. This is an excellent pairing to pamper yourself if you are able.

I also had the Total DAC S100s on the end of this amplifier and this pairing too was rather splendid with the amp showing that it can keep the bass drivers on these speakers well in check and in control whilst losing nothing of the amp's sweet character. In my review of these speakers I did say that a 300B SET amp would be a great match and whilst this amp is in a Push-Pull configuration the two are a fantastic match which errs on the side of a more audiophile listen, majoring, as it does, in the mids and through the tops. I keep talking about how good this amp is in this band of frequencies, and it is, but what does that mean? With these speakers I mean that there is a complete lack of harshness and a flow to the music that sits you down and envelops you in a warm blanket of sound. It's detailed without ruthlessness in the extremes of frequency and it's softness without a feeling that anything is rolled off or missing. Hard to describe but it's very nice to experience. These speakers stayed in the system for a fair old bit too and I had planned to carry out the whole of the review with them in place, but I also wanted to plug in the more conventional (in some

ways) Audiovector R6 Arreté that I thought would be more of a challenge to this amp.

As it turned out these speakers gelled perfectly with the JADIS I300, something I wasn't really expecting if I'm honest, though at 91.5dB sensitivity, they weren't going to be a problem for the 10W JADIS. So, the majority of this review was done with these speakers in place, and from here on in it is this combo that I'm going to be talking about.

As always I played a load more music throughout the review process than gets mentioned here but I'll be picking out tunes and pieces that I think demonstrate the point (or feature of the amp and its sound) that I'm trying to convey.

Robag Wruhme's No on Kompakt was first chosen as it has a lot going on from a spatial perspective but it also has a low and insistent bass line. That bass line and kick are handled splendidly by the amp with there being control but also a good deal of texture is evident. The effects like long reverbs and space around sounds are portrayed really well and it's clear that whilst only having a relatively meagre ten watts a channel to its name, the JADIS doesn't struggle dynamically. In fact, I'd say this is a wonderfully dynamic amplifier and I didn't feel it ever ran out of steam, even when it was pushing these speakers to volumes that I'd suggest it unwise to listen to for all but relatively short periods. At these volumes, however, the amp really brought these speakers to life and conveyed an excellent sense of this being a techno tune made for the club. Spatially (again) the soundstage was wide deep and high with instruments holding their own in the space properly. I whacked a lot of techno through the R6 and I300 combination and I would say that technoheads are exceptionally well catered for. I mentioned the texture thing on the bass at the start of this paragraph and that carries through all the frequency range remarkably well. I would suggest that this isn't a sterile amplifier, in that it isn't absolutely neutral, and it does add a flavour of its own, but personally, I thoroughly enjoyed this ever so slightly "bloomy" through the mids feeling I got from the amp – particularly with these speakers.

Another favourite of mine to bring out for reviews is the excellent Ali Farka Touré's Roucky. The idea is that I want to hear the sound of the strings of the guitars and the sound of the body of the guitar too. Bends on steel strings sound "in-the-room" lifelike.







This is as good as I've heard this track in our system and that mid-band bloom (it's not huge) adds something indefinable to the whole listening experience. Notes that are extended hang in the air and more staccato notes start and stop on a dime/ penny/centime. Sounds on the fretboard and body of the guitar are unmistakable in the mix and everything sounds very right. There's a natural and (review speak alert) organic sound to everything that I'm hearing and the amp is doing an amazing job at creating a magical listening experience. This is a good thing and what I think many want from their systems. Yes we want fidelity and we want detail, speed and all the rest of it, but we also want something that opens its arms and welcomes us in for a long and inviting listening session and the I300 does this. As I am catching up on my notes, Roon throws up (bit of an odd one to throw out after Roucky, I thought) Rudimental's Waiting All Night. But it does make me sit up and take notice right from the first compressed and tight kick drum. I listen through and not once does the amp sound like it could have done with a bit more power in reserve and when the breakbeat first kicks in and the vocal soars over it, the goosebumps come! Stunningly good and a real aural experience that was thrown up totally unexpectedly to this listening session. Again, I think it's something to do with how this amp deals with the mid (vocal) frequencies and the way that these play with the bass and tops in a manner that just somehow presses a load of our (my) emotional-connection-to-the-music buttons. Whatever, it's doing something very right. Likewise, on totally different material (Le Pas Du Chat Noir (Anouar Brahem, Francois Couturier, and Jean Louis Matiner) there's a lifelike and natural quality to the sound my system is making that connects the music to the listener in a very real and emotional way. It's that "je ne sais quoi" that some system combinations have, and this amp (in this particular combination) is doing something spectacularly and yet subtly right.

Neil Young's When You Dance from Live Rust has this amplifier bringing out the distortion on the guitar really well and with a grit and (again) texture to it that brings that edge-of-your-seat playing style that Young has to the fore. It's almost as if he's going to lose it and then he brings that overdriven sound back from the brink and controls it. Of course, this is always there and the amp isn't adding something that isn't already there. What this amp does do, however, is allow the texture (again... sorry) to really shine out and I found myself looking/listening into

that sound and being drawn into it. It's very difficult to explain, but I'd say that the I300 is somehow connecting with something in my unconscious that my ears/brain really like to hear. The Merrill Thor amps we have are perhaps just as accurate (perhaps more so) than the JADIS, but the JADIS is, to my ears, a far superior amp for listening and putting a big grin on your face. This opens up a whole discussion, I know, and for me, it questions the whole validity of judging sound systems based purely on the way they measure when we as human beings listen and interact with that music and that system. In short, something else is going on over and above whether a product measures "correctly". Whether the system I'm listening to and with this amplifier in place measures as some would want it to, I don't give a monkey's toss – it's giving me a whole bagful of joy and that has to be a good thing!

I put on Todd Terry's Resolutions album specifically for the first track, Blackout. This is a track that really should sound best on a clinical and cold system - it's all steely drum and thunderous bass – but on again with this amp in place there is nothing but a feeling of rightness to the music I'm listening to. It's free of harshness but still has that hard hitting and visceral quality across the (very broad) frequency range. Again, this amp just keeps on going and offers up a dynamic and yet nuanced listening experience there's a sound bendy effect on the tom (I think) at 4'06" and for a bit after that goes somewhat to demonstrate to me that this amp is conveying a whole load of detail to the speakers in a manner that they can make sense of and deliver to me in my listening seat. I get the same sense of rightness listening to the frantic programming of Squarepusher on his Ufabulum record – speed, depth, space and texture.

QUIBBLES

The remote is a bit pants and isn't in keeping with the rest of the amplifier.

If you are looking for an amplifier that is absolutely neutral in its presentation then you may want to go and listen to something else – but don't discount this as once bitten forever smitten and all that.

CONCLUSION







The JADIS I300 has a look all of its own. Note also the inclusion of the balance control knob.





A build quality that is commensurate with the asking price of this amplifier makes this a real jewel of a product with regards to it as an object even before you plug it in and play your tunes. The remote should be taken out and shot to put it out of its misery, though, to be fair, it's better than some I've had with kit and does its job well enough — at least it says JADIS on it!

Once you do plug it in and start to listen to music it's MUSIC that you end up listening to. It's not got any "etched" or hyper-detailed quality to its sonic signature, but then it is very detailed – it's just that that detail is delivered through the speakers in a manner that allows you to relax. Think a glass of well-rounded, room temperature Bordeaux red over a steely cold white Chablis.

The character of this amplifier is dynamic and yet restrained, detailed but without being overly in your face, and it's got control of the bass without adding bloat or artifacts.

Would I buy it? Yep, at the drop of an AMEX card. I loved it very much!

Editors Choice award without a shadow of a doubt and I find myself looking for excuses to buy it!

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality:

Impossible to make any negative comment about the build of this amplifier

It's gold and it's blingy. Some will love it and others will hate it

Remote is not in keeping with the build of the amplifier

Balance control is an excellent thing to include

Sound Quality:

This amplifier isn't warm in that pipe and slippers (boring?) sense, it's got a well rounded character that oozes class and refinement

Bass is excellently controlled and right

Mids are wonderfully smooth and yet defined

Tops are clear and in keeping with the character of the rest of the amplifier

Overall it is a well-balanced amplifier that somehow connects the listener with the music they are listening to

Value For Money:

It's a lot of money but you could spend a lot more and do a lot worse

We Loved:

The way it connects listeners with music

Complete lack of harshness

Plenty of drive and dynamics

Excellent bass handling with the speakers I tried it with

Allows the speakers to throw an excellent soundstage that is stable and natural

We Didn't Love So Much:

The remote

I imagine that with speakers much less sensitive than I tried it could struggle to deliver at high volume

Valves aren't going to be cheap to replace

Elevator Pitch Review: The I300 amplifier from French brand JADIS is an integrated based around a pair of 300B tubes in push/pull configuration. It's only got ten watts per channel but I found it drove all the speakers I tried it with well loud enough, though those with particularly difficult to drive speakers will no doubt need to look elsewhere. It has five line level inputs and its controls include a balance control which I think is a useful addition.

I don't know how this measures with regards to the measurements that some think indicates an accurate and therefore good amplifier... and I don't care. When listening to this amplifier I feel connected to the music I'm listening to on a really basic and



REVIEW



human level. It bounces along with techno music and allows you to see into the recording without it being in-your-face analytical in character. In short, it is a refined and accomplished performer across the audio spectrum and with all kinds of music.

Price: €13 500

SUPPLIED BY JADIS





ELECTROCOMPANIET AW 800 M POWER AMPLIFIERS

Magico loudspeakers was at the National Stadium in Warsaw when powered by a pair of Electrocompaniet monoblocs. It was stunning, and I came away from that demonstration knowing in my own mind that I really wanted a pair of their amps, though given their price, that is unlikely to happen anything short of a substantial win on the Euorsquillions lottery. However, like with many things, not being able to afford a product does not stop us from admiring them and I have done just this with these amplifiers and the AW 600 NEMO amplifiers from this Norwegian manufacturer that preceded them. Of course, a show is no place to make definitive comments on a product, though you can get a very good idea of whether it's likely to be something you would like to audition...or just sit outside your local dealers drooling through the window.

Electrocompaniet AW 800 M Power Amplifiers are big, expensive, and come from Norway. Stuart Smith takes a listen and is smitten.

£19,500 (EU and US prices are at the end of the review) is a chunk of money and unless you want to run this amp in stereo mode (which is an option) then you are going to be wanting two of them, though following my time with these amps I think I would settle on owning just the one to power our Audiovector R6 loudspeakers....or any other of our speakers for that matter. I think you can probably tell where this review is going from this point on.

Electrocompaniet says the following about the design of the amplifiers: "The AW 800 M encompasses the Electrocompaniet direct coupled high open loop bandwidth topology, further enhanced with high slew-rate and very high bandwidth amplifier stages. In addition, a brand-new output stage is designed that heavily shields the input and driver stages from the load and makes the output extremely stiff and unaffected by the connected load. This has the added benefit of significantly simplifying the workload of the already gently working feedback system and thus provides vanishingly low distortion figures."

Reviewed by Stuart Smith

BUILD AND FEATURES

If you love big, luxurious, and purposeful-looking audio equipment that sits there in a rather attractive but somewhat menacing kind of









The AW 800 M Amps are very distinctively Electrocompaniet





way then you are going to fall in love with these amplifiers. They have an air of a product that doesn't need to shout about what it can deliver. A quiet confidence in its abilities without demanding attention. That said, they are pretty big and you are going to need a decent amount of space to home them if you buy the pair. If you buy just one of them then they are no bigger than any other muscle-bound power amplifier and pretty much any decent rack should be able to accommodate it.

The front of each amplifier has a thick clear Perspex plate over it and little else other than the Electro-companiet "E" that glows when switched on, the company name and the model number in gold lettering, and an on/off button. It's understated and classy, and I just love the aesthetic of these amplifiers.

Around the back, we have XLR inputs (there are no RCA inputs) and a mode selection switch to position according to whether you want to run the amps in mono, stereo, bi-amp mode. Not having RCA inputs may irk some but I much prefer XLR interconnects and they do allow for longer runs of cable than their RCA counterparts. There are two sets of left and right stereo speaker binding posts and they are clearly labeled as to which you need to use when running in mono. You get a ground terminal to connect the amp to a ground source in your system, a mains power switch, and the power IEC. There are also 12V trigger input and outputs.

Instructions for the amplifiers are provided by a pamphlet which is very clear and well written.

Each amp weighs 55kg/122lb and measurements are 292mm (11.49"), 406 (14.98), and 488 (19.21) (HWD).

The amps are supported on Soundcare Superpikes.

INSIDE THE ELECTRO-COMPANIET AW 800 M AMPS

For those that are interested in this kind of thing, in each amplifier there are two 800VA toroidal transformers that are both electrostatically and magnetically shielded and the amps have built-in DC and

high-frequency mains filtering. Power supplies for each channel are wholly independent as are the power supplies for the input and output stages of the amplifier. There is a total of 210 000uF of power supply filtering and we are told that "hyper-fast, soft recovery rectifier diodes are used throughout".

The amplifier circuits in each amplifier are fully discrete and run with Class-A input circuitry and no capacitors are used in the signal path. JFET and bipolar transistors, low noise metal film resistors, and film capacitors are used throughout - there are no less than 32 15A, 60 MHz bipolar output transistors used!

In stereo mode, the amplifier delivers 300W/ch into 8 ohms, 600 into 4, and 1000 into 2 ohms. If that wasn't enough, when used in mono mode output into 8 ohms is 800W, 1500W into 4, and 2200W into 2 ohms.

Those that are into specs and whatnot will be tingling with excitement having read the above, I'm sure. Before they arrived I too had a look at the specs online and my excitement at their imminent arrival grew.

Whether running stereo or mono, the ancillary kit never changed and I used Audiovector R6 Aretté speakers, with a Music First Baby Reference V2 phono preamplifier (review soon come), a hugely modified Lampizator BIG 7 DAC, and a Stack Audio streamer. Everything other than the amplifiers went through a Torus power unit and the streaming system was through an Ansuz switch (review soon come), Cables were by Tellurium Q, Atlas, Cardas, and Way Cables on this occasion.

The first thing I noticed when plugging in these amplifiers was the bass control they had over the Audiovector R6 loudspeakers. The TotalDAC Amp 1 that serves as our reference is certainly no slouch in this aspect of its performance, but the Electrocompaniet amps bring another level of control and depth to everything I listened to using them. And, for the record, the AW 800 amps are certainly a terrific match for these speakers. I've said it a fair bit in reviews (and perhaps folk get the wrong impression with regards to myself and bass) but the bass performance of the system underpins everything that goes on top of it and lays the foundation on which the music and our perception of the music we listen to is built...that's my thoughts anyway. The







XLR Inpts only around the back but lots of options for different combinations of amps when money allows







One of the amps with its top off



REVIEW



bass with the Electrocompaniet amp/s is addictively powerful and tight; listening to Gui Boratto and his fantastic Abaporu was as good as I've heard it at home, or anywhere else for that matter. That bass control allied with the R6's isobaric loading really was a thing to behold. Drums and bass are the rhythm section of a track and it's these that get your ass out on the dancefloor, the elements of a track that our bodies relate to, and the Electrocompaniets in this system and with this type of music do engage your body in a very real and primeval way. Now here is where there may be some confusion with my relationship to bass in a system - yes I like big, powerful, and controlled bass for all the reasons I've touched on above, but a system that is bass-heavy is just that and sounds unbalanced and uninvolving. If bass is the foundation of a track, the mids are the structure of the building, and the tops are the embellishments that make everything so appealing visually/aurally... a bit of a crap analogy, but you get my drift. With these amplifiers there is nothing that is overly exaggerated and, like a piece of well-structured architecture, everything from top to bottom and including the trimmings comes correct. Small details in the makeup of tracks on Abaporu are presented (as I would see) correctly and without being over-pushed in the mix and they appear in the stage where I would expect them. This is another thing that struck me about the amps in this system; our resident amp has a wonderful presentation with regards to soundstaging, but it's almost as if the system has been at some kind of enhancement powder that brings everything into crystalline detail before you...and it's all underpinned by that bass. Look, whatever sounds were played on this record (yes I'm still only on about the first album that I bothered to take notes on) they sounded "better" than our resident amp – and so they should given the price difference. I know there will be people reading this that will say that they can achieve a similar or better sound with less outlay – (adopts wry smile and says) "Well isn't that lovely. Carry on." I don't have this kind of money, but if I did, on the basis of what I have played through them so far, they seem to be worth every single penny powering the Audiovector R6....apart from the speaker binding posts, they wouldn't accept the Atlas spades I was using!

Dynamically speaking these amps are incredible; it's as if they react to every part of the signal they are fed immediately and without hesitation. The bass drum kicks on the track and the amps react instantaneously and tell the speakers what to do. The





snare hits and it's instant. Dynamics are important to the way we enjoy music and the way a piece kit reacts can make or break a system – these amps make this system and I'd be very happy to pitch this system (with these amps) against pretty much anything out there, dynamically speaking. This comes across perfectly on the Groove Culture (fantastic label) "All About The Culture" track by Micky More & Andy Tee on 12" 45. I know this track inside out and have played it pretty much every day we've been at home since it arrived. The dancefloor comes to your home only with a level of refinement that only a high-end system can bring to the party when the Electrocompaniets are in the system. I defy anyone to listen to this track on this system and not want to move! Detail is pulled from the record by the excellent front end of Hana Umami and Technics 1200G with a Nasotec Swingheadshell and the amps get this to the speakers. Likewise, the groove is brought to life when listening to the excellent Funkadelic Reworked By Detroiters remix record. Look, both of these records sound wonderful on the system with our reference amp in place, but, as I have said before in this review, these amps add something else by way of power and control.

Switching to an American first-press of Rumours by Fleetwood Mac, that power and control is still evident; the walking basslines and the way they interact with the drums is all there, but so are subtle details like the tap on a cymbal that is on pretty much the whole of Dreams. Again, I think this is as good as I have heard this record sound anywhere, and again, it's a record I play a lot. Power and subtlety are, I suppose, what I'm banging on about here. It's almost as if the amps aren't having to try to get across the full experience of every little nuance of the record and everything feels natural and unforced on every track and makes the whole experience an absolute joy. My late dad used to like cars and whilst he never owned really esoteric cars, he did have a Merc or two and a Daimler Double Six way back in the late 70s and I'm reminded of something he always said about such cars – "You don't use the power they have very often, but it's good to know it's there should you ever need it." And this sums up these amplifiers very well; they are a bit like that Double Six – big, heavy, quite luxurious, and fabulous to cruise around in, but hit the motorway, put your right foot down and you can leave much of what went before you in your review mirror. And it's time to put the Chain on again!

And then I want some more techno and reach for Regent "Cory, Embedded, Simulation, and Efficient" on ARTS (045). This is hard techno that may well sound a mush to some, but these amps and these speakers partnered together to bring out a wonderful sense of the stereo image and details that may well be missed on other lesser systems. This is a glorious experience and a demonstration of why I love this kind of techno so much. There is power in the kick and the bass, and then there is finesse in the details that draw you in and let you lose yourself in the music. Again I'm hearing small details that I knew were there but are now more evident. Look, it's not lifting veils or any of that reviewer-babble, it's just better than I'm used to...and I'm used to very good!

Look, I can waffle on forever and a day and pull endless records of the real and virtual shelves but the long and short of it is that there is so much to love about these amplifiers when partnered with these speakers that I don't think I need to go on. The R6 aren't a difficult speaker to drive and you can do so with modest amps, but these amps take them to a level I have not had the pleasure to encounter before. Whether it's Songbird off the Rumours album or something from Dusty Kid, these amps bring the best out of the speakers and the music. I'll leave it there!

Playing the same tracks with just the one amplifier in the system isn't all that much different from having two if I'm honest, though there are small differences in overall control and dynamics – most won't notice or care and will enjoy their music either way! Would I prefer the pair, yep, I would because I want to eek that last ounce of performance out of a system and I want to connect with my music on an emotional level; and a higher fidelity (read better), however small, allows for this connection to be better made. Our brains and bodies react better to better products, or mine does, otherwise I'd spend my money on other things and not chase the ultimate aural high, though your mileage may well vary!

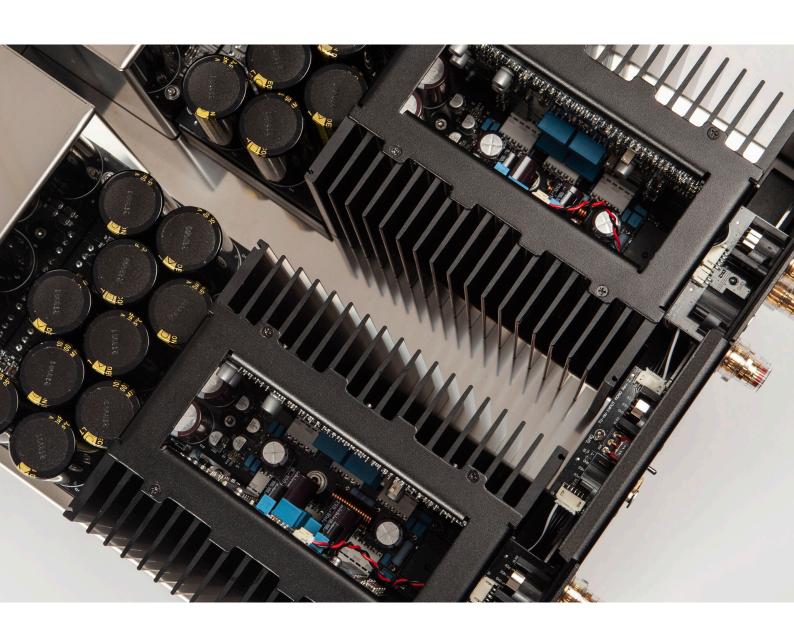
QUIBBLES

Speaker posts would not accept my Atlas cables with spades, though I'm told they will accept less thick spades. I want to be able to attach any speaker cables a want, please, particularly at this price.









Look at those caps!



REVIEW



The control for the illuminated E on the front of the amps is underneath the amp and all but inaccessible.

I can't afford to allow these to stay with us, but I am so pleased to have had the opportunity to experience them at home.

CONCLUSION

The truth is that I was very excited about these amplifiers arriving for review and my expectations for them was very high. From a review perspective, this is a double-edged sword — will my objectivity be swayed by my excitement or will I be harsher on them because I am expecting too much? As always, I have tried to review these amplifiers as I would any other product that arrives for review and I hope that my enthusiasm for the brand and my previous encounters with their amplifiers have not allowed me to be swayed.

First of all, let me say again that one of these amplifiers will suffice for the vast majority of people. They have the power and control to satisfy even the most demanding of music lovers and deliver the music to your speakers with authority and control across the frequency spectrum - nothing is lacking in this respect. Adding an extra amplifier and running in mono is better and with even more of a feeling of the amplifiers being fully in command of proceed-

ings, but only you can decide whether that increase in performance is worth the extra £19 500. Personally, if I had the money I'd have both, but, equally, I'd be cock-a-hoop with just the one sat betwixt my loudspeakers. For those with the financial ability, by all means buy four and go double mono - and if I had just shy of 80K to spunk on amps, I'd likely go down this route myself.

I've thought about this and then I've rethought about it again and I have absolutely nothing I can say about these amplifiers that is negative other than I can't get the speaker posts to accept spades and the dimmer for the light on the front of the amps is way underneath and all but inaccessible. I love the looks, I love their sonic performance...and they don't even have or need a remote control that I can whine about!

These are the best solid-state amplifiers that I have experienced in our reference system... bar none!

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality:

Look great and very Electrocompaniet

Binding posts wouldn't accept my Atlas cable's spades

Sound Quality:







Power allied with subtlety

Tremendously detailed throughout. It's a cliché but I really did hear details that I'd not been as aware of previously

Dynamic as a dynamic thing that has just been on an extensive dynamics training course

Totally detailed at every level and every frequency but without any harshness or a feeling things are being forced or over-emphasised

They really connected me with the music I listened to on both an emotional and a physical level

Value For Money:

That's for you to decide. I can't afford them but if I could I'd have them in a heartbeat!

We Loved:

There's not much I don't love about the styling or the sound of these amps. They really did tick every one of my boxes, bar a couple of quibbles as outlined

We Didn't Love So Much:

I have to send them forward to whoever it is that is lucky enough to be getting these next and the

speaker binding posts are a bit pants

The LED dimmer doodad is underneath and you need small fingers to get to it...so I didn't bother Elevator Pitch Review: Form Norway Electrocompaniet will be well known to many. These amps are big, heavy and purposeful-looking and when you turn them on they carry this on through their sound. They are hugely dynamic and fast, but with that they also bring subtlety and nuance when a recording has it. They are equally happy banging out floor shaking techno as they are female vocals and whilst they are expensive they are not as expensive as some that I don't think have the same high quality sound. There's a couple of things I'd want done better, with my main quibble being that the binding posts wouldn't accept my chosen Atlas spade-terminated cables. If you have the dosh, audition now!

Price:

EU is 21.800 €

UK is 19.500 £

US is 22.500 \$

SUPPLIED BY ELECTROCOMPANIET





MATRIX AUDIO ELEMENT X2 STREAMER/DAC/PREAMP

atrix Audio has been around for 10 years now, and they have a long history of making well-built headphone amplifiers and DACs. In more recent years, they've begun to produce more home regular HiFi products, without forgetting about the headphone community. They're a brand that stands out by having very clean aesthetics and well-thought-out designs, with solid technology backing up its products.

The Element series is now in its second generation, starting with the Element i2 and going up to the newly released Element X2 Pure. I will be covering the Element X2 and, having previously used the original Element M I have high hopes for this product.

In his first review for HiFi PiG, Oscar Stewart takes a listen to the Matrix Audio Element X2 Streamer/DAC/ Preamp.

ELEMENT X2 BUILD AND FEATURES

Now, where do we start? Matrix Audio pitch the Element X2 as a full-featured stand-alone source device for your system, and that really does sum it up pretty well.

Let's start with it being a DAC first. The DAC part of the X2 comes with your standard optical, coaxial and USB inputs, but add in IIS-LVDS along with HDMI ARC support and you have most bases covered. HDMI ARC input is not all that common in HiFi currently, but I am glad to see it here as it really helps with those who use their TV with their 2ch HiFi set up. The Element X2 allows you to plug in pretty much any current digital source and it will decode the digital audio with its ESS Sabre ES9038 DAC Chip and Crystek CCHD-950 clock.

The DAC has multiple user-selectable filters, with being quite common in higher-end DACs and it is great to see it implemented here. There are also 12v trigger inputs and outputs, allowing you to turn on/off other components that support this in your system - a cool feature that will be useful to some.

Then you have the streamer side of things. With a gigabit ethernet port on the back and an integrated dual-band Wi-Fi card, you can easily hook it up to your network and stream high-res audio without a hitch (up to 22.4MHz DSD). It supports most of the common streaming services (Tidal, Spotify Connect, DLNA/UPnp etc...) along with being Roon Ready certified for seamless integration with Roon.

Have a NAS drive, or music on a USB drive? Do not worry, the Element X2 has you covered. Using the MA Remote App, you can playback

Reviewed by Oscar Stewart









A clean and well laid out front panel will fit in with most homes.





locally stored files along with pointing it towards a NAS location to playback the files from that.

Did somebody mention vinyl? Well, the Element X2 does not have a built-in phono stage, but it does have a single pair of RCA analogue inputs. This means you can hook up an analogue source and use the Element X2 as a pre-amp or hub. I will highlight one downside to the analogue input though, and for those listening to vinyl this may be problematic. Due to the way volume is handled, the analogue input is converted to digital and then back to analogue. I guess this does somewhat defeat the process of listening to vinyl, but it is nice to have the analogue inputs. however, it is a useful feature for those wanting to add a record player (with a phonostage), CD player or other line-level source.

The Element X2 has a built-in headphone amplifier with 4.4mm balanced and 6.3mm outputs along with high and low gain settings. The headphone amp is not some afterthought though, outputting 1600mW unbalanced at 330hm or 2600mW balanced at 330hm. Given the company's background, I'd expect headphones to be well-catered for.

There is a pair of RCA outputs on the back along with a pair of XLR balanced outputs and in the MA Remote App these can be configured to 0dB fixed outputs, 0dB Variable or +10dB Variable so you can use it as a pure DAC into an integrated amp, or pre-amp into a power amp. This adaptability is a useful feature in my opinion.

Build quality is excellent and Matrix Audio has really nailed it with the Element series. The Element X2 has an elegant and smooth silver aluminium outer shell, with black anodised aluminium main chassis that has channels on the side to help with heat dissipation. The unit weighs 4kg and feels solid with the front touchscreen having various brightness settings and is responsive in use. In the app, you can set the front display to turn off after a certain period, handy for those who use it near a TV or to listen without it being a distraction.

The main volume knob and all the sockets on the front and back are all extremely high quality and not one single part of the Element X2 feels cheap. I am aware that this attention to detail comes at a cost, but at least you do not feel short-changed when you take it out of the box.

MA REMOTE

The MA remote app is versatile and it gives you access to most of the usual remote functions such as changing inputs, volume control and DAC Filter settings. However, dig into the configuration settings and there are a whole host of options you can change. DPLL bandwidth can be important when using this with a TV via optical - certain LG and Samsung models are prone to dropping out with ESS DAC chips due to jitter and changing the DPLL bandwidth usually solves this.







Around the back of the Matrix Element X2







Good connectivity that will satisfy most needs





There is a handy shortcuts screen on the touch screen where you can swipe to the right to access this so that you can assign inputs and outputs to this screen.

If you add your physical library to the Element X2 via USB or NAS, it is easy to browse through and play your music without any hassle. Personally, I have mostly been using a mini-PC running Roon Rock OS and using the Element X2 as a Roon endpoint, it perfectly displays what I am playing and I have not experienced any issues with this setup.

SOUND OF THE MATRIX ELEMENT X2

I used the Matrix Element X2 in various configurations within my current system and will try to cover most of them. I use my 2ch HiFi setup for TV audio, so having HDMI Arc input was handy and this input is immune to the optical dropouts my LG TV is known for. Whilst this is not a critical test, using the Element X2 with HDMI Arc was convenient and provided a crystal-clear sound that basically allowed it to disappear within my system.

As a Streamer/DAC with fixed outputs into a separate amp it simply integrates within the system without any fuss and without drawing any kind of attention to itself. The best DACs out there, in my opinion, are the ones that do not sound like they are influencing the overall signature of the system. This is true here and the sound is audibly perfect to my ears and X2 never sounds like it is trying to colour the sound. There is no "ESS Glare" that people used to love to bring up when discussing DACs with this chip. The implementation is key and Matrix Audio has done a superb job at creating a DAC that has such an effortless and clean sound. It doesn't really matter what input you use; streaming, USB, Coaxial it all sounds detailed and open with what I would describe as accurate tonality.

Next up I decided to try using it with variable volume into a power amplifier, and it is much the same story. Due to the implementation of the volume control, there is no channel imbalance at any level and you hear the internal relays click when adjusting the volume. I did use the analogue inputs when listening to vinyl, and as much as I do not like the fact that it converts the signal to digital and then back to analogue, I will say that the sound did not change much. I agree this is not ideal, and, personally, I like to keep analogue as analogue, however, I am impressed at how faithful the A/D – D/A conversion is on the Element X2. The preamp stage is very good and it works extremely well with power amplifiers driving passive speakers, as well as being ideal for active speakers. As the circuit is separate from the DAC stage, there is no worry about losing bits either – bit perfect sound at any volume.

For the headphone side of things, I often use the DT880 6000hm as my reference point as they are quite a transparent headphone making it easy to pick up on differences between amps. The headphone amp in the Element X2 is impressive to say the least and even on low gain you easily get deafeningly loud levels out of the DT880 and I found myself listening to it at about 50 on the volume display. It is a transparent amp too, delivering audio in a crisp way that avoids being bright or lean. There is a solid foundation for the bass, but it is precise and controlled and it does not round the edges of notes but also is not overly analytical in its presentation. This is a high current solid state headphone amp and works wonders with hard-to-drive planar magnetic models, even better when using the 4.4mm output. This would make an excellent desktop DAC/Amp/Streamer for headphone users as it is all incorporated into a single device and it will drive most headphones out there (yes, I am looking at you HiFiMAN).

It really does not matter what music you throw at the Element X2 – it will always deliver a transparent and detailed sound that few will be able to fault. It does what any good DAC should do, converts digital audio into an analogue signal without messing with it, along with having an extremely high-quality built-in streaming platform and easy-to-use app.

CONCLUSION

Matrix Audio has been producing great quality products for a while now and the latest Element series really is their most refined to date.

The app is stable and reliable, the products are attractive and extremely well-built, and the overall functionality is rock solid.

The Element X2 is such a feature-packed all-in-one source device, yet it manages to master each function incredibly well.

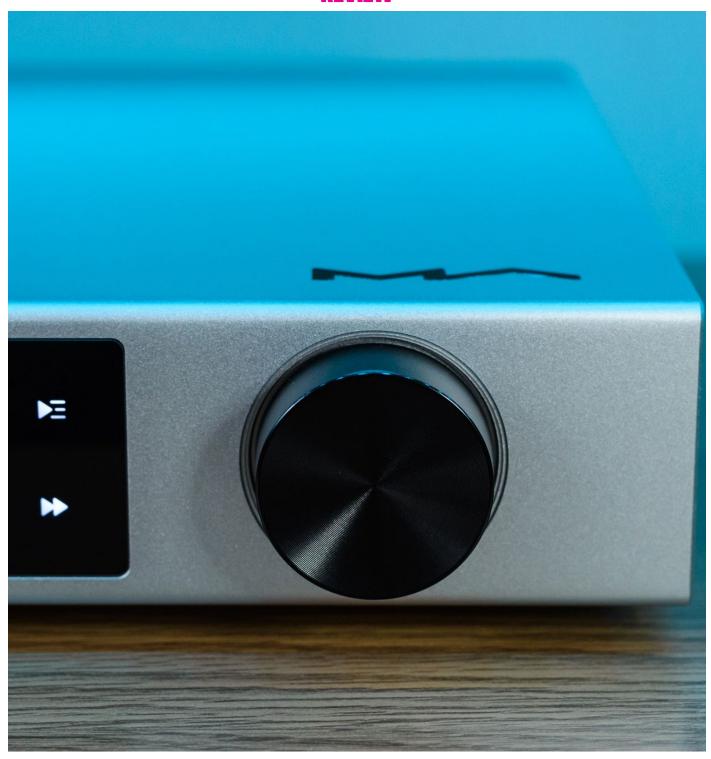
Being Roon Ready, it is as simple as it could be to set up, but if you use other streaming services or want to play locally stored music it will do that with ease too.

The DAC section is clean and detailed yet does not have any hint of glare or sharpness to it, the preamp stage works a treat, and to top it all off it has a superb sounding and powerful built-in headphone amplifier. If only that analogue input was true analogue from end to end it would be pretty much flawless at what it sets out to achieve.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality:





Solid aluminium that is both attractive and helps with shielding the Element X2

Sound Quality:

Clean, open, and detailed

Transparent and tonally accurate

Value For Money:

It's not cheap, but you don't feel short-changed given the number of features and the quality of each of them

We Loved:

Design, ease of use, and versatile functionality

Sound quality

We Didn't Love So Much:

The analogue input isn't true analogue from end to end

Price: £4399, \$4399

Elevator Pitch Review: Do you stream music, use your TV through your HiFi, need a preamp, and listen to headphones? Well, the Matrix Element X2 will do all of this and more, it really is a jack of all trades, however, it masters each one too.





REVIVAL AUDIO ATALANTE 5 LOUDSPEAKERS

evival Audio is a French-based manufacturer created by Daniel Emonts and Jacky Lee with their loudspeakers being designed in collaboration with Paris-based A+A Cooren Design Studio. You may not know the brand (yet) but the people involved suggests that the Revival Audio Atalante 5 is likely to be a bit special. The company also makes a smaller standmount, the Atalante 3 loudspeaker.

Daniel Emonts has been designing loudspeakers since his early teens and his CV tells us that he has dedicated almost four decades of his life to acoustics. His resumé also tells us that he worked on lots of speakers for both Dynaudio and Focal and now designs the Revival Audio speakers and tech' at the company's laboratory in France. Like many brands in France, the company make a thing of the speakers being "designed and assembled in France"! Revival Audio's website emphasises that they do not buy off the shelf and that they "define and design" every detail of their products with a main emphasis being on sound. I particularly like the quote on their site "We believe: Sound is an Art on top of its nature. A Revival Audio product equals an Art Piece of Sound."

Jacky Lee is a Swiss-based Taiwanese strategist who has worked with brands including Dynaudio, IBM and L'Oréal and boasts of being CCO of "a top-tier Danish HiFi brand."

The company is based in Alsace in the far East of France and the two main players' pedigrees suggest that this is a company who have their sights set on shaking things up a little in the world of HiFi and I was particularly drawn to their statement about the Revival Audio Community — "A customer-centric community with exclusive benefits". This latter point gives you a 45 try-at-home program allowing you to make your own mind up about the speakers in your own system and in your own listening space. It also gives you free delivery in the EU and the UK and a TEN-YEAR warranty. In truth, there's not a lot to go wrong with loudspeakers but this ten-year warranty certainly puts the company's proverbial money where its mouth is and will offer buyers and potential buyers a good degree of peace of mind when making purchasing decisions.

Revival Audio is a relatively new french company with two products to their name; the Atalante 3 and the much larger Atalante 5 that we have here. They cost £4490 plus £399 for the stands.

Reviewed by Stuart Smith







THE TECHNOLOGY OF REVIVAL AUDIO ATALANTE 5

The RASC TWEETER, like the other drivers in the Atalante 5 has been designed by Daniel Emonts. It is a 28mm soft-dome affair with asymmetric suspension to provide a more "linear resonance-free guiding of the dome" and better dispersion. The Ferrite magnets used in the tweeter are 100mm and give a 91dB sensitivity. The company tells us that Ferrite magnets are used in place of neodymium in an effort to keep costs lower and be more eco-friendly. The coating on the dome tweeter is made to Revival Audio's own recipe and they claim it brings "perfect" break-up control.

The RASC MIDRANGE is a 75mm soft dome and features an inversed suspension and has the same coating as the tweeter and for the same reasons. The driver (ARID+) is a dome-shape with its surface being software simulated to avoid resonances. The shape is said to guide waves behind the ARID to be absorbed by the large back cavity, which looks like it is tapered. Here you get a 140mm Ferrite magnet and 92dB sensitivity.

The bass driver in the Atalante 5 is of a Basalt Sandwich Construction (BSC) and is said to be a first. Yes, this is the Basalt you know from geography class! It's said to have similar characteristics to glass fibre and is eco-sustainable. The basalt fibre is made into a fabric that is the top layer of the sandwich, then there is a polymer glue interface to joint bond the fabric to a felt filling and the bottom of the sandwich is a "customised foam-based" layer. Essentially, the sandwich is designed to be lightweight and rigid. The basket is open and asymmetric and the magnet is a Ferrite one, once again.

REVIVAL AUDIO ATALANTE 5 DESIGN AND AESTHETICS

The speakers arrived in two separate BIG cardboard boxes. The packaging is well thought with the

speakers being well protected but easy to get out of

their boxes safely and easily – you can do this on your own but I'd recommend a couple of people get involved in the unpacking process. A stand arrives in a separate box and will need some bolting together. These are big speakers and measure 71cm high and 42cm wide. Of course, they need to be big to incorporate the three drivers, one of which is a 12" BSC bass driver. The other two drivers are the 1 1/8" soft-dome tweeter and the 3" soft-dome mid. The speakers are heavy at 33 kg.

Claimed frequency response is down to 28Hz and this is via bass-reflex loading, with a pair of ports on the rear panel of the speakers. Usefully, and to allow a good degree of tuning of the bass, foam bungs are included. Crossover points are 450Hz and 3.5kHz. The nominal impedance is 4 Ohms and the speakers are 89dB sensitive, which would suggest to me that they will like a good bit of power up them. However, I did run them in using a Hiraga Le Monstre amp that has just 8W of Class A power to its name and I'm sure I could have happily lived with that combo. However, for the majority of my time listening to these speakers, I chose our Krell KST100 and it worked very well. They are equipped with a single pair of nice quality speaker binding posts.

The finish on the speakers is a lovely walnut veneer and they come with a pair (per speaker) of magnetic grilles that carry on the retro feel of these speakers. There's a band of lighter veneer around the middle of the speakers that sets them off nicely and the whole look is very classy indeed, if somewhat traditional. I like speakers that look like speakers and I think many others will enjoy the aesthetic of the Atalante 5's design. They have a sort of "mid-century" look that is in vogue at the moment but they will look good juxtaposed against modern interiors too. Like it or not Mr. and Mrs. Audiophile, looks are important when considering a pair of loudspeakers that you will sit in front of for (hopefully) many years.

Without their stands, they tilt upwards towards the listener and look very cool. On their stands they are pretty imposing – I like this, but be aware that you will need a good bit of space to accommodate the Atalante 5 and their stands.

The stands are relatively simple to put together, but it did take me a fair bit of time (half an hour or so) to get them sorted. I'm no DIY enthusiast and I would have much preferred the stands to come



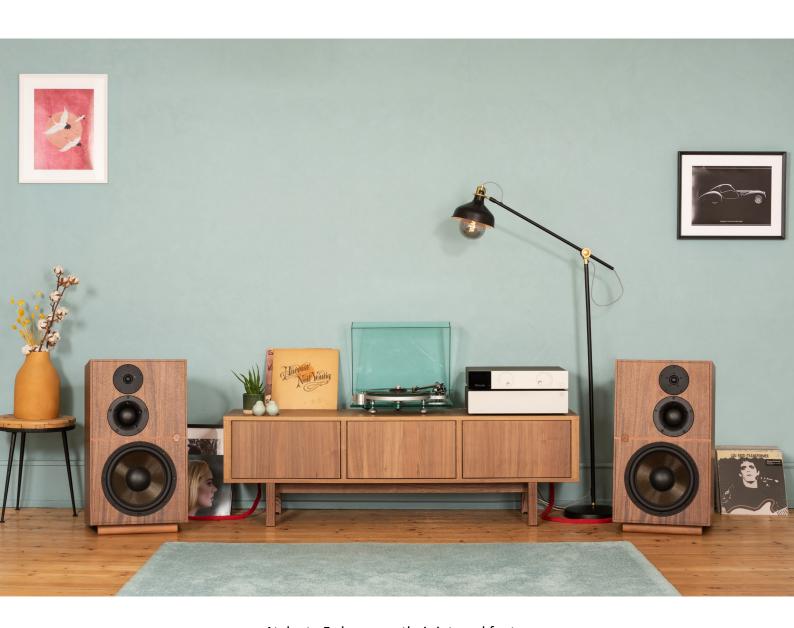




Daniel Emonts and Jacky Lee







Atalante 5 shown on their integral footer





ready assembled, though I do appreciate that packaging and shipping considerations have to be taken into account with these kind of things. To get the speakers on the stands you need to remove the larger front lip from underneath the speakers, though the second, smaller lip to the rear is not removable and a pair of, for want of a better word, washers are provided to space the speakers and top plate properly.

SOUND OF THE REVIVAL AUDIO ATALANTE 5

The system for this review was the Stack streamer and its associated power supplies and filters, our Lampizator Big7 DAC (modded), and a Krell KST100 power amp. The pre we used for this review was the latest Baby Reference from Music First Audio and which we have been getting to know for the last couple of months. This is a system that is resolving and transparent, but also highly enjoyable from a musical perspective. All electronics are fed by a Torus unit and Atlas and Way Cables mains cables. Interconnects were Tellurium Q and speaker cables Way Cables.

The speakers were run in for a good period with me playing a whole load of house and techno through them whilst I practiced DJing. No critical listening was done until I thought the speakers were sufficiently run-in.

I had the speakers well out into the room and away from the side and back walls and firing down the room with a slight tilt in towards the listening position and about 3m apart. Setting the speakers up wasn't a difficult job at all though I did much prefer the speakers away from walls. I suppose the use of the bungs will allow positioning nearer to back walls. I did try the bungs in and out in the position I had the speakers in and I much preferred the fuller sound of the Altante 5s bungless. I also played with the mid/tweeters being positioned towards the middle and outer (the speakers are mirror images of each other) and I personally preferred the sound with them towards the middle. For me, this gave a more realistic souondstage to when the tweeters/mids were to the outside of the speakers - again, YMMV.

I wasn't really expecting a great deal from these speakers - they look like speakers you would have found back in the 70s and 80s and they are "just" a rear-ported box. I also didn't expect them to image very well given that they are very wide, but I was wrong on both these counts. Imaging is very, very natural and unforced with the Atalante 5, and whilst they certainly don't aurally disappear, they are a very pleasing speaker to listen to in this respect.

My other expectation of these speakers garnered from when I was running them in, was that they would be bass heavy. Again, this expectation proved to be false and what you actually have with the Atalante 5 speakers is a very nice and very balanced approach to the way they play music. Yes, they will go deep when needed (the opening to Spritiualized's I Think I'm In Love (Chemical Brothers Remix) had the required oomph from the basslines and associated noises. Quoted bass response is down to 28Hz. One of the criticisms aimed at bass-reflex speakers is that they can offer up a one-note bass response, but this is not the case here and it was easy to discern the different notes in tunes. Dusty Kid's Crepuscolaris fair rattled the walls when played at volume, though they also played contrabass really well on tracks like Charles Mingus' Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting where basslines were easy to follow within what is a very busy track. Listening to Gil Scott-Heron's Bottle, has the fast and muted bassline really simple to pick out from the rest of the tune and was a really enjoyable thing to listen to. Donker's Adagio in D minor from a Classical Church Organ record had my app showing 32Hz (around -80dB) which I thought was pretty impressive. If church organ music is your thing then these speakers will please you, I'd suggest.

I sort of hate separating bits of kit out into how they performed in the tops, mids, bass, and whatnot, but I suppose it's really the only way to give you, dear reader, an overall feel for, in this case, the speaker's presentation and attributes. I'd be interested to hear others' thoughts on this on our social channels!

These are a big speaker and have a 12" bass driver and you would expect them to do bass, but the whole bass thing without definition and coherence with other frequencies makes for an unbalanced one-trick pony of a speaker - these do definition and coherence. I listened to a lot of music on these speakers over a good period of time and I thought they played well with many different genres. Bowie's The Bewlay Brothers showed they could do subtlety and nuance as well as just banging out the party







tunes. The strummed guitar has clarity and detail with the differences between being strummed hard and softly being clearly audible. The steel strings of the "solo" acoustic guitar were also well-evident. You don't have the same kind of feeling for the instrument here as, say, the Audiovector R3 or R6 speakers we have to compare against, but for the asking price (€4490/£4490 plus £399 for the stands) I think they do very well at the whole definition thing through the mids and high-mids. This is an important frequency range for speakers to get right and whether it was Bowie, David Crosby or Gil Scott-Heron I was listening to, I had few complaints. Being highly critical, I would suggest that this upper-mid was a smidge compressed when compared to our much more expensive reference speakers, and, indeed, our Avantgarde Duo XDs, but the vast majority of folk will be well-chuffed with their purchase. In some ways I would rather have this slight compression in this frequency than a speaker be all shouty and too forward in its presentation that some cheaper speakers demonstrate.

The tops are similarly nicely balanced and not too sharp, spiky, or shouty. This leads to a listening experience that is easy to get on with for long periods without you reaching for the volume button. You don't get the hats flying around the room like you do with, say, the R6s I mentioned but there's enough movement and a sense of spaceyness to satisfy.

I do think these speakers enjoy a bit of power up them and I tried them with our Hiraga Le Monstre, our Lab 12 Suara and our Clones Audio 25iRX but found that the grunt of the solid-state Krell KTS100 brought the best out of them – they like an amp with a firm grip, I think.

QUIBBLES

Bolting the stands together took a lot longer than I thought it would and I'd have preferred to have had them arrive ready assembled. You also have to remove the front lip of the underside of the speakers to attach them to the speakers.

You need a big space for these speakers and they do dominate a room, particularly on their stands. They also like space behind and to the sides of them and so if you don't have a larger room and you are interested in this brand, then you may want to take

a look at their smaller Atalante 3 loudspeakers.

They are not the most detailed speakers I have listened to through the presence band, but what they do is offer a compromise that is, I think, sensible – OK, that's not really a quibble and should be seen as a positive attribute.

CONCLUSION

Overall these are not the most refined speaker I have listened to, but then they (sonically) do a lot of things right and which I find really enjoyable in a loudspeaker. I also think you are getting a lot of speaker for your money when compared to some of the other offerings out there - perhaps, a little too much by way of their physical size and the kind of room I think you need to give them the space to properly breathe and work to their full. If you have the space then they are a fab allrounder that will delight!

Dynamically, these speakers bounce along like an excitable (large) puppy on speed.

They are definitely a speaker you can crank up and belt out the party tunes, but they are also a reasonably refined speaker for the asking price. They don't shout at you and they are not in your face through the vocals and the tops are nicely done and not eardrum-piercingly aggressive. This is a good balance of attributes!

The finish on the speakers is lovely and they have that retro vibe that is all the rage at the moment (think JBL etc), but I was disappointed with the stands, particularly for the £400 asking price.

Personally, I really enjoyed these speakers and they appeal to the latent party person that still bubbles under the surface despite my rapidly advancing years. I think they will find favour with folk that want a speaker that is able to belt out the tunes as well as those looking for an "audiophile" loudspeaker. As I say, a nice compromise of attributes allround.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality:







Metal stands for Atalante 5 are an extra £399





Nicely finished and nicely veneered

Look great, though they are a large speaker and you should take this into account

Work well on their integrated "stand" but do need their stands to work at their optimum

Stands are a bit meh for the money

Sound Quality:

These go deep and with good speed and dynamics

Nicely thought out presentation that isn't at all shouty or over-emphasised at any frequency

They know how to throw a party

Value For Money:

This is a lot of speaker for your money and it's all presented very nicely

Stands are a bit pants and overpriced in my opinion

We Loved:

The finish is fantastic

Big, bold, and dynamic sound with enough resolution across the range to satisfy

Easy to listen to for long periods

A lot of box for your money

We Didn't Love So Much:

They do need a big room and a decent amplifier to power then to best effect

The stands work but don't really do the speakers justice and are expensive

Elevator Pitch Review: French brand Revival Audio produce only a couple of speakers; the Atalante 5 we have here and the smaller Atalante 3. This is a

large three-way, rear-ported bass-reflex speaker that is very nicely finished in walnut veneer and with nice touches to the finish. Whilst they are a big speaker and certainly do bass, they offer a very enjoyable listen across the frequency spectrum and are equally at home with jazz vocals as they are with more party-oriented musical fare. Sensible compromises in presentation have been made to offer an excellent product at a reasonable price! They are not the most three-dimensional speaker with regards to sounstaging but it is perceived as being fairly natural. They come with an integral "footer" but to get the best out of them you really need the stand which is not then best I've seen, though it works well enough.

Price: €4490/£4490 plus £399 for the stands

SUPPLIED BY REVIVAL AUDIO





PSB PASSIF 50 LOUDSPEAKERS

assif 50 is Canadian-based PSB's 50th Anniversary speaker, made to embrace and celebrate the company's first Passif speaker back in 1972. Incorporating retro styling with current production materials and components to offer a nostalgic take on what is achievable 50 years on.

PASSIF 50 DESIGN

The Passif 50 is a tall stand mount speaker with included short stands. It's as deep as an iPad in landscape orientation and just a little wider, coming in at 870mm H \times 280mm W \times 254mm D, and is a closed box design, making it theoretically less fussy in terms of placement.

The styling of the Passif 50 is retro and reminiscent of PSB's Passive I/II loudspeakers. The woven cloth grills look and feel beautiful and have the original PSB logo stitched onto a pull tab at the bottom of the grill - which is magnetically attached. Another nice touch to commemorate PSB's anniversary is the rear plaque, adorned with the Canadian maple leaf which reads "Passif 50 - 1972-2022". The finish on the Passif 50 is a real walnut open-grain veneer with a matt finish to it.

The included stands have either spikes or threaded domed rubber pad inserts included to be installed depending on floor type.

The Passif 50's drivers are a 1" Titanium domed tweeter, which is off centre and with a felt pad surrounding it to aid in diffraction (there's actually a left and a right speaker in the pair, with orientation being that each tweeter sits on the inside of the soundstage to aid imaging), A 6.5" paper mid/bass, and an 8" paper coned passive radiator with a frequency range of 50-20,000hz at 60hms with a sensitivity of 89db, making them rather easy to drive. There are bi-wire/bi-ampable binding posts with gold-plated links to the rear.

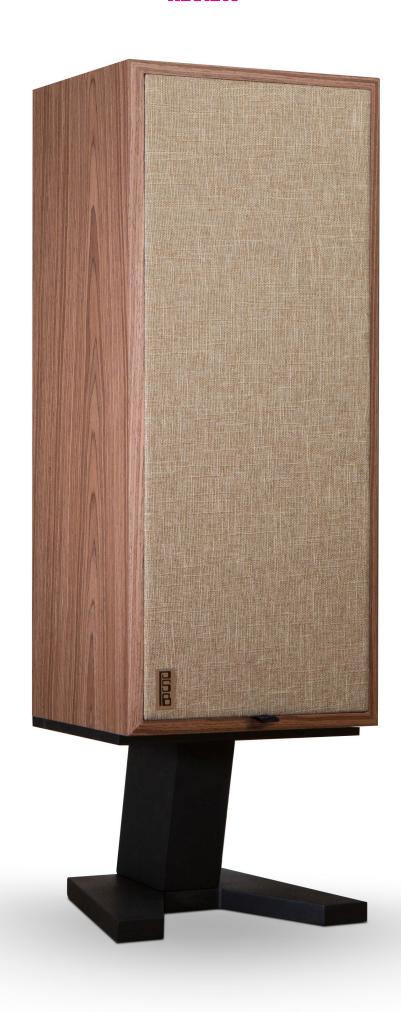
INSTALLING AND POSITIONING THE PASSIF 50 LOUDSPEAKERS

Dan Worth takes a listen to the PSB Passif 50, a £2500 I oudspeaker that has more than a hint of nostalgia in its design.

Reviewed by Dan Worth











Unboxing and installing the Passif 50s is easy given they're not very heavy or large. The packaging is very robust and carefully thought out to minimise material usage and yet maximise protection, which was a nice touch.

The stand comes in 3 pieces if you discount your choice of feet. Four Allen bolts per side (key included) make for short work in setting them up ready to connect the speaker cables.

Being an infinite baffle/closed box design (actually, they're a passive radiator design) positioning these loudspeakers isn't very difficult at all and they are really quite unfussy. I spent a little time during this review testing slightly different toe-ins and distances from the front wall and distances from each other and although like any speaker there can be small adjustments made over time, they really aren't going to misbehave if your room doesn't allow for the most ideal placement.

For me, a standard position in my room at around 6-8 feet apart and a little toe in, so that each speaker would face inward no more than firing over my shoulder on the same side of the speaker worked as expected and with little difference in overall presentation.

SOUND QUALITY OF THE PSB PASSIF 50

In all honesty, for somebody who never has any preconceived ideas regarding equipment I accept for review, I must admit that in this instance seeing the Passif 50s in photographs and then in the flesh (and knowing PSB wanted to honour the first Passif design) I immediately thought Passif I/II - or for us in the UK, more so Spendor BC-1 vintage. In short I thought that these are going to be a little on the thick-sounding side... oh, how wrong I was!

There is nothing fluffy or overly coloured when listening to the Passif 50.

My obvious choice for the review amplifier was my Gato DIA-250S NPM, a Class D design with an onboard streamer. NAD are complimenting the Passif 50 with a matching 3050LE Class D model amplifier with built-in Bluesound BluOS streaming capabilities, which has the same walnut veneer to

its chassis and complimentary vintage sytyling, only 1972 units will be manufactured and is a clear reference with the company's first year of trading. The use of the Gato made absolute sense in terms of listening to how the 50s' intended design sounded.

Firstly their resolution is insanely competent, with high notes which extend and sparkle fantastically well, a midrange that is generously proportioned and balanced so much so that it doesn't even reside on a single plane be it a forward one or a more recessed presentation - in fact, midrange presentation is very three dimensional and has great scope and shape.

Vocals are placed so convincingly well that it's a little spooky and highly unexpected, to say the least. Bass notes are big and solid, dig deep and most of all flexible to the genre being played (read unfussy), really doing a sterling job in keeping everything flowing and bouncing along with elasticity and rhythm.

The soundstage is nothing short of magnificent for a speaker of this price. There was no warm up period or even break-in before my focus was drawn to how complex an image these display.

Centre focus is again solid, vocal placement is absolutely on the money and independent of genre, artist gender. With regards to placement of the instruments, the Passif 50 conveys a most lifelike depiction of the recorded material. The layering within the midrange is the cornerstone of what makes this speaker so engaging and everything else around it just compliments these abilities so well - a trait of paper cones that is often overlooked in modern-day speakers in my opinion.

Width and height of the stage are quite stunning compared with the height the tweeters sit and the overall soundstage spread is huge. The speakers do disappear to an extent within the soundstage, even in smaller spaces and without critical positioning or much room from the front wall. It's been a very long time since I've had the pleasure of coming across a more modestly priced set of speakers which can achieve this - even at lower volume levels the Passif 50 is connecting and informative.

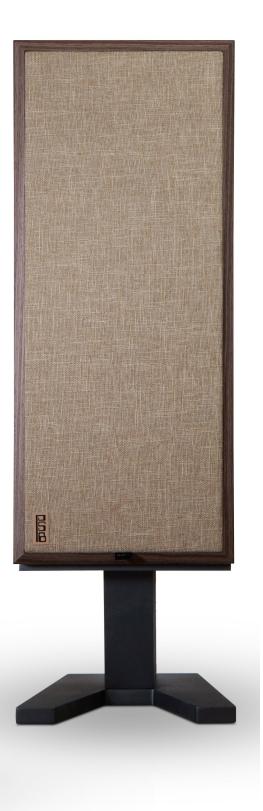
Many people state quite confidently that they are not "soundstage freaks". For me, however, the













soundstage is absolutely key in enjoying music realistically, otherwise, I'd simply be happy with background music and a non-fussy listening position. It's the realism and believability of a performance that draws us into the music, combined with additional aspects such as good texture and tonality, dynamics, and resolution that refine the experience.

Lower-end detail is engaging in the Passif 50 and there's an abundance of well-tuned information on hand, and although the 50's don't go really low they have a beautiful roll-off, unlike say an ATC SCM19 which has a much steeper slope at 50Hz. Listening to live performances from the likes of Fink, Fleet-wood Mac, and Genesis conveyed many additional drum beats that I have found to be far more muted and blurred on many other designs around this price point, leading me to conclude that the crossovers must be minimalistic, of high quality and components selected by somebody with an incredibly good ear, as everything is just so transparent and tuneful.

It's been many years since I've heard PSB speakers and those of you that have also heard them will no doubt have a soft spot for their skills in being a consistently musical speaker brand. PSB speakers have a wonderful ability to convey a fun and engrossing sonic signature that gets a little closer to what only larger drivers can do naturally. Yes, there are still limitations in comparison to multi-driver designs trying to emulate a substantially larger and lightweight cone, but they capture that essence very well indeed and present it in a way that makes me smile. The Passif 50's 6.5" mid/bass and passive 8" radiator make light work of dealing with larger robust bass notes, don't get confused when speeded up, and also retain, space and air - never clouding the midland and allow for layered depth that usually only comes with higher spec designs.

I tried the Passif 50's in two rooms - one a really quite damped squarer room with very thick carpets and plenty of soft furnishings and another with wooden floors and leather sofas, which sounds far cleaner than the latter. In both rooms the speakers performed very similarly, with slight differences in top-end presentation - with the more heavily damped room sounding a little thicker up top and the starker room a little more tuneful in the lower bass. No matter how I positioned them in either space they imaged exceptionally well.

CONCLUSION

Once in a while, a speaker comes along that doesn't cost an awful lot in comparison to a lot of HiFi and that doesn't have amazing specs on paper, doesn't look flamboyant, or boast exotic component selections, but does make you sit up and say wow! The PSB Passif 50 is one of those speakers - unassuming, nostalgic visually, and modestly sized - the 50s make a big impression.

They are one of the most toe-tapping and engrossing speakers I've had the opportunity to listen to in recent times.

If you want a non-fussy placement, a non-genre-specific speaker that is fun, lively, and detailed then you need look no further. The Passif 50 soundstages like it's on steroids and has fantastic midrange tone and depth.

Vintage meets modern with the Passif 50 and as they sound just so right with modern-day Class D amplification.

AT A GLANCE

Sound Quality:

PSB has created a speaker which has a vibrant, detailed, and highly musical presentation with a significantly appealing soundstage and overall room filling presence, which contradicts its traditional styling, giving hours of listening pleasure without fatigue

Build Quality:

Build quality is great, with beautiful material grills which I'd love to see on more speakers in the future

Little touches such as the embroidered logos, rear model plaques, and real wood open grain walnut bender all add together to give a good pride of ownership feel

Value For Money:

For a performance this strong I would say the Passif 50 represents great value

We Loved:

The unexpected sound vs traditional styling





Beautiful woven speaker grills

The obvious careful voicing of the crossover components

Having a paper cone-based design

Real wood veneer

Magnetic grills with embroidered pull tabs

Addictive, toe-tapping musicality at a realistic price

We Didn't Love So Much:

Binding posts could be a little nicer

Bi-wiring is not really necessary at this price

Potential for other finishes to really confuse the

vintage/modernness of the design over sound, even if they were just wood finishes, walnut is very specific

Price: £2499

Elevator Pitch Review: With a combination of retro looks and modern sound, the PSB Passif 50s are a beautifully made and wonderful-sounding speaker which excels in sound staging and musicality. Regardless of what level you are at with your HiFi journey, one would need to be deaf not to appreciate what they do. At this price point, there are very few speakers that sound so engaging without sounding too HiFi and these speakers keep the music true in their heart.REVIVAL AUDIO ATALANTE 5

SUPPLIED BY PSB AUDIO





GRIMM AUDO LS1be, MU1, AND SB1 SYSTEM

efore I start this review I'd like to extend my thanks to Marc at Prestige Audio Diffusion in France who organised the loan system through their dealer Jean François at 1877 Audio that have this very system on permanent demonstration and who has undergone full setup training on the system at Grimm.

WHAT DO WE HAVE?

Essentially we are looking at three different products here; the LS1 be active loudspeakers themselves, a pair of SB 1 subs, and the MU1 Digital Source, though the latter can be used with your existing setup should you not wish to go down the full Grimm route. I think it's probably best to look at each in isolation and then consider them as a whole as that's how I used them.

GRIMM LS1 be ACTIVE LOUD- SPEAKERS

The LS1 be are the top model of three in the Grimm Audio ecosystem, the others being the entry-level LS1a and the LS1v2. Like the other speakers in the Grimm range they have a response that is set up in the factory via the company's Computer Aided Calibration process to be as linear as possible. You can, as I mention again later, go into the settings and play around with the DSP settings to get them right for your room should you feel the need.

The LS1's look fabulous in my opinion and I need to say that I think these are a "lifestyle" product. Now the dreaded "L word" seems to have negative connotations in the audiophile world but we need to get out of that mindset and understand that not everyone wants to have a rack full of boxes and for the vast majority of folk, what they need is a system that plays music well. Most looking for "lifestyle" products will be happy with the likes of a Sonos speaker, but for those that demand a system that fits in the modern home and lifestyle, AND delivers audiophile quality sound, then they are going to want to look elsewhere, and I believe this is where the Grimm Audio system fits in the marketplace. I don't think these speakers are a product for the "hobbyist" audiophile they may want to swip, swap, and tweak with new boxes, wires, and whatnot, though from a sonic perspective these speakers deliver to an audiophile standard.

So with the LS1be, you get a couple of hollow metal legs onto which the actual speaker box fits by a series of magnets and bolts. Inside these legs are the electronics and amps. This is a neat system that A fully integrated system from Dutch brand Grimm Audio includes everything the serious music lover could want. What's it all about and how does it sound?

Reviewed by Stuart Smith











makes very good sense from an aesthetic perspective.

The speakers themselves use a wide-dispersion Beryllium tweeter (hence the be in the naming)

Grimm tells us that the speakers have been designed to demonstrate that it is achievable to have a speaker that is analytically precise (behaves like a studio monitor) and is pleasing to listen to at the same time. The Grimm philosophy is that the studio model of having a linear (flat) frequency response is desirable and that voicing a speaker to have a "trademark" sound "masks aberrations from linearity". So with the LS1 speakers, they are measured and calibrated in a semi-anechoic chamber and calibrated accordingly via DSP – this is all done in the production phase and so they should come to your home ready to rock and roll.

Should you want to you could just add a digital line source or a computer and you can connect that straight to the speakers and away you go.

Like "lifestyle", Digital Signal Processing is sometimes seen as a dirty word in the audiophile world, but it is commonplace in the studio environment and in the home cinema world. It's available, it works well and I think it is the future of music reproduction in the home, though I am fully aware that there will always be purists out there that will eschew this technology... and I suppose to an extent there's a little bit of that kind of person in me. In these speakers the use of DSP allows you to plug in your analogue source and then it is converted to a digital signal using a high-quality Analogue to Digital converter and the response correction of the drivers, cross-over between tweeter and mid/bass driver and phase correction of the cross-over are all taken care of internally and in the digital domain. Obviously, this kind of thing is not possible in the analogue domain. All very clever!

However, Grimm also tells us that the design of the LS1 goes back to the earlier part of the 20th century when it was the norm for loudspeakers to have wide fronts (baffles) which made frequencies below 250Hz (the Baffle-Step effect) radiate equally in all directions and those above 250Hz to be more forwardly directional. The benefit here is that frequencies above 250Hz are less affected by rear wall and sidewall reflections which cause phase issues and given that the human ear is only sensitive to phase problems down to 250Hz phase issues are naturally attenuated. But, edge diffraction would also be a problem with these (and any other speaker) if it weren't for the fact that these are strongly rounded off by the integral (once bolted on) legs.

The drivers in the LS1be are SEAS units and the tweeter (beryllium in this case) is said to have low mid-band distortion allowing for a relatively low crossover frequency that is good for vertical dispersion. The tweeter sits inside a small constant direc-

tivity horn that again allows for even dispersion of high frequencies.

The shallow cabinet is designed to avoid "boxiness".

There's a whole lot more in the literature for Grimm Audio and its speakers on their website and it's beyond the scope of this review to include it all here. Suffice it to say, the design of the LS1 speakers is such that they avoid many of the pitfalls outlined above as well as avoiding problems with the room's bass (room) nodes.

Looks-wise I think the LS1-be have been designed to be both acoustically "clever" and good-looking – I'd certainly give them house room!

GRIMM MU1

MU 1 is essentially the upgraded source for the LS1 speakers but it can also be used as a source for your own system without the other Grimm kit.

It's a Linux-based system with a Grimm-designed FPGA interface board at its heart. The MU1 has the Grimm ultra-low jitter clock onboard and importantly for me, it has ROON built-in in the form of ROON Core which is exactly the same as I run on a PC in my own system. This meant that once the whole system was wired together and wired to our home network, I just fired it up, opened my iPad to ROON, and found the MU1. Easy and absolutely intuitive.

The MU1 can also be used as a source for your existing DAC and it has outputs via two AES 3 sockets and inputs for the ethernet cable, a couple of USB inputs for using external hard drives and a 3.5mm socket for the remote control, though there was no remote with the sample unit and I wouldn't have used it anyway as ROON does everything including properly controlling the volume. There are also inputs for SPDIF and optical digital signals.

It's a lovely looking bit of kit with a large brass control button/knob on the top in a contrasting brass colour and which is used for selecting inputs, scrolling through menus and can be used as a volume knob. It's pretty intuitive but long presses and short presses on the knob access different functions and so the manual is essential.

For the tech-heads amongst you, the computer inside this box is an intel i3 CPU running at 2.4GHZ with two cores and 4 threads with hyperthreading (whatever that is). There's 4GB of DDR4 RAM and it has an internal SSD for the operating system and an optional internal SSD for storage, which this unit had.

The FPGA interface board I mentioned earlier is, Grimm tells me, what sets this product apart from the competition. It's all far too techy for me, and beyond the scope of this review to get into details,







The MU1 is a great looking unit







Around the back of the MU1





but in essence Grimm's FPGA upsampling effectively offloads the upsampler in the DAC up to 4 x 44.1 or 48 where Grimm say the calculations the unit is doing are most intensive. This in turn is said to deliver a better listening experience.

The unit will support all sample rates and all digital formats and given it has the outputs I mentioned, it can be hooked up to your own existing DAC.

On the front is a 3.5-inch TFT LCD screen and it all looks very nice and understated.

Set up to play with settings is via any web browser and is all pretty straightforward once you know what you are doing. The system I got needed to have an update installed (the front panel told me this) and installing this was simplicity itself; navigate to the relevant menu (to be fair there's very little menu-diving needs to be done with this unit), press the button and ten or fifteen minutes later all is done and you can play tunes again.

GRIMM BASS SB1

The system we were supplied with came with a couple of subs called the SB1 and these are designed to fit precisely and snuggly under each speaker and between the legs. I liked this and it meant that there was no need to have another box lying about or hidden somewhere in the room.

The sub has something called DMF (Digital Motional Feedback) which is used to minimise distortion in the bass region. If I understand this correctly (and I do) this DMF is a sensor to monitor acceleration on the aluminium cone that feeds-back information to the DSP that does its stuff and essentially reduces distortion by up to 30db.

The response of the sub is flat down to 20Hz and turns the LS1be into a three-way active loudspeaker system with the sub crossing over at 70Hz with the LS1 – essentially this means that everything below 70Hz is handled by the sub.

Each sub is run by a 700W Class D amp and connects to the LS1s via a short umbilical - see SET UP.

This is a very neat and very aesthetically pleasing solution in my opinion.

PACKAGING

The packaging is excellent but massive. All parts for the speakers and everything else arrived safely but what normal users would do with the (basically a palette with a big cardboard box on top) packaging I don't know. However, I suppose the main purpose of packaging is to get the product safely to your door without any damage and in this, it succeeds... but do keep in mind that you are going to have to

store this somewhere dry and that it will take up a good deal of space.

SET UP

Putting the speakers together and getting them in place is a pretty straightforward operation but you do need the manual to get this right. Everything is magnetic and supported by bolts and tolerances are reassuringly tight.

The sub unit (SB 1) connects simply so that you only have to have the sub plugged in, with a short umbilical IEC (female to male) being included to do this. This is well thought out and makes for fewer wires which in light of what I said about the lifestyle aspect of this product, is very important.

Online PDFs are available for the MU1 and LS1-be and SB 1 systems. I fully understand that most people are looking to reduce their paper use and will be able to work with a PDF on their tablet, PC, or phone but personally, I prefer to have printed versions of everything and so printed them off at home. I would have expected to have full printed manuals for everything and set up guides in the boxes.

Once you read the setup instructions through a few times the actual wiring up of the various boxes is actually fairly simple for someone that is pretty used to setting up audio systems. However, I think for the normal punter that setup will prove to be fairly complex and I'd suggest that if you buy this system then you should insist that it is properly set up by the dealer that you bought it from and this, I am told, is always the case when buying the system - I expect this is pretty much a given for products at this price and I would certainly expect it.

All the relevant wires are provided in the boxes and you simply connect the MU1 to one of the speakers and join the speakers together with the included cables. Actually, it doesn't look that simple when reading the manual.

Once all wired together and the MU 1 connected to your network or switch you simply turn everything on, select ROON on the MU 1, your tablet will see it and hey-presto you have music.

The Grimm system has a dedicated download program from which you can select different settings and different DSP settings, but in this well-treated room I saw absolutely no need to change anything from the standard flat settings. Others may want to dive into the various menus and settings and whatnot but personally, I would suggest this is, again, a job for the dealer to sort out when they come around to set it up, and once done you should leave it, or at the most tweak it should your room change significantly.











I noticed at shows when I have seen Grimm Audio exhibit that they have their speakers guite wide apart and severely toed in. I talked about the idea behind this with the late Ken Ishiwata as this was something he did at shows and he reckoned it was to give everyone in the limited space a better feeling for the soundstage and stereo image than more conventional placing would allow for. I wanted to know the theory and so asked Eelco at Grimm more about this unusual setup. However, having played around in our room I found that the best positioning was well away from side and back walls and with only a very (very) slight toe-in which goes to some extent against what you are about to read from Eelco at Grimm. I found that in this room this pretty much straight-ahead setup offered up a wider soundstage both in the hot seat and slightly out of the optimal listening position, though the speakers were pretty much in "open space" and at least 1,75m from the back wall and more from the side walls. I spoke to Eelco about this and he explained that this was normal for the positioning I had them in and the large distances I had them from the wall. Anyway, here's what Eelco had to say on the toe in they use at shows - I thought readers would find it quite interesting and that it would give an insight into Grimm themselves.

"By far the most asked question in our room at trade shows is why we turn our LS1 system 'toe-in'? To clarify, 'toe-in' means that the left and right loudspeakers aim at a crossing position in front of the listener instead of at the listener. The short answer is that this setup offers three advantages:

In most rooms the stereo image is much sharper this way;

There is a larger sweet spot with nice stereo imaging;

The sound spectrum is more even across the room.

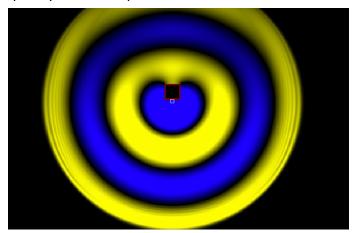
So, if there is such great advantage, why isn't everybody doing this? The reason is that the loudspeaker cabinets need to have a special shape to make this happen. Let's have a look at how this works.

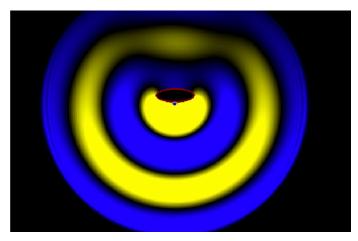
A loudspeaker usually has a few cone drivers, mounted on the front panel of the cabinet, called the 'baffle'. Now sound that is radiated from the cone likes to flow in all directions, but when sound heads toward the back of the loudspeaker, it runs into an obstacle: the cabinet. So the loudspeaker cabinet is an obstacle for its own sound. Because of this, there will be a 'shade' behind the cabinet, where the sound is softer than on the front.

The frequency above which this shade effect manifests itself is dependent of the ratio between the sound wavelength and the width of the cabinet. We will soon have a look at some pictures that show this effect, but first we need to understand how wavelength and frequency are related. A high pitched tone of 1000 Hz vibrates 1000 times per second, which means that one vibration takes only

1/1000th of a second, or 1 millisecond. You may know that sound travels at 'the speed of sound' which is app. 344 m/s. So in 1 ms sound can travel 344 times 1/1000 = 0.34 m, or 34 cm. This means that the wavelength of a 1000 Hz vibration is 34 cm.

A rule of thumb is that if an obstacle is wider than one third the wavelength, it will generate a shade of sound behind it. So when a cabinet is 11 cm wide, it will offer shading for frequencies above 1000 Hz, but not for lower frequencies. Low frequency sound will flow around the cabinet without any shading. A standard width of 20 cm will offer shading above 600 Hz. And if a cabinet is 52 cm wide, like the LS1, it will offer shading for frequencies above 230 Hz. These frequencies are called the 'baffle step frequency' of a loudspeaker.





The illustrations show how a wide cabinet offers more shading at low-mid frequencies than a traditional width loudspeaker.

The question we asked ourselves when we developed the LS1 is: what would be a logical frequency for the baffle step, one that makes sense from an acoustical standpoint? Since listening rooms usually have a different, more resonant, acoustic character below 200 Hz, a baffle step in that region seemed to make more sense than at 600 Hz. So we designed a 50cm wide baffle. The effect of such a wide baffle is that the whole frequency range from 250 Hz upwards is radiated in a similar 'hemispherical' way.

Okay, now to the toe-in effect. Our beloved stereo image, or phantom image, is constructed in our

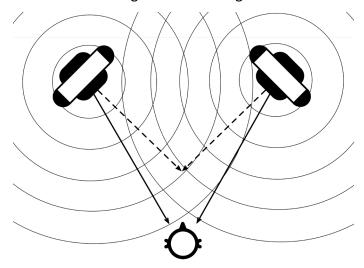




brain by comparing the sounds that arrive at our ears. They can be louder, or earlier in time, in one ear. For example, if the sound from the left speaker is louder or more early in time than from the right, the image shifts to the left. For this process to work well, the sound from the speakers should not be disturbed by reflections on walls etc soon after the direct sound. If it is not possible to apply acoustic absorption, it helps to aim the sound away from the wall to attenuate the reflective energy. So by turning the speakers a little inwards ("toe-in"), the reflected energy of the nearby wall becomes softer. And then the stereo image improves.

There is one catch though. If the baffle size is small, like with traditional loudspeakers, a toe-in setup will only attenuate the higher frequencies of the reflection; it will still have energy between 250 and 600 Hz. As a result the stereo image above 600 Hz is more focused than that between 250 and 600 Hz, which sounds a bit unbalanced. So in general small baffle loudspeakers don't profit much from toe-in, and the technique is not often used. With the wide LS1's however, it works. So they offer a choice to turn them toe-in and have a clearer stereo image, or point them at the listener (or even use 'toe-out') to create a less focussed, more spacious image.

A bonus of toe-in is that people who don't sit in the sweet spot, but for example left of it, will still enjoy a pretty nice stereo image. The reason is that although they sit closer to the left loudspeaker so its sound will arrive earlier - shifting the image to the left - they are now more off-axis of the left speaker and more on-axis of the right speaker, which makes the right loudspeaker sound slightly louder - and that shifts the image back to the right.



Another bonus is that when you walk through the room and the speakers have been set up with toe-in, the total spectrum of the sound is less dependent on your position in the room. The reason is that as soon as you walk off-axis of the left speaker, you will be more on-axis of the right speaker and vice versa. The sound colours of the speakers will therefore always complement each other. When the speakers are angled outwards however, you will be on-axis of the left speaker when you walk in front of

it; when you walk to the middle you are off-axis of both left and right; and once you're in front of the right speaker you are on-axis of it. Since the spectrum of the sound is duller when you are off-axis, the sound colour changes with position. Of course this is only true for sound mixes that have equal spectrum on both channels, but in general, this is often the case.

In ending: one never just listens to loudspeakers, it's always the combination of the loudspeaker and the room that you hear. A good loudspeaker has a neutral sound both on-axis and off-axis, with a controlled frequency roll-off, so the room sounds neutral. "

So, there you have it, straight from the horse's mouth.

SOUND

I used the system as it was sent: the speakers, the subs, and the player. My comments need to be taken in the context of this being a full turn-key solution to delivering music in your home needing only a source, in this instance ROON with QOBUZ.

Fist of all this is a sophisticated sounding system that just sounds immediately balanced and, for want of a better word, correct. By balanced I mean that nothing is out of place throughout the frequency spectrum; no sharp top, no booming bass, and a clear and articulate midband. Initially, my thoughts were that perhaps the system as a whole was a bit boring and that it wasn't really very exciting, but much in the same way that a Bentley motorcar may seem a bit boring when compared to, say a skitty 80's 911 Turbo, it's just relaxed and not at all inyour-face - whether or not that level of sophistication will suit all ears is going to be up to you...and if it's not, then open up the control program and fanny about the DSP, boost the top and bottom and you can tailor the sound to the sound you prefer. Boomshanka!

Out of the box and given a few days to acclimatise and "run in" the system is very reminiscent of a monitor, and it's no surprise that Grimm do sell these into studios to monitor from.

Let's have a listen to some tunes and try and describe what I'm getting here, though, to be honest, I've pretty much summed it up above.

You are going to smile at this! One of the first tunes that came up in "My Albums" was the much-played and much-maligned Keith Don't Go from the Acoustic Live record by Nils Lofgren. I get why this is played a lot and it does sound fabulous on this system. Every detail of the guitar playing is heard, as are the taps on the body of said guitar. It sounds pure and detailed with no hint of overdone top end. Speed and agility of the system are noted as Lofgren





moves across the higher notes of the fretboard and it's actually a real pleasure to listen to this tune at home again. That lack of boxiness becomes apparent at around the four-minute thirty or so mark as Lofgren ups the ante and the playing becomes more aggressive and the crowd shows their appreciation. It's impressively precise sounding on this system with the steel-stringed guitar sounds fantastically real. Is it sterile? Well, you can hear exactly what is going on and if High-fidelity is what you are looking for in a music reproduction system in your home then this system is going to be for you!

Keith Don't Go isn't really what you'd call taxing on a system, though it does a good job in showing off the perceived accuracy of this system, and so I pop on a favourite album in the form of Daft Punk's Random Access Memories and let it play through from the start. The volume needs to be at a decent level for this wonderfully produced record to shine, in my opinion, and that's all doable from within ROON, which I like a lot. The subs do get a bit of a workout during this album, but they are never really noticeable other than the bottom-end being filled out and, again, I'm searching for a word to replace sophistication. The bass goes low (very) but not once did I find it boomy or laggy. Robotic vocals, for example on The Game Of Love have a metallic edge at the top end which is immediately apparent on this system whereas I've had to "bend an ear" to hear it on some systems. What's also apparent is that the noise floor on this system is very low (read absolutely silent), though it should be noted that I am using an Ansuz switch in the system and have been doing so for a month or so, though I am using the stock mains and other cables in the Grimm system. On the Moroder track, I note that the click before the track starts proper is very dry, whilst once the track does start the room is filled with music, though I would suggest that the soundstage thrown by these speakers is not as expansive as the Audiovector R6 speakers we use day in day out. Perhaps this is to do with the effect of the AMT tweeter on the R6 and perhaps the Grimm are more accurate in this respect, though that is obviously conjecture as I wasn't at the final mixdown of this record! Whatever, it's a treat to listen to the whole album but the feeling never escapes me that perhaps all is a little too correct with the Grimms - I say this as it's a bad thing but it's not meant to be, it's more to suggest that my personal preference is a more "pushy' system whereas this is a case of the Grimm system sort of saying "Look, pal, I know what's what here and I'm not going to add stuff to the records I'm playing that's not there just to please you!" I also get the impression that the system isn't even beginning to break a sweat with anything this record presents it with, even Contact, the final tune on this record; nothing is too forward in the mix and it is presented flatly and without embellishment or histrionics. The detail in the noise, which is what I tend to look for in this record, are all there and you can hear the layering of noises to make the whole. Drums are positioned across the soundstage so that

it sounds like you have a drumkit in front of you (I'm well aware it's likely a sampled kit) and it's all quite exciting really! Yep, this system works for me!

Radioactivity from Minimum-Maximum Live by Kraftwerk is another good workout for a system. The difference between a dry kick and a reverbed kick is obvious to hear and is what I picked out from this session as was the fact that vocals weren't artificially pushed to the fore. The sequenced bassline sounds analogue and fat, and the system doesn't miss a beat when the track enters its more upbeat and funky second half. Bass is solid and never overdone. There was always the possibility that the sub was going to integrate badly but it just doesn't - it's there but not noticeable, if you get what I mean.

Playing John Martyn's Solid Air from the playlist that we put together from the Bristol Show LINK and all is present and correct with nothing for me to comment on other than it sounds very nice. Likewise when ROON throws up River Man by Nick Drake, I am just able to sit and relax without feeling the need to over-analyse or pull the system apart with regards to what it is or isn't doing. This is a good sign, I think, and demonstrates that, to me, the Grimm system is designed to just play tunes and be as transparent as possible without feeling over-analytical and tiresome. If this is what it is designed to do, then it succeeds.

QUIBBLES

The full manuals are online or to print off which I find a pain! They are also a bit long-winded in the explanation of what is what and why things have been designed and built the way they are. However, some will like this insight and I am speaking with regard to personal preferences, this is in part why I included the comments from Eelco with regard to toe-in.

A little bit of tweaking with regards to the positioning of the speakers is needed to get the best from the soundstaging, but once that's as you like it, they are fit and forget. It may be that your preferred setup in this regard is different from the recommended setup.

The amp slipped down and almost out of one of the legs when initially taking the parts out of the boxes. These are usually fixed in place with a bolt that is accessible through a small hole in the leg. I assume this came loose in transit, despite the excellent packaging the whole lot came in.

Packing is massive!

CONCLUSION

This is a set-and-forget system and I really enjoyed







The compact SB1 bass unit fits neeatly under each main speaker and is simple to connect





the whole "choose a tune, play that tune, and have nothing to worry about other than turning the volume up or down" simplicity of it all.

When I started this review (and I mentioned it earlier on) I had the idea that this was a "lifestyle" system for the well-heeled music lover that wants a system that just plays the music that they love, and I stand by this remark. Dyed-in-the-wool audiophile hobbyists will not find enough scope for messing about with cables and other bits and bobs, and this brings up an interesting point for me; are the hobbyists the future of HiFi, or do brands need to embrace the lifestyle market? That's a discussion for another time, but I think Grimm has done just this and has done it very, very well.

What I loved about this system was that it just worked out of the box without any fannying about with settings, though there is that option should you wish via the DSP settings. There's no preferred kind of music this system will play well and what I think is accurately; from Sleaford Mods to Fleetwood Mac and a lot more in-between, the Grimm system is unflustered and just gets on with the job in hand.

There's no shoutiness and no dramatics from the Grimm system whatsoever and I listened for ages and ages to it. There's no feeling of it being "voiced" in a particular way to please certain preferences and this leads to a system that will please many people, whilst others with listening "preferences" may find it (out of the box) a bit flat, though a quick play with the DSP control will sort this should you really think this wise.

For me, this system is something that I would aspire to if I didn't need a system that I needed to be able to slot other kin in and out of. A perfect system to retire with and with which to relax and enjoy the music that I love.

Overall I thoroughly enjoyed my time with the Grimm system. From the top to bottom of the frequency spectrum it just sounded "right" and that it wasn't emphasising stuff that needn't be and shouldn't be emphasised – it's a system that isn't out to initially impress with sonic fireworks and instead aims (and succeeds) to deliver a sober and "proper" representation of whatever music you choose to play through it.

The price of the combined setup, should you want to go the whole Grimm hog and in the finish we had and with full storage capacity on the MU1, is going to cost you around £55K with VAT in the UK. This is a lot of money, though to put this into the perspective of the high-end audio, a pair of Audiovector R8 is going to cost you around 54K and you will still have to buy suitable amps, sources, and DAC.

I've awarded these our Five Heart award. There is no doubt that the system as a whole is superb. For some, it will be absolutely perfect and their "forever system". For others, myself included, it will not offer enough scope to mix and match different brands. If you are a music lover that wants a fit-and-forget system, and has the funds, then you may as well see the Five Hearts as an Editor's Choice

AT A GLANCE

Sound Quality:

What I would consider being accurate (flat)

Very easy to get on with and listen to to

As a whole system, very dynamic but without unnecessary fireworks

Build Quality and Features:

Overall excellent build quality and features

Fit and forget

Clever electronics

Value For Money:

That's for you to decide. I don't think the whole system represents bad value for money when taken in the context of it being a complete system and when compared to other high-end audio products

We Loved:

The looks

The fit-and-forget nature of the system

The lack of fireworks and histrionics

Accurate sounding

We Didin't Love So Much:

The price is going to be prohibitive for some

Over-complicated manuals

Packaging is massive

Some playing to get the best positioning is needed

May lack excitement for some

Elevator Pitch Review: The Grimm system is a lifestyle product in the sense that it is simple to use and looks fabulous. However, in this case, that "lifestyle" badge must not be confused with a product that looks great and performs with mediocrity. No, the Grimm system offers a turnkey solution for any music lover that wants superlative sonics in a package that will fit in with any home. A very good product that will be the end game for many.





Prices:

MU1 without storage: 10,000 GBP excl VAT

SSD 2TB: 190 GBP excl VAT

SSD 8TB: 500 GBP excl VAT

LS1be stereo set in white Hi-Macs: 25,100 GBP excl

VAT

LS1be stereo set in white lacquer: 20,150 GBP excl

VAT;

LS1be stereo set in bamboo finish: 21,150 GBP excl

VAT

SB1 stereo set: 10,200 GBP excl VATFINAL EZ8000

Bass extension

SUPPLIED BY PRESTIGE AUDIO DIFFUSION





JAMO STUDIO7 15B LOUDSPEAKERS

love Danish furniture; such intricate and minimalist lines and gorgeous colours, with famous designers such as Arne Jacobsen and Frits Henningsen. To be sent a pair of speakers by Jamo, also from Denmark, was going to be a further discovery of art. The company has always put together speakers of unique visual design, a sort of B&O on the cheap, and which – as with the furniture – you'll either love or give it a wide berth.

Started in 1968 by cabinet maker Preben Jacobsen (not related to the furniture maker) and his salesman brother-in-law Julius Mortensen (hence the name "Ja-Mo") their speakers offer a rare combination of aesthetics and audio performance at a good price. Based at Glyngøre, a tiny fishing village in Denmark, they have produced a number of significant designs over the years, and by 1994 they were Europe's largest speaker brand. Major awards include Speaker of the Year in Europe for their Concert Series in 1997, and again later with my favourite, their skeleton R909, voted European High-End Loudspeaker of the Year 2006-7 by EISA. In 2005 the company was acquired by Klipsch Group Inc. With the rebirth of Jamo in 2020 their Studio7 series was launched.

Jamo's Studio7 15B is a compact little two-way loudspeaker that costs £449.

JAMO STUDIO7 15B LOUDSPEAK-ERS DESIGN STRATEGIES

As a tribute to their Scandinavian roots, the mid/bass drivers in the Studio7 series are embossed with the symbol of Thor's Hammer, a "T" shape. Thor is the god of thunder and, apparently, his hammer (Mjölnir) has the power of lightning. Of course, the letter "T" has a dual purpose as it also increases the rigidity of the paper-coned drivers and improves the transient response. The name "Studio 7" relates to the fact that all the speakers in the series are angled with a 7-degree tilt.

The S7-15B, up for review here, is the smallest bookshelf speaker in the series with a 14cm woofer and comes in at £449. Others in the series include the larger S7-17B bookshelf (with 17cm woofer), two centre speakers and two floorstanders, therefore making them particularly suitable for a surround sound setup. All speakers come in the choice of

Reviewed by Janine Elliot









two vinyl finishes representing the chromatic palette of Scandinavian landscapes; Norwegian fjords inspire the dark blue vinyl surround, while the grey finish channels the hue of fog hanging over a Finnish forest. The corners of the baffle are similarly curved to represent the pebbles on the Danish coast as well as to reduce diffraction and prevent colouration of the sound. It also gives the speaker a unique look. The speaker does look excellent and would look good in any living room or bedroom.

RINGS AND HAMMERS

The 1" tweeter features a copper Faraday ring to reduce non-linear distortion, and the tweeter and surround are made up of fabric. The tweeter lies at the centre of a small waveguide and this helps to give it a uniform top end, which was optimised using Jamo's exclusive COMSOL software. The bass driver is an embossed paper cone with increased rigidity due to the Thor's Hammer. An aluminium inductance ring increases power handling and reduces distortion, acting also as a heat-sink. It also gives it a distinctive look.

The cabinet is mounted on an angled plinth which also contains the crossover. The reason for the 7-degree angle is to improve time-alignment for the listener. The cabinet is 15mm MDF with an 18mm front baffle. The cabinet is well braced and is a 2-way reflex design with a port at the rear.

The crossover uses Myler and non-polarised electrolytic capacitors and 25W resistors. I did find the unit rather smart and rigid despite its light weight. The unit comes with rubber feet and these are to be fitted into holes at the extreme edges of the base, so some will find this means the speaker won't fit on certain types of narrow speaker stands. It would have been better if on the stand-mount speakers they were self adhesive so that you could attach them appropriately yourself. Indeed, this "small" speaker has a large width and depth, at 20 and 34 cm respectively. Its depth is larger than its height, due to the horizontal wing at the rear extending to connect the cables. This makes attaching the speaker cables a lot easier than conventionally placed sockets.

SOUND OF THE JAMO

STUDIO7 15B LOUD-SPEAKERS

To start with, I played some good old progressive rock from the 70's in the form of Yes and their "Rhythm of Love". Immediately I was aware of the excellent soundstage. Music was tight and clear, with instruments placed well around the stage. Instruments and vocals in Supertramp's "Crime of the Century" (also 24bit/96kHz) were similarly well placed and fun to listen to; the Rhodes piano was clear and realistic, and cymbals were particularly clear, though not quite as extended as some tweeters can go - cymbals here were still good, though, remembering the cheap price for this loudspeaker. Tops were tight and controlled; the hand clicks in track 3 were very well-paced. Where mids and tops were very clear - perhaps very slightly too prominent a midrange in some of the music I played – the bass was very forceful, extended and well-timed, just slightly lacking clarity.

Turning to something completely different, the mellow Katie Melua's 'In Winter' (LP) which includes the Gori Women's Choir. Here, the Choir played well, but it wasn't quite as velvety a sound as I have heard before, though on pricier speakers. The bass wasn't bad, just lacked control at the extreme.

Pink Floyd's 'Dark Side of the Moon' (24/96) was accurate with good tops and a particularly good and detailed soundstage, making them ideal as part of a 5.1 set-up.

Turning to jazz and Duke Ellington's "Rockin' in Rhythm" (LP), this was tight and with excellent definition between the left and right. Including persuasive trombones and trumpets, and a clear top end from the cymbals, the Jamo held tight reign on the music, and was very good for such a small speaker. My only concerns were that the very top cymbal sizzles and the very lowest lows weren't quite as controlled as I would like, though, again, we are talking about a sub-£500 speaker here. The sound is energetic and with excellent soundstage making them compete well with anything costing well over the price. Having the tweeter set in its own waveguide allowed the top frequencies to dissipate uniformly, allowing me to move off-axis but still get a good top-end. I also found the speakers played better at louder levels. Playing quietly just didn't







The integral stand angles the speakers and helps with time allignment







Attaching speaker cables is a cinch with the stepped lip on the back of the Jamos





quite inspire me, despite the "thicker" 18mm MDF front baffle being designed to increase resolution at low listening levels.

Playing the Kate Bush 'Aerial' (CD) the sounds of birds chirping worked very well across the stage, and the mechanical noises from the pianoforte came across clearly; if anything, the bass was a little too much here. It just lacked timing skills that more expensive speakers should achieve. These speakers were good, though; nothing like the Jamo I remember from the 70s when I first got into HiFi.

Time then to go back to the 70s and play reel-to-reel and even some cassette tapes! Now if only I had a Nakamichi Dragon, though my Tascam cassette recorder isn't bad, claiming 19kHz on metal tapes. Now I wasn't going to seriously review the speakers playing cassettes, but the format does give a very analogue sound and gave an excellent performance on the 15B's. Incidentally, the format is starting a revival, but if it is ever to come back seriously it will take 10 years to even relearn the mechanics and motor design skills. Oh, and Dolby B and C don't exist anymore.

Getting back to serious matters, I played some

pre-recorded reel-to-reel albums made in the '60s-'70s including The Beatles and Dave Brubeck. These ¼" quarter-track tapes at 7½ ips on 7" spools were excellent at the time and played well on my Akai reel to reel; energetic and with excellent soundstage particularly on the Beatles, just that precision was somewhat lacking at times. Having said that the tweeter had extremely low distortion and accurately showed any flaws in the recording. Turning to a recent tape release 'Diamond Voices' from STS (T6111198) on my Nagra iv with incredible vocals from Doris Day, Peggy Lee and the likes, the music was highly engrossing, the Jamo holding itself well against the competition, particularly with its mid-frequencies. It really did perform. The only negativity I found with the Jamo was a slight lack of that velvety sound on the vocals; just as the Katie Melua album, which is full of the most beautifully smooth vocals and guitar, just left me short of excitement.

CONCLUSION

The Jamo Studio 715B really does have much to offer for the price and is an excellent series of speakers to mark the company's comeback. It is certainly unique in looks and design and gave an excellent account of the music during my long listening sessions.











It was good from the bass all the way up to the tops, and with all types of music. Now that can't be bad for £449.

I am giving the Studio7 15B loudspeakers our 5 Heart award because they offer such low distortion and an excellent soundstage at a low cost. Excellent soundstage

Mid-frequency detail

Distortion-free top end

We Didn't Love So Much:

Some might not like the vinyl wrap or the angled shape of the cabinet

Elevator Pitch Review: Jamo from Denmark is back! A speaker manufacturer I remember from my early childhood. I was particularly interested in seeing how good they would perform based on my memories from youth, and wasn't to be disappointed. Designed with a typical Danish minimalistic appearance, I got down to listening to music I remembered from my youth, so much that I even got out my cassettes.

Price: £449

SUPPLIED BY HENLEY AUDIO

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality:

Very well put together speaker with novel use of vinyl wrap

Sound Quality:

Well-extended bass and distortion-free top end

Value For Money:

£449 gets you a lot of music per pound, so it is highly recommended if you have limited finances

We Loved:

Bass extension





STAX SR-X9000 EARSPEAKERS

ack in 1981 when I first started thinking about putting together my first proper audio system, I spent a lot of time and money reading the HiFi press of the day (money, that in hindsight would have been mostly better being set aside for the actual system). It wasn't all money wasted though, because as well as learning about the kinds of kit that I could possibly afford I also learned about the stuff that was out of my reach but that I could dream about one day possibly possessing. Where would the audio industry be if we didn't all have those dreams, eh?

In my reading, the name STAX emerged as the product of choice for the serious headphone listener. In my naivety, I briefly wondered if the company had any connection with the American soul music record label that I had recently become familiar with. It seemed unlikely, even to me, and of course, proved not to be the case. What I did take away though, from the various articles I read, was that STAX headphones (or earspeakers to give them their proper name) were: A) expensive, B) oddly shaped compared to any other headphones I had seen and C) required a special amplifier to drive them. It was also clear that the people who liked STAX earspeakers liked them very much indeed and that there was genuine value and purpose to be had from investing heavily in a high-quality headphone system. But that wasn't for me with my tiny budget and I somehow doubted that it ever would be.

Fast forward more than forty years and out of the blue came the opportunity not just to review a pair of STAX earspeakers but to review the company's flagship SR-X9000 model. Obviously, I jumped at the chance.

While some things have changed (I'll tell you in a minute), some things have remained the same: the SR-X9000, along with other models in the STAX range, still requires its own dedicated amplifier due to its electrostatic design. Fans of electrostatic loudspeakers will be familiar with the speed and transparency that are part and parcel of this technology and these are the same qualities that have been prized by STAX afficionados over the years, but it is this electrostatic technology that necessitates a particular type of amplifier to drive the earspeakers. I was supplied with STAX's SRM-T800 drive unit to carry out amplifica-

John Scott spends some quality time with the flagship SR-X9000 earspeakers from STAX.

> Reviewed by John Scott









tion duties.

If the need for a dedicated amplifier remains, what is it that has changed? The STX earspeakers I was familiar with were large rectangular boxes that sat on each ear, literally making it look like the wearer had a pair of small speakers glued to their head. The SR-X9000 has more conventional round earpieces, considerably more attractive in my opinion and a bit of research revealed that STAX have in fact always made round earspeakers.

UNBOXING AND SET UP OF THE STAX SR-X9000 EARSPEAKERS

Before we get to the SR-X9000, we need to talk about the SR-T800 drive unit. This is a hybrid unit with two 6922 dual triode valves in the input stage and a class A output stage. The SRM-T800 is a fairly substantial unit weighing 7.3kg and measuring 320 (W) x 103 (H) x 395 (H) mm. Set up was no more complicated than that of a standard integrated amplifier. Balanced and unbalanced inputs are catered for (3 inputs in total). The front panel has outputs for two sets of earspeakers, should you live with someone who has their own pair of STAX earspeakers or have a friend who likes to pop found with theirs so that you can both sit in splendid isolation, listening at the same time. (Yes, I know. But I guess there must be a use case for this feature or STAX wouldn't include it). A dual-gang volume knob allows balance control if required. STAX recommends turning the volume to zero on power up and then increasing it to the required level.

As for the SR-X9000s, the earspeakers come in a rather ordinary-looking branded card box which opens to reveal a rather lovely polished wooden box featuring a brushed brass effect plate with the wording "SR-X9000 electronic earspeaker" inlaid in black lettering along with the STAX logo and "made in Japan". The box is of a high quality, befitting the earspeaker's flagship status but, presumably as a result of being a demo model and having had a fair amount of handling, mine had a dent in the side and the lacquered surface does look like it could be quite easily damaged so I would advise purchasers to take good care of the box as part of a premium package.

Internally, the SR-X9000s are firmly secured within foam padding along with 2 cables, one of 1.5 meters and one of 2,5 meters, allowing a good degree of versatility in siting the SRM-T800 drive unit and my preferred seating/listening position. The cables are a flat, six-stranded design (think those liquorice rolls with a beaded aniseed sweet at their centre) made from 99.9999% pure copper.

BUILD QUALITY AND COMFORT

You would expect any product at this price point to have excellent build quality, but when the product in question is the flagship model of a company with Stax's reputation then you can understand that my expectations were particularly high. Thankfully, the SR-X9000 doesn't disappoint. Up to this point, my impression had been that STAX earspeakers very much favoured function over form. However good they sounded, they were unlikely to be considered as being attractive. The SR-X9000s combine aluminium, stainless steel, and leather into a luxurious, high-quality product that accommodates the requirements of its electrostatic design without compromising on looks.

Electrostatic drivers consist of a thin membrane placed between two charged plates which act to vibrate the membrane. STAX uses a charge of 580 volts to alternately push and pull the membrane to produce sound. Due to its delicate nature, the membrane needs to be protected from damage. Equally, the user needs to be protected from the charged plates or "stators". And all of this has to be done in a way that does not adversely affect the sound quality of the earspeakers. STAX have refined a layered metal-mesh design for their stators over decades, resulting in the four-layer version that appears in the SR-X9000s. Further mesh protection is required on each side of the stators to protect the user and STAX have introduced a non-parallel design, intended to reduce sound reflection within the earspeaker. As these are open-backed speakers, this mesh work really needs to be aesthetically pleasing as well as practical and the SR-X9000s totally deliver in this respect – I think they look great, combining a solid build with visual finesse.

While good looks are nice to have in any piece of HiFi equipment, where headphones are con-

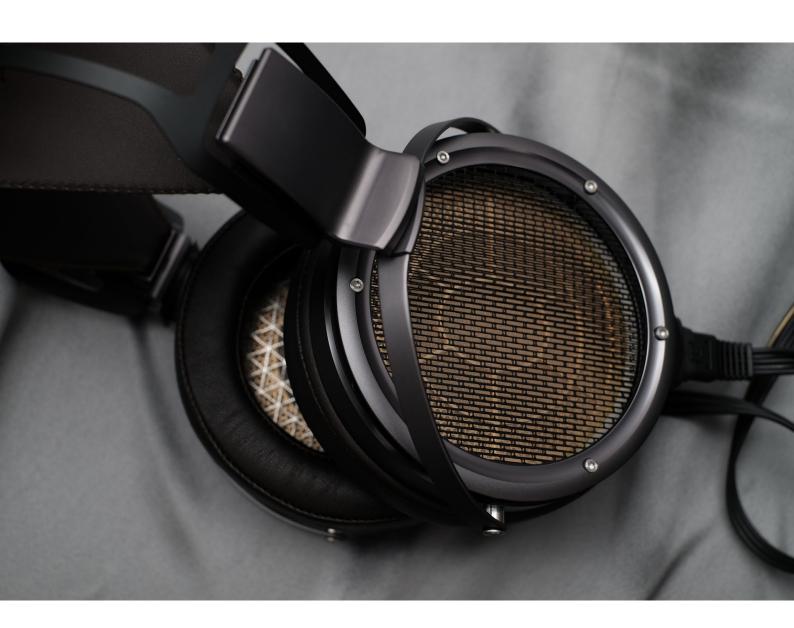




These are an open-back design







The Stax earspeakers were comfortable for long listening sessions





cerned, comfort takes a much higher priority; no one wants discomfort distracting from their musical enjoyment. At around 430g, the earspeakers are of average weight for their size; you know you are wearing them but there is no sense of fatigue even after several hours of use. Unlike some headphone cables, the SR-X9000s flat cable did not give a feeling of adding weight and dragging the headphones downwards on the ears. A wide leather headband and finely-stitched leather earpads help prevent that clammy feeling that can sometimes occur when synthetic alternatives are used.

SOUND QUALITY

I'm not a great fan of HiFi test records, but when swapping kit in and out of a system I often find it useful to do a channel ID test just to make sure that I have connected everything up correctly. My channel ID of choice comes from Dr Chesky's Sensational, Fantastic, and Simply Amazing Binaural Sound

Show! album. In this test, Dr David Chesky explains that he is standing in a cathedral. As he speaks, he

walks closer and closer to the microphone until he ends up whispering in the listener's ear. I have used this track with several pairs of headphones but this was the first time I could have sworn that I actually felt Chesky's breath on my ear. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up. No one (I hope) buys headphones of the calibre of the SR-X9000s to listen to test records though and so it was time to move on to some proper music.

Electrostatic speakers have a reputation for being suited to classical music but I ignored this as a starting point and got stuck into Get Lucky from Daft Punk's Random Access Memories album instead. Heard on the radio, this is a fairly straightforward pop song but the SR-X9000s laid out all the subtle interplay between the guitars, bass, and drums, revealing the skill that went into the song's production. Sticking with the album, the track Giorgio By Moroder moves from a simple spoken word intro in a nightclub setting to an increasingly complex mix of electronic, electric, and acoustic instruments where

the drums become increasingly distorted until they turn into slabs of noise. I had wondered if this might







have taken the SR-X9000s out of their comfort zone but they rose to the challenge, effortlessly delivering the speed and attack of the transients as the drums morphed from acoustic to electronic.

Moving to a bit of reggae, if Linton Kwesi Johnson's Iron Bar Dub lacked some of the sense of moving air that you get from loudspeakers in a room, bass extension was deep and well controlled and LKJ's powerful vocals were clearly presented in front of the music before spiraling off in a heavily echoplexed dub style.

Finally, it was time to see how the SR-X900s fared with what many would consider their forte; classical music. I began with Alice Sara Ott's live recording of the solo piano version of Mussorgsky's Pictures At An Exhibition. In a piece that ranges from delicate single notes to complex chordal work, the piano held its position within the soundstage with the acoustics of St Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre around, in front, and behind it. Sticking with Pictures At An Exhibition I switched to an orchestral version, Leonard Bernstein with the New York Philharmonic. The change in the acoustic was clear to hear and the various sections of the orchestra were clearly laid out inside my head. Closing my eyes, it was easy to imagine being present at the recording.

CONCLUSION

Given STAX's reputation, a new flagship model naturally has high expectations to live up to. It's worth mentioning at this point that STAX had also supplied me with a pair of SR-L700 Mk2 earspeakers so that I would have a baseline to reference against. The SR-L700s were great - I'd have a pair in a heartbeat, but the SR-X9000s were just head and shoulders above them in every respect; build quality, comfort, and sound quality.

You need to be a seriously committed headphone user to consider the investment that a pair of SR-X9000s and accompanying amplifier involves but if you are, start saving up now because STAX's top earspeakers need to be on your audition list.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality:

Far too refined to shout, these earspeakers whisper

quality at every opportunity

Solidly built, but with an air of delicacy, you'll feel like you are indulging your ears with every use

Sound Quality:

Outstanding speed and dynamism

Bass is uncoloured and fast

Incredible level of detail will have you revisiting your music collection

Value For Money:

VFM does not really apply here! There is no world in which this product can be considered as a bit of a bargain. However, if you decide that you need them then nothing else will do.

You get what you pay for.

We Loved:

I genuinely loved everything about these earspeakers. However...

We Didn't Love So Much

The combined outlay required to purchase the SR-X9000s and accompanying SR-T800 amplifier will put them beyond the reach of all but the most committed, but that is an observation rather than a criticism.

Elevator Pitch Review: You don't build a reputation in the way that STAX has without continuously evolving and improving. The SR-X900 is the current expression of the best that the company has to offer. The headphone equivalent of a luxury car, it will be bought by those who can and dreamed of by those for whom it is beyond reach. And if like me, you are one of the dreamers, the more attainable SR-L700 Mk2 is a great product in its own right.

Price: US\$ 6 200. £5 195

SUPPLIED BY STAX





CAMPFIRE AUDIO SOLARIS STELLAR HORIZON IEM

hen you are sent a Campfire IEM and you know you're about to be amazed by its looks and performance. The Solaris "Stellar Horizon" comes at the top end of their large range of IEMs, all looking as amazing as those produced by Final, Noble Audio, Unique Melody, etc. They all look too good to be placed in the ear and look like jewelry, but looks are one thing, so would the Solaris Stellar Horizon IEMs sound 24-carat gold just like its appearance?

The Oregon-based company comprises 13 team members. Formed in 2015 they have been pushing the boundaries of housings and sound to make them more ergonomic, durable, and striking in looks. Even the paperwork is all done in-house, and the Solaris comes complete with a wooden box to store the beautiful-looking product. This isn't the first Solaris to appear, but this new replacement "Stellar Horizon" version is definitely the better looking and adds another £1100 to the price of the original.

Coming in at £2669 I put them to the test.

BUILD AND FEATURES OF THE CAMPFIRE SOLARIS STELLAR HORIZON

On opening the beautiful wooden box I was immediately impressed with the detail; a choice of three "marshmallow" and 3 silicon ear-tips, unbalanced 3.5mm plus balanced 4.4mm and 2.5mm silver plated Litz flat cables, Campfire Audio pin badge, a leather magnetic closing bag for the earphone, a smaller earphone bag to put the earbuds in for extra safety, a magnetic closing cable pouch for the other cables, some cleaning tools and a miniature plastic model of a hand which I still can't work out what it's for.

The IEM body has a brushed stainless-steel housing with brass accents, meaning that it is fairly heavy in the ears, so it is essential you use the correct ear-tips to keep them in your ears.

Inside there are 4 drivers; three custom Dual-Diaphragm balanced armatures – two high and one mid – plus a 10mm ADLC dynamic driver with radial venting. The visible end once in your ears has beautiful art deco custom PVD gold accents in laser-cut acrylic giving it the look of sophistication.

The Campfire Audio Solaris Stellar Horizon are an expensive in-ear monitor that promises a great deal sonically and is presented in a suitably luxurious package. But how do they perform in the real world?

Reviewed by Janine Elliot













The unit comes with an instruction book written in red ink on orange paper (why do people think this is a good idea? It is hard to read unless you're standing under a strong light!) What is nice is the certificate of ownership card just to make it feel even more special.

SOUND OF THE STELLAR HORIZON IEMs

The importance of fitting the correct eartips was apparent right from the start; having put the Solaris in my ear with the attached eartips gave a bass-less and predominately mid-frequency sound. Nothing to write home about until I actually changed the ear-tip so that it provided a proper seal around my ears to allow a better bass end (down to 5Hz apparently) and a flat frequency range all the way up. A tip; always try all the provided ear tips until you get the best sound! This was particularly important with the Solaris; very they are heavy and so you need to make sure the ear-tip will hold it in your ears!

I started the listening session with an old favourite. I'm partial to John Barry's 4-CD compilation of all his famous film music, and I was promptly whisked away to musical heaven. This IEM provided a tidier bass and a detailed and fast midrange. Campfire only states it going as high as 20kHz, but the top end was extremely extended and clear. Only an odd few times listening to music did I feel the sound could be a little bit "digital". The soundstage was excellent, as was the flat frequency bandwidth showing the tuning of the four drivers to be exceptionally good.

Turning to "Almost Like Being in Love" (Joe Stilgoe, 'Songs on Film', 24/192 Linn) gave an exceptional amount of detail and a wide soundstage from this live performance. The double bass was extremely agile and the cymbals were tight and extended in frequency, possibly the best I have ever heard on IEMs/headphones. Clarity was something this IEM excelled in; even the distorted guitars in "Old Greenwich Time" (Maeve O'Boyle 'All My Sins', Linn 24/192) just worked so controlled and transparent and almost beautiful, but certainly, once the synths and guitar supported the vocals everything was perfectly proportioned and timed. Indeed, the Stellar Horizon gave excellent separation of the instruments, making it easy to follow this piece, and indeed any other work I played.

So, too, with Louis Armstrong's "All the Time in the World" (24/96). This dated and iconic recording was tastefully and professionally performed by the Campfire.

"A Trace of Grace" (Michael Godhard and friends, DSD 11.2MHz) is a very open recording with guitars, followed midway with violin, brass, and sax to add weight. Listening to music is often confusing; we can want detail and openness of sound from sol-

id-state amps but also musicality that comes from valves, and it can mean we have to sacrifice one for the other. Here the music is transparent, fast, and detailed, but still has that musicality that we really need to make the music pleasurable. Only on a few occasions, I felt the Campfire just lost a minute speck of the musicality. But, would that put me off buying the IEMs? No way. These are easily worth the £2699 asking price, not just build quality and accessories, but also the epic performance.

Next to The Kinks "Misfits" (24/96). This track had excellent decay of the cymbals and tom-toms. The Solaris Stellar Horizon was equally good with quiet verses as it was with the powerful chorus. Bass was fluid and tops were precise. That agility with powerful sections was tested further in Nirvana's "Smells Like a Teen Spirit". Here the powerful distorted guitars and drums were so well controlled that I started to enjoy this album for the first time.

I wondered just how honest compressed MP3 tracks would sound, so tried several including Dream Theatre's "Repentance" and Mahler's iconic 8th Symphony complete with choir. I needn't have worried. The A&K SE180 DAP and the Campfire just worked so well together that the music flowed with clarity and detail giving little clues that this was indeed a compressed file. Vocals were fluid and instruments were carefully constructed to complete the sound painting. Only the occasional drum sounded a bit brash. Again with classics, Antal Dorati and the London Symphony Orchestra playing Beethoven's 'Wellington Victory' was surprisingly good considering this work is his equivalent to Tchaikovsky's later '1812 Overture', complete with canons and shotguns. But this really doesn't work on MP3, whatever IEM you might be using! The quiet sections were great, as were the triangle rattles, but the loud drums and brass followed by the canons and rifles at 03'50" just made the piece as hard for me to listen to as it would have taken them to record in the studio. The Campfire did its best and for that I am grateful. Playing the Sibelius Symphonies (Simon Rattle, DG 24/192) was much fairer on the Solaris, let alone my ears. This was very good, concluding my belief that this was indeed a superb IEM.

CONCLUSION

The Stellar Horizon gave me a chance to sit back and listen to music of all genres with equal enjoyment and excitement.

This is a stellar product with excellent detail, authority, and sensitivity. It just did things brilliantly. If it could be very slightly more musical on occasion, I would say this is the best IEM I have ever listened to

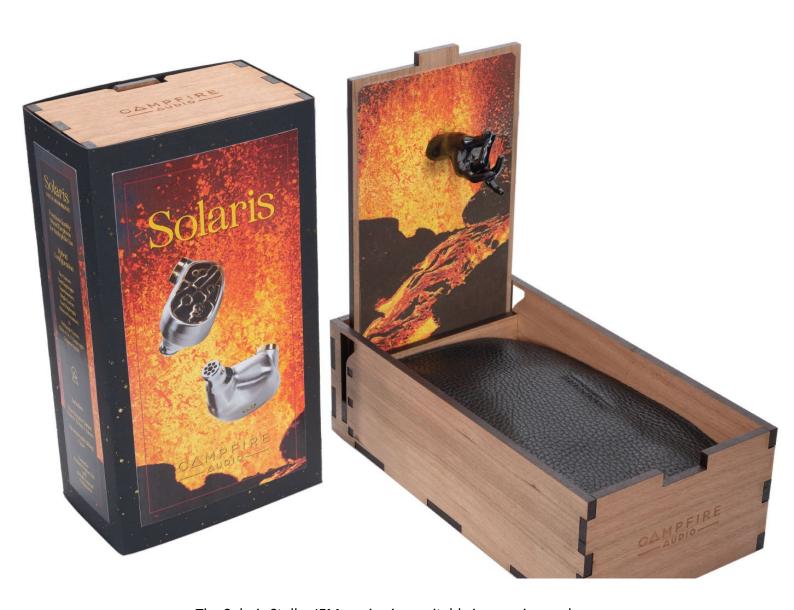
If you are in the market for a really excellent IEM (and remember this isn't even the top model in the Campfire portfolio) then you should definitely give











The Solaris Stellar IEMs arrive in a suitably impressive package











the Solaris Stellar Horizon a listen.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality:

Excellent design and build

Sound Quality:

An exciting and transparent performance, with masses of detail and an excellent soundstage

Value For Money:

£2669 is a lot of money but the sound quality is worth every penny

We Loved:

Transparency

Speed of performance

Bass extension

Excellent soundstage

Lowest distortion

Excellent accessories and product design

We Didn't Love So Much:

Just wish I could afford them!

Elevator Pitch Review: I'd expect a stellar performance from an IEM called Stellar Horizon, and I wasn't to be disappointed. This really was the best I have heard to date. Transparency, detail, and frequency response were all excellent, as I'd expect at this price. It even looked great, though its Stainless-Steel build made them rather heavy on my ears as well as my pocket – they come in at £2699.

SUPPLIED BY KS DISTRIBUTION





FINAL ZE8000IN EAR MONITORS

aving followed the 8000 range of headphones and wired IEMs from Final I was excited to hear that the company has brought out a top-of-the-range TWS (True Wireless Stereo) Bluetooth earphone. Coming in at £299 this is more directed at the true audiophile than the keep-fit runner, not that they wouldn't be delighted to use it. For me, lazily sat at home in my armchair with a cappuccino I was also delighted to try these out, not least because the ridiculous price of electricity and gas means I didn't need to turn on my leccy guzzling Class AB valves to listen to excellent music. Following on from the ZE2000 and ZE3000 this is their first flagship Bluetooth IEM from this Japanese company (not to be confused with the electrostatic loudspeaker company from the Netherlands).

Final was established in 2007. It began as a subsidiary of Molex, the American connector company, and in 2014 it went independent. Final sells its own high-end audio earphones and headphones as well as conducting component technology development, product planning, design, manufacturing, and sales of other companies' brands. Their products cover a wide price range, from excellent cheap units to the top-end 8000 series, which includes the planar magnetic flagship D8000 headphones with Air Film Damping System (AFDS) that I reviewed in 2022, and the Pure Beryllium diaphragm-driven flagship In-Ear wired Monitor, the A8000. The ZE8000 is the third in the series of Bluetooth IEMs and takes quality to a new level for the company. Indeed, it is labeled as "Remastering Your Music Listening Experience with 8K SOUND" suggesting the amount of musical detail and transparency is as detailed as the very best video quality, not that I listen in pixels. Final is certainly a prolific company with a wide range of products, each with its own distinctive looks, especially the IEMs such as the beautiful Lab and Piano Forte series.

Costing £299, the FINAL ZE8000 IEMs are a Bluetooth IEM with a few innovative features. Janine Elliot gives them a whirl.

Reviewed by Janine Elliot

BUILD, COMFORT, AND FEATURES OF FINAL ZE8000 IEMs

The ZE8000, like other products from the company, is also very distinctive in its appearance, and it is obvious that a lot of thought has gone into the design. Coming in white or black the electronics are kept in a long narrow 38mm rectangular bar in front of the unique earpieces containing the driver. The earpieces are "dual layered Type Q ear-tips", designed in two parts; the smaller front part is pushed into your ear canal and held in place by the larger outer ring in your concha. Clever design, though it does take a bit of getting used to. Final even created an "ear fitting" division at the company to look into good IEM comfort. In the initial attempts at fitting the units in my ears, I inadvertently











turned on and off the various noise canceling options on the ZE8000, as these are operated (as indeed are all functions) by pushing the rectangular bar. I quickly learned the best way to insert the units is by holding the top and bottom of the bar, though pushing hard into the ear was not quite so easy. After a few attempts, I quickly learned how to do it well, and once in your ear it is there to stay. The main feature of the Type Q double-tip design is to allow people with very small ears to wear the unit securely. It comes with 5 sizes of eartips (SS, S, M, L, LL). The smaller front ear-tip that fits into the canal has also been designed out of a softer rubber, meaning long listening sessions were possible without pain. Also of note is the fact that all the housing which touches your outer ear is made of soft silicone, so no hard plastic touches your ear resulting in discomfort.

As mentioned above, the unit does offer ANC (automatic noise cancellation) and there are 4 modes operated by pressing the left IEM; Active Noise Cancelling Mode (to get rid of ambient noise), Ambient Sound Mode (to blend music and ambient sound, allowing users to be aware of their surroundings while listening to music), Voice Through Mode (so that ambient sound is prioritized over music, meaning you can still have clear conversations without turning off the music), and Wind-Cut Mode (intended to eliminate wind noise captured by the microphones when it's windy!) Turning on an ANC can often degrade the music, and in the past I have switched these operations off, but the Final system was actually very good, and by offering four options controlled from the earpiece or from the downloadable app - this was a good idea to meet different needs. Whilst Final engineers conducted numerous experiments with equipment and evaluations with actual humans using minute Knowles MEMS (Micro ElectroMechanical Systems) microphones, they produced reasonable algorithms that even I would be happy to use. Having said that, I must admit that on trying the ANC whilst listening to music, during which my television blasted out voice, music, and effects in the background, the unit was very effective in lower frequencies but it did leave a quiet tizz on spoken voice in the background. I guess if the serious audiophile is using the ZE8000 he/she would probably turn off the television beforehand!

The ZE8000 app includes the Volume Step Optimizer which allows you to increase or decrease volume in smaller decibel steps than is usually set on your smartphone's volume control. However, most of my reviewing was done using an Astell and Kern SE180/SEM1/SEM4 DAP which works much smaller than 1dB steps. However, using this app on my Sony Xperia phone was a godsend.

The core of any IEM is the driver – or set of drivers. I have heard a few IEMs with 8 or more Knowles drivers that really lack bass and even clarity, so was happy to be presented here with a single 13mm ultra-low distortion driver. That is massive, especial-

ly for a Bluetooth unit. Consequently, bass was brilliant and tops were equally good. A lightweight aluminum-magnesium dome in the centre is injection molded onto a flexible special silicone surround, and a floating mechanism is used for the CCAW (copper-clad aluminium wire) voice coil. This makes it very lightweight. This also means very low total harmonic distortion. Indeed, Final claims the dynamic driver has the "lowest THD+N (Total Harmonic Distortion Plus Noise) in wireless earphones and IEMs".

Another important feature is that the amplification system onboard is Class-AB, which is known for its excellent balance between sound quality and power efficiency, rather than the more usual Class-D amplification. In testing, the audio sounded controlled and musical. The decoupling capacitors for digital signal processing are high-performance, low-distortion Polymer multilayer capacitors designed by the renowned Japanese manufacturer Rubycon. This achieves significantly lower distortion than a typical multilayer ceramic capacitor.

The unit has two microphones – one at the top and one at the bottom – that not only pick up the owner's voice but also any background noise so that it can be extracted from the overall sound.

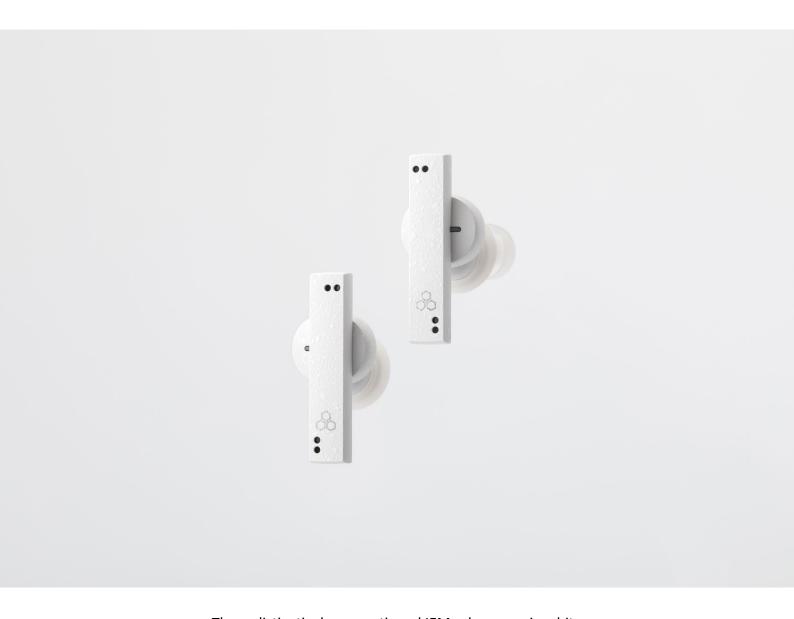
The ZE8000 supports SBC and AAC codecs, plus high-quality Qualcomm[®] aptX[™] and aptX[™] Adaptive codecs for wireless transmission up to 24bit/96Hz. The unit can also be used for gamers using Snapdragon Sound™ enabled devices. The unit is also Siri/Google Assistant friendly and obviously can receive phone calls. To complete the package the box comes with a charging case, ear tips (5 sizes), USB Type-C charging cable, plus an acoustic tool and dust filters to keep it clean and operating at its best. The IEM lasts for 5 hours between charges and, combined with the charging case, totals 15 hours. Charging times are 1.5 and 2 hours respectively. 15 hours total is nothing to write home about, as a cheap Cambridge audio Melomania 1 lasts for a total of 45 hours, but, in terms of sound satisfaction, it is well worth the extra charges and is still an average time. Worth noting, a 5 minute charging time will give 45 minutes of play, in case you want a quick listen to an album. The unit is also water-resistant to IPX4. Instructions are fairly good for such as small product, though details of charging time and technical specification etc was missing.

SOUND QUALITY OF FINAL EZ8000 IEMS

For the review I tried three sources to ascertain the sound quality and ease of setting up/using. My Sony Xperia phone worked really well, especially with the downloaded app, but most of my review was either with a Fiio DAP and for the main part the excellent Astell and Kern SE180 DAP. Bluetooth connection



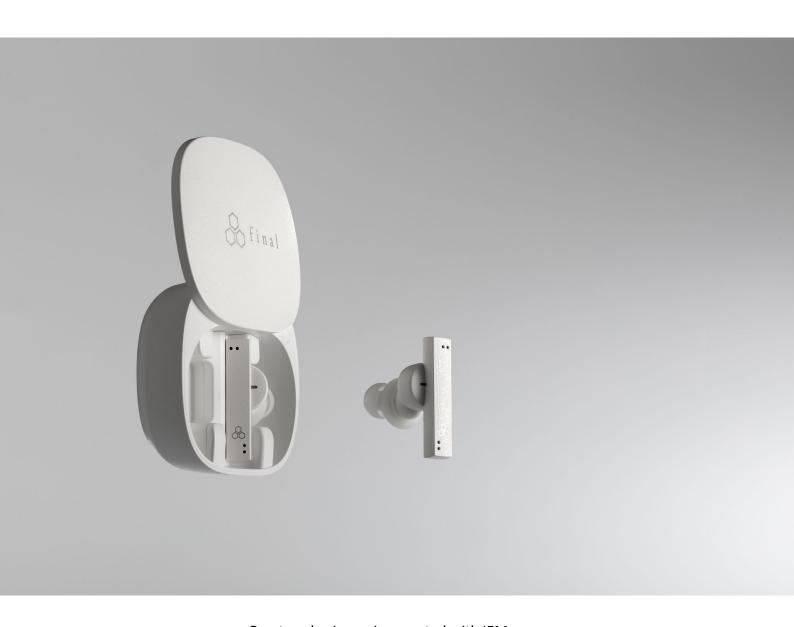




These distinctively proportioned IEMs also come in white







Great packaging as is expected with IEMs now





was easy, particularly with the SE180.

The reference to 8k music was something that stuck in my mind consistently during the review period. Music was just so clear and fast, with bass extended and accurate, that I could sense it was the equivalent difference between 1080p and 8K, if you really wanted to compare it with your TV. Listening to Karl Jenkins 'The Armed Man: A Mass' was so much more detailed and clearer than I have heard before on Bluetooth IEMs. A highly ambient album with an excellent range of dynamics, the IEM was very much in control of the proceedings. The music of Karl Jenkins is easily recognized, and his works are often repeated in various forms in different albums, a bit like the music of The Enid. Listening to both these artists through the ZE8000 I was highly engrossed and even able to pick up things I hadn't noticed before. Sometimes the extraction of detail took away a bit of the musicality, though it was still very good.

Similarly, turning to another composer whose works are equally recognizable, John Barry, I found myself surprised at the speed and transparency of the music. For a Bluetooth player, I was highly enamored with the detail and speed of the music. His music for the 007 films was so epic and the Final gave a very musical performance here, even for long listening sessions. That Class AB amplifier is no doubt coming to the fore here.

The opening to Pink Floyd's "Shine on you Crazy Diamond" has a beautiful synth melody and plenty of atmosphere and effects and the ZE8000 opened up the different sources succinctly whilst still providing an excellent orchestration of the music. The ZE8000 is very quiet in operation, so quiet sections were not spoiled by any background noise. The very deep bass entry at 4'26" just added great power and authority to the music, and was extremely well controlled, thanks to the large 13mm driver. At the other end, the cymbals similarly offered great precision.

Turning to 'Jazz' from Queen and "Don't Stop me Now", there was no stopping me from listening to this IEM; I just didn't want to take them off my ears. With excellent piano and top frequencies, everything was tight and transparent, though the distortion in the recording itself in places was noticeable. Instruments were perfectly placed in the soundstage. This was even more noticeable in the Binaural albums from Chasing the Dragon. Turning to 'Come Fly With Me' (STS), not only was the piano and top frequencies equally clear but the mid-band was excellent, too. 'The War of the Worlds' with Richard Burton speaking and Justin Hayward singing similarly showed that mid-band speech and vocals earned the title of "8000". Finally, Josh Groban's 'Closer' got me closer to the music than my stock wired IEM, convincing me that Bluetooth IEMs can be as good as wired. "All' Improvviso Amore" suddenly explodes with the orchestral entry before a relaxed vocal and guitar tune takes over. Wow, this

24bit/96kHz album filled my ears with an amazing burst of precision and musicality.

CONCLUSION

I didn't expect a Bluetooth IEM could sound better than my more expensive wired IEM, but I was proven to be wrong. This is a spectacular product that is not only excellent at all frequencies and all types of music but offers a highly transparent and fast performance. Once you get used to the unusual looks and fitting, this will reward your music collection with long listening sessions.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality:

Excellent design, build, and fit

Sound Quality:

An exciting and transparent performance, highly musical due to the Class AB amplification

Value For Money:

£299 gets you a lot of music per pound.

We Loved:

Transparency

Speed of performance

Bass extension

Excellent soundstage

Low distortion

We Didn't Love So Much:

Some might find the fit takes a bit of practice, but it's well worth it!

Elevator Pitch Review: If you think that Bluetooth IEMs aren't as good as wired, then you need to listen to these. The ZE8000 is the top-of-the-range wireless IEM from Final that comes in at just a pound less than £300. With clever design and a Class AB amplification I was so highly engrossed in music over the time I had them, that I didn't really wanted to give them back...

Price: £299

SUPPLIED BY KS DISTRIBUTION



LIMEMUSIC

NOT BORING BY HIFI PIG'S LIVE MUSIC ROUND UP BY OUR RESIDENT GIG GOER JOHN SCOTT



KULA SHAKER AT THE LIQUID ROOMS, EDINBURGH

You may well remember Kula Shaker from the Britpop explosion of the mid-nineties.

'ula Shaker emerged with their debut album K in 1996 just as the Britpop bubble was looking like it might finally burst. A handful of earwormy singles helped propel the album to the top of the UK charts but the critical backlash wasn't long in kicking in. The band was seen by many as a plaything for its entitled frontman Crispin (son of Hayley) Mills whose evident enthusiasm for Indian mysticism and Holy Grail mythology was considered to be thirty years past its sell-by date. The band split in 1999, re-forming ten years later, touring and releasing albums without, it seems, anyone really noticing.

Despite their recent low profile, Kula Shaker has drawn a sell-out crowd to The Liquid Room and the band seems to be out to have a good time. From the first notes of the early single Hey Dude, Crispin Mills throws himself into each song, whipping the crowd up, conducting sing-alongs, and throwing himself around the stage while slashing out rhythm and lead licks from his psychedelic Stratocaster.

Mills, bassist Alonza Bevan and drummer Paul Winterheart have recently reunited with original keyboard player Jay Darlington. The band are touring their latest album 1st Congregational Church of Eternal Love and Free Hugs, mixing new songs with tracks from across their catalogue and a couple of covers. New tracks like Whatever It Is (I'm Against It) and The Gingerbread Man show that the band has stuck firmly to their original template - sixties psychedelic-tinged pop rock. The Kinks, Beatles, and Stones are never too far away but the band respects their influences too much to descend into pastiche, John

Lennon's Gimme Some Truth fitting seamlessly into the setlist. The Prodigy's Narayan, for which Mills originally provided the vocals, is given a makeover that is more Woodstock than Glastonbury and Joe South's Hush, as filtered through Deep Purple's own cover, is driven by Jay Darlington's Hammond groove.

Big hit Tattva makes an interesting sing-along: "Tattva, mumble mumble mumble, Tattva!" as does the equally uncertainly-lyriced Govinda but the audience throws themselves in, undeterred. Kula Shaker are far from just a rich kid's plaything, they are a seriously good band and a great night out.



Not Boring

BUZZCOCKS & FROM THE JAM AT THE QUEENS HALL EDINBURGH



et a guitar, learn three chords, and start a band; the punk philosophy that started a revolution against the bloated excesses of prog. Making a racket with your mates was one thing but if you wanted to have a hit it helped if you had an ear for a good tune. Fortunately, in singer and guitarist Pete Shelley, Buzzcocks had a songwriter with pop music nous to match their buzz saw energy.

Sadly, Pete Shelley is no longer with us, and original bassist and drummer, John Maher and Steve Garvey, no longer play with the band but guitarist Steve Diggle has kept the flag flying with live performances and last year's album Sonics In The Soul.

While new songs like Senses Out Of Control, Manchester In The Rain, and Bad Dreams fit seamlessly into the setlist, it is obviously the classic album tracks and singles that the fans have come to hear. The band opens with What Do I Get and the pace never lets up from that point on. Unfortunately, poor sound results in Diggle's vocals being slightly muffled but the crowd compensates by singing along with favourites such as Fast Cars, I Don't Mind, Autonomy, and Orgasm Addict. As the band reaches a climax with Ever Fallen In Love (With Someone You Shouldn't've), the years just melt away.

Just like Buzzcocks, The Jam has a catalogue of classic songs. A Jam reunion has never been a realistic propo-

sition, with Paul Weller showing no interest in rejoining his bandmates to relive former glories, but bassist Bruce Foxton continues to keep the band's material alive in From The Jam.

Accompanied by Russel Hastings on guitar and vocals, Mike Randon on drums, and Andy Fairclough on keyboards, Foxton's distinctively melodic basslines are at the heart of the jukebox of timeless tunes that make up tonight's setlist. Opener Pretty Green is a reminder that the Jam took their inspiration from the early beat group days of The Who and The Small Faces. The Wellershaped hole in the band is admirably filled by Hastings who obviously loves these songs and knows them inside out (and has better hair). He has thankfully fully recovered from last year's heart attack and bristles with energy throughout the show.

With so many great songs to choose from, the gig cannons along with barely time to take a breath. Highlights include Start!, David Watts, That's Entertainment, A Town Called Malice and Martha Reeves and The Vandella's Heatwave. Whether required or not, a pause for breath is well deserved and then the band return for a killer encore of Eton Rifles, Down In The Tube Station At Midnight, Ghosts and Going Underground.

Two terrific bands banging out over thirty-five fabulous songs



Not Boring

THE MUSICAL BOX AT THE USHER HALL, EDINBURGH

Genesis "tribute" act The Musical Box plays and John Scott is there to take in the experience.



n 1974 Genesis released The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway, the most ambitious album of their career.
Sprawling over two LPs, it saw the band toughening up their sound on tracks like Broadway Melody Of 1974 and Back In N.Y.C and experimenting with sound textures with a bit of help from Brian Eno. While the band had established a repertoire of storytelling songs, with the characters brought to life on stage with the help of singer Peter Gabriel's costumes and props, this was Genesis's first (and only) fully-fledged concept album. The surrealistic, impressionistic story sees Puerto Rican street punk Rael transported into a psychological underworld in which he is tested and ultimately transformed. Ironically, the band also found themselves tested during the recording of the album and Gabriel left the band after the album was toured.

The tour for The Lamb began two days after the album's release. In common with most rock fans, Genesis audiences knew what they liked and liked what they knew so playing the entire album from start to finish was a brave move. The tour was also the most technically complex that the band had attempted with 1,200 images projected onto three screens throughout the performance and Gabriel's Slipperman costume proving difficult to sing in. Ticket sales suffered and the last two dates of the tour were canceled. If the tour was a disappointing end to Gabriel's tenure in the band, the album is now regarded by many as the best that Genesis recorded during his time with them.

Forty-nine years on, it's unlikely that anyone in the audience for The Musical Box's performance of The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway tonight is unfamiliar with the album. The band prides itself on recreating Genesis shows as faithfully as possible. Happily, this means that the band has permission to use the aforementioned 1, 200 images and can recreate the stage production exactly as it was back then. Less happily, Gabriel's use of make-up to simulate Rael's Puerto Rican skin tone now seems inappropriate and unnecessary and it is disappointing that the band has chosen to retain it.

As the lights go down and the familiar keyboard intro to the album's title track begins, we are transported back to 23 April 1975 when Genesis brought The Lamb here to The Usher Hall. In common with Genesis at this time, guitarist François Gagnon, bassist Sébastien Lamothe, keyboardist Ian Benhamou, and drummer Marc Laflamme remain seated behind their instruments for most of the show. Singer Denis Gagné emerges from a simulated burst of sidewalk steam and the story begins. In case you haven't seen the show or are unfamiliar with the album I won't spoil the plot; it's a bit like one of those dreams where you turn up naked at school for an exam you haven't taken the class for, but a lot more sophisticated.

Musically, The Musical Box is spot on. François Gagnon nails all of Steve Hackett's guitar tones as does lan Benhamou with Tony Banks' keyboard playing. Marc Laflamme has a difficult job to do in filling Phil Collins' boots but impresses throughout and Sébastien Lamothe juggles guitar,

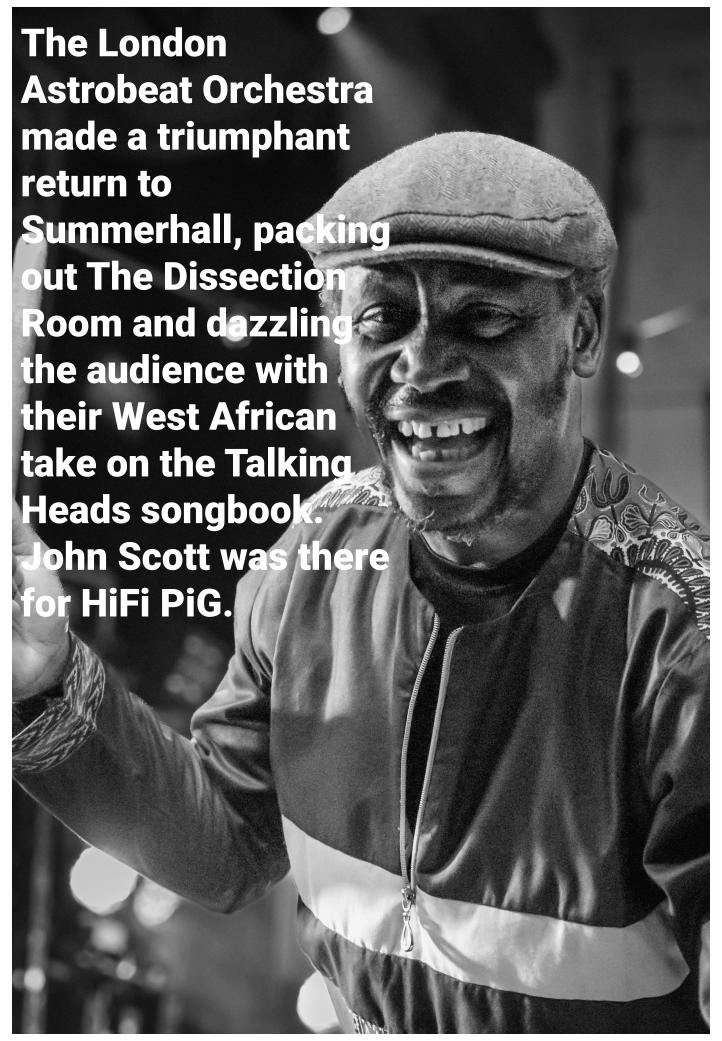


bass, and bass pedals admirably. If I have any criticism, it is that the band, in trying to recreate the Genesis experience as authentically as they can, failed to bring any of their own personality to the performance. Similarly, Denis Gagné's attempts to mimic Gabriel during the spoken interludes don't really come off and I'd

rather have seen him break character at these points.

This small criticism aside, it was a real joy to see and hear The Lamb played live in its entirety. Just as Genesis did at the time, the band finish off the evening with rousing versions of The Musical Box and

Watcher Of The Skies. Rumour has it that this is the last time that The Musical Box will tour The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway show so if you are a Genesis fan, I recommend that you get along to one of the remaining shows. If like me, you were too young to see it the first time around, it's an experience not to be missed.





utside, it's a chilly Edinburgh evening but with the first notes of Burning Down The House we are transported to a long, hot Congolese night, full of sinuous grooves and non-stop dancing. Julian Burdock on lead vocals, guitar and electronics, provides a rootsy, bluesy counterpoint to Jeannot Bel's intricate filigree guitar lines while Mosi Conde' kora floats an extra layer of rhythmic intensity on top. This multi-stringed interplay is anchored by tight, propulsive drumming from Felix Ngindu and ever-changing melodic basslines from Edd Bateman. In the hands of less skilled musicians, this could end up as a hot mess but these guys leave enough space to allow the music to groove.

All of the songs played tonight are

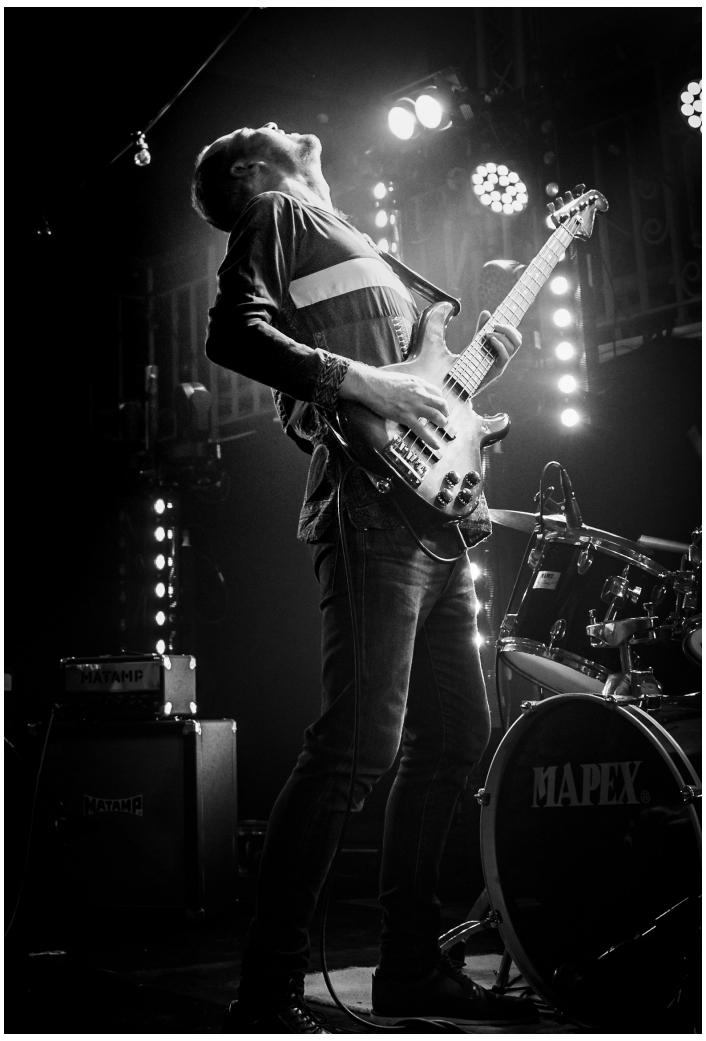
now more than forty years old and only one, Once In A Lifetime, was a hit. While some of us in the audience are old enough to remember them the first time around, many are not. It's pleasing and surprising to see some of the youngest audience members singing along, word-perfect, to even some of the more obscure songs in the setlist.

The band stretch out Life During Wartime, Once In A Lifetime and Girlfriend is Better. Mosi whips up the audience with some cowbell syncopation, jumping down into the crowd to conscript a willing bunch of volunteers for an on-stage danceathon.

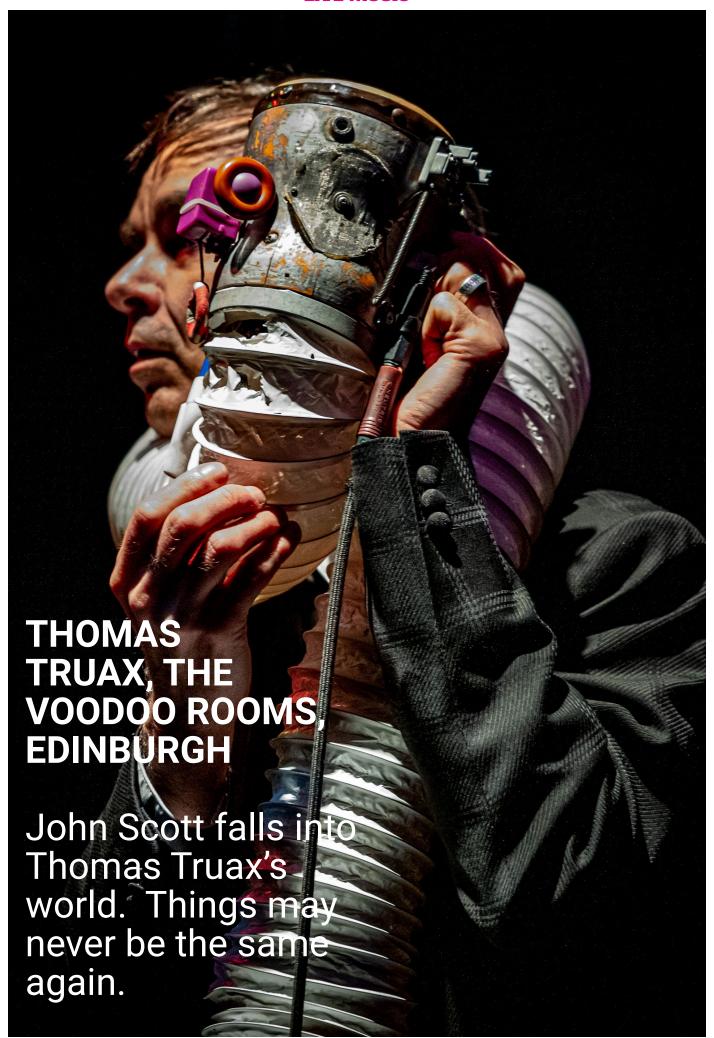
After a well-deserved break, Julian returns to the stage. A song emerges from a looped rhythm guitar riff and

a bed of electronic percussion. Mosi sparks off some kora licks and Julian adds a lead guitar line while scat singing on top. It's Psycho Killer, Jim but not as we know it. They are joined by the rest of the band and move into This Must Be The Place, picking up the pace as they go. The King Of The Cowbell is back and can't resist getting down among the audience again.

The evening tops off with Take Me To The River featuring some fabulous drum fills from Felix before the familiar Edinburgh encore chant of "One more tune!" brings the band back for a joyous Road To Nowhere. As the band leaves the stage, a young lady beside me with a huge grin on her face declares this to be the best night of her life. Right now, in the moment, it's impossible to disagree.



Not Boring





homas Truax wrong-foots us from the outset, appearing not on stage but in the doorway of the venue's kitchen. Sporting illuminated spectacles and lofting a set of chimes above his head he processes around the room, moaning wordlessly into a metal tubelike a steampunk shaman conducting a purification ceremony.

In suit and tie, Truax is wiry and urbane and wears an expression of mild bemusement; imagine David Byrne unable to remember where he left his car keys. He introduces us to two of his bandmates for the evening. Mother Superior is not so much a drum machine as a mechanical drummer, a percussive automaton fashioned from bicycle wheels, chains and levers. The Hornicator looks on from the other side of the stage patiently waiting to be tapped, strummed and serenaded, a conspiratorial echo chamber for Truax's songs.

Truax recently recorded an album, Dream Catching Songs, with celebrated drummer Budgie (The Slits, The Creatures, Siouxsie and The Banshees). He was concerned that Budgie and Mother Superior might not get on then later worried that she, Budgie, and the Hornicator might form a trio and oust him from the ensemble.

In a live setting Truax, Mother Superior, and The Hornicator have no need of anyone but themselves. Truax's electrified resonator guitar is filtered through a Roland guitar synthesiser and a loop pedal to provide complex layers of sound. Mother Superior sits out with admirable restraint when not required to play (try getting a human drummer to do that). The Hornicator, when called on to contribute, rests in Thomas's arms like a languid dance partner, offering up its brazen body to the music.

Before we know it we are immersed In Thomas Truax's world. His songs range from the serene to the surreal,

philosophical to profound. If Twin Peaks' Red Lodge had an open mic night, Truax would most likely be the warm-up guy. Everything's Going To Be Alright insistently assures us that we will be okay, despite all evidence to the contrary. Truax breaks off one song to tell us that a bit of audience participation will be required, the sing-along couplet revealing itself to be a tongue twister of alarming intricacy.

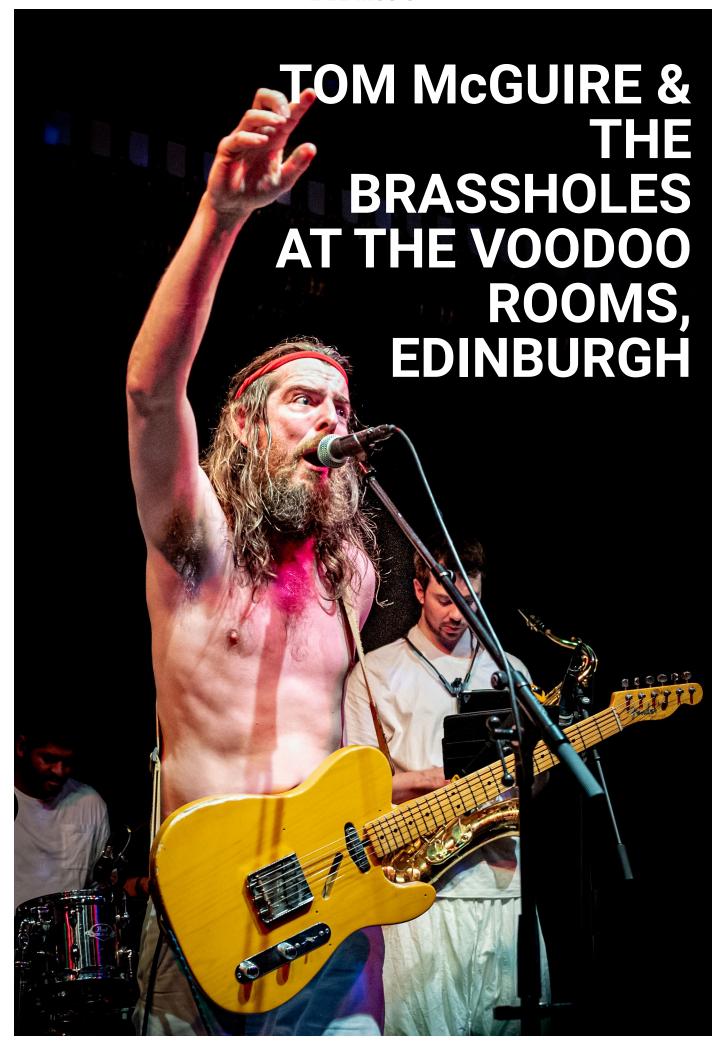
Each full moon, Truax releases snippets of songs and spoken narratives often chronicling the goings-on of the inhabitants of Wowtown. Thomas unplugs his guitar and jumps down from the stage to belt out Full Moon Over Wowtown, rushing through the audience to stand on a chair at the back of the room in a not entirely successful attempt to shine "moonlight" from the headstock of his guitar onto the ceiling.

Back on the stage, a portable hand fan of the type that invariably breaks or runs out of batteries within minutes of being taken on holiday is put to much better use in producing a mandolin effect on the lovely and poignant tale of The Butterfly & The Entomologist. The evening climaxes in a near cacophony of looped noise before Truax introduces The Stringaling which appears to be fashioned largely from a tumble dryer extractor hose for the epic Whistling In Your Sleep. We finish up with the frankly nuts Beehive Heart which features more novelty eyewear, deployed this time as much for its sonic qualities as its visual appeal (I don't possess the descriptive powers to do this justice – just go Google Beehive Heart).

You know that you have seen something special when total strangers are falling over themselves at the end of the show to rave to each other about what they have just seen. Thomas Truax is still a bit of a well-kept secret but he's the cult that everyone should join.



Not Boring





void the funk, the funk's gonna get you anyway! advised Defunkt on their 1982 album Thermonuclear Sweat. There is no possibility of avoiding the funk tonight even should you wish to; Tom McGuire & The Brassholes have brought the funk with them in great big huge buckets labeled EXTRA FUNKY FUNK. If you don't want to get funked tonight then you are simply in the wrong place.

The band (Tom McGuire – Guitar vocals, Luca Pisanu- bass, Moss Taylor – keys, Micah Johnston – drums, Liam Shortall – trombone, Mateusz Sobieski & Michael butcher – saxophones) arrive on stage in baggy white trousers and white tee shirts. Tom tosses what appears to be a hastily-scribbled setlist on an equally-hastily torn-off bit of cardboard onto the stage; the first indication that this may not be a man overly concerned with the professional standards of your average touring musician.

Tom McGuire & The Brassholes recently released a new album, Stay Rad, which they are showcasing tonight. They kick off their set with the opening track D.R.E.A.D. One

thing becomes immediately apparent: The Brassholes are not just tight. The Brassholes are tighter than an Aberdonian in a cost-of-living crisis. The Brassholes are tighter than Tom Jones' trousers. The Brassholes are...well, you get the idea.

At first thought, Scotland may not seem the natural environment in which The Funk might thrive. Think again though; from Lulu through The Sensational Alex Harvey Band, The Average White Band, the claymore-wielding Jesse Rae, and the itchy, scratchy Orange Juice – cut them and a little bit of The Funk, or at least its close cousin, The Groove, bleeds out. The Brassholes take all of this heritage and quite simply wipe the floor with it.

"We're from Glasgow" announces
Tom. Unusually for an Edinburgh gig,
no one boos; not even ironically. A
straw poll later in the show reveals
that about 80% of the audience have
seen the band before so they know
exactly what they are in for. Audience participation is actively encouraged, whether it's an improvised scat
singing/trombone call-and-response
duet or Tom casually handing his guitar down from the front of the stage

to be looked after while he does a quick changeover.

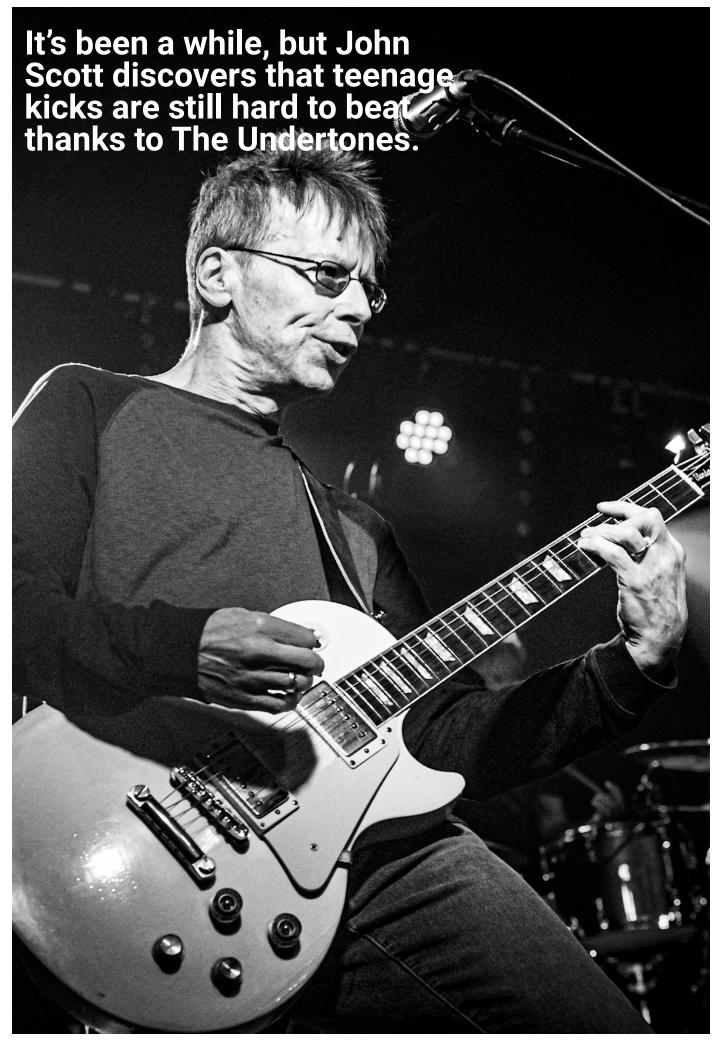
Songs fly by in a blur of sheer fun, making it hard to identify standouts but the pinpoint precision riffing of Standout recalls Frank Zappa putting The Mothers Of Invention through their paces. Towards the end of the gig, keyboard player, Moss Taylor, leaps from the stage into the crowd for a bout of frenzied dancing. The choice of encore is decided by the audience by proportionate volume of cheers, or at least it is until someone boos instead.

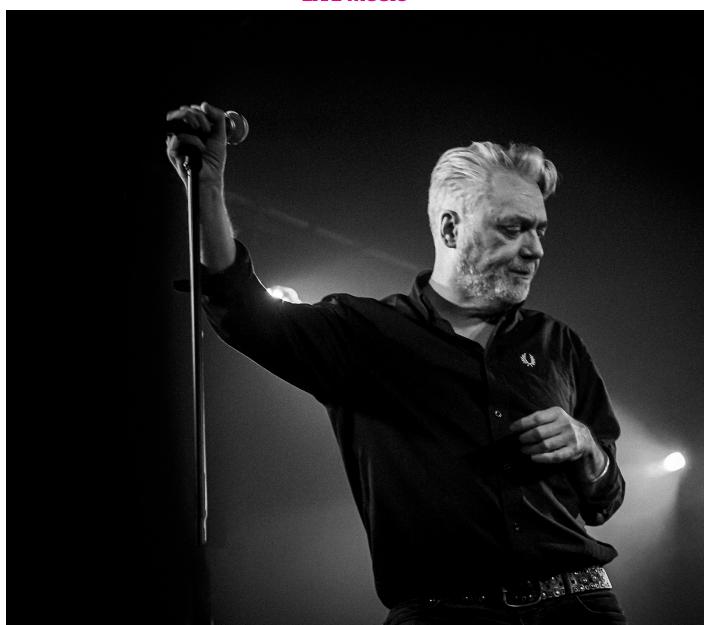
"Alright," says Tom, "let's do it by boos instead". Do You Still Got Your Soul is met with utter silence and is therefore deemed the winner. The song is pretty much a distillation of The Brassholes' philosophy and as saxes and trombone take centre stage, the evening ends like a funked-up, free-form New Orleans funeral.

Tom McGuire and The Brassholes may well be appearing at a venue or festival near you over the summer. Don't miss them, they are a funking blast.



Not Boring





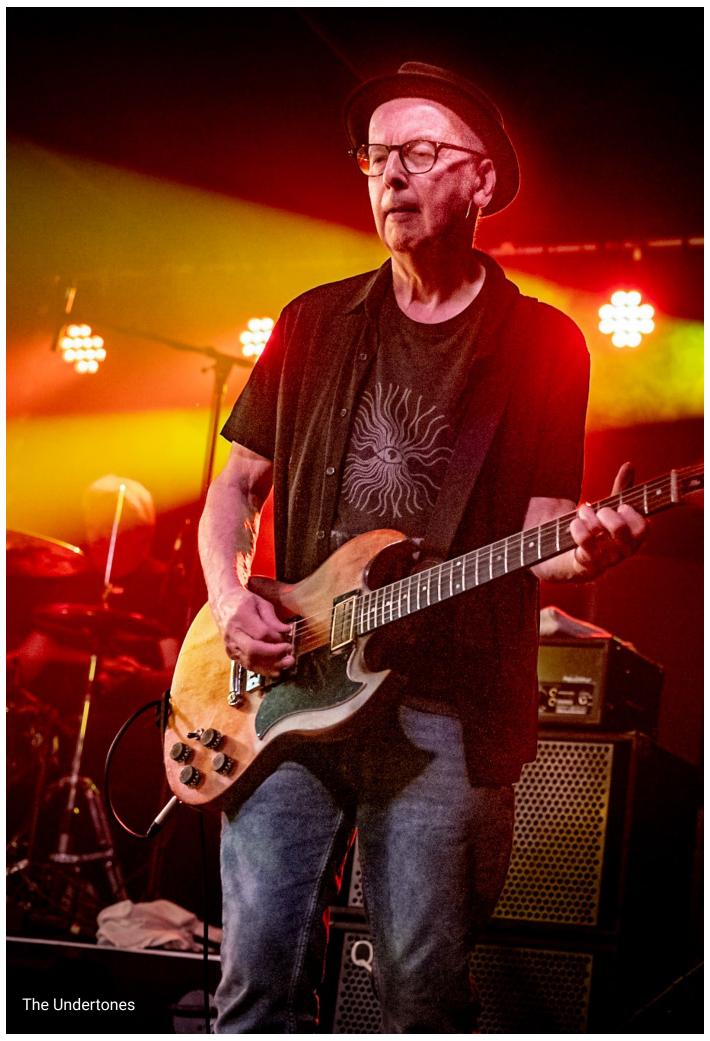
If the hallmark of a great band is the quality of its singles collection (and I think it is) then The Undertones rank amongst the greatest. In the five years between 1978 and 1983, they released fourteen A-sides, each a perfectly polished pop gem, their accompanying B-sides equally precious. The band also boasted a singer, Feargal Sharkey, whose distinctive vocals made the band instantly recognisable. When Sharkey left the band after 1983's The Sin Of Pride, it seemed likely that we had seen the last of The Undertones but a reformation in 2003 with new frontman, Paul McLoone, proved successful and the band has continued to tour and record ever since.

Tonight's sold-out gig sees the band pack twenty-eight songs into 90 minutes (a further three encores were dropped due to the venue's curfew). Drawing heavily on those classic songs, the setlist also features album favourites from both the Sharkey and McLure iterations. From the opener Girls Don't Like It, the pace rarely lets up. After more than forty-five years of playing together, Derry's finest are tightly honed. A fan at the front holds up a banner with the request: "Can I play guitar on Teenage Kicks?" "Even John can't play it, it's not easy" ripostes bassist Michael Bradley, gesturing to John O'Neil, guitarist and the writer of the song in question. Bradley is of course gleefully doing his pal a disservice. John O'Neil and his brother and co-guitarist, Damian, trade riffs and licks like a punk-pop Ron and Keith, Damian, in particular, adding lightning-fast ornamentations to their seemingly simple but deceptively complex songs.

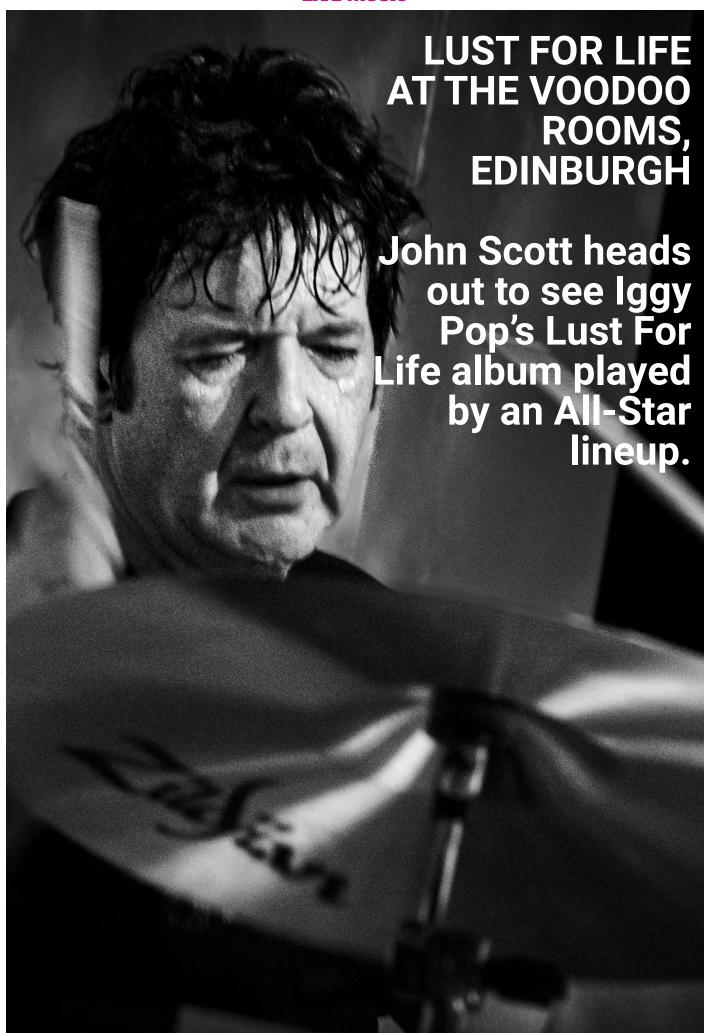
If it seems impossible to imagine these songs sung by anyone other than Feargal Sharkey then that's a notion that quickly evaporates. Paul McLoone may share something of Sharkey's tone but he has an easy, swaggering self-confidence and sense of fun that allows him to make the songs his own. His more-camp-than-Jagger hip swivels and hand gestures are so self-deprecatingly ironic that's impossible not to love him for them.

The highlights are of course those peerless singles: You've Got My Number (Why Don't You Use it), The Love Parade, Jimmy Jimmy, It's Going to Happen. It almost seems impossible to remember that there was a time when Teenage Kicks did not exist. If any other band had a song as iconic as Teenage Kicks (and few do) they would surely save it for the encores, but it arrives mid-set and such is the quality of the Undertones' songbook that the songs that follow it are undiminished by its magnificence.

The encores may be cut short but we have been far from short-changed. My Perfect Cousin sees us out ("his mother bought a synthesiser, got The Human League in to advise her": still genius). My only regret is that it has taken me until now to see The Undertones. If you haven't seen them, don't pass up the opportunity.



Not Boring





ggy Pop leapt from cult status to overnight ubiquity thanks to the opening seconds of Danny Boyle's 1996 film Trainspotting and its use of Iggy's song Lust For Life. Tonight we are here in Edinburgh's Voodoo Rooms, literally a stone's throw away from where those iconic scenes were filmed, to celebrate Iggy's Lust For Life album in its glorious, hedonistic entirety.

Originally the Band assembled for this project was intended to be headed up by bassist Tony Fox Sales who with his brother Hunt formed the rhythm section on the album. Unfortunately, Tony is unable to travel at the moment so stepping into the breach comes former Sex Pistol Glen Matlock who has also worked with Iggy in the past. Most of the all-star band have close connections with Iggy and/or David Bowie: Blondie Drummer Clem Burke has played previously with both Iggy and Matlock; guitarist Kevin Armstrong has recorded with Iggy and Bowie and headed up Bowie's band at Live Aid; second guitarist Luis Correia has backed Bowie guitarist Earl Slick and keyboard player Florence Sabeva tours with Heaven 17.

Perhaps the most surprising addition to the band's lineup is vocalist Katie Puckrick who, if you know her at all, you will know as a presenter on the 1980s TV show The Word. Katie has also danced with Micheal Clark's ballet company and Pet Shop Boys and Sung with Sparks. If she seems an unlikely Iggy Pop avatar, she soon shows that she can bring an energetic, enthusiastic and engaging

presence to tonight's performance. A future as a glam rock pocket rocket goddess could well be on the cards.

As Clem Burke launches the unmistakable drum beat intro to Lust For Life, we are thrust headlong into the album. Unsurprisingly, Burke is an absolute machine; a whirlwind of machine gun drum rolls and hi-hat flurries. While the whole album really comes alive in a live setting, standouts include Sixteen's slashing guitars, a swaggering The Passenger, and an epic Turn Blue ("Jesus?, this is Katie").

Almost before we know it we are at the end of the album. The second half of the gig features some more solo Iggy (Sister Midnight, Nightclubbing and Funtime from The Idiot), a bit of Stooges (I Wanna Be Your Dog and No Fun) a tribute to Television's Tom Verlaine (Kingdom Come) and a little bit of Blondie (Rip Her To Shreds).

Both the band and the audience are clearly having a great time. Katie takes a break to let Glen Matlock take vocals on Iggy's Ambition (he reckons his version is better), his own Head On A Stick, and an inevitable but entirely welcome Pretty Vacant.

What might have seemed an unlikely prospect has been an absolute triumph, only bettered if Iggy himself had put in an appearance. No Fun? No chance.



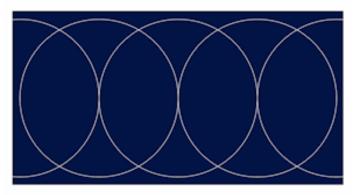


Not Boring

JUST ONE VERSE

Spiritualized®

Ladies and gentlemen we are floating in space



ш

1 tablet 70 min

hen I came up with the concept of pulling a lyric from a tune that had a profound effect on me, this verse by Spiritualized was the first one that came to mind. It's a track I play a lot, mainly in the form of the Chemical Brothers' remix.

The original cut of I Think I'm In Love is the third track from Spiritualized's third album "Ladies and Gentlemen, We Are Floating in Space" released on Dedicated way back in June of 1997. It's a record that can loosely be associated with the shoegaze movement.

In the context of the whole song this, verse fills me with sadness. It's conjures images of a junky, or soon to become junky, sat alone in an empty room with bare wooden floors, and with sunshine streaming through the windows catching the dust in the room to create beams of golden light that illuminate the unfortunate person sat with his drug paraphernalia and falling in love with dope to the exclusion of everything and everyone else.

Essentially (to me) it is a love letter to heroin and the oblivion to the world outside the room that the dope apparently brings.

JUST ONE STATE OF THE STATE OF

Love in the middle of the afternoon Just me and my spike and my arm and my **spoon** Feel the warmth of the sun in the room But I don't care about you and I've got nothing



COCKTAILS WITH TERRY



he recordings discussed here are not of "audiophile" or demonstration quality, but for a variety of reasons have captured my imagination at this particular moment, and as with the cocktails described below inspired by the music, I would ask that they be enjoyed responsibly, and without any unnecessary fuss if either is not completely to taste

A brief introduction:

The company I work for went into lockdown very early into the pandemic. This meant that all who could work from home did so. As a result of the surprisingly high level of business the company enjoyed during those otherwise difficult times, I found myself regularly working ten, twelve, fourteen, sometimes even sixteen-hour days. At a certain point something had to give, and steps needed to be taken to break this unhealthy routine. So, I set a string of lights along my balcony's railing to turn on at 18:00 to signal the end of the business day and to begin making a cocktail in celebration of that fact. I began posting the cocktails to social media, made using locally sourced ingredients whenever possible to support in some small way local producers and businesses here in my hometown of Malmö Sweden during the pandemic. These posts came to the attention of the fine folks at HiFi PiG, which led to their invitation to submit articles pairing music and cocktails for Not Boring by HiFi PiG.

THE MUSIC

Music is memory, whether in the making or the recalling. I recognise that this is more than a well-worn cliché, but as I write, a notification has come into my news feed of a Guardian editorial written by a man who coming out of a coma had no memories until hearing a particular song, at which point all his memories came flooding back.

And this is in my mind as I think of how the sunny throwback pop of the recently released album "Oas" (Oasis) by Dina Ögon (Your Eyes) has stormed across wintry Sweden like a series of welcome spring showers.

This may be because spring seems to be unusually slow in coming this year, with this sense only heightened by Sweden's meteorological office announcing that spring had technically arrived (officially defined by ten straight days of temperatures above freezing) just before the winter's worst snowstorm hit the entirety of this very long country.

The music of Dina Ögon reminds me, and anyone for whom I played it, of summers in the 70's spent lounging around lake cabins in the sun drinking ice cold beer or delightfully simple, refreshing cocktails while listening to equally simple but satisfying pop songs played again and again and again.

My friend Wendell used to back his station wagon up to the boat dock and plop his all-in-one system consisting of turntable, cassette deck and 8-track player down on the tailgate to play from the milk crates filled with some of the best music we could ever have wanted to listen to again, and again, and again.

The first two singles from Dina Ögon's album, Oas and Mormor, bring this to mind as they seem to be in heavy rotation on every radio station in Sweden. Cafes and bars have it featured on their playlists, to the point where a recent meal was accompanied by the full album played through three straight times. Their spring concerts are completely sold out, leaving me without much desired tickets to the local venues they are playing, with announcements of summer festival appearances influencing many summer schedules, including mine.

When Gaffa, Scandinavia's largest music and culture magazine, listed Dina Ögon's first album as one of the best Swedish albums of 2021, they described the band's sound as having: "A strong nostalgic vibe, a summer long ago. The heat and sweaty studio sessions taken from California's 70s. The sun-bleached feeling and the Fleetwood Mac-like idea of creating smooth music that still feels. All that is in Your Eyes"

And while the band describes their music "a love child between Fleetwood Mac, Khruangbin and obscure Motown b-sides," their sound clearly echoes 70's Swedish pop. Particularly bringing this to mind is the recording style of lead singer Anna Ahnlund's vocals, recreating the sound of ABBA's Agnetha and Frida's voices run through the world-famous echo chamber at Metronome / Atlantis studio in Stockholm where the early ABBA hits were recorded. And while "Oas" was not recorded at that iconic studio (although they may have used an "Atlantis studio echo chamber" plug-in when doing so) the band has recorded live to video several songs from both of their albums. These are available on YouTube at the playlist linked below.

THE COCKTAIL

Inspired by thoughts of my favourite summer drink during the 70's, combined with a promotional image of the band holding cut glass tumblers of cocktails, I decided that the best thing for listening to the album would be a Greyhound; a simple two ingredient drink of grapefruit juice and vodka, and one we thought to be so much more sophisticated than the common Screwdriver back in the day... what did we know, we were very young.

COCKTAILS WITH TERRY



This led to the further thought of a Greyhound cocktail with a HiFi PiG twist of using pink grape-fruit juice. However, I had no fresh pink grapefruits readily at hand, and necessity being the mother of inspired invention, used two varieties of blood oranges, Tarocco and Moro, that I did have available, and in effect representing the sound of Anna's doubled voice. Pairing this with hometown Malmö Purity vodka and a little bit of homemade blood orange simple syrup for essential harmony of ingredients results in what is in effect a really good blood orange screwdriver, here called I Dina Ögon (In Your Eyes):

THE RECIPE

2 parts Purity vodka

4 parts pink grapefruit or blood orange juice

1 part blood orange simple syrup

1 part sparkling water

Garnished with black currant and lingonberries - optional

Non-alcoholic version, for those no alcohol drinking HiFi PiGs:

4 parts pink grapefruit juice

1 part blood orange syrup
1 part apple cider vinegar
1 part sparkling water
Garnished with black currant and lingonberries optional

Note: to make the simple syrup, simply bring to a boil equal parts fresh squeezed blood orange juice and castor sugar, and then let cool.

MORE MUSIC, MEMORIES AND ANOTHER COCKTAIL

This being Sweden, warm sunny days tend to have a cool breeze and a touch of Swedish melancholy, with the album reflecting this in "Mormor" ("Grandma"):

Grandma, I always saw the moon in your eyes

Mormor jag såg alltid månen i din blick

But I never understood what was meant by it
Men jag förstod aldrig vad det var som menades
med den
Now I know grandma
Nu vet jag mormor
That look
Den där blicken
What was it you wanted to tell me
Vad det var du ville säga mig
Now I know grandma
Nu vet jag mormor
That look
Den där blicken
What it was
Vad det var

Bringing to my mind being in my early teens and sitting on the back steps of the family farm in North Dakota after a hard warm summer's day of work with my Grandpa Thor. We would gaze off into the vast western horizon to predict the weather for the coming day and to determine if we would be working the fields or finding other things to do. Before getting seated, my Grandpa would reach into a boot of a never worn pair left by the back door for as long as I could remember to remove a bottle of blackberry brandy. He would always insist it was to help ease the muscle pain he felt, and as he shared a small portion with me would always say, "Let's not tell Grandma..." as he looked to the setting sun.

Mormor could well wind up being my favourite song of 2023. The subject of what was undoubtedly my favourite song of 2022 also featured the memory of a grandparent, Madison Cunningham's extraordinary "Life According to Raechel," from her stand out album Revealer, a song choked up on memory, with references to Joni Mitchell's Both Sides Now, Little Green, and The Last Time I Saw Richard, as well as the Beatles' "Let It Be", all songs of recollection and

COCKTAILS WITH TERRY

regret, longing, and loss:
"Busy hands, I'll set 'em down
To say I love you right out loud
I'll bet you're making heaven laugh
But it feels like tears and memories are all we have"

I was so taken with this song, not being able to get it out of my mind and finding myself humming it loud enough for people in airport security lines to turn around to look me in the eye, with a smile I might add!

It was my friend Pål Bråtelund that confirmed for me that I was not alone in feeling that this recording is a gem that immediately brings tears at every listen. In its motifs and timing, he hears a bit of Elvis's version of Willie Nelson's "Always on My Mind," another classic of heartache and acceptance. And while his validation confirmed for me my connection to the track's universal themes Madison so artfully expresses through both the lyric and the extraordinary production, the real reason for mentioning him here is his role as co-founder, with Sarah Stuart, of Musifée, an online magazine and playlist collection.



Pål studied music at Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts, worked for Tidal and works now at SPARWK assisting artists in creation and the navigation of the global music environment. This experience, combined with his own innate musical sense, informs the articles and playlists that are engaging and thought provoking, going far beyond the usual curated algorithms. It has long form interviews with people behind the music. And handpicked playlists that can be used across the major streaming services. So, check out new releases or lots of great playlists on Musifée at the link below.

THE COCKTAIL

While it would have been easy enough to simply suggest a shot of blackberry brandy, I wanted to honour both my grandmothers and grandfathers: for Florence and Esther, elderflower vinegar, to suggest both their love of flowers and the general aroma of their preferred perfumes; for Thor and Ted the blackberry shrub and birch-sap whisky, as both took me fishing on the lake north of their farms ringed with beautiful birch trees.

THE RECIPE

3 parts Blackberry Shrub (in this case made with Malmö Vinägarfabrik Fläderblomma Vinägar – elderflower - vinegar)

1 part Whisky (in this case Mackmyra Björksav – birch sap - Swedish Single Malt Whisky)
2 parts sparkling water

Non-alcoholic version simply skip the whisky, as a shrub with sparkling water is refreshment enough.

Note: for a quick shrub, simply blend one part each fruit and water in a blender, then bring to boil that liquid with one part sugar, and when that liquid has cooled add one half part apple cider vinegar.

THE LINKS

Buy/Stream Dina Ögon Oas
Dina Ögon Atlantis Studio live recordings playlist
Play a beautiful live recording of "Life According to
Raechel" recorded at Sonic Ranch Big Blue
Check out Musifée

With the hope you enjoy both the drink and the music during a great summer! Terry

Please drink responsibly and never drink and drive

Drinkaware.co.uk

YOUR HIFI HOROSCOPE

Gasp in wonder as OUP audiophile astrologer foretells your Hifi future

Aries March 21 to April 20

On Saturday, an impetuous combination of red wine and online auctioneering results in an unplanned audio upgrade. Sunday sees a growing sense of dread. Wednesday welcomes the arrival of 25 m2 of Sorbothane sheeting. Marital discord ensues.

Taurus April 21 to May 21

An unexpected power cut on Tuesday offers an opportunity to spend rare quality time with your significant other. Apparently, they don't work at Woolworths any more. Marital discord ensues.

Gemini May 22 to June 21

A busy week is eased by a lazy Sunday afternoon lie-in followed by a day out with the family. A trip to the zoo? A walk on the beach? A quick half-hour of cable management before you set out stretches into Monday morning. Marital discord ensues.

Cancer June 22 to July 23

That £25 Eames chair on Facebook Marketplace seems just too good to resist. Midweek, the searing pain in your lower back is soothed by a visit from Kandi, a 23-year-old peripatetic unlicensed chiropractor and goose whisperer from Phuket. Marital discord ensues.

Leo

July 24 to Aug 23

Times are tight and budgetary constraints have to be considered. Nevertheless, you book a romantic wedding anniversary weekend away at a lovely country house hotel in Cheshire from 17-19 June. Just the two of you. Bliss. Marital discord ensues.

Virgo

Aug 24 to Sept 23

Sad and unwelcome news this week as someone you have known for many years informs you that they are moving away. You visit them to say goodbye and purchase a new pre and power amp in their closing down sale. Marital discord ensues.

Libra Sept 24 to Oct 23

You've been keeping a secret but it soon may come out in the open. A close friend could accidentally let something slip. How much? For a chuffing FUSE? Marital discord ensues.

Scorpio Oct 24 to Nov 23

With great power comes great responsibility. With great power amps comes great electricity bills. Your assertion that you can hear the difference if it's not left on 24/7 will butter no parsnips. Marital discord ensues.

Sagittarius Nov 24 to Dec 21

Recent disagreements prey on your mind. Words

YOUR HIFI HOROSCOPE

have been said that are now regretted. Time to build bridges and make amends. On the other hand, sod it. You deserve another pair of speakers. Marital discord ensues.

Capricorn Dec 22 to Jan 20

An unexpected turn of events results in a sudden change of plans. Those turntables don't turn up at that price every day and the Seychelles are overrated anyway. Marital discord ensues.

Aquarius Jan 21 to Feb 19

We all need a little me time on our own now and again. Your life partner has been banging on the front door for half an hour now. Do you think it might be time to turn off the HiFi and let them in? Marital discord ensues.

Pisces Feb 20 to Mar 20

You came to terms long ago with the fact that they don't share your hobbies and passions but unexpectedly, your other half agrees to go 50/50 on a new mains cable for your amplifier. Marital power cord ensues.

DISCLAIMER: Hroscopes are a load of old bollocks and should not be taken seriously in any way!

