

# HIFICRITIC Awards

## AUDIO PRODUCT REVIEW SELECTION: A RETROSPECTIVE

Completing HIFICRITIC's third year, a brief review of some of the more outstanding audio products we have tried, reviewed or lived with is in order. We have tried to consider relevant and important product rather than hoovering up all that has been presented for review, but despite our critical stance, a number of winners have emerged which really entertained and impressed us. We also have a significant archive of reliable reviewers' experiences, so can now publish our recommended product listings, without ceremony, awards dinner or fanfare – simply a hopefully helpful listing of hi-fi hardware that meets our approval.

The award categories are based on well established practice. All out sound quality and build, price more or less immaterial, components are dubbed 'Audio Excellence'; class leading value for money models are denoted 'Best Buy'; and there's a more inclusive group of fine 'Recommended' products which could well be strong contenders in the right system context. Taking product categories in essentially logical order, we begin with sources.

### ANALOGUE SOURCES

#### Audio Excellence

##### CARTRIDGES:

Dynavector XV-1S  
Koetsu Urushi Sky Blue  
Red T  
SoundSmith Strain Gauge  
SGS-6/SGA-400  
**TURNABLES/TONEARMS:**  
Audio Note TT3  
Linn LP12 Radikal/Keel  
Naim Tone-arm  
Rega RB1000

#### Best Buys

##### TURNABLES:

Rega Planar P7  
Thorens TD160 Mk3

#### Recommended

##### CARTRIDGES:

Sumiko Pearwood Celebration II  
Dynavector DV XX-2 II  
Rega Apheta  
Audio Note IO II  
Sumiko Blackbird  
Transfiguration Axia

##### TURNABLES:

Roksan Xerxes2/Artemiz2  
Audio Note TT2

##### FM TUNERS:

Magnum Dynalab MD106T,  
MD109

### DIGITAL SOURCES

#### Audio Excellence

##### CD PLAYERS:

DCS Paganini drive/DAC,  
Puccini U-clock  
Meridian Reference 808i.2  
Rega Isis

#### Best Buys

**DAC:**  
Musical Fidelity V-DAC

##### CD PLAYER:

Exposure IIx Classic

#### Recommended

##### CD PLAYERS:

Creek Classic  
Naim CDS3  
**DACs:**  
Audio Note DAC5 Signature  
Cambridge Audio DACMagic,  
Chord QBD76  
Firestone Audio Fubar II  
Pro-Ject USB-Box  
**Network Music Player:**  
Slim Devices Transporter



Audio Excellence:  
DCS Paganini drive/DAC

### AMPLIFICATION

#### ANALOGUE PHONO STAGES:

#### Audio Excellence

Naim Superline/HiCap or  
/SuperCap.

#### Best Buy

Pro-ject Tube Box SE II

#### Recommended

Creek OBH18 (MM)  
Roksan Phono Reference DXP SE

#### PRE-AMPLIFIERS:

#### Audio Excellence

Audio Research Reference 3  
Conrad Johnson ACT2-2  
Krell EVO TWO  
Naim NAC552

#### Best Buy

Creek OBH22 (passive)

#### Recommended

Krell EVO 202, Conrad  
Johnson CT-5.

#### POWER AMPLIFIERS:

#### Audio Excellence

Audio Research Reference  
D110, D210  
Conrad Johnson 350 SA  
Krell EVO ONE, 900, 600, 402  
MSB Platinum M200

#### Best Buy

Naim NAP200

#### Recommended

Naim NAP500  
Howes modified Quad II

#### INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS:

#### Audio Excellence

Krell FBI  
Naim SUPERNAIT/HiCap

#### Best Buy

Krell S-300i  
Naim SUPERNAIT, NAIT5 XS

#### Recommended

Arcam A38FMJ  
Creek Destiny, Evolution  
Dartzeel CTH-8550  
Gamut Si-100  
LFD NCSE  
Musical Fidelity XT-100  
Pure Sound A30  
Roksan Kandy LII  
Unison P40  
Unison P70

### CABLES

#### Audio Excellence

**MAINS, INTERCONNECTS  
AND LOUDSPEAKER:**  
Transparent Reference XL  
MM2

##### INTERCONNECT:

Cardas Golden Reference  
**MAINS FOR AMPLIFIER:**  
Russ Andrews Silver Reference  
PowerKord

##### MAINS:

Synergistic Research Hologram D

#### Best Buy

##### SPEAKER:

Vertex AQ Moncayo

**INTERCONNECT:**

Van den Hul *The First Ultimate*

**MAINS:**

Naim *Powerline*

**Recommended****SPEAKER:**

DNM *Precision*

LFD *Ribbon*

Russ Andrews *Crystal 24*

Yter

Microphonic Audio *Reference*

Wyrewizard *Dreamcaster*

Wireworld *Luna*

Transparent *Music Wave Plus*

*MM series*

Kimber *KS 3035*

**INTERCONNECT:**

Abbey Road *Reference*

Audio Note *Sogon 24*

TCI *Tiger II*

Wyrewizard *Enchantress*

Kimber *Silver Streak*

## ACCESSORIES

**Recommended****MAINS CONDITIONERS:**

PS Audio *Power Plant*

*Premier*

Pure Power *balanced mains*  
(1kVA)

Synergistic Research *Tesla*

**SUPPORT FURNITURE:**

Ikea *Lack*

IsoBlue

Vertex AQ *Kinabalu*

**FEET:**

Bright Star *Iso-node*

## HEADPHONES

**Audio Excellence**

Stax *SR404 Signature/SRM-006tII*

**Best Buys**

Grado *SR222*

Sennheiser *HD555*

**Recommended**

Audio Technica *W5000*

Denon *AH-D7000*

## LOUDSPEAKERS

(Note: Large loudspeaker variations in size, price, bass extension, sensitivity and amplifier loading mean that room size, amplifier choice and personal taste must always be taken into account.)

**Audio Excellence**

Avalon *Eidolon Diamond*

Meridian *DSP7200*

Quad *2805, 2905*

Sonus Faber *Amati*

*Anniversario, Stradivarius*

Wilson Audio *Duette,*

*MAXX3, Sasha, Sophia 2*

**Best Buys**

Kudos *Cardea C30*

Magneplanar *MG1.6*

PMC *FB1i, IB2i*

Q Acoustics *1020i, 1050i*

Rega *RS1*

Wharfedale *Diamond 9.1*

**Recommended**

Audio Physic *Scorpio*

Audiosmile *Kensai*

Amphion *Helium 520*

Audiovector *S3 Super*

Aurousal *VS*

B&W *800D*

Cain & Cain *Abby*

Focal *Electra 1007Be*

Chorus *706v*

L&R *Utopia Be*

Gamut *Phi5*

Guru *QM10*

Meridian *P350W*

Naim *SL-2*

Pioneer *S-2EX-W*

PMC *Fact-8, OB1i*

PSB *Synchrony One*

Rogers Royal *LS3/5a*

Shahinian *Compass*

Sonus Faber *Cremona*

*Auditor M, Elipsa*

Spendor *SA1*

Stirling Broadcast *LS3/5a*

Tannoy *DC6*

Vivid Audio *Giya*

Von Schweikert *Vr5*

*Anniversary*

Zu *Essence*