

HIFICRITIC Awards 2014

OUR RETROSPECTIVE AWARDS COME IN THREE FORMS:
AUDIO EXCELLENCE, RECOMMENDED AND BEST BUYS

At the end of the year we're listing some of the better audio products we have tried, reviewed or lived with. We have attempted to include relevant and important products, though after eight years of *HIFICRITIC*, and in spite of our critical stance, the list is starting to become somewhat unwieldy. Sound quality ratings are also published on our website.

A number of newcomers entertained and impressed us in the last year, and a wealth of past experiences add to the mix. 'Audio Excellence' represents products of the very highest sound quality and build, more or less irrespective of price. Models that deliver the best value for money are denoted 'Best Buy'. The larger and more inclusive group of 'Recommended' products will also be very strong contenders in the right system context.

ANALOGUE SOURCES

TURNTABLES

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Audio Note *TT3*, Continuum *Criterion*, Linn *LP12/Radikal/Keel* (plus *40th Anniversary Edition*), Rega *RP10*

RECOMMENDED: Audio Note *TT2*, Roksan *Xerxes.20/Artemiz*, Spiral Groove *SG2*, Thorens *TD309*, Well Tempered *Versalex/LTD*

BEST BUYS: Rega *RP3*, Rega *RP6*

TO NEARMS

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Naim *Aro*, Rega *RB2000*, Continuum *Copperhead*, Spiral Groove *Centroid*

RECOMMENDED: Funk *FXR II*

BEST BUY: Rega *RB303*

CARTRIDGES

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Dynavector *DRT XV1S*, Koetsu *Urushi Sky Blue*, Koetsu *Urushi Vermilion*, Koetsu *Red T*, Linn *Akiva*, Ortofon *Anna*, Soundsmith *Strain Gauge SGS-6/SGA-400*

RECOMMENDED: Audio Note *IO II*, Audio Note *IQ3*, Audio Technica *AT-OC9ML3*, Dynavector *DV XX-2 II*, Dynavector *Karat 17D3*, Rega *Apheta*, Sumiko *Blackbird*, Sumiko *Pearwood Celebration II*, Transfiguration *Axia*

BEST BUYS: Audio Technica *AT-F7*, Linn *Klyde*, Rega *Exact*, Ortofon *Rondo Blue*, *Quintet Red*

FM TUNERS

RECOMMENDED: Magnum Dynalab *MD106T*, *MD109*

DIGITAL SOURCES

CD PLAYERS

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Audio Note *CDT-Six/Fifth Element*, DCS *Paganini drive/DAC/Puccini U-clock*, Meridian *Reference 808i.2*, Naim *CDS3* (inc *PS555*), Rega *Isis*, Lector *Digidrive TL-2* (disc drive), Exposure *MCX*, CEC *TL3N* (disc drive)

RECOMMENDED: AMR *CD-777*, Creek *Classic*, Naim *CDX-2*

BEST BUYS: Exposure *IIX Classic*, Rega *Apollo-R*, *Saturn-R*

DACs

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Audio Note *Fifth Element*, Naim *DAC*, MSB *Platinum/Signature/Diamond DAC IV*, Metrum *Hex* (large transformer), Metrum *Octave*, Lector *Digicode 2.24*, Vertex AQ *Aletheia dac-1*

RECOMMENDED: Audio Note *DAC5 Signature*, Chord Electronics *Hugo*, Firestone *Audio Fubar II*, Lampizator *DAC G3L4*, Pro-Ject *USB-Box*, CEC *DA3N*, MSB *Analog*, Audiolab *M-DAC*, Audioquest *Dragonfly*, Heed *Obelisk*

BEST BUYS: Cambridge Audio *DACMagic Plus*, Cambridge Audio *DACMagic 100*, CEntrance *DACMiniCX*, Musical Fidelity *V-DAC II*, Musical Fidelity *V90-DAC*, Naim *DAC VI*, Rega *DAC*, SchiitAudio *Loki*, Schiit Audio *Modi*.

STREAMERS/SERVERS

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Linn *Akurate DS*, Naim *UnitiServe*, Naim *UnitiServe SSD*, Naim *NDX*, Naim *NDS/PS555*

RECOMMENDED: Marantz *NA7004*, Slim Devices *Transporter*, Squeezebox *Touch*, Widelab *Aurender S10*, Aurender *W20*, Krell *Connect*, Resolution Audio *Cantata*, Astell and Kern *AK100*

BEST BUYS: Cambridge Audio *NP30*, Mytek Stereo-192DSD

AMPLIFICATION

ANALOGUE PHONO STAGES

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Audio Note *M-9/ANS-9*, Audio Research *REF Phono 2*, Naim *Superline/HiCap* or *1SuperCap* (MC), Thrax *Orpheus*

RECOMMENDED: Creek *OBH18* (MM), Linn *Uphorik*, Pure Sound *P10*, Roksan *Phono Reference DXP SE*, Aurorasound *Vida*,

BEST BUYS: Musical Fidelity *V90LPS*, Pro-ject *Tube Box SE II*

PRE-AMPLIFIERS

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Audio Music *RS*, Audio Music *R-T1*, Audio Research *REF5 SE*, Krell *Evo One*, Exposure *MCX*, Naim *NAC552*, Thrax *Dionysos*. Passives: Music First Audio *Reference*, Townshend *Allegrì*, Townshend *Glastonbury PRE-1*, VAC *Signature Mk IIa*

RECOMMENDED: Krell *Evo 202*, Concert Fidelity *CF-08LSX2*

BEST BUYS: Quicksilver Audio *Full Preamplifier*. Passives: Creek *OBH22*

POWER AMPLIFIERS

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Audio Research *REF 150*, D'Agostino *Momentum* (stereo), Howes *PX4*, Krell *Evo One*, *Evo 402e*, MSB *Platinum M200*, Naim *NAP300*, Robert Koda *Takumi K-70*, Thrax *Spartacus* (monoblock), VAC *Phi 200* (stereo and monoblock)

RECOMMENDED: Burmester *036*, Bully Sound *BSC60s*,

Cambridge Audio *Azur 851W*,
Naim *NAP500*

BEST BUYS: Bully Sound
BSC100m, Exposure *MCX*,
Naim *NAP200*, Howes modified
Quad II

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: AMR
AM-77, Krell *FBI*, Naim
SUPERNAIT/HiCap, Raysonic
SP-88, Proteus *Diamond II*

RECOMMENDED: Arcam
A38FMJ, Audio Analogue
Crescendo, Audio Research
VSi75, Creek *Destiny*, *Evolution*,
Dartzeel *CTH-8550*, Gamut
Si-100, LFD *NCSE*, Jolida
JD502BRC, Pathos *Inpolremix*,
Pure Sound *A30*, Roksan *Kandy*
LII, Unison *P40*, Unison *P70*

BEST BUYS: Krell *S-300i*, Naim
SUPERNAIT 2, Naim *NAIT5*,
Naim *NAIT XS*, Naim *Uniti*
2 (receiver etc), Rega *Elicit-R*,
Roksan *Caspian M2*

HEADPHONE AMPS

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Lehmann
Linear, Trilogly *933*

RECOMMENDED: Beyer
Dynamic *A2*, Chord Electronics
Hugo, Creek *OBH21SE*, Meier
Audio *Corda XXS*, Oppo *HA-1*,
Pro-Ject *Head box SEII*, Rega
Ear, Sennheiser *HDVD800*,
Triode Corporation *TRV-84HG*

BEST BUYS: Musical Fidelity
V-90HPA, Pro-Ject *Headbox DS*,
Sennheiser *HDVA600*

CABLES

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: EnKlein
David (interconnect), MeiCord
CAT6 (Ethernet), Naim *NACA5*
(speaker), Naim *Powerline*
(mains), Russ Andrews *Superkord*
Sig. SD-II (mains), Synergistic
Research *Hologram D* (mains),
Transparent *Reference XLmm2*
(mains, interconnect and
loudspeaker), Vertere *Pulse R*

(interconnect), Vertex AQ *HiRez*
Moncayo (speaker), VertexAQ
HiRez Solfonn (interconnect).

RECOMMENDED: Audio
Note *Sogon 24* (interconnect),
Black Rhodium *Twist*, Chord
Sarum Digital, DNM *Precision*
(mains), Kimber *Silver Streak*
(interconnect) & *KS 3035*
(speaker), Kondo *KSL-LPZD*
(digital), LFD *Ribbon* (speaker),
Russ Andrews *Crystal 24*
(speaker), Supra *Sword* (speaker),
TCI *Tiger II* (interconnect),
Transparent *Music Wave*
Plus (speaker), Wyrewizard
Enchantress (interconnect),
Wyrewizard *Dreamcaster*
(speaker), Wireworld *Luna*
(speaker), Yter (speaker).

BEST BUYS: Belkin *CAT6 UTP*
(Ethernet), Deltec *InSlink*
(mains), Kimber *Timbre Mini-*
Zap (interconnect), Naim
Powerline (mains), TM Systems
Pulse (interconnect, speaker),
Van den Hul *The First Ultimate*
(interconnect), Vertex AQ
Moncayo (speaker)

ACCESSORIES

RECOMMENDED:
MAINS CONDITIONERS
Isol-8 *PowerLine Axis*, NVA
BMU, PS Audio *Power Plant*
Premier, Pure Power balanced
mains (1kVA), Synergistic
Research *Tesla*, Tacima *CS929*

SUPPORT FURNITURE
Ikea *Lack*, IsoBlue, Leading
Edge *Platform*, Naim *Fraim*,
Townshend *Seismic Corners*,
Vertex AQ *Kinabalu*

FEET: Alto Extremo *Fat Boy*
MkII, Bright Star *Iso-node*,
Synergistic *MiG*

LINK: Musical Fidelity *V-Link*
192 (USB-to-S/PDIF)

HEADPHONES

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Denon
AH D7000, Sennheiser *IE800*,
HD 800

RECOMMENDED: AKG
Q701, Apple *Classic*, Bowers
and Wilkins *P5* & *P7*, Beyer
DTX501p, Beyer *Custom One*
Pro, Grado *SR325i*, *SR225*,
JAYS v-JAYS, *a-JAYS Four*,
Martin Logan *Mikros 70*, Oppo
PM-1, PSB *M4U-1*, *M4U-2*,
Sennheiser *IE8*, *IE80*, *HD555*,
Stax *SR-404*, Yamaha *HPH-*
MT220

BEST BUYS: AKG *K550*, Apple
EarPods, Philips *Fidelio X2*

LOUDSPEAKERS

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

AUDIO EXCELLENCE:
Audiovector *SR6 Avantgarde*
Arrete, Avalon *Eidolon Diamond*
& *Idea*, Event Electronics *Opal*
(active), Bowers & Wilkins
800 Diamond, Franco Serblin
Ktoma, Gradient *Helsinki 1.5*,
JBL *Everest DD66000* & *K2*
S9800, Kaiser Kawero! *Vivace*
& *Chiara*, KEF *Blade*, Linn
Klimax Exakt 350, Magico *Q1*,
Magico *S5*, Meridian *DSP7200*
(active), PMC *IB2i*, *IB2 SE*,
fact.12, Quad *2805* & *2905*,
Revolver *Cygnis Gold*, Sonus
Faber *Amati Anniversario* &
Stradivarius, Soundkaos *Wave*
40, Spondor *D7*, Wilson Audio
Alexia, *Duette*, *MAXX3*, *Sasha*
2, & *Sophia 3*, RAAL *7020XR*
(tweeter)

RECOMMENDED: Amphion
Helium 520, AMR *LS-77*,
Audio Physic *Scorpio*, Audioplan
Kontrapunkt, Audiosmile *Kensai*,
Audiovector *S3 Super* & *S1*
Avantgarde, Aurelia *Cerica*,
Auroual *VS*, Avalon *Compas*,

Axhorn *AXJET*, Bowers &
Wilkins *802 Diamond*, Cabasse
Pacific 3SA, Cain & Cain
Abby, Dali *Ikon 7 Mk2*, Eclipse
TD712zMK2, Eminent *LFT-8b*,
Feastrex *Nf5ex*, Focal *Electra*
1007Be, Focal *Utopia Diablo*,
706v, L&R *Utopia Be* & *Scala*
V2, Gamut *Phi5*, German
Physiks *Unlimited MkII*,
Graham Audio *BBC LS5/9*,
Green Mountain *Rio V2*, Guru
QM10 MK2, Lumen White
Silverflame, Magico *S3*, Martin
Logan *Electromotion ESL* &
Motion 15, Meridian *P350W*,
Monitor Audio *Platinum 200*,
Neat *IOTA*, Neat *Motive SX2*,
Pioneer *S-2EX-W*, PMC *OBIi*
& *GB1i*, PSB *Synchrony One*,
Quadral *Aurum Antal VIII*,
Raidho *C1* & *D-1*, Revolver
Screen 3, Rogers *Royal 3/5a*,
Stirling Broadcast *LS3/5a*,
Shahinian *Compass*, Sonus Faber
Cremona, *Elipasa*, *Auditor M*,
Olympica II, SP Acoustics *SP1*,
Spondor *A9*, Supravox *215-2000*
EXC (driver), Tannoy *DC6*,
Totem *Sttaf* & *Arro*, Triangle
Lyrr, Vivid Audio *Giya*, Von
Schweikert *Vr5 Anniversary*,
Voxativ *Ampeggio Due* & *Pi*,
Wharfedale *Diamond 10.1*,
Zingali *Client Name 1.2*, Zu
Essence.

BEST BUYS: Acoustic Energy
AE Reference 1, Amphion *Argon*
1, Audiovector *Ki3 Signature*,
Bodnar *Sandglass Fantasy*, B&W
PM1, Dali *Zensor 1*, Kef *LS50*,
KRK *Rokit 10.3* (active), Kudos
Cardea C30, Magneplanar
MG1.6, Neat *Ultimatum XLS*,
PMC *FB1i*, *Fact.3*, *Fact.8*,
Twenty.23 & *Twenty.24*, Pro-
ject *Speaker Box 5*, Q Acoustics
1010i, *1020i* & *1050i*, Rega
RS1 & *RS7*, Russell K *RED 100*,
RED 50, Spondor *SP2/3R2*, *BC1*
(secondhand),