

HIFICRITIC *Awards 2017*

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

Here we list the better audio products we have reviewed. We have attempted to include relevant and important products, though after eleven years the list has become somewhat unwieldy. (Some sound quality ratings are also published on our website.)

Audio Excellence represents products of the very highest sound quality and build irrespective of price. Models that deliver the best value for money are denoted **Best Buy**, while the larger group of **Recommended** products will be strong contenders in the right system context.

ANALOGUE SOURCES

TURNTABLES

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Audio Note (UK) *TT3*, Continuum *Criterion*, Linn *LP12/Radikal/Keel* (plus *40th Anniversary Edition*), Rega *RP10*, *Naiad*
RECOMMENDED: Audio Note (UK) *TT1*, *TT2*, Clearaudio *Concept*, Roksan *Xerxes.20/Artemis*, Spiral Groove *SG2*, Thorens *TD309*, Well Tempered *Versalex/LTD*.
BEST BUYS: Rega *RP3*, *RP6*.

TONEARMS

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Continuum *Copperhead*, Linn *Ekos*, Naim *Aro*, Rega *RB2000*, Spiral Groove *Centroid*.
RECOMMENDED: Audio Note (UK) *Arm-One*, Funk *FXR II*.
BEST BUY: Rega *RB303*.

CARTRIDGES

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Dynavector *DRT XV1S*, Koetsu *Urushi Sky Blue*, *Urushi Vermilion*, Red T, Linn *Akina*, *Kandid*, Lyra *Delos*, Miyajima *Madake*, Ortofon *Anna*, Rega *Apbelion*, Soundsmith *Strain Gauge SGS-6/SGA-400*, Zephyr *MIMC*.
RECOMMENDED: Audio Note (UK) *IQ3*, *IO II*, *IQ3*, Audio Technica *AT-OC9ML3*, *ART9*, Dynavector *DV XX-2 II*, *Karat 17D3*, Ortofon *Cadenza Bronze*, Sumiko *Blackbird*, *Pearwood Celebration II*, *Transfiguration Axia*.
Best Buys: Audio Technica *AT-F7*, Linn *Klyde*, Ortofon *Rondo Blue*, *Quintet Red*, Rega *Exact*, *Apheta 2*.

FM TUNERS

Recommended: Magnum Dynalab *MD106T*, *MD109*.

DIGITAL SOURCES

CD PLAYERS

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Audio Note (UK) *CD1.1x*, *CDT-Six/Fifth Element*, C.E.C. *CD5*, *TL3N* (disc drive), dCS *Paganini* (drive)/*DAC/Puccini U-clock*, *Rossini* (player+clock), Exposure *MCX*, Lector *Digidrive TL-2* (disc drive), Marantz *SA-10*, Meridian *Reference 808i.2*, Naim *CDS3* (inc *PS555*), Rega *Isis*, T+A *PDP 3000 HV*.
RECOMMENDED: AMR *CD-777*, Ayon *CD-35*, Creek *Classic*, Luxman *D-06u*, McIntosh *MCD550*, Naim *CDX-2*.
BEST BUYS: Exposure *IIx Classic*, Rega *Apollo-R*, *Saturn-R*.

DACs

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Audio Note (UK) *Fifth Element*, *DAC 4.1I*, BAD *Alpha DAC Reference Series 2*, Lector *Digicode 2.24*, Metrum *Hex* (large transformer), *Octave*, MSB *Platinum*, *Signature*, *Diamond DAC IV*, Naim *DAC*, Vertex *AQ Aletheia dac-1*, *Aletheia dac-1.5*.
RECOMMENDED: Audiolab *M-DAC*, Audio Note (UK) *DAC5 Signature*, Audioquest *Dragonfly*, C.E.C. *DA3N*, Chord Electronics *Hugo*, *DAVE*, Firestone Audio *Fubar II*, Heed *Obelisk*, Lampizator *DAC G3L4*, Metrum *Pavane*, MSB *Analog*, Pro-Ject *USB-Box*.
BEST BUYS: Arcam *irDAC*, Cambridge Audio *DACMagic Plus*, *DACMagic 100*, CEntrance *DACMiniCX*, Chord *Mojo*, Fostex *HP-A4BL*, Meridian *Explorer2*, Musical Fidelity *V-DAC II*, *V90-DAC*, Mytek *Brooklyn*, Naim *DAC VI*, Rega *DAC*, Schiit Audio *Loki*, Schiit Audio *Modi*.

STREAMERS/SERVERS

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Linn *Akurate DS*, *Klimax DS (KATALYST)*, Naim *UnitiServe*, *UnitiServe SSD*, *NDX*, *NDS/PS555*, ReQuest *The Beast*.
RECOMMENDED: Astell and Kern *AK100*, Cambridge Audio *Azur 851N*, Krell *Connect*, Marantz *NA7004*, Melco *NZ1*, Musical Fidelity *M6 Encore Connect*, Naim *Uniti Core*, Resolution Audio *Cantata*, Slim Devices *Transporter*, *Squeezebox Touch*, Wideland *Aurender S10*, *Aurender W20*.

Best Buys: Auralic *Altair*, Aries, Cambridge Audio *NP30*, Mytek *Stereo-192DSD*, Naim *ND5 XS*, *UnitiLite*, *Uniti Atom*.

AMPLIFICATION

ANALOGUE PHONO STAGES

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Allnic *H-3000*, Audio Note (UK) *M-9/ANS-9*, Audio Research *REF Phono 2*, MFA *Reference Phono Amplifier*. Naim *Superline/HiCap* or *SuperCap* (MC), Thrax *Orpheus*.
RECOMMENDED: Aurorasound *Vida*, Creek *OBH18* (MM), Linn *Upborik*, MFA *Classic MM Phono Stage 632*, Pure Sound *P10*, Roksan *RPP Reference Phono Amplifier*, *Phono Reference DXP SE*.
BEST BUYS: Lejonklou *Gaio*, Lounge Audio *LCR MkIII + Copla*, Musical Fidelity *V90LPS*, Pro-ject *Tube Box SE II*, Rothwell *Headspace*.

PRE-AMPS/CONTROLLERS

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Audio Music *RS*, *R-T1*, Audio Research *REF5 SE*, Aurorasound *Preda*, Exposure *MCX*, Krell *Evo One*, Naim *NAC552 DR*, *Statement NAC S1*, Pass Labs *XP-12*, Thrax *Dionysos*, VAC *Signature Mk IIa*. **Passives:** Bespoke Audio, Music First Audio *Reference*, Townshend *Allegrì*, *Glastonbury PRE-1*.
RECOMMENDED: Concert Fidelity *CF-08LSX2*, Krell *Evo 202*.
BEST BUYS: Quicksilver Audio *Full Preamplifier*.
Passives: Creek *OBH22*, Glasshouse *TVC*, Music First Audio *Baby Classic*.

POWER AMPLIFIERS

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Audio Note *Kegon Balanced*, Audio Research *REF 150*, CH Precision *A1*, Constellation *Inspiration*, D'Agostino *Momentum* (stereo), Howes *PX4*, Krell *Evo One*, *Evo 402e*, MSB *Platinum M200*, *M204*, Naim *NAP300 DR*, *NAP500 DR*, *Statement*, Pass Labs *XA30.8*, Robert Koda *Takumi K-70*, Thrax *Spartacus*, VAC *Phi 200*.
RECOMMENDED: Bully Sound *BSC60s*, Burmester *036*, Cambridge Audio *Azur 851W*.
BEST BUYS: Bully Sound *BSC100m*, Exposure *MCX*, Howes-modified *Quad II*, Naim *NAP200*, NVA *The Second Statement*.

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: AMR *AM-77*, Gryphon *Diablo 300*, Krell *FBI*, Naim *SUPERNAIT/HiCap*, Pass Labs *INT-60*, Proteus *Diamond II*, Raysonic *SP-88*,

RECOMMENDED: Arcam *A38FMJ*, Audio Analogue *Crescendo*, *Puccini Anniversary*, Audio Note (UK) *OTO SE Phono Signature*, Audio Research *VSi75*, *Creek Destiny*, *Evolution*, Dartzel *CTH-8550*, Gamut *Si-100*, Jolida *JD502BRC*, LFD *NCSE*, NAD *C 388*, Pathos *Inpolremix*, Pure Sound *A30*, Roksan *Kandy LII*, Rotel *RA-1572*, Unison *P40*, *P70*, Vincent *SV-700*.

BEST BUYS: Arcam *A49*, Krell *S-300i*, Leema *Tucana Anniversary Edition*, Lejonklou *Boazn*, NAD *C 368*, Naim *SUPERNAIT 2*, *NAIT5*, *NAIT XS*, *Uniti 2* (receiver etc), Rega *Elicit-R*, Rogue Audio *Sphinx v2*, Roksan *Caspian M2*.

HEADPHONE AMPS

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Lehmann *Linear*, McIntosh *MHA100*, Trilog *933*.

RECOMMENDED: Allnic *HPA5000*, Beyer Dynamic *A2*, Chord Electronics *Hugo*, Creek *OBH21SE*, iFi *Pro iCan*, Meier Audio *Corda XXS*, Oppo *HA-1*, Pro-Ject *Head box SEII*, Rega *Ear*, RNHP, Sennheiser *HDVD800*, Teddy Pardo *HPN*, Triode Corporation *TRV-84HG*.

BEST BUYS: Audeze *Deckard*, Fostex *HP-A4BL*, *PC100USB-HR2*, Musical Fidelity *V-90HPA*, Pro-Ject *Headbox DS*, Sennheiser *HDA600*, Schitt *Vali 2*, Schitt *Mjolnir 2*.

CABLES

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: AudioQuest *Diamond* (HDMI), EnKlein *David Digital*, EnKlein *David* (interconnect), MeiCord *CAT6* (Ethernet), Naim *NACA5* (speaker), Naim *Powerline* (mains), Naim *Super Lumina* (interconnect), QED *Supremus* (speaker), 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 (UK) *Sogon 24* (interconnect), Black Rhodium *Twist*, Chord *Sarum Digital*, DNM *Precision* (speaker), IsoTek *EVO3 Premier* (mains), Kimber *Silver Streak* (interconnect) & *KS 3035* (speaker), Kondo *KSL-LPZD* (digital), LFD *Ribbon* (speaker), Missing Link *Passion Signature*, Russ Andrews *Crystal 24* (speaker), Studio Connections *Platinum*, Supra *Sword* (speaker), TCI *Tiger II* (interconnect), Transparent *Music Wave Plus* (speaker), Wyrewizard *Enchantress* (interconnect), *Dreamcaster* (speaker), Wireworld *Lama* (speaker), Yter (speaker), Ziro Audio *Disclosure* (interconnect).

BEST BUYS: Audience *OHNO III* (speaker), *OHNO* (interconnect), AudioQuest *Carbon*

(HDMI), Belkin *CAT6 UTP* (Ethernet), Chord Company *Active V2* (HDMI), Deltec *InSlink* (mains), Kimber *Timbre Mini-Zap* (interconnect), Naim *Powerline* (mains), QED *XT25* (speaker), SLiC Innovations *Eclipse C MkIII* (interconnect), TM Systems *Pulse* (interconnect, speaker), Van den Hul *The First Ultimate* (interconnect), Vertex AQ *Moncayo* (speaker).

ACCESSORIES & MISCELLANY

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Astell&Kern *AK500 NAs* (complete system), dCS *Network Bridge*, Naim *XP5 XS* (power supply).

RECOMMENDED: Alto Extremo *Fat Boy MkII*; Bright Star *Iso-node*; iFi *S/PDIF iPurifier* (USB purifiers); Isol-8 *PowerLine Axis*; Ikea *Lack*; IsoBlue; Leading Edge *Platform*, *Little Fwend* (arm raiser), Magico *SPOD* (decoupling spikes); Musical Fidelity *V-Link 192* (USB-to-S/PDIF link); Mutec *MC-3+* USB; Naim *Fraim*; NVA BMU (balanced mains); PonoPlayer (personal player); PS Audio *Power Plant Premier*; Pure Power (balanced mains 1kVA); Synergistic Research *MiG* (feet), *Tesla*, Tacima *CS929* (mains conditioners); Sonority Design; Townshend *Seismic Corners*; Vertex AQ *Kinabalu* (support furniture).

BEST BUYS: AVM *Inspiration CS 2.2* (complete system); Google *Cast* (music player device/service); Gustard *U12* (USB purifier); HiFiBerry (for Raspberry Pi); Leading Edge *Panels* (room treatment); Musical Fidelity *Merlin* (complete system); NVA *Intro System* (complete system); Roon (software music player); Wychwood *Audionics* (mains treatment).

HEADPHONES

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: Audeze *LCD-3*, *LCD-4*, Denon *AH D7000*, HIFIMAN *HE1000*, Sennheiser *IE800*, *HD 800*, *HD 800 S*.

RECOMMENDED: AKG *Q701*, Apple *Classic*, Bowers and Wilkins *P5*, *P7*, Beyer *DTX501p*, *Custom One Pro*, Fostex *TH610*, 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*, Focal *Spear*, HIFIMAN *HE400S*, Philips *Fidelio X2*.

LOUDSPEAKERS

(Note: large variations mean that personal taste must be taken into account.)

AUDIO EXCELLENCE: ATC *SCM50SL*, Audiovector *SR6 Avantgarde Arrete*, Avalon *Eidolon Diamond*, *Idea*, Bowers & Wilkins *800 D3*, *802 D3*, *803 D3*, Event Electronics

Opal (active), Focal *Scala Utopia Evo*, Franco Serblin *Ktama*, Gradient *Helsinki 1.5*, JBL *Everest DD66000*, *K2 S9800*, Kaiser Kawerol *Vinace*, *Chiara*, KEF *Blade*, Linn *Klimax Exakt 350*, Magico *Q1*, *S5 II*, Meridian *DSP7200* (active), PMC *IB2 SE*, *fact.12*, *Quad 2805*, *2905*, Revolver *Cygnis Gold*, Roksan *Darius*, Sonus Faber *Amati Anniversary*, *Stradivarius*, Soundkaos *Wave 40*, Spendor *D7*, Tannoy *Kingdom Royal*, Wilson Audio *Alexia*, *Duette*, *MAXX3*, *Sasba*, *Sabrina*, *Sophia 3*, *Yvette*, RAAL *7020XR* (tweeter).

RECOMMENDED: Amphion *Helium 520*, AMR *LS-77*, Audio Note (UK) *AN-J Lx Hemp*, Audio Physic *Scorpio*, Audioplan *Kontrapunkt*, Audiosmile *Kensai*, Audiovector *S3 Super*, *S1 Avantgarde*, Aurelia *Cerica*, Aurousal *VS*, Avalon *Compas*, Axhorn *AXJET*, Cabasse *Pacific 3SA*, Cain & Cain *Abby*, Chartwell *LS3/5*, Dali *Ikon 7 Mk2*, *Eclipse TD712zMK2*, Focal *Sopra No2*, *Electra 1007Be*, *Utopia Diablo*, *706v*, *L&R Utopia Be*, *Scala V2*, JL Audio *CR-1+Fathom f112 v2*, Totem *Sky*, Eminent *LFT-8b*, Existence *Euphoric*, Feastrex *Nj5ex*, Gamut *Phi5*, German Physiks *Unlimited MkII*, Graham Audio *BBC LS5/9*, *VOTU*, Green Mountain *Rio V2*, Guru *QM10 MK2*, Lumen White *Silverflame*, Magico *S3*, Martin Logan *Electromotion ESL*, *Motion 15*, MBA *Progression*, Meridian *P350W*, Monitor Audio *Platinum 200*, Neat *IOTA*, *Motive SX2*, *Momentum SX3i*, Ophidian *Mambo*, *Minimo*, *Mojo*, Pearl Acoustics *Sibelius*, Pioneer *S-2EX-W*, PMC *OBIi*, *GB1i*, ProAc *Response D Two*, 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*, *Elipsa*, *Auditor M*, *Olympica II*, *Olympica I*, SP Acoustics *SP1*, Spendor *A9*, *A5R*, Supravox *215-2000 EXC* (driver), Tannoy *DC6*, Totem *Staf*, *Arro*, Triangle *Lyr*, Vivid Audio *Giya*, Von Schweikert *Vr5 Anniversary*, Voxativ *Ampeggio Due*, *Pi*, Wharfedale *Diamond 10.1*, XTZ *TUNE 4*, Zingali *Client Name 1.2*, *Zu Essence*.

BEST BUYS: Acoustic Energy *AE Reference 1*, *AE1 Active*, Amphion *Argon 1*, Arendal *Monitor*, ATC *SCM11*, AudioSmile *LBM*, Audiovector *Ki3 Signature*, Bodnar *Sandglass Fantasy*, B&W *PM1*, Dali *Sensor 1*, Dynaudio *Emit M10*, Focal *Aria 905*, Heco *Direkt*, KEF *LS50*, *LS50W* (active), KRK *Rokit 10.3* (active), Kudos *Cardea C30*, Magneplanar *MG1.6*, Neat *Iota Alpha*, *Ultimatum XLS*, PMC *FB1i*, *Fact.3*, *Fact.8*, *Twenty.23*, *Twenty.24*, *Twenty.26*, *Twenty.24*, *Twenty.24*, Pluto, Pro-Ject *Speaker Box 5*, Q Acoustics *1010i*, *1020i*, *1050i*, *3050*, *3020*, Rega *RS1*, *RS7*, Russell K *RED 100*, *RED 50*, Spendor *A4*, *SP2/3R2*, *BC1* (secondhand).