

# HIFICRITIC Awards

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 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition), Origin Live *Calypto Mk4*, 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:** Pro-Ject *Essential III*, Rega RP3, RP6

### TONEARMS

**AUDIO EXCELLENCE:** Continuum *Copperhead*, Linn *Ekos*, Naim *Aro*, Origin Live *Illustrious Mk3C*, 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 *Akiva*, *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 *Digdrive 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*, Chord Electronics, 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*, iFi Audio *nano iOne*, Lampizator *DAC G3LA*, 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*, *DAC-R*, Schiit Audio *Loki*, Schiit *Audio Modi*.

### STREAMERS/SERVERS

**AUDIO EXCELLENCE:** Auralic *Aries G2*, Linn *Akurate DS*, *Klimax DS (KATALYST)*, Naim *UnitiServe*, *UnitiServe SSD*, *NDX*, *NDS/PS555*, *NDX 2*, 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*, Widelab *Aurender S10*, *Aurender W20*,

**BEST BUYS:** Auralic *Altair*, *Aries*, Cambridge Audio *NP30*, Marantz *ND8006*, *ND6006*, Mytek *Stereo-192DS2*, Naim *ND5 XS*, *UnitiLite*, *Uniti Atom*, Pioneer *N-70AE*.

## AMPLIFICATION

### ANALOGUE PHONO STAGES:

**AUDIO EXCELLENCE:** Allnic *H-3000*, Audio Note (UK) *M-9/ANS-9*, Audio Research *REF Phono 2*, *EAT E-GLO*, Musical Fidelity *Reference Phono Amplifier*, Naim *SuperLine/HiCap* or *SuperCap*, Thrax *Orpheus*.

**RECOMMENDED:** Audio Research *PH9*, Aurorasound *Vida*, Creek *OBH18* (MM), Linn *Uphorik*, Musical Fidelity *Classic MM Phono Stage 632*, Pure Sound *P10*, Roksan *RPP Reference Phono Amplifier*, *Phono Reference DXP SE*, *Rothwell Signature One*.

**BEST BUYS:** iFi Audio *micro iPhono2*, Lejonklou *Gaio*, Lounge Audio *LCR MkIII + Copla*, Musical Fidelity *V90LPS*, *MX-VYNL*, Pro-ject *Tube Box SE II*, *Phono Box 2*, *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 *Allegri*, *Glastonbury PRE-1*, *Allegri+*.

**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*, *SA10*, 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, KR Audio Electronics VA340i, LFD NCSE, NAD C 388, Pathos *Inpolremix*, PMC cor, Pure Sound A30, Roksan Kandy LII, Rotel RA-1572, Unison P40, P70, Vincent SV-700.

**BEST BUYS:** Arcam A49, Audion Sterling EL34 Anniversary, Krell S-300i, Leema Tucana Anniversary Edition, Lejonklou Boazya, NAD C 368, D3020 V2, Naim SUPERNAIT 2, NAIT5, NAIT XS, Uniti 2, Pioneer A49AE, Rega Elicit-R, Rogue Audio *Sphinx v2*, Roksan Caspian M2.

#### HEADPHONE AMPS

**AUDIO EXCELLENCE:** iFi Audio Pro *iDSD*, Lehmann *Linear*, McIntosh MHA100, Trilogy 933  
**RECOMMENDED:** Allnic HP45000, Beyer Dynamic A2, Chord Electronics *Hugo*, Cipher, 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:** Astell & Kern ACRO L1000, Audeze Deckard, Fostex HP-A4BL, PC100USB-HR2, Musical Fidelity V-90HP4, Pro-Ject Headbox DS, Sennheiser HDVA600, Schitt Vali 2, Schitt Mjolnir 2.

#### CABLES

**AUDIO EXCELLENCE:** AudioQuest *Diamond* (HDMI), CAD *Cable1*, *Cable11* (USB), EnKlein *David Digital*, EnKlein *David* (interconnect), MeiCord CAT6 (Ethernet), Naim NACA5 (speaker), Naim *Powerline* (mains), Naim *Super Lumina* (interconnect), QED *Supremus* (speaker), Quiescent *Park* (speaker), Quiescent *Peak Analogue* (interconnect), 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), Inakustik, 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), Silver *Solids*, Studio Connections *Platinum*, Supra *Sword* (speaker), TCI *Tiger II* (interconnect), Transparent *Music Wave Plus* (speaker), True Signal *Silver Ultimate*, Wire-on-wire *Experience880*, Wireworld *Luna* (speaker), Wyrewizard *Enchantress* (interconnect), Dreamcaster (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*, AqVox *Switch 8 SE*, *CAT 2109*, Bright Star *Isotope*, 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*, *N90Q*, Apple *Classic*, Audeze *iSINE10*, 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*, Brainwavz *Delta*, Focal *Sphear*, 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 *Ktéma*, Gradient *Helsinki 1.5*, JBL *Everest DD66000*, *K2 S9800*, Kaiser Kawero! *Vivare*,

*Chiara*, KEF *Blade*, Kii *THREE* (active), Linn *Klimax Exakt 350*, Magico *Q1*, *S5 II*, Meridian *DSP7200* (active), PMC *IB2 SE*, *fact.12*, *Q Acoustics Concept 500*, *Quad 2805*, *2905*, Revolver *Cygnis Gold*, Roksan *Darius*, Sonus Faber *Amati Anniversario*, *Stradivarius*, Soundkaos *Wave 40*, Spendor *D7*, Sveda Audio *Blipo* (active), Tannoy *Kingdom Royal*, Wilson Audio *Alexia*, *Duette*, *MAXX3*, *Sasha*, *Sabrina*, *Sophia 3*, *Yvette*, RAAL *7020XR* (tweeter).

**RECOMMENDED:** 3 Square Audio *Translator*, 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*, Arousal *V5*, 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*, Jern *w8000*, 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*, *Iota Explorer*, Ophidian *Mambo*, *Minimo*, *Mojo*, Pearl Acoustics *Sibelius*, Pioneer *S-2EX-W*, PMC *OB1i*, *GB1i*, *twenty5.23*, 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 *Sttaf*, *Arro*, Triangle *Lyr*, Vivid Audio *Gija*, Von Schweikert *Vr5 Anniversary*, Voxativ *Ampeggio Dne*, *Pi*, Wharfedale *Diamond 10.1*, XTZ *TUNE 4*, Yamaha *MusicCast NX-N500* (active), 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*, *707 S2*, Dali *Zensor 1*, Dynaudio *Emit M10*, *Special Forty*, 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*, *Twenty5.24*, *result6* (active), Pluto, PreSonus *Eris 5* (active), Pro-Ject *Speaker Box 5*, Q Acoustics *1010i*, *1020i*, *1050i*, *3050*, *3020*, Rega *RS1*, *RS7*, Russell K *RED 100*, *RED 50*, *RED 150*, *RED 120*, Spendor *A4*, *SP2/3R2*, *BC1* (secondhand).