

JULIAN MUSGRAVE

## Brilliant, bustling Bristol

JULIAN'S UPBEAT VIEW OF THE 2019 BRISTOL SHOW...

'Brilliant' sums up Bristol 2019 nicely. Last year's show was a tad *deja-vu*, I felt: it's not that it wasn't still the best UK trade-run show, but we were all treading water. This year there were new exhibitors, a new energy and gems to be found, meaning I got more innocent, giggling joy from the Bristol Show 2019 than from any other show in recent memory. There was even a trend or two to pick up on, but first let's take a cruise round some of the rooms that tweaked the interest of this wandering scribe.

**RUARK:** What do you say to a company that produces stereograms and Bose-like table-top radios, good enough for me to yearn to find room for one of its R7 High Fidelity Radiograms (approx. £2200) somewhere in the house? You need nerves of steel to bring a faux-1950s radiogram to market, but not only is it bang up to date technically, but it sounds pretty damned good too.

More practical is the R5 High Fidelity Music System (approx. £1000): it's very svelte and able, offering a very serious alternative to the Tivoli range, albeit at a much higher price. Our kitchen needs something along these lines.

**ATC:** This was ATC's first time at Bristol and it brought the new CD2 player and SLA2-100 amplifier. These are narrower than the norm – a theme I will pick up on later – and the sound via SCM40 speakers was excellent; being tonally accurate and dynamic. The Helius Designs *Alexia* turntable was interesting too but, I'd rather see an ATC turntable! Come on Billy and Ben: what I'd like is a high-end turntable in the style of the P1 amp – all polished stainless steel with titanium highlights – with direct drive, a start time of less than a second and room for a 12" arm. Or even two 12" arms.

**SPENDOR & AURALIC:** There's something inherently right-looking about Spendor's *Classic 100*: it's a chunky standmount that pretty much defines the classic UK speaker for audiophiles of a certain age. It's like going home and your mum cooking a roast dinner: it may not be the last word in *haute cuisine*, but hell, it tastes wonderful. The room sounded pretty good with a pleasing rich mid and upper bass range, and while the speakers lacked a bit of sparkle, that could just be down to the music played. At home, and with the right electronics, these are going to prove to be keepers for many audiophiles.



**HARBETH:** Both speakers and people in the two Harbeth rooms oozed urbane sophistication. The P3ESR has a timbral accuracy and ease of delivery that pleases while playing within its limits, but like virtually all mini-monitors, the speakers congest when driven hard. More capable was the C7ES-3 next door, where Alan Shaw played some marimba music that charmed with its naturalness.

**PRIMARE:** I've paid scant attention to this brand in the past, but the i15 and CD15 integrated amplifier and CD player should make any audiophile sit up and take notice, being super Internet-savvy and able to be voice controlled via the proprietary Prisma control solution. One to watch.

**FYNE AUDIO:** When I entered the Fyne Audio room I winced: the music was much too loud and harsh, and was exciting a room mode that almost had me heading straight out again. However, with my solo piano recording going from pianissimo to triple forte, from 27Hz upwards, all in the space of 27 seconds, the Fyne Audio F702 delivered timbre, density, flow and musicality in bundles. What a transformation! Were I looking for speakers, I would definitely have them on my audition list.

**MELLOW ACOUSTICS:** New company. New product. New designer. Tim Mellow's *FrontRo* electrostatic hybrid speakers (12" electrostatic panel top section, 5" dynamic driver lower section) are a bold offering. Whether Tim has 'solved many of the problems facing electrostatic enthusiasts', to quote his own words, remains to be seen. What I heard was, according to my notes, 'interestingly fast and spunky', but panel speakers of any description have

