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Published by
HIFICRITIC Ltd.

Registered in England No.6054617
Registered Office: Winnington House,
2 Woodberry Grove, London, N12 0DR
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Printed in the UK by
Premier Print, London

HIFICRITIC

is a printed publication available
by subscription only.

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We leap into the ‘twenty-twenties’ with this brave new issue, the first in our expanded format: we have refreshed layouts, typography and presentation, thanks to our designer Philippa Steward, and hope you’ll enjoy it. This update offers the opportunity to be more creative with our presentation of both features and reviews, include extended technology investigations, and write greater detail where appropriate – and it’s also easier to read. Instead of the oft- found breathless chase to a quotable conclusion found in many publications, we favour a deeper exploration of the subject, the product, and its context. ‘Slow publishing’, if you like...

I hope I’ll be forgiven for my extended review of the smallest of the ‘M’ series Magico, the M2, which I found by turns to be frustrating, fascinating, fast, feasible, feisty, fettled, fervent, funky and fulfilling, and that’s enough ‘f’ words for now (although at least one other may have been used as I struggled with it!). My examination of this loudspeaker also reaches back to primary acoustic research undertaken 70 years ago.

Our rich and varied menu for this issue also includes a complete record player from Vertere: with arm and cartridge, it’s just about ‘plug and play’. Called the Dynamic Groove (DG-1) turntable, it’s sold as a bundle with its own ‘Groove Runner’ tonearm and a Vertere-branded ‘Magnetic’ moving magnet cartridge, based on a trusted Audio Technica design. In the world of turntables that’s as close to ‘fit and forget’ as it is possible to get – although the sound is anything but forgettable.

Technology correspondent Keith Howard gets stuck into one his favourite subjects, namely the continuing lack of correlation between the usual simple distortion measurements commonly used, and sound evidence showing that a more intelligent approach to distortion harmonic weighting would provide better correlation with this aspect of sound quality. Meanwhile columnist Stan Curtis explores the innate sound quality of components, some of military origin, used in audio amplifiers reaching back to Cambridge Audio in the 1970s.

Avoidable or not, we return to Naim with a long planned revisit for the HIFICRITIC reference ND555/555PS DR network player – one year on and by now well run in. This work is complemented by an upgrade: the player is now running with double 555 PS DR supplies, thus further separating digital sections in the ND555 from the analogue. Where will this costly three-box combo place in the international rankings?

Chris Frankland gets to grip with the resurrection of the legendary JBL Century L100, a modern interpretation of an original design I knew well while working as a student demonstrator at Audio T West Hampstead in the mid 1970’s. From Avid we have the Integra ES, an intriguing integrated amplifier with a refined phono stage included (as you might expect from this company), reviewed by Ed Selley.

Kevin Fiske gets to grips with a pair of compact Focal loudspeakers, the CHORA 806, with intriguing results, while I attempt to qualify the sound quality of the latest Townshend Allegri Reference, a remotely controlled autotransformer line control unit. I find that it adds almost no sound of its own – surely the ideal situation?

Chris Kelly has an all too brief but still meaningful encounter with the behemoth McIntosh M9000, a 300W per channel integrated amplifier, while I’ve been revisiting Magico’s ‘S Series’ accessory speaker support ‘Pods, following discoveries uncovered during my extended Magico M2 review.

We complete the marathon overview of Manfred Eicher and ECM penned by music expert Mark Prendergast, who presents his selection of must-have ECM recordings, followed by our classical and jazz reviews.

Finally on our back cover, Andrew Everard celebrates the valued audio lives of Ken Ishiwata and our own Malcolm Steward.

Martin Colloms
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