

NEWSLETTER vol. 31

September 2004

With over 20 years of experience at the cutting edge of high end audio and home entertainment, Absolute Sounds knows a fine product when we see and hear one. As the world moves further into convergence - who better to guide you through the audio & video jungle?

As Absolute Sounds settles into its second quarter-century, we've learned never to judge too hastily. Against all odds, the juggernauts that are home cinema, custom installation and multi-channel have not relegated two-channel to the audio



Audio Research VM-220

cemetery. To our great delight - we are, after all, music lovers first and foremost - stereo products continue to dominate not just our sales but those of nearly all high-end brands. The steady flow of new stereo products, NOT just multi-channel models, from the industry's most highly-regarded brands proves that demand for the ultimate in LP and CD playback remains a high priority.

Although we do not at present offer a turntable, we are the leaders in the supply of state-of-the-art cartridges, courtesy of Koetsu - for 30 years the finest pick-ups on the planet. Our selection of no-compromise phono stages includes the awe-inspiring Audio Research Reference Phono, which we've just learned will be joined by the brand-new PH5. (See below.) Copland, Jadis, and Krell, too, continue to support the venerable LP. By our standards [and we know a thing or two about collecting vinyl!], there are no better ways to extract the maximum from a record album.

This is not to say that we've cooled on home cinema, multi-channel or custom installation. The quality achieved by a well-installed home cinema is now conducive to music-only enjoyment as well as the theatre experience, and we feel that it is no longer wise nor mature to think of home cinema installations or multi-channel electronics as somehow inferior to classic stereo set-ups. Provided, that is, you've employed the services of an Absolute Sounds-approved installer. Indicative of the newest wave of multi-channel products that have convinced us of their ability to match the best two-channel electronics are Theta's Six-Shooter pre-amplifier and the addition of Krell's Showcase DVD player to complete the range of the same name - to mention just two. Thanks to the Krell SACD Standard and the Theta Compli, we are convinced that SACD has a role in the future of high-end audio. We recommend our more traditional customers to consider the new format, a far easier request to make now that the catalogue has expanded to include such fare as a large chunk of the Bob Dylan catalogue, the Police catalogue, a dozen Kinks SACDs, Keb' Mo', Eric Bibb, Diana Krall, the Who and fine recordings from the worlds of classical, jazz, blues, opera and even country music.

Regardless of format or number of channels, we believe that the possibility of improving the reproduction of sound in the home has never been more promising. Just look at what the past year brought us: the unbelievable Sonus Faber Stradivari Homeage, the Krell Resolution 1 speakers, Wilson's awesome Alexandria, the absurdly musical Primaluna Prologue One valve amplifier. The last-named product - which sets impossibly high standards at a ludicrously low price point - even justified the creation of a new division of Absolute Sounds set up specifically to handle this new genre of entry-level masterpieces: Pistol Music.

Thanks to the support of all of our customers and dealers, we are able to continue to encourage our suppliers to strive for even greater things: better sound, better reliability, better value. We have no doubt that the 2004-5 season will be as laden with surprises as was last year, so watch this space.

AUDIO RESEARCH

While ever true to its two-channel roots, Audio Research has not ignored multi-channel. With the introduction last year of the 150M multi-channel amplifier, the company provided an initial entry for its dedicated fans into the world of surround-sound. To mate with it is one of this year's most important debuts: the MP1 multi-channel pre-amplifier has finally arrived. Correctly anticipating the profusion of SACD, DVD-Audio and universal players with multi-channel analogue outputs, Audio Research has created the ideal control unit to accept those signals. The MP1 has no less than three sets of six-channel analogue inputs, so users can feed it with up to three six-channel components - including SACD, DVD-A and universal players as well as stand-alone A/V processors - two in single-ended form and one of which offers both single-ended and balanced connection. Sized like the Reference pre-amplifier, the MP1 also provides four sets of stereo inputs and can act as either a pre-amplifier or a unity-gain pass-through stage. The six-channel outputs are provided in both single-ended and balanced XLR form. Pure Class-A, all-FET, remote controlled, with absolutely zero-compromise two-channel performance, this is the solution to every purist's multi-channel dilemma.

Following the 150M and the 150.2 is a hot new solid-state power amp for systems requiring a lot of oomph. The 300.2 produces a blistering 300W channel into 8 ohms, or 500W into 4 ohms. It offers both single-ended and balanced connections, gold-plated binding posts and optional handles. Like the 150s, this monster uses Audio Research's authoritative application of Class T digital switching technology for better sound and fault-free operation.

Speaking of digital, we're simply overwhelmed by the reaction to the CD-3 Mk II, by far the most musical CD player we've heard in ages. Audio Research believes that 'red book' CD has a long future, and they've optimised the player with a change of over 150 parts from the CD-3. The only mystery is why they didn't call it the CD-4! Detail changes include a tremendous reduction in jitter, the use of the Pro 2 transport from Philips, provision for CD-R and CD-RW playback, balanced and SE output, and it can, of course, be used as a stand-alone transport.

Back in the land of tubes and two-channel, Bill Johnson - doyen of the valve revivalists - has something very special to offer to the pure analogue lover. Replacing both the PH3 and PH 3SE phono stages is the wickedly wild PH5. Just look at the specification: looking like an SP-16, it features an LED function indicators and four soft-touch buttons to command power, mute, mono and loading. Fanatics can now load their cartridges with settings between 100 and 47kOhm at the touch of a button...via remote control! That means you can assess the changes from the listening position! The PH5 utilises a new high-gain J-FET input stage, RIAA circuits modelled after the Reference Phono's stages, and output through a quartet of 6922 twin triodes, separate regulators for all tube heaters, plate supply and microprocessor logic, total gain increased to 57.5dB - this is a dream phono stage, at the unbelievable price of £1799.

Last but not least is a new power amplifier in the Audio Research family that has given us the acclaimed VS55 and VS110. The VM220 is the long-awaited monoblock, and it's good for over 200W. As with other high-power Audio Research amplifiers, it supports both single-ended and balanced operation, and delivers the magic of the '55 and '110 to users on need of more power. A pair of VM220s will set you back £9000 - roughly half of what it would have cost to achieve this performance as recently as five years ago.

COPLAND

As we predicted, Copland's CSA29 integrated amplifier, launched last year, has been a runaway success. This stylish and compact amp is beautifully-styled, ergonomically close to perfect and features the company's advanced valve/transistor hybrid technology. What it also does with ease is deliver a serious 85W/ch, it features a cutting-edge phono section with active RIAA equalization, and its remote control will also operate a matching CD player. The award-winning CDA822 CD spinner is replaced this year by CDA823 - trust us, it's even better and with only a tiny price increase! If you want a sublime entry-level two-channel system, or a package for a second 'zone', this is the place to start. Best of all: Copland's styling and finish are so luxurious that you'll never think of it as affordable, only as divine!

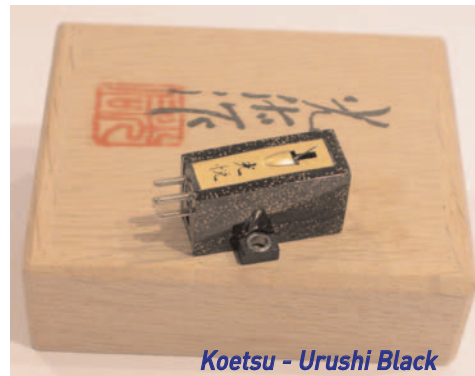
DREAMVISION

Any manufacturer will tell you: passing Absolute Sounds' muster is tough, and we don't add new lines lightly. So DreamVision must be pretty special. They offer stylish prod-

ucts with top-level visual performance, starting with the DreamWeaver Two single-chip DLP. The DreamWeaver Two is particularly exciting, because its entry-level projector price includes such niceties as a Carl Zeiss lens, a 1500:1 contrast ratio, and 16.7 million colour display. Augmenting this is a range of screens including their edge-to-edge 'full glass' displays - the Odyssey 30 TFT 30in and the Odyssey 42 plasma with built-in PAL tuner and speakers, and the Odyssey 50 and 60 monitor-only full-glass plasmas. New for Heathrow will be the fabulous three-chip DLP X3 projector. This little masterpiece can support all video sources from 480p up to HDTV, it features the Genesis/Faroudja chip for converting interlaced video signal to perfect progressive video signals, it has enough inputs to satisfy the craziest videophile, and the X3 can be fully customised to the user's preferences, thanks to a customizable remote control and built-in learning programme. Silent when working, it even looks sensational!

DWIN

Finally reaching the UK, our favourite display manufacturer's 3rd generation TransVision(tm)3 High Definition DLP(tm) Projection System is deliciously clever: it employs two complementary components - the 720p DLP(tm) Projector with the latest Mustang/HD2 DMD technology from Texas Instruments, and DWIN's acclaimed Digital Video Processor. The latter provides great installation flexibility, eliminates double processing of video signals and enables complete digital connectivity from digital video sources to



Koetsu - Urushi Black

the display, ensuring the best picture quality possible. Better still, the TransVision(tm)3 is the only contender amongst the competing 720p DLP(tm) projectors to employ Prism Free Optical light path architecture to guarantee maximum picture contrast. The result is true high definition, stunning film-like images with superior detail, deep blacks, high contrast and vibrant colours unsurpassed by any other competing system. With its Carl-Zeiss(tm) zoom lens, this baby produces the widest single lens throw distances, ranging from 1.41 to 2.1 times the screen width, and it employs a 200 watt lamp to cover a wide range of screen sizes. Flexibility is assured because the TransVision(tm)3's Digital Video Processor accepts a total of 10 video inputs.

JADIS

Basking in the glow of the success of their DA 50 Signature entry-level integrated amplifier, Jadis has announced another desirable integrated, the DA 8. This is a unique model that is already capturing the hearts of audiophiles thanks to its sweet sound. Rated at 80W/ch, the DA 8 drives speakers far beyond its price category, which explains its status as the 'ultimate integrated' amongst a certain coterie of music lovers. Also attracting attention from the cognoscenti is the Jadis entry-level line stage, the DPL 2. For those of you seeking the ultimate sensation from tube monoblocks, the JA 100 and JA 200 remain pre-eminent as the absolute standard for most audiophile systems, defying the years with the grace of an aged Parisian aristocrat.

KOETSU

If there are any who still doubt that there's a revival in the passion for two-channel sound and vinyl playback, then the continued demand for Koetsu cartridges has convinced us that records simply are not going away. Keep in mind that Koetsu are intrinsically limited editions - they cannot be made in greater numbers because of the skills required to assemble and tune them. They are like fine wristwatches or Italian exoticcars - they're simply works of art. Because of the



demand, Koetsu has not felt the compulsion to introduce new models gratuitously. The range for 2004-5 will consist of these modern classics: Black with aluminium body, Red T with rosewood body, the various Urushis configured differently in terms of 'engine tuning', the Platinum series comprising of the legendary Signature, Gold with onyx body, Itoigawa and Jade. For those who crave even more exclusivity, we can arrange for any Platinum model to be fitted with a diamond cantilever. It continues to amaze us that Koetsu cartridges demonstrate longevity not evinced by any other moving coils, making them long-term investments rather than short-term risks. Quite simply, there's no better way to retrieve sound from vinyl.

KRELL

From new kids on the block to bastion of the establishment in 25 years, Krell is a concentrated study in the ascendancy to the top. They dazzled us in the early 1980s with their brave Class-A amplifiers. Now, in the 21st Century, Krell is one of very few high-end companies to survive the late 1990s doldrums, to emerge as one of those rare brands able to provide a complete system from source to speaker. We're proud to have been among the very first of Krell's supporters; our loyalty has been rewarded with the most comprehensive line-up of true high-end components in the industry.



DreamVision-DreamWeaver 2

With the entire high-end audio industry still shaky from last year's ructions, the top of the solid-state sector – both two- and multi-channel – is settling down...and Krell is one of the survivors thanks to its unbroken record of king-of-the-hill contenders. Amplifiers, CD players and now speakers – is there anything this brand cannot do, and do well? For 2004-5, the entire Resolution Series loudspeakers will be made available to selected dealers. The range includes the Resolution 1 floorstander, Resolution 2 and 3 bookshelf or stand-mount monitors, the Resolution C centre channel and the Resolution subwoofer. For those sceptics who feel that Krell can only make electronics, please be open-minded. After all, Dan D'Agostino started out making speakers! Whether two-channel or multi-channel, the Resolution range simply must be auditioned in an all-Krell milieu. We can now demonstrate the Showcase DVD player, a fantastic entry-level machine, while the SACD Standard continues to win converts to the new format – it's that good!

MARTIN LOGAN

Martin Logan has developed a split personality! The company's catalogue has evolved into two complementary ranges – lifestyle products and core models. The lifestyle line-up, user- and room-friendly and ideal for multi-channel, consists of the Script i, the Mosaic, the Montage, the Cinema i, the Theatre i, the Fresco and the Grotto. They'll be joined this year by another versatile and compact on-wall ATF transducer, the Vignette, while the Dynamo is the small subwoofer coming in below (no pun intended) the Grotto. Truly a compact sub, it uses the newly-developed Inverse Mathematical Equation filtering technology. Front-firing and down-firing configurations provide bass down to 25Hz, all from a gorgeous enclosure measuring only 13.9x11.7x12.9in! The Dynamo covers the 25-120Hz range and powers its 10in aluminium cone woofer with an onboard amplifier good for 200W RMS! Truly a baby Depth!!!!

What the Vignette brings to the Martin Logan fan is a new level of flexibility – it will augment any Martin Logan models, and can be used for two- or multi-channel roles. And if the Vignette's discreet presence is still too much for certain applications. The company has released a brace of in-wall speakers! The Voyage and the Passage feature a fully-adjustable Tweeter Alignment Sphere to ensure optimum set-up, and they're IR Repeater Ready, too. They fix to the walls using custom-made hardware, and we reckon they're the best 'environmental' speakers money can buy!

For Martin Logan's purist following, the core models now include the Clarity, the Aeon i, the Ascent i, Odyssey and Prodigy, augmented by the mighty Depth and Descent subwoofers. For those seeking the ultimate in full-size electrostatic sound, the Statement Mk II still represents the ultimate.

PRIMA LUNA

Perhaps the biggest surprise of all for us in 2004 was the arrival of a brand so shockingly capable and so mind-bogglingly inexpensive that it demanded the creation of a new division within our ranks. At last, we can offer a true 'entry level' all-valve amplifier that delivers world class sound, but for a price you'd expect to pay for a mediocre Japanese receiver. Built to a faultless standard, fitted with top-quality Russian EL34s, the ProLogue One is a line level, 2x35W integrated with enough real power to drive speakers normally paired with 150W solid-state behemoths. It forced reviewer Ken Kessler to write, 'With apologies to various British and

Italian geniuses, this amplifier has – to my ears – no equals at its retail price of £849.' That's right: an unbelievable £849. But that's just the start. Soon to follow is the ProLogue 2 which will add a new auto bias stage and KT88s for only £200 more; power goes up to 2x40W. We've been told that separate preamps and power amps will follow, as well as monoblocks and other models. If they can match the sheer brilliance of the ProLogue One, then Prima Luna could emerge as one of the hottest brands of the decade.

SONUS FABER

There's no escaping it: for Sonus Faber, this has been the year of the Stradivari Homage. Sonus Faber's largest and most expensive-ever speaker has earned rave reviews around the world, with headlines proclaiming it to be the world's finest speaker. We can't argue with that, and judging by the 8-12 week wait for a pair, those who have heard them would agree. This is Franco Serblin's statement product, the third in his 'homage' series dedicated to the great violin makers of Cremona. A work of art in terms of styling and finish, it delivers sound even more beautiful than the promise of its curves and sweeps, the satiny finish of the rare woods, the gloss black accents, the 'violin string' grille. Make no mistake, this is a milestone product to rank with the original Quad ESL, the Audio research SP6b, the original Koetsu Rosewood. A masterpiece? Indubitably. For those with less generous budgets, we're still in love with the Cremona range, especially with its amazing sympathy for multi-channel installations, while the Concerto Home range represents astonishing value – and you should hear how they sing with a PrimaLuna Prologue One!

THETA DIGITAL

Basking in the glow of absolutely rave reviews for its amplifiers, Theta has added a fourth model to the series that includes Dreadnaught, Intrepid and Citadel. The new Enterprise is a 300W monoblock based on the Citadel, selling for £4444 – less than half the price of the parent amplifier! Zero feedback circuitry, balanced operation, Cardas wiring, 'control tower' styling – another gem from a source better known for processors. Which brings us to the main announcement for 2003: Generation VIII. The model that stationed Theta up with the greats is now into an incarnation that ensures future-proof ownership, even including suitability for direct feed from SACD and DVD-A players...when they're available. The Gen VIII is a full differential-balanced DCA preamplifier with custom-designed software, upsampling, jitter filtering, five digital inputs, compatibility with Casablanca and CasaNova and much, much more. The most advanced DAC on the market? We believe so. STOP PRESS: Theta showed the Compli universal SACD/DVD-A player at CEDIA, and it looks like it's going to transform the market for the new formats: Theta's high-end performance for under £3000, and it will play any flavour of silver disc that you care to feed it! A DVI card for Compli is also being introduced, a pure digital interface that avoids extra transitions from the digital realm to the analogue and back again all that for £4482. Theta's other big news is the long-awaited response to customer demand: the 6-Shooter is an analogue preamplifier expansion model that works with the CasaNova and Casablanca III, allowing the use of multi-channel analogue sources, such as the analogue outputs of SACD and DVD-Audio players, balanced or single-ended both ways, with a high quality volume control and the ability to accommodate two multi-channel devices. Theta tells us that the 6-Shooter was created for a simple, but important reason. "Rather than negate the sonic advantages of these advanced systems, by forcing these fragile analogue signals through digital processors or re-digitising the signal, Theta protects the analogue signal. The 6-Shooter is simply a fine straight-line analogue preamplifier, but controlled seamlessly by the Casablanca." Also new for Casablanca III is the Superior II card and Xtreme DAC upgrade, both offering sonic improvements over their predecessors.

TRANSPARENT CABLE

Last year was a transitional period for Transparent, the company having upgraded its entire line to use MM technology. This effectively adds a touch of Opus to every model in the catalogue. MM boasts such details as a refinement of the Transparent filter network, individually insulated strands of oxygen-free copper, improved damping materials and much more, making it the most sophisticated wiring we've experienced. For the home installer and home cinema user, each and every Transparent cable can be terminated in any type of connector. And for those of you with a cost-no-object approach to fine-tuning your system, we believe that the Opus line remains the finest selection of cables that money can buy. Bar none.

For 2004, Transparent has launched its own DVI cables, after

nearly a year of research and product development.

The two cables will provide stunning video resolution and colour over long lengths without any additional signal boosting in the path – normally a problem for DVI wires. These new products represent another industry first for Transparent, the new High Performance DVI cable (HPDVI) delivering superb performance on all video devices with DVI outputs at lengths up to 30 feet! Depending on the device, HPDVI can provide very good performance at even longer lengths. Transparent's new Premium DVI cable (PDVI) provides superb performance on all video devices with DVI outputs at lengths at least up to 65 feet. PDVI clearly outperforms HPDVI at all lengths in terms of colour saturation and dynamic range. PDVI also has a lower noise floor and does a better job at keeping artefacts out of the picture because of its superior shielding, precision 100-ohm impedance, and Teflon insulating materials.

WILSON AUDIO

By now, you're familiar with Wilson's new flagship model, the Alexandria. Coming in well above the X1 Grand SLAMM, which stays in production, the Alexandria is so huge a leap in performance and price that it has even laid to rest the mighty WAMM. Reports from those fortunate enough to have heard it suggest that there's nothing on the planet that even comes close to the sheer grandeur of the Alexandria's performance: breathtaking naturalness, sublime bass control, utterly convincing stereo imagery – it's got the lot. In the event that we haven't received a pair in time for the show (the first 50 pairs have been sold, and Wilson can only make four pairs per month!), they will definitely be available for auditioning in the UK by the end of the year.

The good news for 2004 is that the new technology manifested in the Alexandria has yielded its first trickledown offshoot, the MAXX 2. This speaker will be demonstrated at the hi-fi show, with Wilson's Peter McGrath attending as a special, honoured guest. We expect it to be a future classic, to stand alongside the timeless and truly legendary WATT Puppy System 7.

It's becoming something of a tradition for us, to take the opportunity presented by our newsletter to congratulate our suppliers for their achievements. Our brands are recognised around the world as the premier manufacturers within their respective disciplines, and it continues to warm our hearts, every time their efforts are acknowledged. It is with much delight that we raise our glasses in acknowledgment of the following honours during 2003/2004.

Krell Showcase/Showcase 5

Home Cinema Choice
Award of Excellence

Krell LAT 2

Robb Report
Best of the Best

Krell HTS7.1

Stereophile Guide to Home Theatre
Editors Choice Platinum Award

Koetsu Red K Signature

Hi Fi Plus

Product of the Year

Martin Logan Odyssey

Audio Art Japan
Best Performance of the Year

Martin Logan Clarity

2003 International CES, Innovations 2003
Design and Engineering Showcase Award

Wilson Audio System 7

Robb Report
Best of the Best

Wilson Audio System 7

Soundstage.com
Hall of Fame

Wilson Sophia

The Absolute Sound
Golden Ear Award

Theta Dreadnaught 2

The Absolute Sound 2003
Product of the Year

Krell KAV400xi

Hi Fi Choice 2003/2004
Product of the Year

Sonus Faber Cremona Auditor

Hi Fi Choice 2003/2004
Product of the Year

Martin Logan Clarity

Hi Fi Choice 2003/2004
Product of the Year

Sonus Faber Cremona Auditor

Hi Fi Plus 2003/2004
Product of the Year

Krell SACD Standard

Hi Fi Plus 2003/2004
Product of the Year

Wilson Audio System 7

Hi Fi News 2003/2004
High End Product of the Year

Krell Showcase 5

Home Cinema Choice
Best Amplifier of the Year



Krell resolution 2

