

NEWSLETTER vol. 35

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With over 25 years' experience at the cutting edge of high-end audio and video, Absolute Sounds is your best guide through the maze of home entertainment.

ABSOLUTE SOUNDS NEWSLETTER 2007

As we predicted last year, rival high-res DVD formats, the continued rise of low-res downloading and the concomitant decline of disc sales through specialty stores have had no effect on high-end audio. True music lovers still prefer classic, two-channel stereo, and the astounding growth in sales of analogue components now even earns front covers from Sunday colour supplements. We've seen the fruits of this in the phenomenal sales of our Audio Research Ref PH7 and PH5 phono stages. And it seems like there will never be enough Koetsus to go around.



Beyond analogue, we at Absolute Sounds are delighted to announce that our top-end sales have never been stronger, exceeding the purchases

of entry-level models against all logic. In part, it's due to the extreme loyalty of our clients, whose systems have grown and matured and evolved over the years. Equally, we, too, have grown and matured and evolved to embrace - with our usual caution - the new technologies as and when they attain our required levels of stability and performance. A perfect example is the arrival this year of not one but two iPod 'docks' that we deem to be of high-enough quality to warrant inclusion in an Absolute Sounds system: Jadis' Orchestra DiP integrated amp with iPod module and Krell's mind-boggling KID. There are no longer any excuses for keeping your iPod away from your main system, provided that one takes advantage of the high-res music files which are available from CDs or sound engineers (no MP3 or any other compressed formats!!)

Inevitably, high-end audio has had to grow up: in today's luxury fields, the ever-burgeoning sales of supercars, complicated watches, fine wines, bespoke clothing and other rivals for disposable income have - and we welcome it - forced specialty audio manufacturers to address the lifestyle of the 21st century. They have to consider sophistication, refined tastes and levels of customer satisfaction that never before challenged their abilities. Absolute Sounds' brands have managed to do this without compromising what remains the single most important measure of all: sound quality.

We are immensely pleased that the brands we represent have adapted to custom installation and multi-room use, but more importantly, they have addressed a long-neglected issue - that of aesthetics. Market leaders Sonus Faber and Martin Logan, who first raised the bar in speaker design, continue to delight us with loudspeakers that do not cause interior decorators to revolt, while the latest generations of Krell and Copland hardware are too pretty to hide. Finally, we are seeing audio components with the same desirability as Richard Mille wrist-watches or Pagani Zonda automobiles.

For the coming season, our brands have come up with an array of exceptional products that we simply didn't anticipate. The aforementioned KID brought smiles to the faces of everyone who saw the prototype in New York in the spring, Martin Logan's Purity is their first fully-powered electrostatic speaker, Sonus Faber has redesigned the Cremona range, Wilson just announced the Alexandria II, Yter has - at last - announced a balanced cable and Koetsu (at the 11th hour!) added the Urushi Sky Blue moving-coil cartridges to their mouth-watering catalogue.

What follows in greater detail are the pleasures awaiting you during the coming year.

AUDIO RESEARCH

With the completion last year of the Reference family - the addition of the 'baby' REF 110 stereo power amp making the flagship series accessible to an even greater number of music lovers - Audio Research's premium range has at last garnered the acclaim it has deserved all along. Now our most devoted Audio Research customers understand and appreciate the vision that has created this peerless line of valve electronics. The globally-acclaimed REF 3 pre-amplifier, adjudged by the senior members of the audio press as the finest control unit on earth, and either the 610 and 210T monoblocks, allied to the REF PH7 phono stage and REF CD 7 CD player, form a system to rival anything on the

market today. But now, with the REF 110 and one of the new pre-amplifiers from the 'regular' Audio Research range, the stunning LS17 and LS26, the music lover of slightly restricted means can savour all that 'REF' stands for. We suspected as much last year, and are profoundly happy that the LS17/REF 110 combination has emerged as a winning ticket.

With the REF series established as its statement line, Audio Research is now in a position to expand and refine the rest of the catalogue, with an eye and ear to convenience and efficiency. A new topology is embodied in the HD220 Hybrid Drive stereo power amplifier, its 220W/channel delivered by a dozen bipolar devices, driven by a 6922 dual triode gain stage and a 6H30 dual triode cathode follower. With conservatively-rated valves at the front-end, and the latest solid-state devices feeding the speakers, the HD220 could offer the best of both worlds. And for those who wish to make the leap entirely into an all-solid-state system, the new SD135 JFET power amplifier produces 135W/ch from a unit slightly larger than the 300.2 that it replaces.

COPLAND

Slowly, deliberately, Copland continues to produce magnificent products that combine aesthetics, performance and value in measures unknown elsewhere. This year, another star emerged, the sublime CTA405 50W/ch integrated valve amplifier. Boasting Copland's exquisitely tasteful styling and sound quality that seduces the ears the way that clean front panel charms the eyes, the CTA405 drove Hi-Fi News attributed to it "superb build quality, user-friendly ergonomics, a lack of stupid frills, styling befitting products 10 times its price and sound quality that encourages marathon listening sessions."

While we're eager to trumpet the CTA405, we must also apologise for the delay in delivering Copland's astounding DRC205 Digital Room Correction system. We promised this last year, but Ole Muller has spent intervening period refining the algorithms and dealing with licensing issues. But now it's ready for delivery, and we're expecting its debut to take place at the Sound & Vision show at Heathrow in September. To recap, the E1290 DRC205 looks like a DAC or low-profile power amp, so it will sit with the rest of your system unobtrusively. Set up its microphone, hit a button, and 20 seconds later (yup, 20 seconds) it will have tailored the sound of your system to your room. Its properties include optimizing system performance, adjusting the system's frequency response, eliminating room acoustics problems and adjusting impulse response. You can even hook it up to a Windows-compatible PC to access other functions. At its price - less than a metre of high-end cable! - the DRC205 has to be the best accessory on the market.

CRYSTAL

No cable brand has arrived from the outset with such sheer professionalism and competence as its modus operandi as Crystal. From the clever and innovative packaging to the svelte, easy-to-manoeuvre form, each Crystal model demonstrates a real-world approach to premium cable design. Using silver as its primary material, with faultless construction and professional-quality termination, Crystal has covered all the requirements necessary for a world-class introduction to high-performance wiring.

Exploiting its' peerless pedigree and background in metallurgy to produce high-end cables from under £300, Crystal has delivered interconnects, matching speaker wire, a digital cable, FireWire, BNC-to-RCA, power cables, HDMI and more. For 2007-8, though, Crystal is upping the ante with Ultra, which promises to deliver top-level, reference-grade performance in the highly-competitive world of cost-no-object wiring. To make its presence known, Crystal Ultra will debut with a line-level interconnect, speaker cables, balanced wires and digital cables, boasting Kapton-treated dielectrics and proprietary noise cancellation said to be over 60dB quieter than other cables.

DARTZEEL

So in-demand are these Swiss-made masterpieces that dartZeel has been occupied for the whole of the past year simply with meeting orders. Serge and Herve will try to deliver something new next year, but for the time being, they have demonstrated the solidity of their brand by satisfying demand. And the dartZeel combination is so good that clients are prepared to wait. To remind you of the models that make this one of the most exciting brands of the new millennium, the range consists of the NHB-18NS pre-amplifier and the award-winning NHB-108 Model One Power amplifier. The pre-amp contains every feature needed to form the heart of a sophisticated system, with modular construction to ensure longevity, and a battery power supply to free the sound of any mains-borne interference. The power amp? A delicious lend of power and finesse. We can't wait to see what they do for an endore....

DREAMVISION

DreamVision is a brand for which we have a special affection because of one particularly notable achievement. In a market where the majority of products are made by faceless multinational corporations, building projectors and display panels to the lowest common denominator, DreamVision has shown that there is demand for a true high-end video

product, for customers who place quality above price.

What has astonished the toughest critics, though, is the realisation that DreamVision's latest models actually represent astonishing value as well: the new DreamBee and DreamBee Pro Tri-D-ILA projectors compete with 3-chip DLPs at half the price! The DreamBee itself delivers state-of-the-art performance up to 1920x1080 full HD resolution and 15,000 contrast for £6999, while the Pro adds a dedicated version of the highly desirable DreamScaler 3 for £9500. Naturally, they will address the needs of any home cinema installation, and they just beg to be fed a signal from a Blu-ray or HD-DVD disc.

Joining the company's popular DreamVision LCDs are two exceptional plasma screens; again, they represent the premium level of performance at prices which have forced us to reassess 'value for money'. The MovieStar 42 is a 42in plasma with 1024x1024 resolution for £2500, while the 50in MovieStar 50 offers 1366x768 resolution for £4500. Their Fine Mode equalizer automatically adjusts the display's emitted light depending on the movie's sudden changes, an ambient light sensor automatically adjusts the brightness of the screen to the light of the viewing environment, and compatibility is assured for PAL (M, N, 60), SECAM, NTSC & NTSC 4:3, 480i, 576i, 480p, 576p, 720p and 1080i.

EAT

Nothing surprised us more over the past few years than the passion our clients have for optimising the valves in their amplifiers and pre-amps. EAT arrived to a sceptical reception, customers wondering how a single KT88 could be worth £140. Once they tried a set, that was it: we've had repeat customers and comments that suggest only total satisfaction. Then came the Cool Dampers, and people marvelled at so much of a performance gain for only £15 per tube! But throughout, they were asking, 'What about our pre-amps?' So EAT has responded with the ECC803S Selected, ECC803S Diamond, ECC88 Selected and ECC88 Diamond, the first pair compatible with the ECC83/12AX7, and the second pair being upgrades for the ECC88/6DJ8 - thus covering the vast majority of popular pre-amplifier valves. Starting at £65 each, they cost a lot less than a new pre-amp - but they'll make your existing control unit sound better than the day it left the factory.



Martin Logan Purity

JADIS

France's premier valve amplifier manufacturer kicked off the season with the delightful Orchestra DiP integrated amplifier, shown in a blood-orange finish at the Paris show in March, and sporting a slot for an iPod. This is wonderful news for Jadis devotees - among the most loyal we've encountered - who have been puzzling over their iPods and how to segue them into their systems.

But that's not all Jadis has been up to this year. Now shipping is the new valve CD player called the Symphonia Evolution with Delta-Sigma multi-bit 24/192 processing, the latest Philips transport and, most importantly, a tube output section, all housed in a stylish yet compact chassis. For those who wish to extract a bit more, the company has also



introduced the JD3 Evolution Pro CD drive and JD3 Evolution Pro CD player, the JP15 line stage valve pre-amplifier, and the JPS3 phono pre-amplifier.

KOETSU

No brand has benefited from the incredible revitalisation of analogue than Koetsu. Categorically the doyen of cartridge manufacturers, Koetsu has continued the traditions established by Sugano-san, to remain the defining producer of hand-made cartridges. Indeed, it's now synonymous with the artisan movement among extreme high-end Japanese audiophiles. Koetsu continues to experiment with different body materials and finishes, as well as wire and magnet types; the traditional stable



Koetsu Urushi Sky Blue

has been augmented to include the Coral, Onyx, Tiger Eye and Burma Jade models, while the stalwart Black maintains its position as Koetsu's entry level. The latest to join the fold is the eye-wateringly gorgeous Urushi Sky Blue, with French blue finish. Inside, it uses an Alnico magnet producing 0.4mv output. The coil windings are silverclad wire, rather than the alternate copper-and-silver wire found in the Urushi Vermillion, and the sound promises to be fresh and invigorating. [Note: this is THE cartridge to consider if you happen to own a Bugatti.]

KRELL

Krell's Evolution series lives up to its name: it continues to evolve. The company is filling all the gaps with models that ensure that your choice is the ideal one, from the heart-stopping 900W Evolution 900 monoblocks on down. For those who simply cannot house two chassis, and whose requirements demand less power, the new Evolution 302 is calling to you: 2x300W in a single component. Naturally, the signal path employs Krell Current Mode and CAST circuitry, while an advanced microprocessor control monitors critical operational parameters: bias, load impedance, regulator output voltages and operating temperature are all continuously monitored.

In the 'normal' range, the S-1000 is a new surround preamp/processor which combines robust, high-end audio performance with HDMI video switching in one easy to use, feature-rich package. A unique software-based eight-channel digital room equalizer maximizes system performance in any room. And there isn't a surround format it can't cope with, be it Dolby Digital Surround EX, Dolby Digital 5.1, DTS 6.1 ES, DTS 5.1, DTS NEO:6 or Dolby Pro Logic II. Moreover, there are nine proprietary Krell Music Surround modes. An ideal match for it is the S-1500 multi-channel, upgradeable amplifier, which provides an upgrade path for the Showcase 5 and Showcase 6 amplifiers, enabling additional channels to be installed at any time. Class-A circuitry is employed in the input, pre-driver and driver stages to provide the most accurate signal path, Krell Current Mode, fully-balanced topologies are utilised



Krell Evolution 302

for all amplifier channels and eight high-speed power devices per channel deliver 150W into 8 Ohms.

The summer's most recent launches from Krell are the Krell Evolution 302 Power Amplifier, delivering a stunning 300 Watts per channel, and the Evolution 400 Mono Block Amplifier, delivering 400 Watts per block. The Evolution 302 represents exceptional value for money for a Krell high-end amplifier; as for the Evolution 400, it is an easy route into the world of high-quality mono amplification.

The latest news for 2007-8 is the arrival of the Modulare speaker concept, a £30,000 per pair system weighing in at 300lb. Its separate woofer and satellite units are made of machined billet aluminium, just like the first LAT-1 speaker system. The woofer enclosure houses contains three 8in aluminium-cone woofers, while upper frequencies are covered by a 1in ScanSpeak ring-radiator tweeter and a 6.5in aluminium-cone midrange driver. Said to offer much higher power handling, the Modulare system can be upgraded by adding more enclosures.

We expect the arrival of the long-awaited Reference Standard Evolution 707 sound processor and the Evolution 525 Universal CD/SACD/DVD player by the end of the year. We thank our clients who have ordered these units for their patience.

MARTIN LOGAN

For 2007-8, Martin Logan has a company 'first' that will delight audiophiles who prefer to go active: the Purity is Martin Logan's first-ever self-powered speaker. Naturally, ML has years of experience with this technology, having produced a number of powered subwoofers. This time, the entire speaker is powered across its full frequency range, from its cone woofers to its electrostatic main panel.

Called the Purity, this loudspeaker represents a new level in user-friendliness for electrostatic users. Internally powered with a high-resolution 200W digital amplifier, Purity is equipped with a standard line-level input, so it can be connected directly to any line level source with level control, such as digital music players, flat screen televisions, computers or CD players with output controls, as well as to traditional systems - receivers, integrated or pre-amps for both two-channel or home theatre set-ups. And to ensure the best match to the listening position, it can even be adjusted with 1° to 13° degrees of rake.

Another addition to the Martin Logan family is the Motif, which is directly influenced by the Stage centre-channel speaker: state-of-the-art XStatTM electrostatic panel, dual aluminium-cone woofers and a soft dome tweeter embedded directly in the electrostatic panel, in a unit supplied with wall-mount brackets and a pivoting stand for up to with 35 degrees of Motion. Cleverly, the Motif can work as either a centre or surround speaker, on- or off-wall, playing horizontally or vertically.

Then there's the Source, which just may turn out to be the hottest new speaker this year: it's the world's most affordable high-performance electrostatic loudspeaker. Ever. And yet it features all of the technology that makes Martin Logans the world's premier range of electrostatics: ultra-high-resolution AirFrame technology as developed for the Summit, an 8-inch woofer and a sophisticated crossover. Oh, and looks to die for. So here's a tip for all our Copland and PrimaLuna customers: there's now an electrostatic speaker for only £1599. Per pair.

MIMETISM

We can't get enough of Mimetism. Their 20.1 CD player provides a natural progression from the affordable Copland, and it works so perfectly the darTZeel electronics that we no longer feel so impatient waiting for darTZeel's own CD spinner. But now there's an in-house amplifier to consider, Mimetism's own luscious 15.2. Delivering a juicy 2x180W, this solid-state beauty offers full-remote control, a crystal-clear info display and the cleanest, most minimalist styling we've ever seen. We weren't exaggerating when we said before that our brands are addressing modern needs. This product would look good in a museum of modern art. And yet it boasts all of the techno-goodies you could require, including power courtesy of Hitachi Lateral Mosfets 2SK1058 & 2SJ162 complementary power transistors, in a configuration of two pairs per channel. Its input section uses a cascode differential stage for the best performance, and its driver operates in pure class A. The circuit is fully direct-coupled but for a single ingress capacitor, and all signal paths are kept as short as possible. And the remote itself is a work of art, a long, thin, sculpted bar of solid aluminium, with controls not only for the 15.2, but also the Mimetism CD player and any other device that uses RC-5 codes. All-in-all, Mimetism is a brand to watch. And to listen to....

MYSTÈRE

The big news from the Dutch valve freaks is the new prestige line the sexy-looking Mystère integrateds. Feature sleek, curved front panels and high-gloss black finishes, the Mystère models are said to sound more 'tube-y' than the less-expensive PrimaLuna, and they have the clever facility of accepting either EL34s or KT88s at the flick of a switch. The 40W/ch ia11 uses EL34s, the 50W/ch ia21 employs KT88s, and both feature high-quality 24-step volume attenuators, hard-wiring throughout, dual-mono topology with Adaptive AutoBias and full pentode push-pull output circuitry with minimal feedback.

PRIMALUNA

They probably never sleep at PrimaLuna. This year, not only do we have new models but a whole new range! Prologue 8 is the sensational PrimaLuna valve CD player, a snip at £1590 and a perfect match in every way for the company's market-leading amps and pre-amps. For those who wish to sample what PrimaLuna can do with less of an eye to cost constraints, two new integrated amplifiers have been added to the catalogue, both offering the company's proprietary auto-biasing circuit and differing mainly in the choice of valves. The Dialogue 1 uses EL34s for its 36W output, while the Dialogue 2 extracts 38W/ch from KT88s.

SONUS FABER

For this season, Sonus faber has concentrated on refining the already-sublime Cremona range, spurred on by the phenomenal success of the Cremona Elipsa. Dubbed 'the baby Stradivari' but its devotees, the Elipsa represents the latest stage in the development of the high-spec Sonus fabers that have benefited from Homage research. And the best news of all is that the Elipsa has a baby of its own: the adorable Auditor Elipsa Looking like a scale model of the full-scale Elipsa, the Auditor Elipsa is a 2-way system in a vented enclosure, using the same elliptical shape and combination of sandwich construction made from 20 hand selected wood layers and solid maple. With its 25mm ultra



Sonus Faber Cremona Auditor M

dynamic ring radiator-driver and 150mm mid/bass cone driver in a chassis measuring only 335x224 x341 mm (WxDxH), the Auditor Elipsa can be used as either a pair of main speakers, or wall mounts for surround systems.

Though unmistakably a Cremona, the new M version has been re-tuned and features new, proprietary drivers designed in-house. Since its inception, this has been one of the most impressive 3-way floor-standing speakers on the market. Now it's even better. With 91dB sensitivity, it will work with medium-output power amplifiers, and it comes so close to Homage series performance that it just may be the biggest bargain in the catalogue. For those who require a smaller speaker, or a model for use with rear channel duties, the same magic has been worked on the 2-way Auditor, which now has M status, too.

THETA DIGITAL

Theta continues to innovate at the forefront of digital audio and video technology. They're virtually unique amongst the manufacturers of costly home cinema and multi-channel hardware in that their roots are purely audiophilic: this company cares about sound quality, not just the number of features. Along with the Six Shooter, launched earlier this year, the range has two new, deeply groundbreaking additions. Affordable and versatile, the new Valis is a multi-channel music and cinema processor able to handle all digital streams. The Virtu, the perfect mate for the Valis, is a 7-channel ultra-high-speed digital amplifier, one that can truly be called a PowerDAC: it accepts the full digital stream from the Valis, while sparing the signal from the degradation of the various extra D/A and A/D conversions necessary with other systems. The Valis/Virtu combination keeps the signal in the digital domain, all the way from the recording until it powers your speakers.

TRANSPARENT AUDIO

Over many years of exclusive partnership with Absolute Sounds, Transparent has rewarded our customers with cables that demonstrate the greatest respect for music. From The Link to Opus, Transparent offers connections to suit all budgets and all audio and video applications. This year Transparent has been honored with a Product of the Year award on the PowerIsolator Reference, as well as a Hall of Fame Award for the Reference series of Audio and Video cables. Transparent has also expanded their upgrade program to include their 7 levels of power cord products. All Transparent owners should contact their dealer to participate in the unmatched factory and distributor sponsored upgrade program. As a loyal customer you can choose to go in one- or two-step upgrades for just a little expenditure, reflecting Transparent's and Absolute Sound's continuous commitment to their customers



Wilson Audio-Duette

WILSON AUDIO

2006 was the year of the Duette, the company's first true mini-speaker. Though it stands only 18in tall, it sounds like it has the dimensions of a Sophia or WATT Puppy. As promised above, the brands we represent have addressed modern requirements, and Wilson is no exception: the Duette can be used in corners or against the wall, or, in free space on stands, and it will deliver superior imaging, detail retrieval, sound-staging and dynamics regardless of the position. Wilson even produces a special external crossover to cope with both free-space and near-wall placement. Every time we fire up a pair, we're astonished at the sheer scale of the sonic picture, and we have no hesitation in calling this one of the most impressive stand-mounts we've ever supplied. New for 2007 is the Alexandria II, a major overhaul of the company's flagship model. The great news is that the updates are completely retrofittable to the original. They include all-new, proprietary drivers, so the change is truly evolutionary, and a milestone for the company.

YTER

Discreetly, with minimal fanfare, Yter has seduced a following from the world's toughest audio critics and most discerning customers. We suggested last year that it's a mix of simplicity, price and a truly manageable form. Or maybe it's the leather wallets in which they're supplied? Whatever circumstantial evidence leads to the positive reaction, above all it's the performance, thanks to the design team consists of Sonus Faber's Franco Serblin and his son-in-law, a qualified metallurgist. Still meeting demand for the original speaker cable and interconnect, the team at Yter have responded to overwhelming demand for an XLR-terminated, balanced version of the interconnect, so now users of Krell and Audio research equipment in balanced mode can enjoy these stunning wires from Italy.

AUDIO SHOW 2007

We will be exhibiting most of these exciting products at the Park Inn Hotel, Heathrow, between the 21st-23rd September. Please ensure to get your tickets for guaranteed-seated demonstrations by the experts at Krell, Martin Logan and Wilson Audio upon arrival to the show in front of the Johnson, Earheart and Armstrong suites.

