

# HIFICRITIC



AUDIO REVIEW JOURNAL

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## REVIEWED THIS ISSUE

GRADIENT HELSINKI  
NAIM UNITISERVE  
NAIM NDX  
MAGICO Q1  
LAMPIZATOR DAC  
AURELIA CERICAS  
AUDIO-TECHNICA AT-OC9MLII  
ORTOFON RONDO BLUE  
DYNAVECTOR KARAT 17D3  
ZU AUDIO DENON DL103  
NAIM NAC552 DC PS  
UNITY AUDIO THE ROCK  
THRAX DIONYSOS  
CENTRANCE MINIDAC  
RED WINE AUDIO S10 BLACK LIGHTNING  
ELIPSON PLANET L  
NOVO SPA-II  
BLACK RHODIUM TWIST  
CHORD SARUM DIGITAL  
ATLAS ASIMI  
ATLAS MAVROS  
MEICORD CAT6  
AUDIOQUEST FOREST ETHERNET  
DNM HFTN

### GRADIENT HELSINKI

A speaker with unique directivity and presentation

### NAÏVE NETWORKING

A sceptic gets to grips with network audio

### MINIATURE EXCELLENCE

Magico Q1 – probably the most advanced miniature speaker around

### FOUR AFFORDABLE CARTRIDGES

Mid-price moving-coils, from Audio-Technica, Dynavector, Ortofon and Zu Audio

### THE VALVE DAC

Mixing up the old and the new

### WHITHER DIGITAL?

Meridian's Bob Stuart describes the past, present and future of digital audio

### MUSIC & MUCH MORE

# Bits and Pieces

A ROUNDUP OF SHORT REVIEWS BY MARTIN COLLOMS

**HIFICRITIC**  
AUDIO EXCELLENCE



*MeiCord CAT6 Ethernet Cable*

## MeiCord CAT6 Ethernet Cable

Sound quality differences between CAT cables have been reported for a few years now. We have tried a few generic types of *CAT5* and *CAT6 UTP* (unshielded twisted pair), unshielded and shielded (preferring the unshielded type), and we reported on these in *Vol 6 No1* (p22).

Mains Cables R Us distributes the German made MeiCord *CAT6 UTP*, and we obtained our 10m standard length for this review. MeiCord speaks of a more uniform build, more stable conductor geometry and higher performance vibration resisting connectors, and the 10m cable costs about £200, which is ten times that of Amazon-sourced Belkin *CAT6* (our current favourite). However, it does compare on price with audiophile offerings from Audioquest and other premium cable brands, and would therefore probably be chosen for a more upmarket server system. Of course it might not be needed in this length, and it was suggested that shorter interconnections (for example, NAS-to-router) would also benefit from such an upmarket cable.

No one needed to strain their ears to hear what benefit this cable brought. It delivered unmistakable improvements in clarity, image depth, all round definition and dynamics, and there was no loss of neutrality, in contrast to some designs.

Above all it showed fine timing, holding the listeners attention with its upbeat, nicely synchronised rhythms. These qualities can be elusive in some server/streamer systems and it was great to find such a link in this chain upon which one could rely.

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# Subjective Sounds

PAUL MESSENGER

## HIFICRITIC

AUDIO AND MUSIC JOURNAL

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Martin Colloms, Publisher

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What with the Naim network system and a number of DACs, I seem to have done an awful lot of 'digital' over the last couple of months. It was therefore very nice to dig out some vinyl, and realise that the old format still has plenty to offer. It might not have the freedom from background noise associated with digital sources, but it retains that curiously natural quality that somehow gives a more relaxing listening experience.

My own turntable has been through three major upgrade stages over the past year. However, I should point out that what originally started out as an old *Sondek* had already been through a number of previous modifications, and was a far from standard item. Indeed, after using a Naim *Aro* tonearm and *Armageddon* supply for some years, it had long been fitted with a Rega *P9* motor (not without considerable difficulty), alongside its matching power supply and a Rega *RB1000* tonearm. Then, rather more than three years ago, I purchased a Soundsmith *Strain Gauge* cartridge.

The first of the most recent upgrades was an AudioFlat *RubiKon (Vol6 No1)*. This fabricated metal subchassis/armboard is half the price of Linn's own machined-from-solid aluminium *Keel*, but more important for me is that a version exists to match Rega *RB*-series tonearms. The *RubiKon* replaces the standard steel subchassis and wooden armboard to give greater mechanical integrity, and provided a clearly audible improvement, especially through the midband.

The next stage replaced Linn's (nearly) flat steel top plate with a Tiger Paw Khan (*Vol6 No2*), a machined alloy piece with raised and lowered concentric and diagonal sections that add a 'third dimension', greatly improving stiffness, and again sound quality by a significant margin. Here the improvement seemed more at the bottom end of the audio band, firming up the foundation underpinning the music.

The final step came when Peter Swain of Cymbiosis visited, bringing with him a selection of Chris Harban's beautiful hardwood *LP12* plinths which Cymbiosis imports. I met Harban at the Whittlebury show a couple of years ago, but his company, Woodsong Audio, is located in the US heartland state of Idaho. It specialises in making the most beautiful plinths, mainly for Linn *Sondeks*, but also for Garrard *301/401* and Thorens *TD124* idler-drive classics.

I picked a lovely Indian rosewood example, and Swain set to work transferring all the bits from my standard fluted teak plinth. Even with his experience, this quite complex task took a couple of hours, much of which was spent checking alignments very precisely. Naturally it therefore wasn't possible to do direct before'n'after comparisons, though he was quite complimentary about my Linn's state of set-up before the plinth change.

I in turn was quite blown away by the sound quality of my turntable after the change. It's hard to say how much this is down to the new plinth and how much to the re-setting-up, but there was no denying the significant sonic upgrade, in the overall coherence, in dynamic range and especially in the power of dynamic expression. Whereas the *RubiKon* improvements had mainly improved the midband and the Tiger Paw *Khan* the bottom end, the Harban plinth somehow pulled everything together, taking the mechanics of a rotating turntable further out of the picture and emphasising the music instead. Intriguingly, it also made cartridge downforce setting much more critical, as one searched for the magic 'sweet spot' that brought everything together.

And even though I've long regarded my hi-fi components as 'work in progress' rather than 'objets de vertu', I do occasionally find myself stroking that lovely rosewood plinth...