

# NEWSLETTER vol. 34

# September 2006

**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 2006

Again with the new formats and more confusion: as the desperate mid-fi multinational manufacturers throw Blu-ray and HD-DVD at you, as downloading of low-res MP3 files continues to hack away at CD sales, genuine music lovers have resolutely chosen to support two-channel. We predicted this more than a decade ago, and the wisdom of our choice – to support uncompromised stereo playback – has paid off with our continued success.

In the last year alone, we've seen darTZeel ascend to the very pinnacle



Audio Research - Reference 110

of solid-state technology, Yter and Crystal cables have created legions of fans, Wilson Audio released its first truly small speaker to universal acclaim, Martin Logan's Vantage and Summit dazzled a new generation of electrostatic speaker lovers, Jadis kept the tubes glowing with the magnificent DA88 Signature, Krell's Evolution series has re-established the company as THE high-end solid-state champion, Sonus faber revamped the classic Guarneri Homage to its new Memento form with astounding results, PrimaLuna commandeered the entry-level valve sector, Koetsu employed more precious materials with the new Coral, Jade, Onyx and Tiger Eye models, while Audio Research unveiled its first-ever Reference CD player and two new Ref-series power amps. We have spent the last year fine-tuning our approach to system synergy. Instead of focusing on individual components, we have worked with our dealers to ensure that the customer looks at the bigger picture: compatibility between components, even from disparate brands, has become our priority. Thus, we ensure that the consumer who wishes to own, for example, a valve pre-amplifier and a solid-state power amplifier will be supplied with a perfect match from tens of thousands of possible combinations. And this can only be achieved through experience. In the case of Absolute Sounds, our staff members have combined experience almost as long as the collective age of the Rolling Stones!

For 2006-7, we plan on refining the system concept even further. We have already played matchmaker to Mimetism and darTZeel for our Studio division, and we're continually surprising ourselves with the near-divine compatibility of Yter cables across a broad span of products, the blissful sound of a current Koetsu through Audio Research's Ref Phono 7 and other delightful discoveries that we have shared with our retail partners.

Above all, we will continue to play our part in pushing the high-end audio envelope. At Absolute Sounds, we believe that the sound quality of the finest components available today denotes a new 'Golden Age' for music lovers. And that, above all other concerns, is what matters most to us. Dan D'Agostino, William Z. Johnson, Franco Serblin, David A. Wilson, and the other creative geniuses who develop the products we sell have managed to extract even more from your LPs and CDs and DVDs, such that we are witnessing the emergence of systems at all price points with sonic attributes unimaginable 10 years ago. The sound in your home has never been closer nor truer to reality.

What follows in greater detail is a list of the pleasures that await you during the coming year.

## AUDIO RESEARCH

Nothing can stop the assault on the high-end undertaken by Audio Research, the brand clearly taking the name 'Reference' at face value. This no-compromise series at the top of the Audio Research catalogue has been responsible for a revival in the company's prestige that none could foresee. At last, the talents of Bill Johnson are being acknowledged by the toughest critics in the world: the customers. What a fantastic reward for one of the founders of the high-end!

We must never forget that Bill almost single-handedly saved the tube. Every product to bear the Reference label has been a stunner, and the current line-up is the best yet. Perhaps the biggest shock was finding that the new CD7 was so good – its internals include a Ref 3-derived output stage – that it earned the honour of becoming the first-ever Reference series digital source component. For analogue supporters, the all-tube Ref PH7 phono stage is probably the best phono section on the market today – categorically the perfect match for the Ref 3. In

addition to the flagship Ref 610T and 210T monoblocks, Audio Research has just announced the Ref amp many of you have been craving: a stereo model called the Reference 110, with a price tag of £8400.

In their regular range, the company has added two new preamplifiers, the LS17 and LS26. The '17 represents the entry-level model, a dream match for the VS55, and it is an astonishing introduction to Bill Johnson's wizardry. But we're gob-smacked by the LS26, which we suspect will find itself driving a more than a few Reference 110s.

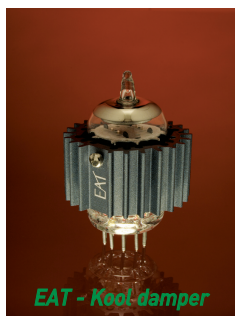
## COPLAND

In keeping with our philosophy of total system synergy, it is our pleasant duty to report that we have placed more Copland CDA823 CD players into price-conscious systems (as well as reviewers' reference systems!) than any other player under £2000. It is, beyond any question, the most musical, high-resolution player for critical listeners on a budget. As Hi-Fi Choice concluded, 'Its performance is full, fluid and free-breathing, and overall it comes highly recommended.'

We apologise for the delay in delivering Copland's astounding DRC205 Digital Room Correction system, but the fastidious Ole Muller has spent the last year refining the algorithms and dealing with licensing issues. Now it's ready for delivery, and we're expecting its debut to take place at the Hi-Fi News show at Heathrow in September. To re-cap, the £1290 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 a mere 20 seconds later, it will have tailored the sound of your system to your room. Its properties include optimising 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

Silver has a certain charm and appeal for audiophiles, but the majority of cables made from that metal are simply too high-priced for many of our customers. So you can imagine how excited we were by the arrival of Crystal cables. A part of our entry-level sector, along with our unbelievably popular PrimaLuna amps and new Sonus faber Domus models, it didn't take much to convince us that we could benefit from adding a line of cables to meet both criteria: silver content and brand pricing. Crystal Cable is a brand with a peerless pedigree; its background in metallurgy is the envy of all other cable companies. Their unique approach to design extends even to the packaging, which we can only describe as 'cool and sexy'! For under £300, you can invest in Crystal's interconnects, and no corners were cut: even the connectors are 'cool and sexy'! There's also a matching speaker wire, a digital cable, FireWire, BNC-to-RCA, power cables, HDMI and more.



EAT - Kool damper

## DARTZEEL

This is a no-brainer: 2006-2007 is, for darTZeel, the Year of the Pre-amp. The long-awaited NHB-18NS pre-amplifier, the natural partner for the award-winning NHB-108 Model One Power amplifier, has shown the world what an 'artisan' brand can do for the dedicated audiophile. They've created a pre-amp that 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. Totally original, truly unique, the darTZeel pre-amp is destined to sweep the awards this year. We suspect it will be regarded, in future years, as a classic on the order of the Mark Levinson JC2. For those who appreciate the peerless construction of all things Swiss – from wristwatches to cutlery – the darTZeel products will delight them beyond measure. darTZeel is, for us, the most welcomed new brand of electronics in a decade.

## DREAMVISION

What a stunner! DreamVision has cracked the high-end LCD price barrier with a 42in gem that does it all, including compatibility with the one new format we actually can't wait to enjoy: HDTV. DreamVision has built into the DV42 every feature you could want: two separate tuners, full HDMI functionality, resolution up to 1080i, with 1280x1024 resolution on D-Sub, True Wide format at 1366x768 RGB resolution, nine window mode, picture-on-picture that allows you to watch two 4:3 images at the same time, enhanced remote control, 12 inputs and a lifetime of 40,000 hours. This display is simply gorgeous – both the image it produces and the frame in which it's held. News Flash: We're pleased to announce that owners of the DV42 will have access to a hotline and full technical back-up in the event of any problems.

## EAT

If you remember, we couldn't believe that the EAT replacement valves could be worth the rather eye-opening prices they commanded. But we've now tried them in everything from PrimaLuna amps to Audio Research and Jadis, and we're convinced that they're worth every penny. If you use KT88s, 6550s, 300Bs or other popular output tubes, and your amp is due for re-valving, give us a call to discuss what the beautifully-made, fully matched and tested EATs can do for your system. And we've just learned the best news of all! After supplying us with such astonishing output tubes, EAT has released the first of their small input/signal valves! We're pleased to announce the availability of the Cool Valve ECC803S, a sublime Twin Triode equivalent of the popular ECC83! Naturally, you'll want to order these with Cool Dampers, but don't delay: word is out already in the valve underground, and demand will be HUGE!!!!

## JADIS

We just can't get enough of the JCA30, an absolute bargain of a tube monoblock that's so tiny the French valve masters market it as a multi-channel amp. That's because five of 'em don't take up much space! This is an adorable, warm n' cuddly valve amp that has such a strong following people want to buy five – not just two! Uncharacteristically, Jadis' other hot product isn't an amp or a pre-amp, but a wild new valve CD player called the Symphonia Evolution. This oh-so-Gallic device features 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 a two-chassis CD player, the JD3 Evolution, with outboard power supply, and with every single stage of the unit possessing its own power supply. It uses the Philips CD Pro 12 CD mechanism for supreme disc handling and data retrieval. We're also noticing that a cult is growing up around the DA88 Signature Pure Class A all-tube integrated amplifier. 2x60W, KT88-powered: at £6999, it's something of a bargain!

## KOETSU

No brand has benefited as much from the incredible revitalisation of analogue than Koetsu: it's as if the world has finally caught up with the brand's pure artistry. 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. Of late, Koetsu has been experimenting with different body materials; the traditional stable 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. 'Flavour of the Month' cartridges come and go, but the connoisseurs always return to Koetsu.

## KRELL

After many years with the FPB series, Krell tested the waters in 2005 with their current statement product, the four-chassis Evolution Preamplifier EV02 and the matching EV01 power amp. And, wow! did everyone take notice! Now Krell has followed this advance guard with an entire family of products, nine truly remarkable new components that take their lead from their flagship parents. For source components, users have a choice of the Evolution 505 CD/SACD player or, if



Krell Evolution 402

there's a need for DVD as well, the 525. Preamplifiers include the 222 and 202 stereo units, along with the 707 audio/video processor that can handle every form of processing, feed 8.4 channels, provides HDMI switching and even 12-channel digital room EQ. And to drive Krell's LAT or resolution series speakers? A choice of four power amplifiers, including the 402 (2x400W) and the 403 (3x400W), plus a choice of two mono units, the 600W Evolution 600 and the astounding 900W Evolution 900. Also new this year is the FBI Class A fully balanced, integrated amplifier, pumping out a serious 2x300W! Our faith in Krell, our support for it for a generation, has been rewarded with the company's most impressive line-up to date.



## MARTINLOGAN

After the appearance last year of the earth-shatteringly good Summits, followed by the devastatingly good Vantage, we didn't expect MartinLogan to create a hat-trick. We were wrong: ML didn't simply complete the hat-trick with one more, they delivered three new stunners. [What do you call five winners in a row??] First, they made the Vantage sound available to those with space or budget restrictions in the form of the passive-woofer Vista. Slightly smaller and less expensive, it may just be the best-value MartinLogan ever –

certainly a must for any short list of entry-level high-end speakers. On the sub-woofer front, there's a new baby sub called the Abyss, coming above the very successful Dynamo but below the Grotto. It features a 12in woofer, front- or downward-firing, driven by a 300W amp. It uses inverse mathematical equalisation, for sound to suit the environment. We can't imagine a room where it won't work! Lastly are the Stage, a new centre channel, and the Ticket, a very compact and affordable in-wall model. The Stage is a terrific hybrid centre-channel speaker that fits into an enclosure only 34.6in wide, ideal for the new generation of wall-mounted displays. Better still, a pair of flush-mounted Tickets will complement an in-wall monitor so unobtrusively that we can see them appearing in studies, bedrooms and anywhere else a secondary system is used. Take it from us: MartinLogan has now covered the entire span of both two-channel and home theatre needs.



Martin Logan Vantage

## MIMETISM

One of the nicest discoveries we made when defining our Studio approach was Mimetism. This brand's 20.1 CD player provides a natural progression from the affordable Copland, and it is so simpatico with the darTZeel electronics that you'd swear the companies collaborated. We love happy accidents, and finding this beautifully-built, ultra-musical disc spinner is just such an event. We're expecting more surprises from this company, our confidence based on the founders' many years of experience – a new brand with a long pedigree!

## PRIMALUNA

This amazing brand just goes from strength to strength. It is now recognised globally as THE entry-level valve amp range, single-handedly creating a market that is now rife with imitators. What started out as a couple of truly affordable integrated valve amplifiers has grown to include a selection of pre-amps and power amps as well. This year, the range has been augmented by the Prologue 5 40W stereo amplifier with KT88 tubes, the Prologue 6 mono amplifier delivering 70W from EL34 valves, and the Prologue 7 mono amplifier, also rated at 70W, but using KT88s. All of these sound delicious driven by the Prologue 3 dual mono, four-input pre-amp. All Primaluna products can be fitted with silver of gold front panels.

Straight out of the box, the Prima Lunas sound sensational, but we've noticed a strange phenomenon: a number of owners have upgraded their amps with EAT valves (see below). We bemused by the notion of fitting a £1198 amplifier with a set of tubes costing £599, but the results are simply astonishing.

## SONUS FABER

For over a quarter-century, Sonus faber has led the entire industry when it comes to creating utterly desirable loudspeakers. This Italian giant blew away decades of dull, cubist speakers, inspiring nearly every manufacturer to re-assess their approach to cabinet shapes, materials and – above all – aesthetics. In the 1990s, Sonus faber introduced one of many watershed products, a model that re-defined the role of the compact monitor in domestic systems. That masterpiece, the Guarneri Homage, is the most-copied speaker in history. Now it has been revised to become the Guarneri Memento: refined beauty, revised components. And its devotees believe that Sonus faber has somehow managed to improve every parameter! We agree entirely: the Memento is to the Homage exactly what Ferrari's 430 is to the best-selling 360.

For those who need a larger speaker with similar virtues, its bigger sister, the Amati Anniversary, remains one of our best-sellers, while the Stradivari is, well, we suspect that, were he to return to earth, Leonardo Da Vinci would own a pair. For less elevated budgets, the Cremona series delivers the true Sonus faber experience, while the Domus has made both the sound and the price of ownership available at entry level prices. Match the latter to Copland or Primaluna electronics, and you have high-end sound at real world prices!

## 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



Sonus Faber - Guarneri Memento

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 amulti-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, they've produced three new power products and one new video product, the latter just in time for the UK roll-out of HDTV! The new Powerisolator MM (PIMM - 1outlet) and Powerisolator Reference (PIR - 4 outlets) both feature removable AC cords with the PIMM featuring the top-of-the-line PLMM cord. There are now 6 levels of power cords available with the new High-Performance PowerLink mains cable added this year. This new mains cable packs a lot of the MM technology at a price that suits even our entry-level components.

And, at last, Transparent has finally launched a high-performance HDMI cable. With all the connectors and adaptors available for HDMI and DVI, you can now connect all digital video signals using Transparent's 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

We just don't know how Dave Wilson does it. After launching a new flagship and upgrading the MAXX and the Sophia, he still found time to



Wilson audio- Duette

deliver two new models that will set the audio community ablaze. Most important of all is the WATT Puppy System 8, the latest incarnation of what is arguably the best-selling, true high-end speaker in the world. Sure, lots of giant audio companies make speakers with five-figure price tags and sell them by the container-load, but they sound like what they are: pimp-my-ride versions of mass-market crud. Hardly

what we would call 'high-end'. Not the WATT Puppy. It is what it is: a domesticated version of a speaker that started out as the most critical studio monitor ever. The new System 8 is a complete revamp, with new crossover, drivers and cabinet revisions, and it was unquestionably the hit of the Stereophile show in LA in June. But the biggest surprise of 2006 was the arrival of the Duette, the company's first true mini-speaker. It stands only 18in tall, it can be used in corners or against the wall, or, as one journalist discovered, in free space on stands, and it will deliver superior imaging, detail retrieval, soundstaging and dynamics regardless of the position: Wilson produced a special external crossover to cope with both free-space and near-wall placement. We have no doubt that the Duette will become an industry standard for both price point and size. It's a little miracle.

## YTER

Maybe it's the simplicity. Or the price. Or the lean, mean form. Or the leather wallets in which they're supplied. Or maybe it's because the design team consists of Sonus faber's Franco Serblin and his son-in-law, a qualified metallurgist. Whatever it is, the Yter range of cables – only two models – has established itself as one of the most satisfying lines we've ever carried. An interconnect. A speaker cable and a set of banana-to-spade adaptors: that's it. But these cables seem to synergise with any system we try, regardless of type – valve or solid-state, dynamic speakers or panels, source-to-pre or pre-to-power. They're delicate and subtle, but able to handle dynamics. One noted reviewer who despises cables says he will no longer use anything else, and can't wait for Yter to bring out a balanced interconnect. Neither can we!

## A WORD ABOUT ACCESSORIES

While all of the above can provide you with the primary elements, there are still minor needs to address. We like to think that Absolute Sounds have always taken a realistic approach to accessories. Indeed, very few reach our catalogue because most are, frankly, utter nonsense conceived to keep eccentrics employed and third-rate audio journalists busy. We do not approve of nor endorse the mumbo-jumbo gadgetry that so captivates the more desperate audiophiles. We do, however, as indicated above, endorse the wonderful valves and dampers produced by EAT, which – in the two years we've been supplying them – have been a runaway success. Their hand-made and individually-tested KT88 and 300B tubes are simply the best we've ever used; more models will follow. And for smaller tubes, we heartily recommend the Cool Dampers, which eliminate resonance and extend valve life. At £15 each, they cost less than the premium-quality tubes they protect! As an added bonus, they look just like their name: cool.

Note: Ordinarily, we use this space to list the awards our products have won over the previous year. However, this year we have reserved the space as a memorial, to a dear friend who passed away unexpectedly last month.

Dean Roumanis, the Chief Operating Officer and part owner of Krell Industries, passed away at the age of 52, of a heart attack a day after being taken to the hospital with chest pains after a long bike ride. In recent years, Dean had taken up bike riding as a means of becoming healthier and was a Century Rider (biking 100 miles per day or more) and rode to raise money for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. Dean lived in Hamden, CT and is survived by his wife Sally, son Nate and daughter Leah.

Dean began his career at Krell in 1986 and was pivotal in planning and implementing new methodologies and disciplines in manufacturing, allowing Krell to grow and become the leader in high end consumer electronics manufacturing. "We mourn the passing of Dean Roumanis, long time friend and business partner," stated Krell CEO Dan D'Agostino and Krell President Rondi D'Agostino. "He was a wonderful man with a positive outlook on life – full of energy and vision. Dean brought that positive outlook to Krell. He dealt with challenges with forethought and vision, and a highly developed sense of integrity and compassion. A fine recording engineer and musician in his own right, he was the kind of man you wanted to be around. Family man, lover of life, connoisseur of music and high-end audio, we will miss him immensely."

Along with Paul Neri on guitar, Dean played double bass in the contemporary Jazz band, Acoustic Suburbanites that released the album Watercolors in the spring of 2005. Dean was also an accomplished piano and drum player. Early in his career Dean was an analogue recording engineer, founding Roumanis Recording and recording albums for the likes of pianist Richie Bierach, bassist George Mraz, saxophonists Roscoe Mitchell and Gerald Oshita, as well as the legendary pianist Dr. John.

From the executives to the workers on the assembly line, Dean was well-liked by all. He was known around the office as a man of principles who had a passion for life, music and his family. He will leave a lasting impression on many. Dean was a friend and will be greatly missed.

## Hi Fi shows

Three prime Absolute Sounds dealers will be showing from Friday the 22nd of September to Sunday some great Absolute Sounds products at the London Sound and Vision show at the Park Inn Hotel at Heathrow in suites Armstrong, Johnson and Earheart, if you intend to attend the show please register online:

[www.chestergroup.org](http://www.chestergroup.org)

Absolute Sounds will be showing their exciting novelties at the Hi Fi news Show at the Renaissance hotel at Heathrow in suites Caravelle, Britannia and room 1077 on 22nd, 23rd, and 24th September. Please note that if you register online for the Hi Fi News show at [www.hifinewshow.com](http://www.hifinewshow.com) you will be able to access according to the organiser, the sound and vision show free of charge.

Let us end this newsletter thanking you all for your support and assuring you that we will make your upgrade and/or your new acquisition a happy one.

