



# absolute sounds

ESTABLISHED 1978

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FINE AUDIO INSTRUMENTS  
NEWSLETTER 2024



# A WORD FROM RICARDO

Dear Music Lover,

With more than a decade working in the professional music and recording world, I then founded Absolute Sounds approaching high end audio from a different angle than the traditional BBC & Quad audiophilia style. My goal was to recreate that previously experienced exhilarating thrill of live music and to bring that energy back into the home.

In high-end audio, only a few brands have the talent to strike a balance between the passion of music lovers and the expertise of skilled engineers. Most products are developed solely by engineers focused on technical specifications, often overlooking the passions that music can inspire and evoke. Music acts as a soothing elixir, with scientific evidence showing it stimulates the brain, enhances mood, influences emotions, and promotes overall well-being.

In 2024, with the arrival of the dCS Apex and the reference Varese system, as well as the exceptional game-changing Oladra music server from Antipodes, Absolute Sounds confidently appreciates that the debate of "digital vs analogue" is now closed. Both formats serve vital purposes and enhance the quality of your audio system - each can and should coexist rather than compete. With the right approach, both analogue and digital sources can create extraordinary emotional experiences.

At Absolute Sounds, we meticulously curate a harmonious blend of audio products that embody both technical excellence and emotional resonance.

With nearly 50 years of unrivalled practise and expertise in this field, we understand how to assemble and mix these exceptional instruments, ensuring that - whether you choose analogue or digital - your listening experience must be nothing short of supremely captivating and exhilarating.

Join us in creating an environment and lifestyle filled with joy and inspiration, achieved through the transformative and eternal power of music.

*Ricardo Franassovici*

Musically yours,

**Absolute Sounds**





# AUTUMN 2024 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the annual Absolute Sounds newsletter. This is a year of significant change, and some of the most remarkable changes have occurred in the last months of 2024. As always, our focus remains on producing the best possible sound in the home using the most outstanding products available today. This is harder and easier than ever; while few 'bad' audio products are available, there is an encroaching mediocrity that means most hi-fi equipment is little more than 'okay'. We will never accept 'okay', and neither should you!

The best audio is a meeting of musical passion, a thorough understanding of the technology, and industrial design that often borders on fine art. This combination is scarce and doesn't translate, so all our partners are specialists in their respective fields. Just as La Cornue makes the finest ranges in the world but doesn't make knives, refrigerators, or kitchen cabinets, specialists 'stay in their lane' for a reason; a dCS loudspeaker or a Wilson Audio turntable would be far beyond their area of specialism. While some high-end brands take a 'nose-to-tail' approach to design, we think the best turntable or amplifier makers should stick to what they know rather than risk becoming a less good turntable maker, for example, that diverted its design team to make 'okay' amps and speakers.

In today's hectic world, where we are bombarded by rolling news and 'always on' social media, good audio is a distraction-free reminder of more gentle times. Few home entertainments allow you to—and should—set your smartphone or tablet aside, sit back, and enjoy yourself for an hour or three. Good audio is your regular 'reset' button. It's like a weekend break, for you and your music!

## AUDIO RESEARCH

Audio Research continues to make an essential contribution to the tube amplifier world. With a range spanning the elegant and sophisticated I/50 integrated and rising to the Reference 10 preamp and phono stage, it offers the music lover a considerable range of price and performance options. Now, with the Reference 330M mono power amplifiers – the best amps Audio Research has ever made – the finest Audio Research systems sound even better!

## ANALOG RELAX

This exciting new line of Moving Coil cartridges perfectly combines Japanese engineering obsessiveness (in the right way) and extraordinary musicality. The four cartridges in the range – from the entry-level EX300 to the outstanding EX2000 – all exhibit state-of-the-art groove tracking, and their unique body shape is designed to lower resonance. A careful selection of components in each case makes a beautiful music-making transducer that your records will thank you for playing!

## ANTIPODES AUDIO

Antipodes Audio is a new line for Absolute Sounds that offers two essential server products, including the Oladra. Everyone who has listened to this elegant music server has changed their view on streamed and locally stored music; that's how good it is. The four boxes in the more affordable Kala series can be configured to suit your system and come very close to the step-change in performance from the mighty Oladra.



## ARTESANIA AUDIO

The best equipment support system in the world continues to shine in its Classic and Organic lines. The ranges can be used in many configurations to suit any system at any price. Both lines now include a Modular variant that allows the equipment support to grow with your system. Unlike most equipment support systems, Artesania Audio actively improves the sound of your system.

## CONSTELLATION AUDIO

Constellation Audio is busy upgrading its entire line to Series 2 models. This involves reworking the power supplies from traditional linear designs to low-noise, more reactive switch-mode designs. Implemented first in the Inspiration 2 Series and Revelation 2 Series, before the end of 2024 the new line preamplifier, phono stage and stereo and mono power amps in the Performance 2 Series will arrive. Reference 2 Series is expected in early 2025.

Constellation Audio's Statement Series is arriving soon, too. The Stereo and Mono power amplifiers represent the ultimate expression of Constellation Audio design. The Constellation Switch-Mode supply filtering down through the range was born here, and these amplifiers will drive anything with the sophistication and charm of the Reference amplifiers but with 850 watts per channel in the stereo amp and 1700 watts from the mono design. This means that even the most formidable loudspeaker challenge is met with ease.

## COPLAND

Danish amplifier specialists Copland continue to produce a small but exquisite range of very affordable integrated amplifiers. The brand makes just four integrated designs and a dedicated headphone amplifier. Except for the

entry-level CSA70 integrated, all the company's designs use tubes, either a hybrid tube/solid-state system or an all-tube amplifier in the range-topping CTA407 integrated. If ever a brand can be considered to punch above its weight, that brand is Copland.

## DAN D'AGOSTINO

The brand that carries the signature of industry legend Dan D'Agostino must deliver the goods. Fortunately, its Progression, Momentum, and Relentless lines do just that. New to the brand is the Momentum C2 preamplifier – which takes the lessons learned in making the Relentless preamplifier and applies them to the more affordable Momentum series and continued development to Relentless Preamp, 800 Mono and Epic 1600 Mono amplifiers.

Also new is a bold new direction for the company: Pendulum is the company's first integrated amplifier. It's a 120-watt per channel JFET-based design with an optional built-in DAC with Ethernet and eARC connections, balanced and single-ended inputs, and the striking new Dan D'Agostino Master Audio Systems bidirectional remote handset. This brings D'Agostino's performance to a new audience.

## DEVORE FIDELITY

Alongside its new micr/O loudspeakers, John DeVore of DeVore Fidelity is completing the higher-end line of Orangutan loudspeakers. The Orangutan O/Bronze fills the gap between DeVore Fidelity's award-winning O/96 and the company's top O/Reference. It features the tweeter from the O/Reference and a new 10" paper cone woofer in a cabinet with the exact dimensions as the O/96. As the name suggests, it extensively uses cast and machined bronze to construct the drive units and the port tubes.





Also, at the flagship end of the DeVore Fidelity range, the original four-box O/Reference is joined by the O/Ref 3, which scales the speaker system down to three pieces. It uses the same main O/Reference loudspeakers and a single Bassmachine summed to mono for the lowest octave. This is ideal for those who desire the ultimate DeVore Fidelity sound but lack the room size to cope with two Bassmachine woofers.

## dCS

The new five-box Varèse streaming system rethinks every parameter of high-performance digital audio, and the results are staggeringly good. With its twin DACs, Master Clock, and User Interface, all fed via the company's own ACTUS cable system from its Core unit, this represents the ultimate in digital performance, even beyond that of the previous dCS flagship, the still-remarkable Vivaldi APEX.

With all the attention lavished on Varèse, it would be easy to overlook the rest of the dCS line. However, LINA (the three-box headphone amplifier system that can also be the two-box streaming DAC and clock entry point to dCS in conventional systems), the ever-popular Bartók (with or without its built-in headphone amp and now in APEX form), the Rossini APEX and Vivaldi APEX line continue to represent best in class digital performance.

## DÖHMANN AUDIO

Mark Dohmann's two legendary turntables – the Helix One Mk 3 and Helix Two Mk 3 – continue to represent the state of the record-playing art for many listeners. The headline feature of Dohmann's two turntables is their use of the Minus K vibration isolation platform. However, every aspect of how a turntable works is the subject of Mark Dohmann's scrutiny. The two turntable platforms –

the Helix One for those using two arms and the Helix Two for those wanting a smaller chassis with a single tonearm – are future-proofed too, just as existing owners can update to Mk 3 status, when Mark makes Mk 4, your turntable can be brought up to date!

## FRANCO SERBLIN

One of the greatest names in high-end loudspeaker design, Franco Serblin's legacy lives on in the brand that carries his name. His last designs – the Ktema and Accordo – form the core of Franco Serblin loudspeakers today, and the final projects he worked on with his son-in-law, Massimiliano Favella – now CEO of the Franco Serblin brand – have been instrumental in design of the Ligneà loudspeaker.

The original Accordo stand-mount design resulted in two new designs: the Accordo Essence floorstanding loudspeaker and the new, larger two-way stand-mount Accordo Goldberg. As the name suggests, this variation on the Accordo theme is receiving high praise as one of the best new loudspeakers in high-end audio.

## IKIGAI AUDIO

The word 'Ikigai' broadly translates to 'reason for living' in Japanese, but Ikigai Audio comes from the Netherlands. The company makes three ranges of cables – the entry-level Sugure, Kangai, and the top Kinzan – but all three are based on the same principles and have similar 'family' sounds. All three use cables of increasing levels of sophistication, with carefully curated 5N silver (and 5N silver with 24ct gold) using a recrystallisation process to create mono-crystal conductors. The cables also use a range of EM and RF shielding processes. The result is a sonic revelation!





## JADIS

Jadis Electronics operates on a more leisurely timeline than other companies. It doesn't launch a new product yearly because it keeps those products in the catalogue for decades. Its most recent product launches include the Diapason Luxe, a reimagined version of the original Diapason 15W Class AB entry-level integrated amplifier. At the same time, the 50W in Class A, I-70 integrated comes from the company's highest range and was one of the first amplifiers to feature the KT170 power tube. Those wanting more power from an integrated amplifier are best served by the recent I-88, which uses eight KT150 power tubes to deliver 90 pure Class A watts per channel.

A product launched a year ago is a fresh-faced newcomer to Jadis' extensive and long-lived preamplifier and power amplifier range. The JA-170 mono power amps use four KT170 tubes per chassis in a double push-pull configuration to deliver 85 Watts in pure Class A. They are the perfect partner for a Jadis preamplifier!

## MAGICO

Magico is a company that never sleeps. With the accolades piled on the 2023 S3 tower loudspeaker, this year the company delivered the remarkable M7 floorstanding loudspeaker that trickles down many of the features found in the company's M9 flagship design. That would be enough for most high-end brands, but Magico has also reimagined the S5 loudspeaker in the same 'root and branch' degree of change found in the 2023 S3. Like that new S3, the 2024 S5 is not simply a minor change reflecting a new 'Mark'... this is a wholly new loudspeaker.

Beyond the top M Series and might of the S Series, it's easy to forget the

outstanding A Series. More than simply the first rung on the Magico ladder, the A1 bookshelf design and A3 and A5 floorstanders are excellent loudspeakers in their own rights, distilling much of the Magico DNA into a more affordable package. These are not 'diffusion' or 'compromise' products; they are every inch a Magico!

## PRIMALUNA

PrimaLuna's range of tube-based, affordable, high-performance products continues to amaze. From the EVO 100 integrated amplifier to the EVO 400 preamp and power amplifiers, the twelve all-tube amplifier products are joined by two specialist products: the EVO 100 digital converter and, most recently, the EVO 100 Tube Phono Preamplifier. This all-tube MM/MC RIAA phono stage uses the same point-to-point wiring as the company's amplifiers and high-grade components. It allows a high degree of MC cartridge adjustment, making it a perfect match for any cartridge.

The latest product in the line-up is the second-ever hybrid design from PrimaLuna, the EVO 300 'Floyd' power amplifier. This 100W amplifier uses six 12AU7 tubes in its input stage and hand-matched MOSFETS in its output to be the perfect blend of tube and solid-state amp performance.

## REED

Reed's sophisticated range of tonearms is the stuff of legend. We were stunned by the performance of the pantograph gimbal of the 5A tonearm, and the more products we have tested from the company, the more profound our respect for the brand grows. Our latest discoveries from the Reed stable include the 3P arm, which uses three pivots, vertical and horizontal, all held in check by mechanical stabilisers. This gives the 3P the rigidity of a conventional





gimballed bearing and the low friction coefficient of the best unipivots. It also allows you to adjust VTA, azimuth and anti-skate while playing a record.

We have also been deeply impressed by the company's 5T flagship tonearm, which builds on the tangentially tracking pivoted tonearm design in the 5A but adds laser control for absolute accuracy through the arm's travel across the record. We know of no other tonearm that delivers the same degree of technical and musical perfection.

Although the company is best known for its arms, Reed also makes two turntables, the 1C and flagship 3C. Both turntables use two DC motors in friction drive (similar to Garrard turntables) but can be switched to belt drive in a few minutes. The 1C is also one of the few high-end designs to play 16RPM records and has speed adjustment for 78s between 70-85RPM. This makes it one of the most flexible turntables in audio today.

## THIELE

Although Thiele might be a new brand on the turntable scene, designer Helmut Thiele has been designing turntables and arms since the late 1970s. His design skills went into some of the biggest names in vinyl, including a decade with turntable legend Thorens. In his models, Thiele focuses on the 'zero tracking error' concept in his TA01 arm and TT01 turntable. The latter combines classic looks with a unique three-layer design that keeps noise, vibration and resonance to an absolute minimum.

## TRAFOMATIC AUDIO

Fast becoming our 'go-to' brand for those wanting the more romantic sound of tubes, Trafomatic Audio wowed us with the 300B-based Rhapsody

integrated amplifier. A spin-off from that excellent integrated design is the new Glenn 300 B-based mono power amps.

Trafomatic Audio's entry Evolution range has been bolstered by the Evolution Line One preamplifier and the matching Phono One phono stage. The latter being the first product in the Trafomatic Audio line to feature op-amps in place of tubes.

## TECH DAS

The TechDAS brand has long been associated with the best in turntable design. However, it had also developed a matching tonearm in the background for over three years. That tonearm is the Air Force 10. The arm uses a TechDAS-invented horizontal air-bearing float system, coupled to a tungsten pivot and ceramic ball bearing in the vertical domain. Adding a vacuum force tonearm lift-lower device.

This last means no more random stress forces on the cartridge when lowering the arm over a record, and in the event of power failure, the spring mechanism will automatically lift the arm from the record. The Air Force 10 is unique in tonearm circles because most air-bearing arms before this have been parallel tracking devices, and the titanium and tungsten Air Force 10 is a critically damped pivoted design that is an ideal partner for the TechDAS Air Force range of turntables.

## TRANSPARENT AUDIO

Since the 1980s, Transparent Audio has made cables that shape an amplifier's output to make it the ideal partner for a loudspeaker. With Transparent Audio's most recent 'Gen 6' design, that connection between amp and speaker has





become laser-focused! Moreover, regarding the company's top Opus and Magnum Opus lines, this optimisation process is hand-tailored to your choice of amplifier and loudspeaker. A few other brands use cables as filters, but only Transparent Audio is a musical matchmaker.

## WILSON AUDIO

Turning 50 proved to be a busy time for Wilson Audio. To celebrate its half-century in business, it turned to the classics and remade one of the most popular high-end loudspeakers of all time: the WATT/Puppy. This 'stand-mount on a bass cabinet' design has influenced Wilson Audio and others since its launch in 1986, and many will welcome its return for the first time since 2011. The WATT/Puppy rejoins the six-strong Wilson Audio line-up of floorstanding loudspeakers – from the single-chassis SabrinaX below it to the Sasha V above it and right on to the mighty WAMM Master Chronosonic. These are also met by the TuneTot stand-mount, the home cinema rear and centre loudspeakers range, and three subwoofers – including the new Submerge – that add bass and depth to the already robust Wilson Audio bottom-end.

In addition, the new Vfx aesthetic modification package gives the Alexx V a 'glow-up'. This includes prismatic finishes on the gantry and upper module bracing, laser engraving on the adjustment indicator plate, and honeycomb carbon fibre inserts on the crossover cover and port ring. The locking bolt and cable grip hardware are also supplied in upgraded finishes. These are more than just cosmetic changes; they are designed to make the Alexx Vfx look more elegant without undermining its sonic performance.

## THE RATE OF CHANGE

We often talk about 'evolution' in audio. This is normally thought of as a linear progression. Things this year are a little better than last year, which was a little better than the year before. But there's another concept in evolutionary biology; Punctuated Equilibrium. There are periods of relative stability where things make small, slow changes... and then there are points where everything changes significantly and changes fast. We are in one of those points of great change in the top end of digital audio.

The best has been getting a little better every year, but in the last few months we have seen some of the biggest changes to digital audio in more than a decade. Music lovers with long memories might recall a period in the mid-1990s when CD replay suddenly went from being 'OK' to 'great'. The same thing has happened to streamed and stored music. A couple of years ago, the sound of even the best streaming trailed behind properly-handled CD and especially SACD replay, with vinyl still standing far above digital replay of any kind. But now, thanks to innovations in digital audio replay, the lines are blurred. Streaming, stored, and digital disc play of all kinds gets closer than ever to the sound of vinyl. LP replay itself has made great strides forward too recently, but the quality of digital audio is achieving undreamt of levels of sonic performance.

These changes to digital audio are a once in a generation change, and while many are at the highest possible levels, the lessons learned at the ultra high-end is already influencing and improving digital audio at more 'reachable' levels.





## GIGO

There's a term in computer science that applies just as equally in audio: GIGO, or 'garbage in, garbage out'. Put simply, it means music played at home is only as good as the source. In recent years, improvements to amplifiers and loudspeakers challenged this importance of the source component, but the pendulum is swinging back. The quality of sound we are getting from the greatest analogue front-ends and now with the best quality digital servers and streaming systems rekindle that idea that the source is of absolute importance.

We think 'everything matters' now. With an increasing number of people streaming their music from the internet, people mistakenly think they can do without a server and simply let the streamer connected to the internet take the strain. There is good reason for this because until recently that was largely true. However, recent developments in music servers have changed everything.

We have been advocating good servers for years, but even we were surprised by the power of the Antipodes Oladra server. This changes good audio for me and changes it entirely; suddenly digital audio from online or stored sources are now high-performance instead of simply 'music discovery' sources. This transforms your musical enjoyment as the promise of accessing all music online now comes with the sound quality to match.

## MUSIC AS MEDICINE

Perhaps more importantly, as recorded music gets closer to the live event, so the more health benefits we receive from that music. Music therapy is a branch of healthcare with specific goals for people with physical, mental, emotional or learning difficulties. It returns remarkable results at times. But there's something

more; the beneficial effects of music on our bodies. Music played properly can calm the listener, lowering blood pressure and heart rate. It can also move people from stressed beta waves to more calm alpha wave brain states, demonstrably relaxing the individual.

We've found those health benefits to the listeners improve the better the recording and equipment. Deep bass, accurate, uncoloured sound, and great soundstaging all combine to put us in the same space as the musicians. That all combines to make us feel more refreshed and alive. This effect is often associated with classical, choral, and acoustic music but applies universally.

## IT'S A SYSTEM THING

We have seen an increase recently in our supply of full systems, but we still enjoy, with the utmost pleasure, following your upgrade journey with our approved audio consultants utilising our unchallenged system matching expertise.

Music lovers are still upgrading their great audio systems, often to accommodate fantastic new innovations. But increasingly we are finding people are buying carefully curated whole systems today. We think this is a reflection of what we strive to do; make great music through painstakingly constructed systems using our portfolio of products.

In part, this is because of an increased range of equipment across the board. Recently we've seen companies like D'Agostino deliver ever-more affordable integrated amplifiers that bring that fantastic Dan D'Agostino sound to more music lovers. Combine this amplifier with something like the Wilson Audio





TuneTot or Sabrina X – or the sublime Accordo Goldberg from Franco Serblin – and the results are remarkable. Designed for smaller rooms, this quality of sound was simply unattainable just a few years ago.

At the other end, we have bespoke, or exceptionally powerful amplifiers, coupled to the finest ever sources and phono stages, and loudspeakers that continue to push the barriers of what is sonically possible from an audio system. For those without compromises in room or budget, truly wonderful recreations of recordings are now possible. While getting ever closer to the live event, real live recordings in natural acoustic spaces are still the benchmark by which we judge every system. However, we're not likely to have any new live Jimi Hendrix or Miles Davis concerts any time soon!

We've been thoroughly energised by music this year, discovering new genres and recordings that were beyond us only a year ago. And those lucky enough to experience the best in audio are saying the same thing. Jazz fans discovering the joys of classical music. Metal heads finding the same passion and energy in opera. Classical music lovers finding new musical loves in bhangra or blues and so on. And, as more people experience what the best music systems can do, they will have the same ear-opening response.

The only problem is fitting in enough time for trivial things like sleeping because there's so much more music to hear.

## THE ABSOLUTE SOUNDS STUDIO

Over the last 2 decades The Absolute Sounds Studio is the place in which we have sought refuge in peace and in confidence to evaluate all components that we distribute and decide not to distribute.

It is now open for trade customers to bring their favourite client or partner by appointments only for private audition with insanely good sounds.

Please make enquiries with your dealer.





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