

Searching for Sleepers

A PASSIONATE ENTHUSIAST FOR VINTAGE HI-FI, STEPHEN ANSELL NOW EARNS HIS LIVING TRADING SECONDHAND EQUIPMENT THAT WAS CREATED AROUND THE TIME HE WAS BORN



Secondhand gems: KEF 104aB, Revox G36, and Systemdek IIX

It's been a strange journey to the hi-fi system I use now. Back in the early 1990 I was slaving over the stoves of a local hotel, in my first job as a chef, a job I held down for 20 years. I remember my first wage packet of £660 went straight into the hands of Mario, now of Audio Note UK, at his Audio South shop in my home town of Farnham, Surrey. This funded my first serious (all valve) amplifier, which was an Audio Innovations series 800 pre- and Edison 18 power amp, a stunning little combo that replaced my

beloved integrated Rotel 820AX, and made a world of difference when fed into my KEF 104aBs, driven from a Systemdek front end. I loved this system, and as a dealer in secondhand audio today, I often get the chance to listen to these great old bits of kit and realise that this stuff still holds its own in today's market.

There are so many bargains to be had from the 1970s, '80s and '90s. Just pick up the old mags and look what the 'best buys' were back then, and these are still available through auction sites and second hand outlets. I can remember being stopped in my tracks by such gems as an Audion *Silver Knight*, Snell *Type E* and a Luxman valve CD player, all flirting with me from Mario's shop window. I'd dream of them all night, before embarking on my daily routine of poached eggs at 6.30am.

All this is now within most people's grasp, and classic kit can now be snapped up for fraction of the original price. It's easy to find the more obvious items, such as the Pioneer A400, Thorens TD160, NAD 3020, Audiolab 8000A, Heybrook HBI and suchlike, all of which can be had for under £100 if the wind is in the right direction. But the more esoteric gear is a much more exciting prospect for the budding secondhand audio explorer.

It wasn't until I bought a huge Sansui AU-919 for just £15 at a carbooty that my eyes were really opened. I blame that amplifier for my ongoing obsession for the odd and interesting, that has now rescued my wife and I from the nine-to-five rat-race, and become our full-time job and life.

I have a circle of friends that have gone the same way as me, building truly high-end sounding systems with classic and sometimes very obscure components at bargain prices. Just do some research and plenty of listening, and the rewards can be great. The resulting system may not be a neat rack of matching black boxes that blend in; it might look a bit, dare I say it, a trifle untidy. But at the end of the day you might finally find the audio nirvana we are all looking for...

So, as I bash this article out on the laptop, I'm sat in front of a pair of Infinity RS IIBs, listening to a Krell KSA100, a Mk1 Oracle Delphi, an Onkyo P-3090 pre-amp and a Sony S9000ES disc player. It's a system which would have cost upwards of 10 grand at its original price tags, but can now be sourced (with a bit of luck..) for about the same cost as a new SME Series V. I'll bet that's got you thinking!

We are currently living in uncertain times, and the spare money is drying up for many of us, so this sort of set-up may well make perfect sense in today's fragile financial climate. An added bonus is that you