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When reading Martin Colloms' piece on reviewing techniques (pp30-33) I started to realise just how personal such a process can be. I'm not criticising Martin's methodology, which has a rigour and thoroughness that I rather envy (up to a point anyway), but the fact that it varies considerably from my own approach does interest me, and I daresay readers too.

My own tactic when confronting a new component is less formal and certainly a lot more casual. Rather than undertaking specific listening sessions in a system that has been carefully set up in order to maximise its performance, I'll merely insert the item into my regular system and use it as and when circumstances dictate or the mood takes me.

Both approaches are probably equally valid, but they are also essentially antithetical. As I see it, MC is applying his conscious mind to focus on the performance of the component in question, whereas I try to let my subconscious make the important decisions about what I think about a product, only reverting to my conscious when actually writing up the review.

It has always been my personal maxim that the reviewer (of hi-fi equipment or anything else for that matter) is only as good as his/her last review. The fact that both MC and myself have survived for so long would seem to validate both approaches, which I actually find quite intriguing.

Vinyl Longevity

According to Wikipedia's entry for 'LP Record', Columbia introduced the first examples way back in 1948. That's actually before I was born, and I've just started drawing my old age pension. In the modern world that's one heck of an achievement, and means that I'm able to play any discs manufactured in my lifetime.

Would that the same was likely to hold true for our computer systems, which seem to require updating on such a regular basis that I've simply lost my faith in their likely longevity. As far as I can tell the music files I've made will still replay, but they only go back a few years, and I was quite shocked to discover that my current *MacBook Pro* doesn't seem to like opening *Word* files created before 1996. Have I lost six year's work? More than likely (given my level of computer disinterest and illiteracy).

Then there was a nearby lightning strike a few months back. Such events and their consequences are very unpredictable I can accept, and I still can't explain why I still managed to send and receive e-mail and access the internet while the server system simply failed. To get it back I had to replace my modem and something that Apple calls an *AirPort Express*, but there was no problem with any of my other hi-fi components. (To be fair, a Sutton-based friend suffered much more seriously after a lightning strike, and even had to replace his *Troika* cartridge, so maybe I got off lightly.)

Computer audio in its various forms is certainly by far the most convenient way to access and play music today, but I seriously doubt whether it will still be possible to play the files we create today 20 (never mind 50) years hence.

Paul Messenger
Editor