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Every few days I seem to receive a press release about the latest little Wi-Fi speaker from some well known brand that did well in the 1970s hi-fi boom. These Wi-Fi devices, like the docks that preceded them, may not be hi-fi by any stretch of the imagination, but they do make money for opportunistic brands, and are also an inevitable consequence of a brand coping with the changing situation and trying to diversify into related areas. However, the crucial factor that needs to be borne in mind is that hi-fi today is no longer a mass market phenomenon, even though it was just that in the pre-video 1970s

The number of separate Garrard SP25s sold never got anywhere near the numbers achieved by BSR, an operation that supplied many of the mass market record player makers of the vinyl era, from Dansette and its many competitors. Birmingham Sound Reproducers was actually shipping some 250,000 turntables a week by the end of the 1970s, as I recall, just before it purchased Hong Kong-based plug-top power supply maker Astec, and then moved the whole operation to Hong Kong.

Hi-fi might have enjoyed its boom time at around the same time as the music business, but the arrival of colour and multi-channel TV, VCRs, hard drives, DVD players, games consoles and so on has led to enormous changes for both the music and hi-fi industries.

I was rather shocked to walk into my local record store recently, to discover that it was now selling cakes and teaching people how to bake them. I knew the lease was running out, but thought it still had some months to run. Happily the same store has another branch in the next town some five miles away, and has no intention of closing that one down (or turning it into a cake shop).

The other day I heard a radio programme about the catastrophic decline of the traditional music press, which has all but disappeared following the internet's arrival around the time of the millennium. All paper publications have suffered significantly from on-line chat, including specialist hi-fi magazines, but none have been quite as devastated as the music press. It used to sell maybe as much as a million copies *in toto* a week, and is now reduced to the point where the NME sells just five per cent of what it sold at its peak

We do indeed live in interesting times, though one might wonder whether the interest is now all about the technology and the delivery of the musical or AV content, rather than the music itself. We've already seen how the rise and rise of MP3 and track-by-track downloading has forced the closure of many record stores, and this latest *HIFICRITIC* contains an extended feature by Andrew Everard about the latest means of delivering music (and movies) to the home – live streaming over the internet.

The music business has an notorious history of ripping off the people who actually compose and play the music, and as it seems impossible to make a living from streaming services, one consequence of Spotify *et al* has been that musicians are increasingly moving towards live performance. I recently spent a couple of days attending the Womad festival, courtesy of B&W and its Society of Sound initiative, and thoroughly enjoyed some interesting new musical experiences. But I was still happy enough to return to my physical music collection and hi-fi system, even though I'll happily concede that it's a minority interest.

Paul Messenger
Editor