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While becoming accustomed to isolating and social distancing from family, friends, fellow authors and neighbours, and not least from our supportive audio industry, a key part of not losing the plot is to stay in touch by phone email and social media.

The HIFICRITIC team of freelance reviewers and journalists has devised ways to continue its investigations and writings, with new review product successfully sourced and delivered. I thank all our contributors and those involved in the magazine's production, who are supporting the HIFICRITIC project. Also, the readers who have contacted me with comments and suggestions. As our government might well put it, our audio and music examinations, evaluations and judgments have continued at pace!

Audio equipment designers continue to exercise their creativity, ingeniously devising new solutions for the advancement of sound quality. Sound reproduction systems have benefited from many decades of research but remain far from perfect. While many systems are already highly satisfying musically and require no revision, I believe there is always room for improvement. It is perhaps surprising that we can discern and value the many subtleties of sound reproduction by careful listening while some aspects still escape the compass of conventional laboratory measurement.

This is when listening experience helps to direct equipment evaluations, leading to valued comparative opinions on sound quality. Because audio consumers value fine sound reproduction, reviewers and readers are prepared to invest in compatible, well calibrated audio systems carefully installed in suitable listening locations. As ever our objective is a still more satisfying musical experience.

A fair chunk of this issue is devoted to the painstaking efforts of Hervé Delétraz, the pioneering Swiss amplifier designer. Early in his career, his disappointment with the prevailing state of the art defined his personal objective for musical naturalness in amplification. He exhaustively researched novel ways to satisfy this mental construct, in particular where loop negative feedback, typically employed to combat harmonic distortion, is absent. Built in Geneva, with prices to match, the review darTZeel pre/power combo is fascinating and made for an extended feature-length review.

For our industry personality interview we have brought our focus to bear on international high-end stalwart Ricardo Franassovici, who more than 40 years ago founded audio import agency Absolute Sounds and has been a supporter of Delétraz's designs from their inception.

Bryston's BP-17³/ 3B³ pre/power combination caught reviewer Kevin Fiske by surprise. He felt he had to borrow some solid state muscle to drive the powerful, full scale, full-on PMC MB2SE studio monitors he was assessing, but was so intrigued by the Bryston amplifier combo he decided to review it as well.

Chris Frankland pens a major feature on high-end headphones and their supporting equipment, including the Audeze LCD-X; the Focal Clear, Stellia and Arche; and Novafidelity's HA500H tube /solid state headphone amplifier. Also on the subject of headphones, Ed Selley takes on the T+A flagship headphone package, combining the reference level Solitaire P planar magnetic headset with the HP200 amplifier.

Tech guru Keith Howard has two topics for this issue: firstly he's been experimenting with the combination of a low-frequency effects 'shaker' on his listening seat and the headphone experience. As he puts it, 'seat vibration could be a game-changer for headphone users'. Keith has also provided an informative in-depth feature on optimal pickup cartridge alignment.

Prima Luna tube amplifier technology has matured over the years and Chris Kelly has been listening to the class-leading Evolution 300, as well as evaluating the new, and well priced Keith Monks Prodigy record cleaning machine. And that brings this month's total of product reviews to 15 – not that we're counting, you understand.

Our usual complement of music reviews – pop/rock, classical and jazz – leads to our back page *Soundstage*, featuring Floor van der Holst from NativeDSD.com.

Martin Colloms
Editor-in-Chief