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Published by
HIFICRITIC Ltd.

Registered in England No.6054617
Registered Office: Winnington House,
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London, N12 0DR
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Printed in the UK by
Premier Print, London

VAT Charges, EU Subscriptions

Conforming with EU VAT regulations we now have a trusted contractor dealing with prepaid and documented VAT charges. We have to adjust existing EU subscriptions and add top-ups. Paper and print prices have risen and sub rates will have to be revised.

HIFICRITIC

is a printed publication available by subscription only.

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More by happenstance than any masterplan, this issue seems to have turned into something of an amplifier special, starting with the outlandish-looking HiFi Rose RA 180 on the front cover. Yes, it may look like the designers have been raiding the odds and ends bin in order to populate the front panel, but as I explain in my review, there is some logic to their thinking: we're told that the fascia is supposed to represent a flow diagram of the path of an audio signal through the amp.

What's more, as with the company's range of network audio players, there's some interesting original thinking in play here, from the 'dualling' of the power amplifier stages, indicated by that very unusual gear-train volume control arrangement you'll have spotted on the cover, to the high-frequency filtering this set-up allows.

Once you've got your head around the complex speaker output arrangement here – the RA 180 has no fewer than 16 terminals! – it's easy to appreciate just how flexible and fine-sounding an amplifier this is, and it's also good to see a company not taking its industrial design too seriously, and daring to be different.

The same goes for the little Pro-Ject MaiA S3 I also review in this issue: it's truly tiny, but capable of a big, involving sound when used with speakers of suitable sensitivity. It's not by any means the first 'mini-amplifier' of this kind – quite apart from earlier generations of this design, there's also the likes of the Chord Electronics Anni, and the compact Marantz HD-AMP1, now a little long in the tooth but still a fine choice where space is tight. It always makes me think of the company's MusicLink series from back in the 1990s: I still have a miniature preamp and a pair of monoblock power amps from that series, which I must get round to digging out and trying again sometime.

For a number of reasons, not least the pressure on living-space and the need to save energy – or at least reduce the cost of consumption, I get the impression there may be the stirrings of a movement towards downsizing hi-fi, as I suggest in my *SoundStage* column on the back of the magazine: several people I know are reducing the size of their once-massive systems, and going for 'less is more' set-ups, and all of a sudden the running costs of a big, room-heating valve amplifier are beginning to get a bit serious.

Not that there's any evidence of cutting back in the massive Vitus Audio integrated amplifier Chris Frankland also reviews in this issue, the product of a company founded on the principle of 'if I can't buy what I want, I'll make it myself'. However, as Chris also discovers this quarter in his interview with the team behind Cambridge Audio, the secret of that company's success is giving the customers what they want – or more to the point, predicting what will be popular, and then delivering it at the right price. It seems to have worked extremely well for the London-based operation so far, so it will be interesting to see whether the audio landscape will change in response to what's increasingly described as 'world events', and how the industry as a whole will respond.

That may involve changes beyond the obvious energy-consumers, such as amplifiers: changing to speakers able to make more of the Watts with which they're driven will play a part in reducing your bills, provided they're driven with amps designed for both efficiency and fine sound quality, and speakers such as the superb Living Voice Auditorium R25 Anniversary floorstanders, reviewed this quarter by Martin, would certainly seem to fit that brief, even if they're not exactly entry-level designs.

Mind you, raised sensitivity has long been a hallmark of highly affordable speakers, in order to allow users to play them loud – in a market where that's seen as major selling-point – with relatively modest amplification, so perhaps what's being going on in generations of budget boxes will show us the way ahead.

Whatever the path of the future, I remain confident the global hi-fi industry will continue to develop and innovate to deliver ever more performance, as is evidenced by Martin's review of the dCS Rossini APEX DAC which starts off this issue. The internal changes may be subtle, but they have a transformational effect on the sound of this already acclaimed product, he says, greatly enhancing the enjoyment of the music. And what's more, the upgrades can be applied to existing units, just as other products out there can be improved by the kind of firmware updates we've all become used to in the computer arena. And that's a truly green solution.

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