



“One of the five best hi-fi shops in the world”

ARENA Magazine

## pestalozzi rotary forest

In our Winter 2007 newsletter we said we would sponsor 50 trees in the Pestalozzi Rotary Forest in the name of our first 50 customers who bought a system in December. We are pleased to let you know that we have now made this donation.

The Pestalozzi International Village Trust, founded in response to the experience of war, aims to bring the right kind of education to the right people, to provide part of the answer to a world divided by misunderstanding and inequality.

As President of Golders Green Rotary Club, David Graham is pleased to carry on the Rotary tradition of supporting this cause, as well as doing “our bit” to offset our rather large carbon footprint.

More information about the valuable work of the Pestalozzi International Village Trust can be found by visiting [www.pestalozzi.org.uk](http://www.pestalozzi.org.uk)

## shop on line

Grahams’ current website has proved to be highly effective for our clients, bringing up-to-the-minute information on the wide range of products we currently offer. We are now about to introduce a new service - the ability to shop directly online - which will be launched very soon. This will enable customers to order gifts and replacement type products quickly and efficiently online. This facility is in addition to our well-known personal advice and demonstration service when visiting our showrooms

## freesat HD

Freesat was formed in May 2007 as a joint venture between the BBC and ITV, intending to bring digital TV and Radio programmes to UK homes without any subscriptions or fees. This may also include high-definition programmes for the launch in late 2008-early 2009, but at this time this has still to be confirmed.

As the name implies, the public service platform will include high-definition channels and will be available free, but customers will need to buy a special Freesat digital receiver and satellite dish (most existing Sky dishes will also be suitable). Two types of receiver will be available, one for standard definition only, and one that provides both standard and HD channels. Currently these boxes are not yet available, but it is possible to sign up for email notification regarding the progress towards its launch. [www.freesat.co.uk](http://www.freesat.co.uk)

Channel 4, Channel 4 HD, E4 and More4 hope to be joining Freesat as soon as their contracts expire with Sky. Channel Five, Five Life, Five US, Virgin 1 and Dave, which are free on Freeview, have no current plans to join the new service. All these services are currently encrypted on satellite. Channel Five may well opt to join Freesat when its current contract with Sky expires.

The main benefit of the BBC’s Freesat proposal is that it should be simpler for consumers to buy, much like Freeview is. But the main reason to invest in a satellite platform for high definition TV broadcasts is the massive bandwidth available via satellite makes it a natural outlet for more free HD channels in the future. Due to the bandwidth restraints on Freeview, satellite and cable are currently the only technologies capable of pumping out free-to-view high-definition television. The future for Freeview HD is uncertain because it depends on the analogue switch-off process and also on how the resulting spare capacity is allocated by the broadcasting regulator Ofcom. As the BBC explained, “Of the 7 million homes yet to switch to digital, over half fall outside the Freeview coverage area.”



## new staff

**Rob Travis** joined our company as a Project Manager last January. Prior to working for Grahams, he was a self-employed AV installer and brings a wealth of knowledge and experience with him. When he isn’t working, he enjoys many sports including surfing and cycling and, dare we say it, yoga. His other hobbies include painting, photography and supporting Sheffield Wednesday.



**Simon Thurston** joined our Custom Sales Team at the end of last year. With four years’ previous experience in sales within the industry, we are sure he will be a great addition to our existing team. Simon’s passion is practising Western Martial Arts, which he took up several years ago. When Simon isn’t wielding his long sword around, he also enjoys travelling and sports, in particular skiing.



**Paul Trafford** joined our company July last year. Before joining us he spent several years working for another custom installation company and distributor, where he gained experience in lighting control and home cinema installations. In his spare time he DJs and follows Liverpool FC.

We wish all our new staff long and happy and successful careers at Grahams.

# on track

Keeping you on track with the developments at Grahams Hi-Fi

Spring 2008



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## new loewe studio

We now have a demonstration studio that is dedicated entirely to Loewe TV systems. We have almost the entire Loewe range on display and are able to give our customers the opportunity for the first time to see the wide variety of high performance Loewe screens and peripherals – all available from Grahams. Grahams has become one of the top two Loewe demonstration facilities in London!



Having sold Loewe screens for over 15 years, we believe this will add considerably to the service we can offer our customers when they come to choose a new TV or home cinema system. We can offer demonstrations using several alternative sources, such as Sky HD, Blu-Ray, Freeview and normal DVD. Please feel free to come in with your own movies and we will be happy to show you how well these can be displayed!

Loewe has consistently been at the forefront of TV technology and design. Their premium brand has recently expanded with the addition of the new Loewe Connect range - the first TV available on the market with an Ethernet port, which allows you to access pictures, music and movies from your home PC network.

For those of you who were not able to attend our recent Loewe open day, we are pleased to tell you that we have the Loewe Connect and many other Loewe models on permanent demonstration in our dedicated studio.

## loewe connect

Loewe released the brand new Connect system at the beginning of March. At the very cutting edge of technology; this is the first ever LCD TV with a network connection, giving it the unique ability to simply 'Connect' to your PC network and allowing you to play music, view photos or watch movies from your PC through the screen.

An additional two USB ports on the TV make it even easier to access external storage devices.

With Loewe's high-quality picture and sound as standard, as well as two HDMI ports and a VGA socket for direct connection to a PC, this really is a TV that can sit at the centre of a digital home. The Loewe Connect is available in Silver, High Gloss Black and High Gloss White finishes.



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## naim power-line

Naim have just launched their first custom-designed mains cable. The mains cable is a fundamental part of any system and it was felt there was a lot of room for improvement in the standard designs. The Power-line is the result of hundreds of hours of experimentation and R&D into the critical elements that affect the performance of a mains cable. Mechanical energy transmission, eddy current propagation and conductivity issues were identified as being the main areas of performance loss. To address these issues Naim have broken the lead design into three separate areas: the mains plug is a thermoset resin case housing floating pins that align for an enhanced contact area, and uses profiled clamp screws and cable fixing points. The actual mains cable is custom-manufactured with 4mm cross-section copper conductors, and individual dielectric insulation is used to provide the best shielding. Finally, the IEC socket contains the same decoupling and clamping elements as the mains plug. Needless to say, the results need to be heard to be believed!

## naim roadshow

You are cordially invited to visit us for Naim's 2008 Roadshow on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2pm – 7.30pm.

The line-up will feature Naim's new reference class phono stage, the SuperLine and Power-Line mains cable. It will also be the first opportunity to hear Naim's first ever upgradeable Audiophile Hard Disc player.

There will be Naim merchandise available for purchase and one lucky visitor will win a Naim Power-Line worth £395.00 following entry to our prize draw on the day.

## naim net hdx music server

We are entering a very exciting period for digital music. The replay of digital music files through computers and MP3 players is nothing new, but now audiophile British companies that have defined our listening experience over the last 40 years are starting to get involved, which means that the concept of storing vast amounts of music on a convenient device is sonically viable.

The Naim HDX is a one-box CD player/music server. It has a built-in 400Gb hard drive to store music. In addition to this, a second 400Gb hard drive mirrors the main drive which will back up the music stored on the HDX automatically. It will play WAV or MP3 files (there is also scope to play FLAC files from external hard discs) and has five USB inputs to allow external hard drives to be accessed (including iPods).

The server plugs into your home router or network via an Ethernet cable and uses any handheld device that can access the Internet to control it (Apple iPod, Nokia N800 etc). It then connects to your amplifier via standard RCA or Din connections. There are also two digital outputs (optical and coaxial), composite, S-video and VGA connections and the ability to connect a mouse and keyboard.

In use, the HDX is very straightforward. You insert a CD, via the CD loading tray, the server then 'rips' the information from the CD and stores it on the internal hard disk as a WAV file. As the server is connected to the Internet, it is able to retrieve - via the AMG online database - all the disk information and cover art, which is stored and displayed on the server. You then have the usual ways to access and search the database. The music can then be played as individual albums or you can create playlists and allow the server to play tracks randomly. It has a built-in 3-inch screen on the front fascia which allows the user to easily navigate the menu system and change settings. Audio replay is comparable to a £3,000 CD player - unprecedented for a device of this nature. It will also allow for connection of a separate power supply, allowing for significant sonic improvements. Naim also produce the NS01 music server, which has an extra three analogue outputs making it ideal for use as the musical hub of a NaimNet multi-room system. The NS01 comes with a comprehensive remote control and a control software disc.

## naim superline reference phono stage



With the release of the CD555 CD player,

Naim achieved a complete flagship system from CD through to power amp. The final piece of the jigsaw was a Phono stage.

The Superline is designed to be a completely no-compromise moving coil phono stage.

It comprises a two stage single-ended class A discrete amplifier with part-passive RIAA filtering. This is powered by no less than 25 regulated power supplies! It shares the thermal isolation technique pioneered in the NAP500 power amplifier. Another significant part of what makes the Superline so special is a 4.5kg brass plate that is spring-suspended inside the casework. This isolates all the working components from any harmful micro vibration and resonance. The Superline requires an external power supply - either from the power supply output of a Naim pre-amp/Supernait or a dedicated Flatcap2, Hi-Cap2 or Supercap2. Turntables can be connected via RCA phono or DIN connection, while four resistive and three capacitive load plugs allow for cartridge impedance matching. This makes 20 different load combinations possible. Sonically, this phono stage truly deserves its place alongside Naim's flagship 500 series products. It quite simply transforms vinyl replay, giving unprecedented levels of clarity, detail and dynamics.

## b&w zeppelin

Almost everyone has heard of - or is aware of - the iPod. This wonderful portable device has changed the way we listen to music and also rekindled an interest in music for many people.

There are many hundreds of speaker/docking station options on the market that allow you to listen to the iPod at home, but none will do it like the Zeppelin.

The Zeppelin is a 2.1 speaker system that allows you to listen to and charge your iPod. It comprises of a 5-inch bass unit powered by a 50w amplifier; 2 x 3.5" mid-range units and 2 x 1" tweeters powered by two 25w power amplifiers, all housed in a sleek stainless steel casing (I would liken it to the shape of an elongated rugby ball!). It also has a 3.5mm mini-jack connection that will allow for another source to be connected. There are also S-video and composite outputs to allow connection to a screen to view video content. A remote control will enable you to control volume, source switching and move tracks forward or back.

Apart from its looks, the most striking thing about the Zeppelin is the sound. Given that all the drive units are housed in a cabinet only 635mm wide, you get a great sense of separation, which is normally the key weakness in any system of this design. B&W have put a lot of research into making sure the Zeppelin gives a very full, detailed and well-separated sound; where the tonal qualities are just as important as the volume levels. It will also allow for the bass frequencies to be altered; ideal to allow for the variety of room positions in which it is likely to be used.

As a standalone iPod system, it certainly takes a lot to beat and was recently voted as the best iPod docking system on Channel Five's 'The Gadget Show'. Price £399

## Spendor sa1

The new Spendor SA1 is something of a little treasure. Harking back to the good old days of the original SA and BC1s, the SA1 is a two-way infinite baffle design loudspeaker incorporating an entirely new 22mm wide surround hybrid tweeter and 15cm mid-bass unit. As usual, Spendor has spent a lot of time and attention on the cabinet design. It is constructed using three different panel thicknesses; each panel is designed to have a specific resonant characteristic, and these combine to evenly dissipate vibration. Internal wiring is silver-plated solid copper, leading to a heavy-duty pair of WBT binding posts.

The speakers come in three finishes: Zebrano Hi-Gloss, Black Piano Lacquer and Wenge Deep Satin.

In conjunction with the speakers, Spendor have also designed a set of speaker stands to complement the performance and style of the SA1s. The light, rigid composite design with 3 spikes allows for easy levelling on uneven surfaces. Each stand has a wooden inlaid panel that will visually match the finish of the speakers. They cost £1,500 a pair, including the matching stands.



## Aktimate active iPod speakers

Aktimate are a new company owned and run by Mike Creek of Creek Audio and Epos fame. The concept is simple - design a high-quality set of active speakers that will allow an iPod and other sources to be connected. Most of the existing active speaker solutions sound pretty poor playing music, but this is where amplifier and speaker building experience proves invaluable.

The Aktimates are a pair of bookshelf design two-way speakers with a 40w per channel amplifier on board. There are a set of RCA phono inputs, a 3.5mm mini-jack input and an iPod docking socket, allowing three sources to be connected. The master speaker houses the amp, inputs, iPod socket and volume control. A slave speaker then connects to the master via a length of speaker cable. They come with a remote control, which allows the iPod to be controlled as well as volume and input switching. Available in black or white piano lacquers. Cost: £399



what's new at grahams

## arcam solo mini

Following on from the success of all the Solo products; Arcam has released a Solo Mini music system. Having successfully managed to produce an all-in-one music system that redefined what was possible from the one-box design, Arcam has taken the concept one step further by producing the Solo Mini. It may be a box that is half the size of the Solo Music, but there is no shrinkage when it comes to features. The Solo Mini is a CD,DAB/FM radio and 25wpc amplifier. In addition to this, there are 6 analogue inputs, headphone socket, remote control, alarm clock and a USB input which allows you to play music directly from a USB memory stick. It will also allow iPod control when used in conjunction with the r-Dock.

Sonically, the Solo Mini uses various components - DAC, power supplies etc – which are used in products such as the CD73 and the Music Solo. They are simply combined in a smaller space about the size of a shoebox. This means that the Solo Mini is now the perfect solution for either a system where space is at a premium, or as a secondary bedroom, kitchen or study system.



## pure ecoplus

In a bid to make a significant contribution towards the upkeep of the environment, Pure have revised their power supply and packaging designs. Their DAB radio range will now need less power in both use and standby modes. This also extends to their rechargeable batteries. The packaging is now a combination of 100% recycled inner packing and a minimum of 70% recycled outer packing, using water-based varnish and soya-based inks. It is excellent to see that the biggest player in the digital radio market is doing its bit to help.



## epos speaker range

Epos has released an entirely new range of loudspeakers. The Mi series consists of the M5i (£425) and M12i (£525) bookshelf speakers and the M16i (£850) and M22i (£1,100) floorstanding speakers, with a matching M8i centre speaker for cinema systems.

Although this new series retains the “M” moniker of the old series, this is a completely revised range of loudspeakers. Every facet of every speaker has been re-engineered.

There is a new metal-dome tweeter that is housed in a rubber suspension unit. This allows for the tweeter to have a much sweeter sound than normal metal dome designs allow. The mid and bass units have also been significantly altered with a combination of subtle changes to the cones, voice coils, surrounds and cone chassis.

The most striking changes are in cosmetic terms. The new cabinets have a ‘classier’ veneer that we would expect to see on speakers costing twice the price. The speakers are made in matched pairs, so there will be much greater consistency in colour finish. They also now come with proper cloth grills – a big visual improvement over the old metallic grills. The speakers come in three finishes: Black, Cherry and Red Cherry.

All in all, the changes Epos has made bring the Mi series of speakers bang up to date in terms of sound quality, looks and value for money.

## arcam range updates

Arcam has always looked to advance its excellent stable of products wherever possible.

The latest improvements to their entry - mid-level products have been made possible from experience gained in producing their flagship FMJ range. In fact, they are so happy with FMJ that they have now moved over their entire product range to the FMJ livery. There is now an FMJ CD17 to replace the CD73 at £500, an FMJ A18 (amp) to replace the A70 at £450, an FMJ CD37 replaces the CD192 and FMJ CD36 at £1000 and, finally, an FMJ A38 (amp) replaces the FMJ A32. All new products have had a significant internal and external overhaul, availing of big changes in all elements of CD and amp design including latest DACs and Toroidal transformers etc.

# what's new at grahams

## meridian's signature reference cd player got better

Three years ago Meridian introduced the stunning 808 Reference CD player and pre-amplifier. This set the standard for Meridian CD playback and now, with the 808.2, it has been further improved upon.

Identical in shape and size to its predecessor, the refinements made to the new model are substantial enough to see it as an entirely new design project. In short, it contains a new digital filter design from Meridian's own research team, claimed to correct errors in the recording and mastering process, as well as in the disk replay stage. In layman's terms, 'CDs played back on the 808.2 Signature Reference can sound even better than they did in the studio!' according to Bob Stuart of Meridian.

It also features improved clocking and data buffering systems set to virtually eliminate jitter error, reducing them to lower than any other CD player. They have also improved on the analogue output stage and main processor. This player is also Meridian's first product to feature a 'speaker link', a full digital interface connection that runs along CAT5 cable and uses standard RJ45 sockets, allowing a direct, single-cable link from the 808.2 to any of Meridian's unique DSP loudspeakers (or to a Meridian digital pre-amp/controller). It features a resolution enhancement process capable of up-sampling a CD to 176.4 kHz with 24-bit precision.

As before, the 808.2 is available in two versions: the standard player with digital and analogue outputs, and the 808.2i, which adds a digital and analogue pre-amplifier to the basic player.

To go with Meridian's best ever CD player, the company has also introduced a new high-end digital active speaker designed to take advantage of the RJ45-based speaker link interface found in the 808.2. The DSP7200 floor-standing digital active loudspeaker features extensively re-designed electronics, new software and revised drive units.

Price: 808.2 - £7,195    808.2i - £8,250

## the global relaunch of mk sound

For more than three decades Miller & Kreisel products have been held in the highest regard by the audio press, film industry, music industry and home users seeking the finest loudspeakers for home theatre and music. M&K speakers have been used on some of the biggest and loudest movies such as Lord of the Rings, The Incredibles, King Kong and of course Star Wars.

We have had great results with the range, in particular the 'Tripole' design rear speakers, which we have recommended to good effect. Rather suddenly, in the middle of 2007, the company ceased trading and ended up being put into Administration. This was quite a setback for all M&K lovers; the company's future seemed bleak.

After being closed for over a year, we are pleased to announce the return of the highly regarded M&K brand, now re-launched as MK Sound. It is also important to know acquisition was by M&Ks long-term distributors – people who genuinely know and care passionately about the company. 'We now have on demonstration a select combination from the newly designed 'M' series and the updated Xenon series'.



## meridian dsp 7200 £17495.00

The DSP7200 is also the first of Meridian's DSP loudspeaker range to include SpeakerLink - which employs RJ45 sockets for 'Meridian Comms' interconnection, delivering the simplicity and elegance of installation via inexpensive, commonly available, and easily custom-run CAT-5 cabling.

## linn majik lp12

For the first time, Linn have introduced an LP12 turntable that comes inclusive of an internal power supply, Project tonearm and Linn Adikt MM cartridge and solid baseboard. It is called the Majik LP12, available in standard LP12 finishes: Maple, Cherry, Walnut and Black at a cost of £2,000

## quadraspire sunoko-vent table

Quadraspire have released a new table that slots neatly into their range between the classic Q4 and the Acrylic Q4 Reference. It combines some of the important design elements of the Reference with the more traditional styling of the Q4. The Sunoko-Vent consists of 25mm thick veneered MDF shelves that have a slotted design running across their width. This is more than cosmetic as the slots help reduce mass and at the same time diffuse vibration. They also use concave column spacers to separate the shelves which also help to reduce resonance and overall help to deliver a clean and open sound. There is also a double-width AV table and an extra large XL table. The full range of six wood finishes is available, and spacers come in black or silver. Prices start at £720 for a 4-tier table.

## quadraspire qx7

Following on from the excellent QX isolation supports, Quadraspire have turned their attentions to speaker and table floor-protectors. Using a unique suspension system, the QX7s do an excellent job of protecting wooden floors while at the same time offering a real sonic improvement. They cost £80 for a set of 4.

## grahams installations in the cedia awards finals

We are pleased to announce that two of our recent installations have been shortlisted as finalists in the CEDIA awards 2008. The installation featured below is from the best home cinema category £20,000 - £100,000.

The brief from the client was to turn the top floor 'Playroom / Gym' into a room that will be used primarily as a home cinema for the kids and their friends. Through careful use of the space, a separate sleeping area has also been created which is curtained off, allowing the area to be used as a guest bedroom for 'sleepovers'. The system needed to be used not only for cinema use, but also with a Mac and various games consoles and had to be easy to use. Naturally, with a project of this nature, high-quality picture and audio performance was paramount and the customer already had a reference point of quality audio from the existing Meridian surround system we installed a few years ago as part of the whole house AV installation.

At Grahams we are fortunate to have the opportunity to work in some of the most beautiful homes in the world. What makes this installation so appealing is the careful design that has gone into the room, to make a great looking space that is not compromised in its primary function as a cinema room, but also meets all the client's requirements for flexibility. We try to make our installations that little bit extra special by, for example, not only working closely with the room designers to come up with aesthetically pleasing solutions, but also finding ways to differentiate our work from our competitors by using smart programming techniques to make the systems easier to use.

To meet the design criteria of having discrete but high-quality speakers, we specified a Screen Research acoustically transparent screen with three Meridian on-wall speakers mounted behind. Below the screen a floating cabinet on the wall was designed that also had smart cable management with ducts running to the AV equipment rack located in an eaves cupboard just behind the screen. This flexibility allows for simple addition of games consoles and future upgrades.

The main equipment used was a Meridian surround processor, Kaleidescape DVD server, SKY+ HD and a Cineversum Black Wing 2 pro projector with 1080p external scaler. A Crestron control system with wireless web tablet allows us to simplify operation and also, with clever programming and integration, we are able to use the standard SKY remote control to operate the system too.

Having created this room, we have also provided an environment where the children and their friends can 'hang out', watch films, play games and, for the parents, some reassurance of knowing that their kids are safe and at home.



# grahams recommended music



## 1. Julie Fowlis Cuilidh

Julie Fowlis, who is BBC Radio 2's Folk Singer of the Year 2008, comes from North Uist, in the Outer Hebrides, and sings solely in Gaelic. 'Cuilidh' means treasury, and the CD is a collection of traditional songs that she arranges, plays pipes and whistles, and sings on, often using her voice as a rhythmic instrument. She is joined by members of folk groups Altan and Capercaille, as well as John McCusker on fiddle.

**CD £13.00**



## 2. Jennifer Warnes Famous Blue Raincoat 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition

The original 1987 album, known as 'Jenny sings Lenny', blended Cohen's poetry and music with Warnes's voice and empathy, and added musicians such as Stevie Ray Vaughan and Robben Ford to the mix. Already an audiophile recording, Bernie Grundman has re-mastered the album, using the original two-track master tapes. Three additional Leonard Cohen songs have been added to the original nine, as well as a live version of 'Joan of Arc'.

**CD £14.00**

**LP (3LP SET) price TBC**



## 3. Melody Gardot Worrisome Heart

This excellent jazz-tinged CD was not planned. At 19, whilst riding her bicycle, Gardot was hit by a car. Her severe injuries included memory loss, so a doctor suggested music therapy to help heal the neural pathways of the brain. Unable to sit to play piano, she learned to play the guitar while lying down, and write songs. She still has to carry a cane, and wear sunglasses and earplugs; but she has a new career and we have this enjoyable CD.

**CD £14.00**



## 4. Orchestra Baobab Made In Dakar

This album was indeed made in Dakar, as it was recorded at Youssou Ndour's studio in Dakar, Senegal, and he sings on one of the standout tracks, a reworking of their 1970s hit 'Nijaay'. Five years on from their comeback CD 'Specialist In All Styles', they are now a working band, playing Saturday nights at the Just 4 U club in Dakar. There is the same mix of African, Cuban, Latin American and Caribbean rhythms, but with a tighter, live sound.

**CD £14.00**



## 5. Otis Taylor Recapturing The Banjo

The title refers to the fact that the banjo, which originates from Africa, has become mainly associated with country and bluegrass music in America. To redress the balance Otis Taylor, a bluesman who sings and plays the guitar, banjo and mandolin, enlists the help of some of the best blues musicians playing today, Alvin Youngblood Hart, Keb' Mo', Corey Harris, Guy Davis and Don Vappie. The CD contains a mixture of traditional and modern songs.

**CD £14.00**



## 6. Charlie Haden The Private Collection

These rare recordings have been re-mastered and re-released, as a double digipack, to celebrate Haden's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. The first disc was recorded at his home on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, and features Ernie Watts, sax, and Alan Broadbent, piano, from the original Quartet West, with Billy Higgins on drums. The second disc, recorded in Missouri a few months later, has the same line-up except for Paul Motian as the drummer. Available on LP for the first time.

**2 x CDs £17.00**

**3 X LPs £30.00**

This selection of music is available for collection or by mail order. Contact us by phone, e-mail, fax or post. Our contact details are on the front page of this newsletter. Postage & Packing for 1 CD is £1.00 and for 1 LP or up to 4 CDs is £3.00. There is a maximum charge of £5.00. There is a 10% discount for anyone purchasing all six recordings.

## MP3 storage how to move the clock forward 30 years

Given that there is now a wealth of choice when it comes to items that can play audio files, isn't it worth making sure your files are being converted at the best rates in the first place? Sadly, many people are listening to music that is far worse than the quality of the standard set when CD was first launched back in 1983 – but they need not!

If you're intending to use either of the MP3 systems reviewed on page 3, then the likelihood is you will own an iPod. It's also likely that you use iTunes to store all your precious music. If this is the case, then it may just be possible that all the music you buy and convert is being stored at a very low bit-rate.

The old adage of 'garbage in - garbage out' is still a truism. When iTunes converts CDs it compresses the information on that CD and it extracts a wealth of musical information that we can all hear. Any decent speaker system is going to accentuate this compressed "lossy" sound and result in very poor performance. It is not too bad on headphones, but can be awful with a good system.

The main reason for compressing music is to allow for more music to be stored. However as time goes by and iPods have larger hard disks, this becomes less necessary. It is possible to store music as "lossless" without taking up much more space. Unfortunately, Apple has made this choice rather hard to find! By going through a series of menus, you can set the default-encoding mode to Apple Lossless. This ensures that the sound you get through a decent system will be of an acceptable standard. Try experimenting with a couple of tracks you already have stored; you'll be amazed what a difference it can make.

To change follow these steps: In iTunes click on Edit – then select Preferences – followed by Advanced – then Importing – then Import Using – and finally select Apple Lossless.

If you do need to compress this even more, then follow the same instructions up to Import Using, then choose MP3 Encoder – select Setting – then Custom – then Stereo Bit Rate – and scroll down to 320Kbps. This will compress the music, but it will remove less information than the default setting of 128Kbps. Storing music in Apple lossless creates a file around half the original size, in MP3-320Kb the size is around 20%. The current largest iPod classic has a massive 160Gb hard disc and can store approx. 440 CDs in Apple Lossless.

Finally, most downloads currently purchased online are only recorded at 128kbs and until this increases (as broadband speeds up), you are far better off buying the CD and burning it yourself – unless you want to go back to sound quality that was worse than you had 30 years ago!

