

# Hi-Fi News

05/2005

Großbritannien

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# Hi-Fi News

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INTERVIEW

Jean Michel Jarre: why CD sucks, DVD and the future

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US \$ 9.00 Canada \$ 9.75 Aus \$ 10.25



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# In concert

**Howard Popeck builds a system around the first loudspeaker from piano maker Bösendorfer, with accompaniment from Accuphase, Dynavector and Acoustic Solid. The result is a reclusive's dream...**

<b>Bösendorfer VC7 loudspeakers</b>
PRICE: £4745/pair
<b>Acoustic Solid Small Royal deck</b>
PRICE: £1270 (optimal base +£850)
<b>Accuphase E-530 amplifier</b>
PRICE: £8950
<b>Dynavector 17D2-Mk2 cartridge</b>
PRICE: £550
<b>Dynavector DV-507 tonearm</b>
PRICE: £2995
<b>Dynavector P-75 phono stage</b>
PRICE: £460

**I'm in favour of system reviews rather than A/B testing. I'm not convinced that A/B testing is always of major practical value.**

Would you rate a review of a Ford Mondeo gearbox if it were, in addition to the Mondeo, comparatively tested inside an Alfa, Audi, Maserati or whatever? Of course not. I believe that audio components should be tested within the context of harmonious ancillary items. However, as you'll see here, not necessarily items in similar price bands.

But first a little history. Bösendorfer has been making concert pianos for 175 years. The VC7 loudspeakers are its first venture into hi-fi. The aim with the VC7 was to produce the most authentic sound possible. So Bösendorfer researched with leading artists and prominent concert halls to help achieve this. Hans Deutsch, the company's acoustician, uses unusual design techniques to satisfy both Bösendorfer's demands and his own: in essence, using acoustic panels that vibrate in a manner similar to the way musical instruments work. All drivers are Bösendorfer-designed.

#### CHOICES

Although I'm focusing on the VC7 speakers, supporting roles were played by components from

Accuphase, Spectral, Musical Fidelity, Dynavector and Acoustic Solid. The CD source was my own Ayre CX-7; FM radio came from my Trio KT-917. The CX-7 has been commented on so favourably elsewhere that it needs no further commentary from me. The KT-917 is an indisputable masterpiece of audiophile Japanese historic pre-eminence in this field – commanding secondhand prices of well over £500 even today, 25 years after production ceased.

Why Accuphase? I've always had a warm spot for class-A amplification as exemplified by Krell in the 1980s. To me, while Krell subsequently built bigger and more reliably, I never again heard anything quite as musically magical nor agile as the KSA-50. I wanted to recapture that type of amplification characteristic if I could. A hunch,

interconnects used, these were LAT throughout, again from Audusa, as was the distribution box. Meanwhile, supports were, as always, from Mana Acoustics throughout.

#### MEET THE STAR

The Bösendorfer VC7 is a floorstanding cabinet just 1330 x 195 x 404mm (hwd). Power handling is quoted as 180W, claimed nominal impedance is 4 ohms and sensitivity is quoted as 91dB/m. The cabinets are designed to resonate, which means that there is very little mechanical damping. Visually they are elegant.

Now, meet the 'cast'.

**Accuphase E-530:** This full-width 25kg integrated amplifier sports eight RCA inputs, tone controls and bypass, pre-out/main-in jacks,

**I believe that audio components should be tested within the context of harmonious ancillary items**

and no more than that, suggested the Accuphase E-530 might be a good sonic match for the VC7. For vinyl, well Dynavector was my first choice. A solid reputation, no hype and very little UK editorial exposure in recent years. Ideal. If it's overlooked by others without good cause, well it's a natural choice for me. The Dynavector DV17 m-c cartridge was always a favourite of mine and has evolved to the 17D2-Mk2. The DV-507 tonearm is an expensive mechanical delight, and a tweaker's dream as well.

So, one slot left. Something new, untried and potentially risky that could take the shuddering weight of the DV-507 and sound good too. Enter please, the Acoustic Solid Small Royal turntable, which like the Bösendorfer speakers, is distributed in the UK by Audusa. As for the mains leads and

facilities for two tape decks and two pairs of speakers. It also has slots for a retro-fit phono stage and DAC. Power is 30 watts RMS at 8 ohms. A conversation piece.

**Dynavector DV-507:** a bi-axis inertia-controlled dynamic-balance tonearm with a suite of uncomplicated tuning adjustments; 1.38 kg; SME-type detachable headshell. Looks like something from an operating theatre.

**Dynavector 17D2-Mk2:** a 5.3g m-c cartridge with Micro-ridge stylus, 0.26mV output and a 1.7mm solid diamond cantilever. Tracking force is 1.8 to 2.0g. Tiny.

**Dynavector P-75:** an entry level phono stage with several outstanding features that, it is claimed, ensures the P-75 will outperform other phono stages costing considerably more. By a simple





Acoustic Solid's Small Royal turntable, seen here with a Rega arm and mounted on the optional matching plinth

Bösendorfer's VC7 (right) seen from rear, with Acoustic Sound Boards on each side.



arrangement of jumper settings conventional m-m and both high- and low-output moving-coil cartridges are catered for. The case looks nothing special. From New Zealand.

**Acoustic Solid Small Royal:** a 60mm-thick solid, highly-polished aluminium platter on an un-sprung base driven via a thin cord from a synchronous-type motor. Plexiglass platter-interface piece and leather platter top pad included. 25kg. German.

#### ACCUPHASE E-530

No doubt about it, the E-530 is magnificent both cosmetically and sonically. The attention to detail, the facilities and that clean uncluttered sound that so characterises exemplary class-A circuitry are all here in abundance. In some ways though it's anachronistic. Giant power meters confront you; beautifully engineered, but ultimately pointless. You get tone controls that lack sufficiently subtlety, at least with the Bösendorfer VC7. There is a tone-control by-pass, fortunately.

The alleged 30W RMS per channel is mightier than I ever believed possible but then again, if my suspicions are correct in that the VC7s may drop towards 2 ohms, the Accuphase is probably delivering circa 100W RMS (pure class A mind you, not class A-B) at times.

Only when trying deliberately to provoke the system into misbehaving is there a glimmer of dynamic constriction. This amplifier is highly

recommended. If you want true class A from something that will look good on a shelf rather than deserving to be hidden in a bunker, this Accuphase amplifier is probably your only option today.

#### DYNAVECTOR 017-D2 CARTRIDGE

Properly mounted in a sympathetic arm, this must surely represent one of the audio world's hidden bargains. Yes, it has a lowish output, and a miniscule brittle cantilever that you can barely see, but the sound is so very dynamic and the bass so tight and fast. Transients are superbly resolved. It's a little bright, but to me that's no problem. Excellent detail, tightly focused imaging; in fact tonally, it's very reminiscent of the best examples of the many Decca London cartridges I remember using in the late 1970s alongside the original version of this Dynavector – which, by the way, has sold over 50,000 globally to date.

#### DYNAVECTOR DV-507 TONEARM

This is a joy to use. 'Bi-axis inertia separation' sounds complex but this simply refers to a tonearm having two arms that operate independently in the horizontal and vertical planes.

The design philosophy is that the arm should have a large effective mass and enough damping in the horizontal plane while at the same time having a small effective mass in the vertical plane. These conditions are almost impossible to achieve with an

arm of conventional design using gimbal bearings. So Dynavector designed a tonearm where the shorter and lightweight vertical sub arm is placed at the end of the massive horizontal main arm.

Tracking force is applied by a precision spiral spring device which, it is claimed, maintains an unvarying force regardless of any record warp. It is easily adjusted by turning a calibrated dial.

I truly doubt if there is a cartridge made that can't be properly accommodated here. Realistically though, this arm is probably too expensive now for the sound quality – what with the Brinkmann 10.5 being around £800 less, and superb arms from Origin available at reasonable prices. Having said this, its ability to be tuned to extract the best from most cartridges is very seductive. For sonic quality and engineering finesse, it deserves to be mentioned in the same breath as the SME V and its few peers. The DV-507 is a viable alternative to these.

#### DYNAVECTOR P-75 PHONO STAGE

In some ways this modest looking device was the most surprising, enigmatic and wonderful pieces of audio kit I've heard in a long time. The PE ('phono enhancing') circuit by Dr Tominari is claimed to 'dramatically improve the performance of low output moving-coil cartridges'. As it turned out, the full significance of this circuit only became apparent by chance... Experimenting, I plugged my Spectral DMC-12 pre-amp into the Accuphase's



Accuphase E-530 amp front and rear, and [above] Dynavector D17-D2 m-c cartridge and DV-507 'bi-axial' arm

power amp section. CD and FM were slightly more musical than when using the complete Accuphase E-530. This improvement wasn't significant though, and so not worth the additional £4k. Clearly, the pre-amp stage of the E-530 is first class. Then I tried the Dynavector cartridge straight into the phono stage of the Spectral pre-amp. It wasn't too good. The Dynavector P-75 into the DMC-12's Aux input was more dynamic, the top

using this specific Dynavector cartridge on full gain was just too intrusive. The Spectral was, at full gain, silent in comparison. In retrospect it should have occurred to me to set the PE circuit to medium gain which would reduce the white noise and probably still give enough gain too. But annoyingly, it didn't occur to me.

There is so much potential with the P-75 in terms of musicality that I fully intend to revisit it

than my Michell Orbe SE/DC. It sounds closer to my old AC-driven Orbe than my DC driven Orbe, and I like that. A single word description? OK, 'lively'! The bass is superbly solid, deeply extended, very precise and taut. Tonality for the price is outstanding. However, I regret to say that based on the sample I received direct from Germany, quality control with this model appears to be a significant problem currently and I can't, despite the above, offer a recommendation right now. Circumstances permitting, I'll try to revisit this model using the Michell Tecno Arm.

## Using the Accuphase there were times when my listening room became my entire world... a reclusive's dream

end was further extended, the presentation was tauter, more rhythmic, better defined. Bear in mind though, the P-75 phono stage is considerably more expensive than the DMC-12's on-board phono card.

Now, admittedly my Spectral phono stage has been set to match my EMT – but loading alone can't account for this. The Tominari circuit really does work for this cartridge and no doubt many others too. It gives life, energy, vividness and above all, believability to vinyl in a way I've only heard through vastly more expensive equipment.

However, I had a problem, probably of my own making. The level of white noise from the P-75

later this year. Meanwhile, I urge you to listen to it in your own system. It might be the best value vinyl replay upgrade you'll make this year, or any other.

### ACOUSTIC SOLID SMALL ROYAL DECK

Fitting the tonearm and cartridge took around 10 minutes. Alignment took just a little longer. No springs, no bouncing, no self-congratulatory gurus needing to pronounce the set up as being 'just right'. No flatulent bass and, above all, no ambiguity. You set it up according to the sparse instructions, and that's that. The sound is more reminiscent of the Brinkmann LaGrange rather

### THE Bösendorfer VC7 IN ALL ITS GLORY

In my room via this equipment there was almost complete neutrality. So self-effacing in fact that the initially ignorant listener might feel the system to be 'boring'. There isn't the visceral grip and immediacy of the Wilson WATT Puppy 7 nor quite the wonderful midrange of a Quad 57, nor quite the treble shimmer of a Pinsh Model 1. What there is though is a sound so wonderful that you might question how you've lived without it. I certainly did. There are some aspects that take getting used to, seating height being the principal one. The vertical dispersion of the twin forward-facing tweeters is deliberately tight, although it's wide horizontally. Sit too high or low and you lose detail.

The designer confirmed that this was exactly as he expected. If you hear these loudspeakers at a

dealer or show, sit down. No exceptions! The mid/bass drivers are side-firing. Naturally, positioning with regard to side walls is important and takes time to get right. I needed to sit within the 'magic triangle', with me at the apex about 10 feet from the toed-in cabinets. Outside the 'triangle' the sound became a little odd; a bit like being in the corridor outside the concert hall.

Above all though, the VC7 is an instrument. This isn't marketing hype. Fine tuning of the cabinet itself and its interface with the floor gives a range of options far beyond any non-parametric controller I know of. The four heavy duty spikes per cabinet noticeably change the bass characteristics depending on how those spikes are capped. Spikes into small brass cups give one bass perspective, piercing the floorboards gives another and ceramic cones yet another. It's personal taste, so there's no recommendation from me here.

After tuning the cabinet/floor interface to my personal taste for taut rather than extreme extension I achieved a sound very reminiscent of the LS3/5A speakers – but with an extended, properly integrated and tuneful bass. I achieved a clean and solid 31.5Hz, a useful but faint 25Hz and nothing at all 20Hz and below in my circa 2300ft<sup>3</sup> room.

The sound is extraordinary in its overall balance. The VC7s are capable of exceptionally fine detail and dimensionality. There is an impressive naturalness and the soundstage is both big and wide. The dynamics are imposing and the tonality is vibrant. Stereo and tonal separation are marvellous. Bass is extended, integrated and self-assured by which I mean the lower bass only 'speaks' when appropriate; it doesn't need to interrupt on every inappropriate occasion.

Clarity is so fine (but a touch behind the £14k PCI Express) that even complex passages sound open and clearly defined. The music – from any source – sounds vivid and engaging. In short, highly involving, three-dimensional, true-to-life, living sound as close to level of the original performance as I've ever heard in my room.



Acoustic Solid's massive platter is driven by a nylon thread and has a mat of suede-finish leather

Am I alone here? No. When the designer visited and heard his speakers with the above equipment, playing the Esther Ofarim record (ATR 001), tears rolled down his cheeks. Yes, literally. He said he'd never heard them sound better – anywhere.

#### AND BY THE WAY...

Just in case you think you can only achieve greatness on a high budget, then think on this. I plugged in a Musical Fidelity X-150 integrated – cost £800. Even stone cold it was an admirable match. This unpretentious inexpensive little integrated gave a smooth, detailed and lively sound that demanded I pay attention. It had a little more verve than the Accuphase but was slightly harsher. The bass was softer and less controlled and voices did shout a little – but then again, look at the price comparison! Everything you've read about this fine design is true, and then some. It's astonishing value and the ratio of speaker to amplifier pricing: 5.87:1. It's absurd.

The VC7s are the first speakers in many years that I've seriously thought of buying. When I was

listening through them, even using the modestly priced Musical Fidelity X-150, I just didn't want to leave the room. Using the Accuphase, there were times when my listening room became my entire world. A reclusive's dream, really. In terms of the sensible compromises, the sheer musicality and the sense of being there, the VC7 is masterpiece. I'm in no doubt the company can, and will, take this design philosophy further. In terms of value, they are simply terrific.

#### ENCORE

The Bösendorfer VC7 is for me a dream come true. I've been searching for a speaker that demonstrates all the sonic qualities of the LS3/5A – but which can fill my 2300ft<sup>3</sup> listening room with sound, and much larger spaces too, but which can resolve detail at modest volumes and also generate extended but credible bass. All of this at a tolerable price, in a cabinet with a modest footprint. The VC7s are all this and more. I can offer no higher praise than this. ■

Howard Popeck

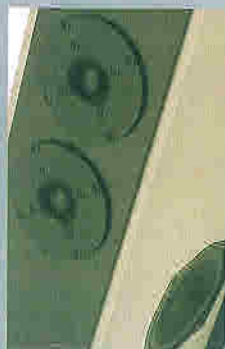
#### Tuning the boards

Bösendorfer's philosophy is to view the cabinet as a vibrating, resonant body, creating a three-dimensional, transparent, true-to-life sound. This goes against conventional concepts of cabinet construction, whose overriding goal is to suppress all vibrations and resonances.

Designer Hans Deutsch says that conventional thinking pays no regard to the overall sound, while delicate tones are simply 'corrected' by powerful filters. Deutsch's approach is to use Acoustic Sound Boards, heirs in spirit to the Horn Resonator, whose unique form guarantees a

multitude of resonances spread across the entire bass frequency range. The unique shape and construction of the cabinets along with the implementation of special materials which function as acoustically absorbent vibrating components work together as sound dampers.

In this way Bösendorfer loudspeakers are able to avoid using additional – imbalanced or non-linear – damping material. These Acoustic Sound Boards can be tuned. No instructions are given because only a thoroughly trained dealer or the importer should do this.



Resonances are encouraged rather than suppressed here!

#### Suppliers

Bösendorfer, Acoustic Solid: Audusa  
0208 241 9826  
www.audusa.com

Accuphase: RT Services  
01235 816455  
www.rtsaudio.co.uk

Dynavector: Pear Audio  
01665 830662  
www.pearaudio.co.uk

#### Hi-FiNews verdict

As a speaker able to resolve detail at modest volumes and generate credible bass from a cabinet with a modest footprint, Bösendorfer's VC7 is a dream come true. Vivid and engaging sound, too.