

The UK Hi-Fi Show *Live*

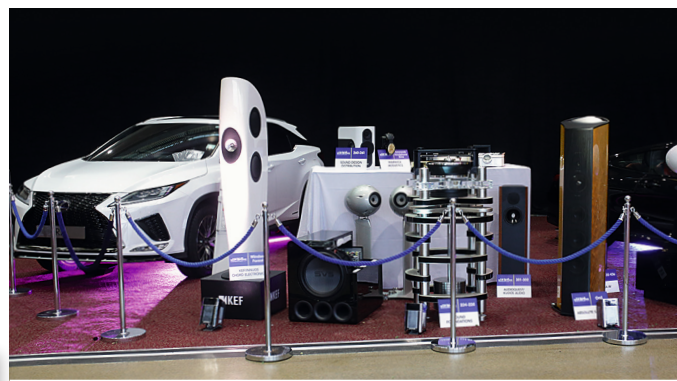
Words: Adam Smith Pictures: Adam Smith, Doug Schneider, Hifi Pig & Paul Miller



Now in its seventh year, the UK Hi-Fi Show *Live* witnessed a change of venue – and what a change! For 2019 we took the ‘hotel’ out of hi-fi shows, hosting the cream of high-end audio in the vast but elegant settings of Ascot’s iconic Grandstand. Home to Royal Ascot in June, in October this spectacular venue saw exclusive UK product launches from brands including BAT, Wilson Audio, Constellation, Innuos, Isotek, Avantgarde and D’Agostino. The luxurious Parade Ring, On5, Ascot Authority and Windsor Forest suites provided the ideal environment for packed workshops, hosted by world-class presenters including Germany’s Matthias Bode, Michael Fremer and Ken Kessler. Here’s a taster of this unique high-end audio extravaganza.



Putting the amp into campervan was Clearaudio, its VW vehicle housing its Concept Active turntable paired with KEF’s LS50 Wireless speakers [HFN Oct '17]. www.clearaudio.de



A gold-leaf Sonus faber Liliun and Clearaudio Statement deck were just two world-class components to greet visitors, alongside three shiny examples of manufacturers’ forays into car audio: a Mark Levinson-equipped Lexus RX [top], BMW 8-series Coupé with Harman Kardon system and the JBL Lamborghini.



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Karma AV's stereo room featured the flagship Falcon Acoustic GC6500R loudspeakers driven by a Balanced Audio Technology VK-P12 phono stage, REX DAC, REX II preamp and VK-655SE monoblocks. The turntable was MoFi's EISA Award-winning Ultradeck+M. www.karma-av.co.uk



Now owned by Monitor Audio, Roksan alternated between its Radius 7 turntable and Xerxes 20 Plus with new Sara unipivot arm, the set-up played through Roksan Caspian amplification into Monitor Audio PL300 II loudspeakers. www.roksan.com; www.monitораudio.com



SCV Distribution used Vertere's MG-1 turntable and a NovaFidelity X45 streamer/DAC as sources into a Bricasti M12 Source Controller and M25 amp. IsoAcoustics demonstrated its Gaia isolation products [inset] with Focal's Sopra N°2 loudspeakers. www.scvdistribution.co.uk



Absolute Sounds arrived with a dazzling selection of products from its portfolio, including components from Magico, Constellation, Continuum, EAT, Sonus faber, Krell and PrimaLuna [above left] and the TechDAS AirForce One Premium turntable [above right]. Two rooms offered ticketed demos, the larger with the all-new Wilson Alexx speakers driven in turns by Audio Research Reference 160S and D'Agostino Relentless amps [top]. www.absolutesounds.com



Vertere made its mark once again in Stone Audio's set-up where the SG-1 Super Groove turntable with Audio-Technica AT-ART1000 cartridge fed Aesthetix Rhea, Calypso and Atlas amplification driving GamuT RS5i floorstanding loudspeakers. www.stoneaudio.co.uk

SHOWBLOG Sights and sounds from around the globe

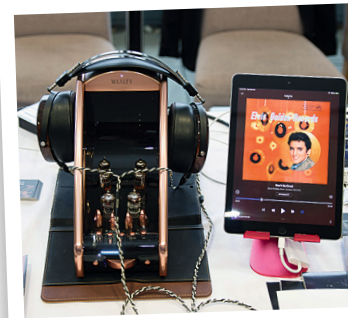
Paradigm's Persona 9H floorstanders [p48] are a semi-active design and looked superb in their metallic orange finish. They strutted their stuff with Anthem STR pre/power amps and IsoTek power conditioning and cables. www.pulsecinemas.com



Cambridge Audio occupied two rooms – one showing its flagship Edge models, the second the CX Series 2 components [below] in the form of the CXA61 and CXA81 integrated amplifiers, CXN (V2) streamer and CXC CD transport. www.cambridgeaudio.com



Henley Audio brought along a comprehensive selection from its catalogue with static displays featuring products from Pro-Ject Audio Systems, Klipsch, Ortofon and Musical Fidelity, including Pro-Ject's 'Ringo Starr Peace & Love' turntable [see inset]. On demo were the retro-looking Klipsch La Scala AL5 loudspeakers [HFN Jun '19] driven by Musical Fidelity amplification and fed by a Pro-Ject Signature 10 turntable. www.henleyaudio.co.uk



Centrepiece of the Headphone Zone was Warwick Acoustics with its own booth surrounded by a who's who of headphones and partnering electronics including Rupert Neve Designs' Fidelice range [top left], Audeze [top right], Manley Labs [above left] and iFi Audio [above right]. On other tables could be found amps and 'phones from Astell & Kern, MrSpeakers, Novafidelity, Benchmark, MOON, Meze, and JBL with its TUNE and LIVE range.



Node Audio hails from Cambridge and demonstrated its £30,000 Hylixa loudspeakers which feature a one-piece enclosure formed by fusing nylon and glass. Their sound, using Goldmund amplification, was as impressive as their looks. www.node-audio.com

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In one of the rooms occupied by Harman was to be found this sweet little system, comprising an Arcam CDS50 CD player and JBL HDI-1600 loudspeakers. The amp was Arcam's slimline SA30, said to deliver a full 2x120W/8ohm. www.arcam.co.uk

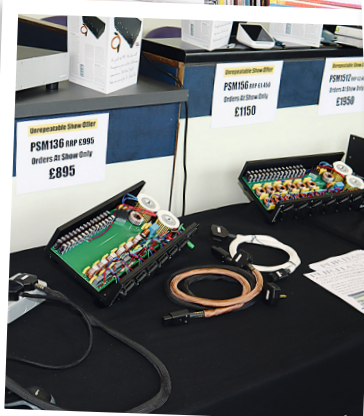
Elite Audio demonstrated a system fronted by an Acoustic Solid Round Wood MPX turntable that played through a brace of Manley Labs amps into pairs of Verity Audio Parsifal [left] or Boenicke Audio W8 SE speakers [right]. www.eliteaudiouk.com



Gato Audio's room boasted a fine-sounding system comprising the CDD-1 CD drive/DAC [HFN Oct '13], PRD-3S preamp/network player and PWR-222 mono power amps [HFN Jun '17] complete with their stylish LED meter 'needles'. www.gato-audio.com



Audio Pinnacle showed this Gold Note system with the Italian company's Mediterraneo turntable, B-7 Ceramic tonearm and Tuscany Gold cartridge. The IS-1000 amplifier kept a firm grip of the XT-7 loudspeakers [far right]. www.audiopinnacle.co.uk



The Frankel Bar offered the chance to check out cables from Atlas and the Chord Company, browse LPs in the racks of Theme One Records and Diverse Vinyl [top], enjoy hi-res audio courtesy of Qobuz and Highresaudio, and grab a bargain at Puritan Audio Lab's display of its mains treatment products [above left]. Live music wasn't forgotten either, Naim Records recording artist Harry Jay-Steele [above] entertaining visitors on guitar.

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Inside the Origin Live room the company's Voyager turntable [foreground] was making sweet music via a Discovery 2 phono stage and Astute loudspeakers with matching subwoofer. Also to be savoured was a prototype phono stage from L'Art du Son, said to cost £24,000. www.originlive.com; www.artduson.com



A superb-sounding match: Luxman's PD-151 turntable [*HFN* Oct '19], EQ-500 phono stage, D-05u SACD player and L-590AXII amp [*HFN* Apr '16] were used with DALI's Epicon 8 loudspeakers [*HFN* Sep '12]. www.luxman.com; www.dali-speakers.com



Signature Systems ran multiple rooms and a show highlight was a set-up comprising a SOTA Escape turntable hooked up to PS Audio amplification – including a Stellar phono stage – driving a pair of Duevel Venus loudspeakers. www.signaturesystems.co.uk



One of the loudest experiences at the show had to be recording guru Mike Valentine's shirt. Mike, who runs Chasing The Dragon, is giving a big thumbs up to the sound of Trilogy Audio's 915R tube preamp and matching 995R power amps driving Magneplanar 20.7 speakers. www.symmetry-systems.co.uk



Karma-AV's surround sound demonstration room utilised a rack of Emotiva electronics, including the new 16-channel XMC-2 processor and 11-channel XPA-11 power amp. Loudspeaker and bass thunder came courtesy of SVS and I wasn't the only visitor to leave the room with a big grin on my face! www.emotiva.com; www.svsound.com



VPI and MOON by Simaudio came together to great effect to show off the capabilities of Dynaudio's Evoke 30 loudspeakers. These 920mm-tall floorstanding designs boast 'trickle-down' technology from the company's Confidence range in a more compact and affordable package. www.renaissanceaudio.co.uk

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The synergy sparked as Focal's Chora 816 loudspeakers – the intermediate model in a lineup that has replaced the old Chorus range – were driven by a set-up from brand partner Naim comprising an NDX 2 streamer [HFN Sep '18], Unitcore hard disc player, and Supernait 3 amplifier. www.focal.com; www.naimaudio.com

Melco treated visitors to an extensive display of its digital storage products plus a system fronted by its N10 digital music library [HFN Jun '19] playing through a Norma REVO IPA-140 integrated amp into Russell K's flagship Red 150se loudspeakers. Also on display was Melco's S100 'audiophile network switch'. www.melco-audio.com; www.russellk.co.uk



Bluesound played the 'compact and stylish' card very effectively with a fine demo of its Node 2i streamer via a Naim Supernait 3 amp into B&W 703S2 speakers. www.bluesound.com; www.bowerswilkins.com



As well as having cables for sale in the Frankel Bar [see p23] the Chord Company also unveiled its new EpicX loudspeaker cables. These see the Epic updated with Chord's XLPE insulation. www.chord.co.uk



The sound coming from Goldmund's £67,500 active Prana speakers was nothing short of breathtaking. The VPI Avenger deck fronting the system [inset] did a great job but I wasn't the only one to ask about a new Goldmund deck. No firm word as yet – next year, perhaps? www.sonatahifi.com



Sound Foundations used Kerr Acoustics' K300 Mk3 speakers with Exposure's 5010 preamp/monoblocks [HFN Nov '18] and a Clearaudio Innovation turntable [HFN Sep '09]. Adjacent is DS Audio's ION-001 vinyl ioniser, said to keep records free of static as they play. www.ds-audio-w.biz; www.soundfoundations.co.uk

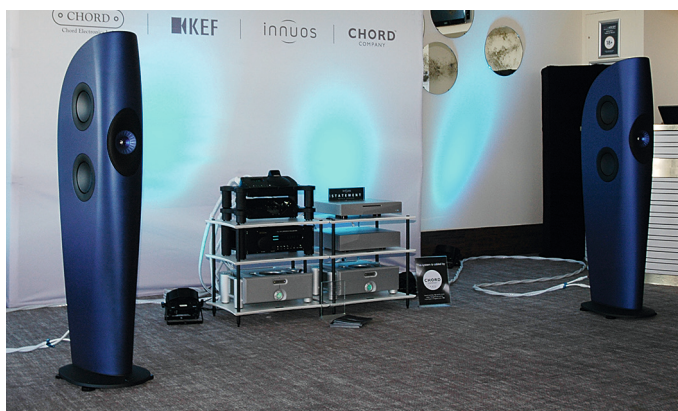
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Tim Jarman's vintage showcase saw a Sony PS-FL7 turntable, Hitachi FT-8000 tuner and HA-7700 amp drive Technics SB-7000 speakers. He also gave cassette its first hi-fi show appearance for many years using classic decks by Sony, Nakamichi and JVC.



Signature Systems used PS Audio's DirectStream Memory Player, PW DirectStream DAC [HFN May '18] and BHK Signature Preamplifier to showcase the HiFiMan Shangri-La headphones [left], at a cool £50,000. www.psaudio.com; www.hifiman.com



The Windsor Forest Suite played host to KEF's Blade 2 speakers, finished in soothing blue. Electronics included Innuos's flagship Statement server, Chord Electronics' BLU MkII CD transport and DAVE DAC [HFN Apr '16] plus its Ultima 3 monoblocks.

In one of the larger rooms, Raidho's new £95,000 TD3.8 loudspeakers let rip on the end of an Esoteric set-up based around components from the Grandioso Series [inset]. These included the Grandioso K1X SACD player, C1 preamp and M1 monoblocks. www.raidho.dk; www.esoteric-highend.eu



Visitors to the Reel-to-Reel Rambler room enjoyed music through a system comprising Aesthetix amplification, Raidho speakers and open-reel machines from Revox, Pioneer, Akai and Ballfinger. There were also talks from industry luminaries such as Ken Kessler, Ed Pong of UltraAnalogue recordings and Michael Fremer [below left], and singer Lyn Stanley [below right]. www.thereeltoreelrambler.com

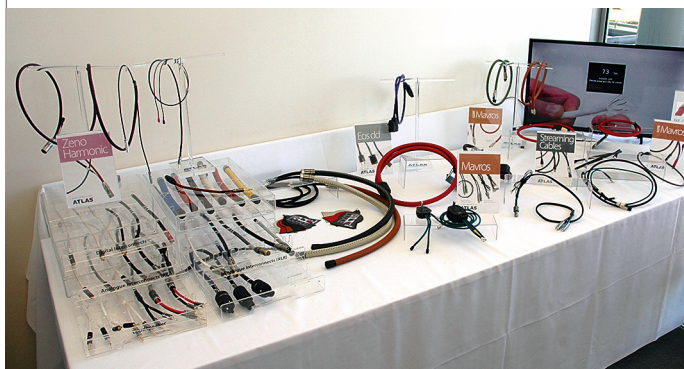


SHOWBLOG Sights and sounds from around the globe

Harman Kardon filled a room with its range of wireless Citation speakers. There was something for everyone, from the compact Citation One up to the slick-looking Tower models shown here, with four drivers per enclosure. www.harmankardon.co.uk



Atlas Cables impressed with an array of cables from its extensive range. It also introduced three new streaming cables from its Equator, Hyper and Mavros lines at £85, £165 and £495, respectively, for 1m lengths. www.atlascables.com



While £65,000 worth of Kronos turntable [inset] dominated one of Decent Audio's two rooms, in the other, Magnepan's 20.7 speakers [HFN Apr '18] staged a sonic disappearing act at odds with their size. www.kronosaudio.com; www.decentaudio.co.uk



POWER | PRECISION | PURITY



As well as inside the Lexus RX car [see p18], Mark Levinson equipment was found making fine sounds in the Harman rooms. Here a N°5101 SACD player/DAC feeds a N°5802 integrated amp into Revel F226Be loudspeakers. The server is a Melco N100. www.marklevinson.com; www.revelspeakers.com



Cadence Audio/Padood's demonstration was centred around the mighty Avantgarde Duo Primo XD loudspeakers driven by electronics from Nagra's HD range with a Garrard 301/SME/Ortofon front-end [top and above left]. Other demos featured components from the SME range, YG Acoustics, Sendor, Plinius Audio and Boulder, with a lid-off look at the mighty Boulder 2160 stereo power amplifier [above right]. www.padood.com

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Avid Hi-Fi could be found in two rooms at the show. Its larger system featured the company's Acutus Dark Reference turntable with SME V arm and Reference Ruby cartridge, hooked up to a Sigsum amplifier feeding Evo 2 loudspeakers. www.avidhifi.com

The first Kudos and Exposure pairing was set up in the AQ/Kudos room, where Titan 707 speakers were driven by Exposure 5010 monoblocks. The system also featured AudioQuest's Niagara power conditioners. www.kudosaudio.com; www.audioquest.com



Talk Electronics unveiled the new Edwards Audio TT6 turntable with EA6 tonearm, which was equipped with a Goldring 1000 series MM cartridge. The brand's new IA8 integrated amplifier, said to offer 100W per channel into 8ohm, drove a pair of Apprentice SP loudspeakers. www.talkelectronics.com

Kii Audio demonstrated its £30k fully active/DSP-governed Kii THREE speakers [HFN Aug '18] with BXT bass extension modules and digital controller. One of the most impressive sounds at the show, it made a convincing case for the benefits of loudspeaker DSP. www.kiiaudio.com; www.sounddesigndistribution.co.uk



The second Exposure/Kudos pairing was to be found in Exposure's own room. The components were a little smaller here, comprising the XM CD player [HFN Nov '19], XM7 preamp, XM9 power amps with PSUs and VXN active crossover. These ran the Kudos Titan 505 loudspeakers on their matching stands. www.exposurehifi.com

Next Year

The Hi-Fi Show *Live* 2020
19th-20th September