

AUDIO

Our audio expert *Michael Brook* takes a look at the best new audio and video equipment to help you get the most out of recorded classical music

MUSIC CHOICE



STANDING TO ATTENTION:
the stylish Technics OTTAVA SC C500 hi-fi system

ALL-IN-ONE NETWORK HI-FI Technics OTTAVA SC C500 £1,699

Owning a state-of-the-art hi-fi system was seen as a lifestyle choice a few years ago and these high-end, all-in-one products are now enjoying a resurgence, albeit in the form of something a little more forward-thinking than the traditional CD player and speakers combination.

On first look, though, that's exactly what the Technics OTTAVA is, with a CD player that is centre stage and a set of compact speakers that sit neatly at either side of the main unit. Where the OTTAVA gets really interesting is with its network features. You can connect

a USB memory device, or smartphone, or link it to your home network to stream high-resolution music files.

Backing up the main unit's technology, the two speakers have been designed from the ground up to reduce cabinet vibrations and to provide the sort of low-end thump that isn't generally associated with compact speakers. Without wishing to get too technical, the Technics speaker technology enhances the different frequency ranges, with better clarity and

resonance in the low- and mid-range frequencies. The high frequencies are handled by a multi-angled tweeter arrangement that brings crispness to the fore.

And it all works exceptionally well. Given the restrictions of its size, the OTTAVA is more than capable of filling all but the most imposing rooms, only missing a beat when presented with large open areas. For those of us that live in anything other than a stately home, the OTTAVA delivers in spades.

If you're looking for a do-it-all system and have the necessary budget, the Technics OTTAVA system comes highly recommended. www.johnlewis.com ★★★★★

COMPACT AUDIOPHILE SPEAKERS Dynaudio Contour S 1.4 LE £2,495

Danish audiophile brand Dynaudio is well known in hi-fi circles and is one that audio enthusiasts aspire to own. Dynaudio creates gorgeous, well-built speakers that are exceptionally accurate, and ones with a price tag to match.

The S 1.4 LE (right) is the latest addition to Dynaudio's renowned Contour range and comes in four finishes, including oiled walnut, plus three piano lacquer styles – black, mocha and bubinga (rosewood).

The Contours are certainly a talking point, but this is

of little use if they don't deliver the goods sonically. Thankfully, they do. The speaker's design produces a surprisingly large amount of bass thump for the cabinet size and, as we've come to expect from Dynaudio, the treble frequencies are bright and crisp, while the mid-range is well-defined.

There's an awful lot to like about the Contours. Yes, the £2,495 price tag is a large chunk of change, but taking finish, build quality and performance into account, they compare very favourably with other speakers at this price point.

www.dynaudio.com ★★★★★



COMPACT MULTI-ROOM SYSTEM Denon HEOS 1 £149

Sonos has dominated the multi-room systems market, with its Play range of affordable, wireless speakers that enable householders to stream music to different rooms. And now Denon's HEOS range is taking aim at this position. That's a tall order, as Sonos has been in this market for a decade, but Denon has plenty of heritage of its own – and it shows. The HEOS 1 (top, right) is a pleasing mini tower speaker that takes on Sonos's entry-level Play:1, albeit with a £20 price difference in Denon's favour.



ON THE GO: Denon's HEOS 1 speaker

The Denon has one pleasing trump card over the Sonos (albeit one that will set you back £79) and that's the optional Go Pack that adds a battery for up to six hours of playback, a USB dongle to enable Bluetooth streaming, and a splash-proof guard to protect the HEOS 1 when it's being used outdoors.

The HEOS 1 delivers an impressive sonic punch for its size but the ecosystem of music-streaming services, including Spotify Connect, Pandora and Rhapsody, isn't quite as established as Sonos's (which has access to 60). That said, if you want the portability that the Go Pack delivers, the HEOS 1 could be the starter system for you. www.denon.co.uk ★★★★★

HIGH-END EARPHONES Audio-Technica ATH-CKR10 £250

Audio-Technica has a formidable reputation for its range of personal audio products, including earphones, particularly when it comes to noise-cancelling technology. But I've often felt that some of its products lacked character, delivering a neutral sound that lacked a touch of vibrancy.

The ATH-CKR10 earphones (below) are something of a revelation, then, delivering deep low-end frequencies and a crisp treble that captures the dynamism and energy of a recording. The build quality is solid, if unremarkable, but that hardly matters when the product itself is so accomplished.

Although the £250 price tag puts them in the upper echelons of earphone technology, this begins to sound a good deal more reasonable when it's compared to Astell & Kern models which cost three times more. The Audio-Technicas hold their own surprisingly well. They may be unexceptional to look at, but their sound is quite remarkable. eu.audio-technica.com

★★★★★

