

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

BBC MUSIC CHOICE



ONE BOX FITS ALL:
the Moon Neo Ace will play music
from a wide range of sources

ALL-IN-ONE MUSIC PLAYER

Moon Neo Ace £2,500

The Moon Neo ACE is a one-box music player, comprising an integrated amplifier, high-resolution streaming capability and an on-board DAC (digital to analogue converter). It's a slab of hi-fi beauty, hewn from brushed aluminium, and is available in black or a very attractive two-tone black and silver finish.

But what about its performance? The ACE can handle more or less any music source you care to throw at it. It includes Bluetooth AptX technology and will stream directly from network-attached storage (NAS) or even from a laptop. It's versatile enough, too, to allow a good old-fashioned turntable to be plugged into it, with three line-level analogue inputs. And there's also a front-mounted mini jack input to cater for non-Bluetooth devices such as personal audio players. The ACE is made even more flexible with an array of digital inputs, including two for short-range audio (SPDIF), two

for optical (for playing CD and DVDs) and USB. In short, there are very few music sources, if any, that the ACE doesn't support.

The intuitive MiND (Moon intelligent Network Device) interface makes organising music a breeze and the associated app takes care of controlling the device direct from your smartphone.

Sonically, it's a revelation. Open and incredibly neutral, the ACE allows the music to breathe, sounding like it was intended to in the studio. In short, it produces one of the widest, most expansive sound stages you're likely to experience. Even listened to via headphones, the sheer depth and breadth of this machine's audio is immediately noticeable.

The Neo ACE is an incredibly accomplished piece of hi-fi kit, and although it might not be within everyone's budget, it's worth the outlay. There is hardly anything finer out there.

www.simaudio.com ★★★★

BOOKSHELF SPEAKER

KEF LS50 £799

KEF is one of those hi-fi brands that creates products that are both aesthetically and sonically pleasing, marrying audio expertise with modern, stylish design.

The LS50 speakers (right) aren't, however, the most stunningly designed, but as soon as you lift them out of their box, their exemplary build quality and finish are immediately apparent.

And they pack a punch sonically, too – despite their small dimensions, they give off plenty of low-end bass, mirrored in the mid-range and treble ends of the frequency



scale. Everything is focused and distinct, delivering a sound that's impressive for a speaker of that size.

As bookshelf speakers go, the LS50s deliver in almost every area, with every component engineered to perfection.

For the money, you'd be crazy to look elsewhere.
uk.kef.com ★★★★

BLUETOOTH SPEAKER

Onkyo T3 £110

Onkyo has long been known for its hi-fi and audio-visual separates. Its products are generally pitched at very reasonable price points and often

ranked best in class. With its range of headphones, the company broke new ground by stepping into the personal audio world and now, with the T3 (pictured above), we have its first foray into the ultra-portable Bluetooth speaker market.

Clad in a rose gold chassis with a magnetic white leather cover, the T3 won't be to everyone's taste. But on the up-side, a built-in eight-hour battery can be charged via USB, so you can power your T3 from a laptop or desktop if you don't have a plug to hand.

Unfortunately, you're limited to Bluetooth for connecting devices to the T3, as its size doesn't allow for a 3.5mm jack. And sonically, the T3 lacks the definition of other speakers on the market. The foxL v2 from



Soundmatters, for example, is £10 less and is arguably superior. All the pieces are in place, but the result is a little underwhelming.
www.selfridges.com ★★★

A RE-ENGINEERED AUDIO ICON

Teenage Engineering OD-11 £499

The OD-11 is actually a re-engineered product based on the original OD-11 loudspeaker created by Swedish hi-fi designer Stig Carlsson in 1974. And when I say 'based' I mean a faithful copy of the original, down to the woven wire steel grilles. The difference is that Apple AirPlay functionality brings a modern twist to this audio classic. You can configure two OD-11s to create a stereo network or use them independently in different rooms. Later this year, they'll be an option for creating a network of six OD-11s.

The OD-11 has two in-built speakers, a woofer and a tweeter, which are all positioned 'orthodirectionally', meaning they aim sound at an angle of 45 degrees upwards rather than at the ceiling.

Music can be played wirelessly via AirPlay or cable (through an optical or 3.5mm line-in) while you can control the device using the 'orthoplay' app or the optional (and quite brilliant) 'ortho' remote for an extra £99. Musically it's bright and clear, with frequencies that are well separated – the overall performance is up there with anything in this class or price point. The OD-11 will also deliver very low frequencies, down to 20Hz, which is phenomenal given its small size. This is an inspired recreation of a legendary product.
teenageengineering.com

★★★★★

