

Simple Approach To A Great Music System!

I was scouring the latest TAS and Stereophile the other day. As I was reading through the myriad of options I was thinking, holy cow, this is absurd! The mags spend inordinate time and effort on a zillion different brands that tend to have one thing in common, they're ghastly expensive. Where's the interest in getting performance for your dollar? Everyone who lives in Milwaukee is interested in hitting that point of diminishing returns. These guys, would miss the Titanic.

One writer is talking about speakers for \$100k as a stunning value. Another guy is talking about a 50w/ch integrated amp with four output transistors for \$10k as tough to beat for the money. Yet a third guy is raving a \$28k tonearm, which you should consider cuz its less than its \$35k brother.

The writers are creating "content" for the magazine. They're not trying to help YOU put together a great hi-fi in a cost effective fashion.

The reviewers are immune to reality because they are LOANED equipment to audition. Almost without exception, these writers are ridiculously kind to the company who loaned them the gear. If they do ultimately buy something, it is dramatically less than dealer cost, much less what you would pay. Guys, this is NEVER NEVER LAND.

Audio Emporium lives in the real world. We sell products to people who work for a living. Your money is finite. We can help you get the best performance for the money you choose to allot.

Step One

Your first step has to be to clean the debris out of the AC line current. If you don't filter out the honey bees on your electrical line, the fine detail we audiophiles crave will be obfuscated by the fog. We have two great choices from Isotek below.

Step Two

Step two is to run with a GREAT source. There is no better source than MQA! Streaming MQA or CD quality music via a fine service like Tidal runs you \$20 per month. Buy the Bluesound Node for only \$550 to have this world with edge of the art sound and expansive music at your whim.

I need a CD player too. I have lots of music that is not available via streaming. Certain labels don't have agreements with streaming services yet. Whether it's a great classical label like Hyperion or a garage band you might love- sometimes CDs are the only way to get this music into your system. You might choose to add records too. Some music is only available on LP.

Step Three

Every speaker benefits from a strong, swift kick in the keister. There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it. Potent water pressure beats wimpy water pressure every time. You're welcome to sit around with pipe smokers and wax eloquently about aromatic bouquets. Yet such effulgent observations tend to blind listeners as to how to spend their money wisely.

I will recommend a couple of cost effective packages that make mucho \$ense for your investment.

Step Four

There is no substitute for having GREAT SPEAKERS. The differences among electronics are tiny compared to the differences among speakers. Speakers at the same price point can sound dramatically different. There is certainly room for taste.

If you're a rocker you're likely to prefer one of the gorgeous new Klipsch Heritage models. If you want your jazz and acoustic music to be its most precise, you're likely to choose Amphion, GoldenEar or Magnepans. Let's have some fun discussing the options!

Mains Conditioner

You need to start with a fine Mains Conditioner. If you don't, there is debris coming out of your wall that presents "haze" getting in the way of your music. Isotek is a British company that makes two conditioners that will filter out the noise without quashing your dynamic range. The sonic improvement provided by both these products is quite noticeable.

To ignore this step is to start creating your POSTER with a NEGATIVE that isn't clear. When you blow up the negative to become a poster, it will be softer than it should be. You cannot achieve stellar musical clarity without dealing with line debris. Isotek is our answer. Isotek deals with airborne AND line interference.

Isotek Polaris \$500

Polaris has six outlets
and comes with an Initium
Power Cable, worth \$100 a la
carte. You would be wise to replace your generic black power cables with
Initiums. The sonic benefit is well worth the investment.



Initium Power Cable \$100

Initium features nickel blades and a dielectric of polyethylene.
If you have a Polaris, you'll be able to hear the improvement
Initium brings. If you don't have a Polaris, you
won't- because your musical detail will be
obfuscated by AC noise.



Isotek Aquarius \$2000

Aquarius is for higher end systems.
If you can swing an Aquarius you should!
It has six outlets, two of which are dedicated to high power
applications.

Aquarius not only offers more filtration
(60 vs 30dB) and better sound than Polaris, but it provides six filters so there's no cross
contamination among products plugged into it!

Aquarius comes with a Premier power cable. You would be wise to replace your generic black power
cables with Premiers as the sonic benefit is well worth the investment.



Premier Power Cable \$200

Premiers feature gold plated blades and a dielectric of Teflon- the best materials out there.

In a basic system of preamp, amp and a source or two, you might end up buying 3 or 4 Premiers. The investment will pay off as long as you run Polaris or Aquarius.

Premier C15 is a traditional audiophile connection pictured here. Premier C7 is the smaller round termination for Bluesound.



Isotek Syncro Power Cable/Network \$2200

Isotek Polaris & Aquarius do a fine job of improving sound by cleaning up line hash. There is a new product from Isotek that adds just as much improvement to Aquarius. You can buy it right away or wait to blow your mind down the road a piece!

Syncro is a power cable with an active AC sine wave correction network. By inverting phase on the electrical sine wave coming into Aquarius, Syncro literally cancels the distortion from this endemic impediment of your power.

The sonic benefit is much improved dynamic range and much more impactful bass. I didn't think this level of improvement could be possible from a product attacking the AC sine wave.

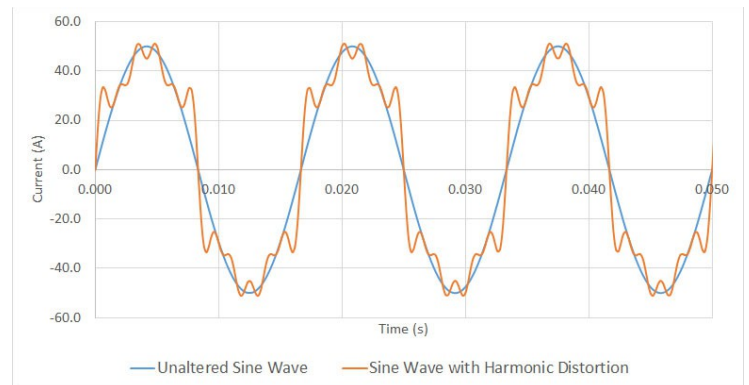
I'm shocked at the substantial improvement!

All I can say is, I reserve the right to be educated and get smarter. This photo has Euro connectors. Of course the version we offer is American.



Syncro's isolation network takes the orange distorted sign wave and delivers the unfettered blue pattern to Aquarius.

The result is less sludge in the road and cleaner sound.



MQA & CD Streaming

Bluesound Node \$600

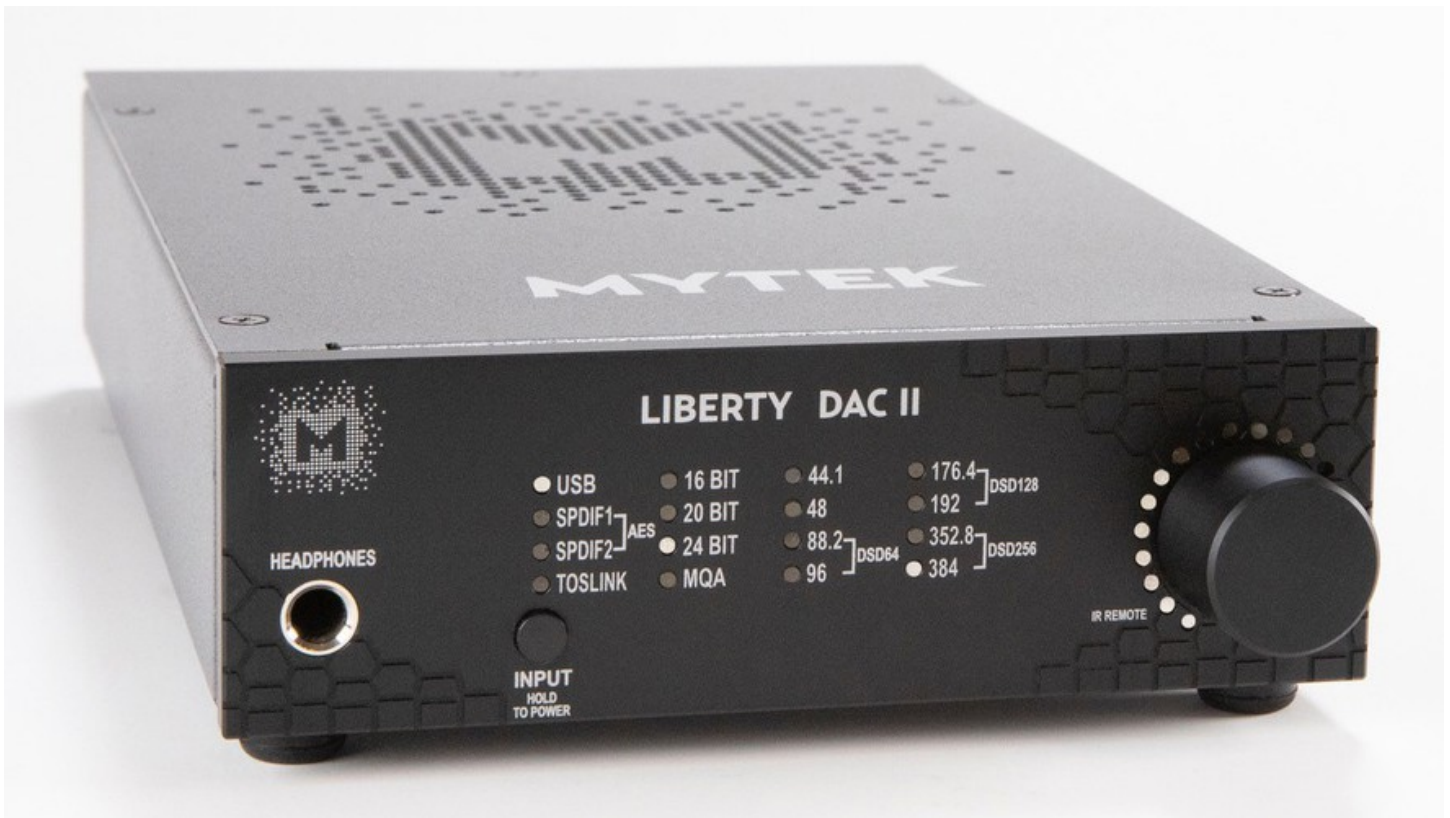
Node of NAD fame, belongs in virtually every system these days! It STREAMS MQA and CD quality music through Tidal. MQA is a hi-res format delivering state of the art sound to you for a modest \$20 per month Tidal subscription. Tidal also provides outstanding CD quality performance.

Don't pass on introducing MQA to your system NOW. MQA sounds better than hi-res files and you don't have to pay \$25 per album for the music! MQA measures ten times less in distortion than traditional hi-res digital filters. MQA doesn't sound ten times cleaner than hi-res files, but it does sound more detailed and less harsh.



Mytek Liberty DAC 2 \$1295

As good as the Node above is, you can't get a state of the art DAC in a unit for \$600. NAD knows this and is super smart to provide digital outs (Opt & Coax) so you can feed Node into the DAC of your choice. What should that DAC be?



While you can buy MQA DACs from \$5-7-18K, please consider the new Mytek Liberty 2. It runs \$1295 and is within spitting distance of the price no object competitors. Inputs include two coax, one OPT, one AES/EBU and one USB-B (yuk). Outputs include analog RCA and BALANCED! You get all this for a grand and I promise, when you hear it here, you're gonna love it. The improved transparency, immediacy and dynamic contrast are to die for!

NAD Electronics

NAD has long been recognized as among the best two channel manufacturers out there. NAD's strength is in providing amplifiers of enormous headroom and the ability to drive any load you throw its way. I want to start with the point of diminishing returns, as always!

NAD C368 Integrated Amp \$1100 (80x2 or 300x1)

You can start, and may END your quest for great electronics with the NAD C368. C368 uses NAD's patented Hybrid Digital technology. It uses an analog switching signal (instead of digital) in its Hypex D design, to deliver amazingly clean & smooth sound. Think of tubes, without the hassle of tubes!



Being an integrated, C368 has a fine preamp on board. Inputs include Bluetooth, two analog ins, two coax ins, two OPT ins and an MM phono input. C368 has pre outs which allow you to add C268- the companion power amp!

C368 is rated at 80x2 but peaks at over 300x2! Most 80x2 amps peak at 81 watts, and shut down if you drive 4 ohm speakers. C368 has a secret weapon if you noticed in the fine print above. What's that 300x1 about ? C368 can be bridged to produce 300x1. All you have to do is buy the companion C268 power amp (\$950, 80x2 or 300x1) and you have absolutely ferocious 300x2 performance from this two box solution for just \$2050!

NAD C268 Power Amp \$950 (80x2 or 300x1)



You can buy C268 to run with any preamp out there. But for the sake of this entry I want you to consider adding C268 to your C368 above. Yup. For just \$2050 all in, you have a dynamite preamp with 300x2 NAD Power Drive horse power! NAD is kinda plain Jane cosmetically. Under the hood, it's KILLER! Why not spend your money on what's INSIDE instead of outside?



Note that C268 can run single ended or balanced inputs. It can run stereo (80x2) or bridged (300x1)! You have an input level control for many potential uses.

First and foremost, C268 is your ticket to almost quadruple the great C368's horse power and grow your system! Keep in mind that with NAD's Hybrid Digital design, this gear sounds warm and smooth in flavor, not biting or harsh. With the addition of C268, NAD is making it hard on its competitors!

NAD C538 CD Player \$380

I still need CDs. I have a million and there is plenty of music on CD that we can't yet stream. NAD's matching C538 is built on a steel chassis and is solid.



While it has analog outputs for any system, please notice that in this system, you'll run coax digital out into C368. Yup, you will be using C538 as a transport while you listen to the sweet DAC in C368. Hence you don't have to spend a bundle on a CD player. Orrrr, if I can talk you into getting the Liberty 2 DAC above, you'll be listening to it, while C538 remains as the system's transport.

NAD C-388 Integrated Amp \$1750 (150x2)

C-388 sounds approximately twice as strong as C-368. C-388 is a more muscular amp for speakers that can use a big punch in the gut. If the money isn't your impediment, C-388 is always worth it over C-368. It has a heavier, more dynamic sound.



NAD C-658 Preamp/DAC/Streamer \$1750

C-658 has redefined what we can expect from an affordable preamp! Not only does it sound smooth with a nice MM section, it has a Node built in for streaming. The on board 32 bit DAC means you can run a digital source into it and glean even more open, airy sound than your source alone has. It supports balanced and single ended performance. It even has a couple of open modules in case you want to add HDMI or something else down the road.



NAD C-298 Power Amp \$2200 (185x2 or 620 monoblock)

My fave affordable amp on the market is C-298. It is a lovely sounding battle ship! Featuring the innovative Eigentakt design, C-298 has less distortion than any amp out there. When you listen to C-298 you're struck by how clean and relaxed the sound is. Traditional power amps have a number of mismatched output transistors. These transistors behaving like tuning forks NOT tuned to the same frequency! Eigentakt technology eliminates this amplifier characteristic. C-298 runs balanced or single ended. You probably don't need to run a pair but- you can.

Power is part of what C-298 delivers in spades. While rated at 185x2, Stereophile tested it and it didn't clip till 275x2! If you take a look in our latest section where I point out C-298 numbers, you'll see how a number of competitors tested. Not only did NONE outperform C-298, many of them barely hit power ratings, or in some cases- didn't even come close!





Speakers

Speakers are a matter of taste more than any other audio products. Since I'm writing this, I get to filter this discussion through my ears. Price plays an important part in this discussion, despite the fact that the magazine reviewers don't care about your wallet.

Wharfedale Lintons \$1800 Per Pair With Stands

There is no better speaker value in our biz than the Lintons! The Lintons are a finely tuned cabinet featuring an 8" 3-way design. They should sit on their stands which decouples them from the floor to deliver tight, tuneful bass. At anywhere near \$1500, the Lintons are a slam dunk best choice.

As we go north from a pair of Lintons, there can be a great case made that the next step should be DOUBLE LINTONS. Since you already have the stands, adding another pair runs only \$1200. You can buy the entire double Linton stack with stands for only \$2700.

While I'm bragging up Lintons, let's address the English elephant in the room. Wharfedale is a UK based company that makes its speakers, IN QUANTITY, in China, to hit low price points. The product is made to the same quality standard as if it was made in the UK. It uses great drivers with real wood cabinets. They're lovely.

Wharfedale is in business to do business. There is no question that building in high quantity with modest labor cost takes advantage of economies of scale. There is no question that great speakers can be made in China, the UK, Canada, or anywhere else where the manufacturer does the job with attention to detail. I'm here to tell ya that if Wharfedale was built in the UK in small quantities, the price would run about 8 times higher than it currently is. That's right, Linton would run well over a grand per pair. I would ask you to be open minded to Linton's performance, and not hold it against Wharfedale that they've chosen to build in China to sell successfully.



Bryston A3 \$3270 Per Pair

Bryston's A3 can bring music with a sledge hammer. If you want power beyond the Linton in a modest sized tower, A3 is the next step up the ladder. Bryston's high end balance is what I call Steinway Smooth. It isn't voiced bright, as most speakers are. Bryston's warranty is 20 years! You'll be under warranty long after other companies have quit supporting their speakers at all.



Bryston A2 \$3810 Per Pair

Yes, I would buy A2 over A3 if I could swing it. By running double tweets, mids and woofs, A2 can hit harder, play deeper and louder, and cast a larger image. Whether your music is rock, jazz or classical in nature, A2 is a marvelous choice and won't let you down.



Bryston Mini T \$4075 Per Pair

The T Series from Bryston employs massive 8" woofs vs the 6.5's of the A Series. Yep, you get even more gusto. I'll quote one of my first customers to experience Bryston Mini Ts. "They have WAUMPUS BASS!" Of course they maintain the Steinway Smooth top end.



Bryston Middle T \$6870 Per Pair

Middle T is the first tower in the T range. At just under 40" tall it is surprisingly domestically friendly while still being ferocious! Middle T is the best seller in the family.



Bryston Model T \$9555 Per Pair

Model T is the top dog in the line, with even bigger dynamics, kick and image than the Middles. You can compare Model T with speakers running \$50k per pair on up. I'm not knocking YG, Magico or Wilson performance. It's just that you pay an intense premium for their esoteric cabinets. You're clearly beyond any rational point of diminishing returns when you go down that rabbit hole.



Amphion Argon 3S \$3000 Per Pair, Walnut

Argon 3S is a stunningly refined stand mount at a fair price. It is tuned as artfully as any speaker out there. Amphion of Finland delivers resolution beyond the competition, without being bright. It purveys a massive sound stage with quite respectable bass in a small footprint. \$2700 per pair in white or black.



Amphion Argon 7LS \$6300 Per Pair, Walnut

Argon 7LS is a gorgeous, lean tower. It is aesthetically as unique as the image it casts- which is wide and deep. Amphions are voiced to provide solid bass without being boomy, or murky. As a classical piano player, and lover, I love the balance of Amphion's delineation and timbre. \$6000 per pair in white or black.

