



## Press to play

The inside guide to  
the world of hi-fi...

'Hollywood created the  
standards battle by agreeing  
to back two formats, so let  
Hollywood pay for it.'  
Barry Fox [p80]



'Assessing this speaker boils  
down to deciding whether  
what it does right is sufficient  
to forgive what it does wrong.  
There is no point beating  
about the bush: I don't think  
this is the case.'  
Keith Howard [p61]



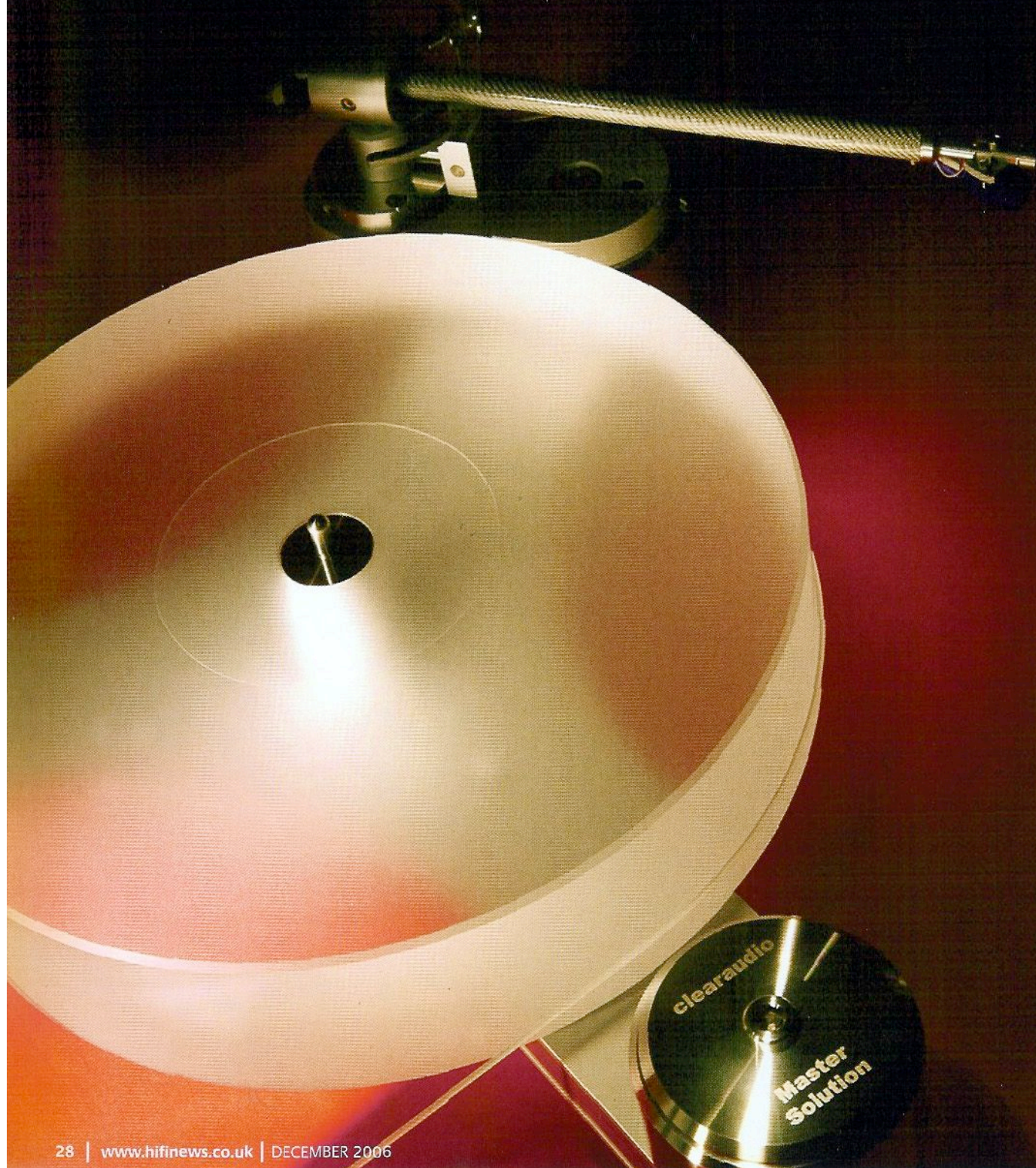
'It became clear that it was quite  
common for recent CD versions  
of songs to have dynamics  
different to those on older LPs.'  
Jim Le Surf [p23]



# Master Strokes

**CLEARAUDIO SOLUTION** (from £1770)

This simply styled turntable can be upgraded from Solution to Master Solution status, and it even comes in a bulletproof chassis edition...



Clearaudio's expansive Solution series of turntables includes three different versions of deck, and a four-level upgrade path allows a model to be augmented at a later date. The base model is the Solution (£1140) with a chassis made from clear acrylic; the Solution AMG (£1410) sheaths this with alloy plates top and bottom. The version seen here is the Wood AMG model that features the alloy plates sandwiching 72 layers of extremely compressed wood, known as 'Panzerholz', a material so dense that it's said to be bullet-proof. This version of the turntable retails at £1770 with the Satisfy tonearm costing £570 extra.

The unusual three-legged shape was arrived at through testing the reaction of different shaped pieces of material to a known level of resonance. The shape that gave the most satisfactory results is seen here.

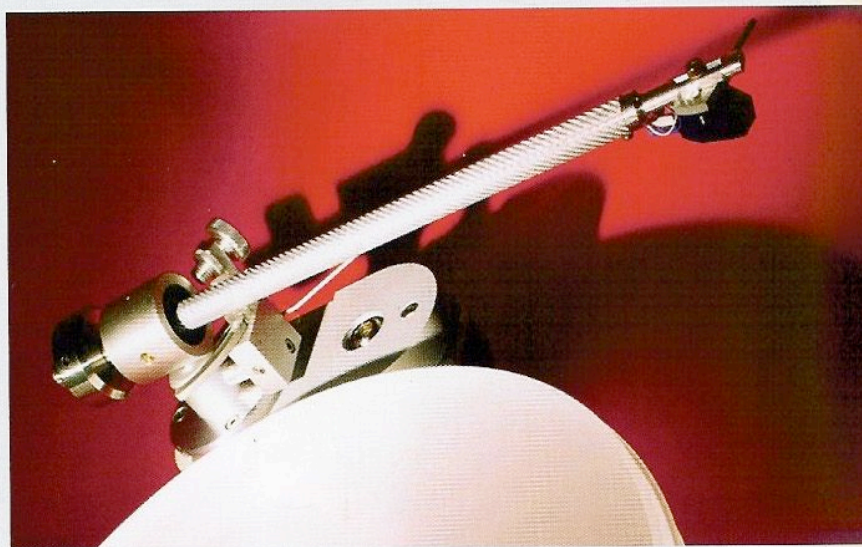
(The same testing process was also responsible for the resonance-reducing 'fingers' that sit atop the current range of Clearaudio cartridges.)

### ONE ARM, THREE LEGS

The tonearm is supported on wolfram shafts, the vertical plane resting in ceramic bearings, while the horizontal sits in sapphire watch bearings. The effective length of the arm is 222mm. While some bias compensation systems involve threaded weights or springs, all of which may be prone to resonance, Clearaudio instead uses magnets mounted in the arm bearing assembly, controlled by a large knurled screw to the right of the bearing. It is simple, and in my experience, effective.

Each leg of the deck has provision for a tonearm to be fitted. In this case, just one was used, Clearaudio's own Satisfy Carbon Direct Wire. As the name suggests, this arm is made of woven carbon-fibre, and boasts an uninterrupted run of proprietary cable from the cartridge tags through to Clearaudio's own phono plugs. Four versions of this tonearm are available, the Satisfy Carbon Direct Wire being the top of the range.

At the centre of the deck's three legs can be found the bearing housing. This is made of polished and hardened steel and contains an inverted bearing of sintered bronze. On top of this rests the 30mm-thick frosted acrylic platter, which is driven by a silicone belt from the outboard motor. This is placed to the left of the deck and is mounted in a separate heavy steel enclosure. Speed change is accomplished by manually moving the belt between the two steps of the motor pulley. Assembly is fairly straightforward. The enclosed instructions were ☺



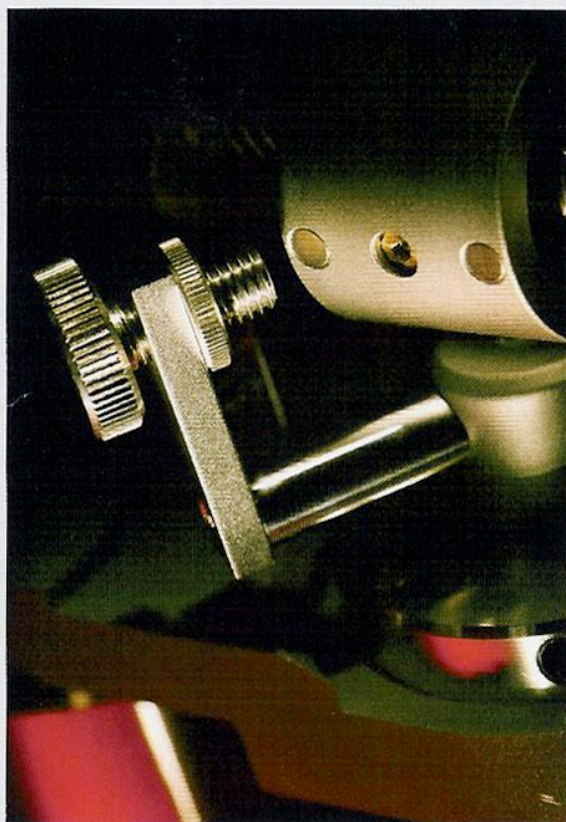
'Electronically generated noises of The Orb seemed better suited to the Solution's style of presentation, noises appearing and disappearing on cue'



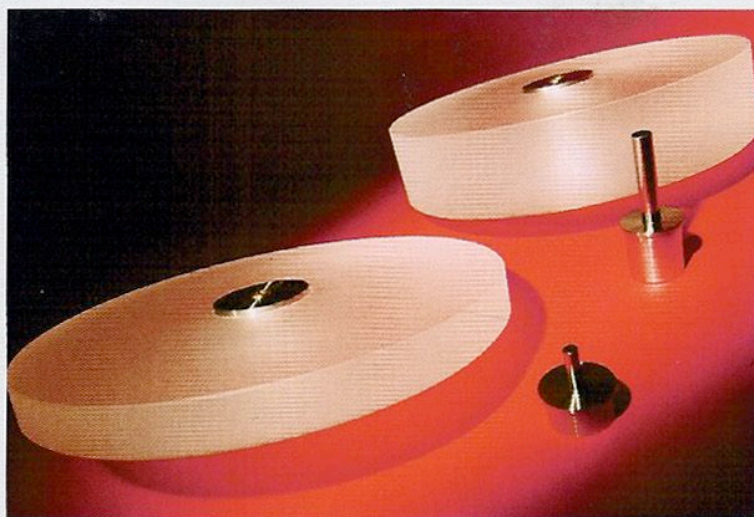
ABOVE:  
Clearaudio  
Satisfy Carbon  
tonearm  
mounted in  
traditional  
right-hand side  
position

BELOW:  
Clearaudio  
Solution in  
Wood AMG  
form, before  
Master Solution  
upgrade





ABOVE: Satisfy tonearm uses a magnetic anti-skate compensation, adjusted by a threaded screw



ABOVE: Platters for the Solution and Master Solution, with matching bearings

both detailed and easy to follow. All the tools required for set up were included, and the process of attaching the coned feet, platter and setting up the arm took less than an hour.

Aesthetically I found the combination of shape and materials very attractive, a view which seemed to be shared by all who saw the Clearaudio deck. The finish was superb: even under close examination I could find no imperfections on the deck or on the tonearm.

**INTO THE GROOVE**

After being so impressed with the design and build of the deck I was hoping that the sonic performance matched the looks. The first record on was the Benny Goodman. This record may bear the scars of 50 years of use, but the Clearaudio/Ortofon Kontrapunkt combination used concentrated on the musical content of the groove, rather than the damage done to it over the years, digging out the essentials of a musical performance. It was not the most detailed that I have heard; certain background information, such as the noise of the audience at their tables, was buried deeper in the mix, but it was cohesive and comprehensive enough to leave this listener pleased with the resulting sounds.

Jazz music showed up a certain 'uprightness' in the timing. It was certainly meticulous, but didn't really have that loose fluidity that, for me at any rate, characterizes good swing music. I was left with the feeling that

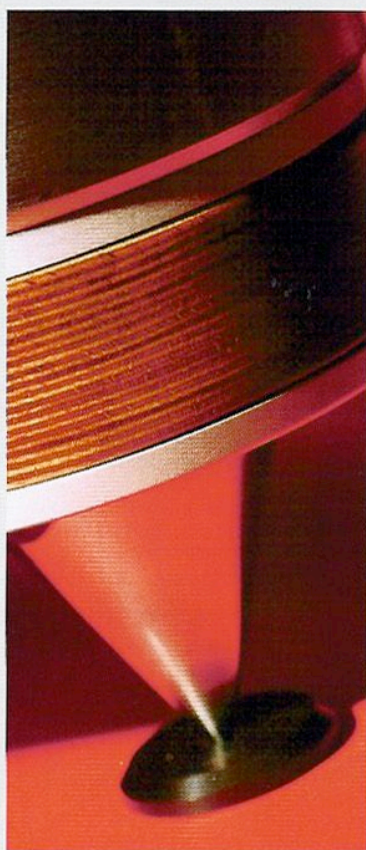
the band were self-consciously on their best behaviour.

The electronically generated noises of The Orb seemed better suited to the Solution's style of presentation. Noises moved around the soundstage, appearing and disappearing exactly on cue, with the tonal qualities of each sound laid out for inspection.

My first step on the upgrade path was the fitting of the Syncro power supply. This is a quartz regenerator unit for the motor to plug into, in lieu of the plug-mounted transformer that comes as standard. Costing £635, about a third of the price of the Solution AMG deck, I still felt it to be a worthwhile upgrade. The most obvious difference was in the timing, which lost its machine-like sheen of perfection and became more human. Reverting to the Goodman LP, I found the band playing in a seemingly more joyous, loose-limbed way that provided the essential 'zing', the energy and feel of swing that I love so much. Imaging was tighter and more detailed, the chink of glasses by members of the audience appearing as a subtle introduction to the deeper layers of sound now being reproduced and exposed.

**MASTER SOLUTION**

After another week or so with this combination, a box arrived with the upgrade kit to elevate the machine to Master Solution status. The same chassis and motor is used, but the platter is replaced by one 70mm thick, and three large polished blocks of alloy are mounted on the end of each of the chassis legs. These lift the arm base up, enough to clear the thicker platter, and also provide mass loading to the deck's plinth. The Ⓢ



RIGHT: Coned foot supports plinth made from Panzerholz – a high-density wood laminate

'The obvious difference on adding the Syncro was in the timing, which lost its machine-like sheen of perfection and became more human'

# Clear Solution

turntable bearing is also replaced by a considerably bigger unit.

My first reaction after lowering the needle into the groove was a desire to turn up the volume, since the 'introductory' surface noise on the Goodman recording seemed somewhat muted. The start of the music, loud and clear, provided a demonstration of the superior signal-to-noise ratio of the bigger deck. Background information, such as the sounds of the audience were clearer without being overly spot-lit. I was left with a greater sense of unintrusive awareness of ambient sounds, while still able to concentrate on the music.

The tonal qualities of the whole range of sounds on display seemed to acquire a sense of greater emphasis and definition.

Textures were more obvious, as were the inky black silences between notes. The whole effect created a far more satisfying listening sensation. More complex sounds, such as the combination of orchestra, piano and organ in the Saint-Saens piece were explored in detail. Each layer was exposed for analysis to a level that I found beguiling. The image spread well beyond the speakers, and had a scale that seemed appropriate. It was big, detailed and multilayered, but avoided the glossy, slightly over-produced presentation that some big turntables can be guilty of.

Meanwhile, the depth of the bass when the organ cut in was realistically weighted without being



ABOVE: labelling on chassis' three corners denotes model name

**FOR:**  
Excellent sound, build and finish

**AGAINST:** Best with Synchro power supply

overblown, or obscuring the more delicate sounds further up the frequency range. A tricky test, and one well passed.

### GOODMAN REVISITED

Coming back to the Goodman piece, I found the rhythm of the music had more drive and human

energy in it. Even the electronica of The Orb seemed fuller and more detailed, and effects that were previously obscured by other noises were now noticeable, adding to the richly laid out sonic canvas.

The Master Solution package, although another £1380 in cost over the straight Solution, proved to be worth every penny in the improvements it made. I would describe this version of the Solution as an essentially neutral performer that lets the music flow in a mesmerizing and totally enjoyable manner. Unequivocally recommended. ☺



ABOVE: Clearaudio Synchro power supply stabilises AC frequency for motor

## Hi-Fi news Verdict

**CLEARAUDIO SOLUTION/MASTER**  
£1770/£3150

In standard form, the Clearaudio Solution Wood AMG is a very capable and precise record player. It played classical and popular music in a very enjoyable and engaging manner, although I felt it was a little too 'formal' in it's timing to really let jazz music move easily and naturally. The addition of the Synchro outboard power supply rectified this, and I would regards this as a virtually essential part of the package to get the best out of the deck.

SPEC/FEATURES



SOUND QUALITY



BUILD QUALITY



VALUE FOR MONEY



Hi-Fi news OVERALL RATING **18/20**

### Manufacturer's specifications

	SOLUTION	MASTER SOLUTION
SPEED VARIATION	± 0.3%	± 0.2%
DIMENSIONS	500 x 400 x 140mm	500 x 400 x 160
WEIGHT	14kg	25kg
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO	82dB	84dB
PLATTER HEIGHT	30mm	70mm

### Contact numbers

UK DISTRIBUTOR: Audio Reference  
TEL: 01252 702705 WEB: www.clearaudio.de

### Equipment used

**SOURCES:** Ortofon Kontrapunkt cartridge  
**AMPLIFIERS:** Icon Audio phono stage, GSP Audio Jazz Club phono stage, Leema Acoustics Tucana integrated amp, Icon Stereo 60 integrated amp  
**LOUDSPEAKERS:** Chario Ursa Major, Kelly KT3  
**CABLES:** All interconnects and speaker cable by Philosophy Cables and Atlas Cables  
**ACCESSORIES:** Isotek II mains purification and mains cables Henley Equipment rack, Voodoo Airtek Isolation platforms, Target wall-mounted turntable shelf

### We listened to

**SAINT-SAENS**  
Organ Symphony  
No 3 in C Minor,  
Op78  
Philadelphia  
Orchestra, Eugene  
Ormandy, E Power-  
Biggs, organist  
CBS Records 72132  
1963

**THE ORB**  
Live 93  
Island Records ILPSQ8022  
1993

**THE BENNY  
GOODMAN TRIO**  
Play for the  
Fletcher  
Henderson Fund  
Columbia Records  
33SX1020 1955

