

Festive Four

There was a time when believing in a vinyl revival was as much an act of faith as expecting Santa Claus to come down your chimney on December 25th, but with brand new turntables appearing thick and fast right now, the humble vinyl record is making a comeback that no one can deny. In this month's supertest, Adam Smith is filled full of Christmas cheer by four mid-price contenders from Consonance, Revolver, Scheu Analog and Vyger...

It's a funny thing; here we are in 2007 with 2008 looming rapidly on the horizon and it is interesting to look back at some of the predictions for the future that were made, in order to see just how much of it has come true. Admittedly we're not all driving round in our own personal hover-cars and space exploration hasn't advanced quite as fast as Trekkies might have hoped, but some advancements bear uncanny resemblances to the ideas that flowed from the pens of science fiction writers. Surely the mobile phone is a very close relative to the old Star Trek communicator, most tasks you can think of in everyday life have some sort of powered gadget to make them easier and, when considering GPS, security cameras and the internet, we may even conclude that 'Big Brother' is indeed watching us...

The advance of technology has been felt in the arena of entertainment as well. Electronic instruments can recreate an entire symphony orchestra, television and radio is increasingly reaching us by digital means and many people carry their entire music collections around with them on a pocket-sized gadget. One thing that no-one predicted, however, was that the biggest increase in sales of a 'hard' music reproduction format in 2007 would be by an ungainly piece of plastic that only makes music when a tiny lump of rock is dragged through it...

Contrary to everyone's futuristic expectations, vinyl is doing very nicely, thank you very much. Be it DJ fashion cachet, nostalgic value or superb sonics, black plastic's recent resurgence is such that previously dormant pressing plants are having the dust blown off their stampers and being coaxed back into life, while new turntables are cropping up everywhere you look, sometimes from quite unlikely sources.

On the following pages you'll find three brand new decks from Consonance, Revolver and Vyger enjoying their very first reviews, and one slightly older but still recent unit from Scheu Analog that has only just arrived in the UK. We were very keen to see just what sort of sound these decks offered for around £1,500. All are superbly engineered, solidly built and styled with refreshing flair - but which will extract the very best from your precious record collection? Read on to find out...

THE CONTENDERS

Consonance Forbidden City Liu	£1,395	p16
Revolver Replay	£1,500	p18
Scheu Analog Black Diamond	£1,500	p20
Vyger Timor	£1,700	p22

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Ortofon 2M Black cartridge
Trichord Diablo phono stage
Anatek A50R amplifier
Snendor S8e loudspeakers



"the Consonance picked up on the leading edges of stringed instruments with impressive precision..."

on in this particular track, but the Forbidden City Liu managed this with ease.

Equally adept were conventional acoustic instruments which were replayed with commendable scale. The Consonance picked up on the leading edges of stringed instruments with impressive precision, ensuring that notes started instantly but faded away gently, as required. Spinning the new Antonio

Forcione release from the Naim label, 'Touch Wood' the Forbidden City Liu picked up on the interplay between the acoustic guitars on the track 'Tarantella' and weaved the cello into them with considerable aplomb. The soundstage offered up by the Liu tends to hang back somewhat within the plane of the loudspeakers but everything is laid out with almost mathematical precision, making it easy to follow the action as it moves from instrument to instrument.

Moving to material of a different kind, and 'Til Tuesday's 'Everything's Different Now', Aimee Mann's vocals were sharp and well defined, cutting through the rest of the track to stand clear of the backing instruments. Rhythmically, this sort of track showed the strengths of the Liu very well, as it takes the flow of the music and races along with it in a very pleasing manner. Where I did have a continual nagging doubt, however was in the bass end of the spectrum, as the Liu did not seem quite so confident here.

Further investigation was needed and so onto the platter went a recent release in the form of the seven inch single of Amy McDonald's 'Mr. Rock and Roll' - definitely

a contender for chart single of the year as far as I am concerned, and a superbly boppy pop tune. However, the bass line on the single is a little reticent and a good deck is needed to really coax it out from the back of the recording.

Here, however, the Consonance struggled. The flow of the track was loud and clear and it boogied along very nicely, but the low end underpinning was definitely rather lacking. Upping the ante with 'Suzie - You Are' from Maxi Priest's 'Maxi' album, the truth became clear that the Consonance is not exactly lightweight as it has enough bass weight to satisfy on a reggae track like this, but it seems unsure of itself and is lacking in low end agility. All Maxi's bass notes were there but they seemed to fall out of the loudspeakers rather than being pushed out with authority.

CONCLUSION

A fine turntable, the Consonance Forbidden City Liu offers impressive build quality and performance. The arm in particular is an absolute star and well worthy of consideration in its own right, but it matches well with the turntable to offer a convincing overall package.

If Consonance could just sort out the arm connection issue and tighten up the low end a little, which I suspect is as a result of the motor's relatively poor wow and flutter performance, then they could well have something of a giant killer on their hands.

plug and socket. This was a disappointingly loose fit on our sample, falling out at the slightest provocation. I ended up relying on a lump of Blu-Tac on the shelf below to hold the connector in place - not so impressive!

SOUND QUALITY

The Consonance Forbidden City Liu announce itself as an impressive performer from the moment the stylus hits the groove. Most prominent is the startling sense of clarity that it imparts onto all music material, cutting through the recording with surgical precision to let you exactly what's going on in the very depths. I strongly suspect the arm is to thank for this, as it has a quite different character to the Rega-based designs that are used by so many manufacturers these days. It lacks the rather grey tonality of the Rega and thus imbues the mid and treble with a pleasing sense of dynamism.

High frequencies were strong and clear, with a lovely sheen imparted to the treble. Spinning my twelve inch single of 808 State's 'Pacific 202', the Consonance picked up every single aspect of the backing electronic track and pushed it nicely out into the mix. With many decks, it can be a struggle to separate everything that is going

VERDICT

A fine turntable package with an particularly impressive arm, the Forbidden City Liu is a solid and stylish addition to the turntable market.

CONSONANCE FORBIDDEN CITY LIU £1,395

Distributed by Alium Audio

+44(0)1273 325901

www.aliumaudio.com

FOR

- top end clarity
- precise soundstage
- sonic verve
- excellent arm

AGAINST

- loose bass
- a few fit and finish issues

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

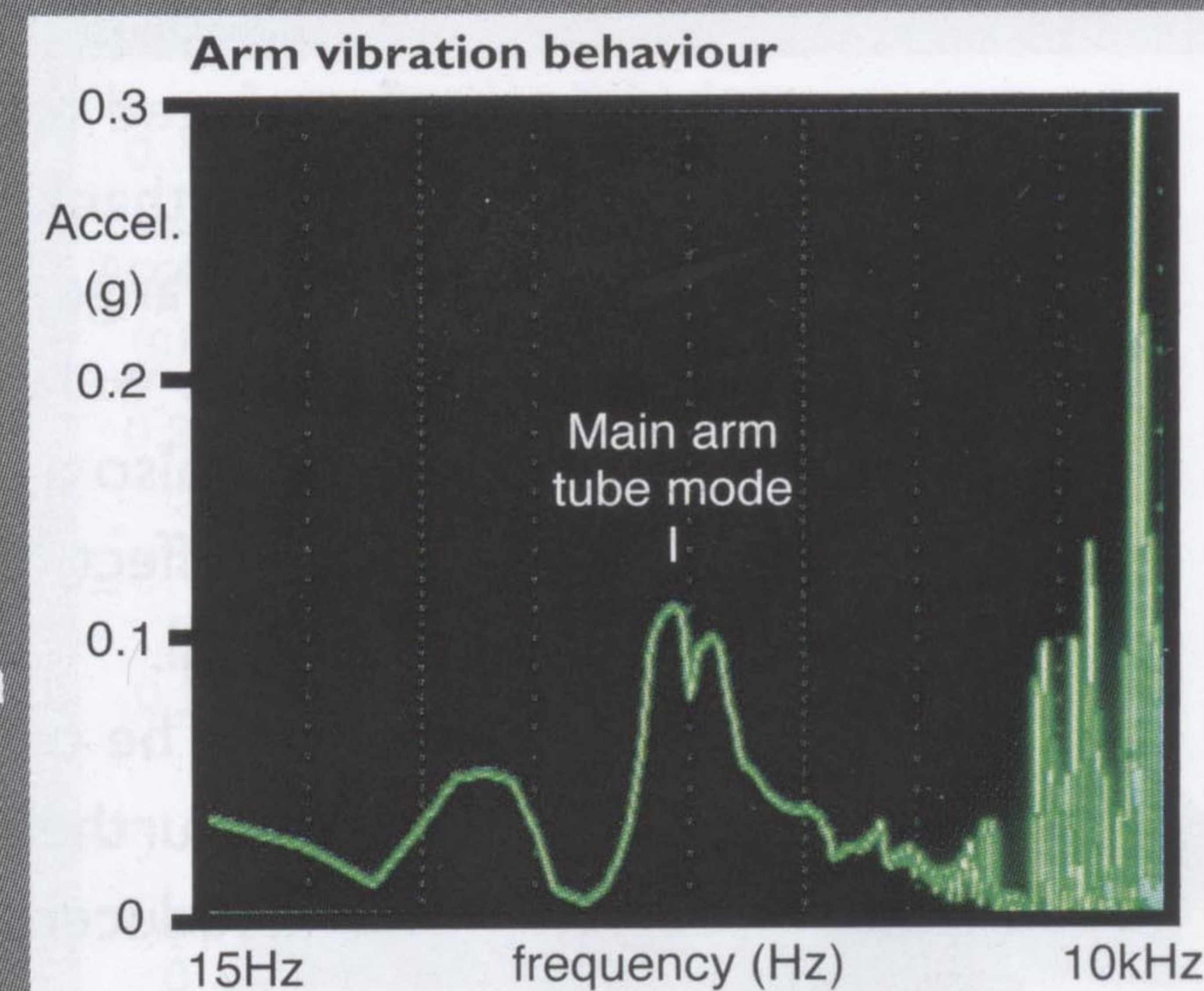
The Consonance Forbidden City Liu seemed to suffer from some low frequency wow artefacts, shown by its IEC weighted Wow and Flutter figure of 0.145%, which is rather high. This was worse with the second belt supplied with the deck, being closer to 0.2%, but this item was visibly riding up and down on the pulley. This should not be audibly obvious but may impact on low frequency timing.

Happily, the fitted ST100 arm was much more impressive, with a main arm tube mode that only just reached 0.1g - a low value. This peak was rather broad, suggesting the carbon fibre tube is nicely damped. Additionally, the ST100's headshell is reasonably well behaved, apart from one large peak which is its main resonance. This is most likely exacerbated by the skeletal form, as there is no top surface to provide innate damping.

All in all, the Forbidden City Liu should sound nice and clean across the frequency range but may suffer from some low frequency uncertainty as a

result of the higher than normal wow and flutter figure. AS

ARM VIBRATION



WOW AND FLUTTER

