

## cover feature

HI-FI COMBINATION  
EXPOSURE / ROYD / NORDOST

# exposed at last

**S**o traditional high end hi-fi is dead is it? Someone had better tell the folks from Exposure and Royd then, because these people dare to release products that are aimed at the true audiophile.

I say true audiophile in the sense of someone who listens to and appreciates pure unadulterated music. Whether this be live music or reproduced in front of a hi-fi, an audiophile is one of those nuts that gets sweaty palms at work thinking about the listening experience he or she has got planned.

There is nothing worse than having this experience turn out to be lesser than one's imagined preconceptions of what it should be. But at the same time it is absolute pleasure to have these preconceptions bettered each time. The enjoyment and satisfaction value that is attained from owning equipment or enough tickets to concerts that can provide in excess of your wildest expectations is immense, and in this day and age true pleasure from simple mediums (in the fact that only one recognised human sense is being utilised) is rare indeed.

To their own detriment, some audiophiles get caught up in the improvement bug, unhealthily so. Always tweaking, always upgrading, always changing in search of that elusive perfect sound is the nature of being an audiophile, but the danger is that along this path sometimes sight is lost of the pleasure that can be had at hand immediately - and the experience becomes a nit picking uncomfortable irritation.

At this stage, the audiophile needs to sit back, take a long hard look at why music is important in the first place and go back to basics. Start with a loved and treasured recording, ignore any (perceived) flaws in your system and listen and love the music you are hearing.

And so it is with the system that makes up our cover review this month. It is a classic example of a wolf in sheep's clothing - the ugly duckling all over again, the Exposure kit is as ugly, but with a sound that is so exciting and engaging, who cares?



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In a nutshell what makes this system so exciting is that it has exactly this ability to produce a sound stage so real that you become a part of it. The speakers completely vanish as a point source and there is a three dimensional tapestry of sound that is so tightly integrated and controlled that it is breathtaking.

This is a system that meets and exceeds any expectations you may have of it from the first time you lay eyes on it. Music is layered and textured and revealed as a coherent whole - it has body and it has soul.

More than that though, the system dumps you so much into the heart of the music that you cannot help but be moved by it.

It is a system that forces the listener to listen to the music, and not the components. There are rough edges if one were to be so nasty as to actively look for them, but with a performance so engaging and vigorous they're not important in the slightest.

Pop on some Pink Floyd, pop off the shoes and just listen as I did, day in and night out. This is the system at its very best - moody and petulant with the ability to instantly change to upbeat and pacy. The dynamics of the system are lightning fast and the listener, yours truly, simply didn't notice any effort or lag or pretty much anything other than a white knuckled expression of utter exasperation at a system that shouldn't sound as good as it does.

I attribute a lot of the system's performance to the amplifier. It is an integrated unit but don't let that fool you too much. It also does not look like much, but it drove the Abbots which have been reviewed previously with so much gumption and ruthless control that it was quite scary. Long before the amplifier was out of steam the Abbots were creaking and groaning under the strain the amplifier is capable of putting on them. Admittedly the Abbots aren't too difficult to drive, but the control that the amp has on them all the way to their maximum limit is amazing to say the least.

One can visually see the bass cones being slammed backwards and forwards with almost pinpoint control and precision, and it's this fact that contributes to the astounding dynamics that the system so effortlessly produces. The rating of a mere 60 watts for the amplifier seems to be ludicrously conservative but there you have it.

Looks wise the amplifier is fairly mundane although the pots are all of top quality. A single power switch controls the happy juice and remote control of the unit is a bonus. Switching can also be driven by remote and the solid thunk with which the selector slots home is re-assuring and hearkens back to the fact that this is anything but a cheap and quickly assembled mass market product.

The CD player is also belied by its appearance. At worst the tray mechanism seems cheap, horrible and nasty and I was sceptical to say the least about its potential sonic capabilities.

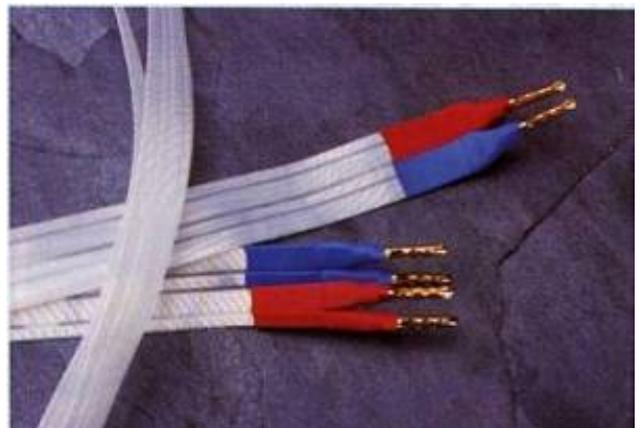
As some readers may have gathered over the years, a CD player is critical to any sound system as it is the origination of the source code for the music - any losses or imperfections here will result in a less than impressive sonic performance. Thankfully this is not the case with the Exposure unit, albeit that it does not impress as hugely as the amplifier.

This is because it takes some time to get used to the approach adopted - this is not a CD player that imposes its impression on you but one that gradually allows you to hear music naturally and with the ear slowly being tuned into what turns out to be a very fine performance indeed. It's only when you downgrade to a lesser CD player that you suddenly realise the level at which the Exposure has been performing...

Needless to say, musicality is kept of paramount importance and the spotlight feature on the company in our Dec/Jan issue is proven correct in its claim by way of solid sonic proof. The three components together combine remarkably well and will do justice to anyone seeking out



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music for music's sake.

However, there is one little aspect to the system that I have not mentioned up until now and it is the cabling. I cheated - the system was entirely cabled with Nordost Solar Wind solid silver interconnects and speaker cables. I have always had a soft spot for silver cables as the sound it generates is unique. There is always an added dimension of crispness and sparkle that adds value to the music in a way that copper just can't quite achieve, in my humble opinion.

In this case, things were even better with the cable being of a flat ribbon construction, which is also my favourite method of cable construction, and each cable is not a solid conductor but made up of a number of individual strands also a good thing to maximise the external surface area of the cable. All in all an impressive set of cables from a materials and construction point of view.

I did swap cables in the system and it has to be said that the Nordosts played a significant role in adding to the three dimensionality and pace of the system as a whole

There is more detail and more nuance to the system with the silver in place and although the cost is not insignificant, in context of a system like this it is well worth the asking price and will add much pleasure and satisfaction to the end user.

Ultimately, in summary the Royd/Exposure/Nordost combination is one that grafts exceptionally well together. There is oodles of power and the system has so much in reserve that it is hard to imagine any music that it cannot play. It was tested with all sorts, but good listening music is what the system caters to - serious material is rendered so well that it becomes a natural tendency to look for more music and so continue to grow one's musical horizons.

At the same time attention to detail, precision surgical accuracy and an overwhelming presence of music, especially so on good quality recordings all combine to produce one of the more memorable listening experiences I have had in a long time. This is what good hi-fi is all about, great equipment that delivers great performance at a price that is totally reasonable.

**William Kelly**

### **- peaks -**

#### **VERDICT**

**A system for all hi-fi tastes.  
Uncompromising musical delivery with  
high end pretensions and thoroughly  
enjoyable from start to finish.**

#### **PRICE**

Exposure 25RC Integrated Amplifier	R14 000
Exposure CD Player	R14 700
Royd Abbot Loudspeakers	R11 000
Nordost Solar Wind Interconnects	R1 000 per 1 metre pair
Nordost Solar Wind Bi-Wire Speaker Cable	R3 000 per 3 metre pair

#### **SUPPLIED BY**

**Extraordinary AV**

#### **CDs**

**Timeless - A Collection of Contemporary  
Music, Jewel - Pieces of you, Tori Amos -  
Under the Pink, Pink Floyd -The Wall, The  
Division Bell**