

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Quad Elite CDP/QSP/12L Classic

This all-Quad package shows the advantages of system synergy, says **Andrew Everard**

The reaction from friends in the audio industry, hearing I was testing a complete Quad system, was predictable: 'Ah,' they said, 'very *Gramophone*.' There's a perception of something 'old school' about Quad, perhaps founded in the apparent link between the brand and classical music in the past, when people buying 'serious' hi-fi systems also listened to 'serious' music.

Maybe they had a point: I've lost count of the number of times I've been asked about a Quad system left to the family by a recently deceased parent or relative. Is it worth keeping? Is it still any good? Or, more depressing, what's it worth?

It's been a while since I had a Quad fix – a bit over two years, in fact, since I reviewed the company's II Classic Integrated amplifier (in the May 2010 issue). However, while that amplifier harks back to the company's distant past with its valve output stage – it's part of a range including re-imaginings of the company's classic Quad II power amplifier – the system we have here is a development of more recent products from the company.

The latest Elite series is developed from the 99 line-up, itself based on the 77 series launched in 1994. I recall that original launch, and its promise of a system with single runs of QuadLink multicore cable carrying both signal and control data. It was 'driven' with an allegedly simple but actually rather complex and occasionally wilful remote handset, supposedly able to give two-way communication between system and remote. It could thus show read-outs of, say, volume level and the radio station selected, and one day extend to track information and even scrolling text from the radio; in reality, the communication proved rather haphazard. The



QUAD ELITE CDP

CD PLAYER/DIGITAL PREAMPLIFIER

Price £1199

Inputs three optical/three electrical digital

Outputs Fixed and variable-level line, optical digital, QuadLink

Accessories supplied Remote handset, QuadLink cable

Dimensions (WxHxD) 32.1x7x31cm



QUAD ELITE QSP

STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER

Price £1199

Power output 140W per channel into 8 ohms

Inputs Ampbus and stereo phono

Outputs One set of speaker terminals, Ampbus for biamping

Accessories supplied 1m Ampbus cable

Dimensions (WxHxD) 32.8x15x27cm



QUAD 12L CLASSIC

TWO-WAY REFLEX-PORTED BOOKSHELF/STANDMOUNT SPEAKERS

Price £499/pr

Drive units 25mm soft-dome tweeter,

16.5cm Kevlar-cone mid/bass

Sensitivity 87dB/W/m

Impedance 6 ohms

Recommended amplifier power 50-150W

Finishes available Cherry, Piano Cherry, Deep Rose, Black

Dimensions (HxWxD) 34x20.5x27.9cm

quad-hifi.co.uk

system we have, built at the huge complex in China owned by parent IAG, comprises the CDP CD player/preamplifier, QSP stereo power amplifier and 12L Classic speakers. It's drawn from a range including further power amps, both stereo and mono, a more conventional CD player and preamplifier, an integrated amplifier and an FM tuner. There's even a system remote handset but it's fortunately rather less ambitious than that 77 Series remote of old.

The £1199 Elite CDP is not just a CD player with a volume control but a fully fledged digital preamplifier: it has six digital

inputs on the rear panel – three each on optical and electrical connections – and the choice of fixed or variable analogue outputs, along with the QuadLink socketry. Digital signals of up to 96kHz/24-bit can be accepted.

The Elite QSP power amplifier (also £1199) delivers 140W per channel and uses Quad's celebrated Current Dumping topology, first used in 1975's 405 power amp and most recently in the 909. It connects to the CDP using the multicore Ampbus connection (using the same connections as QuadLink), with the option of daisy-chaining amps to biampify suitable speakers. The 12L



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Classic speakers, at £499 a pair, have a lineage extending back to the company's original 11Ls, which had a few Quad fanatics hot under the collar when the new Far Eastern owners launched conventional 'box' speakers into a brand until then known for its signature ESL electrostatics.

They had little cause for concern: Quad has launched new electrostatics, and its L-series speakers are highly competitive. As with the electronics, it builds the speakers from scratch on-site, making its own cabinets, drivers and crossovers, matching real wood veneers and lacquering and polishing. The 12L Classic

reproducing every last nuance of a recording, it delivers a rich, smooth yet detailed view of the music that's as hugely enjoyable as it is far away from the erroneous 'pipe and slippers' stereotype of how Quad systems sound.

If you want a more forward, more analytical system, IAG can satisfy that demand with its Audiolab and Mission ranges; the Quad system has an entirely different balance, purely focusing the attention on the music.

That power amp delivers all the delicacy one could want when handling the close detail of a solo instrument or a chamber ensemble, yet is able to deliver all the power required for

'This system is an exemplar of grip and control: even at high playback levels there's admirable fluidity and surefootedness'

speakers, the larger of two standmounters in the range, use a multilayer cabinet construction to damp out resonances, a long-throw mid/bass driver with a 16.5cm woven Kevlar cone, and a tweeter with a 25mm fabric dome and a waveguide to control dispersion. Two rear ports tune the bass.

PERFORMANCE

Setting up this system couldn't be much simpler: one cable to link the CDP and QSP, speakers on 60cm stands and wired to the power amplifier, and you're all set. A little tweaking of speaker positioning – about 50cm out from the rear wall, well away from corners and with a slight toe-in to the listening position – helped 'fix' the stereo image. All that was left to do was to play the system for a few days to let its components (and most notably the speakers) loosen up and run in.

Listening to this system, it's not hard to see the ongoing appeal of Quad systems: like the old set-ups from the brand I've heard in the past, this Elite/Classic set-up delivers music that's 'of a piece'. Rather than constantly drawing your attention to how well it's

the dynamics of music, whether it's the attack and decay of bow or finger on string, or the slam of Wagnerian brass.

Though firmly in the 'big bookshelf' class, the speakers are still relatively compact, standing 34cm tall, yet deliver a powerful presentation of the music when under the control of the QSP power amplifier. This system is an exemplar of grip and control: even at high basic playback levels there's admirable fluidity and surefootedness about its sound, from the most intimate small-scale recording right up to big concert-hall orchestral works, and the system maintains its balance and richness even when you wind it down to late-night or background settings.

Add to that the absolute simplicity of set-up, use and 'living with', and this is clearly a high-quality system with much to offer. Yes, the price – around £3000 by the time you've added in stands for the speakers and some speaker cables – would suggest this is very much an enthusiast system but its design, ergonomics and performance make it as attractive to music enthusiasts as it is to those as interested in the means of playing it. **G**

DESIGN NOTES

Peter Comeau

Director of Acoustic Design, IAG

On the countryside, compression and all-round audio ability



Peter Comeau joined IAG in 2009 with more than 30 years' experience in the audio industry. He says his earliest musical experiences were in a church choir: 'We were lucky enough to have a good organist and I fell in love with Bach immediately. Slightly later the rich vocal harmonies of the Beach Boys and the breathtaking intonation of Frank Sinatra also enriched my musical experience.'

Favourite composers? 'I was brought up in, and love, the English countryside so it's not surprising that Vaughan Williams is my favourite, with Britten a close second.'

When designing products, 'I like to chop and change so as not to get weary of recordings. The ones I refer to for sheer accuracy and enjoyment are *There is Sweet Music* arranged by John Rutter, Malcolm Arnold's *Symphony No 2* conducted by Hickox with the LSO and Rachmaninov's *Piano Concertos*

Nos 1 and 2 played by Andsnes with the BPO.'

And his most memorable musical experience?

A masterclass with Richard Hickox at Dartington Hall leading to a performance of *Carmina Burana* – 'an unforgettable afternoon and evening'.

Asked how important good hi-fi is in the iPod age, Comeau says: 'What people don't understand is that, with digital, you need *more* data to reconstruct the analogue music waveform – not less as the engineers would like you to believe. Thankfully, storage costs are now very low so we don't need to use compression to keep our music on tap.'

'With digital you need *more* data to reconstruct the analogue music waveform – not less'

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