

AUDIO

Our audio expert *Michael Brook* takes a look at the best new audio and video equipment to help you get the most out of recorded classical music

BBC MUSIC CHOICE

NETWORK CD PLAYER

Onkyo C-N7050 £350

Although Onkyo is one of the biggest hi-fi and home cinema manufacturers, it's relatively unknown. Outside circles of audio experts, the name rarely appears on lists of favourite audio brands.

This apparent lack of fame is undeserved, particularly given this Japanese company's knack for innovation. The Onkyo C-N7050 (below) pairs a CD player with network music streaming technology in a single hi-fi unit. After linking it up to a good quality amplifier and set of speakers, I was rewarded with a very appealing music system that delivers in spades.

The C-N7050 uses DLNA (Digital Living Network Alliance) technology, a system that enables you to stream music from music storage devices (such as PCs and phones) to speakers around the home, via your hi-fi

system. But be warned: the C-N7050 doesn't feature built-in Wi-Fi, so you'll need to make sure it's connected to your home network via a standard Ethernet cable in order for it to stream music from other devices. (This means that music streaming services such as Spotify or AirPlay can only be played via a cable connection.)

There is a good selection of USB ports, with the one on the front designed to access music stored on Apple iOS devices such as iPhones and iPods, while also allowing you the option of charging them up. And while we're on the subject of smart devices, it's worth mentioning that Onkyo's Remote 3 app can be used instead of the supplied remote control.

Sonically, the music streaming on the C-N7050 has the edge over the CD playback. But in either form it's more than worthy of its £350 price tag. This is a versatile addition to any system. onkyo.com ★★★★★

Onkyo's lack of fame is undeserved given its knack for innovation



TABLE-TOP ALARM RADIO

Tivoli Audio Model 10+ £150

Alarm clocks don't come much more 'hi-fi' than Tivoli's Model 10+ (below). Even the sleek metallic rectangular design (which is familiar from previous models) has the look of a music system.

The Model 10+ houses DAB+ (digital) and FM radio tuners and its distinctive looks are aided by a single rotary dial on the top of the unit for accessing the various functions. Rather oddly, the five radio preset buttons are mounted on the back of the unit, making preset changes fiddly without the remote control. But this appears to serve the purpose of keeping the clock's design as clutter free as possible.

As we've come to expect, Tivoli manages

to extract far more bass than seems reasonable for a unit this size (202mm by 117mm). One of the first times I encountered one of Tivoli's 'Model' radios I recall looking in vain under a nearby table for a subwoofer unit to explain the impressive low-end frequencies.

Enhancing those hi-fi pretensions even further is the optional extra speaker (for £40) that allows a Model 10+ to become a proper stereo system.

Among the features are an option for dual alarms (you can either set a tone, or wake up to your favourite radio station) and the ubiquitous sleep function for those of us who can't get out of bed of a morning... Overall, I'd say the Model 10+ is well worth consideration. tivoliaudio.co.uk ★★★★★



STUDIO QUALITY CABLES

Studio Connections Platinum Interconnect (from £2,000)

It's all well and good ploughing thousands of pounds into the finest quality hi-fi components, but use poor quality cables to link it all together and you might as well have completely slashed your budget and saved yourself some money because of all the audio performance you'll be losing out on.

The company Studio Connections cut its teeth in the world of studio engineering, so it's at home with working on high-end audio. Cable



QUALITY CONTROL: each Platinum Interconnect cable is built by hand

designer Michael Whiteside builds each cable by hand, before testing, trimming and certifying them for optimum quality.

And it shows. Back-to-back tests against my off-the-peg cables revealed a significant improvement in audio quality. If the dream is to capture the essence of a live performance, the Platinum Interconnects certainly took me one step closer to achieving that goal. It's generally acknowledged that speakers make the biggest single difference to a system, but to squeeze out those last ounces of performance, you'll ideally need a set of these. renaissanceaudio.co.uk ★★★★★

DIGITAL TO ANALOGUE CONVERTER & AMPLIFIER

TEAC AI-101DA £250

A good quality DAC, or Digital to Analogue Converter, will dramatically enhance the sound quality of stored digital music files. But TEAC's AI-101DA (below) is far more than just being a straightforward DAC box of tricks. For a start, it packs in Bluetooth support to allow wireless streaming from smartphones, tablets and laptops. The AI-101DA also boasts a built-in 26W amplifier, meaning this book-sized unit (182mm x 53mm) can drive a set of hi-fi speakers without the need to plug it directly into another amp.

Alongside the Bluetooth wireless connection, there is a wide selection of audio input options, including USB, digital and analogue. If high-resolution audio is top of your wish-list, TEAC supplies playback software for both Windows and Mac, available for download from the TEAC website.

The build quality is superb and the TEAC performed faultlessly with every musical genre I cared to throw at it. At this price, it should be somewhere near the top of your shopping list. teac-audio.eu ★★★★★

