



Steve Harris
Contributing Editor

Steve Harris edited *Hi-Fi News* between 1986 and 2005. He loves jazz, blues music, vinyl and vintage hi-fi and anything that makes good music come to life

Black is back

For **Steve Harris** it was the year in which vinyl looked as if it was here for keeps – thanks to some innovative and fine-sounding analogue components – but PC audio increased its appeal too

This was the year when vinyl got beyond being ‘revived’, and actually started to look as if it could be with us for ever.

For the December 2011 issue, I’d had a lot of fun reviewing the Sonneteer Morpheus wireless network player and ripping server. But after that, I seemed to be spending an increasing amount of time with vinyl.

I’d always tended to make the sign of the cross and back away when an air-bearing tonearm came near, but the sensibly-engineered Bergmann Magne record player won me over when I reviewed it for the June 2012 issue.

Johnnie Bergmann really has overcome the old problems of the genre, with for example a simple and foolproof levelling system and a really quiet, oil-less air pump. Listening to the deck, I was rewarded with a tremendously open and informative bass, and a thoroughly exhilarating listening experience.

TOP MARQUES

After that, I had a great time trying out a group of moving-coil cartridges for the July 2012 group test. There are plenty of moving-coils to choose from, but this group seemed to underline the status quo among familiar marques. My top marks went to the Ortofon Cadenza Red and Benz Micro Ace, along with the Methuselah-like Dynavector Karat D3.

Vinyl was an inevitable topic when I talked to the makers of the docu-movie *Last Shop Standing*, the film about the fall and rise of independent record shops based on the book by Graham Jones of Proper Music. There’s a healthier situation now, but when Graham wrote the book in 2008, there were just 269 independent record shops left.

‘Nostalgia, like the secondhand record business, isn’t what it used to be’



ABOVE: An air-bearing tonearm for the 21st century – the Bergmann Magne from Denmark has been designed to be easy to set up while its oil-less pump promises ultra-quiet operation

Working as a rep in music distribution, Graham had spent 20 years visiting record shops around the country, and his introduction lists the hundreds that he’d seen close since he first decided to write the book. Almost everyone who’s read the book will have picked out a store or two from this rollcall of the fallen and thought, sadly, ‘I used to go in there.’

For me one of the familiar names was 101 Records, close to the old Croydon headquarters of *Hi-Fi News*. The other famous Croydon casualty, not one of Graham’s customers but deserving a special mention, was Beano’s, at one time easily the country’s largest secondhand record store.

Graham quotes the statement that Beano’s owner David Lashmar issued in 2008 when closure became inevitable, blaming downloading in general and file sharing in particular

for eroding the business: ‘How the devil were we ever going to persuade people that it was really a good idea to come into Beano’s and buy an album when they could get it for nothing?’

Nostalgia set in for me here, with fond old memories of lunchtimes spent browsing in Beano’s earlier, much smaller shop in Market Street, Croydon. But

the final, multi-storey store layout in Croydon’s Middle Street was truly impressive. Every staircase was spectacularly decorated with rows of identical vintage Bush transistor radios, the iconic ‘rock ‘n’ roll’ radio created by industrial designer David Ogle.

That classic casework originally housed the MB60 valve set, but Bush changed to transistors in 1959 and went on to sell thousands of the TR82 and related models. Beanos had dozens and dozens of them.

CLASSIC RADIO

Beano’s might have faded out because it became too easy to buy an electronic facsimile instead of a vinyl original, but ironically, it’s just as easy to buy a modern facsimile of David Ogle’s classic radio. Argos, whose parent company Home Retail Group owns the Bush brand, can still sell you a brand new Bush TR82BLU for £29.99, although the TR82DABCC version with DAB seems to have been dropped.

So nostalgia, like the secondhand record business, isn’t what it used to be. By 2012, I’d finally learned to appreciate what computer audio and a server-based set-up really has to offer, and even begun to hanker after a Meridian/Sooloo system. But also in 2012, I’d found myself enjoying vinyl more than ever. Long may it continue! ☺