

2007 GOLDEN EAR AWARDS!

STEREO • MULTICHANNEL AUDIO • MUSIC

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**ITALIAN
MASTERPIECE**

**Sonus Faber's
New Elipsa**

The Absolute Sound's

2007 GOLDEN EAR AWARDS

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Chris Martens, Paul Seydor, Alan Taffel, Jonathan Valin

The Absolute Sound's annual Golden Ear Awards feature is the place where our editors and most frequent contributors honor those components that have won a place in their hearts. Some of these components are long-time references that have withstood the test of time. Others are newfound favorites that may be destined to become classics. In either case, the products selected for Golden Ear Awards are special, indeed.

Unlike our Editors' Choice Awards—a compendium of every product we recommend, agreed upon by a committee of the senior editorial staff—Golden Ear Awards allow writers to express their individual views of which components they think are truly great, and why. The diversity of products selected here not only reflects the industry at large, but also each writer's quest for the absolute sound. —Robert Harley





Robert Harley

Basis 2800 Signature turntable and Vector tonearm

This latest iteration of the Basis 2800 is the culmination of more than two decades of research by A.J. Conti into optimizing turntable design. The 'table employs many proven design techniques along with several innovations and refinements that advance the art. And in a single stroke of genius, the Vector tonearm's novel design delivers the performance of a unipivot tonearm without azimuth error—a problem that has plagued unipivots since their inception. The sonic result is an LP front end that is extraordinarily neutral tonally, with no false midbass warmth or other colorations imposed on the music. Instead, the 2800/Vector combination gets out of the music's way to a degree I haven't before heard in a turntable. It's almost like taking the turntable out of the signal path. This transparency to the source extends to the super-quiet background, stunning resolution of low-level detail, timbral realism, and massive dynamic contrasts. The level of listener involvement delivered by the Basis 2800 and Vector is unparalleled in my experience as a reviewer, no matter what the source. Finally, the Vector's lack of tracking error and distortion not only fosters a greater relaxation and musical involvement, but also protects your record collection from cumulative damage. **Prices: \$12,900 (2800), \$3450 (Vector), \$21,750 (fully optioned with Vector tonearm).** basisaudio.com (reviewed in Issue 172)

Esoteric P-03 universal transport and D-03 D/A converter

This massive, 130-pound transport/DAC pair is built to a standard that's extraordinary even by the highest standards of the high end. Employing Esoteric's mighty VRDS-Neo transport mechanism, the P-03 Universal Transport can handle CD as well as stereo or multichannel SACD and DVD-Audio. When matched with the D-03 digital-to-analog converter, with dual XLR jacks for carrying high-resolution digital along with a separate clock line from the D-03 to the P-03, the sound of this digital front end is among the few best I've heard. The Esoteric combination is characterized by that rare combination of ease with resolution, sensational dynamics, and holographic soundstaging. I should add that the P-03's video performance (it outputs 1080p on HMDI) is of reference quality.

Prices: \$17,200 (P-03), \$13,300 (D-03). teac.com (reviewed in Issue 171)

JL Audio Fathom f113 subwoofer

This remarkable subwoofer goes lower and plays louder than any other subwoofer I've auditioned. But that's not the criterion by which one should judge a sub. More important are transient fidelity, articulation, and most of all, the ability to blend seamlessly with the main loudspeakers—qualities the Fathom has in spades. Amazingly, the Fathom f113 combines effortless brute-force impact with extraordinary finesse, speed, musicality, and pitch definition. And it does so at an eminently reasonable price. **Price: \$3200.** jlaudio.com (reviewed in Issue 170)

Music Interface Technologies (MIT) Oracle MA and Magnum MA loudspeaker cable

MIT's new Oracle MA cable is insanely priced at \$24,900 for an 8' pair, but it's also insanely great. I've used MIT's older Oracle V2 as my reference for nearly five years, and couldn't envision how the new Oracle MA (for "Maximum Articulation") could be that much better. But putting Oracle MA into the system rendered a jaw-dropping increase in bottom-end weight, spatial resolution, and sheer naturalness. This cable must be heard to be believed. The bottom-end tightened up, with simultaneously greater warmth, pitch articulation, and dynamics. Instrumental images within the soundstage were presented with more air and space around them, greater precision, finer gradations of depth, and an indescribable feeling of realism that bordered on the spooky. If you're one of the few who can afford a cable at this level, you must audition Oracle MA. Note that MIT's \$7995 Magnum MA (which uses a less elaborate implementation of the same technology) delivers many of the same sonic qualities for considerably less money. Had I not heard Oracle MA, Magnum MA would be my reference. **Prices: \$24,900 (Oracle MA), \$7995 (Magnum MA).** mitcables.com (review forthcoming)



Esoteric P-03 Universal Transport