

## Naim CD5i and Nait 5i

**Naim CD5i CD player, \$2700. Naim Nait 5i amplifier, \$2500**

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It was only in September 2002 that I was enthusiastically reviewing the Naim Series 5. Less than two years later here is the 5i series, which is not only cheaper, but even more user friendly. This is clever marketing and the combination is very much designed as an entry-level experience for the 'plug and play' crowd. Unlike other Naim gear, this equipment is not designed to have an array of power supplies hanging off it!

### CD5i CD player

The CD5i is a solidly built but high quality piece of equipment well worthy of the Naim label. The same kind of aluminium casework as in the original Series 5, which is claimed to reduce the impact of external vibration that has plagued older Naim equipment, is used. RCA phono sockets allow this CD player to be integrated with other non-Naim gear, though this review was done with Naim's traditional DIN connectors.

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My favourite development over older Naim CD players is the puck. In previous designs the puck was a fiddly thing, balanced on soft rubbers. For optimum sound the rubbers needed to be rotated and kept clean. That is all gone now, with the CD securely clamped on three small plastic points. Two years ago I noted that the knob on the CD drawer can be difficult for some of us large fingered males; however the design is still the same.

### Nait 5i integrated amplifier

At 50watts into 8 ohms or a staggering 500watt peak into 1 ohm this is, by any measure, Naim's most powerful Nait so far. Like the CD player it comes in stylish anti-resonance casework and has the option of using the RCA inputs. Integration into an audiovisual system is made easy via a 'unity gain' input. The remote control is a real honey that I found clear to use and quite intuitive. It is a relief to read that this amplifier



can be used with a wide range of speaker cable rather the 'dinosaur' of a cable that is the usual Naim product.

### The sound

The equipment was evaluated as a total package, and only after a month's warm-up at Takapuna's Shore Hi-Fi, with my own Royd Albion speakers used. The first impression was of a clean, detailed sound, slightly on the clinical side of neutral. As with all Naim equipment there was a strong sense of pace, rhythm and timing.

This is a musical sound that requires and deserves your attention. It is not something to be ignored as a kind of music for elevators. The Naim sound has always been somewhat forward in balance compared with many other brands. The 5i series still brings the sound into the room but tends to place it slightly forward of the speakers rather than sitting in your lap.

Like their more expensive equipment there was not a great sense of depth to the music though some of this I was able to counter by drawing the speakers slightly closer together.

### Getting down and dirty

I was particularly taken with the midrange clarity of this new series. One of my favourite tests of vocal clarity is the Chesky recording of Livingston Taylor's *Ink*. His slightly nasal twang can be difficult at times. This is the first time that I have been able to follow all of the

words

with

complete

ease. It is this easy

open midrange quality that makes this gear so easy to listen to!

I pulled out the old standard, *We Get Requests*, by the Oscar Peterson Trio to get some idea of the treble. Ed Thigpen does some magic brushwork and this was captured in all of its fluid glory. On the same recording Ray Brown bows the double bass, which is a good test of even the most capable equipment. The Nait hung in there and followed the bass in a clear musical and tuneful way. The bass was just a little lightweight, that's all. To get more testicular fortitude you are going to have to go up though the Naim range and spend a few more thousand dollars.

### Putting it all together

It is difficult to think of any equipment in this price range that captures so much of the music. There are some downsides, for example the gear takes forever to come 'on song' and the slightly forward sound will not be for everyone. However, for as little as \$5200 you can now experience the Naim magic and experience what all the fuss has been about. Be warned however that this stuff deserves a health warning. It is that addictive!—*John Groom*

