

Quad 99/11L system

Quad 99/11L system, \$5700. Quad 99 CD-P \$2800, 99 amplifier \$1800, 11L loudspeakers \$1100.

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Quad has long been a cornerstone of the British Hi-fi industry. Founded in 1936 by Peter Walker, they started off making public address equipment. Historical highlights were the first commercially available full range electrostatic loudspeaker and receipt of the Queen's Award for Technological Achievement for the 405 amplifier - the only time the award has been given to a hi-fi company.

Like many companies in the hi-fi field, Quad met with difficult times in



the mid 90s. Eventually Quad came under the control of the Hong Kong based International Audio Group, complete with new manufacturing facilities in China.

Quad loyalists need have no fear of overseas production diluting precious traditional brand values. The sam-

ples provided for review were of superb build quality, especially the speakers, built to a much higher standard than any British made Quad pieces I've experienced.

Wisely, the local importers waited until the dust had settled and the revitalized Quad had proven itself internationally before resuming its importation.

Quadrasonics

Supplied was a complete Quad system featuring:

The new 99 CD-P CD player with 24bit/192kHz upsampling D/A converter, 6 digital inputs and analogue output level control,

99 series stereo amplifier, a 90wpc design,

11L two-way bookshelf speakers.

The CD-P has a refreshingly simple look, no fancy stuff here, just a very leg-

ible green LED panel displaying track and time information and four wonderfully tactile, rubberised buttons handling basic operations. Back panel has a IEC mains socket, main power switch, two sets of RCA outputs (fixed and variable), Quad system socketry (which allows for simplified one cable hookup between compatible Quad components), and six digital inputs (three coaxial, three optical). A generic looking remote handset provides full control from one's favourite armchair.

The amplifier is even simpler with only a power light adorning its fascia. IEC mains socket and mains switch are on the back, along with a pair of Quad system sockets and speaker connection posts stuffed with those stupid little plastic lugs to stop people using 4mm banana plugs.

The highlight of the system are the little 11L speakers. These are finished in a gorgeous piano gloss lacquer that elicited gasps from all who saw the speakers, amazed at the high build quality and modest price. Underneath the stunning finish is a conventional two-way monitor style speaker with dual rear ports and bi-wire capable speaker posts.

Still the closest approach to the original sound?

The CD-P is extremely easy to use and efficient with rapid disc loading and near instantaneous track access. Unlike some high end CD players, the Quad is almost entirely quirk free. It was troubled playing a couple of my test CD's. Sometimes the player would mis-track through a song and occasionally play would come to a complete halt.

With this system Quad have taken to heart the phrase that first impressions count, on first listen the 99 system is nothing less than breathtaking in the sheer beauty of the sound that issues forth.

Music plays with a consummate ease and sweetness that seduces and entrances the listener. It is laidback but reasonably detailed, clear, open, smooth, tactile and coherent, with the ability to make any CD played through it musically enjoyable. Even a fingernails-on-blackboard voice like Kasey Chambers was reproduced with warmth and smoothness that made her



eminently listenable.

The soundstage was wide and deep, missing just a bit of height, with good tonality and an impressive amount of low down power and weightiness coming from the small speakers. A sound totally free of the usual hi-fi artifacts.

There are no rough edges that emerge from the 99 components and escape from the 11L's drivers. Rough edges are often the essence of some musical forms like jazz, rock and even large scale orchestral. This weakness in making everything sound "nice" is likely to be the major determinant in a buying decision on this system.

Individually, the CD-P and the 11L speakers were the stars, each capable of punching beyond their weight. The (relatively) weak link, and source of the excess "niceness" was the 99 amplifier. But together the ensemble forms a system greater than the sum of it's parts and offers very good performance straight out of the box.

Flawed but full of charm

However flawed I found the Quad 99 system, I also found it a guilty pleasure. This is a highly refined system that seduces and encapsulates the listener in a luxurious wash of beautiful sound. It is expensive, at nearly \$6000 before speaker cables or speaker stands (essential) but for all but the most persnickety of listeners (or reviewers), this could be all the system you ever need—*Michael Wong*