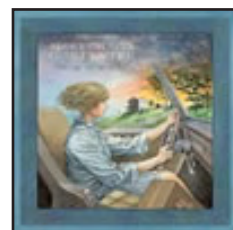
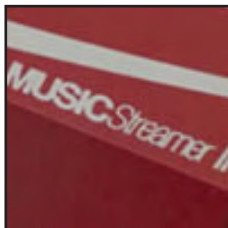
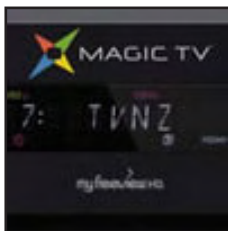


June 2010

**Web page printouts from
the latest issue of AudioEnz**

<http://www.audioenz.co.nz/acrobat/issues/2010/2010-06.pdf>



Magic TV MTV3600TD

By Michael Wong

June 2010

Magic TV MTV3600TD MyFreeview HD PVR. \$799

The Magic TV MTV3600TD is a Freeview certified DTR (Digital Television Recorder) from Hong Kong based video technology company Pixel Magic.



Out of the box this is a very stylish piece of equipment, easily the best looking of the current Freeview certified DTRs. It's all rounded corners and gloss black, there are no controls to clutter the smooth look. The rear panel is equally simple with the main power switch and input jack for the external power supply, USB and network jacks, the usual audio/video connection options and antenna input/loop.

Inside there are two tuners, allowing the recording of two different channels and watching pre-recorded material off the internal 500GB HDD or live viewing of a third channel, provided it is on the same mux. A mux/multiplexer is a device that can send several different data streams simultaneously, over a single carrier. Freeview uses three muxes;

1. TVNZ (TV1, 2, 6, 7)
2. MediaWorks (TV3, TV3+1, C4, C42)
3. Kordia (the other channels Prime, Maori TV, Radio NZ etc.)

The Magic TV records the broadcast stream without recompression so recorded material should be exactly as originally broadcast.

With no controls on the actual unit, all user interaction is through the remote control. This is a large unit with well laid out and differentiated buttons, in a nice to hold, rubberised finish.

Being Freeview certified, the Magic TV uses easy to follow onscreen menus, with an enhanced version of the Electronic Program Guide for recording setup. The simple onscreen guide and printed quick start guide should have the Magic TV up and running in less than ten minutes, unless you run into a

problem...

In my HT system with Rotel AVR and Pioneer plasma, the Magic's HDMI feed was not happy. Basically HDMI was unusable unless I bypassed the Rotel's video switcher and went direct into the plasma. No such problems through my handy OPPO HDMI switcher. Flashback to the early days of HDMI. Love HDMI, not!

Having managed to get a picture to my display, the first thing to do was to tryout the unit's recording capabilities. Before long I had amassed episodes of most of the HD shows on TVNZ and TV3. It was great to be freed from the restrictions of having to use physical media. The Magic TV was so effective, that it instantly banishes tape and disc recorders to the dark ages.



Refelcted glory - rear panel of the Magic TV

Two things to note is that the advert skip function has been disabled; you can only skip in fixed ten-minute blocks and once you have recorded material there is no way to export the recordings. The good news is that this is due to change as Freeview have announced a liberalisation of the content protection protocols for the next generation of Freeview PVRs. With luck there will be a future firmware upgrades for owners of first generation Freeview PVRs.

However, the Magic TV stumbled slightly when it came to picture quality. Straight out of the box the picture was fairly sharp but the black levels were elevated to the stage where the picture could look a little washed out and noisy on some programs. This could only be fixed by tweaking my ISF calibrated plasma settings as the only onboard video adjustment on the MagicTV is a coarse black level enhancement. This adjustment was less than useful as it introduced a noticeable degree of black crush and it was not global, it must be manually switched for each channel.

AAC and Dolby Digital 5.1 audio through the HDMI connection was good with just a hint of roll-off at the extremes and a slight shrinking of the sound field.

PVR shootout

To put the Magic TV's performance into perspective I set up a three-way Freeview HD comparison with a Freeview certified DSE/Zinwell set top box and a non-Freeview Draco 6300.

Best performer was the Draco with crystal-clear pictures, thanks largely to its ability to pass video signals at their native resolution instead of forced scaling. This is important in NZ as Freeview uses three different video resolutions and a good TV will have better video processing than any set top box. Sound quality is excellent (particularly TV3's Dolby Digital soundtracks). Letdowns were the clunky looking (but most informative) OSD, prosaic remote and the inability to pass Dolby Digital 5.1 audio through its HDMI connection.

Next was the Magic TV with good video but the incorrect black level and the forced scaling introduced noise artifacts into the picture. Both problems seemed worse when watching live TV and reduced when watching a recording off the HDD. The Magic TV was not as open sounding as the Draco but it did pass Dolby Digital 5.1 through HDMI. It had the best remote and OSD, albeit the least informative. There's no fan but the Magic TV was the noisiest of the three with the HDD constantly whirring away.

Last was the DSE. This was the first Freeview approved HD set top box and it shows it with forced video scaling, no Dolby Digital through HDMI, crude OSD and unmemorable remote. Video performance was a whisker below the Magic TV minus the black level and noise problems. Sound quality was a bit thin and bright, occasionally veering towards harshness. In its favour was the low pricing; regularly discounted, with refurbished units available for even less, and the inclusion of a basic HDMI cable.

The Magic TV may not be the best performing Freeview HD set top box but it's a well balanced package with ease of use, versatility, solid construction and good looks ensuring it a place as the best Freeview approved PVR currently available.

HRT Music Streamer II

By Michael Jones

June 2010

HRT Music Streamer II. \$299

It was only last September that I reviewed the first [Music Streamer products](#). It shows how quickly moving and competitive the computer DAC (digital-to-analog convertor) market has become that the mark two version are out already.

The Music Streamer II looks similar to the first version, with a USB port in one end and two audio sockets on the other. It's designed solely to be used with a computer – there are no inputs for a CD or DVD player.



Powered from USB

What sets the Music Streamer range apart from most of their competition is the matter of power. Most competing DACs include a power socket and an accompanying ugly wall wart.

The Music Streamer range is powered entirely from the USB bus of your computer, requiring no other power sources. HRT say that the power supply is completely regenerated inside the Music Streamer devices “using a sophisticated set of proprietary circuits”.

The big wiz with the second version of the Music Streamers is asynchronous data transfer. Say what? With USB data transfers it's normally the computer that controls the sending of data. With an asynchronous USB DAC, it's the DAC that controls the flow of data. This, in theory, lowers data jitter

and is thought, by people much more clever than I, to be A Good Thing.

Asynchronous data transfer is but one of many aspects of creating a good sounding DAC and I fear it may be grabbed by the gullible as being a sign of goodness. It's not as simple as that. For example, the Music Streamer II doesn't sound as good overall as the older Music Streamer +, which lacks this new feature.

Streamed...

The original Music Streamer was slightly warm and tapered in the higher frequencies. All the better, perhaps, to deal with some of those nasty sounding low bitrate MP3s. The MS2 does away with this, giving the listener a better balanced, more extended sound. Of course, this means that nasty music rips will sound nasty.

Tonally the MS2 is a touch light, without the heft and body that bigger, more expensive products can achieve. "Focus" is a word that kept coming to mind, both in terms of the excellent sharp, lateral stereo and the ability to hear into the recording.

One area where the MS2 easily surpasses the previous model is in the bass. There's an incredible precision and focus to bass sounds. For example, while listening to a 1969 iTunes playlist, it was easy to hear the differences in bass guitar tone between the Wrecking Crew musicians (the conglomeration of top Los Angeles session musos), McCartney's Rickenbacker on a Beatles track, and that Peter, Paul and Mary's *Leaving On A Jet Plane* has both an electric bass and an upright underpinning the song. Excellent stuff!

And all this for \$299? The Music Streamer II offers amazing sound for a \$299 unit. Highly recommended.

NAD C 375BEE and NAD C 565BEE

By Brent Burmester

June 2010

NAD C 375BEE integrated amplifier (\$2299) and NAD C 565BEE CD player (\$1199)

To BEE or not to BEE? What was the question? When the BEE suffix was first appended to [NAD's](#) CD players and amps a few years ago, it was reserved for the tuned versions of the company's standard-issue components. So, a BEE model would sit alongside its cheaper vanilla equivalent. Think Ken Ishiwata badging on Marantz stuff, only more cryptic. These days, however, NAD's mid-range hi-fi line-up is very much the BEE-Team, featuring the circuit design stylings of electronic maestro, Bjørn Erik Edvardsen.



NAD C565BEE CD player

Neither the C 375BEE amplifier nor the C 565BEE CD player on review is likely to make your female visitors faint with aesthetic over-stimulation. They're an uninspiring black and a bit too plasticky for my liking, but tuck them away in a corner and you won't need to fret about that. Both units incorporate internal architectures enhanced by Mr Edvardsen. In the amp's case, this includes the patented Distortion Cancelling Circuit, which probably serves to cancel distortion, and I'm guessing it does so without recourse to lots of negative feedback, or it wouldn't be that big a deal. There's also a special 'clamp' at work in the power supply, which prevents unpleasantness induced by the output transistors overheating when they're handling difficult speaker loads. In fact, NAD would like to think of the C 375BEE as the next best thing to their rather special (and specially priced) [M3](#) dual mono high-end amplifier. The company claims the 375 is tricked out with goodies developed for its more illustrious stablemate. That may well be: it's certainly quite heavy.

There's also the [C 565BEE](#) CD player, which I'll despatch rather hastily, if I may, as it's the amp I'd like to dwell on. The 565BEE also enjoys a trickle down from NAD's M series. Like most of its direct competitors, it upsamples CD, in this case as high as DVD-A's 192kHz, and DACs come courtesy of Wolfson, a name that is increasingly associated with all self-respecting digital devices. A feature I appreciate is being able to plug a USB stick into the front panel and have the player decode MP3s with rather more finesse than my laptop. More novel, and ergonomically satisfying, is the rotary

control knob for track selection and play/pause functions. In terms of performance, the player showed no favouritism in genre, and all in all, I found it an accomplished player, even tempered and effective. It was, however, rather self-effacing, and some of the kick-out quality of earlier players was missing. In short it was good, and a worthy step up from the C542 in terms of sophistication, but it fell short of great.



NAD C 375BEE amplifier

Getting back to the [C.375BEE](#), we uncover the real story in this pairing. NAD amps are famously direct in their sonic delivery, and in the past they've often exhibited an easily forgiven over-exuberance. They've never been especially interested in exquisite detail, but for what you pay they certainly deliver on system friendliness, flexibility, and fuss-free, no-refunds music making. But now we have this new black heavyweight, and suddenly NAD has gotten all serious and thoughtful, and as I waited over the course of several weeks for the amp to burn in and start a rumpus, it became clear that its maker's priorities may have changed.

The C 375BEE still has the muscle to frighten away evil spirits, boasting 150W per channel and an unfeasible reserve of amperage for when the speakers find resistance is futile, but it doesn't chuck its weight around at all recklessly. Instead, every squeak, tap, and scratch is presented with a calm intensity, like a ninja playing Jenga. I found it slightly unnerving, not because it caused any degree of audio offence, but because it was so not budget NAD. I haven't heard the M range from which the 375 gets its voice, but I remember the earlier NAD Silverline integrated amp, and its similar, determinedly professional manner.

This, then, is an affordable NAD amp that has aspirations, and despite the somewhat working-class exterior, inside the 375BEE has blue-blood running through its circuit boards. However hard I leant on the volume knob, the big integrated amp kept its focus on the notes, who was playing them, and how they were being played, whether it be Led Zep on old vinyl or Jacques Loussier on new CD. I eventually had to concede that this an amp that, for remarkably little outlay, adheres to the audiophile touchstone of fidelity. How good is that?

Rotel RCD-1520

By Gary Pearce

June 2010

Rotel RCD-1520 CD player \$1499

Having owned and enjoyed a pre/monoblock amplifier system from [Rotel](#) in the past, I have a lot of admiration for this almost-boutique Japanese manufacturer and their approach to the world of hi-fi and home theatre.

Their components are usually stripped of unnecessary flashing lights and useless widgets, while the better than competent build and aesthetics have been more than matched with good sound quality for the dosh.

A strange fascination

There has always been a fascination for me when stumbling across hi-fi gear that over-performs, I remind myself of a comparison a friend and I made when auditioning both our systems: mine was a modest system (including the Rotel amps) while my friends more ambitious system included Dynaudio loudspeakers and Plinius amplification.

To cut a long story short, even though the Plinius/Dynaudio system was about three times the cost, it just did things differently in terms of sound quality and didn't embarrass my precious Rotel/Castle Harlech/Esoteric/Pink Triangle gear at all. They were in different rooms of course, but both spaces were similar and we thought highly of their acoustics and similarity to each other in terms of dimensions/floor coverings etc.

So it's thanks to manufacturers such as Rotel for my leanings toward budget to mid-price hi-fi rather than the elusive chase for expensive audiophile esoterica. If less expensive equipment can sound so enjoyable, why pay more?

Of course being perpetually cash-strapped does me no favours either, but there is a hell of a lot of good (dare I say it – great) budget equipment out there, like Rotel's new RCD-1520 for instance.



It's the only CD spinner in the company's flagship 15 series, but the RRP of \$1499 has it firmly in mid-price territory. A solidly built player, the 1520 utilises a slot loading mechanism a la Mac Mini

instead of a conventional tray system and is beautifully styled and engineered. Rotel opted for 24-bit Wolfson dac's for d/a conversion (I couldn't find any further details regarding the actual dac used) while Burr Brown op-amps have been specified due to their low distortion characteristics.

The fully featured front fascia is milled from a seemingly solid billet of aluminium, and despite having a few more buttons than expected (from an audiophile-oriented device) still managed to look extremely uncluttered. Connections on the rear panel are slightly less exciting – plain jane stereo RCA outputs are provided along with a single coaxial digital output. No XLR or toslink here folks! A 12v trigger for custom install systems is included along with a RJ45 Ethernet connector for firmware updates.

So that's the hardware explained, all up the RCD-1520 looked beautiful in the flesh and promised much. It was now time to taste the candy and see what the flavour was like.

Of magpies and hi-fi

My magpie-like passion for HiFi knows no bounds, thus the RCD-1520 was trialed in a number of systems (just to make sure you see). The main system comprises of the following: Korsun V8i 250wpc integrated/Voigt 'Vofo' single driver speakers or Wharfedale Opus Ones, while the secondary system used the delightful Yarland Pro88-2SA tube integrated and TDL Studio 0.5 transmission line loudspeakers to great effect.

Cables were predominately Nordost Blue Heaven interconnect/Superflatline MK2 bi-wire speaker, with a dash of Audioquest thrown in here and there. I mounted the player on a Sole To Soul support, with the player situated on three Nordost Pulsar Points (thanks Neil).

After a suitable warm-up period it was apparent that I was listening to a pretty good CD player. The sound is perhaps a touch on the bright side, but certainly has a good deal of pep and verve. Dynamics were unrestrained and there was good definition, control and speed on tracks with complicated bass lines (like most of my CD collection to be honest)

In fact I considered the timing of the 1520 to be a touch above the average, maybe superior in fact to my much-loved Raysonic CD-128. Where it didn't quite compete with this player was through the midband and although good, just lost out in absolute terms with an oh-so slight veiling of midband detail and emotion. The ability of the RCD-1520 to produce a soundstage was also reduced when compared with Raysonic, although the cheaper player managed to image well with a good '3D' dimensionality.

Listening revealed a cracking CD player with audio performance to match those supermodel looks. Although we may be seeing the decline of the silver disc as a medium, the RCD-1520 is still a serious contender for the middleweight crown.

Firestone Audio Fubar III

By Shane Hanify

June 2010

Firestone Audio Fubar III USB DAC/Headphone amplifier. \$679

Firestone Audio have a few products in their lineup and this is the third in the chain ahead of the two Fireye amps [previously reviewed](#).

Packaging is different from the little amps – this is a much bigger box with a welcome cardboard insert holding everything securely in place. It comes with an instruction manual, a 1.5m stereo RCA cable, a USB cable and a plugpack power supply. Also supplied is an Allen key to get into the unit to configure it.

This little amp is considerably larger than its siblings, in a similar brushed aluminium but of a better fit and finish.



On the front panel is a blue LED, a 6.4mm headphone jack and a smooth volume control with a well finished aluminium knob. Around the back you'll find a pair of variable RCA outputs, a high/low gain switch, a power switch, a USB socket and a DC socket for the power supply.

Setup

As with the Fireye amps, I had my AKG k171s to hand, a loaner pair of Grado SR80i and an aftermarket USB cable that was used for the first week.

Initial thoughts

After a bit of a hiccup (the supplied power supply would not power the unit up) I was up and running. It was left to run for about 24 hours to bed in.

The Fubar III delivers a much sweeter fuller sound than its little brothers with vastly better staging and texture. Presentation at the default settings is quick and smooth, with wonderfully deep bass, exhibiting none of the foibles of the little amps. It could sound a touch thin on some recordings, but that was more down to the track than the amp.

As expected, the higher current design gave the music a lot more slam, giving my CD player a run for its money – especially when partnered with an aftermarket USB cable.

It initially sounds not quite as forward as either of its siblings, allowing you to relax into the music and enjoy it immediately, regardless of genre. There is a touch of sibilance on some tracks, but nothing really to worry about, resolving tune after tune with an easy flowing nature that draws you effortlessly in.

Unfortunately, this higher resolution comes with a price.

Low bitrate (less than 160kbps) mp3s sound atrocious. The compression and loss of detail in these tracks really pull your attention to the technical side of things rather than the music – whereas the siblings gloss over these shortcomings, the bigger brother is critical and unforgiving.

Luckily, the converse is also true.

Fed a good recording, such as a lossless track and it really shines. Even with the standard USB cable this little box was pushing my CD player hard, and coupled with the aftermarket one, came so close to tipping it over I contemplated getting one.

Settling in

After a further week or so, we really started to get to know once another.

The CD player started getting less and less use, always a good sign, true – it did have it in overall sound, there was never any denying that, but the gap was close enough that listening to music off the pc was now a pleasant activity, rather than the background role it was previously assigned to.

Bass weight through the headphones had settled in nicely now, with a greater sense of control – with the pc at near maximum volume, and the Fubar at around 1 o'clock it made the little AKG's sing like I'd imagine they should – near on flat, and wonderfully detailed. Ultimate bass was a little lacking, but I put that down to the aftermarket cable used on the AKG's – not any fault of the little amp and certainly easily lived with.

Going back through the big amp confirmed my suspicions on this as time after time I'd look up from what I was doing as the low notes rumbled down the room causing me to burst out into spontaneous bouts of grinning.

As a headphone amp, I'd say in its class it would hold its own weight – and as a DAC feeding into an amplifier and speakers, it certainly does. The Fubar III is a brilliant all-rounder that does things quietly and without drama, lifting the sound of a computer several levels above your average soundcard. Highly recommended.

June music reviews

Mary Chapin Carpenter: Age Of Miracles

Rounder/Universal

MCC's first album since suffering a pulmonary embolism in 2007 finds Mary in a reflective mood, writing about "a larger, more universal expression of the wonder at the times we are living in... we live in an age of miracles when we still believe they are possible." Songs subjects include the protests of monks in Burma, along with MCC's ruminations on love and now, marriage.

This is a quiet album. There aren't the rocking songs that helped make MCC so popular. Instead, most of the songs re based around a quiet acoustic guitar and often quiet vocals.



Although I no longer find MCC as compelling as I did in her *Come On Come On/Stones In The Road* heyday, it's more a matter of degree than of absolutes. **Michael Jones**

Youssou Ndur: Dakar-Kingston

Universal

As the title suggests we travel the world from Africa to Jamaica to fuse the sounds of Youssou Ndur. From the opening track *Marley* featuring Mutabaruka, this truly is what why reggae music is a universal genre of music. *Black Woman* is a wonderful Jamaican influenced tune paying tribute to all our lovely women in the universe.

Recorded in Kingston, Dakar and Paris, stick this cd under the category of new world reggae! A few favourite tracks for the ipod are *Africa Dream Again*, *Diarr Diarr* and *Don't Walk Away* featuring Morgan Heritage. This should be the album for the World Cup soccer this month! **Ants Fong**



Christian Scott: Yesterday You Said Tomorrow

Concord Jazz

While I'd love to announce the arrival a stunningly clever, innovative new (to me) jazz trumpeter this is not the album that will do it. Apparently his fourth album for Concord this is self indulgent twaddle that just tries too hard to bring something fresh to the table. Glimpses of what might have been will

mean I will check out further (or earlier) releases should they come my way but this can be skipped over by all. **Allan McFarlane**

Angie Stone: Unexpected

Stax

Feeling in the need to check out some of the new soul divas this release duly arrived and received a lengthy audition. The only reason to check this out would be to find out what all the audiophile press are talking about when they refer to the paucity of good recorded pop material these days. This is a stitched together album with each track “produced” by a different entity that provides all the material for Angie Stone to lay down her vocals over the top. Dynamics? Forget it. Originality of musical or production or vocal values – absent. Oh that she was born 30-40 years ago and Motown found her... Disappointing. **Allan McFarlane**



Various: Feel Good 80s

Sony Music

Nostalgia for a past decade is common in music. 60's music has always had a following and more recently we have started to see 70's interest with the revival of groups such as Abba.

This is a three CD set from Sony Music of 55 songs spanning 1980-1989. There are some big 80's tracks: David Bowie's *Let's Dance*, Cyndi Lauper's *Girls Just Want to Have Fun*, Belinda Carlisle's *Heaven is a Place on Earth* and of course Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. There is also a smattering of less well known artists. I had not heard of a number of the artists but if you listen to the CDs without looking at the listings, many of the tunes seem familiar. Not too surprisingly, most of the music is under Sony copyright and while this makes for some restriction in choice, it does not sound like anything is missing when you listen to the tracks.



Without singling any songs for criticism, some of the 80s songs are truly bad! I think this is more a reflection of the 80's sound – heavily synthesized pop and all that. Perhaps they sounded better in the 80s, perhaps they were always bad! Younger listeners, you have been warned!

This set lived in my car for a good part of summer and I would describe it as a good set for driving or dancing at parties. For those of us who lived through the 80's this is a fun way to reminisce. For younger listeners there is still a lot of fun in this album but keep your remote handy and be prepared hit the fast forward button a few times.

Overall: Recommended for fun value –just don't take your self too seriously and it is a good buy.

Matthew Strack