

**Acoustic Signature Barzetti | Turntable | R21479**

Barzetti deck can challenge the very best

**Acoustic Signature** may be a new name to many readers, and now this high-end German brand is also available in South Africa. The brand's new SA distributor, Lowveld Audio, wants to make an impact. With products like this, we think it has a good chance.

This is a beautifully built turntable that oozes quality, from the black gloss finish on its 50mm-thick MDF plinth to the immaculately machined aluminium platter. The platter weighs in at 6kg, and sits on a clever bearing that combines a hardened steel shaft, carbide ball bearing and a housing that uses 'sintered' bronze (a material made from compacted powder), and a material called Tidorfolon - an exotic combination of teflon, titanium, ferrite and vanadium. The point of all this clever engineering is to make a low-noise bearing that doesn't need oil.

**Rega arm is a fine performer, too**

The Barzetti is supplied with a Rega arm, which is a standard choice at this price level for good reason: it's an excellent performer and great value, too.

This turntable/arm combination doesn't come with a cartridge so we used Goldring's excellent 2400 - a moving magnet design that works well in the Rega arm.

Once properly sited the Acoustic Signature works very well. The deck's solid, non-suspended design means it's simple to set up, and an electronic speed change makes it easy to use.

It's a confident-sounding player with a stable, large-scale output. Detail levels are good, and the ability to stay composed with music as varied and complex as Holst's *Mars* and REM's *Automatic for the People* is impressive. The Barzetti has wide dynamic

**USE IT WITH**

**REM: Automatic for the people**

A classic album of top-quality songs



limits and the ability to deliver an expansive, well-focused soundstage. It's a fine performer, but lacks just a little finesse. It can't quite lock onto a fast-moving rhythm track with total conviction, either.

Take price, build, finish and ease of use into account and it's hard not to be impressed by this turntable. As an overall package it's a viable alternative to the class leaders.

**Rating ★★★★★**

**FOR** A composed, stable presentation; wide dynamic limits; build and finish; ease of use

**AGAINST** Lacks just a little sonic subtlety

**VERDICT** A fine performer. It's lovely to use and beautifully built - hear it



**Also consider**

**Roksan Radius R31590 ★★★★★**

A cleverly-engineered deck that delivers class leading resolution with first-rate rhythmic ability.



**Chord Maxx | Amp/DAC | R12950**

Chord lights the way for hi-fi's future

If you like to pigeonhole kit, we suspect Chord's Maxx will flummox you. At heart it's a stereo power amp with a volume control. That's simple enough, but things don't end there. It's also a USB DAC with a Bluetooth receiver. Combined with a suitable laptop or smartphone and a pair of decent quality speakers, the Maxx makes for a cutting-edge high-tech stereo solution.

A power output of just 20 Watts per channel suggests careful system matching is a must if you want high volume levels. And that's true to a certain extent, though we managed to get decent levels even from relatively inefficient speakers such as ATC's SCM 11s.

**Small, but very able**

The Maxx runs hot. It does this despite the use of a somewhat noisy cooling fan and plenty of ventilation. The heat is the side effect of using conventional analogue circuitry in a case barely bigger than a couple of packs of playing cards.

The Chord's tiny size may lead some to underestimate its sonic ability. That would be a mistake. The on-board DAC is a good one that delivers a bold and full-bodied sound from our Apple Macbook using

uncompressed music files. The Apt-X enabled Bluetooth connection sounds almost as good as the USB input, though lacks just a little of the former's dynamic expression and transparency.

The power amplifier sounds just like a baby Chord product should. It's precise, massively detailed and impressively agile. With music such as PJ Harvey's *Let England Shake* it shines while still having the refinement and

**USE IT WITH**

**EB Acoustic EB2**

Speakers that deliver a sound well beyond the norm for the price



finesse to make the most of Elgar's *Cello Concerto in E Minor Op.85*.

It lacks only a bit of scale and authority compared to the more conventional amps available for similar money. But then again, they don't pack this Chord's more advanced - and incredibly useful - features.

If the changing face of stereo music storage brings about interesting products such as this Chord we're happy, particularly when they're as good as the Maxx.

**Rating ★★★★★**

**FOR** Agile, detailed sound; Apt-X Bluetooth and DAC ability; excellent build

**AGAINST** The mandatory power supply costs R2500; needs careful speaker matching; fan noise

**VERDICT** A forward-looking amplifier packed with features. A sign of the hi-fi to come?

**Also consider**

**Cyrus 6XP R17900 ★★★★★**

Our favourite amp at this price is fully equipped and can even be bought with a DAC

