

EU Commission penalizes hi-fi manufacturers

The European Commission has fined Asus, Philips, Denon/Marantz and Pioneer millions of euros for breaches of EU competition regulations. Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager accuses them of having imposed fixed or minimum prices on online merchants and of having threatened to stop delivery if they wouldn't comply. Pioneer had, additionally, prevented online traders from selling across borders to consumers in other Member States, in order to maintain different prices in different countries. Denon/Marantz has been fined 7.7 million euros and Pioneer 10.2 million, while Philips has to pay almost 30 million and Asus even 63 million. Commissioner Vestager wants „to protect consumers when companies are in the way of stronger price competition and better choice“. However, the question remains, who is going to protect traditional hi-fi retailers from the competition of online shops, which save themselves the trouble and expense of providing demonstration and proper customer advice.



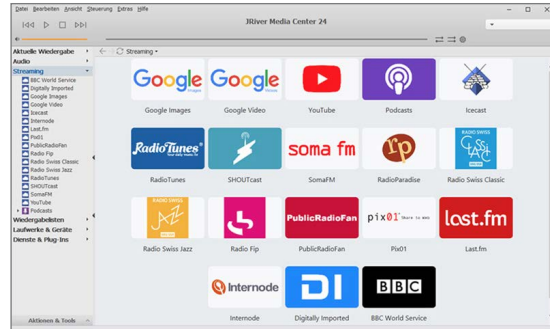
Focal: Evo design for everyone

Also the remaining models of the French loudspeaker manufacturer's Utopia series have now been updated to the fresh „Evo“ design. The models in question are the Diablo Utopia shelf speaker, the Viva Utopia and Viva Utopia Center and the Sub Utopia EM. The baffle now takes on the color of the rest of the cabinet, and the tweeter is matt black at front, sides and rear. The speaker stand has as well been given a matt black finish - in contrast to the high-gloss surfaces of the speaker – optionally available are Carrara White, Black Lacquer, British Racing Green, Metallic Blue or Ash Grey. The new models are obtainable as of now and have the type designations „Diablo Utopia Colour Evo“ (10,500 Euro/pair) „Viva Utopia Colour Evo“ (20,000 Euro/pair), „Viva Utopia Center Colour Evo“ (10,000 Euro/piece) and „Sub Utopia EM Colour Evo“ (10,000 Euro/piece).



JRiver: Media Center becomes more expensive

On July 31, JRiver increased the prices for the popular software „Media Center“. For a single computer (Windows, Mac or Linux) it now costs \$60 instead of the previous \$50 (that is around €52), and the „Master License“, which applies to all three operating systems, also costs \$10 more, hence \$80 (just under €70). Upgrades from older versions increased by \$3 to \$30 (about \$26) for the single version and to \$40 (about \$35) for the Master License. JRiver accepts credit cards or PayPal.



Spotify: 83 million premium subscribers

As befits a listed company, the Swedish music streaming giant has published its first quarterly figures. As of the end of June 2018, Spotify had 83 million paying subscribers worldwide (40% more than at the same time last year) and 101 million free users (+23%). Most of Spotify's subscribers are European (40%), followed by North America with 31%. Average revenue per subscriber fell by 12% to just under EUR 5 per month, due to the numerous new family subscriptions. In total, just under EUR 1.3 billion flowed into Spotify's coffers in the second quarter of this year, around three-quarters of which were distributed amongst the shareholders. The remaining EUR 329 million could not quite cover the expenses for research and development, sales and marketing and general administration, which amounted to EUR 419 million, resulting in a quarterly operating loss of EUR 90 million. In addition, there are remaining debts of 302 million euros. Ergo, music streaming is still a loss-making business, by the way not only for Spotify. Currently the Swedish company employs nearly 4000 full-time employees and freelancers worldwide.

SUMMARY USER AND FINANCIAL METRICS					% Change	
	Q2 2017 ¹	Q1 2018 ¹	Q2 2018	Y/Y	Q/Q	
USERS (M)						
Total Monthly Active Users ("MAUs")	138	173	180	30%	4%	
Premium Subscribers	59	75	83	40%	10%	
Ad-Supported MAUs	83	102	101	23%	(0%)	
FINANCIALS (€M)						
Premium	904	1,037	1,150	27%	11%	
Ad-Supported	103	102	123	20%	21%	
Total Revenue	1,007	1,139	1,273	26%	12%	
Gross Profit	232	283	329	42%	16%	
Gross Margin	23.0%	24.9%	25.8%	-	-	
Operating Loss	(79)	(41)	(90)	(14%)	(121%)	
Operating Margin	(7.9%)	(3.6%)	(7.1%)	-	-	
Net cash flow from operating activities	72	84	30	(58%)	(84%)	
Free Cash Flow ²	59	74	18	(69%)	(76%)	



MC preamplifiers from Rega

As its name „Aura MC“ suggests, Rega’s latest phono pre-amplifier is designed exclusively for moving coil pickups. In the input stage, its fully balanced electronics are operated using low-noise field-effect transistors. Polypropylene capacitors with a tolerance of just 1% provide precise RIAA equalization, while, in order to match the pickup sensitivity, the gain can be adjusted in two stages. One of 5 values between 50 and 400 Ohm is



chosen for the input resistance and input capacitances can be selected between 1000 and 5700 pF. For their own pickups Rega recommends low capacitance values and 100 Ohm input resistance. A „Mono“-button optimizes the sound for mono records, and „Mute“ silences the outputs to avoid cracking noises when engaging the needle. The pickup is connected via RCA sockets and the output signal is provided as RCA and XLR. The Aura MC is available from September at a price of 5000 Euro.

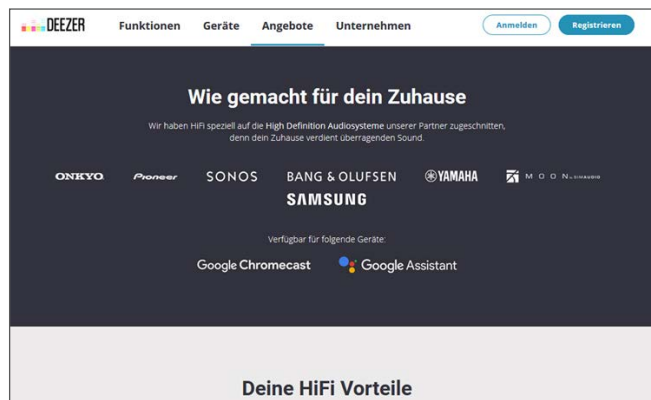
Affordable entry: new Pioneer integrated amplifier

For an affordable 400 Euro – including the remote control – Pioneer will launch the A-40 AE integrated amplifier in August. According to its data sheet, it delivers 2x76 watts into 4 ohms and offers inputs for 5 line and 2 digital (optical and coaxial S/PDIF) sources, as well as an MM pickup. D/A conversion is performed by a Wolfson chip, processing sampling rates up to 192 kHz. Screw/banana terminals are provided to connect up to two loudspeaker pairs simultaneously, which can be operated in parallel or individually. By means of the „Direct“ switch, sound- and balance controls can be bypassed. Direct power-amp input, and the line- and headphone-out complete the set. The A-40 AE’s front is made of aluminum and is available in black or silver.



Deezer HiFi now listens to Google’s voice control

Just recently the music streaming service Deezer has released its lossless version „Deezer HiFi“ for Chromecast transmission from the smartphone app. Now they follow up with voice control via Google Assistant. With the voice command „Hey Google, play my flow“, for example, the user’s personalized playlist „flow“ is started, which is a mix of favorite and recommended songs. You can also search for specific albums, artists, playlists, songs or genres by voice. This works not only on Google’s own „Home“ speakers, but on all voice-controlled speakers with „Google Assistant built-in“.



Cambridge Audio: Edge amplifiers now in stores

The big premiere of Cambridge Audio’s new top components „Edge“ was already celebrated at the High End, and if you were lucky you could hear one at a dealer event. However, only now you can actually buy one. At least the integrated amplifier Edge A is from now on available in selected specialist shops, for a price of 5000 euros. With other dealers you can at least arrange an appointment for listening. In the coming months the Edge system will be completed by the preamplifier/network player Edge NQ (4000 Euro) and the stereo power amplifier Edge W (3000 Euro).



Bluetooth speakers as stereo pair

Starting in August, Denon is going to expand its AV receiver range with models featuring Alexa voice control and Apple's multi-room protocol Airplay 2. The AVR-X 3500H (around 900 Euro) is going to start of the initiative. It is packed with 7 power amplifiers of 180



watts each, WLAN, Bluetooth, Internet radio, Spotify Connect, UPnP streaming, HiRes playback up to 24 Bit/192 kHz and DSD up to 5.6 MHz, phono input, 8 HDMI inputs, 3 HDMI outputs, Audyssey room calibration with included microphone and stand as well as support for the brand's own multi-room system HEOS. Thanks to the HEOS Home Entertainment Skill it will also be compatible with Alexa voice control while Airplay 2 will be made available as a retrofittable update. Naturally, all recent home cinema picture- and sound formats are supported. The AVR-X 4500H (1500 Euro, from September), which has 9 power amplifiers of 200 watts, is even better. The two new Marantz AV receivers SR 5013 (7 power amplifiers, 900 Euro) and SR 6013 (9 power amplifiers, 1400 Euro) are equipped similarly.

Sonos: Update to Airplay 2

Sonos Beam, One, Playbase and Play: 5 MK2 multiroom speakers are now compatible with Apple's new Airplay 2 streaming protocol. After the update, the Sonos models appear in the iOS port in the list of Airplay devices and can also form a cross-manufacturer multiroom system, e.g., together with Apple's HomePod loudspeakers. We tried it out with the "One" and, as usual with Sonos, it works brilliantly, even if set up as a stereo pair. An iOS device with iOS 11.4 is required. Under the latest MacOS 10.13.6, iTunes 12.8 is, since recently and only on Mac not on Windows, also Airplay 2-compatible.



The Sonos speakers can, hence, from now on be supplied with music from any app on iPhone & Co. and can also access the Apple Music streaming service via voice command. Apple's HomePods, on the other hand, do not appear in the Sonos app.

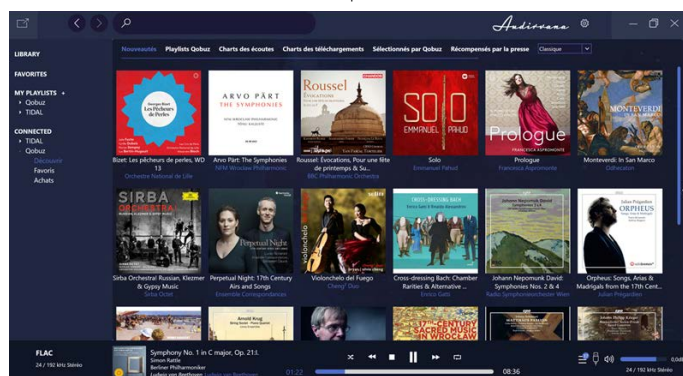
„Good vibrations“ for 10,000 pounds

The English hi-fi company Avid is launching its vinyl drive „Acutus“ in a matt black, limited and numbered edition of 100 copies as the „Acutus Dark“. As with the standard model, the 10 kilo turntable is driven by a 33 or 45 rpm synchronous motor via double belts. The subchassis is mounted on three springs with adjustable resonance frequency. Thanks to single-point bearings made of a tungsten carbide ball, a bearing mirror made of sapphire and the screw-on plate clamp, the „bad vibrations“ are supposed to be dissipated into the sub-chassis and only the „good vibrations“ can reach the feeler pin. The Acutus Dark Limited Edition costs around 10,000 British pounds, without a tonearm.



Audirvana now also for Windows

The popular music player software „Audirvana+“, previously limited to Mac, is now also available for Windows 10. Developer Damien Plisson has completely redesigned the user interface, but otherwise Audirvana Plus for Windows 10 offers exactly the same features as Audirvana Plus 3.2 for Mac. This includes support of all popular audio formats including high-resolution FLAC, WAV, AIFF and DSD files as well as an MQA core-decoder and direct access to the streaming services Qobuz, Tidal HiFi and HighresAudio. Audirvana for Windows 10 communicates exclusively with USB DACs via ASIO and WASAPI or transmits music, via home network, to DLNA network players. The sound signals are provided, with accuracies down to a single bit, at the respective original sampling frequency or, if required, converted, using a high-quality sampling rate converter. Requires a PC with Windows 10 and at least 4 GB, better 8 GB of RAM. Audirvana+ for Windows costs around 77 euros, just like the Mac version.



More receivers with Alexa and Airplay 2 from Denon and Marantz

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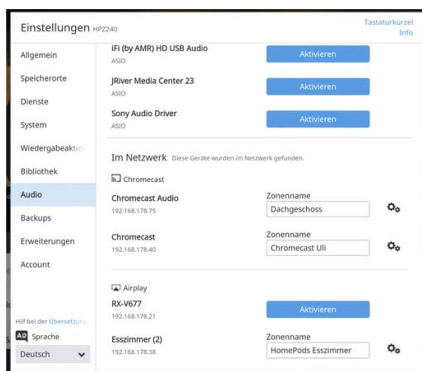
New racks from Bassocontinuo

A completely revised rack series comes from Italy: Bassocontinuo offers the „Reference 2.0“ models in six new surfaces, and its new „Harmonic Damping Resonators“ attenuate each rack level individually at exactly determined frequencies. Depending on the model, 3 cm thick shelves made of MDF or plywood carry devices weighing up to 150 kg. The racks have a modular design and can be reconfigured or expanded according to space requirements. Accessories such as cable management, headphone holder, etc. are optionally available. The prices for the „Accordeon XL4 2.0“ audio rack in the cheapest „Nighthawk“ version range from around 950 to around 1350 euros per rack floor, depending on the height. The top design „Mercurial“ is around 250 euros more expensive.



Roon supports Chromecast and Airplay 2

Since the most recent update, Roon software can also stream to Chromecast-compatible devices, such as Google's „Home“ loudspeakers, Chromecast video and audio adapters and all devices with „Chromecast built-in“. They are automatically detected in the home network and appear in Roon under Settings > Audio. Chromecast audio devices accept resolutions up to 24/96. Roon can also stream to a grouped set of Chromecast devices in multiple rooms. The new version additionally supports Apple's Airplay 2 protocol and can play music, for example, via Apple's HomePod speakers. Roon has also updated the MQA decoder.



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