

Champagne Supernova

Three single-minded maestros of the Japanese high end combine to create a system that has **Ed Selley** mad for it

At affordable price points, there is a basic homogeneity to most audio equipment, regardless of where it originates. As you enter more rarefied levels, though, some of the characteristics of the people and culture that build it start to become more apparent. These three components are from three radically different companies. They look different, feel different and reflect different design priorities, but could only be from Japan.

Melco Audio was one of the first companies to really push the concept of audiophile-grade

storage. Key to its approach is that, as a subsidiary of Buffalo, everything it makes is underpinned by solid and reliable network behaviour. Melcos boot from cold promptly, are easily discoverable, flexible and easy to configure. They have their own music management software, Roon compatibility and the ability to function directly with DACs via a dedicated USB out. This means even when it pushes the boat out, the product that results is exotic but flexible.

The N10 45th anniversary limited edition is exotic, though. As the name suggests, it's a

COMPONENTS

MELCO N10 45TH ANNIVERSARY £7,500

Built in strictly limited quantities, the N10 45th Anniversary is a specially upgraded version of the already rigorously engineered N10, finished in a unique champagne colour and supplied with gorgeous presentation hardware.

ACCUPHASE E-480 £9,250

The E-480 delivers a hefty 180W from its bespoke internals featuring twin power supplies and a level of over engineering that befits the magnificent exterior. The DAC-50 digital input board adds an additional £1,250 to the £8,000 price.

ECLIPSE TD510Z MK2 £2,000 EACH

The TD510Z MK2 is the dedicated floorstanding version of the TD510. It is built to the principles of the company's 'Time Domain' philosophy that is focussed on securing a full bandwidth response from a compact 10cm driver.





framework of *Beautiful Systems*. In some regards, this is because it is almost gloriously contradictory. It is beautifully made yet somehow feels artisanal with it. It is utterly single-minded in its execution, but manages to be impressively flexible in what it can do and how it does it. Finally, despite having three rather different approaches to styling, it somehow sits together like it was designed to.

Total Eclipse of the heart

This visual cohesion has nothing on what happens sonically, however. In some ways, I am a little disappointed that I've used and enjoyed Eclipse speakers before because it means the sheer incredulity of hearing what that tiny driver can do in the right hands is slightly nullified. Even allowing for this though, the manner in which it delivers the deep opening note on the DSD64 version of Dead Can Dance's *Song Of The Stars* still causes a moment's jarring disconnect between eye and ear. It seems impossible to comprehend that the sound I hear is coming from that compact pod, but it is and it is only just getting started.

In the past, I have talked about speed and timing, expressing approval for equipment that imparts a true sense of this. The Eclipse is in a

development of the N10 and employs the same principle of keeping the drive and network hardware in one chassis and powering via a beautifully constructed linear PSU that's in a separate one. Here, however, capacity is boosted to 5 terabytes and the casework, which wasn't exactly insubstantial to begin with, is hand assembled and available in a slick champagne finish.

Going for gold

This throwback to a time when high-end Japanese equipment was almost exclusively adorned in gold is mirrored in the Accuphase E-480 integrated amplifier. It's easy to look at and assume it's a living fossil – a coelacanth with a volume knob – but that does it a grave disservice. It looks like it does because Accuphase believes this is precisely how an amp should look. I have to say that having spent a little time with it, it might look complex but I'm inclined to agree.

Internally, it is highly sophisticated too. Everything, from the AAVA volume control to the tripled-up output stage complete with damping factor that could probably rein in an earthquake, through to the 384kHz-compatible digital module, speaks to a design philosophy that

pursues the absolute with the same single mindedness that more classical Japanese objects have for centuries. I don't recall ever spending time with something that feels so exacting in terms of design and execution.

For the last member of the team though, we move away from audio in the grand tradition to something that reflects the Japanese characteristic of determinedly pursuing an idea to perfection. The Eclipse TD510Z MK2 begins with a near-impossible premise: a speaker that uses a single

This system has sonic attributes beyond almost anything I've ever tested

driver for the entire frequency response, and proceeds to make it work. Every aspect of this extraordinary aesthetic is directed at making a single 10cm driver somehow deliver a frequency response of 42Hz-22kHz, all the time avoiding the use of a crossover and the issues that come with it.

When assembled together, this system looks and feels like nothing else I can remember testing, even within the wonderfully unconstrained

One of the most balanced solid state amps, full stop



different league altogether. There is no time signature it cannot relay perfectly, imbued with an order and a fundamental rightness, be it the tribal-derived Dead Can Dance or the effortless funkiness of Blondie's *Heart Of Glass*. Going back to crossovers after time spent with the Eclipse is like coming down from a particularly potent high.

Biting back

With this latter track, the talents of the equipment upstream start to make its presence felt. To look at the Accuphase is to assume it produces a big, cuddly sort of sound, endlessly cossetting, but lacking a bit of bite. Please dispense of that notion forthwith. Instead, the E-480 is one of the most supremely well-balanced solid-state amplifiers I've had the privilege of spending time with. The obsessive attention that has gone into the power supply and output stage means it has an imperious level of control over the TD510Z MK2 and the effortless current delivery helps that incredible bass response.

Further up the frequency response, the E-480 is no less singular. Maggie Reilly's lovely vocal turn on Mike Oldfield's *Moonlight Shadow* is simply sensational. Without the slightest



WEBSITES
accuphase.com
eclipse-td.com/uk
melco-audio.com

perception of over emphasis, she is tangibly real and lifelike. There's some other useful attributes too. Historically, I've found that the 'sweet spot' for listening to the Eclipse is fairly small. Here, it is prised open into something that is more expansive and effortless without compromising the astonishing imaging of the speaker.

Working out the Melco's role in the performance takes longer because it is rather less overt, but it becomes clear that the N10 45th Anniversary is the foundation for how this system shows

It seems impossible to comprehend the sound coming from that compact pod

off its more conspicuous talents. As someone who leans to the objective end of audio, it still mildly infuriates me that a digital file can be rendered to produce differences, but they are unquestionably there. Comparing against my own venerable Melco – which is still far from a slouch – the Anniversary imparts clarity and three dimensionality to the material even before that phenomenal digital board in the Accuphase sets out to work.

What's no less brilliant is how little this system asks in return. The Melco's functionality is comprehensive, straightforward to use and the small footprint is a boon. The E-480 is equipped with an input for pretty much every occasion and the VU meters – while pure theatre – seem to be extremely accurate in the information they provide. The Eclipse, meanwhile, is an absolute pleasure to live with. Looking at it you might assume that it's not a natural all-rounder, but that's simply not the case. It is superb for TV and film use and, so long as a degree of care is taken in its positioning, it's also able to work in larger rooms than you might reasonably expect.

Part of the process

This is, of course, very much in keeping with the Japanese philosophy. Things that at first glance might look idiosyncratic to the point of whimsy are done because if you go along with the process, it works brilliantly. This system has certain sonic attributes beyond almost anything I've ever tested and it does this while being no less of a delight to look at and use. It might reflect the ethos of the country that built it, but it is indisputably a world champion ●