



## Reviews

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28-NOV-2005

### AUDIO ANALOGUE ENIGMA - 'BEST BUY' HI-FI CHOICE

Importantly for this kind of product, the Enigma, in our subjective opinion at least, beats both its British competitors in terms of looks and style. It sports a highly attractive 'shoe-box' case, fronted with some very high-grade aluminium polished to give a highly attractive sheen. The build quality is also considerably better than that of Arcam's Solo, with an incredibly solid aluminium front panel and extremely responsive controls, array of stainless steel buttons. The volume knob doesn't turn; it 'jogs' one way or the other to increase or reduce the level. All this is no mean feat, considering the asking price is some £150 less than Arcam's offering. Also, it shouldn't be forgotten that this piece of kit isn't bolted together in China, but instead is designed and constructed in Audio Analogue's Italian factory - which makes the price even more impressive.

As is often the case, build quality also has an effect on sound quality, and Audio Analogue claims that the fairly deep body - in relation to the width and height of the unit - allows the company to place sonically vital components away from each other, while still allowing the Enigma the benefit of a slim profile. All this comes together to put a big tick in that all-important sound-quality column. It certainly performs well when compared to the direct competition, whether that be a one-box solution or even a components-based system.

Fittingly for a valve-based music system, refinement is the order of the day here... and the Enigma delivers music in a cool, collected manner. Not 'cool' in the chilly sense, though; there's definitely something 'valvey' about the sound. It stands out from the likes of Linn and Arcam in this respect - while there's nothing bad about the way they perform, there's definitely a more 'electronic' feel to the sound that is delivered by these devices.

Even with the abrasive rock of Iggy and the boys, the Enigma manages to keep things tight, and vocals are a particular highlight - especially the bit where Iggy shouts 'lord/' between tracks, which sets your arm hairs on edge. Switch to the rather better recorded vocal musings of Tom Waits' Real Gone Man and things improve still further, with a lifelike quality to the intonation. Larger scale works also get the full treatment, whether it's the pomp rock of And You Will Know Us by The Tailor of Telford or Beethoven's seventh symphony, there's a scale and presentation that is never less than impressive. It's also very controlled, and even when music gets complicated the Enigma remains sure of foot, and all the separate elements - both instrumental and rhythmic - are kept on a tight leash.

The Enigma system may tread new ground, but sonically it's all Audio Analogue, with many of the manufacturer's signature characteristics present and correct. It knocks all the cheaper competition for six; even the impressive likes of Denon's mini-system offerings can't come close to the look, feel and above all performance of this piece of equipment. But perhaps more importantly, it also gives the Arcam a good run for its money, just edging it in terms of sound quality. . . . **It is possibly the best 'mini' system we've ever heard,** and deserves more than simply being relegated to the kitchen or bedroom.