



GOLDEN EAR the absolute sound 2013 AWARDS

Anthony H. Cordesman, Neil Gader, Wayne Garcia, Robert E. Greene, Robert Harley, Jacob Heilbrunn, Kirk Midtskog, Dick Olsher, Paul Seydor, Steven Stone, and Jonathan Valin

The Absolute Sound's Golden Ear Awards is the annual feature in which our staff and freelance writers choose those components that stand out from the competition. Some of these components are references that have withstood the test of time. Others are newfound favorites destined to become classics. In either case, the products selected for a Golden Ear Award are special, indeed.

Unlike our Editors' Choice Awards—a compendium of every product we recommend, chosen by consensus of the senior editorial staff—Golden Ear Awards allow each writer to express his individual views on which components he thinks are truly great—and why. The diversity of products selected here reflects not just the industry at large, but also each writer's quest for the absolute sound. **Robert Harley**



STEVEN STONE

ProAc Anniversary Tablette Loudspeaker
\$2200

The ProAc Tablette has gone through nine iterations since it was introduced. The latest version still has that same small, ported MDF enclosure as its forebears. But the current model sports a new 5 7/8" Kevlar-coned midrange/woofer and a 20mm dome tweeter. While still not able to defy the laws of physics, the Anniversary Tablette can play louder, with far fewer signs of sonic distress than earlier versions. Over thirty years ago, when I heard the ProAc Tablettes for the first time, I thought they were exceptional speakers. Not much has changed in the interim. They still have a special magic. Tablettes offer a unique combination of high resolution and musicality that makes them a top contender for desk space if you are looking for a great, small-footprint, high-resolution monitor. (234)

Lynx HiLo DAC/Preamp
\$2495

The HiLo combines a unique feature set with one of the most flexible signal-routing systems I've seen in any DAC or digital preamp. This flexibility stems from its FPGA (field programmable gate array). Virtually any input can be routed to any output. Also any input can be routed to play from any of HiLo's three outputs—line, monitor, or headphones. HiLo simultaneously supports eight digital channels at 192/24 or sixteen channels at 96/24. With the addition of the Lynx LT-USB L-Slot the HiLo also supports USB 2.0 inputs at bit rates up to 192/24 for PCM and 64x (2.8MHz) for DSD. The Lynx HiLo's feature set is far more extensive than anyone needs for two-channel playback, but if you have plans to do any transfers from vinyl or tape or want to try some high-quality digital recording, the HiLo's inclusion of a 192/24 analog-to-digital converter and eight-channel capabilities makes for a cool, great-sounding, Swiss Army knife of a DAC/preamp. (234)



Mytek Stereo192-DSD DAC
\$1595

The Mytek Stereo192-DSD comes in three versions. The differences involve ergonomics and cosmetics. The "standard" version is available in two finishes, silver and black. The black chassis Stereo192-DSD has front-panel volume-level LEDs below the LCD panel, while the silver version has none. The "Mastering" version has a front panel similar to the black standard version, but instead of an analog pass-through it substitutes a dedicated DSD input for 128x (5.6MHz) files (currently only accessible via a PC-based computer). Although the Mytek Stereo192-DSD is extremely neutral, it does have more than one sonic personality. The upsampling option, as well as the two PCM filter choices, made a noticeable difference in how it sounds. With lower-bit-rate sources, such as MP3s and audio from video streams, upsampling delivered superior low-level definition, image solidity, and better pace. But with higher-resolution digital files the non-oversampling native rate was superior. If you need a DSD-capable DAC with a FireWire interface (which can be attached to any Thunderbolt connection via an adapter) the Mytek is the only game in town, so far. (234)

