

AUDIO ROUND-UP

Every issue, our audio expert *Nick Renshaw* takes a look at the best new audio and video products to help you get the most out of recorded classical music

MUSIC CHOICE

PERSONAL MEDIA PLAYER Sony Walkman NWZ-A845 £145

Apple's dominance in the personal media player's department is down to one factor – user experience. From its intuitive, well-designed players, through to its lucid music management iTunes desktop software, together with the extensive range of digital music content offered on its online store, no other manufacturer comes close to matching its complete experience. So much so, that other music players tend to get wrongly ignored.

Sony's Walkman range is a case in point but I've gone on record to say these flash memory players are, sonically, superior to similar models from Apple. And its latest 16GB model, the A845, is another superb sounding player that goes up against the iPod Nano. The A845 features a considerably larger 2.8-inch OLED (Organic LED) display that's sharp enough for watching videos, battery life is an impressive 29 hours compared to the Nano's 24, while it supports high-quality content loaded from BBC iPlayer. Unfortunately, while it measures a wafer-thin 7.5mm thick and is eminently pocketable despite being larger than the Nano, it can't hold a candle to its rival's slick design. The same goes for its control system.

There's no scroll wheel to briskly skim through your music collection and its directional mechanised pad isn't as effective as it could be, especially when careering through Sony's version of cover flow (searching by album covers).

But there's no disputing the A845's fine audio performance. It arrives with easy fitting noise-cancelling



headphones worth £70 that do a tremendous job blocking out unwanted outside sounds.

Sonically, these flash memory players are superior to Apple

Sadly the three noise-killing modes to suit your environment only work with the bundled earphones but they

still deliver an assured and weighty sound with plenty of fine detail. If audio quality is your top requirement then the A845 should be heading up your shortlist. However, for an overall seamless user experience it's the Apple iPod Nano every time. www.sony.co.uk ★★★★★

HEADPHONES

Bowers & Wilkins P5 £250

In the previous issue of *BBC Music*, B&W expertly delivered a hi-fi sound to computer-stored digital music with its breathtaking PC speakers, the MM-1. This month, it's the turn of iPod/iPhone/personal media player users to receive the audiophile treatment with the equally impressive P5 noise-cancelling headphones. Kudos goes to B&W for shoehorning a sophisticated sound into such compact cans. I particularly love the retro-style softened square shape of the ear pads – these are couched in fine leather for a cushioned lie on the ears – but even more impressive is the depth and spatial awareness the P5s bring to compressed and lossless digital music. Undoubtedly the audiophile's choice for listening on the move. www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk ★★★★★



SPEAKER SYSTEM

IXOS Divo £250

Because it bundles a docking station, this affordable compact 2.1 music system will be seen predominantly as a speaker set-up for your iPod. However, the Divo is a versatile system and can be connected to your TV via phono cables, to boost your flat panel's weedy audio performance. The cylindrical active subwoofer (this houses the built-in amp) is a well-made solid piece of kit but the same can't be said of the mini towers and iPod dock – these have far too much plastic in evidence. And while your TV's sound is greatly intensified, with voices and dialogue having particular presence, I think it's better suited to playing music via your iPod. www.ixos.co.uk ★★★★★