

REVIEW

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IsoTek

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INTERVIEW

Keith Martin – ISOTEK Founder, Managing Director

“We were driven by our desire to make something better, to design mains conditioning components that improve sonic definition and detail without the dynamic restrictions commonly introduced by products already on the market.”

Keith Martin, founder and managing director of IsoTek, talks whether they have been successful in that.

www.isoteksystems.com

This is how Keith Martin recalls IsoTek’s first months:

The early days were chaotic, but great fun. I remember making the first 50 IsoPlugs (a plug-in noise suppressing device) on my kitchen table; the larger products were assembled on the landing upstairs. We were driven by our desire to make something better, to design mains conditioning components that improve sonic definition and detail without the dynamic restrictions commonly introduced by products already on the market.

„Pulse”, Autumn 2011, s. 4.

This dream soon became reality and the company that was founded in 2001 started to grow fast. IsoTek’s first product was the Substation, a modular power conditioning component that introduced the company’s innovative thinking and solutions to the audiophile world. It was soon followed in 2002 by the Mini Sub, an affordable, six-way conditioning unit. By 2003, it was clear that in order to progress the company needed to restructure. Manufacturing was moved to a 2,500 sq ft industrial unit. This was where a new generation of ‘GII’ IsoTek products was readied for launch in early 2004. Around this time, IsoTek began working with Nordost, the highly regarded cable manufacturer. The idea was simple: to create a



mains conditioning component to be sold under the Nordost brand. The result was the Thor. As Keith recalls, to keep up with order demands they were working over 16 hours a day.

Despite this hectic pace, IsoTek found the time to design two flagship products, the Titan and Nova reference-level conditioners. One was tailored for power amplifiers, the other for preamplifiers and source components. The Titan, sporting Direct Coupled Design technology, was launched in 2005. As in any well-managed company, design concepts and solutions developed for flagship products over time filter down way to less expensive product lines, like the EVO3 series. In 2011, IsoTek launched an upgraded version of the Titan mains conditioner called Super Titan, the first product in the flagship Ultra Reference range.

We met Jonathan Brooks-Martin, IsoTek International Product Training & Sales Manager and Keith's brother, during a recent presentation in Chillout Studio, one of audio salons in Krakow (see <http://www.highfidelity.pl/@main-2054&lang=> ; the description of Chillout Studio can be found <http://www.highfidelity.pl/@main-2054&lang=>). This time we talk with IsoTek's chief of chiefs, Keith.



Wojciech Pacuła: Tell us please, how IsoTek was born, when and where.

Keith Martin: The IsoTek concept was an idea that I had from overviewing the market of audio accessories. It seemed that there were fundamental flaws with existing so called power cleaners, many simply taken from other applications rebadged and sold as an audio solution.

We were a small talented group of music fans with an eye for innovation and a passion for great sound. I designed the IsoTek logo and decided to form a company with a singular purpose: to deliver power filtering products that were more effective than the inadequate solutions available at the time. IsoTek was started in England, Hampshire, by Keith Martin, the IsoTek trademark was registered by Keith Martin in 2003 although the company had been running in a very small way for a few years before. IsoTek stands for Isolation Technology, we

keep every single connected component free from pollution with each having its own dedicated clean power filtered supply (Aquarius, Sigmas, Titan...)

What was your personal reason to start such a company?

IsoTek was started from a desire to do something better. We were driven to design mains conditioning components that improve sonic definition and detail without the dynamic restrictions commonly introduced by products already on the market. To remove the noise on the mains line without removing the soul or emotion from the performance. To open the sound with perceived extended frequency range and openness with increased atmosphere.

How do you persuade the customers that clean power is important?

The first input into any audio or AV system is electricity. It flows through the system, utilised by each component in turn to create the signal that eventually moves the speakers' drive units or delivers the pixels on-screen. What we see and hear is ultimately fashioned from, and by, mains electricity - it is the 'raw material' from which the 'art' is created. Without power no component will work, not even the best products in the world, but the quality of the power will have a fundamental effect on performance. Power is the foundation of any good sounding audio system.



Are there reliable measurements to back up such a statement?

All of our products are tested for function, electrical measurements. Extensive listening tests are also carried out, as it is a fact that a paper capacitor will measure the same as a polypropylene capacitor, but can sound different in an audio circuit, so listening tests are vital.

The products are then tested for maximum compatibility with third party equipment - we cannot claim that IsoTek works with everything, as we've not listened to every single audio component in every single configuration in the world - I don't believe anyone has. But we can say that we've travelled the world extensively conducting product training and A/B demonstrations and we've not failed to improve the sound of all audio systems IsoTek has been used with.

We have independent tests from a Cambridge testing facility dB Technology, but perhaps the most relevant for your article is an independent test by British Audio Publication Hi-Fi News (see http://www.isoteksystems.com/auto_images/review_pdfs/46.pdf).



Why so many people do not “believe” in special power cords etc.?

The simple fact is there are a lot of poor sounding solutions that are spurious and overpriced. It was this that lead IsoTek to design and produce our EVO3 Premier power cable, which uses high purity materials to produce a sub 100 EURO cable that out performs cables costing several times its price. Here are some independent review comments:

“This lead offers a level of performance that competes with considerably more expensive cables... so effective and such good value for money that I now have three!”

Tony Bolton, “Hi-Fi World”

“The IsoTek EVO3 Premier power cable is a bit of a no-brainer as far as I am concerned – the benefits of high-end power cable design, but without the high price. Recommended!”

Jerry Jacobs, “Hifi Pig”

“A distinct cleaning up of the sound... more space, lower noise, greater resolution and a much greater sense of musical flow... highly recommended and particularly good value for money”

Jason Kennedy, “Hi-Fi Choice”



Could you tell us more about your strategy in designing power cables? Do you use a certain gradation?

Our strategy for producing anything first starts with understanding what we're trying to achieve, using the best components or materials that we can, and then applying suitable design and engineering to give a result that is the best possible at the given price point. Of course small compromises need to be made for low cost solutions, but these decisions are carefully weighed up. We also work to a strict build of materials and labour element when pricing so that the product or cable is always very fairly priced. For example EVO3 Premier uses 6N OFC copper, silver plated conductors, FEP (Teflon) dielectric, we protect this dielectric by packing the cable with cotton this not only preserves the dielectric constant but also helps against microphony. We then terminate with solid copper 24ct gold plated connectors. We realised that a considerable amount of time would be spent in the termination process, so we tooled up our own connectors to apply by a manufacturing process, so we don't compromise on performance, but save the customer considerable labour costs. In most cases just the connectors alone would cost more than our fully finished EVO3 Premier.

We would say that EVO3 Premier is the lowest grade power cable that you should use. If you're using the cheap black cables that came free with your equipment you're already holding back the performance of your audio system.

So lets weigh up the challenge. We cannot do anything about the cable from your home to the power station, and to be honest there is less resistance in the power running over pylons (due to the very high voltages) compared to a dirty connector in your home. It is when the power steps down to 230V that our work must begin. A good

quality power cable from the wall socket is important as we don't want to limit things further, high amperage is often beneficial - this should be connected into an IsoTek conditioner, we can then remove Common Mode and Differential Mode noise. Then using our cabling we can preserve this. As we've said Premier is such a great cable for the money it should be the least you should do.



How do your top power conditioners work? Are they similar to products from Accuphase or PS Audio?

We have the greatest respect for Accuphase and PS Audio. We design our unique circuits from the ground up, IsoTek offers unique solutions with a very strong focus on preserving and improving the sound of all audio systems. We offer both passive and active solutions and have just relaxed Mosaic Genesis, perhaps the most interesting hybrid power conditioner yet.

Any special advice to “High Fidelity” readers?

Assemble an audio system on strong basic principles, not marketing or media hype. Don't forget the room that it is placed within. A good quality rack, and good quality input power. Try to run a dedicated spur, a single line to your audio system. From here you have a good foundation point. We have a useful Set-Up CD that will enable you to get the best from your

audio system too through correct loudspeaker placement. We designed it to help our international product trainers Set-Up and fine tune audio systems prior to demonstrations, its also been used extensively at Hi-Fi Shows by other manufacturers too!

10 MUST-LISTEN ALBUMS

Could you list 10 albums that “High Fidelity” readers should listen to and tell us why?

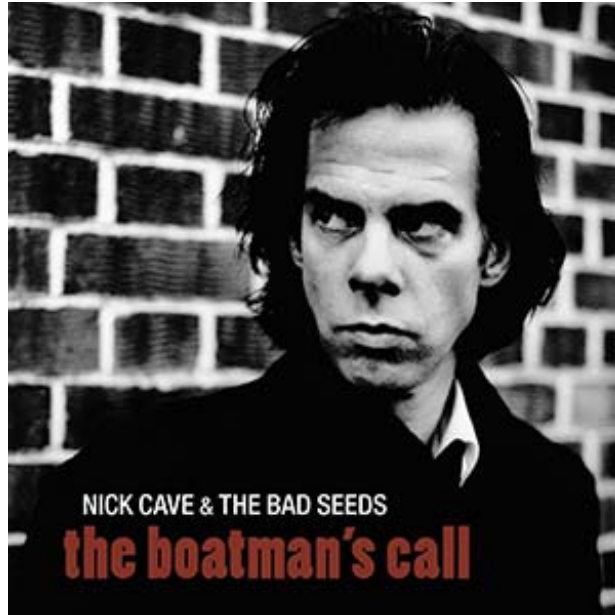
Firstly a word of warning, I listen to lots of different music and have quite an eclectic taste. Your question is very tricky as I've probably close to 6000 albums mostly on vinyl. I've tried to select 10, which cover different styles that perhaps your readers might not yet have heard of, some I'm sure have. Unfortunately I ran out of space for the latest Lana Del Rey album *Ultraviolence* that I'd also suggest buying too... (see a Polish review <http://gameplay.pl/news.asp?ID=86560>). It will be used in some IsoTek demos sometime in the future!! So in no specific order...

Antony & The Johnsons: *I Am a Bird Now*

Beautiful, haunting baroque pop that perhaps is a little sinister at times. On this distinctive album the music grabs a hold of you and just doesn't let go.

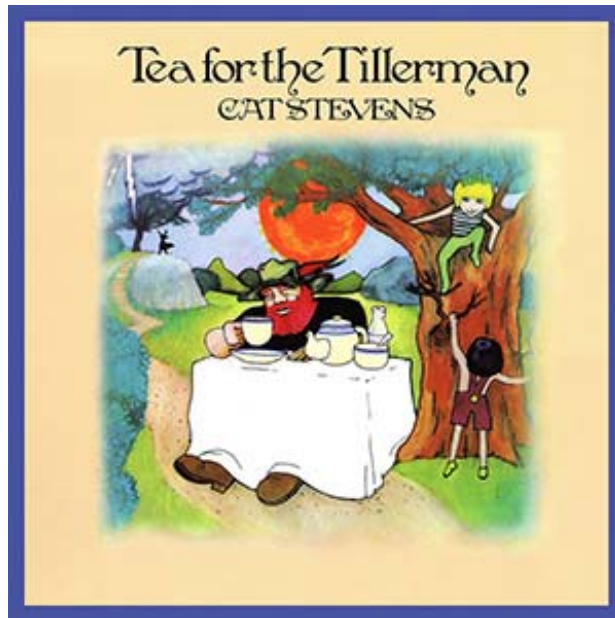


Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds: *The Boatman's Call*
Sombre and minimalist, an album that reflects on personal relationships and spiritual yearnings, it remains one of my favourite Nick Cave albums.



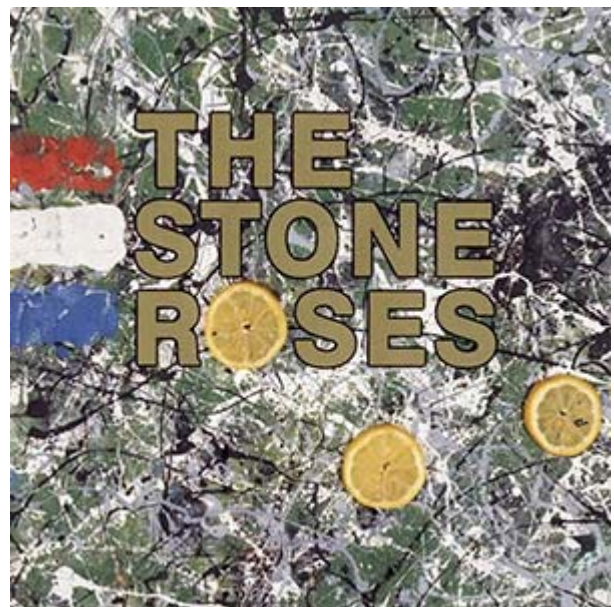
Cat Stevens: *Tea for the Tillerman*

This is well known and a classic and includes many of Stevens best known tracks.



The Stone Roses: *The Stone Roses*

A pioneering English group of the 'Madchester' movement in the late 1980s. This is their debut album released in 1989, just fantastic nostalgic memories of my youth!



Goldfrapp: *Felt Mountain*

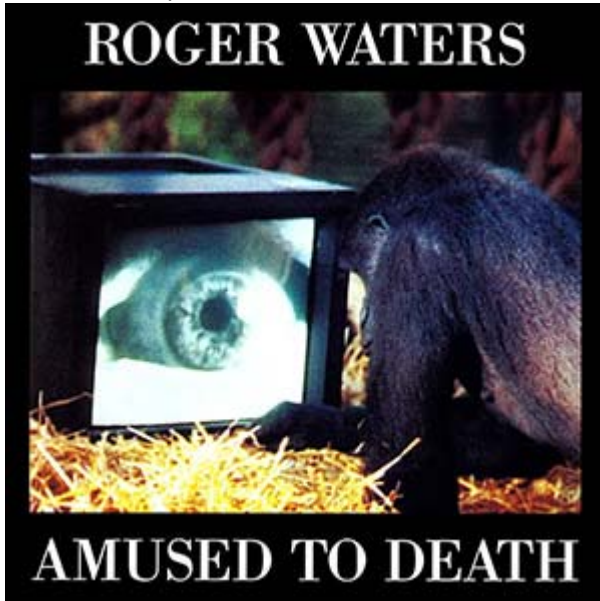
A juxtaposition of shuffling drum beats and hushed vocals coupled with crying analogue synthesizers, seven chords evoke amazingly strong images of all things past but remains undated and fresh.



Roger Waters: *Amused to Death*

This concept studio album by former Pink Floyd bassist and song writer Roger Waters explores his disillusionment with modern western society, specifically the influences of television and mass media. Recorded in Q Sound, this stereo album gives full surround sound effects. If you like The Wall, and you like Waters lyrical style then you'll love this, the recording is stunning! [Soon it will be released again

by Analogue Productions on vinyl and SACD/CD; see more information <http://www.elusivedisc.com/Roger-Waters-Amused-To-Death-200g-2LP/productinfo/APLP468761> and <http://www.elusivedisc.com/Roger-Waters-Amused-To-Death-SACD/productinfo/APSA468761> –ed note].



Rimsky-Korsakoff: *Scheherazade* (Reiner & Chicago Symphony Orchestra) LSC 2446

This is a ravishing and romantic approach that will leave you breathless. It is my favourite interpretation of Scheherazade as well as being a bit of an audiophile classic.



Neil Young: *Unplugged*

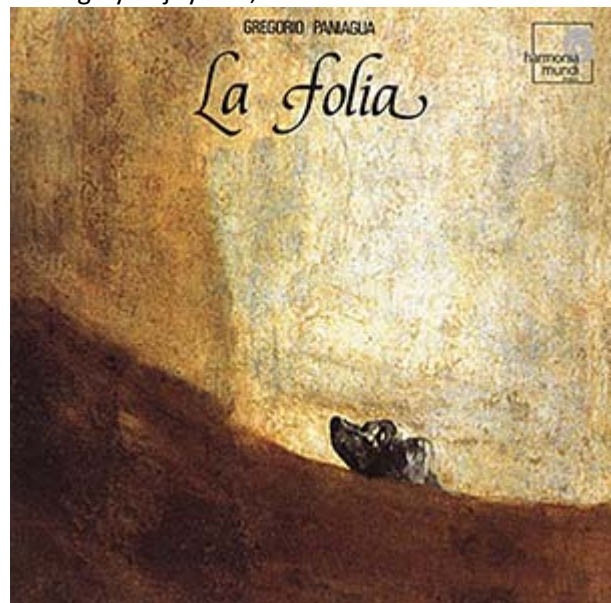
Part of MTV's 'Unplugged' series which captures

classic Young tracks in a laid back acoustic way. I never tier of this album and as my system has improved over the years so has the detail and atmosphere in this recording.



Gregorio Paniagua: *La Folia De La Spagna* (Harmonia Mundi)

A folia is apparently some sort of mad dance, this statement perfectly summarises this album! Consisting of Spanish dance melody ranging from Renaissance, Baroque to ultramodern variations with jazz rhythms, including chainsaws, pistols, birds and automobiles! The performance is excellent, the music bizarre, but fun... not much compares. Thoroughly enjoyable, time after time after time.



Air: Moon Safari

Described as psychedelic, or downtempo space pop, with a progressive rock twist, this is the debut studio album by French music duo Air. I enjoyed this album from the first note and now avidly buy anything released by the group. Virgin Suicides a score created for Sofia Coppola is also fantastic. I recommend both, even though this takes my music selection to 11 or maybe 12!

