



HANDS-ON WITH

HIGH-RES AUDIO

It promises to revolutionise the music you listen to every day, but is high-res audio really the big deal it's made out to be?

Here at T3, we often wax lyrical about high-res audio – what we consider to be the ultimate way to listen to the music we love. High-res audio comes in all shapes and sizes, and in all manner of file types, whether it's 24-bit at 96KHz or 192KHz, Direct Digital Stream or WAV, and there's a huge variety of ways to access high-res files and listen to them.

You can, for instance, buy an amplifier specially designed to play back those files to the best of their ability, and pop it next to the rest of the audio gear in your lounge. There are pocket-sized, iPod-style players, too, giving you high-res audio wherever you go; and you can buy headphones made specifically to wring every last bit of detail from those tracks. It really is a revolution in music, in much the same way that 4K video is right now. But ears are much more forgiving than eyes – it's a lot easier to tell the difference between DVD and 4K, than it is a crunched-up MP3 versus a 96KHz 24-bit FLAC. So what we wanted to do was get some of our readers together in one place, let them listen to their favourite tracks in the highest-quality formats, then get them to tell us what they think about high-res audio.

KIT LIST

- Naim UnitiLite amplifier allied to Kef LS50 speakers
- Chord Electronics Hugo TT DAC/headphone amp
- Sennheiser HD800 headphones
- Audeze EL-8 headphones
- AudioQuest NightHawk headphones

READER ONE



Tom Bradley

AGE 29

OCCUPATION Freelance musician

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT HIGH-RES AUDIO NOW?

The audio sounded fantastic, though I do wonder if the untrained ear could tell the difference. I'm fairly sure my wife wouldn't notice, but then again she can barely tell the difference between SD and HD TV! Comparing FLAC files to Spotify, there was an obvious change in smoothness and depth to the sound. My favourite moment was reclining on the sofa, listening to the Eagles' *Hotel California* through the speaker system, laughing because I was hearing nuances I'd never heard before, despite hearing the song probably a thousand times.

IF YOU COULD TAKE AWAY SOMETHING, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

The Naim receiver – it's such a great piece of kit. I'd love to try it with my own hi-fi set-up at home to see how it compares.

“My favourite moment was reclining listening to Hotel California”

TOM BRADLEY, T3 READER



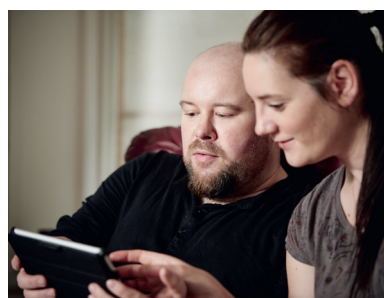
Is high-res audio worth the effort? While some of the more 'alive' readers discussed this, others continued to wait for the caffeine hit



Epic-sounding or not, anodised pink headphones aren't for everyone, unless you're the type of person who has extreme fashion credentials



Let there be no bones about it, high-res audio does sound amazing



You can enjoy great-sounding music without anyone knowing about it



READER TWO



Sammy Maine

AGE 26

OCCUPATION Music journalist

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT HIGH-RES AUDIO NOW?

I'm always on the hunt for improved listening, so high-res audio is intriguing. As a music journalist, I listen to many genres, and with the Naim amp and Kef speakers I was able to hear each section and every layer clearer than ever before. There were new noises, giving the songs an improved, organic feel, which is only ever a good thing. It was like I was listening to certain songs for the first time, despite knowing them really well – bassy stuff like James Blake and Grimes sounded great! They never distorted, which is often the case with bass-heavy songs.

HOW IMPORTANT IS QUALITY OF MUSIC TO YOU?

It's crucial – with more of us listening to condensed MP3s and streaming files, we're losing the magic that originally happens in the studio. High-res audio is bringing some of that magic back.

READER THREE



Dan Haim

AGE 41

OCCUPATION CGI animator

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT HIGH-RES AUDIO NOW?

I vaguely knew that high-res audio was the equivalent of 4K TV, with the depth and richness of vinyl and the convenience of MP3, but I'd never heard it before. If, like me, you love music, I don't think you're missing out without high-res audio in your life. But I would say that if you love music enough to care that you own a good-quality system, you'll appreciate the improved quality of the music you love listening to. The random tracks we played did sound beautifully crisp and rich, whether we listened to them sat in front of the rather splendid Kef speakers, or via the more solitary experience of a pair of headphones.

DO YOU THINK HIGH-RES AUDIO IS WORTH THE EFFORT?

Yes, absolutely – once you've tasted the best, you can't go back; and in our 'upgrade' consumer culture, it's natural progression.

READER FOUR



Louise Jones

AGE 37

OCCUPATION Nurse

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT HIGH-RES AUDIO NOW?

Having only ever listened to music through an ordinary hi-fi system, a tablet loaded with high-res tracks was a bit of a revelation – being able to access all that music in one place. To me, high-res audio is how you'd compare cartoons made now to ones made 60 years ago: everything is clearer, more vibrant and – in turn – more watchable. High-res audio enables you to appreciate the original recording – every part of every instrument used, the technical skill of a vocalist, the post-production and so on. It's like a diamond that's been polished.

IS HIGH-RES WORTH THE COST AND EFFORT?

I love to dance to music, so as long as I can hear it, it's good for me; I don't need to spend money on enhancing what I'm hearing.

Thanks to all the gang at Audio T in Bristol (www.audio-t.co.uk): they've got some cracking high-res audio kit.