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Tannoy Revolution XT8F | Stereo speakers | £1300

There's a Revolution in the air

Tannoy's new Revolution XT range has made quite an impact. The XT6F floorstanders (£1000) waltzed away with a test win in our May issue, while the XT6 standmounters delivered a strong showing the month before. Having spent a considerable amount of time with the new XT8Fs, we think they're arguably the best of the bunch.

In essence, these are just larger 6Fs, using an 8in (20cm) version of Tannoy's dual concentric driver rather than the 6in version. Tannoy has put a lot of work into this latest generation of drive unit, honing just about every aspect of the design from the motor system to the tweeter waveguide in an attempt to push performance standards higher.

Smart finish

By putting the tweeter in the middle of the mid/bass driver, integration is improved over the separated arrangement used in most rivals, as is the time alignment of the drive units and uniformity of dispersion. In the XT8F, a dedicated 20cm bass driver augments the dual concentric's output. The additional unit comes into play below 250Hz.

We think Tannoy has done a great job with the cabinet. It's solid and smartly finished, though with a volume of almost 50 litres it's pretty big. There are two finish options: Medium Oak and our review pair Espresso (pictured), which is a dark walnut. We think both look smart.

There's more to this 108cm tall cabinet than just crisp edges and angled sides (to reduce the build up of internal standing waves). Tannoy has designed a coupled cavity bass reflex system to optimise low-frequency performance. A downward-firing port exits into the gap between the base of the cabinet and plinth.

Power and precision

When we start listening, it's obvious the work has paid off. We begin with Hans Zimmer's *Time (Inception OST)* and discover the Tannoys are capable of producing oodles of low-frequency information. Not only is it deep, it's delivered with real power and precision. There's plenty of agility here, coupled with a solid punch.



The Revolution XT8Fs are hefty speakers, and they produce a sound to match too

If you place them in a small to medium-sized room - say anything less than 4x4m - then it's possible the quantity of low-end may prove too much. But give them a larger room to play in and the XT8Fs will shine. In a suitably large space, these speakers deliver a scale of sound, loudness capability and dynamic reach that's hard to better for the money.

There's more to these towers than just bass and brawn, though. Move up the frequency range and they're articulate and communicative; alt-J's *Breezblocks* is delivered with enthusiasm and coherence. There's a fine degree of rhythmic drive and



Spaced out

The powerful sound of the Tannoy Revolution XT8Fs may be a little constrained in a smaller room. But give them space to breathe and they deliver a scale of presentation and dynamic reach that is hard to beat.

plenty of attack on offer. Vocals are crisply rendered, lacking nothing when it comes to subtlety and precision. There's a lovely directness to the way these speakers produce sound that just draws the listener into the music.

Tonally, these aren't the sweetest-sounding performers around. You'll have to take care not to partner these Tannoys with anything that sounds overly forward or harsh, because they'll do little to tone these qualities down. But feed them with well-balanced electronics and these floorstanders will deliver appropriately.

We're pleased with the stereo imaging. These speakers shine when placed well out into the middle of our test room and given just a touch of toe-in towards the listening position. Once the Tannoys are positioned with care, their sound stage is crisp, nicely layered and pleasingly solid.

Makes music fun

Given a suitably talented system and a large enough room there are few rivals that match the XT8F's combination of muscle and subtlety. Most of all they make listening to music fun and that, more than anything else, is the reason why we're happy to recommend them wholeheartedly.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Huge scale, with plenty of bass; go loud with ease; excellent build and finish

AGAINST Need a larger room to shine; need care in system matching

VERDICT These floorstanders are an excellent buy. Little else at this price can match them

Also consider

Tannoy Revolution XT6F £1000

★★★★★

Smaller, but still with charm of their siblings



System builder total build £3595

CD player

Naim CD5si £995 ★★★★★

A fluid and musical performer that will work perfectly with the Tannoy speakers



Stereo amplifier

Rega Elex-R £900 ★★★★★

Delivers plenty of sparkle for the money, and has expressive dynamics



DAC

Arcam irDAC £400 ★★★★★

Detailed, refined and a really entertaining listen, this is a great value DAC



CD SYSTEM £2670

CD PLAYER

AMPLIFIER

STEREO SPEAKERS

Naim CD5si £1080

Naim Nait 5si £990

Triangle Esprit Titus EZ £600

Reports of the demise of the CD have been greatly exaggerated. It's true that, sandwiched between the ever-growing popularity of streaming services and the vinyl revival, CDs feel like the ignored middle child. But don't dismiss those shiny discs so easily - CD isn't dead. There's still life left in them yet.

What is certain is that there simply isn't an abundance of great-sounding mid-market CD players out there. We had a hard time building the best CD system at this price.

Superbly entertaining

If you're on a stricter budget, the Marantz CD6005 is your best bet at £300. However, for the next step up in performance, you're looking at something like the Audiolab 8200CD at £800 and higher. And at £1080, the Naim CD5si is yet another step up.

It's only natural that we'd want to partner the Naim CD player with its matching amplifier, the Naim Nait 5si. The £990 amp is a former Award-winner, and sonically it's near-impossible to tell where the CD player ends and the amplifier starts.

But when it comes to speakers, we know exactly what will match. The memory of the superbly entertaining Triangle Esprit Titus EZ speakers is still fresh in our minds, and not just because of that gorgeous finish and distinctive shiny tweeter design. Their winning sense of agility, precision and musicality still excites us, and works brilliantly with the punchy, insightful character of the Naim components.

Driven nature

It's an exciting performance. There's power and muscle behind the sound, but the overall impression is of unbridled drive and enthusiasm. The Triangles zip along with glee no matter what song you throw at them, with an accurate ear for rhythm that will keep your toes tapping and your head bobbing.

The Naims are similarly driven in nature, favouring pure enjoyment over transparency. There's a stunning level of detail retrieval: the growling edges of Corey Taylor's voice on *From Can To Can't* are fleshed out, sounding intimate and expressive as the song increases in intensity. Drums hit with impact, guitar strums are layered and sound almost tactile - there's a satisfying sense of weight that underpins the sound.

What we're most impressed by is just how cohesive the system sounds together. The individual strands of The Dead Weather's *60 Feet Tall* are easy to pick out in the larger soundstage, but it takes real skill and precision to sustain the sense of tension and brooding atmosphere present in the song.

A great sonic combination

Crashing cymbals and blaring trumpets have plenty of breathing space to hit their high notes, but the Naims have a slightly rolled-off treble that prevents the sound from getting too shouty or bright. It works beautifully with the Triangles, whose spiky treble is kept in check. This does lend an attacking tone to songs, though, which makes it all the more exciting to listen to.

Dynamic upheavals are handled with authority and subtlety. The system's accurate grasp on rhythms takes any abrupt changes in pace in stride:

Sia's *Chandelier* spins and turns gracefully, and the system never misses a beat as the song slows down and ramps up throughout.

Solid chunks of aluminium

The Naim CD player and amplifier are identical black boxes machined out of aluminium. Not just any aluminium either - very heavy aluminium. There's something about a sturdy, hefty piece of hi-fi that exudes a premium quality feel, and the Naims' construction and finish won't leave you feeling short-changed.

After a while, the discreet finishes make them almost invisible in your room. Only the subtle glow of green LEDs - the simple display, the ring of light around the input buttons, and the volume level indicator - make their presence felt.

The Naims may look plain, but the Triangle Esprit Titus EZ speakers demand attention. They're quite compact speakers, but they make a big impact. The smooth finish - in either walnut, black or white - is impeccable and feels of a much higher quality than a £600 price tag would otherwise suggest. The pointy, horn-loaded titanium tweeter adds some much-needed glitz and style to this system.

Full bodied

We've long admired the CD5si's manual swing-drawer mechanism. It makes loading CD discs that bit more involving. The drawer opens and shuts smoothly and silently, and the CD player reads the disc the second the drawer is closed.

Don't forget to unscrew the transit bolt holding the drawer in place (it's underneath the unit), otherwise it won't open. You also don't want to lose the magnetic puck that goes on top of the discs to hold them in place. The CD simply won't read the disc if it isn't there.

The only connections on the Naim CD5si are a pair of RCA outputs and a DIN connector, which connect straight into either the DIN or any of the three line level inputs available at the back of the Nait 5si amplifier. A DIN cable is helpfully included in the box.

It'd be nice if there were some digital outputs alongside the analogue ones, as it takes the upgrade potential out of the equation. There's no power supply input either - an unusual choice for Naim. However, there is a 6.3mm headphone port on the amplifier's front panel.

UPDATE WITH THIS:

Tannoy Revolution XT8F £1300

★★★★★

If you have a bigger room, you'll naturally want a bigger speaker. While the Triangles have a surprisingly large reach that you might not expect from their petite size, they're no substitute for a pair of floorstanders.

The new Tannoy XT8Fs are astounding. They handle big-scale dynamics with grace and agility, while subtle detail is delivered effortlessly. The depth of bass they dig up is thunderous, but never flabby.

Yes, they're double the price of the Triangles, but the sound quality is a leap forward.



TURNTABLE SYSTEM £2900

TURNTABLE

AMPLIFIERS

STEREO SPEAKERS

Rega RP6/Exact £1000

Rega Elex-R £900

Tannoy Revolution XT6F £1000

There's something about the act of playing a record that still feels like hi-fi nirvana. The tiny, explosive pops and rustling crackles, the delicate operation of placing the needle on to the groove, the way the black vinyl record catches the light when spinning - they bring about the rose-tinted nostalgia in all of us, whether you've owned a turntable system before or not.

The Rega RP6/Exact has been one of our favourite and most coveted turntables for years, and the superb Elex-R works so seamlessly with it we wouldn't dream of separating them. This Rega combination is so good, we kept auditioning speakers with them until we hit the right pair. It's not that the speakers weren't any good (they're all five stars), but it's just finding that one pair that sounds just right.

Ridiculously good

For instance, the B&W 685 S2s sounded rich but bottom-heavy with the Regas; Dali Zensor 3s were lively, but we wanted greater subtlety; the agile and attacking Triangle EZs nearly got the job until we realised their excitable treble wouldn't always play nicely with the Rega's slightly lean character.

And then we heard the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs, and we had our system. These floorstanders - apart from having the obvious advantages in delivering a large scale of sound and being able to hit bass notes while maintaining an articulate, enthusiastic performance - are ridiculously good speakers for their price.

Nimble and versatile

We start off by spinning Nirvana's *Nevermind* and as the first strains of *Smells Like Teen Spirit* kick in, we know we've got a brilliant system on our hands. The classic early-1990s grunge anthem bursts forward with punchy detail, angry strumming and drums that hit with so much impact that it's actually felt more than heard.

The Regas are terrifically musical and agile, and they zip through the charging rhythm with sheer enthusiasm. They handle all the rhythm changes with accuracy too. The stop and start of notes are incredibly precise, and the abrupt changes in tempo and dynamics are delivered effortlessly thanks to the nimble and versatile Tannoy speakers.

Kurt Cobain's voice is all gravel and hoarseness, and the Rega/Tannoy system doesn't flinch from delivering the full aggression of the vocals as the song reaches its crescendo. It's an attention-grabbing system from the get-go.

The Regas are guilty of a slightly lean character, but there's no brightness in sight. The system also doesn't lack the grunt and depth in the low frequencies - basslines are ferociously taut and punchy. Couple the Regas' authoritative tone with the Tannoy's immense sense of scale and you have the kind of solid, articulate and spacious sound that's unrivalled at this price.

Raw and intimate

Switch to the more soulful, melodic tones of Dusty Springfield's *Spooky* and you'll be swept away by how raw and intimate her voice sounds. Despite the occasional crackles and pops littered throughout the recording, the sound is incredibly clear and forthright. Once again, it's that effortlessly fluid character that captivates us - you'll forget just how hard the Tannoys and Regas are working when the music sounds so good.

This is one good-looking system, and not just because it has a turntable in it, although we can't deny the glossy finish of the RP6 looks utterly desirable. Officially, it comes in the standard red, black and white, but other colours are also available, including our review sample's eye-catching bright green. The finish is excellent, and everything from the RP6's platter to the tonearm is built to the highest standard.

Rega continues its good form with the Elex-R. Build quality is impossible to fault, with a sturdy and hefty metal chassis that some may call functional - but we'd rather call it understated and neat. The red indicator lights contrast nicely against the hulking mass of black, while the buttons click satisfyingly when pressed.

Swift and smooth

The remote that comes as standard doesn't quite have the same authoritative design, but the controls are simple and work intuitively with the amp. Response is swift and smooth.

Completing the picture (and sound) is a pair of classy looking Tannoy floorstanders. They're tall, but the trapezoid shape, while crucial in eliminating internal standing waves, also keeps them slim enough that they don't dominate the room. Tannoy's Dual Concentric driver looks striking as always, and finish is pretty much perfect. We like the little design flourishes such as all the exposed bolts having 'TANNOY' etched on them - all these touches add up and show just how much care and attention has gone into constructing these speakers. The XT6Fs are available in either dark walnut or medium oak finishes.

Don't be scared to release the nerd

This is one system where you'll really want to take time and care when setting up. Don't be afraid to get nerdy here, either. The RP6 has no suspension, apart from three rubber feet that aren't adjustable, so make sure the support is level (nerdy tip: use a spirit level for this), has low resonance and is solid.

The key is to keep the turntable as still, flat and vibration-free as possible. We know from experience that most of us don't have a lot of flexibility in their living spaces, but if you can, position the turntable far away from the speakers to avoid

UPDATE WITH THIS:

Rega Fono MM MkII £200

★★★★★

If you're looking to upgrade this system, you don't need to change your speakers or even buy the next turntable up in Rega's range (the excellent RP8, at £2200). No, all you need is this Award-winning phono stage that will barely make a dent in your hi-fi budget.

The Elex-R's onboard phono stage is great, but the Fono MM MkII sounds even better in every single way. Place the Fono between your turntable and amplifier, and you'll hear a marked increase in detail, dynamics and scale. It adds a touch more punch and muscle, while the wide and tall soundstage becomes even more expansive. It's a small but hugely effective upgrade.





With sales up and nostalgia at a high, vinyl is back again. The **Rega RP6/Exact** turntable system will get you spinning your record collection like never before

vibrations. To go one step further, install a wall stand for even greater isolation.

If you've never set up a turntable before, head to YouTube for tutorials. You'll need to know the tracking weight for the RP6's Exact cartridge (it's 1.75g), adjust the counterbalance so that the tonearm just floats on its own, and don't forget to lock the tonearm in place when you're not using it.

Needle positioning

The RP6 comes with its own power supply, too. Once connected and assembled, plug the RP6 into the Elex-R's rather excellent sounding phono stage (always input 1 on Rega amps). There are four other line level inputs for plugging in extra sources. You get the option to biwire or single-wire the

Tannoy speakers. Once you're set up, you'll start obsessing about being able to position the needle precisely at the start of a track. See? This is the fun part of using a turntable.

Gorgeous system

For those with a vast vinyl collection hidden away in the attic, now's the time to get them down. Spinning your old 33s and 45s on this system will have you listening to records like you've never heard them before.

Vinyl sales have been at their highest in almost 20 years, and we couldn't be happier. The revived interest in vinyl can only be a good thing, and if this Rega/Tannoy combination is your first ever hi-fi system - you couldn't pick a better way to start. It's a gorgeous system.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Articulate and rich detail; clear, spacious sound; excellent build quality

AGAINST Turntable set-up will need lots of care and attention

VERDICT Dust off your vinyl - this system will make you fall in love with hi-fi all over again

Listen with this



Giorgio Moroder - Deja Vu

The Italian groovemaster has enlisted the help of Kylie Minogue, Kelis and Britney Spears, among others, for his 21st studio album - a slick, star-studded mix of disco beats and sparkly pop-tastic electronica