



GRYPHON MIKADO CD PLAYER | GRYPHON DIABLO INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER  
ZINGALI OVERTURE 4 LOUDSPEAKERS | £17,145

# Sigh-fi

Gryphon and Zingali get together and spawn a system... the result looks like a futureworld dystopia and **sounds like God's own stereo!**

**L**os Angeles November 2019. Under dark skies, the city is a vast industrial wasteland. Flames belch out of oil refinery towers and factory smokestacks. Thousands of city lights twinkle in the misty, polluted night air. And flying cars, with blinking blue, red and orange lights, cruise all but silently above the drizzling dystopia.

Barely visible in the distance is a huge, flat-topped pyramidal skyscraper hundreds of floors high. As we get closer, it resembles a mammoth Aztec temple or Babylonian ziggurat. Or perhaps it looks like the headquarters of the replicant manufacturing Tyrell Corporation? Try the Gryphon Diablo integrated amplifier.

The moment you muscle the Diablo out of its transit packaging it hits you: *Blade Runner*. The 1982 sci-fi cult movie has been credited with influencing the look of many subsequent films, but Danish high-end audio? It gets better. Gryphon's statement CD player, the Mikado, precisely mimics the scene in the film where Edward James Olmos' flying squad car (or 'spinner') is guided down to the police HQ's roof top circular landing pad by the flashing blue lights around the perimeter. It's uncanny. Place a CD in the Mikado's top loading transport, secure it with the magnetic puck and thumb the 'close' button. A circular metal plate descends gracefully onto the CD. While this is happening lights flash around the perimeter. Blue.

## HE SAY YOU BLADE RUNNER

I don't know, it might be a coincidence but this is the first *Beautiful System* that looks more like an homage to an 1980s sci-fi flick than a stereo. Gryphon Audio Designs' founder and boss, Flemming E Rasmussen, has degrees in painting, graphic arts and, my guess is, the subversion of traditional hi-fi styling. But even if the cyberpunk school of

industrial design doesn't float your boat, trust me, you'll want to stick around for the music. There is nothing that comes even remotely close to being routine about this system. And that goes as much for the Zingali Overture 4 speakers as it does the front end.

But the front is where we'll start. A perfect exemplar of the engineering philosophy that informs all Gryphon electronics, the Mikado CD player is a dual-mono design based around four dual-differential digital-to-analogue converters with separate regulated power supplies, utilising custom-built toroidal transformers, to prevent interference between the digital and analogue audio sections. The large blue-on-black LED display is housed outside the main chassis and is isolated from the digital audio power supply.

## I NEED YA, DECK

Eye-catching as it is, the kinetic theatre of the transport isn't just for casual entertainment. That motor-driven cover effectively seals the floating mechanism beneath it with the aim of eliminating the effects of external vibration. The Philips CD-Pro2 transport's all-metal chassis is, itself, built on a heavy die-cast metal frame and, along with the balanced-mass 40g clamping puck, further improves isolation. Round the back, the Mikado has both balanced (XLR) or single-ended (phono) analogue outputs and balanced 110 Ohm AES and 75 Ohm S/PDIF digital outputs.

What Gryphon calls its "third generation upsampling technology" claims to shift aliasing noise upwards in frequency so that the upper corner frequency of the digital anti-aliasing filter is more than double that of the standard 44.1kHz sample rate. In the interests of extracting the purest, most unadulterated sound possible, the ▶



**Gryphon Mikado CD player**  
**£6,800**

The Mikado could cut it as a fascinating work of kinetic art, but it's also a stunning CD spinner with breathtakingly pure sound. And not just with comic opera.



**Gryphon Diablo integrated amplifier**  
**£6,100**

An integrated to strike fear into the hearts of even the most ambitious pre/power combos, the Diablo is a mighty amp in every sense. Be afraid, be very afraid.



**Zingali Overture 4 loudspeaker**  
**£4,245 per pair**

From a distance, just another unassuming floorstander. Close up, a thing of considerable beauty that sounds wonderful too. Exquisite and sensitive in all ways.

**“Gryphon Audio Design’s founder and boss has degrees in painting, graphic arts and, my guess is, the subversion of traditional hi-fi styling.”**



□ simple first-order analogue filter uses a single, silvered Mica capacitor.

Timing issues are addressed with independent, specially designed, temperature-compensated crystal oscillators with a claimed accuracy of better than five parts per million. In comparison with conventional 44.1 kHz digital-to-analogue conversion and more rudimentary implementations of upsampling, the asynchronous sample rate conversion in the Gryphon Mikado is claimed to offer greater resolution of fine detail, sharper image focus and extended high-frequency response.



#### YOU'VE GOT SOME NICE TOYS HERE

By any standard, the Mikado shapes up. But as a chunk of desirable high-end hi-fi, it isn't in the same league as the Diablo. Even if you don't think it's the prettiest one-box amp on the planet, there's no denying it's one of the heaviest, most powerful and best specified around.

But then Gryphon's resolute belief that, as a species, the integrated amp is a valid high-end contender reaches back to the launch of its ambitious Tabu integrated, which rubbed uncomfortably against the grain of conventional wisdom at a time when it was felt that the minimum requirement for high-end status was a pre/power combo. Indeed, Gryphon champions the idea that

integration brings compelling advantages to the arena. For example, with separates, the distance between boxes introduces exposed interconnects to the signal path. And some care must be taken with electrical and sonic compatibility. Blindingly obvious maybe, but in a single box, the audio signal path is significantly shorter and compatibility issues are elegantly sidestepped, allowing the designer to allocate a greater portion of the budget where it counts: in the audio circuit.

As with the Mikado CD player, the Diablo is a dual-mono design, and one of truly monumental build. Highlights include massive, overkill power supplies, zero negative feedback, heavy biasing towards Class A, military-spec double-sided copper printed circuit boards, dual Holmgren toroidal transformers, PCB mounted sockets and, for all those sonofabitch speaker loads out there looking for a rumble, 250 watts per channel into eight ohms (though it's worth mentioning now that the ultra-sensitive Zingalis could be driven by a circus flea on a treadmill).

Absolutely no horses have been spared in the making of this amplest of amps. Include, in that, a volume control that has been specially developed by Gryphon for its next generation state of the art preamplifiers. The microprocessor controlled 50-step relay volume

attenuator dispenses with mechanical components, digital circuitry and op amps altogether. Instead, it employs only a select few, handpicked components. At any given setting, only a couple of Welwyn ultra precision resistors are in the signal path; according to Gryphon, it's "the most utterly transparent attenuator ever conceived".

The Diablo's simple touch-panel control panel and software-based menu display allow key functions to be customised, and updated software can be installed via flash memory as it is developed. A fixed level throughput allows the power amplifier section of the Diablo to be re-configured for use with a separate multichannel preamplifier. It means the Diablo's power amplifier can be used in surround applications while keeping its signal path uncompromised for stereo listening. XLR sockets cater for the one balanced source and there are gold-plated phono sockets for the four inputs and two outputs.

#### I'VE SEEN THINGS...

Now, you didn't think we were going to round off this system with an ordinary pair of speakers, did you? No, quite right. The Italian designed and made Zingali Overture 4s (for fourth generation) are about as conventional as square eggs, a visually sumptuous *mélange* of carved, real wood cabinets, oddball compression



**“The very deepest bass has the solidity and impetus to bring the sense of venue alive on live recordings in a way few other systems we’ve heard can match. And the sound projects well into the room.”**

drivers and rather stunning ‘Omniway’ horns. They’re also quite ridiculously sensitive and require only a handful of watts to reach convincing volume levels, which means that the Diablo barely has to flex its little finger, never mind its shirt-splitting biceps.

It invites the question, why such a powerful amp? Surely the Zingalis cry out for single-ended valve circuits where the first watt is deemed the most important. Well, you’d have thought so. But what, on paper, looks like a mismatch of car crash proportions delivers more magic than a Harry Potter convention when you fire it up.

There are two probable reasons. One, Gryphon – while deadly serious about the hi-fi holy grail of preserving signal integrity, with no additions or subtractions – makes no secret of the fact that it also pays meticulous attention to the importance of imaging and ambience and, to this end, employs ultra-wide bandwidth circuit topology. And two, this is an approach the large, weighty Zingalis seem born to exploit. Or, just perhaps it has something to do

with the extensive collection of first and second generation master tapes of studio performances in all musical genres recorded between 1956 and 1976 – the so-called golden age of stereo recording – Gryphon uses as a development reference. No CD or LP, it contends, comes close to these original recordings for dynamics and resolution.

#### **YOU’VE DONE A MAN’S JOB, SIR!**

But whatever the reasons, the results are extraordinary. Here’s a system that takes you straight to the heart of the music. The overall balance is maybe a little more relaxed and lush than we’re used to here at *Beautiful Systems*, but stunningly transparent and informative all the same. The long, tall Zingalis are smooth and tuneful at low frequencies and subtle resolvers of detail through the mid and treble. Their delivery sounds remarkably natural and unforced. The system can conjure up a richly textured and detailed soundscape of scalp-prickling realism and holographic depth. The very deepest bass has the solidity and impetus to bring the sense

of venue alive on live recordings in a way few other systems we’ve heard can match. And the sound projects well into the room, effectively making the enclosures disappear. Voices are natural and unadulterated, music is coherent and brilliantly well timed. Despite the relaxed balance, there’s a presence and sense of vitality to the presentation that grabs your attention and won’t let go.

The Diablo is undoubtedly the star contributor. The vast reserves of pure, stable power it can bring to the party might not be called upon directly, but its speed, precision and authority most definitely are. Teamed with the sublime Mikado and ultra-sensitive Zingalis, it accounts for the ease with which dynamic contrasts are struck; the sense of emotional ebb and flow thus liberated is spellbinding.

So here it is, *Blade Runner* in a box and, quite possibly, the best system on which to play Vangelis’s mesmerising soundtrack. **Just a few words of warning, though: enter a room to listen to this system and you might never leave.** HFC

David Vivian

