

music of the year

Esoteric Exclusive SACD Remasters

With companies using the word 'remaster' as an excuse to push up the volume and push down the dynamic range of rock records of the last 40 years, it's refreshing to find a company that's taking a more considered route. Esoteric (that's right, the same company that makes CD and SACD players) has been digging into the back catalogue and delivering musical masterpieces from the Decca label. These uncompromising remasters – both on CD/SACD and on limited edition 200g vinyl LP – have been introduced to deliver the best possible sound quality on either format.

So far, just four albums have been produced (Falla's *The Three Cornered Hat*, Dvorak's *New World Symphony*, Beethoven *Overtures* and Mozart *Piano Concerto No 20*, three of which have already been reviewed in *Hi-Fi Plus*), such is the time and energy being used to deliver this project with the appropriate gravitas. The master tape was played through Esoteric's D-01 digital converter and a G-0Rb Rubidium master clock generator (and played through Esoteric's Mexcel cables) to provide the best possible signal for the recording. Esoteric (in association with JVC) deliberately made an audiophile recording using audiophile technologies that we can use in the living room... to replay these audiophile recordings.

Manufactured by TEAC Esoteric
 Net: www.teac.co.jp
 Distributed by Symmetry Systems
 Telt: +44(0)1727 865488
 Net: www.symmetry-systems.co.uk



Highly Commended Bowers & Wilkins Society of Sound

Loudspeaker experts B&W have teamed up with Real World Studios and musicians like Peter Gabriel and Martyn Ware to create a vibrant download space where you can obtain albums in lossless CD and 'studio master' quality (24bit, 48kHz). These are downloaded in FLAC, so the compression is more like Zipping picture files than compromising sound quality. Although B&W isn't the first hi-fi brand to deliver CD quality and beyond files online, it's one of the few that doesn't charge premium rates for the privilege, as a £33.95 per annum subscription buys you 21 albums a year curated by Peter Gabriel himself.

Net: www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk

Highly Commended HDtracks

Where B&W's Society of Sound is all about bringing new artistes from around the world into the public eye, the website HDtracks is all about bringing the audiophile and the computer in accord. The site features high-resolution audio files (transferred in a choice of AIFF, FLAC or 320kbps MP3) and features an ever-increasing roll-call of major labels, including most recently Harmonia Mundi. Popular downloads include Robert Plant and Alison Krauss *Raising Sand* (in 24bit, 96kHz), Maazel and the NY Philharmonic's version of Mahler's *Eighth Symphony* (in 24bit, 88kHz) and several audiophile demonstration recordings. The only problem with HDtracks is... it's only available in the US at this time, but if audiophiles in the rest of the world start clamouring for high-quality downloads, it will only be a question of time.

Net: www.hdtracks.com +