

BBC

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# music

## BBC Proms THEY'RE BACK!

Your complete guide  
to the world's greatest  
classical music festival



### PROMS SPECIAL ISSUE

#### Rescuing Reger

Why he deserves a second chance

#### Oh Happy Day!

Gospel music's inspiring story

#### Abandoned arias

How to revive a long-lost opera



# AUDIO

Our audio expert *Michael Brook* takes a look at the best new audio and video equipment to help you get the most out of recorded classical music

## BBC MUSIC CHOICE

### ONE BOX HI-FI SYSTEM Naim Mu-so Qb £595

At the tail end of 2015 I was sent the Naim Mu-so wireless music system (the Mu-so Qb's larger sibling) and was blown away. The Mu-so Qb promises to retain that excellence in a smaller package, but is that possible?

The compact build quality is superb and and the whole feels refreshingly

weighty, due, in part, to the arrangement of its five speakers – including two dome tweeters, two mid-range drivers, and a subwoofer – that have been snugly fitted into the confines of the Mu-so Qb's chassis.

It doesn't disappoint when you take a listen, either, producing an astonishing level of sound. There's plenty of thunderous low-end thump, a pleasing dash of mid-range frequencies and crisp, crystal-clear treble. In fact it's very difficult to

**BOX OF DELIGHTS:**  
Naim's Mu-so Qb produces excellent sound



fault the Naim's performance from a purely tonal point of view.

As you'd expect from a product that plays up its network connectivity, there are plenty of music-streaming options, including Apple AirPlay, Spotify Connect, hi-resolution Tidal services, high quality aptX Bluetooth, internet radio, and uPnP (Universal Plug and Play) – allowing multiple networked devices to seamlessly work together.

Setting up is simple and you can be up and running in minutes. Accessing all of the Qb's myriad features will take more dedication but it's no chore thanks to the Naim app for Android and iOS doubling up as both a set-up tool and a remote control (there's no supplied remote).

With stunning audio performance and a plethora of ways to grab music from wireless sources, or via more traditional means, Naim's Mu-so Qb delivers, and will also save you £300 over its larger sibling.

[www.naimaudio.com](http://www.naimaudio.com)  
★★★★★



**FLEXIBLE:** the iGe handles any genre

in-line controls and feel relatively lightweight. And this goes some way to explaining where the money has been saved.

Plug them in to a sound source, however, and you'll see where the money has been spent, with the well-balanced, refined, but punchy sound. You can trip a lot of earphones up by shifting between musical styles – they'll often be more favourable to one genre or another – but the Grados have no such foibles. These are a great set of earphones for music on the move and are my new benchmark recommendation for under £100.

[www.grado.co.uk](http://www.grado.co.uk) ★★★★★

### AFFORDABLE, ON-EAR HEADPHONES Audio Technica ATH-SR5 £99

A few months ago I took a favourable look at the closed-back ATH-MSR7 hi-resolution headphones. Audio Technica's latest model is a set of on-ear, ultra-portable headphones. The company has put its audio skills to good use, depositing them in a frame that's even more suited to use on the move.

You'd be forgiven for thinking that this would result in a set of 'cans' that sounded compromised in one way or another but that's definitely not the case here. The ATH-SR5s (left)

sound crisp, with plenty of low-end frequencies, although they are possibly a little heavy in the mid-range, but there is nothing to indicate that any corners have been cut to miniaturise them.

The build quality, like the MSR7s, is excellent and they're not branded with the hideous font that marred their stablemate's appearance. In fact, there's little to fault with the SR5s. They're a great-sounding, well-built set of on-ear headphones with a performance that belies their size and asking price.

[www.audio-technica.com](http://www.audio-technica.com)  
★★★★



### HI-FI HEADPHONE AMP Audeze Deckard £599

Designed by BMW Designworks and named after Deckard, Harrison Ford's character in the film *Bladerunner*, Audeze's £599 headphone amp has an industrial-style beauty, with a stark, utilitarian brushed metal finish.

The Deckard is hi-resolution audio ready, thanks to an in-built DAC (digital to analogue converter) that's able to handle 16- to 32-bit music tracks with sampling rates all the way up to 384kHz. For the uninitiated, that's very high-quality

digital encoding. The performance is impressive, to say the least. Even with compressed music sources such as Spotify, the Deckard delivers superb playback, almost as if the streaming service had decided to go hi-res overnight and not tell anyone.

The only downside is the hefty price tag. But if you spend a good deal of time listening to music using headphones, the Deckard does a fine job of diminishing the sizeable gulf between headphone listening and a proper hi-fi speaker set-up.

[www.audeze.com](http://www.audeze.com) ★★★★★



### BUDGET-CONSCIOUS EARPHONES Grado iGe £99

Renowned principally for its on-ear headphones, Grado has more recently been dipping a toe into truly portable audio waters with a range of in-ear models, the GR8e and GR10e. And now it's taken these £300-plus products and distilled some of that audio magic into its sub-£100 earphones, the iGe and iGi models.

The iGe (pictured top right) clearly isn't going to give a £200-plus set of earphones a run for its money in the build-quality stakes, as they use a relatively skinny cable, have a basic plastic set of