

Hi-fi Doctor

In the latest of our new series of advice features our Hi-Fi Doctor visits a reader who has invested a fair sum of money in his hi-fi but is still unhappy with the sound results from his CD player...

How do I make my CD player sound better in my system?

'I started with an all Cyrus system which I am gradually phasing out. Soundwise I like something pacy, tonally rich and with excellent clarity, imaging and dynamics. When it comes to classical, things don't sound precise. I want to base my system around my Krell amp and Nordost cables, which have opened the sound up considerably. Perhaps I need a new CD player; I may change speakers in the future. Help!'

[Doctor]

NAME:

Vernon Hamblin & Phil Wannell

FROM: Unilet, New Malden, Surrey

[Patient]

NAME:

Garry Barton

AILMENT: A system in which it seems the CD player is underperforming

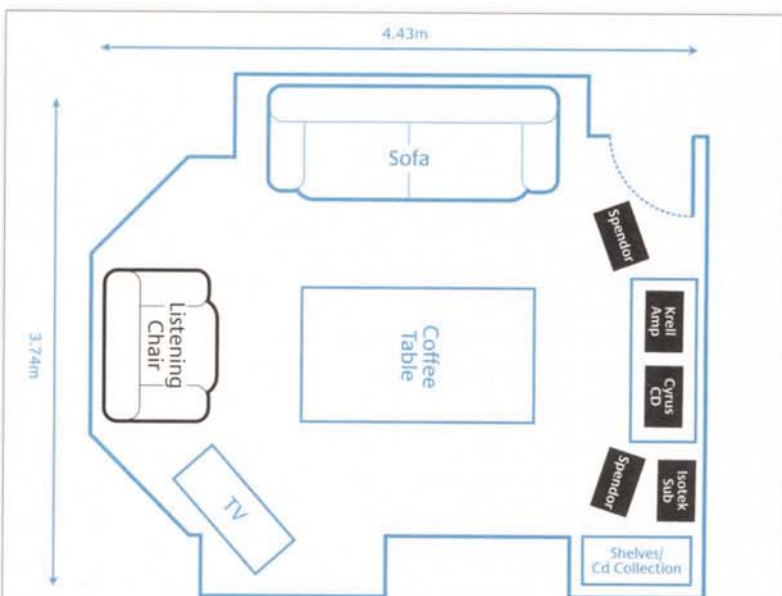




Gary and the Doctors listen in

GARRY'S SYSTEM

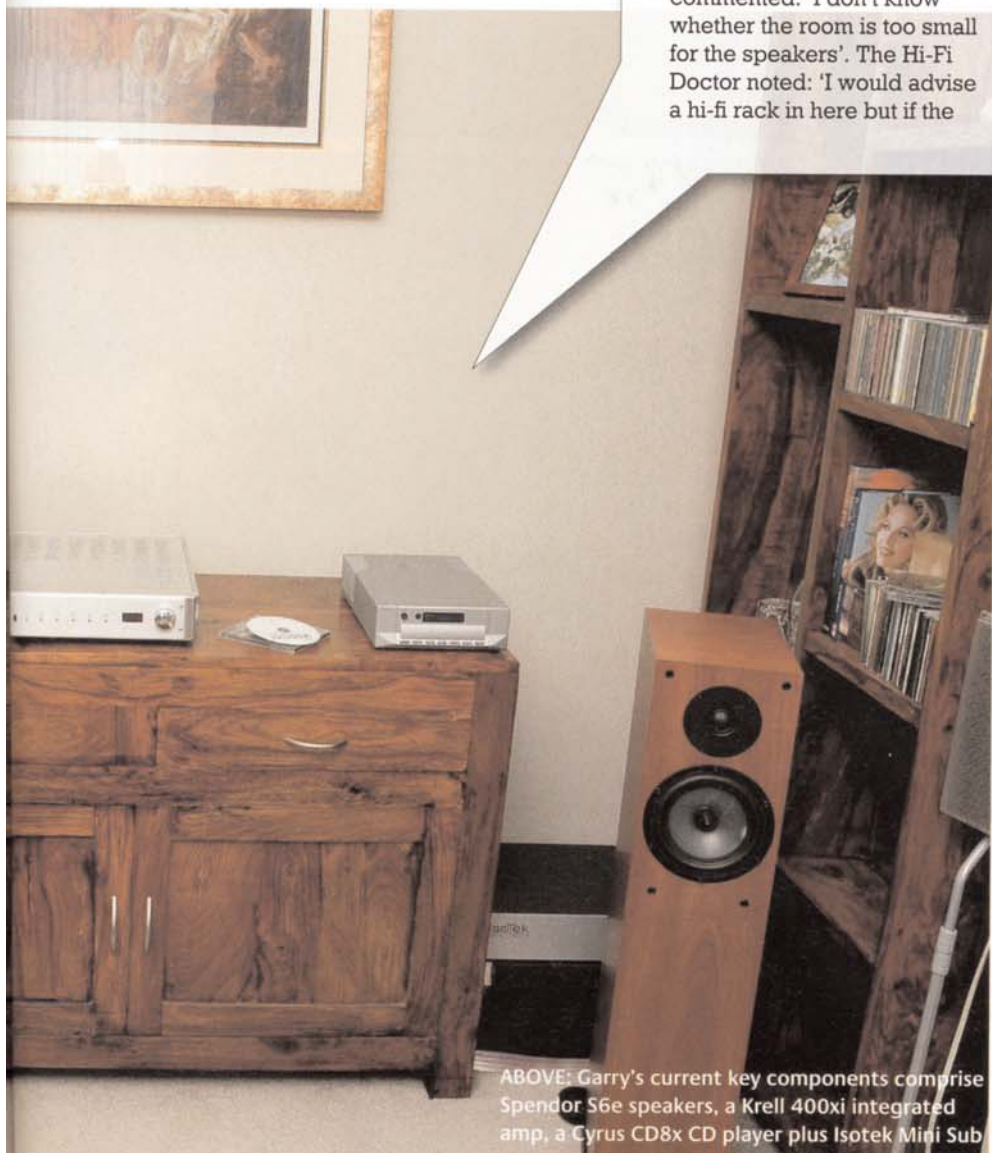
Garry explained: 'In my system I have Spondor S6e speakers going to a Krell 400xi integrated amp with a Cyrus CD8x CD player. I have Nordost Heimdall speaker cable with Nordost Frei interconnects, with one Nordost Visnu power cord from the amp and a Russ Andrews reference power cord from the Cyrus CD player – both going into an Isotek mini sub and Isotek elite mains cable into the mains. As you can see I am trying to make an all Nordost cable loop'.



THE ROOM

At 4.43 x 3.74m Garry's room has some limitations. Garry commented: 'I don't know whether the room is too small for the speakers'. The Hi-Fi Doctor noted: 'I would advise a hi-fi rack in here but if the

room has to stay as is written that's what we've got to work with. The system is facing heavy curtains and that can sometimes overly dampen the sound. The corners that collect bass have things in them – a TV and furniture – so that's OK for our purposes'.



ABOVE: Garry's current key components comprise Spondor S6e speakers, a Krell 400xi integrated amp, a Cyrus CD8x CD player plus Isotek Mini Sub

INITIAL DIAGNOSIS



The Hi-Fi Doctor noted: 'Krell always has an interesting sound and the Cyrus CD player has a neutral sound. Arguably the most interesting part of the system is the speakers but it may end up being the synergy of the system. At first glance all of the cables are all in phase and are wired up correctly but the speakers aren't particularly well grounded. One suggestion would be to house the mains conditioner in the kitchen rather than close to the electronics as it can actually stop some of the current coming through.

The Hi-Fi Doctor said: 'I have to say the spikes on the Spondors aren't the biggest. You could think about putting four 2.5in screws up into the floor and up through the carpet. A good big screw will ground the speakers – it's worth thinking about'. To find out the current capabilities of Garry's system we played Diana Krall's *Almost Blue* and the Pink Panther theme by Henry Mancini and the Doctor noted: 'I'd say the system was laid back considering it's a fast amp, but it's definitely not flat'. ☺

THE TREATMENT

The Doctor noted: 'I don't think it sounds too bad. I think the area we've got missing is the midrange. The high frequencies are quite nicely extended and if anything there's a little too much bass'.

Initially the Doctor measured and repositioned the speakers and checked vertical and horizontals. They were also toed in a tad and we moved Garry's chair a tad to the right. Then the Krall and 'Panther' tracks were played with the Krell amp's volume kept at '50'.

Garry noted: 'The low key piano seems much more defined and the bass is more full'. The Doctor noted: 'Your speakers are five feet apart whilst the ideal distance is at least six feet apart'.

As a further test of the system we took out the Cyrus CD player and brought in the Marantz SA-11 CD player (that also plays SACD format). In addition the Doctor brought in Chord Anthem XLR cables but ran them single-ended. Again we kept the amp at '50'.

Using Krall and 'Panther' again the results were clear. Garry stated: 'The cymbals are more refined on the Krall track and the strings are plucked more finely'. The sound was also notably more dynamic to all those present with the sax showing more body.

With the Marantz SA-11 and Chord cable still in place the Doctor ran the system balanced and played the Krall track again and a classical recording at '50'. Garry commented: 'There's a big difference – balanced is obviously the way to go. The violin's got a lot more "crisp" to it'.

Finally the Doctor played a 1966 Decca recording on SACD of an orchestral version of the Moody Blues' 'Knights in White Satin'. Reproduction was fluid and effortless. Garry was gobsmacked and said: 'Talk about moving up a gear!'



**SEND IN YOUR
HI-FI PROBLEMS IN
BY E-MAIL...**

If you want to contact the Hi-Fi Doctor by e-mail please do yso by sending in your problem to: hi-finews@ipcmedia.com – please mark your e-mail 'Hi-Fi Doctor'. We'll get back to you!

RESULTS & ADVICE

In a little over two hours the CD sound was much more involving with deeper and tighter bass, and much more dynamic without being overpowering. The Hi-Fi Doctor stated: 'As far as I'm concerned the major components of the system must work with £5/m cable and £30/m interconnects. For the speakers why not get a couple of cheap paving slabs and stick them under the speakers and level them. If you like the result then perhaps invest in some nice granite slabs to place under the speakers. As far as I'm concerned if you start putting a lot of exotic cable in it there's something wrong. Garry's initial suspicion was right – it's the CD player'. The Doctor added: 'We've proved this system is capable of so much more with a front end that's commensurate with the rest of the system. If Garry likes the sound of running it balanced he might want to try Siltech cable, Krell CD players or perhaps trial players from Chord, Musical Fidelity or Roksan'.



Adding the Chord XLR cables into Garry's system



The Krell KAV-400 amp that performed at '50' throughout

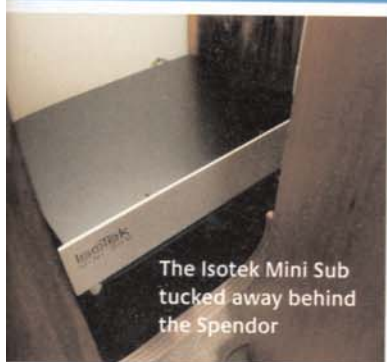


Garry's current Cyrus CD player could be upgraded



Hi-Fi Doctors Vernon Hamblin (left) and Phil Wannell (right) adjust the speaker positions and explain that they are now firing slightly behind Garry's head to pick out the left and right speakers

'I don't think it sounds too bad but the area we've got missing is the midrange. If anything there's too much bass'



The Isotek Mini Sub tucked away behind the Spendor



POSSIBLE PURCHASES



Marantz SA-11 (£2000)

A very musical CD player that also plays SACD and has the stamp of Marantz's technical guru Ken Ishiwata all over it. Great performer for two-channel audiophiles.



Chord Anthem XLR (from £330/m pair)

The balanced lead that we put into Garry's system that performed superbly.

Krell CD players (from £8777)

One suggestion was to pair up the Krell amp with a Krell CD player, budget permitting!

Siltech cables (from £99/m)

Beautiful silver and gold cables from Holland that are chunky and deliver state-of-the-art performance.

...So how is the CD front end & system performing now?

After his consultation with the Hi-Fi Doctor Garry commented: 'I have to say that was superb, especially with the SACD. The balanced was a big surprise for me. Going from single-ended to balanced was the biggest shock. Overall that was very enlightening – I knew the system had potential but I also know it was lacking in a few areas. Now I would definitely not rule out SACD. The backing instruments were really "crisp" compared to being muddled before. There was a major difference in the dynamics. I think if you spend more on the CD player you're going to make more sound. In my opinion the Nordost cables work as they are a leap up from my Atlas Hyper 3s that I started with. Now I'm definitely going to change the CD player and go balanced with the system'.



Can the hi-fi doctor help you?

Yes. Just write in with your hi-fi problem (please include full details of your system, listening room, address, e-mail and daytime telephone number) to: Hi-Fi Doctor, Hi-Fi News, IPC Media, Leon House, 233 High Street, Croydon CR9 1HZ.

Hi-Fi DOCTOR & BADA

Hi-Fi Doctor brings you the answers to your hi-fi problems in conjunction with the UK's top specialist dealers, members of the British Audio-Visual Dealers Association (BADA), who conform to a strict code designed to provide the highest level of demonstration, product knowledge and customer service.

• Special thanks go to Vernon and Phil from Unilet – for more information go to www.unilet.net or call: 020 8942 9567.

