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# Michael Spyres

*The star tenor on his new album of Baroque discoveries*

## COLLECTION

The Magic Flute: the best recordings of Mozart's opera



## PLUS



Sandrine Piau: the soprano invites us on a musical journey



Kitty Whately and Joseph Middleton discuss Mahler



Myra Hess: celebrating the life and career of a piano icon





## REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

## HiFi Rose RS520

The Korean company is making waves in the network music market, and now it's combined all its technological knowhow to build a compelling 'just add speakers' solution

**HIFI ROSE RS520****Type** Network Audio System**Price** £3399**Inputs** Optical/coaxial digital, 3x USB Type A, USB Type B, HDMI eARC, line analogue**Outputs** One pair of speakers, preamp out, optical/coaxial digital, HDMI (for TV)**Networking** Wi-Fi/Ethernet**Streaming services** include Amazon Music, Qobuz, Tidal (with MQA decoding), Roon, Spotify Connect, internet radio, Airplay and Bluetooth**File handling** Audio up to 768kHz/32bit and DSD512, video to 4K**Output power** 250W per channel in 4/8 ohms**Control** via front panel touchscreen, Bluetooth remote, Rose Connect app or web browser**Accessories supplied** Remote handset**Dimensions** (W×H×D) 34.6×12.7×32.8cm**hifirose.com**UK distribution **henleyaudio.co.uk**

There's a certain inevitability about the HiFi Rose RS520. After all, its Korean manufacturer continues to expand the scope of its network audio player range and has recently added a new string to its bow with the arrival of the remarkable-sounding if quirky-looking RA180 integrated amplifier. So a model combining both streaming capability and amplification had to be on the books, and even if the £3399 RS520 isn't its first such product – there's already an all-in-one system in its catalogue, the RS350 also including speakers, even if it doesn't make it to the UK – the ability to buy a system to which you just need add your speakers of choice makes it an attractive buy.

In launching the RS520, HiFi Rose is joining a growing trend in the market, arguably started more than a decade ago by the original Naim Uniti but of late flourishing with the likes of the Audiolab Omnia, Cambridge Audio's Evo models and of course the latest products in Naim's Uniti line-up. There are more, from Linn's Majik DSM to high-end 'network receivers' from the likes of German manufacturers AVM and T+A, and in each case the offering is the same: one-box simplicity, set-up and operation

that's more or less 'plug and play', and sufficient amplifier power and quality to drive everything from compact bookshelf speakers to larger floorstanding designs.

In other words, the ability to replace a whole rack of hi-fi components with one relatively compact unit, able to play both music stored on the home network and online content from streaming services, all controlled intuitively via an app running on the user's smartphone or tablet device. It's not hard to see why these new-generation systems have caught on with hi-fi buyers and music lovers.

**In launching the RS520, HiFi Rose is joining a growing trend in the market, arguably started more than a decade ago by the original Naim Uniti**

The RS520 certainly has all it takes to be a serious contender in this new market. It's smaller than a conventional stereo amplifier at just under 35cm wide, stands less than 13cm tall – in part to accommodate its large, sharp 32cm display, which offers touchscreen control of the unit – and yet

delivers a healthy 250W per channel from its in-house-developed amplification, which is more than sufficient to drive just about any speakers you might use with it.

What's more, it's able to integrate a range of online music services, including Apple Music, Qobuz and Tidal, even mixing and matching between them to create playlists, and also features Spotify Connect, Bluetooth, Apple Airplay and more to keep your music options open. It can be used as a Roon endpoint, for those using that excellent music delivery service, features MQA decoding for music requiring it, such as the high-resolution content on Tidal, and even has internet radio capability built in.

However, even all that only scratches the surface of the capabilities here. An SSD hard drive of up to 4TB can be inserted into a bay in the base of the unit, or you can connect external hard drives of up to 10TB, allowing the RS520 to function as a complete music storage and playback device. You can even plug a USB optical disc drive into it to play your CDs or rip their contents to that storage. Via a USB Type B port you can connect a computer and play music from that; and, as well as music at up to 768kHz/32bit

**SUGGESTED PARTNERS**

The 'just add speakers' appeal of the RS520 makes it simple to install and use. Try it with these ...

**SANDISK**

Adding a solid-state drive, such as this SanDisk model, will enable the unit to function as a complete music centre.

**BOWERS & WILKINS 704 S3**

If you're just adding speakers, the Bowers & Wilkins 704 S3 floorstanders will work well with the RS520's powerful amplification.



and DSD512, it's also possible to play video files at up to 4K (3840x2160 pixel) resolution, either on that large front-panel display or on a TV connected using the RS520's HDMI output. There's also an HDMI input able to accept sound from the TV, using the eARC system, for simple audiovisual integration.

And there's even more scope for connecting external audio sources, should the extensive range of facilities here not quite serve your needs. The RS520 has optical and coaxial digital inputs, as well as a single pair of sockets for a line audio source, and even has preamplifier-level analogue outputs to allow it to be used with external power amplification – although why you would want to do so, given the capability of the internal amplification here, escapes me.

Control is via either that front-panel touchscreen or the Rose Connect app already mentioned, both methods offering a huge range of set-up and operation functions, and the RS520 also comes with a conventional remote-control handset. Well, almost: the connection here is via Bluetooth, not the more familiar infrared, meaning that the handset can operate the unit without the need to be in 'line of sight'.

As is usual with this company, there's a range of frills here, such as the ability of the display to show a complete equaliser feature-set, all operated by touch, or emulate a conventional-looking amplifier. However, the really important stuff is that this is all built on the company's Android-based ROSE OS platform, which does all the audio processing and decoding, and uses the flagship ES9038PRO digital-to-analogue conversion from ESS, enabling all those hi-res music formats to be handled in their native form for ultimate sound quality.

The RS520 is also built to a remarkably high standard, its all-aluminium casework being both solid and stylish, and is available in either natural silver or black finishes.

**PERFORMANCE**

While it's easy to get a bit dazzled by the huge range of facilities and adjustments the RS520 allows, this is very much a unit that puts its money where its mouth is by offering a superbly integrated and captivating sound across a wide range of musical genres. It has all the definition and detail to make a simple recording of a solo performer or small ensemble thrill with its insight and ambience, plus that effortless power to make orchestral pieces

convincingly dynamic and weighty. Play a close-focused piano recording such as Junyan Chen's 'It's Time' recital (Linn) and the sound of the instrument in the somewhat dry acoustic of the Royal Academy's recital hall puts the focus firmly on the playing, the speed and resolution of the HiFi Rose making every note crystal-clear. In a recording such as Matteo Malagoli's 'The Cello at the Montecassino Abbey' (Brilliant) the RS520 allows the more expansive acoustic to wrap around the performances.

Change to Arabella Steinbacher's latest release, Bach and Pärt (Pentatone – see page 38), and the power of the amplification is deployed to bring out all the drama of the latter composer's *Fratres*, with wonderful string tones and taut, impactful percussion, while the Baltimore/Alsop recording of Dvořák's *New World* Symphony (Naxos, 8/08) shows the ability of this compact unit to drive speakers to realistic levels while still maintaining detail, dynamics and that sense there's plenty more to give, making the listening experience both attention-grabbing and reassuringly relaxing. This is an excellent buy, whether you use all its capabilities or just scratch the surface at first, and allow it to expand to open up new listening possibilities. **G**

## Or you could try ...

**The RS520 joins a fast-growing market sector, in which the Naim Uniti Atom is the entry-level model in a three-strong range descended from the original Naim Uniti model.**

**Naim Uniti Atom**

The current Atom is even more compact than the HiFi Rose, at just 24.5cm wide, yet delivers network and online streaming as well as connectivity for external sources including TV sound, and has onboard

40W-per-channel amplification. Find out more at **naimaudio.com**.

**Linn Majik DSM**

Linn's entry-level all-in-one streaming solution is the Majik DSM, which has 100W-per-channel Class D amplification to deliver its streaming, which extends to Tidal, Qobuz, Spotify, Apple Music and Amazon Music as well as network music playback from your computer or NAS. It has built-in HDMI switching for multiple video sources and even a phono stage for a record player. Details at **linn.co.uk**.

**Marantz Model 40n**

If you'd rather your network hi-fi looked more like a conventional hi-fi amplifier, the obvious choice is the Marantz Model 40n. As well as online streaming from Spotify, Amazon Music HD and Tidal, it will also play your music collection and connect to external sources including a record player and TV, and it can even form a multiroom system thanks to its integrated HEOS technology. Find out more about this 70W-per-channel amplifier at **marantz.com**.



## THE GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ...

# Storing and streaming music

Even if you're switching to music streaming services, you probably want some way to keep and access your existing music collection. Andrew Everard offers some options



Leema Audio's Sirius is one of many models designed to simplify ripping, storing and streaming of your music collection

With the seemingly unstoppable rise of network audio devices, from systems and amplifiers to complete set-ups integrated into a pair of speakers, it's never been easier to stream music at the tap of a finger on an app. But unless you want to switch completely to reliance on online services, chances are you'll need a way of storing your existing CD collection for access via a network player, by ripping it to storage on your home network. So how's it done?

Well, the basic elements of storing CDs are twofold: the storage device itself, and how the music is loaded on to it. The first part can come in many forms, from a simple USB hard drive plugged into a suitable player (for 'local storage') to a network-attached storage device (or NAS) connected to your home network hub – at its simplest, the broadband router provided by your internet service provider. These NAS devices come in many forms, depending on the amount of storage you need – always buy more than you think your music collection will occupy – and, plugged into your router, can then allow any network audio device, whether connected by Wi-Fi or Ethernet, to access your music collection.

The most widely used network stores for music are those from QNAP and Synology, simply because they offer simple music-serving configuration, and websites such as [ripcaster.co.uk](http://ripcaster.co.uk) offer a wide range of such stores, as do the usual online electronics retailers. How much storage do you need? Well, sites such as [audioconcierge.co.uk/music-storage-calculator/](http://audioconcierge.co.uk/music-storage-calculator/) offer handy ready reckoners to work that out, from

which we learn that, for example, a 2TB store will hold over 6800 albums in CD-quality lossless FLAC or just under 1000 albums in 192kHz/24bit high-resolution. So something like a Synology DS118 or QNAP TS-131K will do the job more than adequately for less than £250. An alternative, providing you have a player able to accept a USB input to play music, is to use a hard drive plugged straight into it: a mains-powered 'desktop' drive such as the 4TB Elements drive from WD will be more stable than a portable drive powered from your network player.

And how do you get your music on to the drive, whether it's a network or local one? These days computers tend not to have built-in optical disc drives, so a simple USB drive connected to a laptop will do the job, either using the computer's built-in media software or dedicated packages such as dBpoweramp CD Ripper, Exact Audio Copy or Foobar 2000, which offer free 'try before you buy' downloads. The ripped files are then simply copied on to your storage device of choice.

I'm very aware that I've been streaming music for well over a decade, and by now newcomers to this whole world might be shaking their heads and muttering, 'You lost me at local and network storage'. Fortunately there's no shortage of hi-fi hardware out there designed to address such concerns: for example the HiFi Rose RS520 reviewed this month (see page 108), in common with other products from this company, offers its user the option of installing an internal solid-state hard drive on which music can be stored.

The installation is a simple matter of removing a couple of screws to release the cover/hard drive holder, attaching the drive to the cover, and then putting it back in place. Ten minutes and a crosshead screwdriver are all it takes – distributor Henley Audio has a simple 'walkthrough' video at [youtu.be/87V9qBJFFwc](https://youtu.be/87V9qBJFFwc) – after

which the set-up is handled by the product. Connect an inexpensive USB optical drive to one of the ports provided, and you're ready to rip.

Other manufacturers offer a similar option, such as Auralic, for example in its Altair G1 model, and Lumin. The products can also be ordered from a retailer with the storage already installed, or you can just use drives connected to the USB ports provided on the rear of these units.

Naim offers a comparable facility on its Uniti Core, which has a simple slide-out tray, held in place by a couple of thumbscrews, to accept either SSD or full-size HDD storage, plus a built-in disc drive to rip your discs. The Leema Acoustics Sirius is a similar unit, with a drive to play or rip discs and the option of internal storage configured when ordering.

In addition, many of the products designed to play music from network or USB storage also offer the option of adding on a CD drive to rip music. The entry-level Naim Uniti Atom model allows this and can also share music to other players on the home network, while the Uniti Star has a built-in CD drive to play and rip discs. And while some manufacturers, such as Astell & Kern, HiFi Rose and network music server specialist Melco, offer high-quality external drives to rip music to their products, I'd suggest anyone starting out on this path begins with an inexpensive USB optical drive. Spend less than £50 on a device from a well-known brand such as Asus or Hitachi/LG and see how you get on – I'm still ripping very nicely, thank you, with a Samsung drive I bought for about £30 more than half a decade ago. 