

# Greg Chapman of VAL Hi-Fi

by Alan Sircom

This is one of those great stories we rarely get to shout about, especially in the last year or so. VAL Hi-Fi is a start-up dealer. Although it might seem that on a scale of one-to-ten in picking the perfect time to start a retail business, 2020 barely makes it past 'zero', in fact, the early lockdowns proved to be a fine time to get into audio, as many people had money to spend that they weren't spending on holidays and wanted to enjoy their music even if they couldn't get out to gigs, concerts and festivals.

We spoke to Greg Chapman of VAL Hi-Fi about his innovative collection of products new to the UK, as well as a very carefully curated group of more widely available high-performance audio components. His stance is very much enthusiast-led, rather than simply creating a range of products to suit more routine demands. Many enthusiasts who share similar interests will find brands like Line Magnetic and Vitums to be well worth seeking out, especially set against the very similar 'cookie-cutter' lines of many.

## What brands/products do you stock?

We are the exclusive UK retailers for Line Magnetic, Lu Kang Audio, Orchard Audio, Supravox and Vitums Sound Labs. We're also proud to represent AGD, borg.audio, English Acoustics, Moonriver Audio, Wand turntables and tonearms, Aretai, German Physiks, Merason, 432 EVO Music Servers, Hana cartridges, Puritan Audio Laboratories, True Signal Audio cables and Lateral audio stands.

## What inspired you to get into the industry?

Music is a lifelong passion that naturally opened up into the world of hifi as I entered my teens. Firstly, meeting my equally-obsessed brother-in-law twenty years ago kickstarted the audiophile bug. He has wonderful Vandersteen speakers and a record collection to make you weep! Once I heard a system like his, I couldn't go back. Over time, I have slowly bought and upgraded system after system and fallen in love with the process, especially finding boutique, off-the-radar brands. I felt there was a gap in the market for customers like me, who want a truly high-end audiophile experience without the big, well-known brands.

## Who has been your biggest influence?

Aside from my brother-in-law, it's been the music itself. To coin a phrase from John Darko, I'm a music-first audiophile. I'm passionate about 60s/70s country music, such as Mickey Newbury, Townes Van Zandt and Bob Carpenter, as well as jazz from the same era – Grant Green, Charlie Haden and Bill Evans. I'm also a die hard Bruce Springsteen fan. I love to get lost in music and a great hifi system helps that happen.



## What music do you listen to when doing a demonstration?

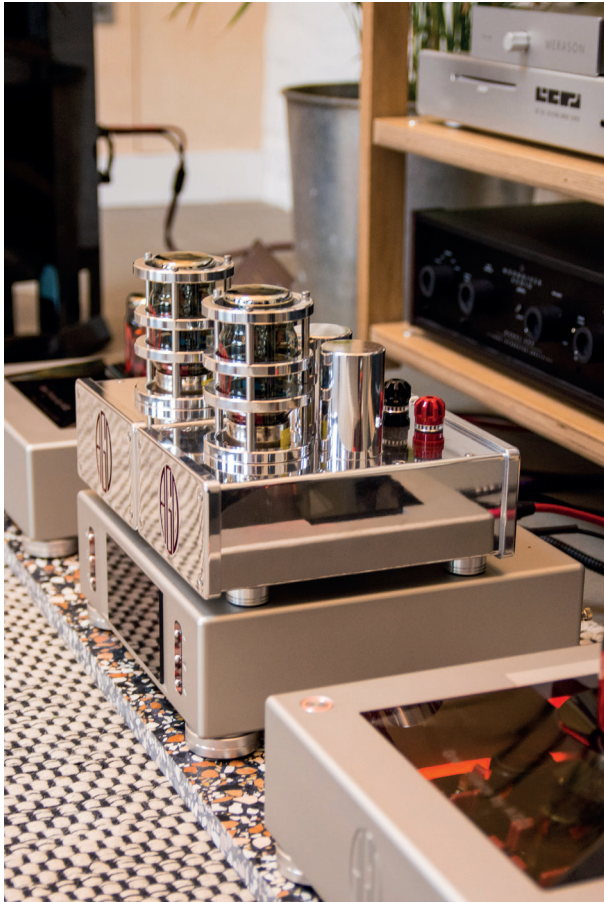
I'm not one for using music simply to show off the technical prowess of a system. For me, the emotional response to a stunning track by Bob Dylan, Nick Cave or Max Richter is far more powerful and better shows the benefit of a personalized, boutique system for a customer. The VAL Hi-Fi motto is *Transcendent Hi-Fi*. I want my customers to have a musical experience that exceeds their expectations.

## What is the best advice you can give to someone looking to improve/upgrade?

Look to the boutique brands for innovation. Their lovingly hand-crafted products result in a real pride of ownership and a truly high-end audio experience, often without the price tags of better-known brands. Most importantly, buy a product that takes you closer to the music – only your ears can tell you that. ▶

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► **Which do you prefer: Vinyl, CD/SACD, or downloading... and why?**

I love vinyl and play it whenever I can, but as a father of three young boys, it's not always practical! I run a 432 EVO music server which is a Roon Core and player, and not only does it sound sublime, but I can listen and change music at the click of an app – so streaming both my music collection ripped as FLACs stored on the 432 and Tidal/Qobuz via Roon is my go to source.

**Is streaming taking over from downloading?**

I think downloading has its place. I'm a diehard Springsteen fan and love downloading the live bootlegs from his site all the way up to DSD (such as *The Christic Shows at The Shrine* from 1990). But when Tidal and Qobuz sound so good – and as I

said earlier, integrate so beautifully with your own music collection through the game changing Roon ecosystem – streaming definitely seems the way forward.

**How do you see the industry in five years from now?**

The last few years have seen an incredible advancement of accessibility of the high-end to within reach of most budgets. Innovation and the trickle-down effect of once extremely expensive features and quality has raised the bar of what we can expect for a moderate financial outlay. Marry that with the ease of high-quality streaming – controlled via apps – and I believe the joy of owning an amazing hifi system will be a realistic prospect for most people.

**What is your ethos?**

VAL Hi-Fi takes a curated approach to hi-fi retail. Our passion is for discovering, supporting and championing boutique brands that give our customers a transcendent audio experience with products that give huge 'bang for buck' and can hold their own against products costing many times the price. The very best in hi-fi does not necessarily come from the most well known brands and we believe we have the ultimate alternatives. +

**URL:** [valhifi.co.uk](http://valhifi.co.uk)