

Lindemann/ProAc system

by Alan Sircom

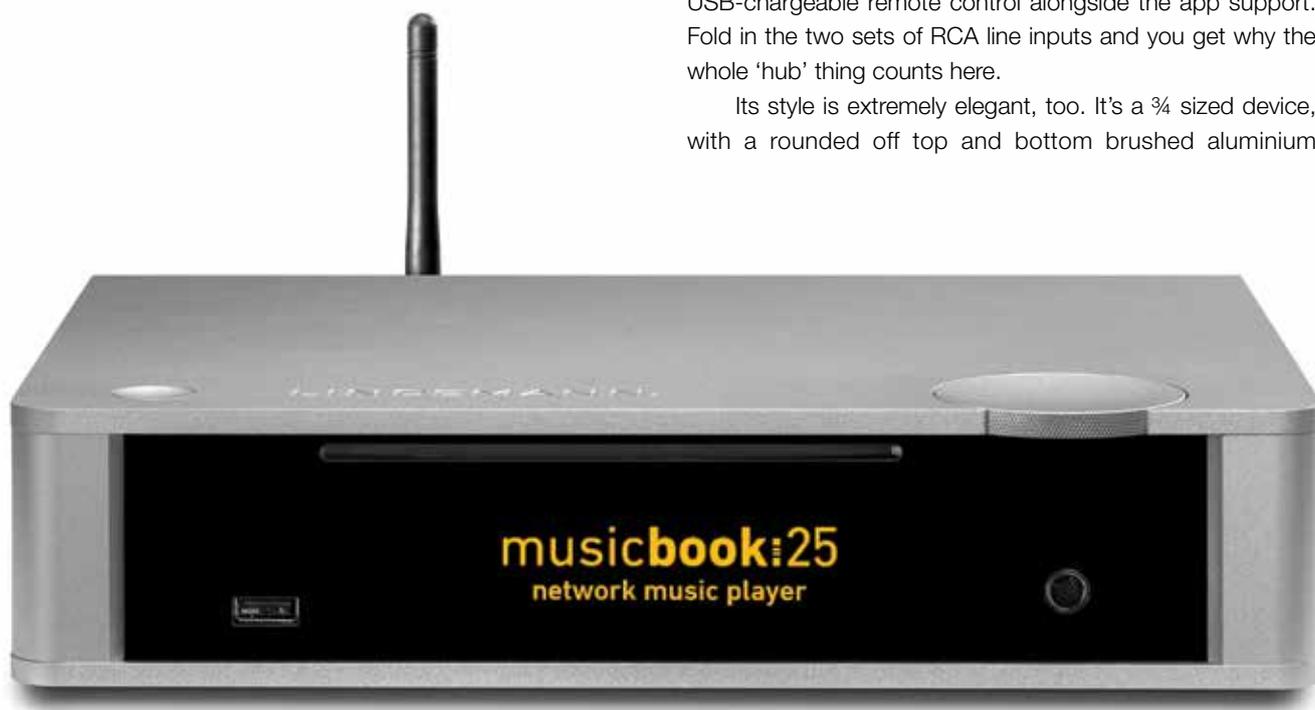
Often, when building a system, it's a good idea to put yourself in the hands of a dealer you trust. Done right, such systems produce rare and wonderful results, as with the system reviewed here, made of German audio electronics from Lindemann, and fine UK loudspeakers from ProAc, and put together by Noel Cloney, of Cloney Audio.

Those with an archive of *Hi-Fi+* issues might remember Lindemann as a maker of a very nice CD, amplifier, and loudspeaker system under the 800 Series, which was reviewed by Chris Thomas in issue 98. Since that time, the German Lindemann company has undergone a complete reboot in terms of its product line. The company now has just a handful of products in its musicbook: Series; two DACs, two network players, and two power amps. Although the DACs and network devices have provision for connecting 'legacy' analogue line inputs, Lindemann's musicbooks are really designed as complete standalone systems, which possibly shows both how far the audio industry has come in recent years, and where it's going.

In reality, most people are going to choose either the network player or the DAC and use it with an amplifier. The use of both network player and DAC is unlikely. Lindemann is obviously highly aware of this, because both share common components in terms of line inputs, outputs, and functionality. Noel chose the network player (in this case the musicbook: 25) for this system, but we also have one of the DACs lined up for an upcoming test. This brings Ethernet streaming and a handy Apple/Android app to control the system (the DAC, by its very nature, implies your computer will be sitting close to the system and that does all the 'legwork').

The term 'digital hub' has become hackneyed of late, but it's entirely relevant in the case of the musicbook: 25. It covers almost all the bases, except for SACD replay and DoP (DSD over PCM) support. It has a slot-load TEAC-based CD player, two S/PDIF and two Toslink inputs, and one of each for digital outputs. It has both a wired and wireless Ethernet input, and can support UPnP, and vTuner internet radio. It has a front mounted USB socket for both thumb drives and hard drives. There's even a dedicated Class A headphone amp, both balanced and single ended outputs, and an elegant USB-chargeable remote control alongside the app support. Fold in the two sets of RCA line inputs and you get why the whole 'hub' thing counts here.

Its style is extremely elegant, too. It's a ¾ sized device, with a rounded off top and bottom brushed aluminium



► clamshell, curved aluminium sides, a black ‘business’ end, a power button set into the left, and a knurled, large thumbwheel set into the right of the top plate. The OLED display is a surprisingly readable shade of yellow, which looks much better than it sounds. In sum, the whole musicbook: 25 exudes a sense of well-built solidity.

This is met and matched by the Lindemann musicbook: 55. This is a 240W per channel amplifier with balanced and single ended inputs. The amp is designed to be bridged to deliver 450W in mono mode should you require an upgrade, all packed into the same $\frac{3}{4}$ size amplifier chassis. How this is possible comes down to the letters ‘UCD’, short for ‘Universal Class D’ amplifier module.

Lindemann’s manual is an exercise in making the fairly complex task of putting a network streaming system together read like it’s not a problem. This doesn’t mean it hides things from prospective owners (resulting in a lot of headscratching and panicked phone calls and emails). Instead it guides you through the usual set-up procedure and offers some semblance of legitimate help should things go awry. This comes down to Lindemann building a digital front-end that doesn’t require a secret-service codebreaker to configure, and to a clean and logical layout of the manual. If you can follow

the instructions to set up a TV or cook a meal, you can install the musicbook: 25.

There are even scaled down versions called the musicbook: 20 and musicbook: 50. The musicbook: 20 network player is basically the musicbook: 25 without the CD drive, while the musicbook: 50 is an 80W per channel, non-bridgeable Class D amp in the same musicbook: 55 chassis. In fact, the musicbook: 50 came before the musicbook: 55 in the development cycle, and the bigger, more expensive amplifier came about as a result of pushing the 80W musicbook: 50, which sometimes has difficulties driving low-impedance loads. The musicbook: 55 is an engineer’s creative response to just criticism; unless you are trying to drive a pair of old Apogee Divas or welding together parts of a battleship, you’ll rarely need more than a musicbook: 55.

Not that the ProAc Response D20R is what you’d call a ‘difficult’ load. The D20R is a simple eight-ohm load and has a sensitivity rating of 88.5dB, explaining why ProAc frequently demonstrates this loudspeaker with a Naim SuperNait in the UK. The D20R is essentially a variant on the extremely popular ProAc Response D18, replacing the 17mm dome tweeter with a custom-made 60mm x 10mm ribbon tweeter in the same offset position as in the D18 (which still remains in ►



▶ the catalogue). The D20R keeps the same 165mm fibreglass weave mid-bass cone, with a phase plug and what ProAc refers to as its Excel magnet. In re-evaluating the D18, ProAc took the opportunity to rework the crossover network and remodel the bass loading – the port still fires into the floor, but the construction of this system has changed, giving the loudspeaker a more graceful bottom (something we can all appreciate) and making it easy to install in a wide range of listening rooms. ProAc also experimented with a new white finish in time for the Bristol *Sound & Vision Show* in February, and was surprised by the uptake, so now these classic loudspeakers are available in a tidy shade of pure white.

Whatever the colour of cabinet, I admit that this would never have been a combination of products I would have thought of putting together. There is no real reason for saying this; there are no obvious incompatibilities, and there is nothing up with using the electronics from one European country with the loudspeakers of another. It's just that there are so many possible permutations and combinations of products that this one would have taken years to fall upon. But having heard it, I'm awfully glad that someone did fall upon it.

This system brings together much of the convenience of Sonos with almost Apple-like levels of design and operation, and yet does so without sacrificing the sound quality in the process. Traditional audiophiles have their personal Rubicon to cross with Class D, and some will never make it. If you view it as just another form of output device, you'll fairly quickly find Class D falls into three broad sonic signatures; too warm, too bright, and 'goldilocks'. The 'goldilocks' point is all too rare, with just a handful of top-class brands enjoying the sweet spot. Well, now, you can add Lindemann to that select list of those getting Class D intrinsically right. This, coupled with the subtle performance of the ProAc's, works wonders.

Taken as a system, it's got a hugely graceful sound, with outstanding dynamic range, great bass and super-accurate midrange. It's one of those systems that never draw attention to their performance, and that is its greatest strength. In 'doing a Yoko' (breaking up the band), it became clear that this was also a common strength in all three components – the musicbook products reminded me of Primare's understated, yet intrinsically 'right' presentation, and the ProAc's overall balance just invited you into listening to the music and kept you there. Once again, the 'goldilocks' point springs to mind.

It really didn't make much difference what type of music you played through the system; it remained clean, clear, open, and informative. It was always musically charming without being saccharine, insightful without sounding 'etched' or hard, and energetic without being over-exuberant.

It's all too easy to whizz through one's music collection when streaming on a network. The iPad in your hand invites such a mindset. But through the Lindemann, although such a gallop through my musical past was easy, at no point did I feel the need to do so. I was just happy in the musical moment, and played more albums than snippets. This is a sign of something very 'right' going on across the system.

It's hard to find flaw for the money. No, the system doesn't have the home-shuddering dynamics, the extraordinary detail and transparency, the volume headroom, the bass extensions, or the seamless coherence of a system costing at least as much as an S-Class Mercedes. And the headphone amp, though good, is no match for the anointed standalone ones. But the thing is the Lindemann/ProAc combo gets close enough. Some think there is no such thing as a law of diminishing returns in audio, but you could be mistaken for concluding that line in the sand is drawn here.

If you listen really hard, you can just about hear the sound of audiophile statues being torn down. This system is part of the quiet revolution that is taking place in audio today. Ten years ago, such a system would have been possible – just – but it wouldn't have been any good. Such is the delta of change in audio that this system isn't just possible and isn't just good, it's at the core of what good audio is today. And, not long after you read this, the Lindemann will also be able to stream Tidal, Qobuz, and Deezer, adding more functionality and good audio to the mix. It would be excellent if the CD transport interacted more with one of the online music databases, to show more than title and track (such as showing the album cover on the app), and it would be fantastic (if almost impossible) to turn that CD transport into a ripper should you wish, but this is being picky.

There is an old-world caveat to this revolutionary zeal; a system this well-matched wouldn't have happened without a good bricks-and-mortar dealer who did due diligence to find a system whose components work together this well. The whole isn't significantly better than the sum of the parts, but I'd struggle to find a system that hangs together better. Cloney Audio proves that a good dealer is not the enemy, if they never forget who their customers are, and if they put together systems like this that work for those customers.

Truth is, I'm a little shocked at how good the Lindemann musicbook: audio equipment sounds, especially when the price is taken into account. ProAc, in fairness, is far more of a known quantity, but even so, we were expecting 'good', and got 'great'. But when you put the three boxes together... that's world class, and Cloney deserves high praise for putting them together. It's all very highly recommended! +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Lindemann musicbook: 25 network player

Supported formats: MP3 max. 320 kbit/s VBR/CBR | WAV and AIFF max. 192 kHz / 24 bit | FLAC max. 192 kHz / 24 bit | ALAC max. 96 kHz / 24 bit | AAC | Ogg Vorbis | WMA (only Standard, no Pro and Lossless) Gapless playback with WAV, AIFF, FLAC, ALAC, MP3

Ethernet: 10/100 Mbit/s

WLAN: 802.11b, g, n. 2.4 GHz band. WEP, WPA, WPA2 safety support. External screw-in antenna DHCP and static IP support

USB 2.0 host interface: fullspeed and highspeed mode. Charging of smartphones and tablets up to 2.1 A. Support of mass storage devices with FAT16/32 file system, e.g. USB sticks, USB harddisks, smartphones and tablets

Internet Radio: vTuner

CD Player: Slot-in drive (TEAC) with CD text support

Digital/analog converter

Inputs: two optical and two coaxial digital inputs (75 ohms) for SPDIF signals (LPCM) up to 192 kHz and 24 bit

Outputs: one optical and one coaxial digital output (75 ohms) for SPDIF signals

THD & Noise: <0.0005% (@ 0dBFS)

Dynamic range: >125 dB

D/A converter resolution: 352.8/384 kHz, 32 bit

Converter architecture: Anagram Sonic Scrambling DAC in dual-differential mono mode jitter performance 250 femtoseconds

Jitter reduction: >60 dB

Digital filter: minimum phase 'apodizing' filter

Analog Inputs: 2x line level inputs (RCA)

Outputs: one balanced (XLR) and one unbalanced (RCA) line level output

Headphone connection: ¼" (6.35 mm) jack socket Recommended Headphone Impedance with 32–300 ohms impedance

Frequency response: 0–200 kHz (-3 dB)

THD & noise: <0.0005% @ 2.50 V output

Dimensions (WxHxD): 28x22x6.5cm

Weight: 3.50kg

Lindemann musicbook: 55 power amplifier

Inputs: XLR inputs: analog line level inputs with 20 kOhms input impedance. RCA inputs: analog line level inputs with 10 kOhms input impedance

Speaker outputs: safety 4mm banana sockets

Power output: 240 W into 4 ohms per channel (<1 min)

Maximum output current: 16 A peak

Gain: 27.8 dB (24.5-times)

Frequency response: 0 Hz–45 kHz (-3 dB)

THD & noise: <0,05% typ.

Dimensions (WxHxD): 28x22x6.5cm

Weight: 3.7kg

Manufactured by Lindemann

URL: www.lindemann-audio.de

Tel: +49 (0) 8153.9533.390

ProAc Response D20R loudspeakers

Type: Floorstanding ported two-way loudspeaker with ribbon tweeter

Drivers: ProAc 60x10mm ribbon with rear-chamber damping, 165mm ProAc unit fitted features glass fibre weave cone, Excel Magnet system, and acrylic damping phase plug

Recommended Amplifiers: 20 to 180 watts

Frequency Response: 28Hz to 33KHz

Nominal Impedance: 8 ohms

Sensitivity: 88.5 dB linear for 1 watt at 1 metre

Standard Finishes: Black Ash, White, Mahogany, Cherry, Maple

Premium Finishes: Rosewood, Ebony

Dimensions (WxHxD): 19x96x22.7cm

Weight: 26Kg each

Manufactured by: ProAc

URL: www.proac-loudspeakers.com

Tel: +44(0)1280 700147

System recommended by: Cloney Audio

URL: www.cloneyaudio.com

Tel: +353 1 288 8477