

# 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



## MUSIC CHOICE

### HIGH-PERFORMANCE BOOKSHELF SPEAKERS

#### Monitor Audio Bronze 1 £230

Monitor Audio's focus may have been split between its more traditional hi-fi offerings and its innovative music streaming Airstream range but, judging by its Bronze range of affordable loudspeakers, it's none the weaker for that. The Bronze 1 (below) is a bookshelf speaker in a group that includes floor-standers for those looking for a more imposing unit. The new range uses Monitor Audio's C-CAM speaker technology, which has an extremely solid build quality and was originally developed for use in the aerospace industry. The speakers have been praised for their dynamism and have the added bonus of looking stylish with a choice of four well-crafted finishes including black oak, rosemah, walnut and white ash. All



**SPEAKER EASY:** the Bronze 1s perform well at all volumes

this technology and build excellence is impressive given the sub-£300 price tag which is generally regarded as a budget price for loudspeakers.

Taut, refined and well balanced, the Bronze 1s are more than capable of handling a wide array of musical styles and, while capable of producing a very respectable bass performance, they never let the low-end frequencies overwhelm. What's surprising is how poised and composed they remain when you begin to twist the volume clockwise. At high levels, where things can get a bit muddled, the Bronze 1s never seem to miss a beat, remaining perfectly timed and in control of the sound.

Given their price and the fact that these are an exceptionally well-built pair of speakers, not to mention that their performance delivers at a level of speakers costing at least two or three times more, I'd give them six stars if I could. [monitoraudio.co.uk](http://monitoraudio.co.uk) ★★★★★

Hugely comfortable, Audio Technica has clearly spared little expense to ensure these headphones are good for extended listening. The MSR7s exhibit taut, punchy low frequencies and plenty of detail to the mid and high frequency range. Although they are not particularly lightweight or compact and won't necessarily compete with a set of open-backed, studio-quality headphones, you'll find you can use them on public transport with no problem. This is a great pair of hi-resolution headphones.

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

### BLUETOOTH SPEAKERS

#### Edifier Prisma Encore £70

The Edifier Prisma Encore is a Bluetooth-enabled 2.1 speaker system. A 2.1 system means it consists of two stereo speakers (the '2'), enhanced by a subwoofer (the '1') and it delivers a greater frequency range than a simple set of stereo speakers alone. Don't despair if your chosen music source doesn't have built-in Bluetooth, as there's an old-fashioned 3.5mm jack to plug in other music and audio devices. Sonically, the Prisma Encore delivers a pleasing, dynamic sound, although low-end frequencies can be a little boomy at high volumes – often a danger when using a subwoofer.

Aesthetically, the Prisma Encore's design team has used its skills wisely, developing a beautiful, curved audio artefact that belies the modest £70 price tag and provides a real talking point, even when it's turned off. Setting up is refreshingly simple and, at £70, there's very little to touch it. So, while there are better 2.1 systems out there, few look as good or sound as good as this for well under £100.

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

### HI-RES HEADPHONES

#### Audio Technica ATH-MSR7 £200

Although Audio Technica is a headphones brand with marketing dollars that clearly can't compete with the Sennheisers and Shures of this world, it nonetheless creates great-sounding products. The ATH-MSR7s (above, right) are on-ear headphones that have been designed with comfort and performance foremost in mind. Best of all, they are ready for high-resolution audio, meaning they can play the growing catalogue of high-resolution audio files available from a variety of music download services. But even hi-res headphones can make a mess of music files if they're not exceptionally well tuned and balanced. Thankfully the MSR7s are exactly that.

are also excellent – never too urgent or harsh, they present a relaxed, laid-back sound. The Active Noise-Cancelling technology (the ANC of the name) – using built-in microphones to produce frequencies that cancel out external noise – works extremely well on this model and is perfect for blotting out any irritations on public transport.

On occasion, the H3s can be a little too laid-back in their approach, with the bass appearing a bit muddled at times, particularly at ear-splitting volumes (though I dare say if you value your hearing you won't try that test). The H3s come recommended, but the audio performance would benefit from being a little bit more focused.

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



### NOISE-CANCELLING EARPHONES

#### B&O BeoPlay H3 ANC £200

Bang & Olufsen (B&O) is one of those brands for whom the word 'affordable' was most definitely not created, but behind the premium price tag lies engineering excellence, faultless build quality and more than a dash of style. While other brands hide behind breathtaking design which can't be backed up with substance, B&O makes beautiful audio products that sound as good as they appear.

The machined aluminium BeoPlay H3s (above) are B&O's newest addition to its range of headphones and they certainly fit right in from a build perspective. Sonically they

