

# MEET YOUR DEALER

## Nick Beasley of Imperial Hi-Fi

by Alan Sircom



Imperial Hi-Fi is based in Hampton Wick, only a short trot in your State Landau from Henry VIII's palace at Hampton Court. That particular part of Surrey has a catchment area that includes some wealthy music-loving individuals (Imperial Hi-Fi is practically next door to the legendary Charlie Chandler's Guitar Experience and less than 100 yards from hi-fi stalwart InFidelity).

A few months ago, the store was a vaping emporium. We rarely see new audio stores on the high-street, especially one that has chosen an intelligent and diverse portfolio of exciting products.

We spoke to Nick Beasley about the new Imperial Hi-Fi store, its brands and more...





► **What brands/products do you stock?**

We are exclusive UK stockists for the amazing Metaxas range of amps and speakers, Wavac for its steampunk valve amps, and Lector for its superbly musical CD players.

We are also part owners and hence the first stockist of the groundbreaking ONKK direct drive turntable, sole stockist of the amazing 200kg Vyger Indian Signature turntable, and the super-high-end Murasakino and Top Wing phono cartridges, not to mention the 23 valve NVO phono stage and extraordinary Dalby Design cables, and shortly arriving from Japan the legendary Shindo Labs amps and speakers.

We also stock Piega loudspeakers, Thomas Mayer's exquisite hand built valve amplifiers and phono stages, Audio Music and KR Audio's steampunk valve amps, and Ayon for their great range of valve CD players, DACs, streamers, and amps.

Finally, we stock Mark Audio, Emmes & Gallo, and Devialet active speakers, Convert technologies all in one player/amp, the Devialet amplifiers, RCM audio phono stages, EMT cartridges, Nottingham Analogue turntables, and Sennheiser headphones. Phew!

**What inspired you to get into the industry?**

A brief stint on University radio exposed me to some quality equipment and a desire to get the best sound of my thousands of LP records led me to hi-fi at an early age.

Imperial Hi-Fi is an expression of my love for beautifully made and beautiful sounding audio. I used to collect old wind up gramophones and vintage valve amplifiers from the 1950s. Equipment was made to a quality in those days and so our range of brands very much reflects this.

Many of these are hand designed and hand built by highly skilled craftsmen. Audio equipment can be beautiful objects and make wonderful music, so why be content with a black box when you can have something that gives you pleasure every time you see and use it?

**Who has been your biggest influence?**

It may sound egotistical, but I am proud to say that I have been an influence. Nothing gives me a greater buzz than assembling a wonderful sounding system for a client. In a very real way, that means so much more to me than praising some industry big-wig. ►

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► **What music do you use for demonstrations?**

I have some tracks that I use to assess a system and its faults and strengths:

Etta James 'Stickin' To My Guns.' This track can sound amazing and dynamic, but her voice easily shows up spitty treble.

The Blasters 'I'm Shakin'.' The midrange can shout if you are not careful when playing loud, but the bass puts a smile on your face every time.

Rather than playing audiophile music that sounds good on anything, I prefer to play something that can actually help the client assess how something sounds on all kinds of music. Of course, I also have favourites in all genres and I am often led by the clients musical choice and insist that they bring their own music. That way, I get to discover more albums!

**What is the best piece of advice you can give to someone who is looking to improve/upgrade their system?**

Have an open mind. Reading a rave review of brand X does not mean it will sound better in your system than something that you haven't seen reviewed. Always audition those products, ideally in your own system (or as near as damn it).

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

Vinyl sounds better in my opinion, but I listen for musicality above other traits and that is what vinyl does best. Musical enjoyment can be had from the other formats, but there are many mediocre CD players, and streaming is still hit and miss.

**Is streaming taking over from downloading?**

For the younger generation yes, but older and generally wealthier customers have extensive LP and CD libraries that took them many years to assemble. They aren't changing.

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

Quality hi-fi will become more of a niche market, manufacturers will keep pushing the boundaries of quality and price, and things could very interesting if AI starts designing audio! +

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