

Let's face it, music is a very important part of our lives. It is not a recent phenomena, but something that has existed since ancient times. Before the dawn and subsequent evolution of the electronic age, people have been appeasing their auditory senses by enjoying live performances given by artists. Dancers and musicians in the courts of kings have been a routine tradition. Public places for live performances have existed ever since; they continue today in the form of modern-day cinemas, theatres and music halls. Music has always enchanted humanity. When one is tired and down, music can be uplifting. Once man stumbled upon electricity and subsequently electronics, drastic changes in the mode of dispensation of music have occurred. No more is there the need for tedious and elaborate preparations for live performances. We can just flick on a switch and *voila*, soul embracing music emanates from the modern day genie of sound, the music system.

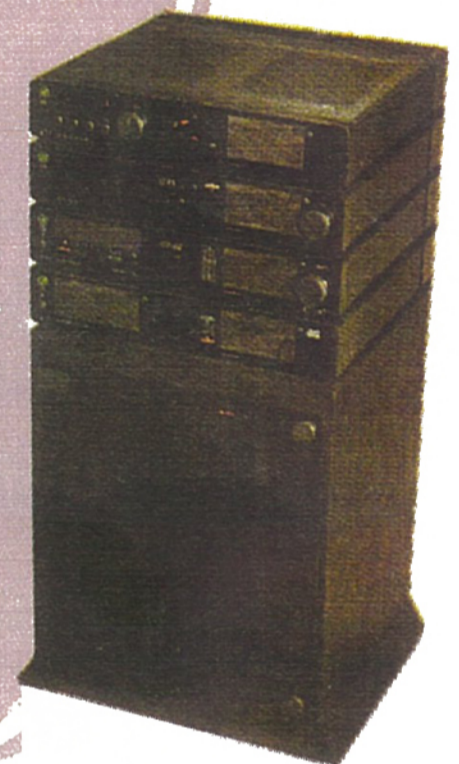
By far the most popular systems of the day are the 'Mini Component Systems'. These are miniaturised versions of complete music making machines. They usually consist of single or double cassette decks, built in amplifiers, equalizers, radio tuners, compact disc players and speakers. Some models are available with remote controls as well. This format has gained popularity for a number of reasons. It is compact and convenient and occupies little space. All the features one might require to play a CD or play a cassette, to record from CD to cassette, or even from one cassette to another, are handily available. All this wrapped up in a small, convenient package. For the average listener, convenience blended with facilities becomes an unbeatable combination, sound not being the ultimate priority.

However, this mini genie has elder brothers. We often find systems being advertised as 'Midi Component Systems' or 'Rack Systems'. These are essentially larger in size than the minis. The ascent in these is more balanced between size, facilities and sound quality. These systems are recommended for the slightly more serious listener. In this system one is likely to find all the components like a cassette deck, amplifier, equalizer, CD player etc... all aesthetically well blended. Each component is likely to be a separate entity and all are normally operated using the same



SOUND TREATMENT

SANJIV MALVI examines mini, midi and maxi music systems, designed to suit every listener



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remote control. The speakers in these kind of systems are much larger than those used in the mini component systems. These systems naturally sound better and relatively more bodied than their smaller counterparts. The average cost is likely to be two to three times the cost of the mini components. An average midi component system by Sony would cost from around Rs 20,000 to Rs 25,000. This would include a remote control and a CD player.

For the very serious listener the sky is the limit. This is because we enter into a totally different realm. The difference is not only in great equipment but in the attitude of the listener. For the average listener satisfaction comes easily, there is only a casual interest in the music being played. It doesn't

become a serious affair, so there is little time and attention given to details. All that the casual listener is interested in is in getting some decent sound out of the box. When we deal with audio buffs we are dealing with a totally different breed. They are emotionally involved with their equipment and music. For them everything has to be nothing less than perfect. It's then that the concept of complex systems with individual amplifiers, cassette decks, sophisticated CD players, separate pre-amplifiers and power amplifiers come into the picture. Each component in the audio chain has to be solely dedicated to the task of doing its job to perfection. Amplifiers must be dedicated just to amplifying with purity and a high level of fidelity and so on. 'Hi-fi freaks', as they are sometimes called, do not bother with gimmicks like remote controls and snazzy looks. Hi-fi addicts are simple people. They only want the best in sound -- no matter what the inconvenience to themselves or others. Just as a *pujari* in a temple looks after and

cares for the idols with real fervour and doesn't allow ordinary mortals to go too near, so also the genuine hi-fi buff will sanctify his equipment, look after it personally and not let ordinary, ignorant mortals touch it.

A friend of mine who migrated to Australia recently, is a genuine audio buff. His wife, complaining to us the other day, said that she had become an audio widow, a growing breed these days. I find it interesting to discover that though many people are attached emotionally to music and its relevant equipment, I've not come across people who react the same way to their videos and TVs. Such is the magnetic power of sound.

Today the consumer electronic industry can titillate any kind of taste from the casual to the freaky. All kinds of equipment are available, from the mini to the maxi and from the cheap to the really expensive. Over the next few weeks I will concentrate on what sort of music systems are available, what one should look out for, what the average Indian taste is *vis-a-vis* sound, what the industry leaders have in store for us and, of course, more equipment specials. I hope that, along with me, my readers will gear up to enjoy and inject a plethoric overview of hi-fi.