

**T**here are very few people in the world who've remained unmoved by the sound of great music, be it a live performance or a simulated performance at home. Most of us are enchanted by the thought of possessing a good music system which churns out quality musical performance at our command.

So what does a good music system really mean to people? To teenagers it spells freedom, relaxation, the loudness lends itself to escapism. To corporate executives it means value for money and of course, good sound. For some, music stirs up creativity. Yet, all, in my experience, still want to know more about their music system — about sound that can be fine tuned to thrill better. What are amps, they'd like to know and what kind are available? Or those little equalizers that come with a set — what do these do, are they really necessary....?

Let's look at music systems in general. There is a programme material in the form of a CD or a cassette or even a good old Vinyl record. Then there is the hardware that translates the programme into audible sound. This hardware

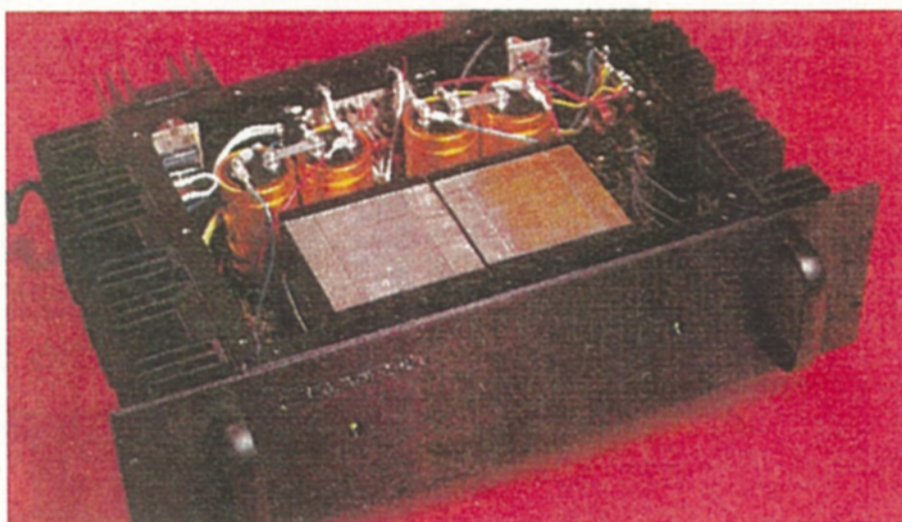
## The anatomy of a music system

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SANJIV MALVI guides you on what to look for in a music deck, inside out



Equalizer with a deck at the top



consists of a 'player', be it a CD player, a cassette player or a record player. The player is that part of the system that extracts the stored musical information from the CD or the cassette. Its job ends here. A mediocre system can have a simple player where the emphasis is only on extracting the musical information. Not so much on the quality of extraction.

This information is then converted to minute electrical pulses or signals which are then passed on to the 'amplifier', whose primary task is to literally amplify or magnify. The electrical impulses after passing through the complex circuitry of the amp are so energised that they no longer remain minute. They become high-powered signals, which are used to activate otherwise

### Amplifier

dormant 'speakers'.

Now come the speakers whose task is to convert electrical energy into mechanical energy. The energised pulses from the speakers are fed to the speakers, whose cones physically vibrate to and fro. These vibrations create the sound that we hear. So simple yet so seemingly complicated.

One may spend a few hundreds to a few lakhs on a music system — yet the basic remains the same. The ideal design goal of 'Audio Engineers' is to create a piece of equipment which reproduces the original sound with the greatest accuracy. A simple cassette player and a high-tech cassette deck have the same basic purpose. The design goal is however different.

## SOUND TREATMENT

The more one emphasises on accuracy of sound the costlier the equipment. This holds good for amplifiers and equalizers too.

We mentioned the equalizer — what is it? It is merely a more sophisticated 'tone control'. It helps to alter the tonal quality of the sound we hear. Normally, amplifiers have built-in tone controls, like 'bass' and 'treble' controls. Bass control helps to boost or cut the low spectrum of sound, ie drums, bass guitar, etc, while the treble controls the shrill sounds. These controls help to alter sound only generally. It's like wearing ready-made clothes which fit us approximately. The 'equalizer' has many controls, each helping to alter only a specific set of sounds.

If you have a simple music system with a separate cassette player, a CD player and an amplifier, the most effective way to improve quality would be to buy a simple equalizer. It could cost you anything above Rs 2,500. It could change the way you hear.