

## Naim Nait5i and CD5i

**Naim Nait5i integrated amplifier (\$2500) and CD5i CD player (\$2700)**

August 2008

Don't panic. Two words engraved on my consciousness since March 1978. Not, you understand, because I developed an early sense of innate coolness. Nor even an ability to deal with unusually stressful situations. More because that's when I first heard a new radio programme.

By sheer fluke I happened to catch the first episode of *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* and in my 15 year-old way became immediately gripped by its oddness and thinly-veiled cynicism about the world. The panic would come, but later.

In fact, it started when I met *Hitchhikers'* creator, Douglas Adams, at a book signing. This was a moment of high expectation for me, but instead

---

*The Naims would sort out the elements then present them in a perfectly-timed and coherent musical picture*

---

of the much-anticipated rays of genius and humour, all I got was a grunt, sneer and hastily scribbled signature. Perhaps it didn't help that I was completely tongue-tied in the presence of such

perceived greatness. So much for meeting your idols.

### The salmon of doubt

Perhaps that experience explains why I was more than normally apprehensive about this month's review. I've always been a bit of a Naim fan but never had much opportunity to get to know the stuff properly. I was anticipating great things, but fearful of the grunt and sneer.

The Nait 5i and CD5i are the latest developments of Naim's established Nait 5i and CD5i units. Eh? Look, it's an *i*, not *i*. A small change, but significant.

Actually, reading the specs you'd be forgiven for thinking that was the only change. The amplifier still turns out 50w per channel, there are still only four line level inputs on the back and, alas, no phono stage. There is a 3.5mm jack on the front panel for your iPod though.

The CD5i seems similarly similar to the non-italic version. There's still the



gorgeous hinged drawer and magnetic puck, and still the rather crude display.

### Life, the universe and everything

With everything placed carefully (reverentially, almost) and allowed to warm up it was time for that first listen. But what to choose? This was going to be a profound moment and I wanted the music to be appropriate. I toyed with the notion of spinning Douglas Adams' favourite, Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos*. Or maybe Handel, or something more modern but still as communicative, Nick Drake or Lou Reed.

I realised it had to be someone who wouldn't let me down. So on went Kylie's *Can't Get You Out of My Head*. Trashy pop, but never disappointing (okay, partly because expectations aren't high, but I was in idol protecting mode here).

The surprise was how good the pocket-sized Aussie managed to sound. Even though it's a busy and over-compressed mix, there were impressive drive and dynamics to the whole thing. Nothing (apart from Kylie) sounded terribly natural, but it probably never did anyway. Not a bad start, but hardly a challenge.

### Mostly harmless

It seemed safe to move to something, well, more moving. If not in the right way. I've never been much of a *Bohemian Rhapsody* fan, and certainly not of the somewhat antiseptic, 25th anniversary remaster, but the CD5i managed to scrape something extra from the disc, a sense of drama and scale that had always seemed to be missing from the payback if not from the intention. Suddenly, the track made sense than it ever had done

before. And I actually enjoyed it for the first time. Hmm... these Naims really do have something special about them.

It was special, but was it what I had expected? Naim is (rightfully) famous for its facility with rhythm and communicating the underlying sense of music. Pace-rhythm-timing get repeated like a protective mantra by Naim enthusiasts. It's a sound that many can find overbearing, but here I was getting something quite different. Sure the classic Naim strengths were present, but there was something else too, a maturity and flexibility that extended well beyond my expectations.

### Last chance to see

In fact, it didn't seem to matter how complex or demanding the music was, the Naims would sort out the elements then present them in a perfectly-timed and coherent musical picture that helped me understand – and feel – precisely what the performers were on about. In the end, I don't think I could expect anything more of a piece of audio equipment.

### Long dark teatime of the soul

My expectations were high. Probably higher than for anything else I've reviewed. And just for once, I actually wasn't disappointed. Not one tiny little bit. The Naim Nait 5i and CD5i are, in combination or individually, quite the best pieces of equipment I've heard in the last few years. This is Naim that can be enjoyed by anyone (including long-term Naim-phobes). Being without it makes listening longer, darker and a lot less enjoyable. —Matthew Masters