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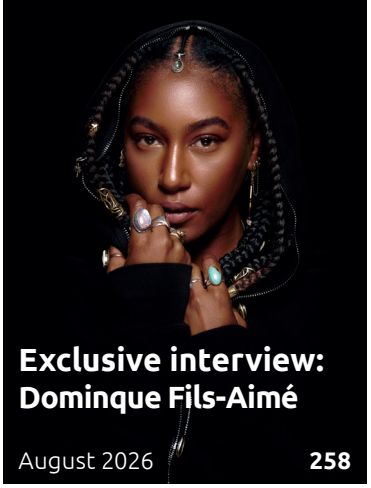

Exclusive interview: Dominque Fils-Aimé

August 2026 258

PERFECT PAIR!

Exclusive: Why Pear Audio Blue's new Aras turntable is the pick of the crop

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Pear Audio Blue Aras turntable and Cornet 3 arm

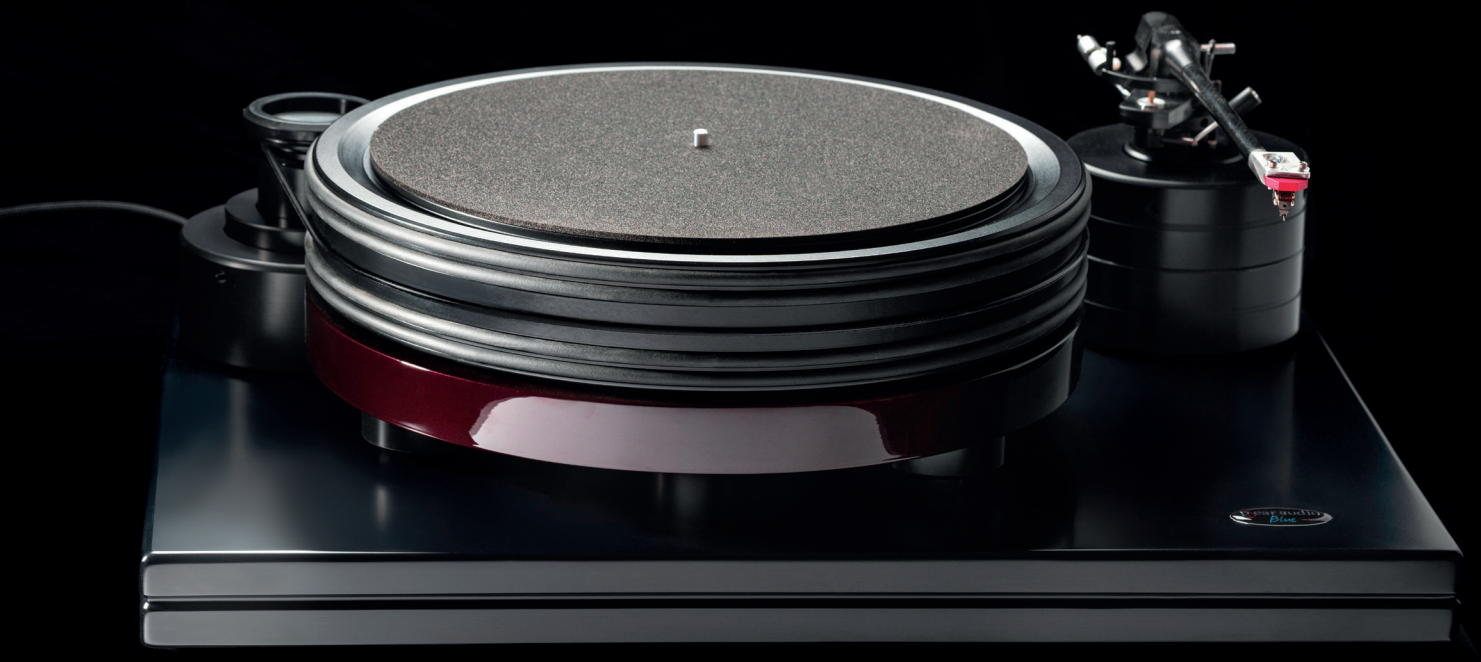
Alan Sircom

For those of us who knew him, it's hard to believe that Tom Fletcher passed on almost 16 years ago. Turntable designer Fletcher left quite a legacy. Nottingham Analogue Studio designs conntinue to be made, while two long-standing associates in Europe also keep the flame alive: Fletcher Audio in Denmark and Pear Audio Blue in Slovenia. Of the three, Pear Audio Blue is perhaps the one moving Tom Fletcher's concepts forward now. While the others preserve the legacy, Pear Audio Blue's new Aras turntable – coupled with the company's 12" Cornet 3 unique unipivot tonearm – shows just how far the concept can be taken.

However, using that oversimplification that audio reviewers do so well, Aras is essentially derived from the company's flagship Odar, which itself springs from the brand's Kid Thomas. However, things come full circle, as the baseboard designed for the Aras is now also provided for the Odar flagship. In fact, in many ways, the only real difference between the two is Odar has an integrated tonearm base, whereas Aras is free-standing.

Kind of Blue

Pear Audio Blue is run by the Slovenian Peter Mezek. Originally a Linn distributor, he became a fan – and distributor - of the Well-Tempered turntable (hence the 'Pear Audio' name and logo, shared with the UK distributor of Well-Tempered, Dynavector and Shahinian). However, when Well-Tempered moved production some years ago, Mezek decided to take another route. He had a long and close friendship with Tom Fletcher, and Tom initially stepped in to create a new line of turntables carrying the Pear Audio Blue name, at first made in Tom's factory in Nottingham, England. »



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That working relationship blossomed as the two recognised they were like minds. Both were also fond of New Orleans Jazz. So like-minded in fact that Tom passed on many of his fundamental concepts and design secrets with Mezek, including some of the ways his turntable designs could be improved upon. Many of these improvements were effectively engineering tweaks, of the kind only the truly like-minded could deliver. They worked together for what would be the final years of Tom's life, with Peter Mezek both as protégé and master in his own right. Those who follow the best in watchmaking might see an analogy between the horologists George Daniels and Roger W. Smith.

Fletcherisms

Peter Mezek calls these unique design criteria and engineering tweaks, 'Fletcherisms' and includes a few on the Pear Audio Analogue website. A typical Tom Fletcher statement was that he likened most audio devices to a brass violin: "pretty to look at, but not something you'd want to play music on!" Tom Fletcher's basic design remains unchanged to this day: a high-mass, low-resonance platter with an outstanding bearing, powered by an ultra-low-torque motor, and ideally coupled with a mechanically damped unipivot arm. Everything is free from excess; even the tonearm headshell lacks a finger lift because it unbalances the mass of the arm at a crucial point.

Perhaps the most uniquely 'Tom Fletcher' of all of these points is that ultra-low-torque motor. It's so low that it can only 'keep' the platter at speed; it can't get 'up' to speed. So, turn the power supply on, press the central 'on' button, the display says 'on' and… seemingly nothing happens. If you feel the motor, it now has a very light vibration, but the platter remains unperturbed by this. It's down to the turntable owner to spin the platter to get it sufficiently over the desired 33.33 or 45 rpm, allowing the platter to slow to the right speed and stay there. You adjust between 33.33 and 45rpm by pressing and holding the power button, with the two buttons flanking it on the power supply acting as speed fine-tuning.

While learning to give the platter the right amount of 'shove' is a bit of a knack, it's a skill soon perfected. I found my own knack involved physically stopping the platter between record changes rather than hoping the speed would remain constant while swapping LPs. But, each of us develops the skill fast. And the reason why you need to do this in the first place? The lower the motor torque, the less noise gets into the system. The round belt contributes nothing to the sound, just enough 'keepy-uppy' energy to keep the platter moving. And this is one of the surprises people get when first hearing this kind of turntable: the absence of background noise. Turntables no longer (hopefully) introduce gross amounts of mechanical noise or rumble, but playing the Pear Audio Blue Aras very quickly shows you just how much noise a high-torque motor brings to the sound. This is about as close as you get to a 'no-motor' turntable.

New but not

This is common to Tom Fletcher's ethos, as is the concept of 'economy of design'. The Aras is effectively Pear Audio Blue's Odar scaled down. Which is itself effectively the company's Kid Thomas with the gloves off. Both Odar and Aras also feature an oversized 14" composite platter. Don't ask what the composite is composed of… that's a closely guarded secret, but it is 'heavy' and 'dead' in equal measure (Odar's platter is even more substantial). One of the many 'Fletcherisms' that Pear Audio Blue observes is that it uses commonplace or even unremarkable materials, working together to create something remarkable.

The other big difference between the Aras and the Kid Thomas is the drastically improved isolation between components. Effectively, the platter, arm board and motor sit in their own housings, sharing only a common baseboard. Fun fact: the development of the Aras led to a few improvements to the baseboard, which have been incorporated into subsequent versions of the Odar as part of a 'trickle-up' design exercise. The change isn't said to warrant existing Odar owners wanting an upgrade, as the new baseboard has only minor aesthetic tweaks that also suit the Odar.

Another unique 'Fletcherism' is the speed compensation pressure tube on the underside of the chassis. It's there for a good reason, but because it's a simple tube just hanging from the bottom of the chassis, it looks a little 'unfinished'. It isn't, and most will pay it no heed. However, obsessive-compulsives will be drawn to it and be unable to unsee it.

The arm shares much with Cornet designs from the Pear Audio Blue brand, but it's extended to 12". Like many arms today, the damped unipivot uses carbon fibre. However, the carbon fibres are laid along the length of the tube, not wrapped around the arm. This layout is said to increase strength, rigidity and resonance control compared with other designs. It also has an in-line headshell with offset

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» slots to find the correct null points for cartridge alignment. This means it's best to use the provided alignment tool, or, better still, get an expert to do the job for you. The arm's design is all about minimising phase issues, and it works with all but the heaviest of cartridges, with Hana being a popular choice.

The knack

Installation is easy, but there are a few little knacks that put it best in the hands of a trained installer. Things like once everything is in place, it's best to rock the individual sections a couple of times to help them bed-in, but that requires a lot of skill when motor and arm are in their correct positions. However, there's no special magic involved in the installation, and maintenance is limited to changing the bearing oil every couple of years. You might want to add a cover too; the review sample was finished in a fantastic Porsche Burgundy, which is at once a dust and fingerprint magnet and curiously fascinating to cats.

Describing aspects of the install as requiring a bit of a knack fits the turntable's operation and use perfectly. There's a bit of a knack to operating the external power supply, as the same button that turns the motor on also changes its speed. You'll spend the first few times accidentally starting the deck at 45, then switching it off instead of reducing its speed. It also takes a few records to retrain your finger lift-free cueing-up skills. And there's the whole knack of spinning the platter at the right speed. And I'm sure for some, I've just listed a 'deal-breaker'. But if you are willing to set those prejudices aside for a few albums, that 'deal-breaker' will melt away.

Negatives?

Note that none of these operational observations makes any mention of the sonic performance. So, let's focus on the negatives in that sonic performance… and having just listed all of the negatives, let's now look at what the turntable does very well indeed. Perhaps the most immediate insights are the absence of noise floor and the overall sense of complete equanimity. It's tonally, rhythmically, melodically and harmonically in perfect balance. Nothing's exaggerated, nothing's out of place, it's all just… right.

The 'let's focus on the negatives' line sounds snarky, but hides what is at the core of this turntable. It doesn't have any negatives. Unless you have made a system that demands emphasis on something like detail, rhythm, vocal phrasing, or soundstage, the Aras keeps surprising you by its intrinsic 'rightness'. No matter how hard you try, if you go looking for negatives in the performance, you are won over by that sense of balance.

A sure sign of a good turntable is that you can try to tilt that balance and nothing fundamentally up-ends it. Sometimes, even changing the mat can make the difference between good and bad performance. It didn't here, even though the foam one supplied sounded best.

All manner of music

I really threw all manner of music at the Pear Audio Blue Aras and absolutely everything sounded as good as it could. It wasn't exaggerating things in a warm and cuddly way; bad records still sound bad, but they are given their best shot here. And when things are well recorded, it's nothing short of jaw-dropping.

There's a record-playing trope that unipivots only play the midrange, and high-mass decks tend to sound 'slow'. To test this, I took out *Sidings* by Craven Faults [Leaf]; my current go-to bass album (I have it on all formats for testing). This is great for two things; to test pitch stability and deep bass. It's a hypnotic, majestic album with some extraordinarily deep drones and arpeggios; it's not a symphonic piece, more like a musical meditation on northern England railways played on vast, modular analogue synths. Any doubts about bottom-end performance from a unipivot are destroyed within the first few minutes. This plumbs the depths, but also does it without it sounding anything but organic… which, given the nature of the instrumentation, sounds like a surprise. But it does sound like a true performance, albeit one that mostly comprises turning a bunch of knobs. »

> Records that were meant for dancing got on with the groove... without making a song and dance about making a song and dance.

Not a scintilla

There was literally nothing in my musical arsenal that caused the Pear Audio Blue Aras even a scintilla of pause; throw the close harmonies of 'Magpie' or 'Bread and Roses' from The Unthanks [*Diversions Vol 5 – Live and Unaccompanied*, Rabble Rouser], the jazz meets Afrobeats groove of 'Victory Dance' from *Where I'm Meant to Be* [Ezra Collective, Partisan] or the uncompromising scale of Holst's Planets Suite [Andre Previn/LSO, EMI]. The Aras shifted scale and image size so effortlessly that you only became aware of the change after a couple of minutes.

Music with drama maintained a sense of dynamic range, and sometimes menace when called for. Records that were meant for dancing got on with the groove… without making a song and dance about making a song and dance. It all just flowed effortlessly, in that way that reminds you of that first, uncomplicated system you had, but with the scale and gravitas of the latest big hitters.

I'll be honest, here. I drastically underestimated what the Pear Audio Blue Aras is capable of. In my defence, it arrived during the peak of the London heatwaves in July this year, and despite having invested in air conditioning, Victorian London houses are not geared up for sustained periods of high heat and humidity. Which meant my usual warm-running system was temporarily put away in favour of smaller, cooler-running gear. I quickly realised that the Aras was confidently out-performing that system, so at the first sign of a drop in outdoor temperature, I raised the in-house heat levels by deploying the good stuff in the rest of the system… and the Aras didn't disappoint.

The more I raised the game in terms of system, the more the Pear Audio Blue Aras had left in the tank. It was quite uncanny. The character didn't change; that fundamentally even-handed, more about the record than the turntable performance was hard to ignore, but it never sounded outclassed. We sometimes want everything from our audio equipment, kind of like a hypercar that costs as much as a cup of coffee, can turn into a people carrier, a helicopter, a piece of sculpture, and a Michelin-starred meal. Sometimes, the wish lists of people in search of a new product become unworkable and impossible. However, it came as something of a shock to find the Pear Audio Blue Aras comes close to ticking all the boxes. It really is a turntable in the 'attainably spendy' price point that is just as comfy being the lion's share of the budget, as it is being the least expensive cog in an almighty super-high-end system. I'd happily put it up against decks five times its price and beyond.

Epiphany point

And it was here I had a bit of an epiphany; I was still thinking of the Pear Audio Blue Aras in terms of its price, not its performance. I was still only half-way there with the performance aspect. It was only when I rebuilt the system in spite of the heat did it really begin to show just how far you can take the Aras. Lana Del Rey's atmospheric 'Venice Bitch' [*Norman F***ing Rockwell!*, Interscope] is a perfect example; this is all about legato sounds mixing together at a leisurely pace, and yet can go so easily wrong. Here, it went as right as I've ever heard it on vinyl.

Is Aras a £100,000 turntable hiding in the shadows? Well, in some ways… yes. It's got the kind of performance that would put it in amongst the biggest of big boys, especially in aspects like staging and musical flow. Sure, at that level, each has its strong sonic reason for its continued existence. But the point is, so does the Aras at that level. So, for the price of admission, it's an absolute steal!

I hate the 'b-word'. Describing almost any audio component as 'a bargain' rarely rings true. And saying that about a £14,000 record player sounds actively idiotic. Until you begin to set the Pear Audio Aras and Cornet 3 in context. When you look at where it sits in the pantheon of good record players in terms of performance, you begin to realise just how good this turntable can be. In that setting, it's one hell of a bargain! +

Technical specifications

Type: non-suspended turntable with 12" unipivot arm
Motor: Low torque, AC
External power supply with speed control
Start-up: fully manual
Can support multiple tonearms
Finish: various
Dimensions (WxDxH): 62.9x39x21cm
Price: £14,000, €14,000, $16,000

Manufacturer Pear Audio Blue
pearaudio-analogue.com

Distributor Audio Skies
Audioskies.com +(001) 310-975-7099

UK dealer Satori HiFi
Satori.co.uk +44(0)7887 955589