

audition

equipment review

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Redgum Audio Hi-Fi Component System

Made in Australia is a tag that's becoming increasingly rarer these days, especially when applied to hi-fi and home theatre equipment. Free trade has opened up the market and Australia, like many world economies has been inundated by very affordable, but often inferior quality products. Whole home theatre systems can now be bought for a few hundred bucks and the least expensive DVD player I've seen advertised lately, cost just \$59.

Something's got to give at these prices and that 'something' is quality, or the lack of it. You might think you're getting a bargain, but when something's this cheap and it's more economical to replace it than repair it when it develops a fault, you've got to take stock and think about what you're buying.

One company that certainly bucks this trend is Redgum Audio. It is one of less than a handful of Australian manufacturers that can claim to produce complete hi-fi systems. Its products are unique in many other ways as well and Australian hi-fi doesn't get any more Antipodean than this.

The name is a clue and the timber faceplates sported by all Redgum components. It's a solid piece of highly lacquered Australian Red Gum timber and definitely the most striking aspect of the aesthetic design. Redgum's product line-up is now quite extensive and as well as real wood hi-fi and home theatre components, there are a number of loudspeakers that have joined the Redgum ranks. Soon yet more products will swell Redgum's ranks, with the cutely named sonofa'GUM Series about to be released. When many Australian manufacturers are tightening their belts and cutting back, it's encouraging to see others like Redgum expanding its product range.

I've reviewed my fair share of Redgum equipment over the years and seen its designs improved and refined. There's still something elementary

**All Australian
and all about
playing music,
this system
would be a joy
to own**

By Nic Tatham

Vital Statistics

Dimensions:

420 x 95 x 360mm (electronics)

Weight:

7.3kg (RGCD5ENR)

Price:

\$14,720 (as tested)

Distributor:

Redgum Audio Pty Ltd
Factory 3, 25 Clarice Road
Box Hill South, VIC 3128

Telephone:

(03) 9897 1277

Facsimile:

(03) 9897 1399

Website:

www.redgumaudio.com



comprises CD player, preamp, monobloc power amplifiers and a pair of floorstanding loudspeakers. The RGM75p preamp is a passive line-level design and is powered up by another unique Redgum feature - a key. This acts as both the on/off switch, plus it means you can stop the kids from tampering and as a security measure, each amplifier and key can be registered with Redgum and if stolen, entered on its database. The RGM175 monobloc power amplifiers deliver 175 watts per channel and capable of delivering huge amounts of current, which is just the thing to drive tricky loudspeaker loads. Speaking of which, the Regnans floorstanders partnered here aren't exactly a particularly hard load, but I do know they thrive on quality amplification. Heading it all up as the source is the upgraded RGCD5ENR CD player. This too is a differently designed piece of hi-fi and using a CD-ROM drive as the transport mechanism. It's very much a hands-on CD player, with no remote (although remote controllable

about Redgum gear, which is all part of its charm. With this system, for example, there are no remote controls, no flashing lights and even the volume controls are individual for both channels. This is all part and parcel of one of Redgum's design philosophy - being persistently different! Whether this is a good or bad thing, Redgum's sticking to its alternative guns.

Not only are we reviewing this system, but we're also offering it as the prize in our latest Subscription Promotion. Collectively, this system's price tag nudges \$15,000 and it

CD-ROM drives are available), the only control you have over the disc is play, stop and forward track skipping. But, if you're really into your music, which you'd better be listening to this system, then these operating idiosyncrasies aren't going to bother you in the slightest.

And that's precisely what this system is all about - playing music. There's an immediacy to the sound of this system that is, well, very lifelike. It's an old adage but the job of any hi-fi system is to sound as close to a live performance as possible - that's essentially why we

listen to recorded music. To this end, this Redgum collection is supremely capable. I let the system run in over the Christmas period and after week or so of use, it was ready to do some proper listening. I'm very familiar with most of this equipment, having recently reviewed the Regnans loudspeakers, but I hadn't heard them driven by such capable amplification. Adjusting the two separate volume controls by ear, the system proves an effortless listen. That immediacy is plainly evident, although the system's enthusiasm is never overbearing and you can listen for a long time without the sound fatiguing.

In use, the Redgum system impresses with its big, powerful sound. I noticed on Redgum's website there's a long article on bass boost, as some feel its products deliberately accentuate the lower frequencies. I for one have never felt this to be the case and enjoy good bass as much as the next music enthusiast. The sound is evenly balanced, whether with rock and dance tracks, big classical works or more intimate recordings. The bass is weighty and warm and there's plenty of rhythmic drive. The soundstage opens up between the speakers and with fine presence in the midband, the sound is both open and airy.

Technotalk

Product Type:

Hi-fi component system

Data Reclocking:

Cirrus Logic CS8412 (RGCD5ENR)

Audio D/A Conversion:

20-bit, Burr Brown PCM 1702 (twin DACs, RGCD5ENR)

Rated Power Output:

175 watts RMS into 8 ohms (RGM175)

Frequency Response:

0.8Hz-80kHz (RGM175)

Signal To Noise Ratio:

More than 100dB (RGM175)

Peak Current:

More than 150 amps (RGM175)

Total Harmonic Distortion:

Less than 0.009% (RGM175)

Slew Rate:

More than 65V/ms (RGM175)

Audio Inputs:

5 line-level (RGM75p)

Technotalk specifications and recommended retail prices are supplied by the manufacturer

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With all sorts of music, the story’s the same - this system really can hold a tune. Whether you listen to gentle, intricate, closely-recorded music or large scale dynamic stuff, this system is well able to take control of all sorts of musical styles.

Just out of interest and while they were in my listening room, I swapped the Regnans and hooked up the Ambience Reference 1600s which are also reviewed in this issue. These are highly efficient speakers that only need a few watts to drive them, but are capable of revealing the world’s best amplification. The Redgum monoblocs proved well up to the task and the result was a sound that was almost larger than life.

This system has been designed to be used as a whole and the Regnans are perfectly matched to the amplification. Each component is available separately, but Redgum does price the pre and power amps collectively. Broken down, the RGC5ENR CD player is \$3,170, the RGM75p and pair of RGM175 monoblocs cost \$5,750 and a pair of Regnans speakers will set you back \$5,800. All up, excluding cables, this hardware is worth \$14,720. This is a lot of money, there’s no denying that and for a CD-only playing system it’s a considerable purchase. Judging whether this is good value or not is tough, as the alternative system options for this sort of money are varied. Some may prefer more conventional equipment, but this is not what Redgum is all about. The brand certainly has a worldwide collection of fans and for that there is a reason - simply because it’s a product that is a bit different, but one that genuinely performs at the same time.

This is the sort of music system that I could happily live with. Some lucky *Audio & Video Lifestyle* subscriber will be soon, which will be half their luck. The other half is knowing the music is being brought to you courtesy of one of Australia’s finest hi-fi manufacturers. **AVL**



Ancillary Equipment: Rega Planar 3 turntable, Parasound Zphono preamp, SAP Relaxa1 isolation platform, Nordost Flatline loudspeaker cables, Audioquest interconnects, Concorde equipment rack

O p i n i o n

The ‘Opinion’ expressed here is that of the reviewer, summarised in the form of a 5-star rating system, and should be considered as an integral part of the full contents of this Audition Equipment Review. As such, each category should be judged on its own merits and not necessarily used as a comparison with other equipment reviews in this, or other editions of *Audio & Video Lifestyle* magazine.

- ★ Shocker
- ★★ Average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Perfection

“And that’s precisely what this system is all about - playing music. There’s an immediacy to the sound of this system that is, well, very lifelike.”

Performance

★★★★★

Build Quality

★★★★★

Compatibility

★★★★★

Value For Money

★★★★