



**IN SIGHT**



- 1 Be hand-painted MDF plinth
- 2 Precision CNC milled and nickel coated bearing block
- 3 8.6in one-piece carbon-aluminium sandwich tonearm
- 4 Pick it PRO MM cartridge
- 5 33.3 and 45 rpm speed selector (78rpm belt is also provided)

and *Wind Chimes* are captivating, but the LP's two inarguable masterpieces – *Heroes And Villains* and *Good Vibrations* – provide further evidence that the retrieval of detail hasn't been compromised in any way. Both are studio creations of almost absurd complexity, on a par with The Beatles' releases of the same period – that heady year of 1967.

Whatever bizarre sounds Brian Wilson chose to employ, the Debut PRO handles with aplomb. And that includes the Theremin, the signature sound of *Good Vibrations* and a rare example of electronic sound that doesn't immediately suggest artifice. Throughout the album, though, are

**The most staggering part of the Debut PRO is the solidity and extension of the bass**

the harmonies of a group that ranks in the permanent Top 10, along with The Mills Brothers, The Ink Spots, The Hollies, The Everlys and the rest. As with *The Letterman* (Capitol Records must have had a thing about harmony), the sound is ethereal yet palpable throughout. How's that for a superhuman juggling act?

**Conclusion**

Spinning over 30 LPs on the Debut PRO, we leave it convinced that it begs to be heard by the sort of audiophile-in-waiting Lichtenegger designed it for, just as it begs the use of a poek or clamp. We'd love to spend more time with it, if only to see just how far the various upgrades can take it – the easy swaps like trick cables, outré man-and-whatever MC cartridge one cares to fit. But even in stock form, it joins the best of sub-£1,000 front-end combinations. 'Entry level' has a new champion ■

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**OUR VERDICT**

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>LIKE:</b> Price, ease of use, simplicity, extensive sound future upgrade options
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★★	<b>DISLIKE:</b> Nothing at the price
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>WE SAY:</b> Hard to better at entry level
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	
<b>OVERALL</b> ★★★★★	

**DURABLE DEBUT**

The Debut was born out of an idea formed in the summer of 1998 by long-time UK distributor of Pro-Ject Audio Systems, Laurence Armstrong, and company founder Heinz Lichtenegger. The two were together in Austria discussing ideas to develop the 'analogue market' and soon returned to Lichtenegger's original thinking behind the formative Pro-Ject 1 turntable launched in 1995. The brief was simple: a turntable that was affordable enough to be considered an 'add-on sale' in stores, but that could wow would-be purchasers with a convincing audiophile performance as soon as it was plugged in. Within a day of their new concept taking shape, a sample was produced in the company's Czech factory by Jan Kroutil, Pro-Ject's original product manager, and within a matter of

months the Debut was flying off shelves and an audio icon was born.

In the early Noughties, the Debut II arrived with a variety of colour finishes and new features including a built-in speed controller and phono stage. This was swiftly followed by the Debut III, also among the first hi-fi turntables to include a USB output. The Debut's status was consolidated at its highest ever price point in 2012 with the Debut Carbon and its carbon fibre tonearm. In 2020, over 20 years since the original concept, the latest iteration – the £450 Debut Carbon EVO (HFC 488), was launched to the same generally high praise, suggesting, if we hadn't realised this before, that Armstrong and Lichtenegger really were on to something all that time ago!

PRO right after using a package costing ten times its price. But the gains you would realistically hope to achieve over this, when the time comes to upgrade, would be matters of scale, perhaps a touch more stage depth. Auditioned in context, the Debut PRO yields nothing, as is clearly demonstrated with William Bell's *The Soul Of A Bell*. This is more about voice than anything else, despite the usual peerless backing that all Stax releases employ.

His sublime composition *You Don't Miss Your Water* exhibits vocal textures so convincing we start to have second thoughts about MCs. The warmth in the voice defies the technology of the phono stages, vivid and apparent whether through all-valve or solid-state step ups. 'Coherent' replaces 'competent' in our summation as this deck certainly earns its suffix, 'PRO' being less of a

conceit and more a statement of intent. This is made even more evident when we turn the screw and subject it to a slightly knackered copy of *The Best Of The Letterman*. Of course, we have no way of knowing how much high-frequency content has been shaved off over the years by abuse, but the Pick it PRO extracts each of the three voices in their own sonic turf, blending them with such authority that we end up digging out a copy on open-reel tape for comparison purposes. Miraculously we come to the conclusion that we no longer consider their takes of The Beatles' *Instantly* or Victor Young and Edward Heyman's *When I Fall In Love* as exercises in schmaltz.

Even better, as harmonising is dominating the mood, is the sublime Analogue Productions release of The Beach Boys' *Smiley Smile*. Even the freaky weird numbers like *Vegetables*