here are times when someone telephones our office with the suggestion that we should feature their system in the magazine, when we just cannot resist, especially if it is both something we think would be of great interest both to our readers and ourselves.

This is one of those systems, and you will have gathered from your initial perusal of the photographs on these pages that it is somewhat of an esoteric one.

Peter Drew has one of those rare beasts, the Linn/Naim tri-amplified systems. In other words, he has a pair of Linn Isobarik speakers, which are driven from three Naim NAP250 power amplifiers, which are themselves fed from the pre-amplifier via an active crossover. The speakers contain no crossover, they are completely passive, and one Naim 250 drives the tweeters for left and right channels, and the other two amplifiers drive midrange and treble each for left and right channels respectively.

Turntable is of course the Linn Sondek LP12 fitted with a new Linn Ittok LVII pickup arm and Linn Asak cartridge.

In point of fact, Peter had only had his system as listed above together for about four months when we visited him. Before the PMS passive Isobariks, he owned the ordinary DMS Isobariks with one Naim NAP250.

Perhaps it would be best if I started by telling you about how he worked up to this pinnacle of high fidelity, since obviously one doesn't usually go straight into the local hi-fi shop write out a cheque for £4,500 and say 'Right, one tri-amped system please, don't bother wrapping it!'

In the dim and distant past, Peter used to own and be quite happy with a Thorens TD150 turntable – a good one in its day—with a Shure M75EJ cartridge, Leak Stereo 70 amplifier and a pair of Wharfedale Melton loudspeakers. This he kept for probably all of eight years, until someone did him the favour of stealing it.

Faced with the necessity to start again, and having been impressed by all the fantastic reviews he read at the time about the Fons CQ30 and SME 300911 being *the* turntable to have – he took the plunge and bought one.

Into it he fitted the Sonus Blue Label cartridge, feeding a Cambridge P80 amplifier to a pair of Tannoy Berkeley speakers, which he made himself.

He was never happy I suspect with the Fons, and indeed on reflection we must admit that despite stunning press coverage at the time, it was a pretty awful deck. So, he looked around, went to KJ Leisuresound who told him that there was really no difference between a Linn



The ultimate system? A look at a tri-amped Linn and Naim system featuring the Asak and Ittok



## **CASEBOOK**





The complete system with, left, the familiar Linn and right, the Naim pre-amp



and an STD, and so Peter bought the STD.

Along with the STD, he bought a Hadcock GH228L pickup arm and an Entre 1 moving coil cartridge. At this time, he decided that he also would be better off with a rather better amplifier, and so opted for the old Meridian 101/105, not the new 105S as we know it now, but before it was modified to be as good as it is now.

The Tannoys were also destined for the chop, as he basically couldn't stand them for more than ten minutes at a sitting, and he plumped for the ubiquitous Spendor BC1 — ubiquitous at that time anyway.

From what Peter told me, I had the feeling that he was never happy with the sound of that system, and he always found the bass soggy and indistinct. He naturally enough blamed the speakers I think, although seeds of doubt must also have existed about the STD, and before

long he arranged to hear a pair of Isobariks at Grahams Electrical, where, he mused, they sounded incredibly awful and where he spent five minutes listening to the salesman telling him why the speakers were so wonderful.

He then heard them at a friend's house, and before very long he was hooked. Certainly, going from Spendor BC1s to Isobariks is a quantum leap forward in terms of sound quality, and he was sure from then on that those were the speakers he wanted.

Basically what happened next was that, again KJ Leisuresound, who had sold him the STD originally, demonstrated the Linn for him up against his STD, and it was obvious after very little listening that the Linn was a vastly better turntable. Why then had KJ sold him the STD in the first place – he asked himself? Fair question!

It became clear to Peter from what he had heard and from what he read and

what various dealers had told him that if he was going to use Isobariks, the rest of his system would need improvement, and he started with the turntable.

He bought himself a Linn Sondek and sold the STD to a friend. The arm he opted for was the Mission 774 and a Supex SD900 Super, The Meridan amplifiers stayed temporarily, and after some hard saving, the BC1s were ousted and a pair of brand new Linn Isobarik DMS speakers more than filled their place. This was obviously so vastly superior to what went before that words fail adequately to describe it.

Some time later, Studio 99, from whom he bought the speakers, lent him a Naim 250 to listen to, as they thought it was a better amplifier for Isobariks, and he was more than impressed with it. He found it had greater dynamics and was less tiring to listen to.

And so, out went the Meridian, in came the Naim. Then I suppose the only



path left to him was clear. But in the meantime, there were small incidentals to sort out like the arm. He got on OK with the Mission arm for quite a while, but he then bought a Grace G707 and found it to be quite an improvement in many areas. Still of course with the Supex SD900 at this time.

He went on to listen to many cartridges, including the Denon DL103D, but when the Asak came out, he liked it and bought one.

Next significant step was to go triamplified, which sounds fairly innocuous if you say it quickly enough, but it does mean buying a new PMS pair of Isobariks and two more Naim NAP250 amplifiers, plus the NAXO active crossover.

But he was clear in his own mind that this was the only step left open to him, and having bowed to the inevitable, he reflects that he is very pleased with the end result.

It was interesting to hear Peter's views

on the new Meridian 101/105S amplifiers, which we all rate so highly on the editorial team. He says that whenever he has had the 105S at home, he has found it rather bright and a little harsh when compared to the Naim 32/250. We have yet admittedly to do a proper A-B comparison between the two, but Peter's comments have certainly persuaded us to do so sooner than we might perhaps have done otherwise.

From the point of view of sound quality, it is difficult to know where to begin with a system of this calibre. Certainly one's ability to sit back and appreciate the finer aspects of a rock or classical performance is greatly enhanced over 99.9% of other hi-fi systems.

Information content was very high, and I found it very easy on some of my favourite albums to pick out all the detail and follow different instruments as they all did their own thing. A rare quality.

What did come over though, which has always been my reaction with Isobariks to some extent, was that the system did at times sound slow. What I mean by that is that the intrinsic rhythm of the music seemed slower than I have come to expect on my own system, and slower than Matt Nicholson says he has heard some DMS systems sound.

What the PMS system has that no DMS system I have heard can match is an openness of midband and a solidity of imagery that allows images to be formed completely outside the cabinets. Dynamic range was excellent, although at no time did the sound ever come out and grab you by the ears, which may well be a good thing.

The fairest we can say is that we spent an extremely enjoyable evening listening to some good music, and we never troubled once by thoughts of hi-fi. A fairer compliment I suppose we cannot give.