

# WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION



## MUSIC & MOVIES MADE BEAUTIFUL

Whatever your hi-fi and home cinema needs, there's a five-star Solo to suit



ARCAM



**BEST HOME CINEMA SYSTEM £1500+**

**Arcam Solo Movie 5.1 £2000**

IT WAS SOMETHING of an open secret that Arcam was due to release a movie variant of its outstandingly successful Solo music system. The real surprise is how long we all had to wait for the product to arrive. Patience has its reward, though, because the Solo Movie 5.1 is

**VERDICT**  
The Solo Movie is a true one-stop hi-fi/home cinema solution. There's no all-in-one better at the price

**"Image quality is simply gorgeous: it's sharp, vivid and packed with detail"**

Simon Lucas, First Tests Editor

something of a gem. As with every all-in-one system in this section, you will get a better performance by going the separates route but, and it's a big one, no separates surround system will

No-frills styling hides a great sound and vision performance



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AWARDS 2007  
ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEMS  
HOME CINEMA SYSTEM £1500+  
ARCAM SOLO MOVIE 5.1

ever look as neat as this, or be as easy to use. When it comes to DVD replay, we doubt this Arcam has anything to fear from most sub-£1000 DVD players.

The Solo delivers rich colours and an impressive sense of solidity. Detail levels are pretty pleasing, as is the way this machine handles movement.

**The picture is only half the story**

The news is almost as positive when it comes to sound quality. No, nothing this slim and easy-to-accommodate is going to rival the kind of power and scale most non-budget standalone receivers manage. But, equally, partnered with a suitable surround speaker set-up – we reckon Arcam's excellent Muso/Logo package (£1200) is ideal – the Solo Movie 5.1 will deliver a rich, refined and inviting sound in most listening rooms.

Despite majoring on smoothness, this Arcam system still produces enough punch and drive to satisfy even the most hardcore of *Die Hard* fans.

Unlike some rivals, Arcam hasn't short-changed on the feature front. Your money buys video switching, so you can route other sources – say, satellite box – through this unit. There's a pair of HDMI inputs, but you can opt for either Scart or component ins/outs, too. You can also integrate iPod operation via Arcam's excellent rDock. Put it altogether, and you have an exceptionally well-thought-out package for the money.

**NOW ADD THESE**

**42IN PLASMA TV**  
PIONEER PDP-508XD  
£3000  
The 'only' HD-Ready screen resolution belies the quality of image this Pioneer delivers – brilliant!

**SPEAKER PACKAGE**  
ARCAM MUSO/LOGO  
£1200  
This elegant speaker package gives a powerful and insightful sound with the Solo Movie 5.1

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**BEST HI-FI SYSTEM £500+**

**Arcam Solo £1000**

COMPROMISES BETWEEN LIFESTYLE systems and sound quality have been just that: a compromise. Until, that is, Arcam gave us the Solo. This one-box solution is attractive and really can replace three units, because it does so without sacrificing performance.

**VERDICT**  
Last year's Award-winner proves that is wasn't just a lucky year. The Solo is an unbridled success

**"Arcam has built a one-box hi-fi that performs like separates kit"**

Ketan Bharadia, Technical Editor

The CD/DAB tuner/amp combination offers excellent all-round sound, with the convenience of a one-box product. Add this to solid build and attractive styling, and with that in mind it's easy to see why the Solo has won another Award.

Great performance from one good-looking, convenient box



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BEST HI-FI SYSTEM £500+  
ARCAM SOLO

Now, we wouldn't lie to you, so here's how it is: a similarly priced, class-leading separates system would pip the Solo for sheer sound quality, but the Arcam manages to get pretty close.

It's when you discover what's inside the Arcam that the secret to its sonic success is revealed. The CD transport, digital-to-analogue converters and audio output stage are similar to those found on the company's renowned CD73T, and the DAB technology is from a stand-alone tuner. That's why there's no sign of performance corner-cutting, then.

**Let the good tunes roll**

Pick a track from Joe Driscoll's *Origin Myths* set, and the Solo uncovers impressive detail, delivering a clean, powerful and cohesive sound. Even if you throw something a little more hectic in its

direction, the Arcam machine stays calm and poised, failing to come across even remotely flustered. Timing, too, is excellent. Spin Henrik Schwarz's *DJ Kicks* set, and you'll hear the Solo's ability to drive tracks along with ease. Switch to the tuner, and the performance is just as pleasing. Noise levels are low, and overall resolution is fine, but we'd still recommend a decent aerial.

If that's not enough, there are also four line-level inputs, a preamp and multi-room outputs. There's even an alarm.

Arcam has built a one-box hi-fi with separates performance – a worthy winner.

**NOW ADD THESE**

**STEREO SPEAKERS**  
MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE BR2  
£200  
The BR2s offer superb sound and build. A more refined speaker than the price would suggest

**IPOD CABLE**  
ARCAM rLEAD  
£60  
If you want more flexibility for your Solo, the rLead gives full iPod connectivity and control

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**SPEAKER PACKAGE**  
ARCAM MUSO/LOGO  
★★★★★  
£1000

**FOR**  
Open, detailed and revealing performance; truly excellent integration

**AGAINST**  
Not the most stylish at the price; leaner bass than some rivals

**VERDICT**  
An accomplished offering: not the most heavy bass nor the most stylish design, but a revealing and articulate performance with serious sonic appeal

**Perfect partners for Movie Solo**

**THIS PACKAGE IS** a little unusual right from the off. It consists of five 'Muso' satellites (an odd name, evoking a nightmare one of our review team once had about being locked in a lift with the members of Steely Dan) – and the more sedately named 'Logo' subwoofer.

The satellites are fairly small, but not as titchy as most rivals. Likewise, the sub, while being reasonably compact, is nowhere near the style icon you'll find with rival packages from the

age offers superb integration, with an articulate and revealing upper bass performance that segues into the midrange with authority.

They're also easy to drive, so will make a perfect partner for a not-so-powerful budget receiver – or the Arcam Movie Solo, which they sound like they were specifically designed to work in tandem with. Add to all that a cohesive soundfield and plenty of punch, and you've got a star speaker package.

**"They offer fabulous integration with an articulate upper bass"**

likes of KEF. But, while these speakers might not have you muttering 'gorgeous' the moment you get them from the box, they are very discreet in situ, and should blend into most rooms discreetly.

**Smooth cohesion**

The most common flaw in multichannel systems is the integration between sub and sats. A frightening number of systems sound as if the lower bass is being phoned in from a cave in Azerbaijan – not here. This pack-

**ALSO CONSIDER ?**

**KEF KHT3005SE**  
★★★★★  
£1000  
October 2007  
A stunning upgrade to the previous 3005 package: great cohesion and fine, punchy bass. Oh, and sexy looks, too

**MONITOR AUDIO RADIUS R90AV-12**  
★★★★★  
£1350  
November 2006  
Product of the year in our 2006 Awards, this is a fine package that does everything superbly. It's decidedly easy on the eye, too

iPOD DOCK  
ARCAM rDOCK  
★★★★★  
£130

**FOR**  
High-quality build and spec; clever battery-charging feature; handles sound and vision; dynamic, bassy performance

**AGAINST**  
Pricey; only Arcam Solo owners benefit from the full feature-set

**VERDICT**  
An essential investment for iPod-loving Solo owners; a damn fine dock option for everyone else

**rDock could be your dock**

**WITH IPOD SALES** soaring and related accessories in high demand, it's little surprise that Arcam has joined its hi-fi counterparts by introducing its own iPod dock. With every 'i' prefix option already taken, please welcome the Arcam rDock.

Opting for a smart metal build over the standard plastic, the rDock has an instant quality advantage. This is backed by an impressive feature-set – including S-Video out to display your videos and pictures, plus an intelligent charging option that stops your iPod battery from getting juiced to a premature death.

Plugged into Arcam's Solo, the system's remote gives you complete control over your iPod, while also

**"The Arcam's superb dynamics and bass steamroller its rivals"**

displaying all track info. Used with any other hi-fi, it's just a great dock.

The rDock has been touted as the first audiophile sound dock, a statement that might have the people at Onkyo and Denon sucking more air through their teeth than a *Jerry Springer Show* audience. However, this bold statement isn't far off the truth, as the Arcam's superb dynamics and bass steamroller rivals like Denon's ASD-rR and the Award-winning Onkyo's DS-A2.

If you own an Arcam Solo, the rDock is its perfect sidekick.

The rDock's die-cast alloy design aims to reduce sound-harming vibrations to zero



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HOME CINEMA  
IN A BOX  
ARCAM  
SOLO MOVIE 2.1

★★★★★  
£ 1450

**FOR**

Great DVD pictures, toe-tapping CD sound and DAB tuner all from one sturdy little box

**AGAINST**

No upgrade path

**VERDICT**

We like a little more flexibility in our equipment, but if the Solo 2.1 ticks all your

# Arcam's 2.1 movie star

**ARE YOU A** decisive sort of person? Once made up, does your mind stay made up? That's the sort of resolute thinking required of the prospective Arcam Solo Movie 2.1 owner, because this isn't the sort of product to indulge vacillation.

This is a home cinema in a box for those who don't really want a home cinema – more specifically, the numerous loudspeakers that a surround-sound system requires.

The Solo Movie 2.1 incorporates DVD drive, amplification for two speakers, plus a preout for a sub-woofer, DAB/FM tuner and CD

**“If you'll never want surround sound, it's thoroughly likeable”**

playback too. There are analogue and digital audio inputs and outputs, a pair of HDMI inputs and one output, and preouts for a pair of active speakers or a power amp.

What there isn't is any provision for expanding the configuration to full 5.1 sound. As we say, you'd better be positive that you'll never, ever want to enjoy surround

sound. If you are, the Arcam is a thoroughly likeable device.

If you've seen our reviews of the Solo Movie 5.1, you'll be primed for what to expect here. Upscaling a DVD of Tarantino's gonzo *Death-proof* to 1080i resolution, the Arcam delivers lustrous, vivid images that handle the glaring red and orange tones well. Contrasts are dealt with effortlessly, picture noise is repressed in all but the most complex scenes, and the Solo tracks motion efficiently. Only a slight, but definite, tendency to soften edges a little prevents it from impressing entirely.

**Broad, burly movie sound**

Movie sound, too, follows the established template. It's broad-beamed and burly, trading off the finest details in favour of a warm and inclusive presentation. There's no surround effect when using two speakers and a sub, of course, but the Arcam offers a broad, well-delineated soundstage. Dialogue especially is natural and believable.

There's more of the same when it comes to playing CDs. The Solo Movie 2.1 is very similar to

Arcam's £1000 Solo Music in its conviviality. John Cale's *Fear is a Man's Best Friend* impresses with its organic timing, polite attack and unthreatening demeanour. There's more bile and desperation to the song than the Arcam describes, but as an all-in-one solution it's mightily impressive. The ability to choose whether the subwoofer joins in with two-

**“As an all-in-one 2.1 solution, this Solo is mightily impressive”**

channel music or not is just one of the thoughtful in-menu touches.

So, if you're clear-thinking enough to reply 'No! Never!' to the question of surround sound, you can enjoy all of the benefits of a Movie Solo with none of the speaker issues, and pocket a handy chunk of change. The indecisive will, as usual, have to think again.

## KNOW HOW CONNECTIONS

**AS YOU CAN** see, the Solo Movie 2.1 is generously endowed, socket-wise, and is ready to form the basis of an expansive system. Your SkyHD and PlayStation 3 can be routed in via HDMI (at 1080i resolution), with

both digital optical and analogue RCA inputs ready to receive audio. And even if you can't expand to full 5.1 sound, you can at least run a pair of active speakers or a stereo power amplifier from the Arcam's preouts.



**TECH SPECS**

**POWER** 50w  
**PLAYS** DVD-V, DVD-A, SACD, CD, CD-R/-RW, DivX  
**SURROUND MODES**  
**INPUTS** Stereo RCA, digital optical, digital coaxial, component, HDMI  
**OUTPUTS** Digital optical, component, HDMI

**ALSO CONSIDER ?**

**ARCAM SOLO MOVIE 5.1**

★★★★★  
£2000

Awards 2007

If you like the look of this 2.1 model, but want surround sound, then this pricier Solo Movie model is for you

**KEF KIT100**

★★★★★  
£1000

February 2007

A stylish 2.1 system with virtual surround sound. Soon to be replaced by a new range cinema systems, see p34