

SYSTEMS AWARDS 2015**Best music system £400-£800****Cambridge Audio Minx Xi £400**

The Minx Xi might not have needed a price cut to defend its 2014 title, but at £400 (down from £600) it is a good opportunity for those looking for an entry-level network streamer but whose budget is a few fifties short of Naim territory.

Thanks to preloaded BBC iPlayer Radio, Pandora and Rhapsody, the Minx Xi puts thousands of internet radio stations at your fingertips. It can stream high-res files (up to 24bit/96kHz) from your smart device wirelessly over your home network or via aptX Bluetooth. If you prefer a wired route, there's a LAN socket and a generous spread of digital (USB, optical and coaxial) and analogue (RCA and 3.5mm) inputs to cater for laptops and CD players alike.

Power, drive - and easy to use

A legible display and responsive remote makes the Cambridge a breeze to use, although the

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Stream Magic app makes quicker work of browsing music from a NAS drive.

There's a sense of power and drive that belies its modest 40W-per-channel amplifier as it tears through Rush's *The Spirit of Radio*. Its fine rhythmic drive makes the most of the track's erratic tempo, and there's plenty of authority and scale to launch a full-frontal attack on the iconic riff. That's balanced out with enough refinement to save the rough-and-ready recording from sounding messy. Expressive up top and down low, the Minx lathers everything from bass guitars to cymbals in texture.

You'll be hard-pushed to find a more affordable box that's this sonically transparent, and that's true across the connections board. Music sounds agile and articulate through its digital and analogue inputs, and even Bluetooth streams sound surprisingly informative.

The new price makes this neat compact, glossy box more of an alternative to the Denon than it was last year - just remember the extra budget for a quality pair of speakers the Minx deserves (page 112 should help you out) and you can't go wrong. For a system of its kind, it's utterly desirable and undeniably great value.

