



• BUDGET COMPONENT OF THE YEAR

**Oppo BDP-95 Blu-ray Disc Player**  
\$995

Oppo's universal players have earned a reputation for versatility and value, with each new model offering better features and sound quality than the last. Even so, we see Oppo's \$999 BDP-95 as a watershed product that, through sheer sonic excellence, establishes a new performance benchmark for sub-\$1000 digital players. The BDP-95 is defined by its distinctive audio section based on dual 8-channel, 32-bit ESS Sabre32 ES9018 Reference Audio DACs. One DAC drives the player's multichannel analog outputs, while the other drives two sets of stereo outputs (one set single-ended, the other balanced). Oppo says the balanced outs provide "a true differential signal path all the way from the DAC to the 3-pin XLR connectors"—a circuit topology rarely seen in players this price. The upshot is that the BDP-95 sounds stunning for the money and in an absolute sense, making it our Budget Component of the Year. *Chris Martens (219)*



• ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEM OF THE YEAR

**Focal Bird**  
\$999

When you first see a Bird system, you behold two dome-shaped satellite speakers and a slender integrated amp/DAC to power them—nice gear, but something you could easily mistake for a "lifestyle" toy. Then somebody turns the rig on and your jaw drops as you hear beautifully focused, three-dimensional, and nearly full-range sound pouring forth. How can this be? First, those tiny satellites are in fact genuine two-way Focal micro-monitors, which is a good place to start. Second, the slim-line amp/DAC also houses a small self-powered woofer with electronic crossover settings for any of three sizes of Bird satellites. Third, the amp/DAC provides analog and digital inputs, plus a Klear technology wireless iTransmitter dongle for iDevice connectivity. Fourth, computer audiophiles can add an optional Klear-based wireless USB dongle. Focal's Bird system represents the simplest path to legitimate high-end audio, but the real magic lies in its shockingly sophisticated sound. *CM (218)*

