



THE SUNDAY TIMES

TECH & GAMES

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06.09.2015

Soundbars connected to a TV immerse you in a world that brings music and movies alive. **Steve May** cranks up the volume on three



They'll knock your ears off



there's room for a set-top box, Blu-ray player and games console too. Bluetooth is built in, so although the price is high you're getting a terrific stereo system for any music held on your phone, tablet or laptop as well. Verdict A fine-sounding soundbar.

★★★★★ arcam.co.uk

BEST FOR MUSIC

▲ **ARCAM SOLO BAR** £650

The British hi-fi specialist Arcam has built its business on high-end audio components, so the size (and price) of the Solo soundbar should come as no surprise. It is more than 3ft 3in wide and weighs 14lb, and should be paired with a substantial TV. But the performance is proportional to the girth: audio quality is so good that it sounds as if Arcam has crammed a couple of its bookshelf speakers into the bar. The aluminium case contains a full complement of bass, mid-range and high frequency drivers to produce a brilliant "soundstage" (the term used for the immersive stereo effect you want from speakers), and there's the option of adding a wireless £500 Solo Sub for extra bass heft. The Solo Bar is at its most enjoyable played loud and you can connect plenty of kit alongside your TV; thanks to four HDMI inputs,

WHY BUY A SOUNDBAR? The trend for thin TVs is bad news for audio, as the flat speakers that the sets use make for weedy bass and a poor soundstage. Adding a soundbar brings much-needed sonic heft to TVs, making films sound more exciting, with crisp dialogue and music that sparkles. You won't get surround sound, though; for that you still have the faff of precisely positioning speakers around the room.

HOW TO CONNECT The simplest way is to use a thin optical cable running from the back of the set and into the bar. Switch off your TV's speakers or you'll get an echo. Another option is HDMI, which carries both the audio and video signal. The advantage is that if you connect the bar to the set over HDMI you can then wire other kit, such as a games console or set-top box, into the bar instead of into the TV — useful if your set is an older model with just one HDMI port. All here also use Bluetooth to act as wireless music speakers.