

FIDELITY

international

04

english



04

01/2017 • February/March/April 2017

The German Voice of Premium Audio... a free online magazine





Burmester

Phase 3 Retrostyle

PHASE 3 stellt eine Erweiterung zu den traditionellen Produktlinien des Hauses dar und vereint höchsten Anspruch an Klang mit Musikkultur und modernem Lifestyle in einer perfekten Mischung.

„Das begehrteste Produkt auf der High End 2016“
The Absolute Sound



Audio Note valve amplifiers are completely hand-crafted. Many models can be customized,... →

~ 3 800 000 000 B. C.

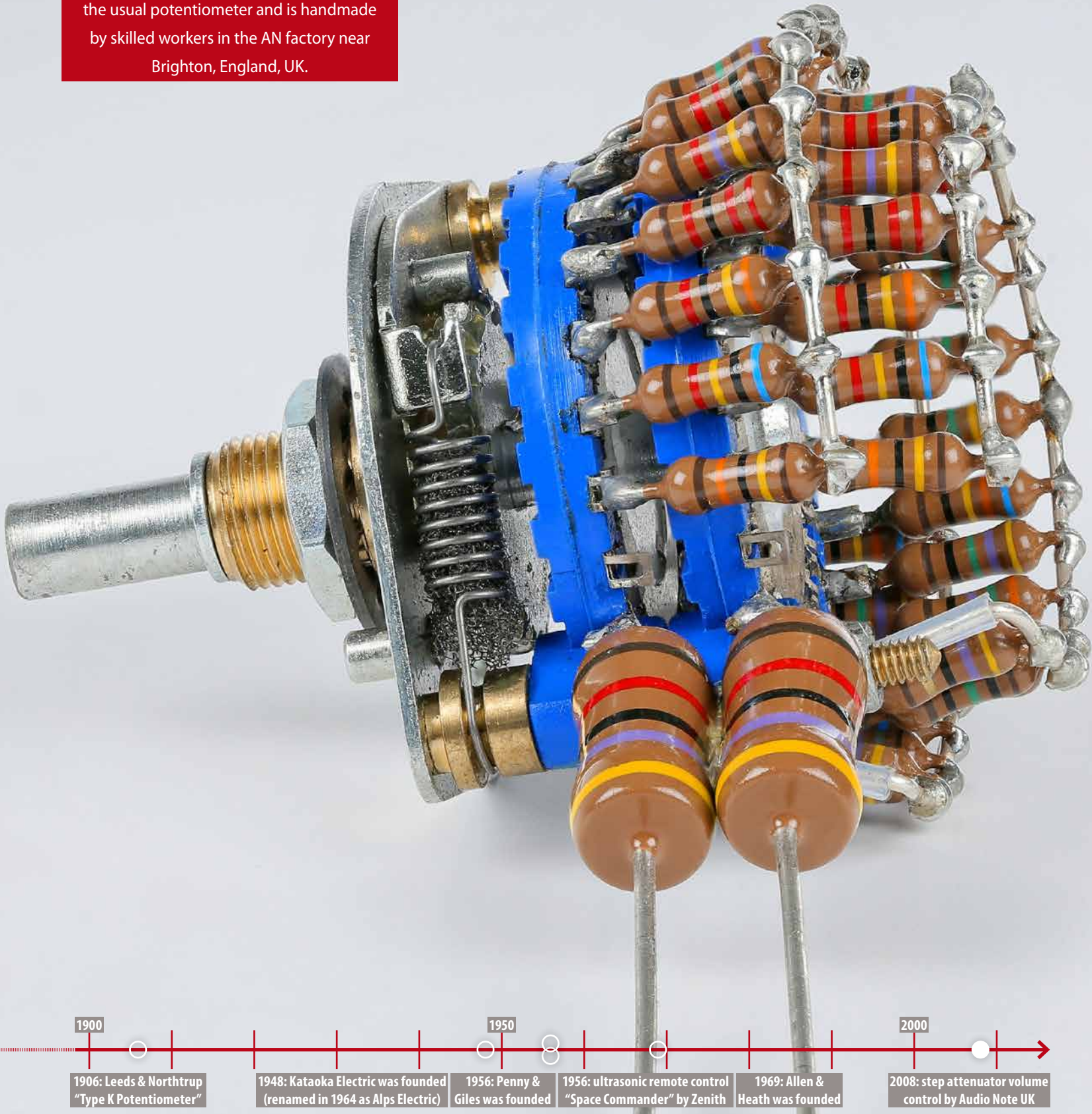
Big Bang: the invention of noise

1850

1841: slide-wire potentiometer invented by Johann Christian Poggendorf

1900

—> ...i.e. with a handmade attenuator volume control featuring 23 high quality resistors with heavily silver plated copper contacts for each channel. The step attenuator substitutes the usual potentiometer and is handmade by skilled workers in the AN factory near Brighton, England, UK.



1900

1906: Leeds & Northrup "Type K Potentiometer"

1948: Kataoka Electric was founded (renamed in 1964 as Alps Electric)

1950

1956: Penny & Giles was founded

1956: ultrasonic remote control "Space Commander" by Zenith

1969: Allen & Heath was founded

2000

2008: step attenuator volume control by Audio Note UK



Cai Brockmann

picture: Hans von Draminski

DEAR READERS,

FIDELITY international No. 4 features an unusually broad range of hi-fi topics.

Starting with Luxman, makers of the 590 AX-II integrated amplifier, a classic premium device “made in Japan,” the land that conquered the audiophile world in the 1970s and 1980s. Daniel Hertz’s M9 is irresistible as well, but in a very different way. The person behind this brand name is one of high-end audio’s most important figures: Mark Levinson. Visiting this living legend in the idyllic Daniel Hertz showroom in Venice, we were given a “live” glimpse into what this “founding father of high-end audio” believes optimum music reproduction should sound like. Once back home in Germany, the unassuming M9 integrated amplifier really opened our eyes, not to mention our ears. The Phase 3 from Burmester makes a similarly unassuming impression, unless, of course, you decide to order this wonderful complete system in a cool “Loft” look instead of the usual chrome design. In contrast, the DS Audio W-1 is very definitely an eye-catcher. But this optical cartridge would be just as sensational without the light show in

the tonearm. The Rega P3 also favors a less conspicuous look, and the latest 2016 version continues to provide great sound for a modest price. Once a tip for insiders only, NAD is another company that has risen to become a well-known name in high-end audio. We have an in-depth feature on NAD and its chief engineer “B.E.E.” Delivering superb-quality German engineering, size is the sole aspect of Live Act Audio’s “midsized” LAS 408 speaker that doesn’t stand out from the crowd.

Start flipping through the pages of this issue of FIDELITY international and dive into the best high-end magazine in the world, right at your fingertips on your tablet.

FIDELITY international—the German Voice of Premium Audio.

Best regards,

Armonia

So klangvoll wie ihr Name

Die High End Kabelinnovation von HMS



NEU

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„HMS schafft mit dem Armonia eine energetische und vitale Verbindung.

Große Klasse wenn Kunst und Können in dieser Form aufeinandertreffen und die Ohren so außergewöhnlich gut verwöhnt werden“

O. Sturm



Armonia
Interconnect RCA/Cinch



Armonia
Interconnect sym. XLR

Armonia

Ein gelungener Technologietransfer.

Die Lautsprecher und Interconnectkabel dieser Neuentwicklung profitieren von den Konstruktionsmerkmalen und hiermit erzielten klanglichen Eigenschaften unserer Top-Serie Gran Finale Jubilee.

Minimalste Verluste und höchste Einstreufestigkeit offenbaren klangliche Details und eine Dynamik die in dieser Preisklasse ihresgleichen suchen.

Wir sind Mitglied der:

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Hans M. Strassner GmbH
Am Arenzberg 42
51381 Leverkusen
Tel: (02171) 73 40 06
Mail@hmselektronik.com

HMS

KOMPETENZ IN KABELN

MADE IN GERMANY

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01/2017
February/March/April

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Please note: All items are listed with German retail prices (including sales tax) at the time of equipment evaluation.



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Please note: All items are listed with German retail prices (including sales tax) at the time of equipment evaluation.





Luxman L-590-AXII

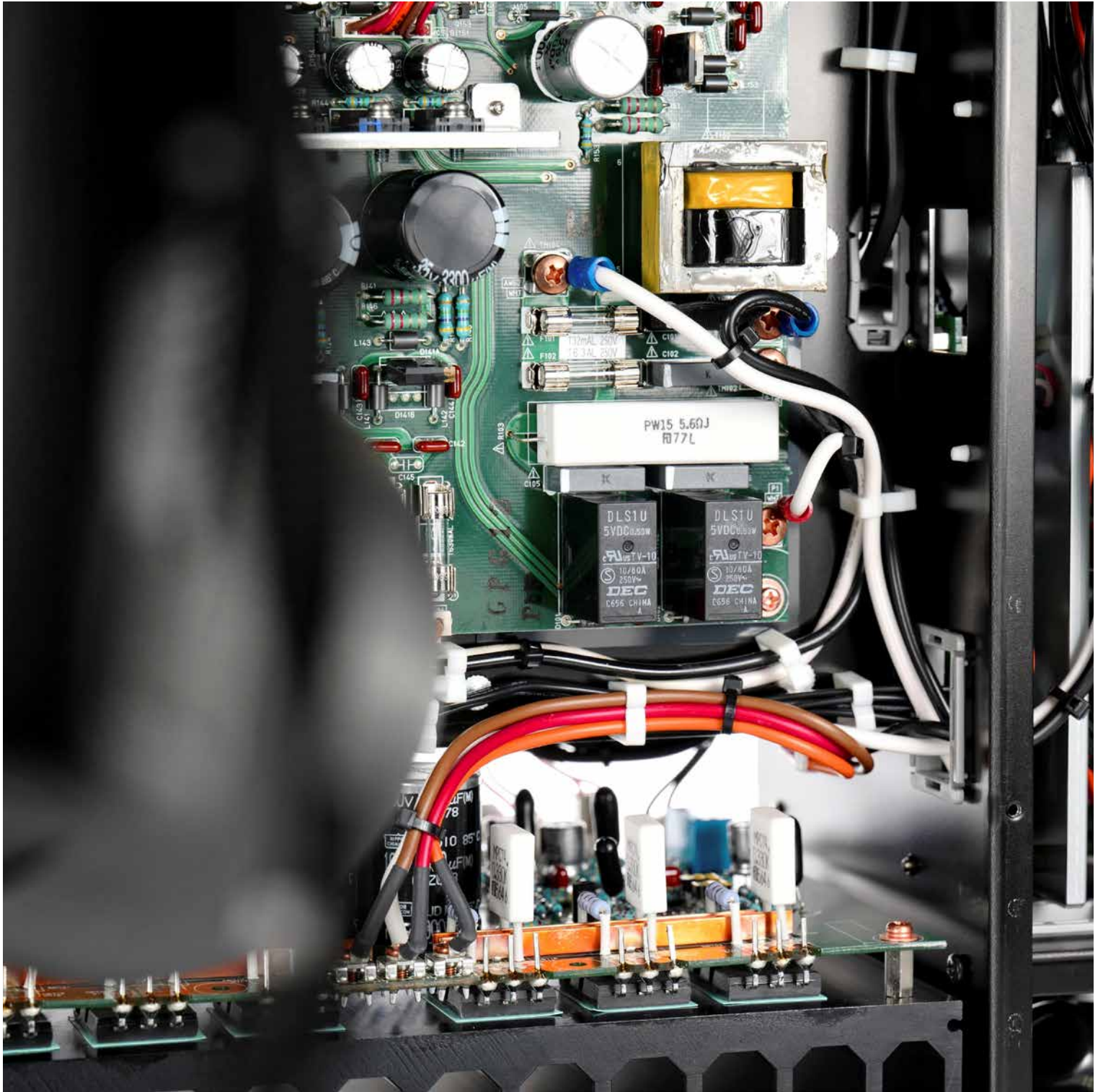
RETRO, BUT ONLY ON THE OUTSIDE

By Hans von Draminski. Photos: Ingo Schulz



NOSTALGICS WILL
LOVE ITS DESIGN, ▶





AND AUDIO CONNOISSEURS WILL
LOVE ITS CONTEMPORARY SOUND. ▶

THE LUXMAN L-590-AXII IS A WORTHY DESCENDANT OF LEGENDARY INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER CONSTRUCTIONS FROM BACK IN THE DAY WHEN WE STILL HAD "STEREO SYSTEMS" WHERE EVERYTHING HAD TO BE COMPATIBLE. ▶



Luxman L-590-AXII
 An integrated amplifier that looks like it's just stepped out of a time machine: opulent features, hot Class A circuit, cool looks, and very fine sound. Achtung! Already a modern classic!

© FIDELITY Magazine

CHALLENGING = A component is 100% intuitive if you can exploit its potential to the full intuitively.
 INTUITIVE =



WELL, HERE EVERYTHING'S COMPATIBLE. ▶

To access a few extra functions, you have to use the handy but rather newfangled remote control.



—Are we back in 1985? Looking at the matte-silver metal fireball I have in front of me, it certainly seems that way. With its beautifully brushed front panel, the satisfying click when you turn the knobs and, in particular, the huge VU meters, I'm really reminded of the devices you used to find only at really good dealers. I don't mean the ones in the shop window displayed with all the other mass-produced items, but rather the ones at the back of the shop, safely tucked away to avoid tempting the wrong people. There was never much of a chance anyone would have made a dash for it with a Luxman amplifier though. They were just too heavy for that—and it seems nothing has changed in that department. After I got home, I played Hercules by carrying the Luxman all by myself from the table to the rack. For days my back hurt, showing me I had clearly bitten off more than I could chew. Well, I should have known: The transistor amplifier weighs about 30 kilograms, even more than its solid appearance would have you believe.

Thirty years ago, you would hang out during a school break then later in the café next to the university auditorium and one up each other with the wattage figures of your dream amplifiers. You know, the ones you actually couldn't afford. You would

revel, so to speak, in virtual power output and enjoy trumping each other.

The current Luxman top model would have given you pretty lousy cards to best someone: The datasheet names a rather modest 30 watts at eight ohms and 60 watts at four ohms; back in the day, anything less than 150 watts per channel wouldn't have been enough for a first-class model. But in the Luxman top model of 2016, the lion's share of the power is achieved in Class A operation, which is always advantageous from a sound point of view. After trying and failing to really push the L-590-AXII to its limits in my sound test—my eardrums raised a white flag before I could reach that point—I assume Luxman is being rather modest when it comes to power output.

This purported time-traveler can get really loud—but that's actually one of the less interesting facets of its disposition. The Luxman L-590-AXII embodies exactly everything that back then, 30 years ago, we were searching high and low, at home and abroad to find in a hi-fi device and would have had to pay top dollar for if we had ever actually managed to find it: sophistication and subtlety. It loves details, willingly informs me that the legendary jazz guitarist Grant Green occasionally plucks ▶

Perfect retro features: smart dials, classic display instruments, and faceted glass.



the strings of his tube-amplified electric guitar so harshly that the rosin stirs up dust (Green Street, Blue Note Records, as SACD reissue through Sieveking Sound) or that the “penny whistle” Morris Goldberg plays in the lively number “You Can Call Me Al” on Paul Simon’s legendary album *Graceland* is actually just a wretched little noisemaker with a light bleeping timbre.

The way the Luxman molds all these specific details into a sound that at every moment strikes a perfect balance between “crystal clear nuance of sound” and “full all-round richness” demonstrates class and style. A large measure of the charm stems from the way this integrated amplifier illuminates recording rooms, arranges ensembles in scales of breadth and depth regardless of their magnitude, and depicts instruments true to size. The Luxman L-590-AXII does not act on its own authority as a macro-lens or as an acoustic magnifier, but is audibly eager to play back only what the sound engineer previously recorded—no more, and no less.

That’s always a good thing when it comes to heart-wrenching moments, for example when the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Geoffrey Simon is joined by the brilliant solo violinist Stephanie Chase to play Maurice Ravel’s somber and dramatic

Tzigane as the deeply black confessional music of a virtuoso plagued with melancholy thoughts. Or when the comforting longing for death of the ironic and metaphoric piece *La Valse* (The Waltz) creeps into the thoughts and the old century ceases to exist amidst massive explosions of percussion.

When the same elite orchestra tackles Gustav Holst’s late Romantic suite *The Planets* (Deutsche Grammophon SACD), the unpretentious conducting of the historically informed performance doyen John Eliot Gardiner ensures this cosmic panorama—intended to delve more into the world of astrology than astronomy—is played with a fascinating tightness and neatness, a structural sharpness that gets right to the point and is vibrantly elaborated with precision.

Few amplifiers I am familiar with are able to depict the immense internal tension of this exemplary interpretation, which should ideally raise the hairs on the back of your neck. The Luxman effortlessly executes the hugely difficult task without being careless or sloppy, for example by overemphasizing massive tutti sections in the piece.

So, is it a sterling classical music specialist that’s too high-brow to going slumming with rock and pop music? Certainly not! The Luxman 590-AXII is a quite neutrally aligned all-rounder ▶



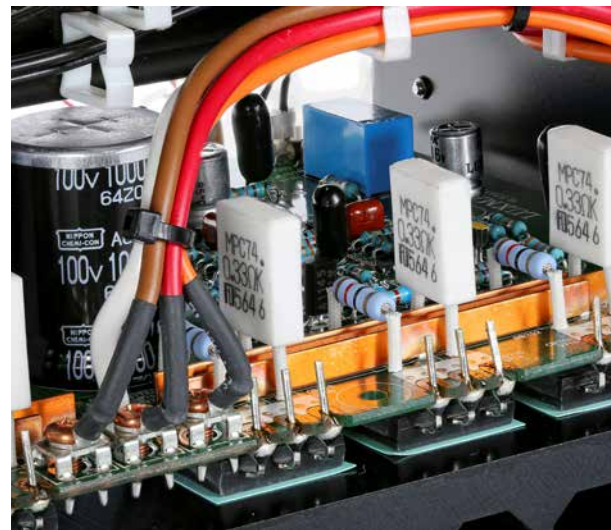
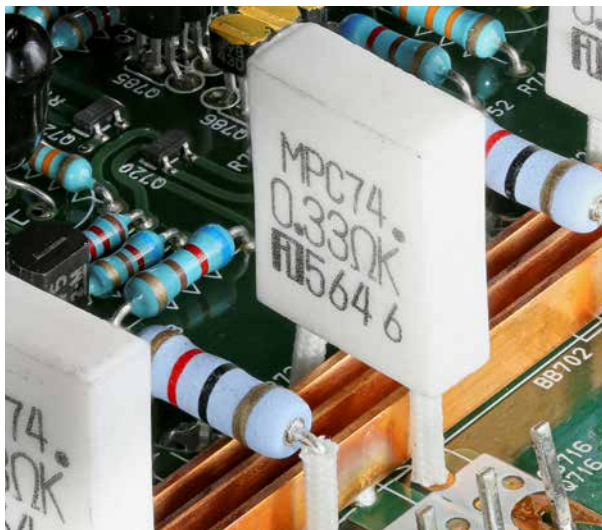
that captures the intimacy and homogeneity of small ensembles such as the Esbjörn Svensson Trio on their album *Viaticum* (ACT SACD) released shortly before the untimely death of the group's highly talented pianist, reproducing even tricky passages with no distortion.

Bach's impressive Toccata and Fugue in D minor (BWV 565), found on the lovingly compiled sound-check sampler of another big Japanese amplifier manufacturer, creates the almost disturbing impression that you are not inside a church but are actually sitting at the console of a huge organ. The person at the mixing desk did too good a job and recorded the king of musical instruments at every loose quarters. The L-590-AXII passes this (venial) sin on to the listener with a shrug and says: "Turn me down a bit, then it'll work just fine."

Anyway, listening with this amplifier at lower levels works very well because it has equipment details that, at least these days, almost seem to get frowned on in the high-end scene, for example, tone control. It also has balance control. And even—and here's where things get truly retro—loudness control. As a reminder for anyone from my generation and an explanation for those born at a later date, this is a switch that moderately increases treble and bass at low loudness levels in order to deliver

a reasonably "appropriate" auditory impression even at neighbor-friendly levels. On the other hand, just a push of a button on the easy-to-use aluminum remote control or on the sturdy front panel of the amp will abruptly sweep the whole tone control fuss out of the signal path—"line straight" is the magic incantation used by all high-enders. And because the lighting of the two large VU meters could have a negative (or at least flitting) effect on the sound, this can also be switched off using the remote control unit.

The Luxman L-590-AXII even has an outstanding-sounding phono stage for MM and MC—as such, a separate phono amplifier isn't completely obsolete, but is an investment that can be postponed for a while. The money saved would be better spent on outstanding sources of equipment as the Luxman promptly acknowledges even the smallest improvements in the analog or digital front end by optimizing its own performance. Don't skimp on the other side either: You won't be making a mistake if you team this €9,000 premium amplifier with top-class sound converters. On the other hand, however, the amplifier also drives comparatively inexpensive loudspeakers to unexpected levels of performance. Paired with the Luxman, the B&W 683 S2 floor-standing speakers sound huge, stately, and ▶



bulky—and produce a sound completely decoupled from the loudspeakers. It's what you would otherwise associate with good magnetostatic or electrostatic speakers. Sharpness in the treble, a problem all of the too “analytically” aligned amplifier designs occasionally struggle with, is alien to the Luxman. No, at this point I won't spread rumors that this amplifier sounds like tubes as that would be complete nonsense. The L-590-AXII comes across like very well-aligned transistor amplifiers from the golden age: stable in terms of the fundamental tone with precise, bone-dry bass and treble that emerge as light and airy but not anemic. In direct comparison, however, you do notice that over the decades something has happened in terms of sound's freedom and simplicity. This is not least due to modern loudspeaker construction principles, which, even with inexpensive designs, no longer permit adventurously warped frequency responses as were common in the 70s and 80s. To cut to the chase: An

integrated amplifier these days usually no longer has to painstakingly bend what was messed up somewhere else. And that's a good thing.

If you look for the audio virtues of the Luxman L-590-AXII in less expensive categories, you'll strike it rich: The musical heavyweight has several smaller siblings that won't steer you wrong. This is because all modern Luxmans share one thing in common: They let you soothingly listen to music for a long time—even albums that had been confined to the “annoying” drawer. In view of the high-quality workmanship, which is akin to some bank vaults, it's safe to assume the joy you get from listening to music with them won't be short lived. You just have to feel sorry for future collectors: They'll probably find it quite hard to distinguish between Luxman creations from the latter part of the 20th century and those from the early 21st century. At least visually. The progress made in terms of sound quality, however, has been huge. ■ ▶

Classic Japanese amplifier architecture: discreet, tightly packed setup, numerous neatly laid cable harnesses, big transformer, and large heat sinks—this is how to do it!



Integrated amplifier | Luxman L-590-AXII

Power output (8/4 Ω): 2 x 30/60 W | **Inputs:** 4 x line in, phono MM/MC, 1 x main in unsymmetrical (cinch), 2 x Line In symmetrical (XLR) | **Outputs:** 2 x loudspeakers (screw terminals), headphones (6.3 mm jack), record out, pre out (cinch) | **Special features:** tape monitor, separation preamplifier/power amplifier, and display lighting switchable, "line straight" for bypassing tone and balance controls, loudness, subsonic filter, mono | **Finish:** brushed aluminum | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 44/19.5/47 cm | **Weight:** 29 kg | **Warranty period:** two years | **Price:** €8,690

IAD Audio GmbH | Johann-Georg-Halske-Str. 11 | 41352 Korschenbroich | Germany | Telephone +49 2161 61783-0 | www.iad-gmbh.de

ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

Turntables: Audio Note TT-2, Clearaudio Innovation Compact | **Tonearms:** Audio Note Tonearm 2, Clearaudio Magnify | **Cartridges:** Audio Note IQ-3, Clearaudio Maestro V2, Grado Platinum Statement | **CD players:** Sugden PDT-4, T+A PDP 3000 HV, Marantz CD14 S1 + SA15, Sony ES202 | **Loudspeakers:** Bowers & Wilkins 683 S2, ELAC CL 82 Ltd., Falcon LS 3/5a, Live Act Audio LAS 408, Piega MLS 2 | **Headphones:** AudioQuest NightHawk, Beyerdynamic T1, Sony SL-1 | **Cables:** Audio Note, AudioQuest, Monitor Audio, Vovox

The Foundation Comes First



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There are many approaches to reducing the noise associated with AC power—conditioner-filters, regenerators, isolation transformers, battery inverters, and more—and all can yield meaningful results. However, some of these techniques also cause ringing, current compression, and non-linear (obnoxious) distortions. **Some cures are worse than the disease**—some are not as good as plugging straight into the wall.

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AudioQuest invites you to experience the proof that Garth has successfully advanced the art, the science, and the efficacy of power conditioning. We believe that by adding a Niagara 7000 or Niagara 1000 to your system, you'll experience **clarity**, dimensionality, frequency extension, **dynamic contrast**, and **grip** that your system was just waiting to reveal.

Sincerely, Bill Low

"The Niagara 7000 better resolved fine detail and threw a deeper, more expansive soundstage.... Transients of the struck notes sounded faster, less thick, more naturally expressed through the Niagara, as did the length of the notes' decays."

—Michael Fremer, *Stereophile*, February 2016



audioquest®



Live Act Audio
LAS 408

FAMILY TREE

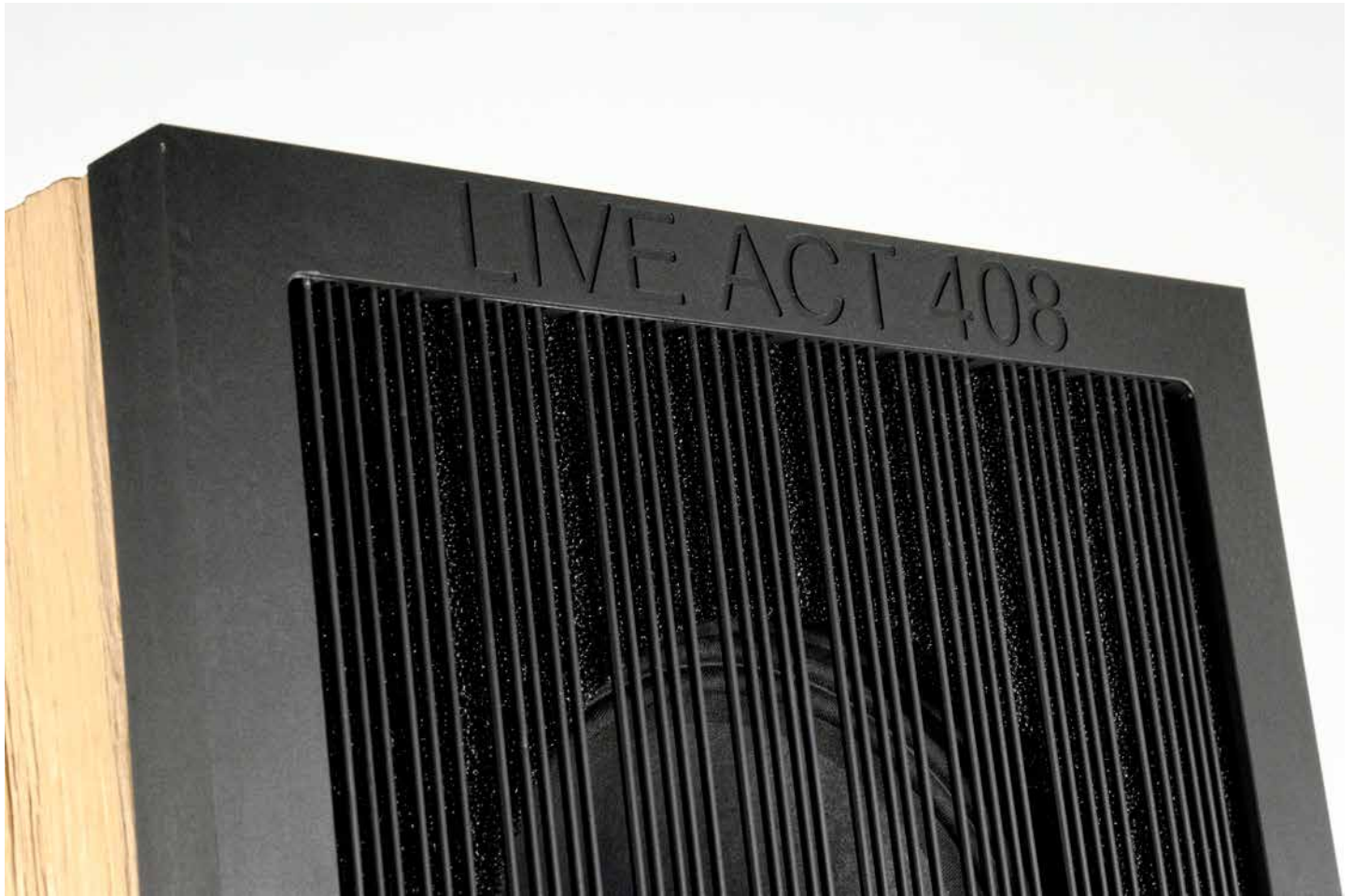
By Cai Brockmann
Photos: Ingo Schulz





TO GIVE NORMAL LOUDSPEAKERS A SCARE, I KEEP A DRUM KIT IN MY OFFICE. BUT THERE'S NO SPOOKING THE 408 FROM LIVE ACT AUDIO.





Anyone prepared to shell out a rather considerable amount of money for a pair of loudspeakers—let's say approximately € 50,000—is going to expect the full works. But no matter what kind of price bracket you can afford, there's no such thing as the perfect loudspeaker. Not even if you just won the lottery. There are only more or less successful trade-offs and attempts at achieving a theoretical "perfect sound"—which almost always amounts to romanticizing a very personal view of music (and how to listen to it). Thankfully, this doesn't apply only to us hi-fi fans but also hi-fi developers.

If you want to experience truly perfect sound, snag yourself a great spot at an amazing gig at a great

concert venue, book a table at your favorite jazz club, go to a matinée performance, never pass up an opportunity to listen to a real piano, or any other acoustic instrument for that matter, or play the drums in your office. Every single live experience will help you in your quest to discover your own personal perfect sound. And, at the very least, have enough faith in yourself to make up your own mind. Good hi-fi developers certainly do. And of course musicians do as well. ▶

The 408 has a very special, unbeatable haptic quality, which manifests itself in even the tiniest of details. The more than 40-millimeter thick and cross-bonded multiplex housing is much better than solid wood: lower resonance, more torsional rigidity and more high-end.



ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

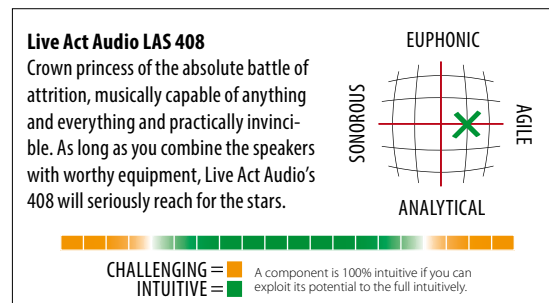
Turntables: Audio Note TT-2, Clearaudio Innovation, EnVogue Astra | **Tonearms:** Audio Note Arm 2, Clearaudio TT-II and Universal, Nottingham Analogue AnnaArm 12" | **Pickups:** Audio Note IQ3, Clearaudio DaVinci, EMT JSD S75 | **MC transformer:** Audio Note S2 | **Phono stages:** Clearaudio Absolute Phono, Synthesis Roma 79DC Roma | **Digital players:** Audio Note CDT-3/DAC 3, T+A PDP 3000 HV, Lindemann Musicbook 15 | **Preamplifiers:** Einstein The Pre-amp, Lindemann Musicbook 15, Shindo Monbrison | **Power amplifiers:** Amplifon SET 140 (monos), Bryston B14SST, Einstein The Silver Bullet (monos), Musical Fidelity M8 500S | **Integrated amplifiers:** Devialet 200, Luxman 590 AXII, Pass INT-60, Sugden IA-4, T+A PA 2500 R | **Cables:** Audio Note, AudioQuest, HMS, MFE, Refine Audio, Vovox | **Power supplies:** IsoTek Evo3 Mosaic Genesis | **Accessories, Mounting Surfaces, Furniture:** Subbase Audio, Acoustic Systems, Harmonix, LignoLab TT100 and "Die Bank" ("The Bench")

Behind the Scenes

As an audiophile, I've always been able to pick out each developer's perfect sound from each of the loudspeakers I've used and tested, even ones costing whopping six-figure sums. Even the latest metrology and digital tools are unable to make a difference. But I quite like that. It gives music a certain diversity and makes it personal.

What I also like is that Live Act Audio got off to a terrific start with its large models, LAS 312 and LAS 512, without claiming to have achieved "perfect neutrality" or "absolute balance," which is usually the case at these echelons (whatever they're supposed to mean in people's own living rooms in any case). In the test laboratory, on the other hand, the LAA speakers do cut a fine figure, but tick off the usual procedures and requirements as matters of course so they can launch into the real pleasure—into the music. The best way to feed the loudspeakers (and also the developers!), by the way, is with über-dynamic live recordings.

"Dynamic, no-holds-barred, live fidelity" is one way to describe the perfect sound that Live Act Audio wants to achieve. The company's name says it all really. Let's get Live Act Audio up on stage (read: living room) again for another performance then. This time it's the turn of the smaller 408 from the extensive Live Act Series (LAS) under the spotlight. Lo and behold! Like its big sisters, the 408 also makes a lasting impression before the party even gets started. ▶





The best way to feed the loudspeakers (and also the developers!) is with über-dynamic live recordings.



I feel like I'm in the forest!

As the saying goes, first impressions count. And in this case, it's doubly true. Delivered in a made-to-measure flight case, the by no means gigantic 408 still weighs in at almost 100 kilos once unpacked! We'll explain why once we've recovered from having to remove it from the case and set it up. But before that, let's take a minute to marvel at the sensational surface quality, which, to the best of my knowledge, can only be found in Live Act Audio's portfolio. We got our hands on the LAS 312 "Limited Nature Edition" in FIDELITY No. 21 (issue 5/2015), and the LAS 408 seems to be made of the same stuff. This split-wood appearance actually makes it look like a highly skilled Canadian lumberjack had just taken his ax and chopped straight through a thick block from the heart of a huge tree trunk. A loudspeaker made from a whole block of wood? Well, that's exactly what the Limited Nature Edition looks like. But, for anyone not keen on introducing such an impressive piece of nature into their living room (or simply cannot stomach the hefty additional price tag), the manufacturer also has some beautiful thick veneer finishes.

Of course, the 408's housing is not chopped out of one piece of material. No. Even under the thick veneer

finish, the multilayered, more than 40-millimeter thick and cross-bonded multiplex housing is much better than solid wood: lower resonance, more torsional rigidity and more high-end. It's a dream-come-true for designers and design lovers. It is, however, a nightmare for manufacturers in terms of costs as this sandwich construction is expensive, and I mean *really* expensive. The visible surface of the Limited Nature Edition is produced using a material-intensive pressing process. After all, in terms of the choice of materials, processing and assembly, Live Act Audio essentially goes to such great lengths to achieve the geometrically linear housing that both gifted wood-instrument makers and seasoned master cabinetmakers would applaud the craftsmanship on display. Unfortunately, I am allowed to reveal just as little about certain housing details as about the exact construction of the crossovers inside the 408. I'll just say this: In this industry, I have only ever witnessed such a profound appreciation for wood as a material combined with such an uncompromising and unwavering understanding of quality right down to the tiniest of details at Diapason. ▶

A technical balancing act: provides impressive efficiency while also being able to endure a few hundred watts.



Three bass chassis plus one coaxial chassis

As its name suggests, the 408 comes equipped with four eight-inch chassis from the world of international professional technology: three woofers and one coaxial chassis for mid-range and treble. The coaxial high-range horn is turned out of solid (!) metal and operated by a highly resilient 50-millimeter beryllium membrane. All four cone drivers potter around in their own chambers with symmetrically arranged "invisible" reflex ports on the baffle. Three chunky yet beautifully equipped crossovers take care of the correct signal distribution. The baffle is finished with a 25-millimeter-thick aluminum frame milled from a single block with "rubber drapes." The chamber cover and the recessed single-wiring terminal on the back are also anchored inside the sturdy, reinforced housing. The heavy body of the 408 rests, with four defined

uncoupled feet, on a solid aluminum plate, and those who think this construction still has to be placed on a set of spikes only have themselves to blame or has a friend who lays floors for a living.

Back to the driver equipment. This is where the expert recognizes a (desirable) proximity to ambitious professional sound engineering, while also the typical battle of attrition among classic high-end devices. It thoroughly improves performance at home and might even also convince a skeptical partner to finally invest in a truly amazing piece of "audio furniture." In any case, Live Act Audio's 408 manages to combine professional and high-end audio, something that is only very seldom achieved but very welcome. The delivery in the flight case is just the start. ▶

Both a tool and a friend

The flight case has wheels, unlike the loudspeaker. This makes positioning it in exactly the right spot a bit like a workout at the gym, but definitely more fun than pumping iron. The funnest part, though, comes when, after all that toing and froing, going backward and forward, you finally find the perfect spot (the virtual room works out and suddenly everything "fits") and the 408 increasingly blends in acoustically. The best spot may be near a wall, but it doesn't have to be, and the distance between the two loudspeakers may be large, but, again, it doesn't have to be. It's all a matter of taste. As I said, have enough faith in yourself to make up your own mind.

During my attempts to subjectively establish the truth, the room in which the 408 has been set up plays less of a role than usual. The sound emission is not designed to offer maximum dispersion, and the sweet spot on the sofa is actually more a spot than a diffuse large area. Two 408s would have absolutely no problem filling a huge room to the rafters with music, even the corners right at the very back, yet the full—or should I say audiophile 3D pleasure of their combined talents—can be enjoyed by only two, maximum four listeners, inside the sweet spot. If you're in it, however, you'll find it also provides a superb overview of the stage performance, neatly arranged and scaled in terms of depth and breadth. That is, however, providing there are capable electronics available for the 408, for which it seems the sky's the limit.

The 408 places certain demands on its sound sources. In view of its "modern" impedance of under 4 ohms, stable amplifiers are recommended, which can, but don't necessarily have to, deliver decent power. After all, the 408 manages a technical balancing

act—providing impressive efficiency of a realistic 94 decibels while at the same time being able to continuously endure a few hundred watts. This provides an enormous amount of room to maneuver for compatible amplifiers—and the maximum sound-pressure level achievable with them.

In any case, what's more important than the pure, unadulterated performance of the driving amplifier is the fact that each sound source, each element before it in the chain, needs to sound "right" and "good" and all of them need to form as harmonious a single unit as possible as an ensemble. Admittedly, these are audiophile truisms, and the LAA 408 is, like her big sisters, a top-class piece of equipment and a sound tester all in one. She quickly and unmistakably tells you whether one component or the entire chain is doing its job correctly or not.

During my initial test runs, I simply hooked up the 408 to every amplifier that didn't run for cover quickly enough. I used tried and tested combos as the sources: For analog, the EnVogue Astra with 12" Arm Anna and EMT JSD S75; and for digital, CDT 3 and DAC 3 from Audio Note. The T+A PDP 3000 HV reads the SACDs. The turntable is double decoupled on Ligno-Lab TT 100 and Subbase Analogique. I put the large Audio Note Black Pallas Digital cable between the digital drive and converter, all digital components are on Subbase Composant S, and the large IsoTek Evo3 Mosaic Genesis also regenerates the power. And why am I telling you all this? Well, because the 408 almost playfully reproduces even the tiniest of modifications. I was essentially already aware of that because of her big sister, the 312, yet the 408 is perhaps even a tad more blunt and direct. ▶





First surprise

Astonishingly, the first Einstein combo (The Preamp plus The Silver Bullet) already manages to keep me shackled to the sweet spot for the first time. Ironically, the OTL monos—not really at all keen on low load impedances—have the 408 nicely under control. The preamp commendably restricts itself to its role as a noble facilitator that simply passes on the signals in a light, airy and crystal-clear manner. The ensuing sound generated by the 408 is ultrafocused, fabulously contoured and controlled, with precisely formed pinpoint midrange and the almost tangible stature of a singer. Any tendency to sound a bit intrusive, which the uninitiated gladly put down to every horn, disappears when you change the loudspeaker cable and use an ever-so-slightly smaller toe-in for the 408.

And speaking of horns, I urgently need to drop a bit of Mnozil Brass again. The crazy and equally brilliant brass septet is on form in *Dasselbe in Grün*. It's a real unexpected pleasure to experience seven super happy brass players live on stage in your living room, from the spoken news-like introduction to the fast Polka capers and the Shostakovich pieces. Even at a moderate level, the sounds from the tuba, trumpet and trombone are tremendously assertive. And the LAS 408 transports all the goings-on so enthusiastically and captivatingly that even this author with his reserved Hamburg upbringing simply "has" to keep turning up the volume until Mnozil Brass are finally performing live in my living room at original full volume. The marquee liquor license has yet to be acquired, but neighbors who previously were quite reticent toward me are suddenly now greeting me with the local Bavarian twang. If they knew that Mnozil Brass come from Austria... and that the band recommends their musical "counseling" in particular for "really dangerous situations (weddings, beer tent brawls and funerals)"...

After so much brass instrument fun, I need at least a smoke on the shisha and a couple of tight-fitting furs to redeem myself as a musical globetrotter. So I go in search of the grandmaster of funk, Maceo Parker.

On *The Bremen Concert*, which was recorded live in 1990, it's not just the extremely dry and funky sax of James Brown's former musical director that causes a sensation. Parker's formation *Roots Revisited*—which featured the likes of Fred Wesley (trombone), Pee Wee Ellis (tenor sax) and Rodney Jones (guitar)—is on point. The bass notes are exuberantly served up with plenty of groove by Larry Golding and the pedals of his Hammond B3 organ, and drummer Bill Stewart kicks things off with a bang right at the beginning of the live recording. Yeah, that's funky drumming, man—I love it! In *Shake Everything You Got*, he is seriously in the groove, including during his solo part. It's impossible not to nod your head, tap your feet and move your legs in rhythm! However, and we're turning here from pure music enthusiasm back to hi-fi matters, the recording is anything but dynamic. The heavily condensed audio mixing borders on annoying, but on the other hand the band is super happy and the music is simply amazing. And the Live Act Audio presents everything, and I mean everything, reliably and transparently. And that's how it should be.

With that in mind, I start the last round of "critical listening" for today. Shall I put the mains filter on its own base? Shall I try the other cinch cable? Shall I test the power plug to see it has the "right" phase? Okay then. When I then connect the superb AudioQuest loudspeaker cables "just like that" to some cable filters that pretty much just happened to be there, the entire sound seriously opens up even more. Just like that. More 3D, no losses. It sounds better. No question. It can stay like that. It's more fun. Well, that's how the 408 rolls.

The fact that LAA's "small" giant enables you to assess any changes so quickly and easily also has to do with the unbelievably stable, low-resonance housing that keeps its cool even in the face of killer levels but still reacts positively to a setup on a Subbase Audio base. No, I definitely don't need any spikes here! ▶



The delivery in the flight case is just the start!

Nothing's impossible

While chatting on the phone with Dieter Molitor, one of the two brains behind Live Act Audio, I discover that the LAA boss is also achieving very similar sounds with the OTL monos from EternalArts. Only when it comes to brutal low bass and ultra-low bass attacks, which are often, for example, mixed into the newfangled EDM or electronic productions for a pleasurable shaking effect, does the 408 exit the dancefloor to make way for her more voluptuous big sisters with their big membranes. It goes against her principles, and it's not in her specifications either. She manages to keep up with her (even more expensive) sisters across all important musical genres. When things are not so straightforward, and complex rhythmic structures prevail, for example, the super nimble 408 rises to the occasion, gives nothing less than 100% witty playfulness, puts you under a spell and reduces some of the big hitters to mere toys. In the words of Aretha Franklin: "R-E-S-P-E-C-T"!

Live Act Audio also has dreadnought-class subwoofers, which, of course, also harmonize beautifully with the 408 for anyone who likes to test the structural engineering of their home with subsonic music, enjoys seaquake simulations or has a penchant for electro-acoustic self-indulgence. Everyone else will be more than happy with the punchy, extremely keen and nimble performance of the "little" sister. Her extreme stability, lightning-fast dynamic development and impressive power are a real pleasure, and her serious audiophile qualities are a reason to celebrate and to crank the volume up. The 408 won't let anyone or anything stand in her way. Only untalented sound sources

can ruin the fun, but the same goes for any excellent speaker. The 408, however, very clearly demonstrates what is musically here and now with a dynamic edge, captivating sounds and real gusto.

Yeah, things really can be that simple if you just have a little faith: This is professional equipment and no toy. Stick to your guns instead of going along with what everyone else thinks: 408 instead of off the shelf.—And I've found a special place in my heart for this speaker. An added note: As the day of reckoning approaches, I quickly maneuver the Live Act Audio LAS 408 into my office, park it right in front of the drum set and connect up a powerful amp that more or less just happens to be there and is ready to go. And as night sets on Ismaning, I put on the B-52's and some early ZZ Top—and crank up the volume. The drum kit is in a real dither and looks like a right wally. Wonderful—mission accomplished! I'm off to do a photo shoot with the LAS 408. ■

Loudspeaker | Live Act Audio LAS 408

Functional principle: Three-way floor-standing loudspeaker, bass reflex | **Efficiency (2.83 V/1 m):** 94 dB | **Nominal impedance:** 3 Ω | **Equipment:** Three 20-cm woofers, coaxial 20-cm mid-range/treble chassis | **Special features:** ultra-stable 42-mm sandwich housing made from special multiplex wood, solid aluminum base with decoupling | **Finishes:** Body—thick veneer according to customer's specifications or optional Limited Nature Edition with split-wood appearance for an extra fee (€5,000); solid aluminum baffle frame | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 30/121/48 cm | **Weight:** 96 kg | **Warranty period:** Five years | **Price for pair:** from €45,000

Live Act Audio GmbH | Burgsiedlung 1 | 87527 Sonthofen | Germany | Telephone +49 8321 6078900 | www.live-act-audio.de



In view of the "modern" impedance of under 4 ohms, stable amplifiers are recommended, which can, but don't necessarily have to, deliver decent power.

BROWSER

N° 01



T+A multi-media player now capable of DSD

The most sophisticated multi-media player from T+A, the MP 3100 HV is now capable of carrying out the full signal processing of DSD bitstream data (up to DSD 512) in addition to processing PCM data to impeccable standards. The machine's new integral disc mechanism features a SACD drive. The integrated new high-res streaming board provides access to various music services, internet radio and of course your home network via LAN or WiFi. A special high quality Bluetooth module accepts music from mobile devices.

www.ta-hifi.com

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BROWSER

Nº 01

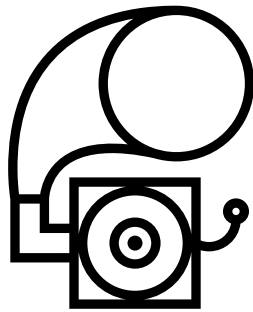


Chord Electronics Blu MkII

Known for its world-class amplifiers and its class-leading FPGA-based (Field Programmable Gate Array) DACs, Chord Electronics has implemented the latest FPGA technology into a next-generation CD transport. The new Blu MkII, which will replace the original Blu, incorporates a powerful new FPGA core with extraordinary capability. According to Chord Electronics' Digital Consultant, Rob Watts, "the Blu MkII redefines CD performance".

www.chordelectronics.co.uk

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hifideluxe
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hifideluxe in Munich

The hifideluxe 2017 shows the finest in high-end audio at the Munich Marriott Hotel on 18th, 19th, and 20th of May 2017. Opening hours from Thursday to Saturday are 12 am to 8 pm. The hifideluxe is held parallel to the other show at the MOC Ordercenter and offers a free shuttle service between both locations. Access to the hifideluxe show is free of charge, too.

Where to go: hifideluxe at Marriott Hotel, Berliner Str. 93, 80805 Munich, Germany.

www.hifideluxe.de

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photo: hifideluxe.de

BROWSER N° 01

Rega Planar 3 (2016) and Rega Elys 2

IT'S BACK AGAIN!

By Uwe Heckers. Photos: Ingo Schulz





WHEN REGA REWORKS ITS
THIRD-GENERATION MODEL,
IT'S TIME TO SIT UP AND TAKE
NOTICE. ULTIMATELY, EACH
OF ITS PREDECESSORS HAS
SET HIGH BENCHMARKS.



The Planar 3 combines a slight accentuation of the mid-range during playback with a somewhat rhythmic emphasis.





Rega's distinctively evolutionary process
has also extended to the tonearm.



A Rega Planar has always been more than a board with a motor, platter, and tonearm. Over the years, the folk at Rega have critically and carefully examined nearly every one of its components, replacing each one with something even better.



It's not all that easy to report on the new incarnation of the Rega Planar 3 without running the risk of boring your readers by repeating yourself. After all, its family tree stretches back to the early 1970s and the Rega Planar (not to be confused with Rega's first CD player from the 1990s), which featured a tonearm made in Japan called the R200 but didn't have a glass platter. Over the decades, the basic design concept has been continuously refined. And with each refinement, reviews of the turntable's latest incarnation have abounded. As a result, it is now one of high fidelity's few true legends and every serious hi-fi enthusiast has at least heard the name.

Innovative evolution

Despite all that, I still find the Rega Planar 3 (2016) really exciting. For one thing, I owned one myself many moons ago. I also find it quite interesting to speculate about the secret of its

success. The super cool look of its, in most cases, all-black drive and distinctive glass platter has surely played a part in this. More important, though, is the fact the design ideas going into the turntable are not just ingeniously simple. They are, above all, simply ingenious. Many competitors have—to put it politely—helped themselves to some of the ideas, but they haven't always executed them successfully. A Rega Planar has always been more than a board with a motor, platter, and tonearm. And because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (something not all competitors have quite grasped), the old Planar produced unusually impressive sound for its price category. Rega has never rested on its laurels, however. Let's face it; the original Planar 3 was never “the world's best turntable.” Even its status as the king of the budget category was occasionally called into question by the competition. Over the years, the folks at Rega have critically and carefully examined nearly every one of its components, replacing each one with something

even better. The result of this long, laborious, and evolutionary process is that the Planar 3 I've known and used over the years shares hardly any of the same components as the current heir to the throne.

Options galore

The chassis of the current Planar 3 (2016) comprises an acrylic laminated wooden plinth that comes in either high-gloss black or white and is laminated with acrylic. It not only looks rather stylish, it also actually ensures extra stability and less resonance. The somewhat strange-looking silver-colored brace with circular recesses that connects the tonearm base to the platter bearing achieves the same goal. As its predecessors, the Planar 3 sits on (newly developed) rubber feet that astoundingly well decouple it from the surface underneath. All the same, experience has shown that the Rega seriously benefits from the optionally available wall bracket. ▶



Drive is provided by a 24-volt motor that can be powered with either a simple wall adapter, which is delivered as standard, or the TT PSU-R external power supply, which is available as an optional extra. The latter not only ensures improved power supply, but also enables you to switch between 33 rpm and 45 rpm at the touch of a button. If you operate the Planar without the TT PSU-R, you will need to remove the platter and place the rubber belt on the corresponding drive groove of the metal pulley. You connect the TT PSU-R using a four-pin jack located under the frame on the motor housing.

As before, the rubber belt works on a plastic subplatter that, by all accounts, should be considerably more rigid than previous versions. The 12 elevations on which the 12-millimeter-thick, highly polished glass platter sits are

particularly eye-catching. The felt mat, which aims to protect the platter from vibrations below, has been retained. You'll also be pleased to know that the dust cover is now transparent during playback. Like an optical-fiber cable, it captures the light from its surroundings and directs it along its edges. It's almost as if the turntable emits a turquoise light from within.

The benchmark for others

Much of the original Planar 3's ongoing success did, of course, come down to the tonearm, the RB300. When it first came out, not only did it receive various industry awards, it was considered so good that you would have no hesitation to trust it over a much more expensive cartridge. That's precisely why it was (and still is!)

used, even as the "entry-level arm" on pricey "super drive devices."

And Rega's distinctive evolutionary process has also extended to the tonearm. From the RB300 emerged the RB301, then the RB303 (still available separately for €680) and finally the current RB330, which, according to the sales team, cannot be purchased as a stand-alone item. When you first lay eyes on it, you'll find the new tonearm looks like its predecessors. According to Rega, some crucial changes have, however, been made (including to the bearing housing, the bearings, and the actual tonearm tube). In fact, its workmanship does seem better: the bearings appear to be smoother but, of course, backlash free, and the tonearm once again has a scaled antiskating unit. The height adjustment is still a little cumbersome as you need to use optionally available ▶



ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

Turntables: SME Model 10, SME Model 15, Technics SL-1210 Mk2 | **Tonearms:** SME M2-9R, SME Model 309 SPD, SME Series V, Technics EPA-120 | **Cartridges:** Audio Technica AT-20SLa, EMT JSD 6, Goldring G-2200, Ortofon Quintet Black | **CD players:** Bryston BCD-1, NAD 5420 | **Network player:** Muvid IR 815 | **Preamplifier:** Bryston BP-25MC | **Power amplifier:** Bryston 3B SST | **Headphones:** Sony MDR-1 RNC | **Loudspeakers:** Spondor SP100R2



washers. Adjusting the height involves freeing the tonearm from its three-point mounting system and positioning the spacers between the tonearm socket and the base. Even the cabling has been optimized. The wonderfully long cable is impressively flexible and equipped with top-notch Neutrik connectors. A typical example of a medium-mass tonearm, it is compatible with around 90% of all cartridges. If, however, the system of choice weighs more than 10 grams, you will need to resort to using the heavier tungsten counterweight that is also available as an optional extra.

An underrated little gem

The Rega Planar 3 (2016) was delivered as a package that included the in-house moving magnet system Elys 2. The original Elys had a violet system casing using Rega's own

three-point mounting system and, to be perfectly frank, was never able to achieve the cult status that the drives and tonearms did. I could never really understand why the cartridge only ever enjoyed moderate success. I always rather liked the Elys and its cartridge siblings. I think the superior, canary-yellow Rega Exact is actually a real insiders' tip I suspect the now light-blue Elys 2 has inherited some of its genes because, if my memory serves me right, it sounds significantly more lively and rich than its predecessor. I've not been able to determine exactly what has changed; in general, Rega hasn't exactly been forthcoming with all the technical details. The Elys 2 has a non-interchangeable nude elliptical stylus. With approximately seven millivolts (at five centimeters per second), it has a large output voltage even for moving magnet and, in case you're wondering, is perfectly compatible with medium-mass (10—15 grams

effective mass) tonearms, which don't actually have to be Rega's own. At 70 micrometers, even the sample value that I measured is totally fine for a tracking force of 17.5 mN. During my experiments with the Musical Fidelity MX-VYNL phono stage (FIDELITY No. 27, issue 4/2016) 50 picofarads turned out to be the ideal input capacity. However, it also made a good impression on my Bryston BP-25MC with its 200 picofarads. If you purchase the Elys 2 on its own it will set you back €250. But if you purchase it together with the Rega Planar 3 as a package, the price drops to just €150.

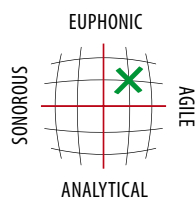
A musical godsend

It's not just the reasonable package price that should convince potential purchasers of the Rega Planar 3 (2016) to also plunk down money for the Elys and make it part of the ▶



Rega Planar 3 (2016)

Modern, no: timeless turntable streamlined to achieve high-level audio performance; substantial understatement in terms of what's delivered.



© FIDELITY Magazine





original equipment. The combination works so harmoniously that I never really got over my shock. Surely a record player that costs less than €1,000 shouldn't sound so good?!

Okay, the Elys 2 does take a bit of time to settle in. At the beginning, it sounds a bit grainy in the treble range and somewhat awkward in the bass range. But after no more than 20 vinyls, you can really hear the difference as the sound changes and becomes perfectly balanced, adding a touch of undeniable warmth. And, especially in terms of my earlier criticisms of my old Rega Planar 3, they practically no longer apply. That one didn't enjoy such a full range, was spatially differentiated, and, above all, was not as lively as its more than 25-year-younger successor. These characteristics enable the Elys 2 to achieve credible playback, even with such symphonic big-hitters as Respighi's "Pini di Roma" (Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Reiner, Living Stereo,

LSC-2436). Certainly not without adding a personal—but nevertheless pleasant—touch to the music. A slight accentuation of the mid-range during playback combined with a somewhat rhythmic emphasis is, of course, in no way detrimental to the enjoyment of the music. On the contrary, there are enough neutral workhorses on the market that seem to get everything right on paper but somehow take the fun out of listening to music. And that's exactly what doesn't happen with the current Rega Planar 3. Unfortunately, I've run out of room to report on other music I sampled. The Planar 3, for example, extolled the virtues of music by Yello. And the new LP from Chie Ayado. And...

The current edition of this classic is, as before, not just the standard-setting king of the budget category. With its absolutely impressive sound quality, it is making the lives of even much more expensive competitors difficult. Very hard! ■

Turntable | Rega Planar 3 (2016)

Functional principle: Belt drive | **Speeds:** 33 rpm and 45 rpm | **Special features:** includes Rega RB330 tonearm, glass platter and dust cover | **Optional extras:** separate TT PSU-R (€380) power supply, wall bracket (€200), and various spacers for adjusting the height of the tonearm (price upon request) | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 45/12/36 cm | **Weight:** 6 kg | **Warranty period:** 10 years (for bearings and tonearm), three years for electronics | **Price:** €800 | **Package price with Elys 2:** €950

Rega Elys 2 cartridge

Functional principle: Moving magnet (MM) | **Special features:** Rega three-point mounting system, non-interchangeable stylus | **Stylus cut:** elliptical | **Cantilever:** Aluminum | **Weight:** 6 g | **Recommended tracking force:** 17.5 mN | **Output voltage:** 6.8—7.2 mV | **Price:** €250

TAD Audio Vertriebs GmbH | Rosenheimer Str. 33 | 83220 Aschau | Germany | Telephone +49 8052 9573273 | www.tad-audiovertrieb.de



...and now for something completely different...

bFly-AUDIO LITTLE FWEND

By Georg-Cölestin Jatta. Photos: Ingo Schulz



bFly-AUDIO LITTLE FWEND





_____Snap, crackle, snap, crackle, snap, crackle... a background noise that will have every vinyl enthusiast hurtling through the house at breakneck speed. Quick. Get to the turntable and lift the precious cartridge off the lead-out groove! We all know pickups are quite sensitive and not exactly cheap.

There used to be semiautomated turntables that would lift up the tonearm at the end of the vinyl, but the cruel analog enthusiasts had nothing but contempt for that convenient little feature. They were far too worried about sound loss being caused by interventions in the drive control and mechanics of the tonearm. So the sound produced by ▶



turntables got better and better but convenience seemed to go out the window. As a result, many vinyl junkies these days sit at home in sports shoes, ready to jump to their feet at the first sign of any clicking so they can sprint to the vinyl altar.

But lo and behold, all you minimalism lovers and sports haters, a savior is born! During a few dark winter nights, two clever Norwegians hatched a reliable and sound-friendly solution to this problem. And voilà: They delivered the most sensible accessory I've ever held in my hand! The Little Fwend, a tiny universal tonearm lifter that, thanks to its smart design, provides the most ardent and puristic analog fans with both convenience and peace of mind. And, of course, no sound loss. The Little Fwend

from bFly is available in three different sizes, which means owners of small, lightweight turntables and imposing monumental devices alike can get hold of the right version to use. The little helper can be mounted in less than a minute even by music fans who are normally all fingers and thumbs. All you have to do is fix the small adhesive base disc between the tonearm and the platter so the arm gently touches the sensor, which is made from flexible piano wire and acts as the trigger. Magnetic force holds the Little Fwend neatly in place on the mounting disc, however it can be moved a little when necessary—recordings of large orchestras are often pressed right up to the label while audiophile blues and jazz numbers may have a more ample lead-out groove. ▶



I admit to feeling nervous during the first few runs and I sat opposite the turntable ready to pounce as I didn't yet trust the Little Fwend and the shaky, fragile single-support tonearm combo. What if the arm jumps out of its support and the system slams down on the frame? The next eight weeks went on to prove that my fears were completely unfounded. The Little Fwend works so well and is so reliable that I could even relax and sunbathe in a hammock while listening to my turntable and I didn't have to worry a second about my sound box. At the end of the side, the tonearm is gently lifted and rests stably on the beam, keeping the stylus out of harm's way while

the record continues to spin. All in all, I think the Little Fwend should be supplied as a standard with any serious turntable, not only for humanitarian reasons but because it has huge benefits, looks great, and doesn't interfere with the sound whatsoever. Conclusion: I get by with a little help from my fwend! •

Automatic tonearm lifter | bFly-Audio Little Fwend | Three models | L (low): 32—49 mm/base 16 mm | H (high): 49—82 mm/base 19 mm | XL (very high): 80—140 mm/base 25 mm | Warranty: two years | Price: €199 (L and H models), €249 (XL)

bFly-audio | Theodor-Sachs Str. 60 | 86199 Augsburg | Germany | Telephone +49 821 9987797 | www.bfly-audio.de



...and now for something completely different...

DS Audio Optical Cartridge DS-W1

THE "NIGHTTRIDER" RETURNS

By Uwe Heckers. Photos: Ingo Schulz

OFTEN WHEN YOU THINK
YOU'VE SEEN IT ALL, YOU
GET A NICE SURPRISE. THE
OPTICAL CARTRIDGE,
WHICH IS MAKING A COME-
BACK, IS A CASE IN POINT.





If you peruse the latest catalogs issued by cartridge manufacturers, you would be forgiven for thinking that there are just three concepts for cartridge systems: moving magnet (MM), moving iron (MI), and moving coil (MC). And all three have one fundamental thing in common: They work according to the principle of electromagnetic induction. Either a magnet moves in a fixed-coil environment (MM) or coils move in a stationary magnetic field (MC). With MI, coils and magnets are fixed, and a moving soft iron component generates the required change in the magnetic field strength in order to generate voltage in the coils. Perhaps some readers still remember piezoelectric or crystal systems that were used in very reasonably priced turntables but never received any high-end accolades as the sound quality they produced was simply too limited. Old-school analog fans might still be able to cast their minds back to condenser systems (for example,

those from Stax), the strain gauge principle (originally from Panasonic, but currently manufactured by SoundSmith), or the first optical cartridge (C-100P). The latter was sold under the high-end label Aurex but manufactured by Toshiba. That all happened in the late 1960s (!), but didn't really result in any lasting success for the inventor. The reason for that concerned the necessary light source. At the time, it had to be provided using a conventional bulb because LEDs had not yet been invented. The level of heat loss was not trivial, which stood in the way of achieving long-term reliability. That said, the actual principle has so many advantages (see technology box) that, over the course of semiconductor development, it had already become high time for it to be dusted off from storage.

Experienced newcomer

All the credit for this revival belongs to DS Audio, which

was just founded in 2014. The company is a subsidiary of Digital Stream Cooperation (DSC), which is based near Tokyo. The parent company has been around for 25 years and is in the business of manufacturing high-quality laser-optic components, in particular CD, DVD, and Blu-ray player read heads. What's more, DSC developed the optical computer mouse with Microsoft. Chances are you have at least one product at home that was developed by this little-known Japanese company. Remarkably, it just so happens that Tetsuaki "Aki" Aoyagi, the 27-year-old son of the company's founder, is a huge fan of analog playback. In view of this technical background—in particular, the many years' extensive experience manufacturing high-precision optical components—it seemed like a perfectly logical step to breathe new life into the optical cartridge, which had almost been consigned to the history books, by employing the latest materials and production methods. ▶







Three practical tips

Using the inseparable DS-W1 unit, which consists of the optical cartridge (nicknamed “Nightrider”) and the equalizer/power supply unit, has proved surprisingly straightforward in practice. There are just three things to bear in mind: 1. You must avoid accidentally connecting a conventional cartridge to the EQ unit. The supply voltage, which is carried by the two ground wires of the signal cable to the optical cartridge, would probably melt the delicate coils of an MM or MC system. 2. At the same time, you shouldn’t connect the Nightrider to a normal phono input. The extremely high output voltage of 500 millivolts (in comparison with typical MMs where this is 5 millivolts, and MCs where this is 0.5 millivolts) may cause damage by overloading the phono stage and subsequent components. 3.

You need to have a tonearm that separately carries the ground wires for the right and left channels. I can’t actually think of a tonearm right now that I can say for sure this wouldn’t be the case. But if you’re not sure, ask the tonearm manufacturer or a dealer you trust. Other than these three points, the optical cartridge behaves like a totally normal cartridge that you’ve matched with an appropriate phono preamplifier.

The dynamic stylus compliance is not specified, but resonance tests indicate the DS Audio Nightrider is happiest when used in conjunction with medium- to heavy-mass tonearms. An SME Series V, weighing 12 grams, seems to represent the lower limit in terms of effective mass. DS Audio recommends a pleasantly low tracking force of between 13 Newton meters and 17 Newton meters. At 15 Newton meters and with a corresponding antiskating

setting during sample tests, my unit accomplished 70 micrometers without any problems; at maximum tracking force, even 80 micrometers can be faultlessly sampled. That indicates the developers have really done their homework, as those kinds of values in no way represent the norm for comparably expensive MC systems, even those from well-established manufacturers.

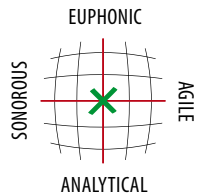
Equalizer included

The front of the EQ unit just has one on-off switch and a small red LED. The magic really starts to happen when the connected cartridge tells you it’s ready to be used: A red LED on the front lights up in a manner somewhat reminiscent of K.I.T.T., the highly advanced car from the TV series Knight Rider, hence the cartridge’s nickname. On the rear of the EQ unit, you’ll find ▶



DS Audio DS-W1 Optical Cartridge

Relatively uncomplicated for a cartridge since impedance and capacity adjustment cease to exist; nonetheless, the system does, of course, want to have a correct geometric adjustment.



© FIDELITY MAGAZINE



CHALLENGING = ■ A component is 100% intuitive if you can exploit its potential to the full intuitively.
INTUITIVE = ■



DS-W1 Nightrider: the revival of the optical sampling principle with modern—and purely analog — materials.

the input, the ground connection, and two different outputs: one with and one without subsonic filter. This filter doesn't kick in until below 15 hertz and, due to the optical cartridge's unusually large bandwidth, only occasionally seems to be necessary. Since you can connect both outputs at the same time, you can create the perfect connection quickly.

From zero to hero

Except for the really bright LED, the cartridge, milled from solid aluminum, actually leaves a rather lackluster impression. But as soon as the boron cantilever with the Shibata diamonds sinks into the

groove, it becomes immediately clear that the cartridge is absolutely first class. I'm not exaggerating: As soon as I listen to the first vinyl record late in the day, it immediately dawns on me that this combo has to rank among the top five cartridges I've ever listened to. In no way can I say that the DS Audio DS-W1 produces spectacular effects. The optical cartridge is not interested in hyperbole or drama. This is particularly true for the neutral, rather warm fundamental tone that's not all that different from my own EMT JSD-6. However, I do have to say that the Nightrider unpretentiously, almost nonchalantly, unearths many additional details—even

in recordings I'm very familiar with. Part of this has to do with the virtual space being perfectly illuminated all the way to the far corners at the back. It doesn't get any better than this. Not to mention the frequency ends. The bass range is reproduced with a seldom (if ever!) heard combination of volume and precision, which means I can hardly wait for the next time the kettle drums will kick in so I can enjoy the astounding amount of nuance and light and shade of the instruments, which in themselves are tonally quite limited. What impresses me the most, though, is the "real" dynamics this cartridge is capable of. Once again, I get the ▶





Using the inseparable DS-W1 unit, which consists of the optical cartridge (nicknamed “Nightrider”) and the equalizer/power supply unit, has proved surprisingly straightforward in practice.

impression that the optical cartridge produces greater contrast between quiet and loud passages than is usual.

The musical performance is produced with a kind of precise effortlessness I’ve never heard before, and it in no way verges on the pedantic despite the discrete attention to detail. It’s astounding how, even with vinyl records I’ve listened to all too often, the Nightrider still manages to uncover nuances I’ve simply never picked up on before. It really doesn’t matter what kind of music you prefer to throw at it—this system is a musically unbeatable, multitasking all-rounder. After playing countless other vinyl

records, I feel happily compelled to revise my somewhat premature verdict: The DS Audio optical cartridge has not only secured a place in my personal top five, it is now my absolute personal favorite! ■

Cartridge | DS Audio DS-W1 Optical Cartridge

Functional principle: Cartridge with photoelectric voltage generation | **Housing material:** milled aluminum | **Cantilever:** boron rod | **Stylus cut:** Shibata | **Output voltage (1 kHz, output EQ unit):** 500 mV | **Channel separation:** > 20 dB | **Stylus compliance:** no information | **Weight:** 6.5 g | **Recommended tracking force:** 13–17 mN

DS Audio EQ Unit | Functional principle: External power supply unit and equalizer for DS-W1 | **Input:** one unsymmetrical (cinch) plus ground

connection | **Outputs:** two unsymmetrical (cinch) of which one has a subsonic filter | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 32.5/10/21 cm | **Weight:** 5.5 kg | **Warranty period:** two years | **Price for set:** €8,800 | **Exchange system price:** €3,900

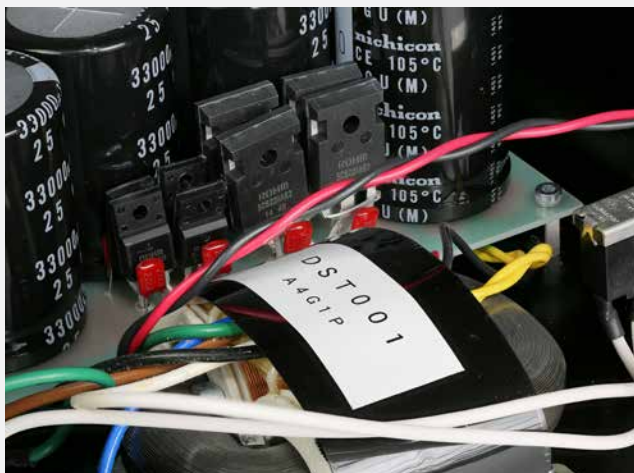
High Fidelity Studio | Dominikanergasse 7 | 86150 Augsburg | Germany | Telephone +49 821 37250 | www.high-fidelity-studio.de ▶

ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT
Turntables: SME Model 10, Technics SL-1210 Mk2 | **Tonearms:** SME M2-9R, SME Series V | **Cartridges:** Audio Technica AT-20SLa Ltd. Ed., EMT JSD-6, Ortofon Quintet Black, Goldring G-2200 | **Preamplifier:** Bryston BP 25 MC | **Power amplifier:** Bryston 3B SST | **Loudspeakers:** Spondor SP100R2 | **Rack:** Music Tools Alica | **Accessories:** Shure SFG-2 stylus tracking force gauge, Millennium audio alignment block

THE TECHNOLOGY BEHIND THE DS AUDIO DS-W1

For each channel in the DS Audio optical cartridge, a type of “light beam” handles converting the cantilever’s movements into electrical voltage: As its names suggests, the process involves the LED (light-emitting diode) emitting a light on two channel-separate photodiodes. Located between the sender and the receiver is a “screen”: a mere 50-micrometer-thick, light-tight and ultralight film with two rectangular cutouts attached to the cantilever. The greater the movement of the cantilever, the more light flows through the screen’s “slits” onto the photoelectric cells and the greater their output voltage. The principle is therefore genuinely analog and can boast a few advantages compared with conventional MM, MI, or MC systems: Because the film on the cantilever weighs considerably less than magnets and coils, the system has an ultralow moving mass. There are no power-induced coils to build up a magnetic field and therefore no counter electromotive

force to work against the current flow on the basis Lenz’s law. And the enormous output voltage eliminates the need for a preamplifier stage. However, the voltage curve produced is particularly advantageous. While the level of induced voltage with MM, MI, and MC systems depends on the frequency (the faster the cantilever moves, the higher the frequency and hence the higher the voltage, too), the voltage curve is not dependent on frequency in optical systems. Only the size of the movement influences the strength of the signal. That means optical cartridge’s developers can implement purely passive RIAA equalization, which in turn only minimally influences the actual signal. The disadvantages are that the LED needs to be supplied with power and the signals of the optical cartridge cannot be processed with a conventional phono pre-amplifier. Therefore, an external power supply unit is always required. •

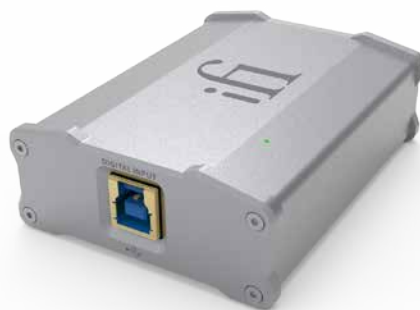


Even Lighter Nano

iFi Audio has trimmed down its formidable nano DSD as well as the price. You can get the iDSD nano LE (Light Edition) for €150 and all you have to do without is the S/PDIF output and switchable filter options. The iDSD nano LE also "only" can handle DSD128.

www.wodaudio.com

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BROWSER Nº 02



BROWSER N° 02

The All-in-One Audiophile Masterpiece

For just under €9,000, you get a lot for your money with the CS 6.2 compact streaming CD receiver: a powerful 500-watt amplifier, a streaming unit that includes support for Tidal and Qobuz, power supplies and DAC converter from the Ovation line, and an enclosed Pure CD drive from Teac. The sister model, the CS 8.2, even features a tube line stage, but it costs an extra €2,000.

www.avm-audio.com

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BROWSER N° 02



New, More Affordable Coaxial Ribbon Line

Those who found Piega's unique Coax 711 too expensive need not despair. The Swiss company has just designed an entire line around its new coaxial ribbon. The smallest model, the bookshelf speaker called the Coax 311, which features just one bass driver, is available from just EUR 6,000 for the pair.

www.in-akustik.de

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BROWSER N° 02

Preamp Squared

McIntosh is set to release two new preamplifiers this March. Their phono preamplifier, the MP 1100 AC (€10,900), has four 12AX7 tubes and three inputs, one of which is even optionally symmetrical, and the digital preamplifier, the D 1100 AC (€9,550), which should set the new benchmark at McIntosh. In addition to nine digital inputs, it also offers three analog inputs.

www.audio-components.de

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The man who quite possibly invented high-end audio wants to do it again. Mark Levinson has come out of creative retirement and is designing exciting audio systems again. ▶

Daniel Hertz M9

MARK LEVINSON'S LATEST MODEL

By Michael Vrzal. Photos: Ingo Schulz

The M9 delightfully and deftly deconstructs large orchestral pieces then heaves them into the listening room with a matter-of-fact vehemence.



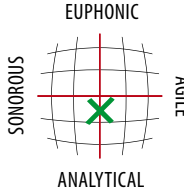
_____ In 1974, \$4,000 was a lot of money. Not enough to get you a new Mercedes W114 Series, but enough to get you an American stereo preamplifier: the LNP-2 from MLAS. A preamp that was significantly more expensive than everything else in its category, it made a huge impact. It also launched the career of the then 28-year-old trumpeter and double bass player Mark Levinson (MLAS stands for Mark Levinson Audio Systems). It may well have also signaled the start of high-end audio as we currently know it.

Some 40+ years later, California-born Levinson can look back on a life packed with so much experience and so many stories it could fill several biographies. After all, the founding of MLAS in 1972 was just the



beginning. Mark Levinson Audio Systems was the spark that ignited the Mark Levinson brand, which today still continues to operate very successfully (independently of Levinson since the 1980s). He founded his second company in 1984: Cello. He chose the name in honor of his mother, who played the cello. Once again, Levinson managed to surround himself with some of the greatest developers of their time. This resulted in devices that achieved legendary status, most notably the Cello Audio Palette designed by Tom Colangelo, who came up with a unique equalizer preamplifier for use in studios.

In the late 1990s, Levinson launched Red Rose Music, a more affordable electronics label. He founded his latest company in 2007 in Switzerland. As was the ▶

Daniel Hertz M9
Not very user friendly and not exactly easy on your checkbook—and yet an outstanding, universal integrated amplifier with a top pedigree. Available with the highly recommended Master Class app as an optional extra.



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CHALLENGING =  A component is 100% intuitive if you can exploit its potential to the full intuitively.
INTUITIVE = 

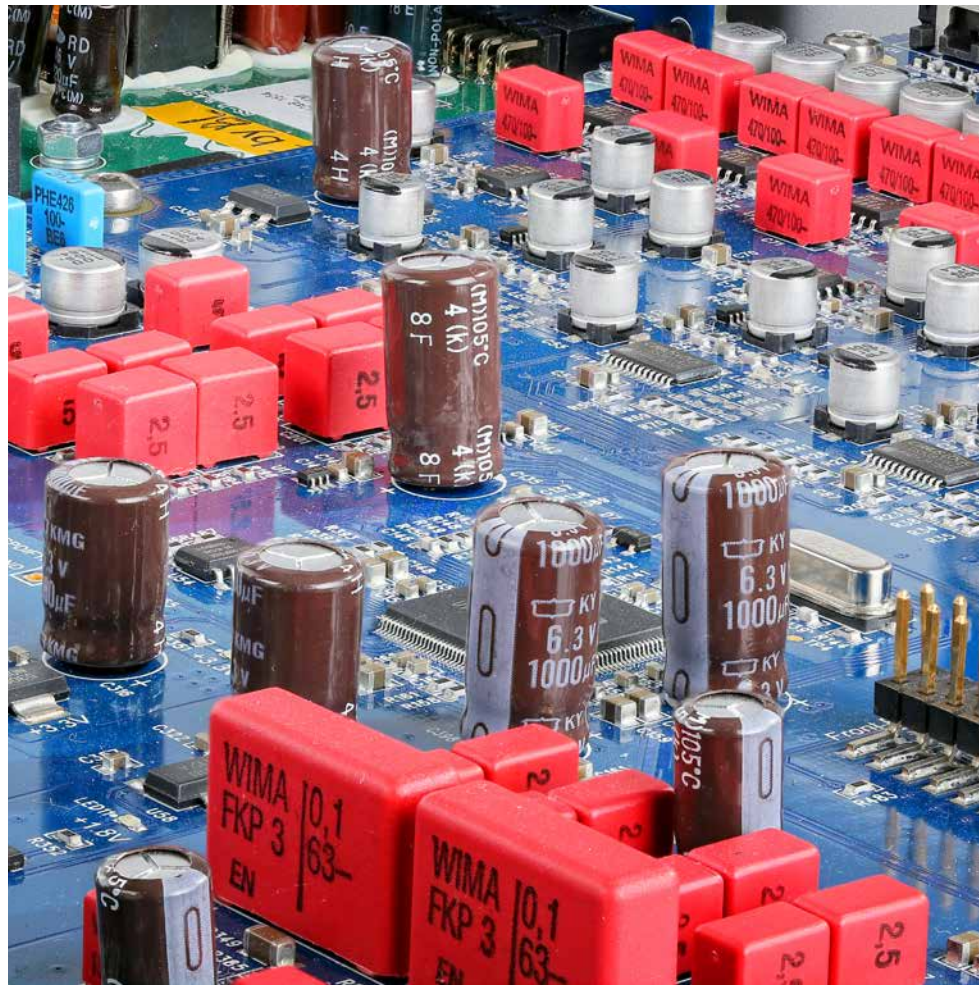


case with Cello, the choice of name was once again very personal: Levinson combined his father's first name with his mother's maiden name to come up with Daniel Hertz.

Around this time, Levinson was also in demand as a consultant, advising such clients as South Korean electronics giant LG and audio chip manufacturer Intersil. Many fruits of that labor have found their way into Daniel Hertz (DH) products, for example the M9 integrated amplifier that we are considering today. Just an integrated amplifier? In our lengthy, in-depth phone conversation, Levinson vehemently begs to differ. No, the M9 is more than the obvious sum of its inputs and outputs. The smallest DH amplifier is designed to teleport listeners into a world of pure

music enjoyment that supersedes everyday high-end concerns about cable directions and device upgrades. This particular characteristic of the Daniel Hertz M9 is not all that obvious at first sight. The lightweight housing is made of brushed aluminum and the walls are not particularly thick. The user interface consists of an input source selection knob, an unmarked volume control knob with infinite rotation, and the on/off switch. Remote control? No chance! Inside the belly of the beast are four circuit boards. The largest, which takes up almost half the available space, is the M9 Main DSP Board. There are inputs in S/PDIF and USB formats and the option for a Bluetooth connection. Up to 24 bits and 192 kilohertz are accepted (in the Bluetooth transmission path, ►

The M9 is more than the obvious sum of its inputs and outputs. The smallest DH amplifier is designed to tele-port listeners into a world of pure music enjoyment.



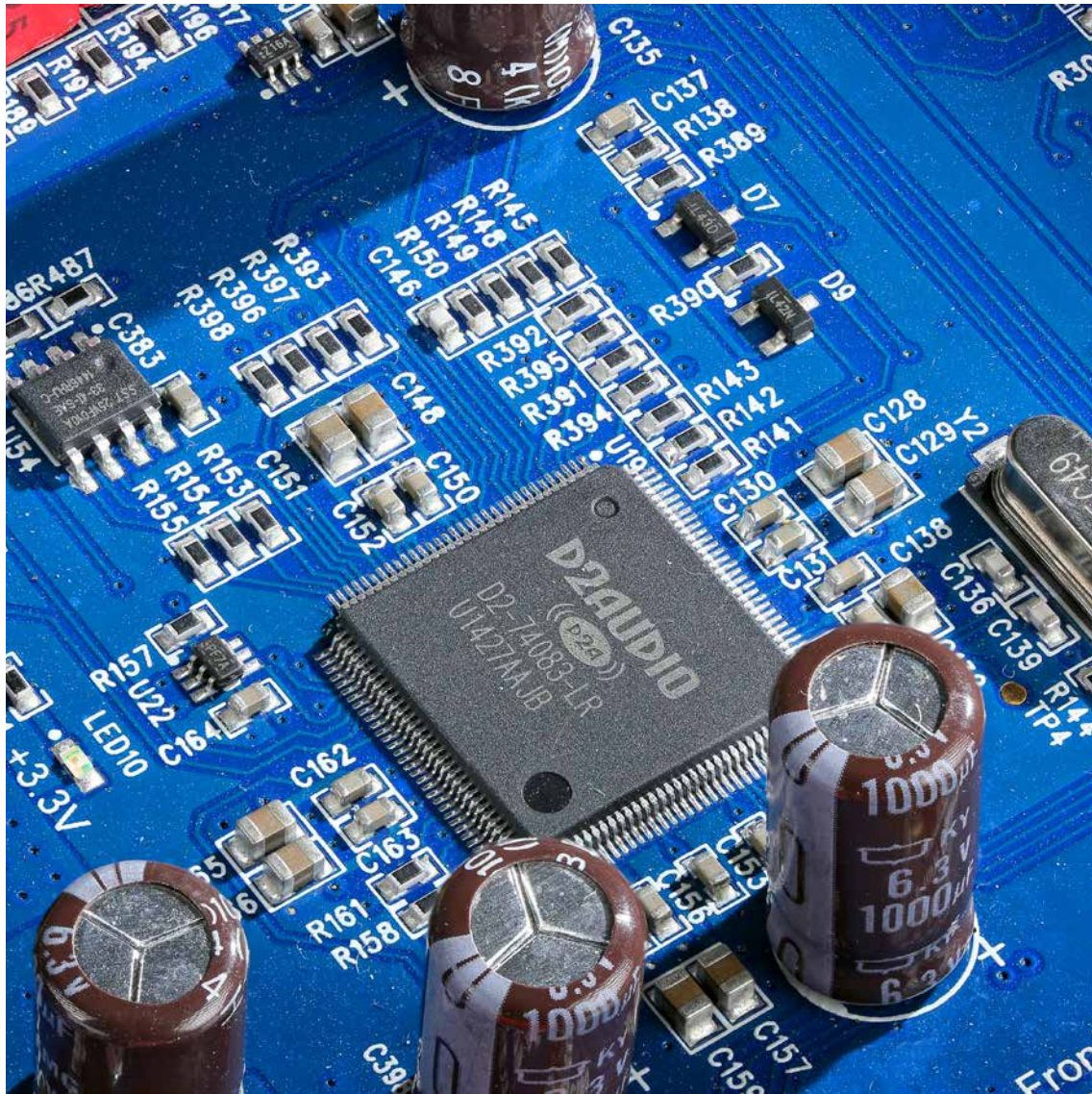
a maximum of 48 kilohertz). Whatever enters through one of the three analog high-level inputs with RCA jacks is digitalized.

Responsibility for signal processing falls to the Intersil D2-71083 Intelligent Digital Amplifier and Sound Processor. That's right: the chip manufacturer Intersil, the company Levinson worked at as a consultant. The result of this collaboration is Mark Levinson Mighty-Cat™ Audio Enhancement, one of the many features this chip boasts.

On top of that, the Intersil all-rounder also houses an all-digital class-D amplifier controller. It's no wonder then that in the M9 it controls power amplifiers using PWM (pulse width modulation) technology. These aren't Daniel Hertz developments, but instead were developed by Hypex. Two impressive power amplifier modules with 400 watts at four ohms along with the corresponding power supply don't raise even the slightest theoretical power-related concerns. Quality concerns are not raised either: On the contrary, the

Dutch switching-amplifier specialist has for many years enjoyed an excellent reputation as a high-end giant killer.

An interesting package is available for use in conjunction with the M9: The company's own M10 bookshelf speaker and the Daniel Hertz Master Class playback and equalizer software written for the Apple platform can be combined with the M9 to form the Baby Daniel Reference System. With its two-way speaker design, the M10 is an attractive little thing. The piano-black housing is, like all Daniel Hertz loudspeaker housings, produced by the Czech piano manufacturer Petrof. However, it's the Master Class software that's more interesting from a technical point of view. First off, it's a pure playback program with no accessories. Rather inconveniently, any tracks you want to listen to need to be manually added to a playlist as the software doesn't provide access to music libraries. A sound-improving algorithm called A+ is activated by checking a box. According to Levinson, it is technically ▶



ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

Turntable: Bauer Audio dps 3 | **Tonearm:** Bauer Audio Tonarm | **Cartridge:** Lyra Kleos | **Phono preamplifier:** Bauer Audio Phono | **CD player:** Electrocompaniet EMC 1 UP | **Preamplifier:** Naim Audio NAC 202 with NAPSC | **Power amplifier:** Naim Audio NAP 200 | **Integrated amplifier:** Silbatone J1300 Mk III | **Loudspeakers:** Ayon Seagull/c | **Cables:** Naim, Fadel, Chord | **Power supply:** Music Line Powerigel | **Accessories:** Bauer Audio rack, Acoustic System loudspeaker feet

akin to MightyCat™ from the Intersil processor and is designed to create a more analog-like listening experience from all PCM digital audio formats, even “improve on it” if possible. How does it do it? Sorry—I’m afraid no further technical details are available. Checking a second box activates a six-band equalizer. With the exception of the lowest and the highest, the

frequency bands correspond to those of the Cello Audio Palette. However, the app considerably broadens the possibilities. Tracks can be rendered from Master Class together with all equalizer settings and are then permanently available almost like private remastered versions. Alternatively, the equalizer settings can be saved individually and be specifically assigned to individual Master Class users.

Nevertheless, the Daniel Hertz M9 is technically anything but exotic and also sounds good with loudspeakers from other companies and without Master Class feed. Really good in fact! It can reproduce complex music at high volumes like no other. Credit for that surely belongs to the Hypex power section, which, however, wouldn’t be anything if it didn’t have ▶

Levinson combined his father's first name with his mother's maiden name to come up with Daniel Hertz.

DANIEL HERTZ



M9

adequate signal processing. The M9's DSP board must be doing something right in that regard. But Levinson is also keeping his lips tightly sealed about exactly what that might be, which is why the M9 is a little like a black box: A signal goes in, a signal comes out, and somewhere in between something magical happens. My first encounter with the M9 is with Johnny Cash, *American Recordings IV*: Cash's voice is articulated with crystal clarity and razor-sharp definition one meter behind the level of the loudspeaker. What the M9 exhibits is an authoritative monitor-like awareness and understanding of the recording. If I were more studio tech savvy, I would definitely be able to pick out every vocal or instrumental track together with the microphone type and compressor setting used. Fascinating.

Various classical and jazz vinyls later and the sound quite wonderfully breaks free from the loudspeakers. This is particularly the case with the ongoing captivating sense that the stage is right in front of you. A new setup for my loudspeakers, with a rear wall distance of 1.5 meters (following George Cardas's precept of the Golden Rectangle), results in beguiling spatial illusions. The Daniel Hertz has clearly more authoritative perceptions of the dimensions of the recording rooms than my tried-and-tested Naim electronics.

Large orchestral pieces, such as the symphonic suite *Scheherazade* by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov or a violin concerto by Philip Glass, are delightfully and deftly deconstructed then heaved into the listening room at just the right moments with a matter-of-fact ▶



vehemence. The M9 is exemplary when it comes to delimiting sound events. Above all, “clarity” is the predominant sound quality you continuously note. The tonal balance is impeccable. That must be the much cited linear stroke as frequency response diagram. The amplifier does not embellish with extra splendor or warmth to overtone-rich classical instruments. A concert grand piano thunders with exquisite precision; percussion instruments smoothly open fire into the room. The M9 is seriously fun!

Did I already mention that the puristic amp has a headphone output? What I’ve written so far fully applies to this too in terms of performance. I connect my Grado SR80 as well as the rare, large PS1 Pro that belongs to my colleague Cai Brockmann—and experience true headphone monitoring. For the acid test, I opt for “The Unspeakable Chilly Gonzales.” Rap accompanied by an orchestra: The music beautifully

arranged and very, very funny. Gonzales’s crazy lyrics are lifted from the orchestra as crystal-clear intelligible speech. More so than any loudspeaker playback, the headphones let you distinctly recognize that the accompanying music, no matter how superb it sounds, is composed of sample libraries.

I test the effect of A+ with an iMac feed. This unspecified global sound optimization system actually makes the untreated signal more angular and somehow more ascetic. A+ brings a dash of warmth into play, and the stage seems to expand a little. Levinson talks of “destressing”—yep, that pretty much hits the nail on the head. I can imagine continuously using A+ over the long term. The results are consistently appealing, regardless of the music, and almost seductive.

What about the equalizer? For deliberate manipulation—whether for room-acoustic adjustment or actually super subtle adjusting of tone control—the ▶



software version of the Cello Audio Palette is invaluable. The six virtual controllers make you feel rather like a sound engineer.

The Daniel Hertz M9 and the Master Class software can be purchased separately. They do seem to be made for each other. With its euphony and equalization functions, the Mac app is the logical addition for the puristic digital integrated amplifier. I'm happy to make a case for the M9 Master Class at the attractive package price but would take this opportunity to suggest adding a balance function and a level indicator. Maybe for version 2.0.

On its own, the Daniel Hertz M9 is a fine piece of audio equipment. It has brains as well as brawn. Its inner qualities are well concealed, which is why potential purchasers are advised to take their time with it and not be troubled by its reserved appearance. Once it's put to work, the M9 digital powerhouse does reveal its true qualities, which are then all the more lasting.

The man, whom friends, such as the renowned amplifier developer and MLAS colleague since the beginning John Curl, call a "true visionary" has done it once again. Mark Levinson is nothing short of a living legend. ■

Integrated amplifier | Daniel Hertz M9

Power output (8/4 Ω): 2 x 200/400 W | **Inputs:** 3 x line unsymmetrical (cinch), 3 x digital (S/PDIF, USB, Bluetooth) | **Outputs:** each 1 x loudspeaker (screw terminals), headphones (6.3 mm jack), record out (cinch) | **Special features:** optional equalizer app (€600) prepared for announced phono option, no remote control | **Finish:** Brushed aluminum | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 43/11/33 cm | **Weight:** 5 kg | **Warranty period:** five years | **Price:** €5,950

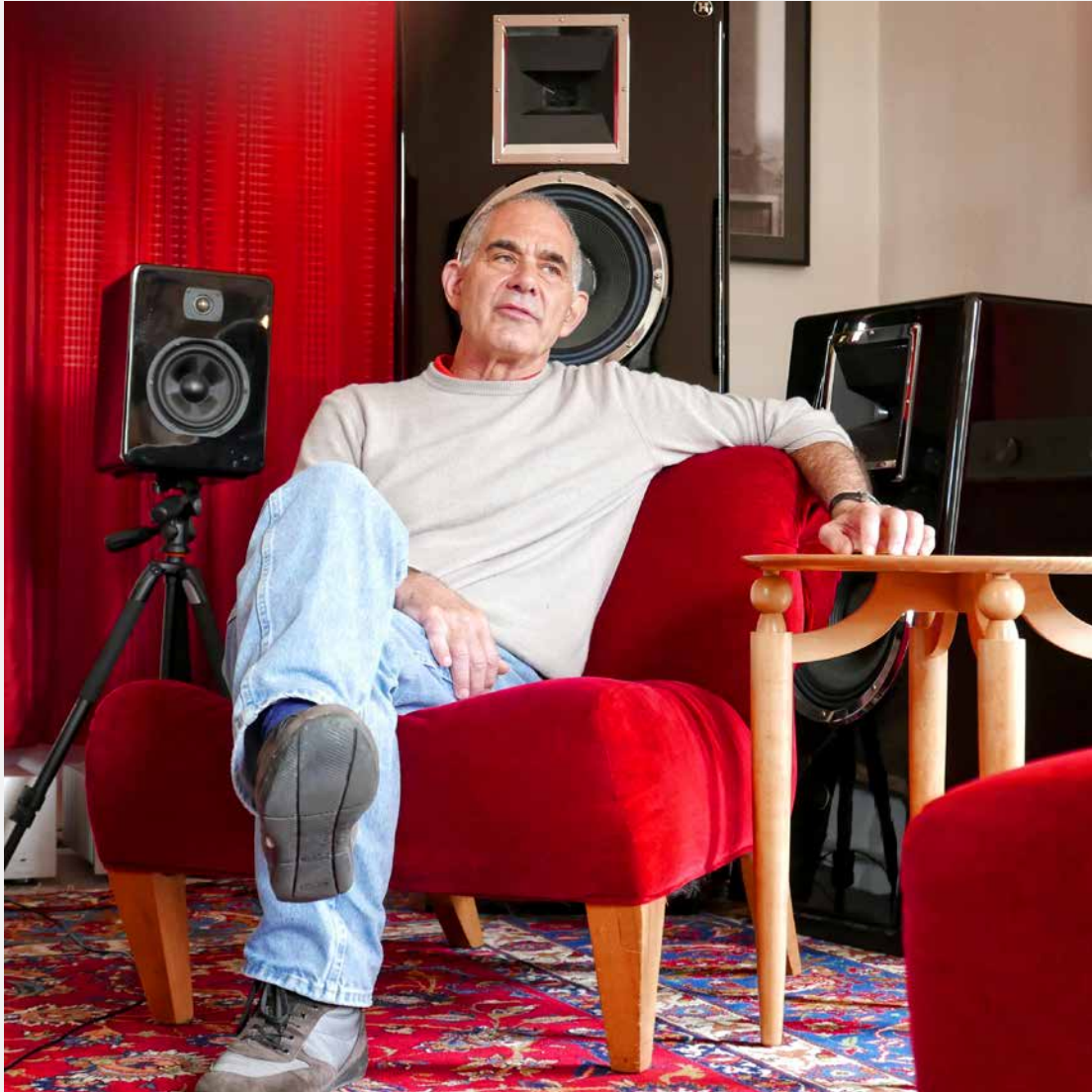
Daniel Hertz S.A. | 8, Rue du Nant | 1207 Geneva | Switzerland | www.danielhertz.com

►

FIDELITY visits... Mark Levinson

VENICE—A VERITABLE TREAT FOR THE EYES AND EARS

By Cai Brockmann. Photos: Ingo Schulz



The invitation sounds like a mixture of mini-vacation and high-end training. So, without further ado, we travel to Italy to meet Mark Levinson, the mastermind behind Daniel Hertz.

_____High noon in Venice, and the water taxi is waiting for us. Mark Levinson wants to personally induct us into the philosophy behind his company Daniel Hertz and demonstrate the products in the showroom. Headquartered in Geneva (where it also has a showroom), the company has already adapted to the current era of international networking. Its boss hasn't lived

in the US for many years now and instead resides in beloved "good old Europe" in a nice apartment in the heart of Venice. Björn Gabriel, Levinson's right-hand man, lives practically next door.

We're now at the apartment where we shake hands. Levinson says, "please, call me Mark." Here's a living legend, a high-end visionary, and you can still feel it in everything that this man says. Levinson, born 1946, continues to be a man on a mission. Ever since his brilliant debut, "high-end audio" has been inextricably linked with his name. Against the backdrop of his pioneering achievements (founding and building of the Mark Levinson, Cello, Red ▶



Rose Music and now Daniel Hertz brands), Mark details for us just how today's challenging audio world works: The idea behind Daniel Hertz builds on a cohesive overall image shaped by music and immaculate engineering. This means we also shouldn't simply refer to "products," but rather to "ideas." And that the best, most musically satisfying hi-fi systems can only result from systematic, controlled implementation—from recording to playback. And that Daniel Hertz products are absolutely at the top of their game as they stem from the "only manufacturer in the world" that is in a position to show the hi-fi and music world a new and better way with innovative and unusual ideas. The Master Class software, in particular, is cited by Levinson as revolutionary because it can generate the very best sound ("like from the master tape") even from a suboptimal music program. There's no doubt about it: Levinson is and will continue to be a visionary.

We expect the great man's great words to be backed up by some great sounds tomorrow. Against the glistening darkness of the Venetian night sky, a water taxi takes us to the tiny green island of La Certosa, where only the lights of "our" little hotel stand out against the night sky. For centuries, the island housed a community of friars and their gardens, but it has also served as a munitions depot and been used by sailmakers. Over several decades, it has been carefully restored to its natural state and today features extensive and diverse gardens that offer an ideal setting for meandering and relaxing. Wall ruins and small service buildings near the small hotel are scattered along the gravel paths, and a small harbor cuts through the middle of the tiny island. And at the heart of this oasis of tranquility is an inconspicuous former garden shed. From outside you would never guess that a first-class audiophile experience awaits inside. The main room is not huge, but also not small. Some equipment and a few prototypes dot the scenery here and there; up ahead on the left is a cello case tucked in behind a row of high-gloss black loudspeakers opposite a coffee machine; and in the middle of the room two sofas are situated one behind the other. It's nice and cozy.

And it sounds good. Very good. We kick things off with the Baby Daniel Reference System, the combination of M9 amplifier and M10 bookshelf speakers that's always controlled from an Apple laptop and the Master Class software mentioned above. Sitting back to relax, we listen our way through the current model range and get blown away by the moderately large M8 and

M2 floor-standing loudspeakers, which are driven by the high-end M6L pre-amplifier—M5L power amplifier combination. The incredible sounds filling the room are commanding, and completely unshakable from a professional standpoint. The FIDELITY contingent is overjoyed by this delightful touch of top-class PA. Yep, that really hits the spot!

Each time new cables are unhurriedly plugged in, there's fresh coffee, fresh air, and time for more input and explanations from the boss. By now we've also gotten to experience the beneficial, remarkable "decompressing" effect of Master Class. A subtle instrument for sound improvement—that's just got to be said!

The absolute highpoint of this long and highly interesting day is when we finally get to experience the top-of-the-range model, the M1: The loudspeaker stands proud like a high-gloss polished fortress, wide and tall and weighing in at a good 150 kilograms, with chrome detailing and some very serious equipment, like classic PA systems. And it not only features a high-gloss piano varnish but also carries an invisible six-figure price tag that you immediately forget about when the music starts to play. Mark is, of course, well prepared and gets the party started with a fiery, percussion-heavy track. The sublimely captured dynamics of several large, masterfully played drums drives the three-way construction into a more casual use of force that really bewitches you. The M1 pretty much pretends to act all innocent and coy, showing you a cheeky half-raised eyebrow when it lets loose at real live music levels and puts the foundation of the old tool room to the test. We even see a few bits of flimsy plaster gently float from the walls, dancing in the sunlight before settling on the floor. I saw it with my very own eyes and suspect our private live concert was heard by everyone else on the island, too. We experience another three hours of top-quality devices and the truly exhilarating performance put on by the huge system: Nothing is left to the imagination as it darts from one style of music to the next, placing us in the right mood for our journey home. As professionals, we all understand: Mark, the visionary, the high-end legend, still has what it takes!

Later, on the way home, we are stunned to realize that we hardly saw a thing over the one and a half days we spent in Venice. Well, we'll just have to come back then. After all, La Certosa, the audiophile center of Venice, is worth a trip. ■



...and now for something completely different...

OPENING THE DOORWAY
INTO THE AUDIOPHILE FUTURE
HAS NEVER BEEN EASIER.
AMONG ITS MANY VIRTUES,



BURMESTER'S ALL-IN-ONE PHASE 3 SOUND SYSTEM IS A PARAGON AMONG STREAMERS—



IT'S SIMPLE TO USE, ALMOST ENTIRELY SELF-EXPLANATORY, AND IT BOASTS EXCELLENT SOUND. AND EVEN IN TERMS OF DESIGN, ITS HIGH-END MANUFACTURER HAS GONE REMARKABLY FAR OUT OF ITS WAY TO APPEAL TO CUSTOMERS.



Burmester Phase 3

BURMESTER'S VIRTUAL WORLD: STYLISH, SMART, AND STURDY!

By Hans von Draminski. Photos: Ingo Schulz, manufacturer

_____Something is definitely wrong here! Where is the new Burmester system I was supposed to be testing? In the listening room I don't find any of the eye-catching high-gloss chrome front panels I was expecting. Instead, someone seems to have parked a rusty steel sculpture in among all the

other stereo equipment. Maybe the FIDELITY team has decided to produce a second publication—a magazine on modern art (“ARTELITY” sounds like a good name)—and the dullish dark gray object over there is going to be the centerpiece. But hang on a minute. That thing has chrome-plated knobs and a

mirrored display. And there's the Burmester logo as well.

The reason for my confusion is now clear: Burmester's latest streaming and home network creation is not only available in the usual chrome design, it also comes in a version with the trendy name of Loft—a name that obviously aims to exude ▶

THE BASS IS CRISP
AND WITH CLEAR
CONTOURS.





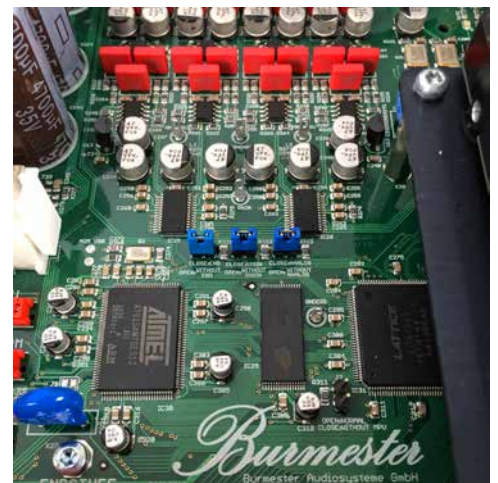
that special charm of old factory buildings that have been turned into pricey offices and apartments. Whatever one might generally think of this post-modern fraud, the “loft” look here is only skin deep. Under its camouflage, the system is truly state of the art. And the Burmester Phase 3 absolutely earns this state-if-the-art label. Behind the gray steel color of the front panel you’ll find leading-edge streaming technology combined with the excellent amplifier electronics that customers have grown accustomed to expect from Burmester. And it all creates a superb sound experience. Although it’s been a high-end topic for quite some time, I have to admit that streaming hasn’t really interested me up to now. Personally, I love the experience of holding a record, CD, or book (preferably a hardback) in my hand. I enjoy the physical pleasure of looking at a good cover and then placing the record on the turntable or inserting the CD

into the tray. Those are things a streamer or an e-book reader can’t give you because they belong to a virtual world.

Then why was I so immediately attracted to the Burmester system? Maybe because it makes it so easy to enter a new world. You only need to set it in its place, switch it on, plug in a LAN cable, and connect up the compact loudspeakers (in the same design) included with the Phase 3 package. That’s it. No need to mess around with a laptop or desktop PC. No annoying installation procedures or messages (“system error, this installation program will terminate immediately”)—simply genuine plug-and-play. The best way to control the Burmester Phase 3 is from an optional preconfigured iPad mini, which has a menu structure so intuitive that I rarely needed to consult the manual. Anyone who regularly works with a computer will immediately understand this performing steel sculpture from

Berlin. And everyone else will only need a few seconds longer. Before you start surfing the web for high-res music files or searching through streaming portals for FLACs, you can simply slide a CD into the unassuming slot on the front panel. Phase 3 silently swallows the disc and politely asks on the iPad display if you want to play or rip the CD. If you choose the second option (don’t worry!—there are no serial killers from Victorian London involved), your CD data will be transferred to the two internal, mirrored 2 TB hard disks (RAID 1) in less than 10 minutes and with no loss of quality. If the CD is badly scratched, you can even run an optimization routine that will reliably eliminate any data errors. And I stress the word reliably! My comparisons revealed that the ripped material on Phase 3’s hard disk generally sounds even better than the original CD. While transferring the data, the Burmester uses the track list and CD ▶

ANYONE WHO REGULARLY WORKS WITH A COMPUTER WILL IMMEDIATELY UNDERSTAND THIS PERFORMING STEEL SCULPTURE FROM BERLIN; AND EVERYONE ELSE WILL ONLY NEED A FEW SECONDS LONGER.



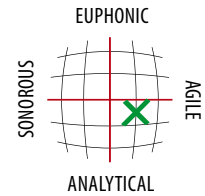
From a visual, tactile, and sound perspective, the newly designed compact speakers that come with Phase 3 are an ideal extension to the system.



The Burmester always remains in control, slurs no impulses, is never sharp or piercing.

Burmester Phase 3

Burmester has put a number of its finest components into Phase 3's attractive and robust housing. The end result is really easy to install, simple to control, and produces an outstanding sound—high-end doesn't need to be complicated!



© FIDELITY Magazine



CHALLENGING = ■ A component is 100% intuitive if you can exploit its potential to the full intuitively.
INTUITIVE = ■

length to determine which album is it dealing with, subsequently displaying the cover as well as the album and song or movement titles. If it can't automatically find a listing for the album in the international databases (which can happen sometimes—with CD equivalents of “mixtapes,” for instance), you can easily add the missing data manually.

Connecting to the local home network is equally intuitive. Once you've supplied the access details, the Burmester Phase 3 does what streamers are meant to do: play the desired music (and collect all the metadata) from your local hard disk. If you prefer, you can also set up a direct USB connection.

It goes without saying that Phase 3 also supports internet streaming services. An equally fascinating part of our test was working through an enormous list of interesting web radio stations. Searching by genre, you'll be pleasantly surprised how many stations around the world have exciting classical music or rousing blues in their repertoire. Doing this also

gives you a chance to automatically learn a lot about data rates and bandwidths—by no means every web radio can deliver impressive sound.

That brings us neatly round to what makes the Burmester Phase 3 stand out from so many of its competitors: the system's sound quality. The fact that I had never really been impressed by streamers in the past had a lot to do with them being mostly “solid” performers. Not worse than that, but definitely not any better. I was a confirmed analog fan, and annoyed rather than impressed by what I often regarded as the exaggerated silkiness and coolness of digital data, especially in the case of hi-res music. So much so that long listening sessions tended to become a challenge rather than a pleasure.

But I've put all that behind me now. I've come to realize that these were the teething problems that often afflict new technologies: The Mercedes-Benz A-Class flipped during the “elk test,” the drivers' cabins in German Railway's first Talent 2 trains were

intolerably cold and drafty—and streamers sounded much too “digital.”

However, the sound produced by the Burmester Phase 3 during my listening sessions led me to soon abandon my old prejudices. Not only did this compact system effortlessly outclass many conventional hi-fi ensembles, it seriously reduced my craving for vinyl. This feeling was definitely reinforced by the system's ease of operation. Not having to kneel on the floor and try to decipher the faded labels on LP or CD spines was a relief, of course, regardless of the tactile experience this might be said to provide. With the Burmester Phase 3, all I needed to do was select Verdi's Requiem conducted by Riccardo Muti. A few seconds later, the room filled with this strikingly paradoxical work, this spectacular and melancholy blend of operatic power and religious fervor, transporting me into the late 19th century on a journey leaving me blissfully unaware of categories such as analog or digital. Switching to the music of Lisa Simone, newly ▶

IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT PHASE 3 ALSO SUPPORTS INTERNET STREAMING SERVICES. A USER INTERFACE ON THE IPAD MINI IS WITHOUT A DOUBT A TEMPTING PROPOSITION.



SOMEONE SEEMS TO HAVE PARKED A RUSTY STEEL SCULP- TURE IN AMONG ALL THE OTHER STEREO EQUIPMENT.

copied onto Phase 3's internal hard disk, the contrast couldn't have been more extreme. But the Burmester had no problems at all making the transition. The bass is crisp with clear contours, and Lisa's voice has an agreeable presence. Despite the production not being any kind of feast for audiophile fans, it comes over as a well-rounded and enjoyable experience that never grows uncomfortable.

From a visual, tactile, and sound perspective, the newly designed compact speakers that come with Phase 3—in matching “steel beam” design—are an ideal extension to the system. They only start to be pushed to their limits by booming orchestral pieces played at a volume neither your neighbors nor your own ears will appreciate. But these neat little speakers will have no problem filling even spacious lofts with a wonderfully differentiated and harmonious sound. Anyone who bothers to position his or her favorite sofa somewhere near the precise sweet spot between the suspiciously squat speakers

and selects a good recording will be rewarded with a 3-D stage performance that seems to have little to do with the unassuming boxes themselves—a wonderful example that size doesn't always matter.

But we still couldn't resist the temptation to connect up two much larger speakers that just happened to be hanging around FIDELITY headquarters looking for a job. Although this may seem a little strange, the Burmester Phase 3 seems to encourage playfulness, so we thought we'd test its all-in-one electronics unit with boxes other than those included in the set. Lo and behold! Connected up to the impressive Piega MLS 2, Burmester's streamer produced such a remarkable sound that it might have been tailor-made for these demanding Swiss loudspeakers. While other amplifiers quickly capitulate when faced with these amazing-sounding dipole speakers because they crave power and a stable current, the Burmester Phase 3 stays absolutely cool and, also while playing Gabriel Fauré's lavishly

performed Requiem, almost off-handedly produces sound levels that shake even the thick window panes of the listening room. The Burmester remains in control, slurs no impulses, is never sharp or piercing—but always clearly shows how good (or middling) the original material is. Compelling evidence of the quality of the amplifier's electronics. Almost more remarkable is the fact that, once reconnected, the compact speakers that come with the set cope pretty well too, leaving nothing to complain about above the lowest octave.

Burmester's Phase 3 all-in-one sound system, including loudspeakers, costs just under €30,000. Certainly a lot of money. But any consideration of this price needs to take into account the many years of top-class music and incomparable ease of operation you can expect from Phase 3. Really a highly advanced computer, Phase 3 can also receive software updates to support improvements such as the new file formats currently being ▶

I LOVE THE EXPERIENCE OF
HOLDING A RECORD, A CD,
OR A REAL BOOK IN MY HAND.





developed—like those such organizations as the Fraunhofer Institute in Erlangen, Germany, are working on. There's nothing to update with the amplifier unit, though. It's already at the top end of the scale. All in all, highly recommended—especially for those who want their all-in-one system to not only sound good, but look good as well. ■

**All-in-one sound system |
Burmester Phase 3**

Set contents: All-in-one-receiver 161 (streamer, music server, CD player, CD ripper, internet tuner, UKW tuner,

pre-amp, power amp) in a steel rack, two B15 speakers on steel stands, loudspeaker cables (2 m x 3 m pre-assembled), remote control, optional preconfigured iPad mini 2 (additional €320)

Supported digital formats: FLAC, WAV, MP3, AIFF, OGG, AAC, ALAC (m4a); stereo 16 and 24 bit, up to 192 kHz | **Power output (8/4Ω):** Two 100/170 W | **Analog inputs:** Line in balanced (XLR) | **Analog outputs:** Line out balanced (XLR), Line out single-ended (RCA), 1x pair speakers (screw-type terminals) | **Digital inputs:** coaxial, TosLink, USB, LAN, WLAN, Bluetooth | **Digital outputs:** coaxial, TosLink | **Special features:** Burmester software, upsampling 96/24 or 24/192 kHz selectable,

gapless play, RAID 1 system (two 2 TB hard disks), Apple AirPlay, integration of TIDAL and HighResAudio services, switchable smooth and volume-compensation function, extra compartment with glass door for accessories such as media players, etc. | **Versions:** Retro-style (chrome) or Loft-style (steel) | **Usable space in extra compartment (W/H/D):** approx. 53/8/29 cm | **Receiver dimensions incl. rack (W/H/D):** 58/63/41 cm | **Loudspeaker dimensions incl. stand (W/H/D):** 25/74/44 cm, height adjustable | **Warranty period:** 2 years, after registration 3 years | **Set price:** €29, 800

Burmester Audiosysteme GmbH | Wilhelm-Kabus-Str. 47 | 10829 Berlin | Germany | Phone +49 30 7879680 | www.burmester.de

THROUGH THE LSD LENS

By Hans-Jürgen Schaal—Part I



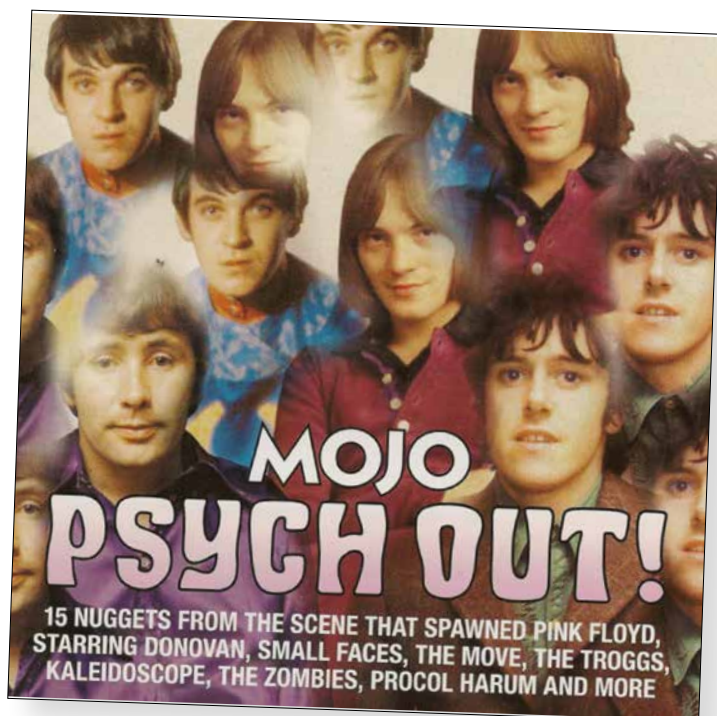
You don't just find covered versions of songs, actual album covers attract their share of copycats, too. Are these "covered covers" simply parodies, witty allusions or tributes—or is there some kind of deeper meaning to find?

_____ Greatly feared in the Middle Ages, ergot derives from a crop fungus containing alkaloids. It has the potential to cause fatal poisoning when food infected with it is ingested. In the 20th century, the pharmaceutical industry hoped to obtain a means to stimulate the human circulatory system from the ergot. After the Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann (1906—2008) had identified lysergic acid as the decisive active compound, he manufactured a synthetic form of the acid in 1938: lysergic acid diethylamide, or LSD for short. Trying it himself in 1943, Hofmann discovered the substance's strong hallucinogenic effects. It began to be used as psychiatric medication under the name Delysid in 1949. Delysid was designed to give patients stirring, liberating psychological experiences. Psychiatrists were also supposed to take the medication to be able to immerse themselves in their hallucinating patients' experiences. In clinical trials in the early 1960s in the U.S., some test subjects were so enthused by LSD that they wanted to identify the path to human enlightenment while taking the medication. Thanks to the likes of Timothy Leary and others, LSD became the lifestyle drug of choice for hippies and creative types.

By 1966, LSD had been banned in the U.S. and Great Britain, which only served to make it more attractive. A year later saw the release of Pink Floyd's debut album *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn*. The album cover

consists of a photograph of the four band members taken with a prism lens—this "multiple vision" was commonly used for photos and films to imply an LSD high. Vic Singh, an up-and-coming fashion photographer at the time, had borrowed the camera lens from Beatles member George Harrison and took the photo of the band in his studio in London. He later reminisced: "The band was really excited at the prospect of being photographed with a prism lens. Once they had seen a few Polaroid test shots, they settled down and got ready to pose for the camera while the Piper music was playing at full blast." It was also Singh's idea for the musicians to wear extremely colorful hippie gear.

The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn became the most famous psychedelic rock album ever. It soon earned itself the reputation of being the ideal music to accompany an LSD trip and perfect for triggering typical LSD euphoria. Musically speaking, it has everything you need—from the space trip "Interstellar Overdrive" (a 10-minute purely instrumental piece), esoteric wafting sounds, and anarchic noises to weirdly innocent pop songs, the bizarre lyrics of which—about gnomes, cats and scarecrows—seem to express the childlike emotions of drug-fueled visions. Syd Barrett, an artist caught between real psychosis and chemical psychotic trips, was the band's front man on their debut album. It's said he was sometimes completely lost in his own world and not able ▶



THROUGH THE LSD LENS

Part II

to communicate or be communicated with during the studio recording sessions. In that sense, the album is really a balancing act between Dada and Gaga. Old-school columnists and pop theorists believe *The Piper* to be the only relevant album Pink Floyd ever made.

At the time, however, Pink Floyd was just one of many bands making a name for themselves on the London club scene with experimental approaches—between pop, rock, and psychedelic rock. In 2006, the British magazine MOJO published the compilation album *Psych Out!*—The subheading read: “15 nuggets from the scene that spawned Pink Floyd...” The magazine’s publishers used LSD inventor Albert Hofmann’s 100th birthday to launch the publication. Its editor-in-chief Phil Alexander says: “In 1965, the Beatles and the Stones had enjoyed their first LSD trips, openly described their experiences, and, as a result, gave their blessing to the dawn of the psychedelic era. What followed was an explosion of creativity, experimentation, and capriciousness that culminated in London and penetrated the world of art, film, and literature and, above all, music.”

These 15 songs from 15 different bands float from poppy, happy melodies to chaotic, confused psychedelic moments then drift to spoken lyrics and distorted sounds to then drift among Indian and blues styles. All the tracks were created around 1967 and are the soundtrack to the London LSD era. Some of the bands today are only known to the experts, even if back in the day some of them did play at the UFO Club where Pink Floyd also became famous—including Tomorrow, The Move, The Smoke, and Procol Harum. No prism lens was needed for the compilation’s album cover in 2006, just some old pictures and Photoshop. The collage depicts Gary Brooker from Procol Harum (top left), Steve Marriott from Small Faces (top right), Donovan (bottom right), and Reg Presley from The Troggs (bottom left). These pictures were taken around 1967, both a piece of history from the music scene and from the drugs scene. ■

Pink Floyd: *The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn* (EMI 50999 028935 2 5)

MOJO: *Psych Out!* (MCPS, magazine insert)

Photo: Stefan Gawlick



Professional musician Stefan Gawlick travels the world and knows almost every major concert hall around the globe. In this series, he reports on the acoustics and other characteristics of famous venues—both in the auditorium and on stage.

THE GOLDEN HALL AT THE MUSIKVEREIN IN VIENNA

_____ You probably already know the facts: Housed in the building belonging to the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien, the Great Hall—better known as the *Goldener Saal* (Golden Hall) im Musikverein—was inaugurated in January 1870 in Vienna. It was designed and built in a style honoring paragons from antiquity and in a classic shoe box form as a rectangular, 50-meter long hall with seats facing head-on toward the stage.

Due to the numerous balconies, ledges, statues, friezes and stucco work, this hall is comprised almost purely of acoustic diffusion elements. The only absorbers in the light-flooded space are the maximum of 2,044 concert goers who, due to the room height of almost 18 meters, don't really have much impact in the end: Whether full or empty, the hall reverberates for a good two seconds. Only the transients are a bit clearer when the hall is full; the distinct resonance the room also obtains through the hollow cavities under the stage and the thin ceiling panels only loosely laid on a beam construction is maintained. These simple facts do not, however, reveal much about

the hall's magic: This is something you can only understand once you've experienced it in person.

As I'm sure many of you are well acquainted with the Golden Hall from having sat in the audience at a performance, I'll try to describe it from the other side: What's it like to play on stage?

Concerts at the Musikverein usually get off to a somewhat tedious start: Entrances are not located at Karlsplatz, but rather in the tiny alleyways opposite. This is a real nightmare for delivery drivers and motorists as there are hardly any loading bays and practically no parking spaces. Inside the building, things don't get any better: The elevators are cramped, the corridors winding, and the doors narrow. The stage side doors are actually so narrow that grand concert pianos have to be relieved of their legs and placed on their side just to be able to reach the stage at all. "Is there a stage elevator?" I hear you ask. Oh, please! To get to the stage from their dressing rooms below, musicians have to tackle long, steep staircases. And, as you might imagine, over the decades many a violin has not survived this arduous journey. ▶



Photo: Stefan Gawlick

On the stage itself, you'll find the seats are packed closely together even when the orchestra is quite small; and, if you are seated at the back, you can quite easily come into physical contact with the first row of the audience. It's quite a strange feeling ...

But, when you play the first note, you immediately forget about all that. The marvel that is the Musikverein is hard to explain, but I'll try my best. When you use an instrument to produce sound, it's part technique, part power. And the bigger the concert hall, the more you usually have to put into the instrument to fill the room. That's not the case at the Musikverein, however. Things work very differently here: You get the feeling you only have to slightly initiate a sound with the instrument and the hall will "actively" draw it out further and carry it over long distances for a long time. When you play in this concert hall, you experience a lightness that let's you can create beautiful sounds without the need to exert yourself to any great extent. And that's because everything here oscillates, resonates, and carries. Or, to put it another way, if you don't mind me making an automotive comparison: If you were to compare the exertion of power and effort in other good concert halls, for example the KKL (Culture and Convention Centre) in Lucerne or the Berliner Philharmonie, with a "healthy" speed range and active driving style, you would, so to speak,

be letting the engine idle in the Golden Hall. And you have to get used to that at first.

That's why many guest orchestras sound strangely rough and angular here. Even the coordination is hard at first: On stage you can hear yourself extremely well, your immediate neighbor reasonably well, but other members of the orchestra farther away only very vaguely. You therefore have to quickly readjust your "antennae" to be able to properly work as one again.

As I round this out, here's a little nugget of audiophile info for you: The golden female figures supporting the first balcony in the auditorium are all made from plaster, however the ones on the stage are made from thin metal that oscillates at a considerably high frequency when you tap it. ■

Großer Saal im Haus der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien (Great Hall in the concert building of the Viennese Music Association) | Musikvereinsplatz 1 | 1010 Vienna | Austria | www.musikverein.at

Music tips: recordings with concert-hall typical sounds | **Johannes Brahms, Symphony No. 1:** Vienna Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein (DGG) | **Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony No. 7:** Vienna Philharmonic, Carlos Kleiber (DGG) | **Various New Year's concerts, in particular with Carlos Kleiber (1989) and Herbert von Karajan (1987)**



Rage Against the Machine
CD and LP, 1992

Shaking Things Up!

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

(REMASTERED ON SACD/CD)

By Cai Brockmann

_____Rage Against the Machine's debut album is ranked number 85 on *Rolling Stone's* list of the best debut albums of all time. In musical terms, the explosive mix of genres can be simultaneously categorized into four different styles: heavy metal, hip hop, rap, and funk. Of course, none of them really apply the way they would for a benchmark-setting crossover album though. Curiously, a Rage Against the Machine single managed to enter the UK charts again 17 years after it was first released. In 2009, a couple of students who were sick of seeing the same old singing "talent" competition drivel year after year set up an online campaign to launch RATM's single "Killing In The Name" back to the number one spot on the UK Top 40. They succeeded—and, what's more, they managed to get it there on Christmas Eve! Conversations held sitting around the Christmas tree must surely have focused on social activism that

year. Oh, and wicked sound. Happy holidays for audiophiles with thick skin and reliable equipment.

But of course not only "Killing In The Name" but the whole album has an extremely dense, heavy, unleashed sound, which, at an adequate volume, makes feeble audio systems feel weak at the knees. Since it was released in 1992, I have always used the album, in the truest sense, as a real acid test for hi-fi components and listeners. I will happily admit that I very rarely listen to the entire album in one go. If you don't follow the band's sociopolitical activism lyrically, Zack de la Rocha's furious rapping and aggressive attitude are only bearable in small chunks.

The Californian band's three instrumentalists are much more interesting though. Drummer Brad Wilk (who also plays with Audioslave and on Black Sabbath's album "13") displays a

steadfast, perfectly timed foundation of funky heavy beats, often reminiscent of Led Zeppelin's legendary John Bonham as well as of Chad Smith (Red Hot Chili Peppers) in terms of his directness. Wilk's congenial musical partner in crime is Tim Commerford, whose electric bass guitar typically invades the living room with full force. And anyone keen to hear how a Music Man StingRay pushed to its limits and an authoritative bass drum complement each other during a high-octane recording need only listen to "Take The Power Back." Of course, Tom Morello, whose aggressive, masterful and at times heavenly guitar style has significantly influenced contemporary rock 'n' roll over the last 25 years, also really shines here with authentic sleight of hand.

Since 1992, RATM's debut album has occupied a top spot among rare, great-sounding rock albums in the category of "audiophile" ▶



Rage Against the Machine
Rage Against the Machine (remastered)
Label: Audio Fidelity (AFZ 244)
Format: Hybrid SACD/CD

music for non-audiophiles.” The normal LP or CD already conveys so much power that it’s no wonder that a planned remastering from Audio Fidelity would initially be viewed with skepticism. However, mastering engineers Steve Hoffman and Steven Marsh not only discovered more dynamics on the analog original master tapes but also significant details and finesse that simply got lost in the original brutal mix. The remaster now shows that music and aspiration also continue to convey a healthy hardness, while the sound is, in the best sense, more rounded and less agitated, no longer so glaringly over-seasoned but rather “naturally

sharp and spicy.” Thanks to limited compression, the disc actually now has more dynamics and headroom and is, as a result, “softer” when considered in direct comparison with the 1992 release. It can and should be correspondingly adjusted. Eschewing unnecessary edginess and using considerably better mastering equipment both increase the impression of “space” and create significantly more shape, which predominantly benefits the bass line. Zack de la Rocha’s voice still stands out as furious, but less “cheap,” and the better-balanced guitar flies into even higher realms... all of that comes across well on the remastered version from Audio Fidelity

(as SACD/CD hybrid through Sieveking Sound) per Red Book standard (audio CD); as expected, the SACD layer sounds even more like a studio master tape. In short, this hybrid disc, which is universally playable, is highly recommended for anyone who loves punchy and powerful hardness as well as audiophile monster sound. It adds a new “hardness benchmark” to my toolbox of musical poisons. To be honest, I could really care less how the remaster sounds on (inevitably expensive) vinyl. The 180-gram original-version issue no longer graces my turntable anyway since the remastered silver disc came out. ■



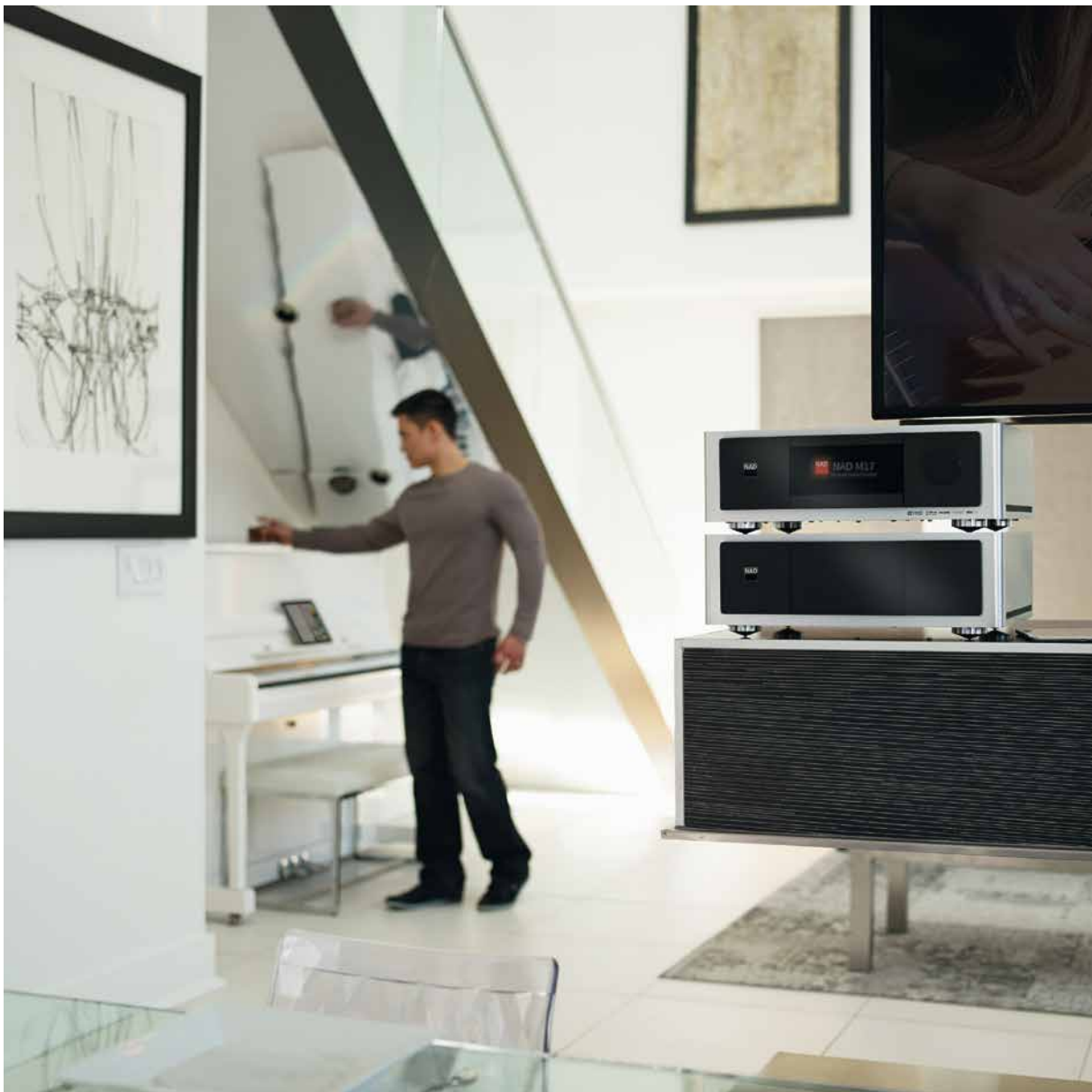
NAD / Bjorn “BEE” Erik Edvardsen

THE VIRTUE OF SIMPLICITY

By: Markus Bruhn. Photos: NAD, Ingo Schulz



AMPLIFIERS ARE GRADUALLY TURNING INTO MULTI-FUNCTIONAL COMPUTERS. THIS GOES AGAINST THE GRAIN FOR THE FOUNDERS OF NAD, A COMPANY WHOSE NO-FRILLS SYSTEMS NOW NUMBER AMONG THE BEST AMPLIFIERS IN THE WORLD.



WE WANTED TO GET BACK TO THE POINT.



During the 1960s, a change in musical style revolutionized the hi-fi world. The emergence of rock music triggered an explosion in

demand for high-quality audio equipment, and the leading hi-fi manufacturers discovered a new market. Up to then, high-class audio systems had been exclusively the domain of connoisseurs, and were often hand-built.

Within a few years, however, they had become a standard product for mainstream manufacturers. Although this sounds like the dream for audiophile music lovers, there was a negative side to it as well. The technology ▶

BJORN "BEE" ERIK EDVARDSEN

"ANYONE WHO IS NOT CRAZY ABOUT SOUND BY THE AGE OF 40 IS DOING SOMETHING WRONG."



contained within these high-end, mass-market products became far too complex, with a proliferation of functions and exorbitant prices. New Acoustic Dimension (NAD), founded in 1972 in London, decided it was time to buck this trend.

By founding their own company, Marty Borish, Bjorn Erik Edvardsen and their team were attempting to return to the basics. In the company's own words: "We wanted to get back to the point." They strove to return to music reproduction that

was genuine, free of sound coloration, and came without any unnecessary frills such as designer cabinets. From the very beginning, the team developed their amplifiers on the basis of truly audible musicality and not just abstract measurement ▶

THE EMERGENCE OF ROCK MUSIC TRIGGERED AN EXPLOSION IN DEMAND FOR HIGH-QUALITY AUDIO EQUIPMENT.



data. One example of this is the NAD 3020 integrated amplifier, one of the best-selling amplifiers in hi-fi history.

Launched in 1978, the NAD 3020 was the brainchild of Bjorn Erik Edvardsen (also known as “BEE”). His aim was to design a simple, affordable amplifier with an authentic sound. The

product cost 280 D-mark when it was first released onto the German market. With a plain cabinet and relatively low power output, the 3020 deliberately ignored features that were often mistakenly regarded as a sign of quality at the time (and sometimes still are today). The amplifier had other qualities, such as low distortion, outstanding sound

characteristics and sophisticated technologies. These are all aspects that continue to distinguish NAD components up to today.

Edvardsen opted for soft clipping, for example. This technology limits sound distortions at high volumes by gently lowering power peaks. ▶



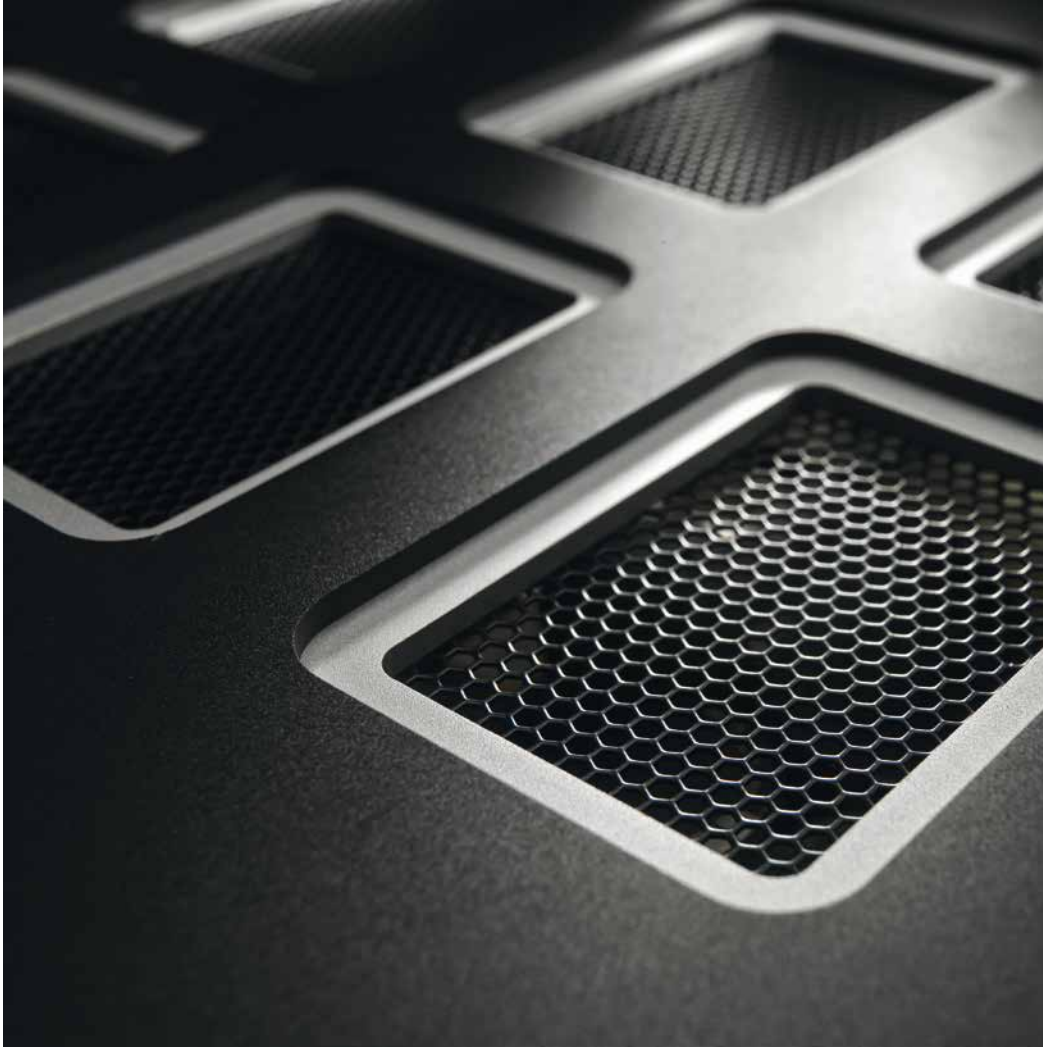
In this way, the amplifier protects the speakers from being over-driven, and so avoids any distortions or even damage. A further original feature of the NAD 3020 was PowerDrive technology, ensuring dynamic bass performance even at high volumes. An amplifier with PowerDrive detects strong bass

impulses and, if necessary, switches silently to a higher current in order to give the speakers the power they need.

Still being used by NAD, these technologies express the principles on which NAD's success has chiefly been built: outstanding performance,

excellent value for money, and simplicity in the product itself. Less is more for NAD. In building their amplifiers, NAD has always taken a "music first" approach, i.e. they focus on optimum sound reproduction. "Despite the unassuming design, NAD has been able to win over legions of fans—and ▶

"DESPITE THE UNASSUMING DESIGN, NAD HAS BEEN ABLE TO WIN OVER LEGIONS OF FANS; AND THIS IS SOLELY ON THE BASIS OF ITS LEGENDARY SOUND QUALITY."



this is solely on the basis of its legendary sound quality." NAD's principle of value for money leads on from this. The company avoids expensive materials and concentrates its development budget on components that are relevant to sound quality. Simplicity is a further

expression of this philosophy: NAD's components are characterized by plain design, ease-of-use and an almost puritanical approach to signal processing.

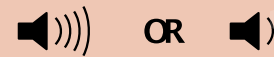
From its beginnings in a small London office, NAD has grown into

a brand with a global reputation. The company sells its products in over 65 countries. In Germany, it has a distribution partnership with Dynaudio. NAD was sold to the Canadian Lenbrook Group in 1999, and the company is now headquartered in Pickering, ▶

PERFORMANCE, VALUE AND SIMPLICITY.



Volume up or down?
A very quick interview
with Sven Pieper,
Product Manager NAD (at
Dynaudio international)
where we wanted him
to respond as fast as
possible.



Volume up or down? *Down.*
Analog or digital? *Digital.*
Tube or transistor? *Transistor.*
Vinyl or download? *Download.*
Cross-country run or gym?
Cross-country run.
Trends or tradition? *Tradition.*
Tea or coffee? *Coffee.*
Salad or steak? *Steak.*
Wine or beer? *Beer.*
Mountains or the sea? *The sea.*
Book or screen? *Book.*
Jazz club or opera house?
Jazz club.
Bach or Beatles? *Bach.*
Wagner or Wacken? *Wacken.*
Stand-by or plug out? *Plug out.*

Ontario. Products are manufactured at several locations, including sites in Asia.

For over 40 years now, NAD has been focusing strictly on what it regards as the “essentials.” The success of this philosophy proves that, like its founders Edvardsen and Boris, audio enthusiasts all over the world crave

an authentic musical experience. If Edvardsen has his way, the strong attachment many audiophiles have for NAD will also be passed on to coming generations: “Anyone who is not crazy about sound by the age of 40 is doing something wrong,” says Bjorn “BEE” Erik Edvardsen. ■

www.nad.de

This is a reprint from “WHO IS WHO IN HIGH FIDELITY”—Vol. 1, the compendium from FIDELITY VERLAG GMBH, to highlight the heavyweights as well as the little guys who still pack quite a punch, and to introduce you to the people behind, to bring some order to the ever-expanding high-end business. Ask for your copy.



...and now for something completely different...

IN-AKUSTIK REFERENZ NF-2404/ REFERENZ LS-2404 AIR

By Cai Brockmann. Photos: Ingo Schulz, in-akustik



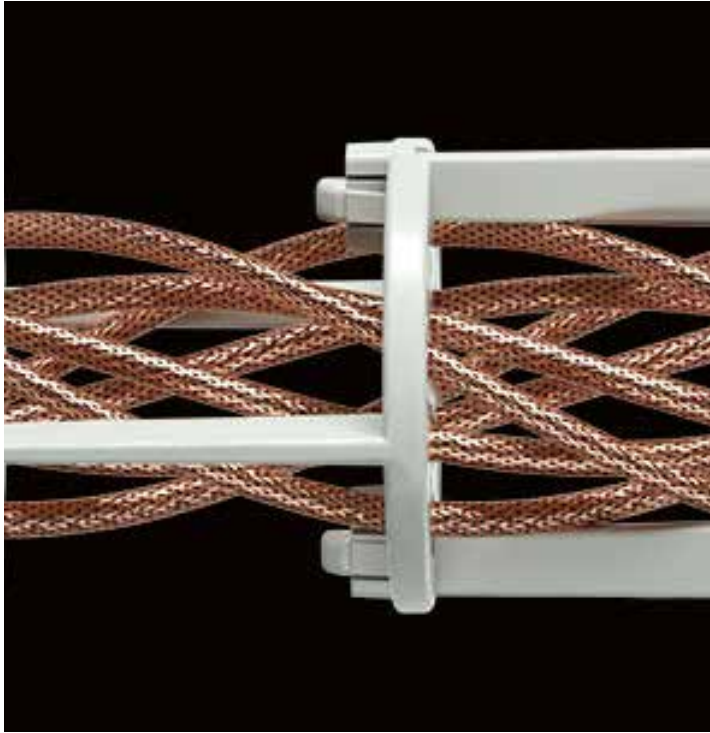
IN-AKUSTIK REFERENZ NF-2404/ REFERENZ LS-2404 AIR





_____Cables sometimes seem to have almost mystical properties. And the more expensive they are, the more magical the results—at least in the mind’s eye of those who have just paid out an enormous amount of money for an exclusive product. Once and for all, they’ll say, these accessories have finally given them the sound they’ve been longing to have for their particular configuration. Sometimes, you even get the impression that cables can handle audio repair work by “improving” the sound a system produces. That’s absolute nonsense of course.

Thanks to their many years’ experience in cable manufacturing—and presumably also due to their Swabian heritage—the experts at In-Akustik have always had a pleasantly level-headed attitude about such things. Their philosophy is clear, even at the very top of the high-end segment: “The best cable is not the one that gets the most out of a system, it’s the one that loses the least.” Every contact between components harbors the danger of loss or interference, which is also true in the cable itself. The engineers from the Black Forest counter this threat ▶

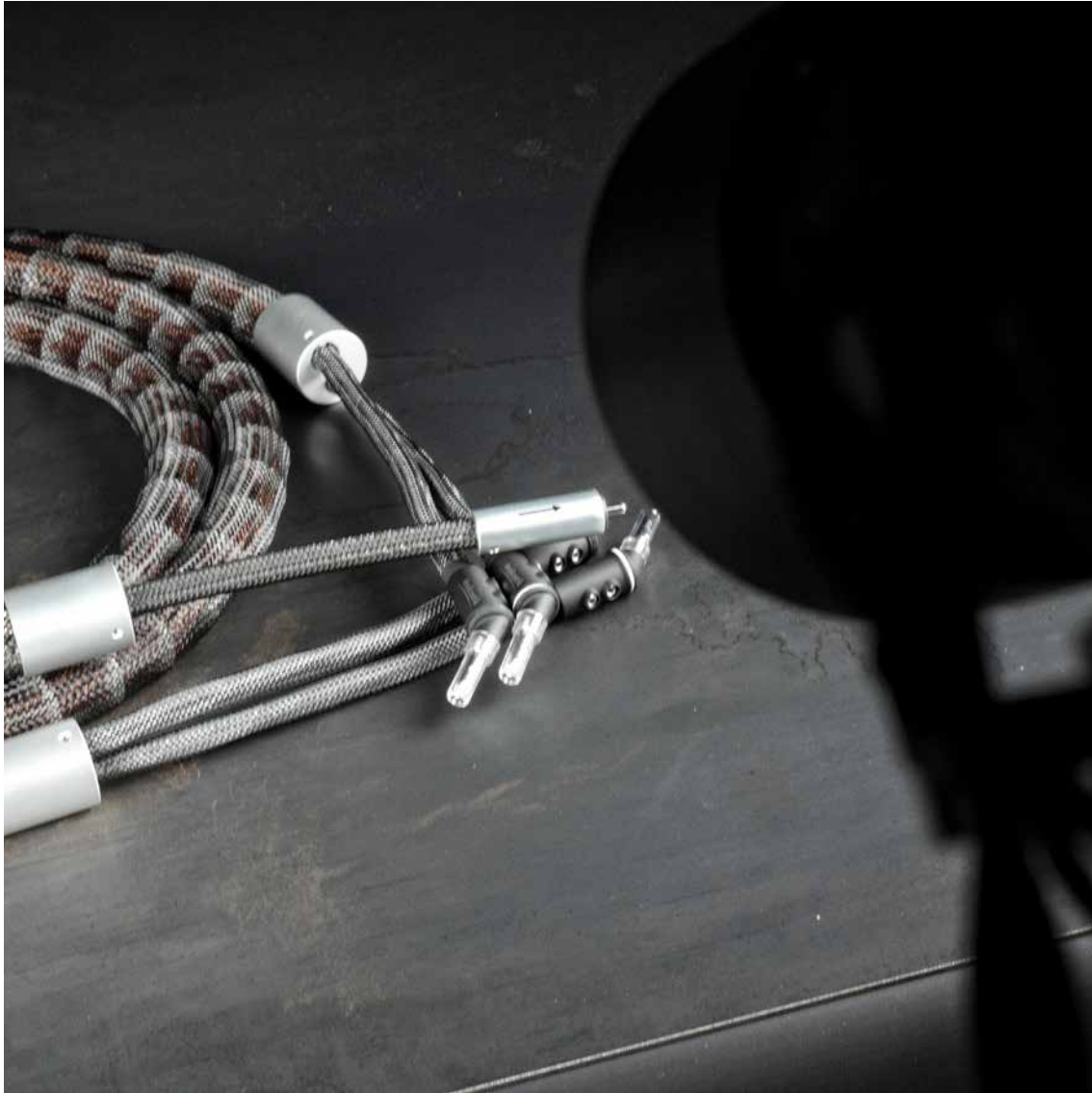


with excellent materials, a sophisticated design and meticulous workmanship. Head designer Holger Wachsmann puts it this way: “We rely on physics, not hocus-pocus.”

And quod erat demonstrandum is the guiding principle in this branch of science. In its recently extended top-of-the-range Referenz Selection series, In-Akustik has set new standards in mechanical engineering and braiding techniques. Because air remains the best insulator, the engineers have come up with a clever but amazingly simple construction made up of flexible supporting frame elements. In the interior of the impressive-looking cable, these supporting frames hold the two symmetrically arranged conductors in a helix shape with much surrounding air, keeping the shielding at an exact

distance. Hence the name “air helix design.” True to the In-Akustik philosophy, the supporting elements as well as the cable itself are manufactured in Germany. During assembly, the elements are clipped together by hand, equipped with the defined braided conductors, covered with a jacket, and fitted with the appropriate rhodium plated connectors. Because this intricate process is too complex for a machine, the air helix Referenz cables are assembled by specially trained staff at an In-Akustik facility near Freiburg.

The NF and the LS cables, both of which I had the pleasure of testing, are really light despite their impressive girth, and also extremely flexible in terms of their bending radius. This practicality in daily use is a pleasant change from a lot of other “super ▶



cables” that suffer from design-related stiffness and/or exert a massive drag due to their own weight. Both In-Akustik Referenz 2404 cables are a joy to use, and I had no problems connecting them up to high-end components. The cable ends are heavily tapered for production reasons, making it easier to access tighter sockets.

From a sound perspective, both Referenz products boast excellent transparency and texture. But anyone looking for that elusive special sound experience or even seeking to compensate for deficits in other equipment has definitely come to the wrong place. The cables give you what they receive at their own

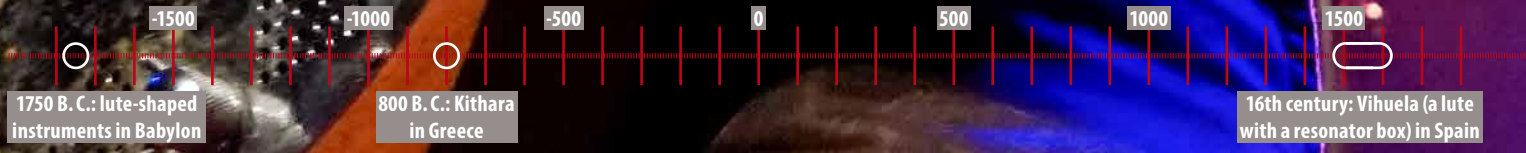
connection sockets, but in a crystal-clear, “airy” and breathtakingly open quality that’s hard to top. And in light of the sometimes astronomical price tags for other top-class cables, the Referenz Selection series from In-Akustik can even be regarded as easy on the pocket book. ■

In-Akustik Referenz Selection | 2404 Air cable series |
Sample prices: Referenz NF-2404 (one-meter set, cinch plugs) €1,200, LS cable Referenz LS-2404 Air (2 x 3 meters) from €2,730

In-Akustik | Untermatten 12—14 | 79282 Ballrechten-Dottingen | Germany | Phone +49 7634 561070 |
www.in-akustik.de



The resonator guitar was invented in the 1920s in order to match the volume of the stringed instrument to its fellow musicians, particularly the brass section. Before the guitar finally got electrified (and its sound amplified) it was imminent to become inaudible amongst the other instruments.... —>



photos: Hans von Dreiminski

—> ...Stephen V. Balkun of the Balkun Brothers is a certified luthier and plays his very own resonator guitar, the "Balkun-a-tor" on stage.



1927: mass production of the "National", the first resonator guitar by George Beauchamp and John Dopyera

1931: George Beauchamp and Adolph Rickenbacher (Rickenbacker) invented the electric guitar.

1985: Cover sleeve of "Brothers In Arms" by Dire Straits shows a National Resonator from 1937

1900

1950

2000

1929: The Brothers Dopyera founded Dobro

1936: mass production of the electric guitar starts with the Gibson ES-150

2016: Balkun Brothers at the B&W Rhythm'n'Blues Festival in Halle (Westphalia), Germany



PREVIEW

FIDELITY international No. 05

We hope you've enjoyed FIDELITY international and are now looking forward with much anticipation to the next issue of FIDELITY's cosmopolitan offspring of the German-language high-end magazine with style and class. Once again we have planned some simply superb stories for the fifth issue of FIDELITY international. ▶

Listening to high-end audio is fortunately pretty much a timeless pleasure, so we're excited to feature a few stories that didn't quite make it in time for this issue. These include articles on the weighty **Massimo** turntable from **Transrotor** as well as the **CanEVER ZeroUno plus**, a superb DAC from Italy that uses quality tube technology in its analog preamp, too. These devices are joined by further world-class speakers, like the new **Wilson Audio Yvette** and the **Avantgarde Uno XD**, which deliver a convincing performance in both the sound lab and the listening room. You can look forward to these and many more inspiring hi-fi stories in the next issue of FIDELITY international.





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Email: info@fidelity-magazine.com

www.fidelity-magazine.com
and www.fidelitymedia.de

Authors: Cai Brockmann, Markus Bruhn,
Winfried Dulisch, Hans von Draminski, Boris
Fust, Stefan Gawlick, Helmut Hack, Patrick
Pohlmann, Jochen Reinecke, Hans-Jürgen
Schaal, Ingo Schulz, Claus Volke, Harald Wittig
a. o.

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Advertising: If you are interested in advertising
please feel free to contact, give us a call
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info@fidelity-magazine.com

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THE END

Thanks for reading issue 04 of FIDELITY international. Issue 05 will be put online by May 2017 or when ready. Be prepared and subscribe to our newsletter to get the latest news at first.