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05

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02/2017 • May/June/July 2017

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This multilayer custom footer for high-end loudspeakers is called MPod. US specialist Magico now supplies the new M3 model of this precision component as standard... —>

ca. 2000 BC: first steel nails

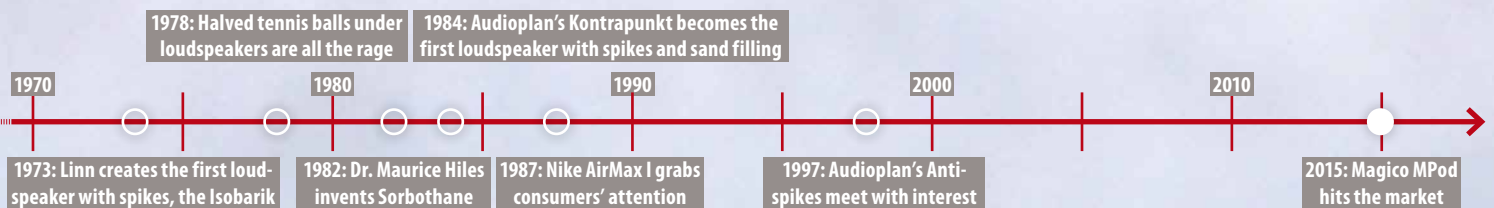
ca. 3500 BC: invention of the wheel

ca. 1650: The first pumps are invented

1844: Charles Goodyear patents the vulcanization of rubber



—>...With their sandwich form, MPods are designed to dissipate mechanical resonance without affecting sound quality.





Cai Brockmann (left)

picture: Ingo Schulz

DEAR READERS,

We are delighted to be bringing you the fifth edition of FIDELITY international. This young off-shoot of our print magazine is continuing to flourish thanks to your warm welcome. On behalf of the entire editorial team, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support. This edition starts off with an exciting nonsuspended turntable “Made in Germany.” Transrotor has already earned a global reputation for precision engineering, and the Massimo has certainly reconfirmed this beautifully. The DAC 8 DSD (digital-to-analog converter and preamp) may not trigger quite the same *gotta have it* response as the shiny vinyl bastion from Transrotor, but it’d be a mistake to underestimate it. Within the clean, straight lines of T+A’s compact box, we found a wealth of finely engineered components that all work toward one single goal: making digital signals sound as natural as possible. Although chock-full of sensational information, this edition does have two definite highlights, and they both hit it off with each other right from the very beginning. Wilson Audio’s Yvette and the Amplifon SET 140 tube amplifier are a dream duo that even managed to impress Peter McGrath (from Wilson Audio, see picture) when he paid us a visit to determine the perfect position for his company’s three-way loudspeaker. We spent a few mesmerizing hours together in

the listening room, and the time just flew by. Once again, we managed to discover a hidden gem buried in the more reasonably priced regions of the audio market. The sound produced by Sugden Audio’s IA-4 integrated amplifier will have the listener gazing in disbelief at the price tag. That just proves yet again that you can get true high-end audio for an affordable price and good looks to boot. For those of you who like to do their listening “on the go,” we can warmly recommend the T5p headphones with Tesla technology from Beyerdynamic. Simply slip them on and immerse yourself in music. Let’s stick with the subject of music for a moment—after all, it’s what our hobby is all about. This is reflected in our wide-ranging and knowledgeably written music section. Get a feel for the atmosphere in the recently opened Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg. Or enjoy the entertaining story of the Pye Beat Girls from the 1960s. With any luck, we’ve stirred your interest and delivered to you an exceptionally enjoyable read! FIDELITY international—the German Voice of Premium Audio.

Best regards,

Armonia

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außergewöhnlich gut verwöhnt
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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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02/2017
May/June/July

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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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Burmester

Phase 3 Loftstyle

PHASE 3 is an extension to the traditional Burmester product lines, joining ultimate demands on sound quality with musical culture and modern lifestyle in a perfect blend. The design-oriented concept incarnates both the timelessness of the Bauhaus style steel tube furniture and the industrial charm of modern lofts.

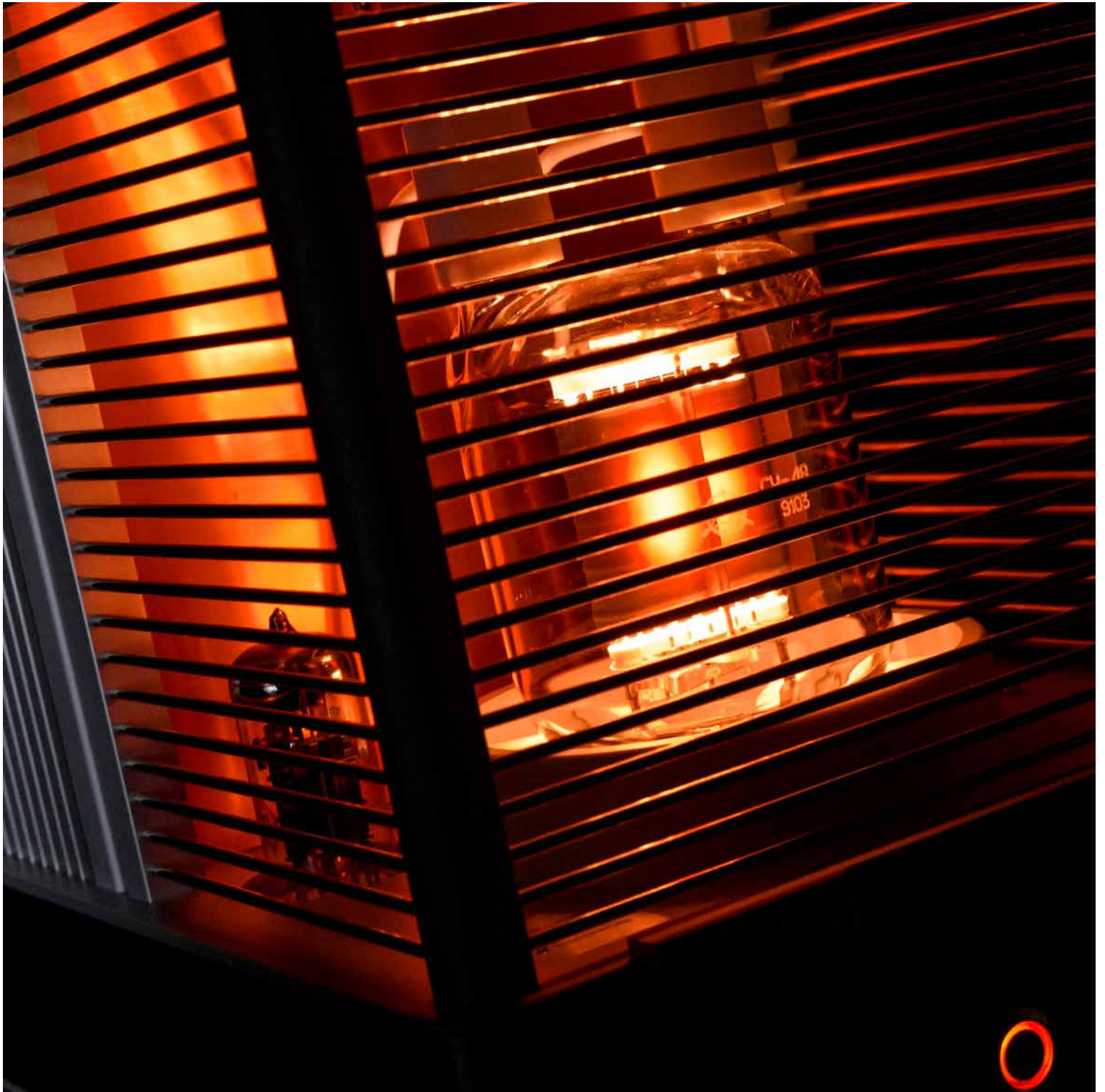
Amplifon SET 140

R.I.P. HIGH FIDELITY

By Helmut Hack. Photos: Ingo Schulz



AFTER A LONG, DIFFICULT ILLNESS
AND AN UNFULFILLED EXISTENCE, ▶





HIGH FIDELITY HAS PASSED AWAY
PEACEFULLY IN ITS SLEEP. ▶

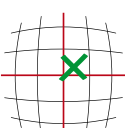


RATHER THAN INDULGE IN AN
OBITUARY, HERE ARE TWO SOLID
REASONS TO SAVE YOUR TEARS. ▶





Amplifon SET 140
Hi-fi: others should concern themselves with this.

EUPHONIC
SONOROUS
AGILE
ANALYTICAL



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



THE END OF HI-FI CANNOT BE EXPLAINED USING TECHNICAL TERMS. WITH COLORS PERHAPS. OR AT MOST WITH A POEM.

With a weight-to-power ratio of half a kilo per watt, the Amplifon SET 140 tube monos from Poland seem rather dated compared with modern Class D amplifiers, anyway at least on paper. They look like steam engines whose era came to an end when the Iron Curtain started to show its first signs of rusting. After a strenuous day of impressive energy savings at home, the Amplifon's two imposing type 833A cookie-jar triodes glow brightly like 60-watt bulbs and treat themselves to a rather generous 500-watt draw from the primary power supply. Neither the radiator starting to gurgle nor the gas boiler firing up can stop them now. Running the two SET 140s even during the frostiest nights in Poland could save you 100% of your heating costs and leave any teeth-chattering to poor Mr. Frost locked out in the cold.

Perfect for killing time during that quiet period as each year unfolds into the next, I thought to myself, and all without considering the consequences. You see, two cases each weighing in at 70 kilos, the lion's share of which is rather unhelpfully

concentrated on the rear side, requires special shipping logistics; or, to put it more clearly, needs at least three rather beefy men. The two pint-sized delivery guys learned that all too well after they struggled, drenched in sweat and cursing like mad (and taking a breather in the elevator), to get the two iron blocks up to the fourth floor and onto a flat area in front of the equipment in the listening room. For a 20-square-meter room purposely filled with clutter to achieve optimum damping, this means in the middle of the room. The editorial team hadn't quite realized just how gigantic these heavyweight amplifiers really were.

The SET 140s are made from 8-millimeter thick CNC-milled aluminum sheets, meaning they are as sturdy as a lion's cage; Molded sectional pieces strengthen the corners and edges. For the skilled mechanical engineer Andrzej Piwowarczyk, who has been at the helm of his company Amplifon since 1997, the poised, steadfast positioning of the tubes is absolutely crucial to keep microphonics at bay from them. Despite the enormous 140 watts of power, the large 833 transmitting triode only releases 40% of its maximum. For that reason, it's inserted ▶



in a rigid Teflon base the size of a horseshoe. The fact that the ventilation grilles and the tube cage create a wonderful harp-like tone when you run your finger across them isn't relevant to the sound, Piwowarczyk holds. On the rear, the monos are solid but nothing special to look at. They include a pair of gold-plated copper screw terminals that accommodate any type of LS cable in the top third and an equally high-quality RCA jack to the side at the bottom; both are from WBT. The front simply features a stainless-steel push button with a modern LED ring. Although this power button is one of the best on the market, a thick toggle switch or rotary switch might have gone better with the nostalgic glowing tubes.

However, it's best to be wary of succumbing to cherished clichés. Piwowarczyk is definitely not nostalgic, even if his SET-140 power amplifiers can be objectively seen as old hat, even before the digital revolution. Everything implied with the power switch and the uncomplicated, no-frills design is only further confirmed when you take a look at the inner workings. Teflon-copper capacitors from Duelund and VCap are not usually had for special-offer prices, and many consider them unrivaled

in terms of sound. Even the tantalum resistors are from the Japanese specialist Shinkoh or Audio Note. Any no-name components were also not the result of any cost-cutting measures. The respectable power transformers have been purchased from the Polish manufacturer Trafber, and the output transformers must be wound in-house. Their quality level is primarily responsible for the resulting sound, says Piwowarczyk. A broadband output transformer for a 50-watt SE amplifier constitutes a complex challenge for any developer; designing and manufacturing a transformer for the triple capacity apparently required a very long development period. It weighs 19 kilos, which accounts for the physical imbalance mentioned above, and has its -3 decibel point only at 23 and/or 37,000 hertz. "Speaker impedance" is a foreign word with no meaning for this repeatedly interconnected, elaborately wound lump of iron. Piwowarczyk points out his objective was to combine the dynamics and stability of the best transistor amplifiers with the charm and melodiousness of a Class A single-ended tube. The SET 140s has come close to this ideal, asserts the modest Polish developer, who is clearly proud of what he has achieved. ▶



The binding posts are from WBT.

Comparable power amplifiers are also few and far between on the international market. The most legendary examples with 833 triodes are the HE-833 monos from Wavac, which are comparable, for all intents and purposes, with the SET 140s in terms of the specifications sheet. Unfortunately, I have never had the opportunity to hear them. I did, however recently borrowed some Silvercore mono power amplifiers, equipment whose absence I still mourn to this day and that were even more reasonably priced than the Amplifon monos. However, they are, except for their identical power tubes, significantly different from the Polish heavyweights. Silvercore's models use a cool, light power supply and operate with considerably less power. Nevertheless, the tremendously colorful German-made monos will sometimes need to serve as a point of reference as we move forward here. When the SET 140s were delivered in person to the editorial office by Sales Manager Christoph Kaintoch, who has a close personal relationship with Piwowarczyk and was a fan before he entered the profession, the team had been waiting for an LAS 408 with triple low-frequency-supported coaxial chassis to arrive from Live Act Audio. We quickly connected

a small Lindemann musicbook 15 DSD behind the T+A MP 3000 HV as the source and gave the tubes a short bit of time to warm up while we got acquainted with the best cables that AudioQuest has to offer. After that, we listened to some Ray Charles and were very pleased. The impedance-critical LAS 408s followed the SET 140s' every word as the voices of Gladys Knight and Ray Charles from "Heaven Help Us All" floated freely in the room while the piano belted out a fierce baseline. Essentially, the official test was over at this point. All that's left to say in conclusion is that the Amplifon SET 140s assert themselves with ease as part of a randomly cobbled-together chain and follow established hi-fi criteria in showcasing their outstanding quality in a favorable orange light. But for me, there was still something missing that's hard to put into words. In the end, the monos ended up with my Steinmusic loudspeakers, a wide-band full-range driver design. And like a missing link they blended into the mix like an invention that called into question everything that had gone before and revealed completely new features. Compared with the SET 140s, everything I had been playing so far was just hi-fi, a ►

ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

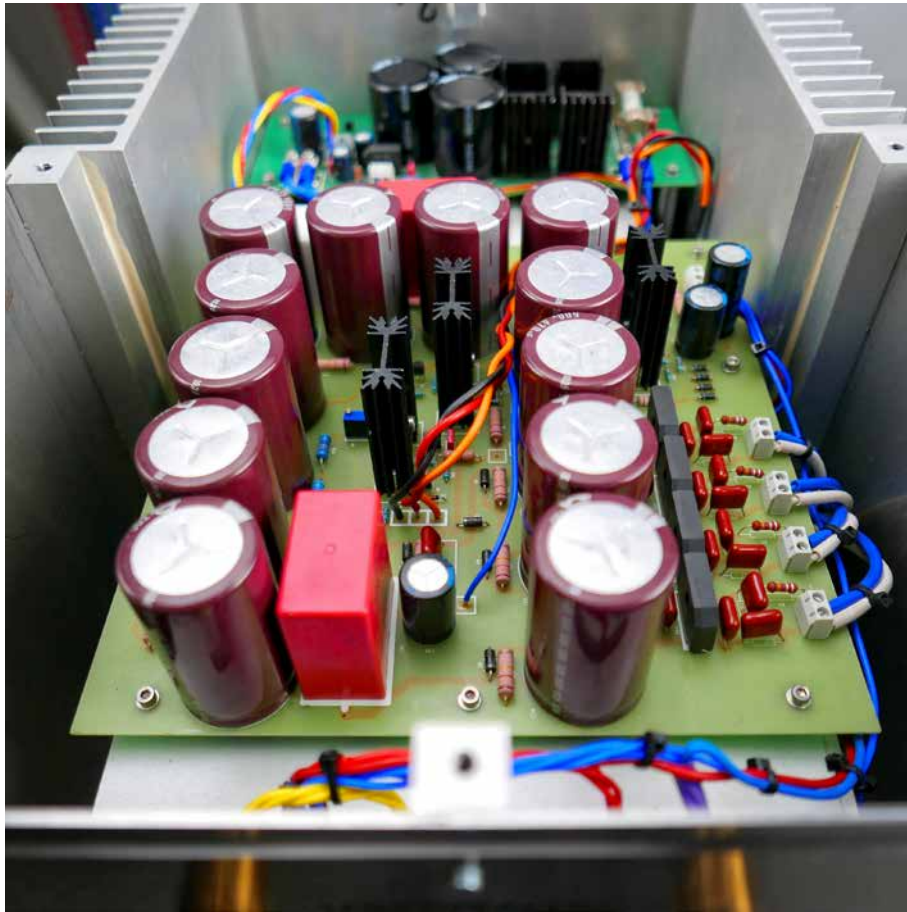
Turntable: Feickert Analogue Firebird | **Tonearms:** Genuin Audio Point, Brinkmann 12.1 | **Pickups:** Ortofon Quintet Bronze and 2M Black, Audio-Technica 50ANV and 33PTG I, Clearaudio DaVinci, Lyra Kleos SL | **CD player:** Revox C 221 | **Digital-to-analog converter:** PS Audio Digital Link III | **Preamp:** MFE Tube One SE (including phono) | **Power amp:** DNM PA3S | **Integrated amp:** Genuin Straight | **Speakers:** Steinmusic Masterclass SP 1.1 | **Cables:** Analysis Plus, Musical Wire, Audiophil | **Accessories:** Feickert-Analogue, Subbase Audio, Steinmusic, Audiophil





desperate, eternally unfulfilled hobby. They changed everything and nothing at the same time. Nothing, because they didn't try to impertinently steal the limelight and didn't come across as vain; rather, they simply wanted to make music—and everything, because this music had never sounded so natural before. In writing this article, it was still easy to pass judgments and say things like “uncompromising in the low bass” or “transparent midrange” and similar drivel. It wasn't all wrong per se, but to me now it seems strangely irrelevant, and it sounds like the kind of thing you would hear at a hi-fi trade fair or during a comparison test. And that is, during Leonard Cohen's “You Want It Darker”, embedded in the room like a memorial stone dedicated to the end of the world, infinitely far away. I'm not thinking about technology but rather whether it was impious to give the old, dying poet such a brutal sound design with profound, abyss-like basses. But I don't reach a conclusion because the master's baritone massages my abdominal wall until the soup in my brain overflows and forms little colorful lakes before my eyes. It's a moment when boundaries dissolve, both in terms of my own self and the whole hi-fi clutter: My pitiful eight-inch

full-range drivers cannot, by physical definition, come close to reproducing such awesome orgies of low bass, my outdated DAC converter is in no shape to sound so transparent, so spacious, and so not artificial. And yet it happens: As I close my eyes, all the technology disappears, and it's just Leonard Cohen and me and an earthquake simulator in the room. Still digital in CD quality, “Take This Hammer”, a very audiophile live recording of Harry Manx, the Canadian Bollywood Bluesman, is next up. His interpretation of the American workers' song creeps up on you with soft slide guitar that increasingly brings the instrument's body into play as a percussion instrument. A harmonica slides into the frame from the left, at first inconspicuously and ostensibly innocently. But that's where the problems begin: On devices that are too well-behaved, the entire track becomes pretentious and trivial: The chain is too sharp, too harassing; the harmonica is annoying, then, so too, is the hoarse croaking of the singing; until at the end the buzzing of the slide guitar finally concludes the entire song. The air around the steel strings has to bear the gashes inflicted during the duel, the blows to the body must resonate like rolls of thunder, the ▶



Very neat circuit board layout with high-quality components

harmonica must be placed exactly somewhere between bored and overexcited so its melody can develop, and Henry Manx must sing deeply, fully, and dryly, not thinly or aggressively. Just like the Amplifon power amplifiers tackle the challenge. No over-the-top gestures and no gun salutes. The music is simply there. End of discussion.

In direct comparison with the Silvercore power amplifiers, which produce a sound I can still recall in my ears (and will actually never be able to forget), the Amplifons come across as considerably more neutral and less extravagant when dealing with the sweet charm of tube technology. Yet the SET 140s have no ambition to knock analytical semiconductor amplifiers off their perch. Amplifon always has the home-field advantage no matter what system is being used. Where Amplifon rules the roost, other so-called hi-fi amplifiers keep their distance; that is, unless they're after a bloody nose. In the lower range, only Series 5 monos from Soullution spring to mind as an amplifier that could possibly compare with the SET 140s if suitable speakers were used. The sensual whip-cracking Swiss high-end amplifiers once really impressed me with their wise-like control, but they

also at least robbed my speakers of their dignity. In contrast, the Polish firecrackers rely on power instead of torque, and Soullution's five-digit damping factor speaks volumes compared with the sweet 12 of the SET 140s. Surely there are speakers out there that need this constant disciplining; but in my chain, Amplifon's confident, energetic hands-off approach is more convincing than the pedantic stop-and-go approach of the dominant Swiss models. The fluid nature of the buildup and tapering off of the 833 monos' sound comes across as integral and not fragmented. After only a very short period of dutiful evaluation, I constantly sink wholeheartedly into the music; not just with vinyl hit recordings, but, as already indicated with digital tracks, with very normal recordings as well, even historical recordings that are anything but perfect but all the more treasured by me. Despite all the SET 140s' neutrality, they never come across as apathetic or lifeless. They also seem to find pleasure in the grating sounds of Robert Johnson—this brings us closer together. Their excellent, skillful balance reduces sharpness in the treble range to such an extent that it no longer hurts, underpinning the thin, tinny recording with a warm fundamental tone that ►



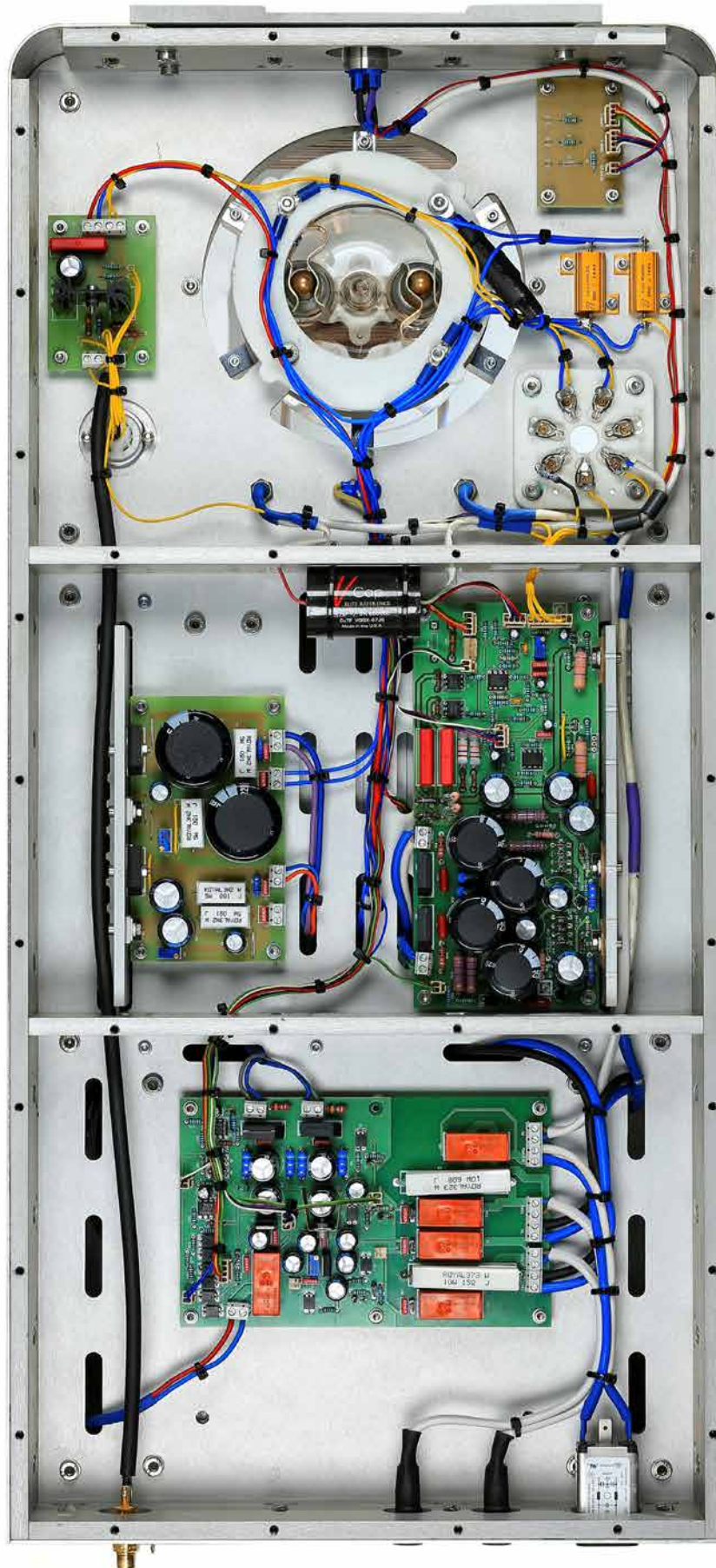
I haven't heard before. Never have I found myself in such an intimate setting standing face to face with the godfather of blues who once sold his soul to the devil. For the first time ever, my ears tell me he did the right thing. I decide to trudge through the *Concierto de Aranjuez* in the form of a 1976 recording with Ernesto Bitetti on the guitar. A borderline kitsch piece of classical music, if you ask me. I automatically imagine an animated Disney film in which a barefooted rotund-looking guitar is skipping gleefully through a green meadow while the string section tussles in the background with woodwinds. Nevertheless, the concert does gain enormous, dynamic tension and excitement from the interplay between intense full orchestral tutti passages and sections where the flamenco guitar only has mild accompaniment. In the second movement, When the room expands toward the back and the broadly staggered instruments fluidly interlink, the Amplifon monos almost make me forget the artistic irrelevance of the performance. Captivated, I instead follow the rich and spirited melodic twists and turns and marvel at violins that (supposedly) grow out of an oboe like a bouquet of lilies.

In all seriousness, I would advocate replacing ABSOLUTE FIDELITY with the heading “No Words” for components that cannot be covered using the jargon we are accustomed to using to talk about all things hi-fi because a squirt gun is not a captive bolt pistol and a swing carousel is not a high-wire zip line. A “test” is not an adequate way of getting better acquainted with music devices like the SET 140s. Just as there won't be any earthly reporters around to recount the Apocalypse, the end of hi-fi cannot be explained using technical terms. With colors perhaps. Or at most with a poem. ▀

Amplifon SET 140 tube mono power amplifier | Functional principle: Class A single-ended tube power amplifier | **Output power:** 140 W (4/8 ohms) | **Tubes:** EC86 (input), 6C41C (driver), 833 (power) | **Frequency range:** 23–37,000 Hz (–3 dB/130 W) | **Distortion factor:** < 0.2% (10 W/1 kHz) | **Input impedance:** 120 kilo ohms | **Output impedance:** 4 and 8 ohms | **Power consumption:** about 500 W | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 31/41/69 cm | **Weight:** 70 kg | **Warranty period:** 2 years | **Price for a pair:** €50,000

Analog Natural Sound | Cranachweg 2 | 55127 Mainz | Germany | Telephone: +49 6131 3330249 | www.annasound.de





Triple chamber setup: Top resp. front the large 833 triode with drivers; in the middle the power supply; and at the bottom the short audio circuit under one huge 19-kilo output transformer.



HOW AN 833 TRANSMITTING TRIODE WORKS IN AN AUDIO AMPLIFIER

Anyone concerned with the operation of a transmitter tube in a hi-fi power amplifier needs to consider different points than those that concern “normal” tubes.

Gradual heating

It all begins with the heating-up phase. The heating can only be switched on without taking any special measures if the technical specifications do not call for a limit on the starting surge current. If, however, a maximum starting surge current is specified, you need to make sure you switch on the heater

voltage gradually. It’s important to always bear in mind that the cold resistance of the heater filament totals only 10% of the heat resistance and the time constant of the heating lies in the region of a few seconds. For the 833, which has heat values of 10 volts and 10 amperes in operation, this means some 100 amperes flow briefly during heating. The advantage of 833 operation compared with that of comparable transmitter tubes is that all voltages (heating, anode, and grid) can be generated at the same time as this tube has a thoriated tungsten cathode. With tubes

that have oxide-coated cathodes, the anode and screen-grid voltages should not be generated until after a specified heat-up period, otherwise there’s a danger the cathode layer could dissipate.

Extremely sensitive: the 833’s cathode

However, there are still important points to note with the 833’s cathode: The specified nominal value of the heater voltage needs to be kept constant at $\pm 5\%$. In the process, you need to ensure, in particular, that the heater connections are kept absolutely clean. ▶



It's a good idea to monitor the connections after a certain length of time in operation to ensure the contact surfaces are not oxidized. An oxide layer means greater contact resistance and therefore insufficient heating of the tube. That usually becomes noticeable when the tube is distinctly "darker."

Insufficient heating reduces the cathode's emission. When fully utilizing the emission, insufficient heating of 5% can lead to a loss in amplifier power of up to 15%. If, however, the cathode is only poorly utilized (limited anode current resulting in less delivered power), then insufficient heating is not critical. In the case of prolonged insufficient heating of more than 5%, the 833's service life will be cut approximately in half. Setting the heating as accurately as possible at operating

temperature therefore ensures a long service life and good data for the power amplifier.

In practice, unavoidable variations in the supply voltage and the switching elements in the device must of course be taken into consideration.

Glowing red: the graphite anode

The tube's anode is made of graphite since it has been designed to withstand very tough operation as a transmitter tube under conditions just below the maximum ratings. The advantage compared with a normal anode plate is thermal stability. An anode plate heated up to glowing red would warp and the tube's technical data (here the transconductance and therefore the amplification) would change. Another advantage this

material offers is that it helps maintain the vacuum in the tube: The graphite is coated with zirconium and, when glowing, binds residual air molecules.

The grid

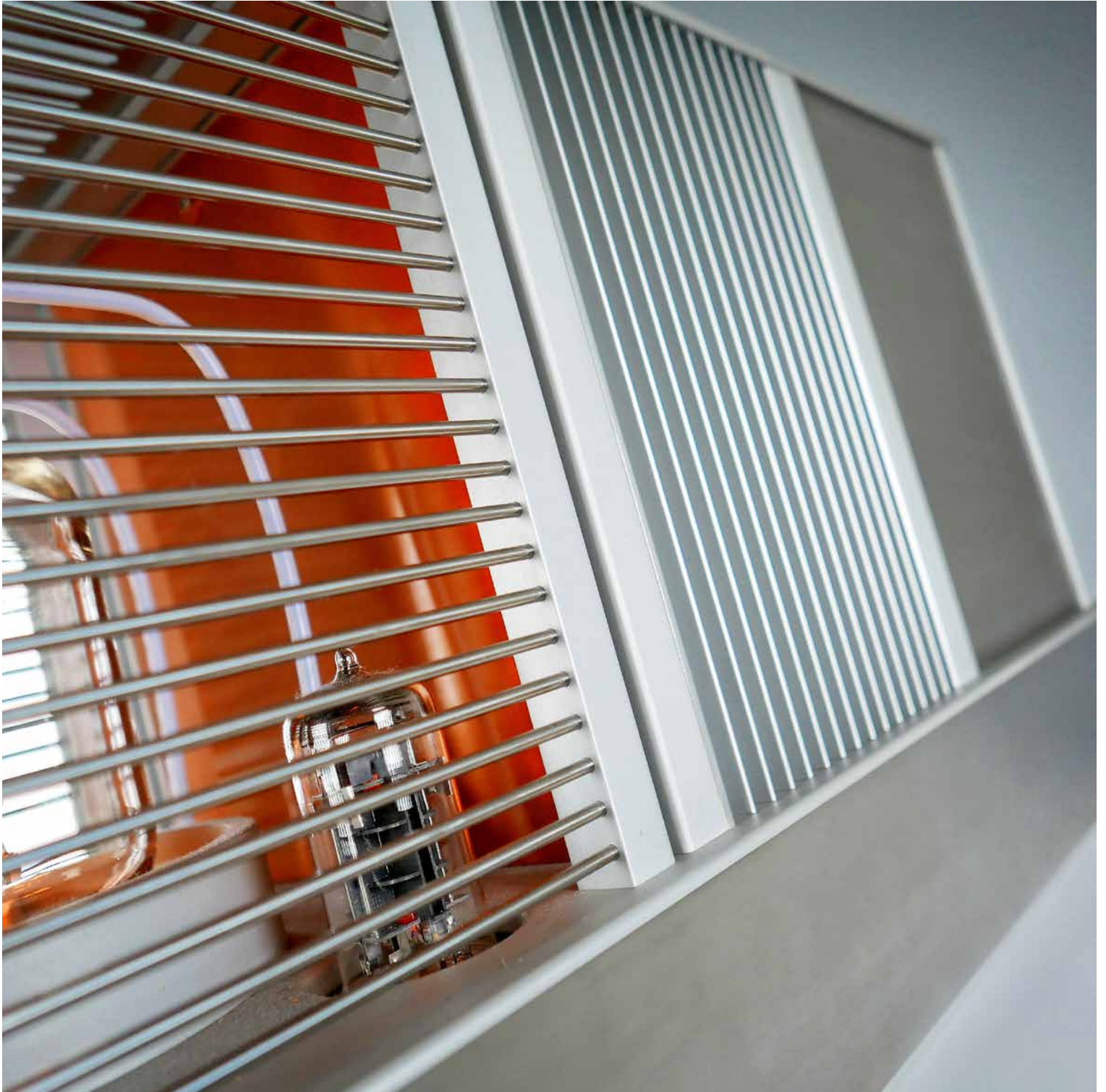
The control grid is also particularly stable mechanically as a nonnegligible grid current flows here during transmission operations. However, in a hi-fi amplifier, this is not important.

In conclusion:

The 833 is a very high-performance tube that is highly suitable for use as an audio tube. As long as you pay a lot of attention to the heating, you can have fun with it for a long time. ■

Erich Engel

NO OVER-THE-TOP GESTURES AND
NO GUN SALUTES. THE MUSIC IS
SIMPLY THERE. END OF DISCUSSION.



The Foundation Comes First



Advancing the Science and Efficacy of Power Conditioning

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.

Niagara Low-Z Power Noise-Dissipation Systems address the many variables and forms of interference that compromise **the very foundation upon which an entire audio/video system is built**. When power is optimized, when a system's foundation is a Rock of Gibraltar, the system is able to deliver maximum articulation and emotional stimulation.

Niagara designer Garth Powell has devoted 20 years of intense research to furthering the science of AC power. His exceptional ability to apply an insatiable thirst for knowledge, a musician's deeply personal passion for music, obvious brilliance, and many hard-won insights is clearly evident in the products he creates.

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



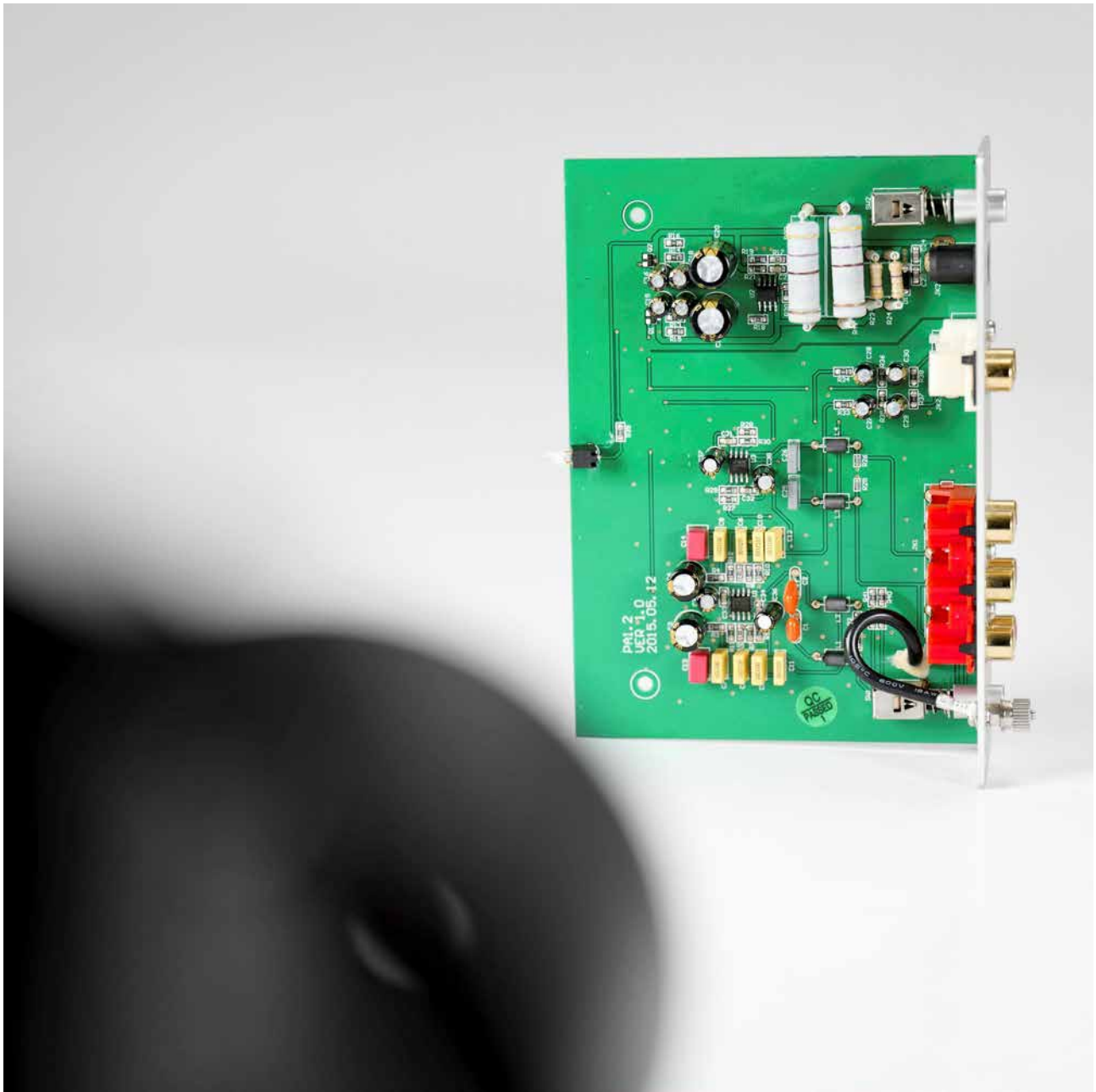
audioquest®

AVM INSPIRATION P1.2

By Georg-Cölestin Jatta. Photos: Ingo Schulz



AVM INSPIRATION P1.2

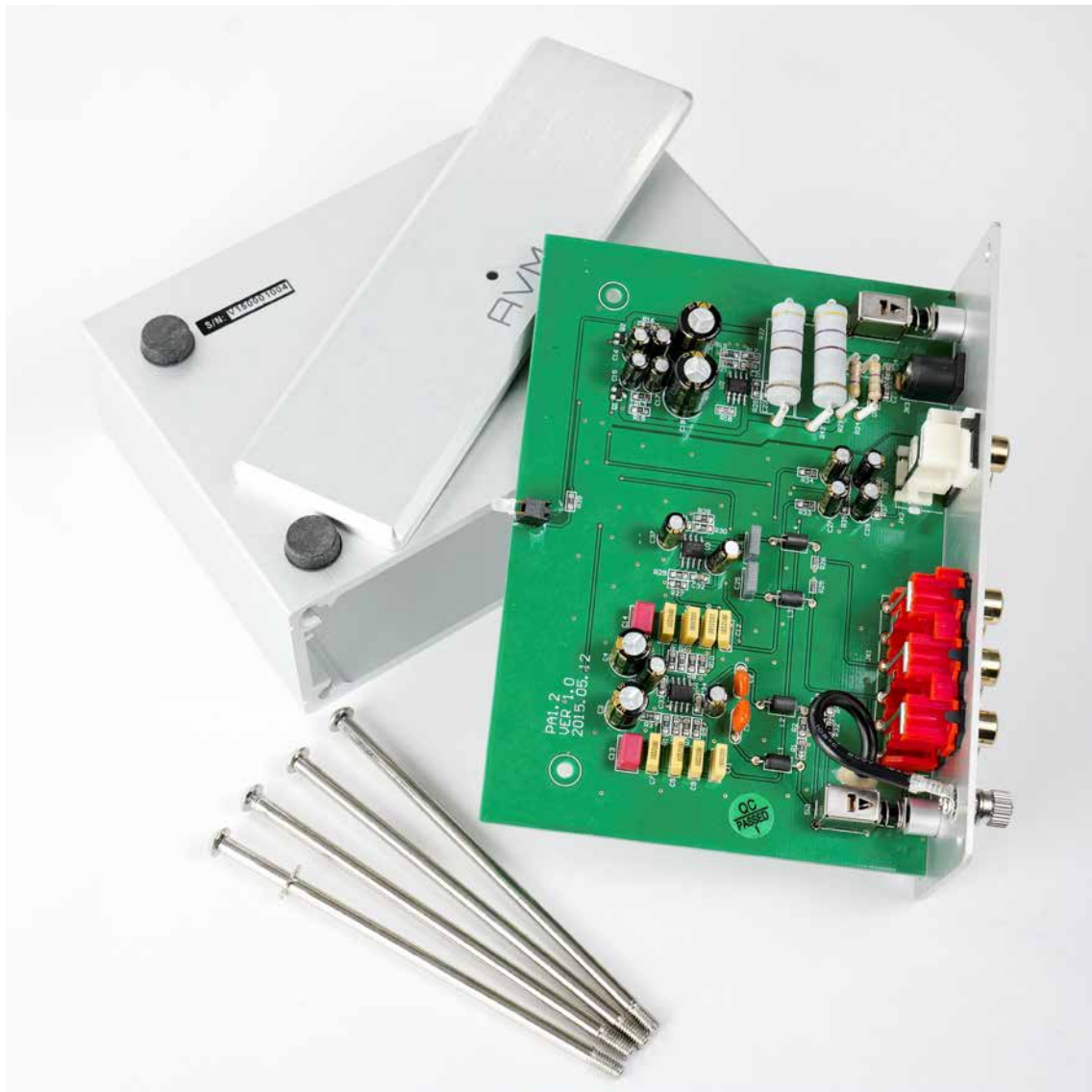


Like ice in the sunshine



— Anyone toying with the idea of getting a phono pre-amplifier for anything up to €1,000 faces a selection about as massive and diverse as the pasta section of an Italian supermarket. It's a medley of almost identical circuit boards where by and large the only real difference among them is the styling of the packaging— that is, the housing. But AVM wouldn't be AVM if the Inspiration P1.2, which has been on the market for just under a year, didn't know just how to clearly set itself apart from all that same old, same old shipped out of the Far East. Even visually, the Malsch-based manufacturer's smallest product is instantly recognizable as an AVM design. As with the more "adult"

members of the product family, a solid aluminum extruded profile is used to create interference-resistant housing for the sensitive inner workings. No visible screws detract from the swish finish of the front, and only a vibrant blue LED lets you know whether the Inspiration is awake or asleep. All the necessary operational controls can be found on the back: the operating mode button and three pairs of RCA connectors for MM and MC systems. Hang on just a sec. That makes six connectors, doesn't it? Yes, exactly six. In theory, four would suffice. The other two are the most practical solution I've ever come across in terms of adaptability and terminal resistance on a small ▶



phono box. No plastic jumpers and no fiddling with a magnifying glass and DIP switch. Günter Mania, the mastermind behind AVM, has employed the ingenious solution, which is also popular among many DIYers, of implementing the terminal resistance as RCA plugs. There's no faster or easier way of adapting a system. The 100-, 200- and 1,000-ohm adapters included as standard should be sufficient for most systems. Anyone who needs different values can just reach for the soldering iron and do it themselves. The 1,000-ohm variation is the perfect match for my Benz ACE, and the little Inspiration is feisty and dynamically enthralling in the way it plays directly from the box. And it comes across as so pert

and firm that it reminds me of Kate Moss' behind in the 1990s.

My ears had to readjust a little in terms of the playback of the presence range. In direct comparison with the Dynavector (FIDELITY No. 28), the AVM emphasizes the midfrequency range somewhat more powerfully, but in the process doesn't manage to achieve the same swinging, dry punch as the device from New Zealand. If, however, you give the Inspiration P1.2 enough time to settle in without unplugging it, you'll witness its gradual transformation from a little ice princess into a seasoned opera diva with every hour that passes. Despite microscopically precise attention to detail in terms of ▶



the orchestra and the spatial precision of the choir, Soprano Maria Callas' performance is given exactly the right amount of tenderness and sensuality that makes me cherish this record. The P1.2's personality also works extremely well with recordings of small jazz combos. The tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves adopts the lead role, for example, in *Gettin' Together* exhibiting rough and occasionally husky panache without the focus being deflected away from the peppiness and energetic gusto of the overall arrangement.

The little AVM delivers a formidable performance. As it happens, you can find many phono pre-amplifiers out there that sound really good and are

affordable to boot; but I can think of only a handful that can boast similarly perfect workmanship, wonderfully straightforward handling, and flawless sound for the price of the AVM. Or, to put it a different way: Even though the Inspiration P1.2 is the smallest and cheapest product in the range, it still exhibits all the hallmarks of Günter Mania and Udo Besser's philosophy. It truly is an AVM. Hat's off, gentlemen! •

AVM Inspiration P1.2 phono pre-amplifier | Warranty period: two years | Price: €700

AVM, Daimlerstr. 8 | 76316 Malsch | Germany | Telephone: +49 7246 4284 | www.avm-audio.com

BROWSER

Nº 01



The Original Is Back

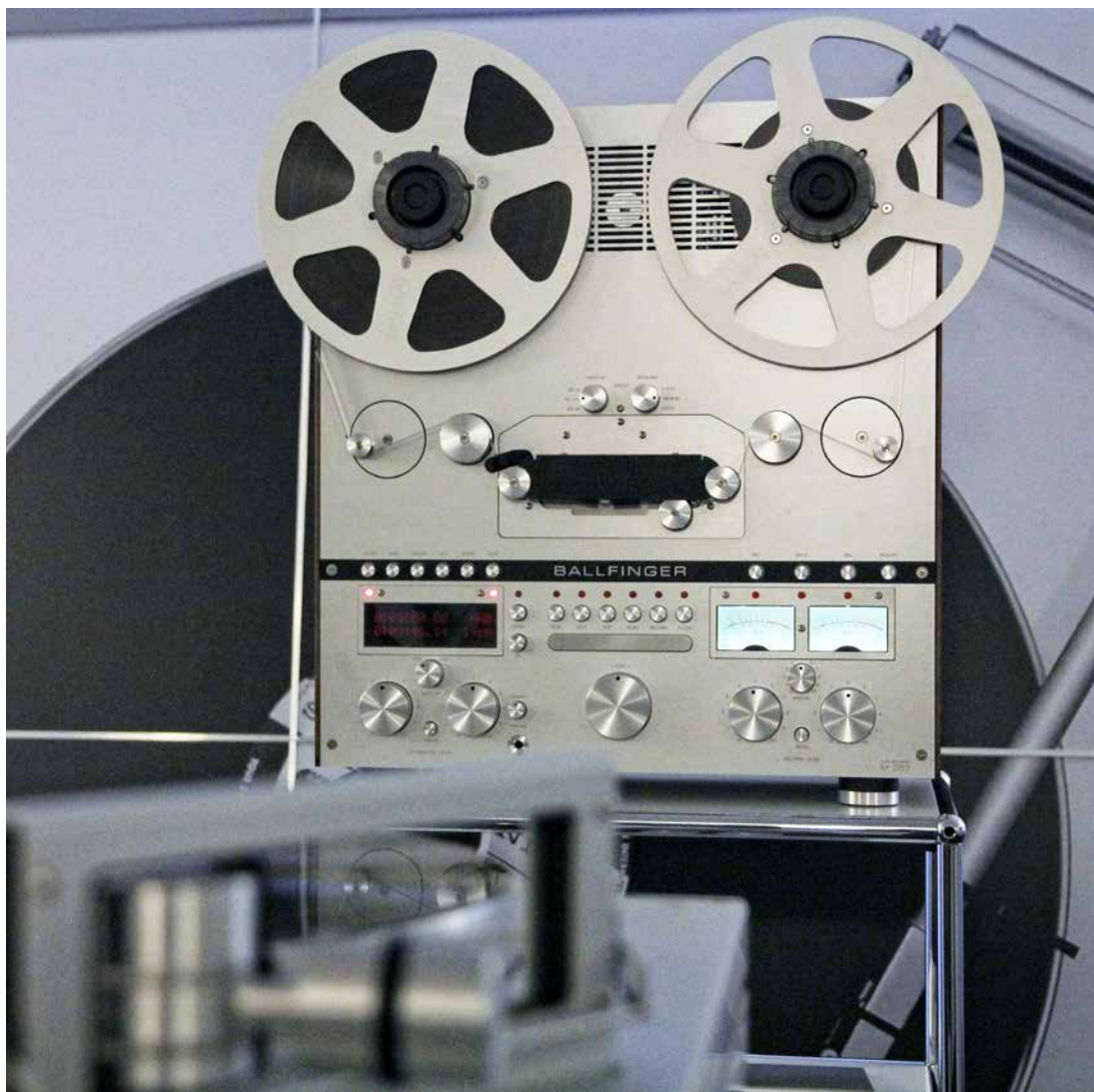
Technics has followed up last year's SL-1200G reference model by now releasing two slightly slimmed-down direct-drive turntables. As their names suggest, the new SL-1200GR and SL-1210GR (black finish available only in Europe) are direct descendants of the legendary reference class of DJ turntables. Available now for €1,500.

www.technics.com

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BROWSER

Nº 01



Analog Aesthetics

Düsseldorf-based Ballfinger has created not only a super slick turntable (PS2) that comes equipped with an active radial tangential tonearm, but also an equally attractive reel-to-reel tape deck. Owner Roland Schneider also continues to produce mechanical wristwatches. We'll definitely be keeping our eye on the Ball(finger)!

www.ballfinger.de

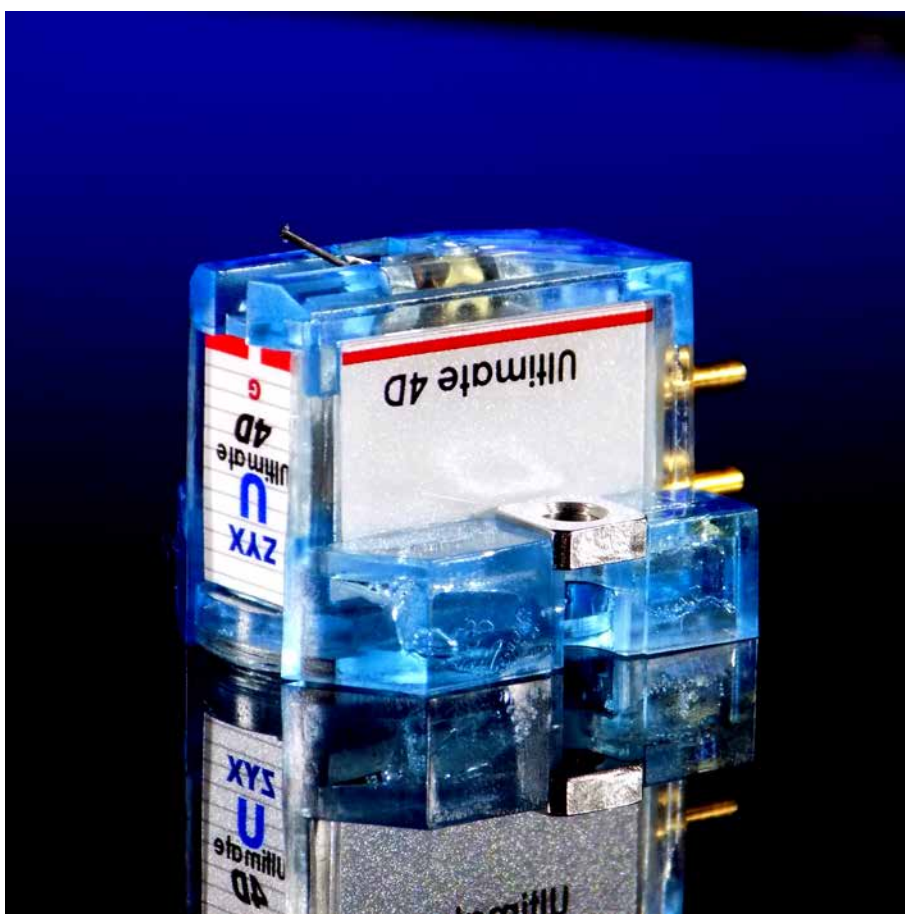
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Carbon Cantilever

Hisayoshi Nakatsuka, the ZYX developer, loves to create an element of surprise. He's now designed a cantilever out of carbon composite material, a lighter, more rigid option than the typical choice, boron. This new material provided the impetus for creating an entirely new product line, which includes the further-refined generator. The initial step into the new Ultimate series begins with the Ultimate 100 H that goes for €1,800.

www.zyx-audio.com

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BROWSER N° 01

BROWSER N° 01



Hi-Fi Earplugs

Many music fans use earplugs at concerts to protect their hearing. However, conventional earplugs unevenly muffle the music and in the process impair your enjoyment of the performance. That's now a thing of the past with the high-fidelity earplugs from Vibes. They reduce volume by 15 decibels over the entire frequency band but otherwise don't affect the integrity of the music. What's more, a proportion of the purchase price is donated to the Hear the World Foundation.

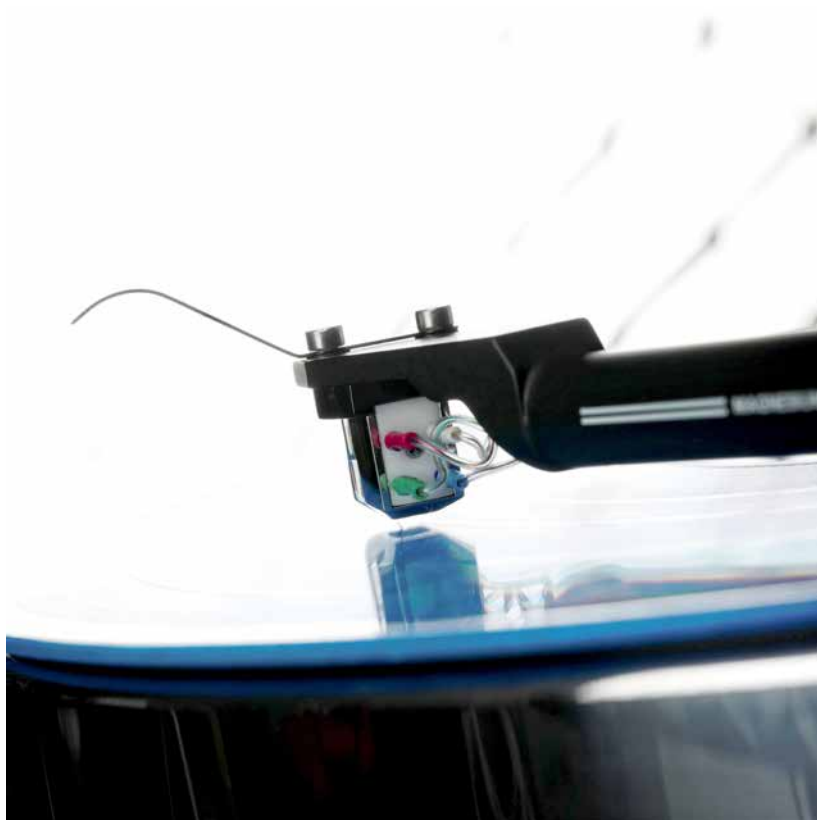
www.discovervibes.com

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Transrotor Massimo

DISAP- PEAR- ING ACT

By Stefan Gawlick. Photos: Ingo Schulz





THE NEW TRANSROTOR
MASSIMO IS SURE TO CATCH
YOUR EYE. BUT YOUR EAR—
THAT'S ANOTHER STORY. AND I
DO MEAN THAT IN A GOOD WAY.



The sound profile now has more composure and definition with the new power supply.





I've never seen a turntable so lovingly packaged in so many layers as if it needs to be earthquake proof.



It takes a trained metal cutter and polisher two full days to achieve the perfect finish for this base.



_____ “Do not throw away!” is written on the larger of the two cartons in which the Transrotor Massimo arrives. My scales tell me this carton weighs a hefty 35 kilograms. I’d like to see someone try to throw it away!

Transrotor doesn’t leave anything to chance, though, I learn as soon I’ve opened the cartons: I’ve never seen a turntable so lovingly packaged in so many layers as if it needs to be earthquake proof. Just carefully unpacking all the individual components that will at some point come together to comprise one complete Massimo takes a good half an hour.

Manual setup

Setting up the Massimo, which in terms of its shape and design clearly mirrors the Japanese cult Micro Seiki RX-1500 turntable, is quick and easy and all done by hand. The square base

is placed on a flat mounting surface, which, as with all other large Transrotor drives of the past, can never weigh enough. It would be great to listen to this turntable on the TT-100 from LignoLab with its air bearings. Highly recommended by Cai Brockmann, who has affectionately dubbed the 100-kilogram device table the “tiger table” because of its striped-design, the Massimo would surely sound even better on it than on my various constructions.

Anyway, after a few minutes, said drive base is level; that is, perfectly balanced: You just loosen the top solid lock nuts, adjust the height with the knurled screws under the base, and tighten on the top again—all done. It’s quick and effortless, and you don’t need any tools at all. There are some nice hidden details, too: Here, metal never touches metal—thin silicone layers in-between always prevent any surface damage from occurring if a heavy hand overtightens of

the screws. And that would be such a shame should you take a closer look at the surface of this chassis to appreciate the impeccable, refined workmanship that’s gone into . It takes a specially hired and trained metal cutter and polisher two full days to achieve the perfect finish for this base.

Once the two motors on the left and right of the base have been put in place and connected to the power supply and the belts have been fitted, the turntable can be set up, which, compared to the 60-millimeter-thick version on my Transrotor Apollon TMD, has gained a few pounds. A wave pattern has been turned into the underside that, together with a plastic insert on the top, is designed to prevent the solid aluminum component from ringing and vibrating in any way. Over time, Transrotor had obviously also changed the belts. The current model consists of a rubber compound with ▶



an even smoother surface that should age even more slowly than its predecessor.

The alignment of the tonearm and system suffered a little during transport, but everything is back on track after just five minutes of tinkering. And after a total of just 12 minutes, the Massimo is all set up and ready to go.

Steady as a rock

To start, the drive operates in the supplied configuration with the SME V tonearm and Transrotor Tamino MC system on the Whest THREE phono equalizer, Lavardin IT, and Diapason Adamantes 25th. After just a few seconds listening to the album *From The Stairwell* by the Kilimanjaro Darkjazz Ensemble, a few things become clear: first, the razor-sharp spatial reproduction. Individual sound events are

unshakably and clearly outlined in the room, regardless of what's going on around. Even with such sharp low-frequency eruptions, the high-frequency pitch is still perfectly sculptured in the room. Only a handful of drives manage to achieve that as a matter of course and with such composure. The background also appears darker and stiller than with other turntables; and even the Apollon TMD, which has three motors and is in no way bad at all in this regard, could take a page out of the Massimo's book. This sound characteristic is particularly helpful when it comes to large orchestral scores: You can listen your way through more easily with the Massimo and appreciate the size of the individual registers of the string section better. In some recordings of Gustav Mahler's symphonies I now experience less "turmoil," more order and clarity, as I do, for example, with master

tapes on my Telefunken M15. At particularly loud points, which can be real acid tests for analog equipment, the Massimo demonstrates real class by, once again, simply stepping aside.

Servant and disc spinner

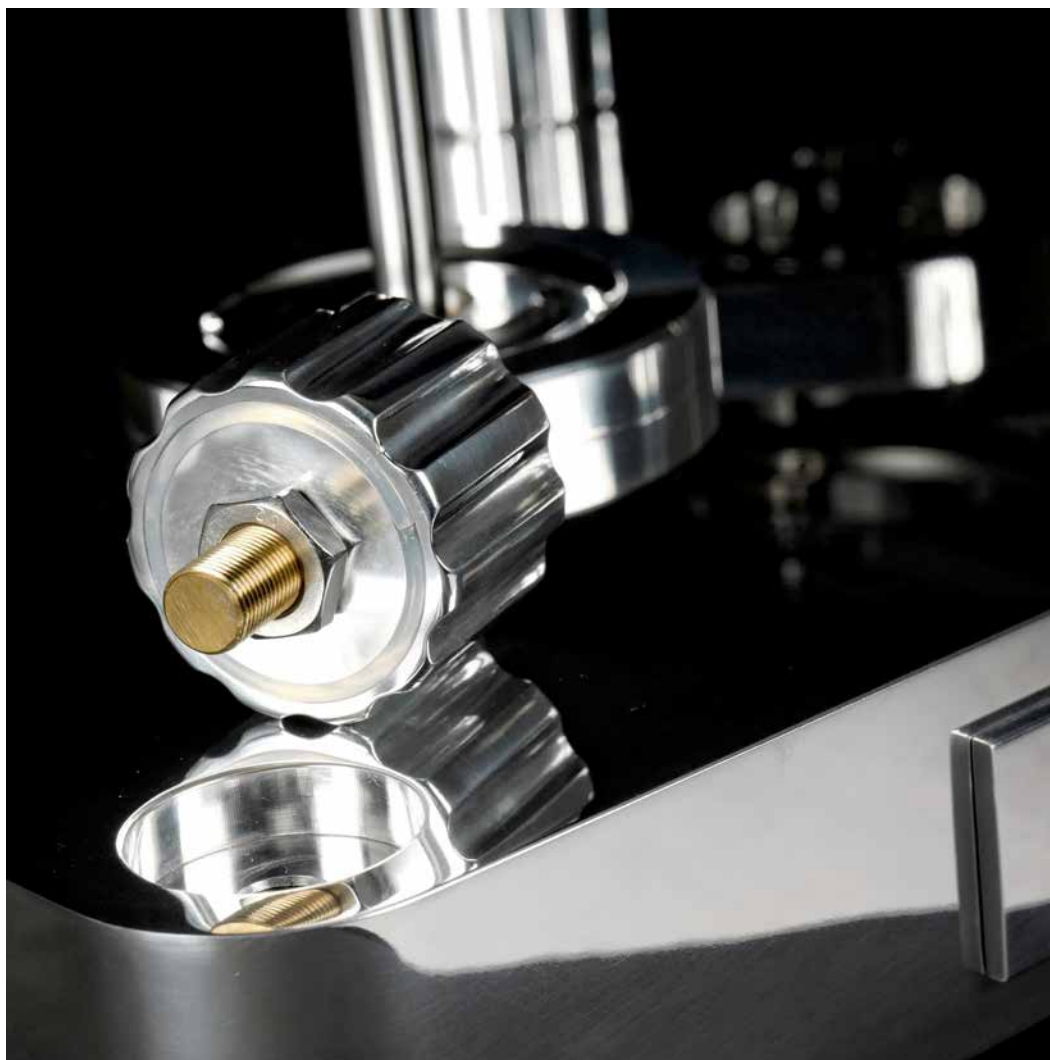
The more I think about, the more I believe I've found a fitting comparison: The fundamental nature of the sound produced by the Transrotor Massimo is like that of a good tape machine. The drive demonstrates the same compelling authority that asserts things have to sound exactly this way. It brings every piece of music into the room in absolute sharp relief and demonstrates practically no masking effects, which, as a result, leaves the sound to take care of itself in the best sense. With me, this always results in a pleasant immersion listening ▶



ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

Turntable: Transrotor Apollon | **Tonearm:** SME V | **Cartridge:** Ortofon Cadenza Black, Transrotor Figaro | **Phono pre-amplifier:** ifi Micro iPhono | **CD players:** Mark Levinson 390S, some computers und music players | **Preamplifier/DAC:** CanEVER ZeroUno plus | **Integrated amplifiers:** Lavardin IT, T+A PA 3100 HV | **Loudspeakers:** Diapason Adamantes 25th, Quadral Aurum Montan 9, Spondor S3/S5E

With the second motor, however, the matter-of-factness increases, impulses seem a tad more direct, and the room seems even more consolidated.



experience; with the Transrotor Massimo, the listening phases are longer than usual with such “work.”

With decent string quartet recordings that demand less of the drive in terms of dynamics, this setup creates a wonderfully defined room, which—depending on the recording—is either a manageable size or huge, in which the musicians are placed. As with the large orchestral pieces, the clarity and “transparency” of the reproduction are delightful. As if a good mixing engineer had adjusted the individual grooves of the recording once more, the different voices simply get in each other’s way less than with most other turntables.

Pop and jazz also come across as clear and “genuine,” whereas with the Massimo you shouldn’t expect any of the typical flirtatiousness that you

get with so many other drives. Nothing surges ahead here, even the band doesn’t approach the listener spatially—everything stays very clearly and precisely in the room. Everyone needs to decide for him- or herself whether reading out the information in the grooves without adding any annotations along these lines is “dirty, sweaty, and fun” enough for them personally. The Transrotor holds back here and comes across as an all-rounder that treats everything and everyone equally well.

System questions

The cartridge contained in this set is the recently presented Transrotor Tamino, which is clearly an analog gem for a correspondingly high price. When replaced with an Ortofon Vienna,

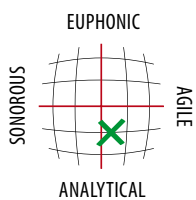
the delimitation of the individual sound events loses some contour. The Vienna paints with a softer, broader brush. And in fact even paints over some details that wouldn’t have evaded the Tamino. Overall, the Vienna plays more graciously and rounded and provides fewer details that could deviate from the musical line.

The Tamino is quickly adjusted in my own SME V. My first impression of a rather “lean” performance is put into perspective after just a few records. The system, manufactured in cooperation with MY Sonic Lab, simply refrains from any exaggeration in the fundamental tone or upper bass; it does, however, really let things fly in the lowest registers. The very open high-frequency range may be responsible for my earlier hasty misjudgment. One very fascinating aspect is how the Tamino traces the ▶





Transrotor Massimo

The Transrotor Massimo provides an outstanding base for up to four tonearms at the same time. And there is still room for a second motor. The visual impression of the tonally very confident high-end drive is that it's immensely imposing.



© FIDELITY Magazine



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



settling of the highest frequencies in the room depth—I’ve rarely heard such clarity like this before! (Note CB: *That’s why I think Transrotor’s top MC system qualifies for a separate review in a future FIDELITY issue.*)

Audiophile modular system

What does the second drive motor actually add? It’s kind of exciting that you can actually hear the system switch from one motor to two motors, although the actual platter uses magnets to rather “weakly” connect to and maintain mechanic separation from the subplatter, which

houses the belt(s). This TMD (Transrotor Magnetic Drive) bearing is also used in some of the company’s other models; with the Apollon we were able to ascertain similar improvements thanks to the twin drive. Nevertheless, the Massimo plays with solid stability and clarity with “just” one motor. With the second motor, however, the matter-of-factness increases, impulses seem a tad more direct, and the room seems even more consolidated. In essence, it boils down to slight differences and enhancements. In direct comparison, these differences are, of course, identifiable; however without any direct comparison, I would not trust myself to really

say whether one or two motors were driving the turntable.

Incidentally, a good chunk of the composure and stability comes down to the extremely solid and low-resonance platter. This is easy to spot because practically everything fits with everything else in the Transrotor modular system, and as a result even my Apollon can be equipped with this part. In fact, equipped and readjusted with the Massimo’s thicker platter, the Apollon also plays a good deal “darker” and more serenely than with the (already “bulky”) series standard version. With sparsely miked vinyls, rooms open toward the rear, and the ▶



Individual sound events are unshakably and clearly outlined in the room, regardless of what's going on around.

whole reproduction shifts a little toward the back wall and approaches the listener less. After quickly reconnecting to the Apollon, the new power supply also indicates what's happened: The sound profile now has more composure and definition.

After all this cross-experimenting, however, everything is nicely restored again, and the Transrotor Massimo plays as ordered and delivered. Since my review is now finished apart from a few closing words, I can escape during the rare free moments of this, as always stressful, holiday time and enjoy some music. That's

because the complete set of Massimo, SME V, and Tamino completely and thoroughly plays all the music entrusted to it without adding any annotations of its own as only a handful of other turntables do.

As striking, shiny, and big as a Transrotor may sometimes be, at least the Massimo almost does a disappearing act. In terms of sound. And, as I already said, I really mean that in a good way. ▀

Turntable | Transrotor Massimo

Functional principle: Belt-driven mass-loaded drive | **Special features:** Up to four arm bases mountable for

all tonearm sockets and lengths, optional one or two motors, optional platter upgrade for guiding a stabilizing ring | **Finish:** high-gloss polished aluminum | **Warranty period:** two years | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** From 55/22/33 cm | **Weight:** from about 40 kg | **Price:** from: €8,900

• **Included in the test set | Transrotor Tamino MC system | Price:** €12,500 | **SME V tonearm | Price:** From €4,560

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Listen. Feel. Communicate.

T+A DAC 8 DSD

THE (NOT SO) SUBTLE DIFFERENCE

By Stefan Gawlick. Photos: Ingo Schulz



Is there really no audible
difference among converters?
My advice is to listen to the
T+A DAC 8 DSD and let it
change your mind!





One of the many analog hi-fi world's rumors that has taken root as a "truth" is that consumer electronics have really reached their pinnacle in the last few decades. In the digital world, people also say there is hardly any difference between one generation of converters and the next or one current model and its competitor. Maybe a look at professional equipment that has to be worth the investment will help. No studio would ever purchase a converter or preamplifier just to bolster their image. New purchases need to give studios a competitive edge by ensuring improved sound quality

and in this way pay for themselves. Admittedly, that doesn't apply to soloists' microphones. Many singers will wait for a trendy tripod model to come out (and may even hang it from above as well, which is completely crazy for transistor microphones!) and often feel less comfortable with a tonally superior underdog. And it shows in their performance. OK, so ... Back to converters and preamps. Both categories have established shining stars, and many new models have come and gone because they were just old wine in new bottles and not really worth the investment. I was initially nervous, to say the least, when I checked out the new interfaces from Merging a while ago. But when I realized the huge progress they had



made, I simply *had* to bag myself a pricey Merging. Since this small Swiss company is currently struggling to keep up with production, it seems that many studios feel the same way. Although we're talking about seemingly "finished" product groups, so much has obviously been done that real arguments in favor of making a new purchase now exist that go beyond the simple mindset of "I want it so I'll buy it" or "I think this one has more tonal light and shade."

After my experience with Merging during recordings, I recently had an opportunity to witness similar progress in the mastering studio. For mastering a recording, I swapped a well-respected mastering DAC for the T+A DAC 8 DSD to try it out for the first time. The device I had been using before really shows the competition how it's done. The T+A, though,

takes things to a whole new level, and it's actually very easy to explain how: The tiniest of cutting errors, poorly built reverberant rooms and brittle fades are all without having to crank up the volume or resort to using headphones (which is what you have to do with most other devices). Congratulations are in order. My curiosity piqued, the DAC 8 DSD found its way into my home stereo system.

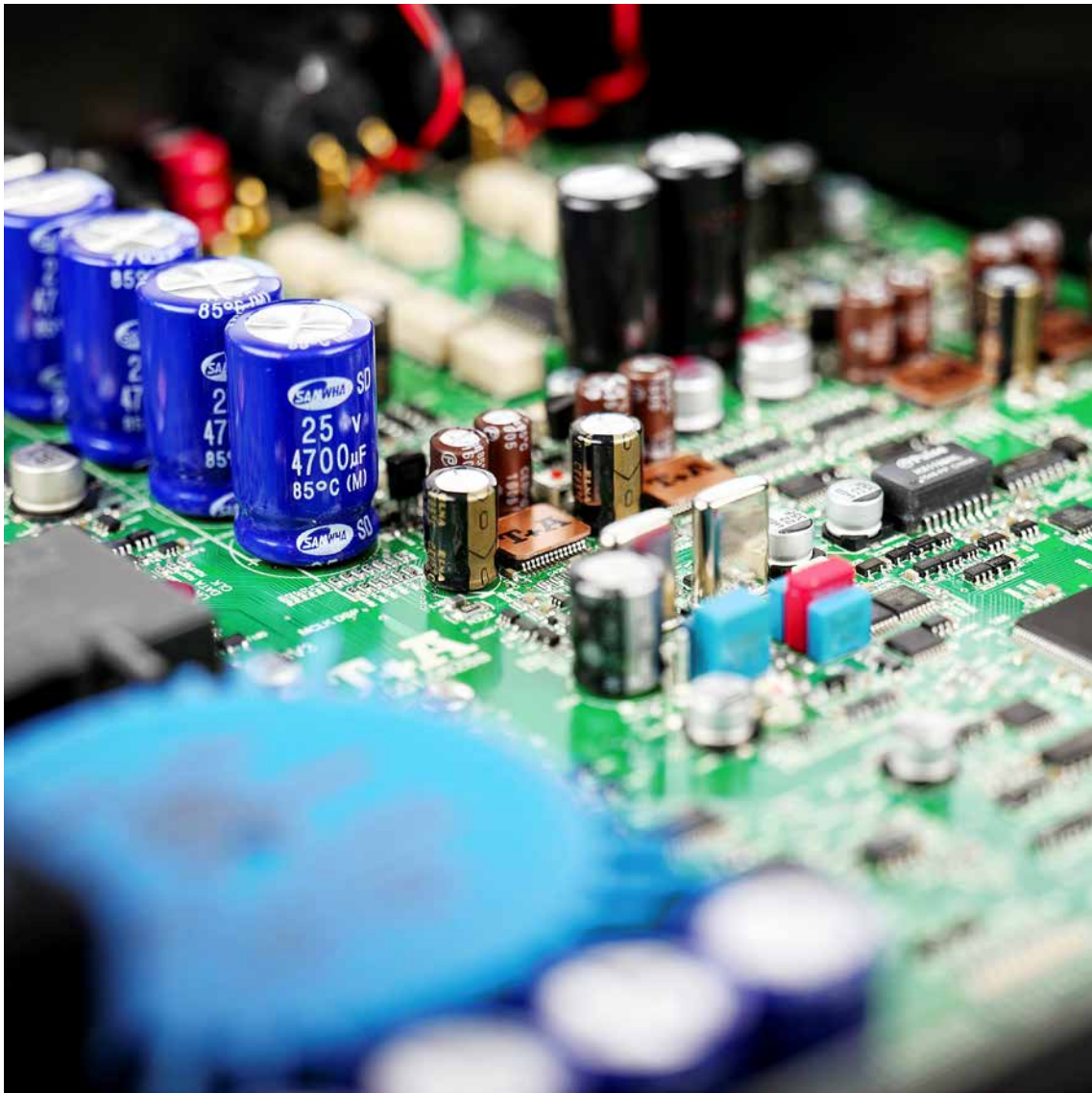
The current model is an evolved version of the well-known DAC 8.: In updating it, T+A head developer, Lothar Wiemann, took the thorough approach he is known for and didn't just give it a pointless face-lift. Instead, he's of course made sure you're getting something worthy of the extra €900 price tag. Like the new DSD function: In addition to PCM data, the DAC 8 can also now read DSD material up to an ▶

impressive 24.6 MHz—and much more “cleanly” than the competition. Usually, 1-bit DSD material is internally converted into multibit data to make it easier to access the datastream; this approach makes it possible to implement volume controls and digital equalizers. But for Wiemann, that wasn’t puristic enough—or, stated more precisely, “clean” enough. So T+A developed their own DSD converters that work in 1-bit mode across all digital operations. Things are then only controlled afterward, in the analog world. To ensure no converter artifacts can sully the analog signal, small SMD components are used at the end. I can best describe these parts as mini transformers with galvanic isolation and add: What T+A has managed to do is truly remarkable!

Not a lot has changed on the PCM side. Eight 32-bit Burr-Brown sigma delta converters are still used. Rather clumsily named Double Differential Quadruple Converter, the package uses its differential circuitry to shift any focus as far away as possible from miscalculations and simple background noise. To ensure jitter also doesn’t jeopardize the impressive sound, two-stage retiming is applied to the incoming signal, which is further filtered if necessary. It would now be my pleasure to essentially advise all audiophiles who find the PCM format enough to get a DAC 8 from the previous series (without DSD). It’s definitely much cheaper. But it’s not as easy as all that: In addition to the DSD conversion, T+A has also tricked out the new model by giving it volume ▶



The headphone jack is not just there for decoration.



control from the major HV series. This means added value you simply cannot ignore has been created on the analog level. Said control is completely analog in terms of the signal: Here is where a galvanically isolated digital control module switches SMD resistors with a particularly high current-carrying capacity and electrical strength when necessary, providing 64 sufficiently subtle increments. SMD components are also used in the fully balanced and discretely arranged output stages.

For the sake of completeness, let's take a look at the front and back of the DAC 8 DSD. A nicely legible display reveals the format of the incoming data. A row of buttons allows you to select from the various inputs and filters and control the volume. The headphone jack on the front is, by the way, not just

there for decoration: Thanks to the DAC 8 DSD's high current-delivery capacity, every set of headphones I tested sounded fantastic.

On the back, you can see just how T+A really went to town. You'll find balanced and unbalanced analog outputs (XLR and RCA connectors), a switch that completely removes the volume control from the signal path if you don't want to use the preamp function, and a digital output (S/PDIF). In terms of digital inputs, the unit has four S/PDIFs plus one AES/EBU, one Toslink, one BNC, and one USB. If I could make one recommendation it would be for one more analog input, but I'm really just splitting hairs here.



As I anticipated, the DAC 8 DSD is a truly terrific DAC converter; you really can hear all the technical mastery that has gone into it. Two major areas ▶



T+A DAC 8 DSD
Real know-how housed inside a smart shell, impeccable workmanship, and benchmark-setting sound—what else would you expect from T+A?

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SONOROUS
AGILE
ANALYTICAL

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

primarily demonstrate this: resolution and naturalness. The unit has details galore and a lot more than most other converters out there. This means that in addition to being able to reproduce individual instruments and voices with extreme precision, the DAC 8 DSD can also depict room dimensions with mind-blowing realism and uniformly light up rooms by filling each and every corner. This is particularly obvious with good recordings with natural acoustics: Compared with other DACs the T+A gives you the feeling you can effortlessly hear individual sound events. It might sound like a strange description, but I'm sure you get what I mean.

Patricia Kopatchinskaja's new recording (*Death and the Maiden*; Alpha, hi-res download) really highlights this phenomenon. In Augustus Nörmiger's *Totentanz*

(“Dance of Death”), the percussionists stumble around somewhat woodenly behind the orchestra, treat every rhythm far too bureaucratically, and therefore work more slowly than the fluid orchestra and the soloists who, as usual, play with real gusto. All bells and rattles ring and jingle, though not ethereally, in the background. But they have body and, more importantly, a fascinating three-dimensionality that, despite the fact they are placed way at the back of the orchestra, is “tangible.”

The DAC 8 DSD's four different digital filters also have a palpable effect on the sound. After experimenting a little, I have decided two of them are my favorites: FIR 1 sounds very precise and matter-of-fact, not especially charming—and so you hear exactly what you're supposed to hear. On the other ▶



T+A developed their own DSD converters that work in 1-bit mode across all digital operations.

hand, Bézier 2 (Bézier filters reduce digital pre-ringing) sounds very natural, fluid, colorful, and almost infinitely spatial. In contrast to the FIR 1 “workhorse filter,” this is a “pure enjoyment filter” and in terms of its signature sound closest to DSD performance. Is there any need for a conclusion? It seems not. I can only say that with the DAC 8 DSD, T+A has come up with a leading DAC converter regardless of what price range you consider. The answer to the question posed at the beginning must therefore be: Yes, things really are continuing to move forward in the digital technology world, too. The magnitude of this progress is something everyone can determine for him- or herself by thoroughly testing the DAC 8 DSD. Just do it: You won't be sorry! ■

Digital-analog converter/preamp | T+A DAC 8 DSD

Digital inputs: 4 x S/PDIF, each 1 x BNC, optical, AES/EBU and USB | **Digital outputs:** 1 x coaxial | **Analog outputs:** Each 1 x unbalanced (RCA), balanced (XLR), headphones (6.3-mm jack) | **Special features:** Direct DSD via the T+A True 1-Bit Converter, PCM via the Double Differential Quadruple Converter with four DAC converters per channel, 32-bit sigma delta; eight times oversampling; four selectable digital filters (FIR short/FIR long/Bézier/Bézier IIR); disengageable analog volume control, switchable bandwidth of analog filter (60/120 kHz), phase inversion, RS-232 interface for computer-controlled operation and future enhancements | **Finish:** Black aluminum housing, silver aluminum cover | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 27/9.5/27 cm | **Weight:** 4 kg | **Warranty period:** three years | **Price:** €2,750

T+A Elektroakustik GmbH | Planckstr. 9–11 | 32052 Herford | Germany | Phone +49 5221 76760 | www.ta-hifi.com



T+A AMP 8

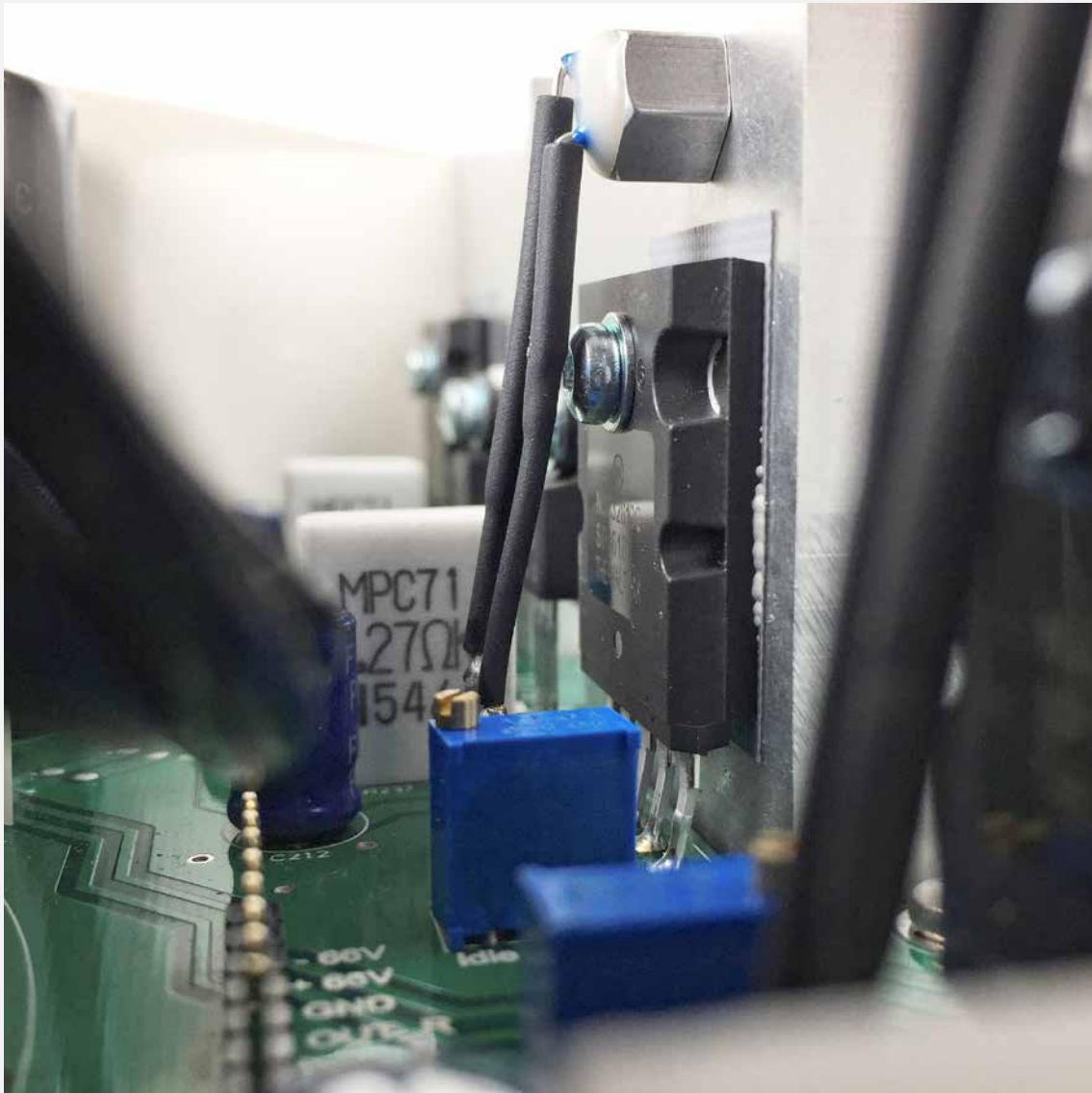
RELIABLE HANDS AT THE HELM

By Cai Brockmann. Photo: Ingo Schulz



THERE IS ONLY ONE LOGICAL AMPLIFIER FOR THE DAC 8 DSD—TECHNICALLY SPEAKING.





_____ Serious lovers of all things aesthetically pleasing will undoubtedly want to combine T+A's DAC 8 with the AMP 8 stereo power amplifier. T+A doesn't offer an alternative. So when the DAC 8 DSD and the AMP 8 are paired, the stereo power amplifier very nobly keeps a low profile: no display and not a single button on the front. And if the famous DAC demonstrates the full extent of its talent (admittedly on significantly larger, more expensive amplifiers), the AMP 8 could initially look a bit pale in comparison. But, that's unfair. While the latest version of the DAC "with the DSD addition" has really shot into the stratosphere, including in terms of its price, the AMP 8 is still, after nearly four years' production time, the same reliable old buddy you can trust with the bigger, tougher jobs despite its rather slim price tag. If you

wanted, you could take your friend to Wacken and attend a club gig or celebrate the great opera divas together without even having to think about it. You could even do this all in one single night if you wanted to. No problemo!

The AMP 8 is really well behaved, multitalented, and extremely easy to operate. The fact its high-voltage basic circuit is based on T+A's major HV series can only be a good thing. We happily noticed it and, in particular, heard it, too. Even a fresh-out-of-the-box AMP 8 seems well rested and doesn't lose a beat in giving the loudspeakers consigned to it a gentle yet stern scolding, making sure to leave out any unnecessary sharpness. After 30 minutes, the warm-up is over. Everyone is nice and flexible, springy and supple and ready to get down to business. Its owner might ▶





not even notice, since the AMP 8 belts out the music entrusted to it without airs and graces. Once you have completed the initial setup, there's hardly anything else to do: Plug in the supply cable from the preamplifier (balanced or unbalanced), connect two loudspeakers, and activate the power switches—ta-dah! From then on the cuddly AMP 8 keeps itself entertained and takes breaks at the right time—and then heads off again at the right time: After around 20 minutes of (real) inactivity, its on/off automatic functionality puts the AMP 8 into standby mode, which is wonderfully efficient with power usage of less than 0.2 watt. When you're in the mood for more music again, the amp gets back on track immediately, either automatically as soon as it detects a music signal or, even better, by using the CTRL interface with the DAC 8.

In and of itself, the AMP 8 has turned out to be a really terrific as a classic stereo power amplifier for classically designed stereo systems. As is usually the case with T+A devices, the small AMP 8 comes fully equipped with all sorts of safety features that only intervene when things really get too hot. To be honest, during the two weeks I had the AMP 8 for testing purposes, I never once managed to bring it to its knees. If you actually push it to its limits, its housing gets lukewarm, which is totally acceptable, and an invisible and inaudible fan underneath the unit begins to monitor each development like a hawk and makes sure nothing goes awry. Neither my KEF LS 50 nor the Bowers & Wilkins 683 S2, nor even my Stereophone Dura could find anything to complain about with the AMP 8 in terms of power, control, and pull-through. The T+A device's very translucent, firm, and stable ▶

T+A AMP 8
The ambitiously engineered AMP 8 is the obvious match to the DAC 8, sporting the same high quality machining and pristine sound in a neat, compact enclosure. But the reasonably priced stereo power amp suits perfectly non-T+A equipment, too.

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



performance nicely maintains control of all speakers without holding them back in any way. In fact, the two-tone made-in-Germany aluminum block demonstrates downright British stability, even at occasional party levels. The loudspeakers really appreciate this even—more than the uninvited neighbors next door anyway.

Anyone keen on stylishly upgrading a DAC 8 to a modern, digitally dominated hi-fi system simply can't ignore the AMP 8. Everyone else will find the compact powerhouse to be an impeccable bundle of musical fun with a very reasonable price tag. A big thumbs up from me! ■

Stereo transistor power amplifier | T+A AMP 8

Analog inputs: balanced (XLR), unbalanced (RCA) | **Outputs:** one pair of loudspeakers | **Special features:** Disengageable on/off automatic functionality | **Finish:** Black aluminum housing, silver aluminum cover | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 27/9.5/27 cm | **Weight:** 7 kg | **Warranty period:** three years | **Price:** €1,990

T+A Elektroakustik GmbH | Planckstr. 9–11 | 32052 Herford, Germany | Phone +49 5221 76760 | www.ta-hifi.com

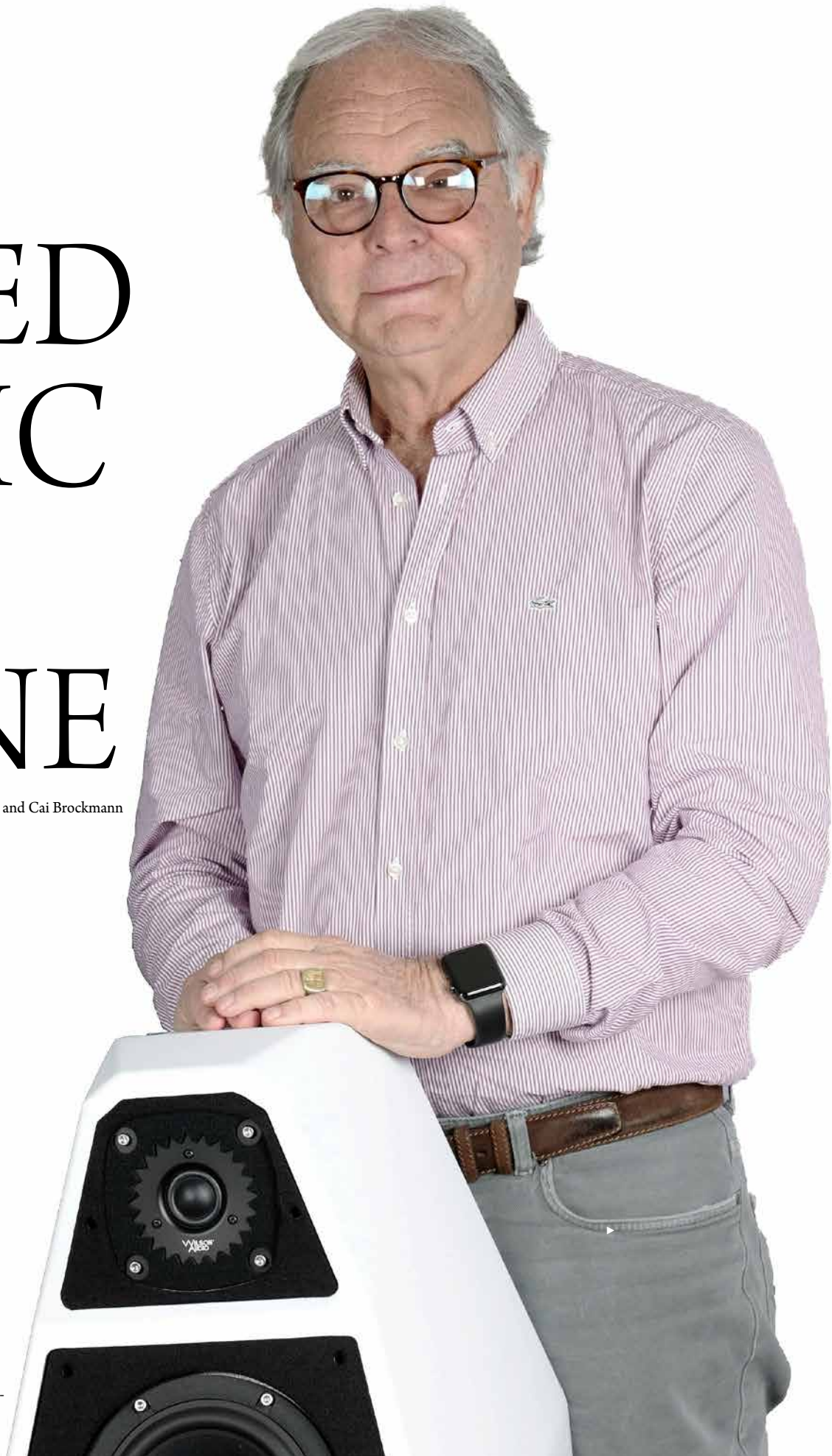


...and now for something completely different...

Wilson Audio Yvette

BE- LOVED MUSIC MA- CHINE

By Cai Brockmann. Images: John Giolas, Ingo Schulz, and Cai Brockmann



Sound engineer Peter McGrath managed to sort out the perfect setup for the Yvette (still wrapped in the white protective film) in just a few hours in the FIDELITY listening room. The Wilson Audio ambassador had all the tools he needed in his luggage, from a tape measure and furniture glides to the high-res digital recorder with his own recordings. Marking their successful debut, the powerful Amplifon tube monos were able to make music well into the night.



IT'S GREAT TO SEE THAT SOME
PEOPLE STILL HAVE AN UNSWERV-
ING DRIVE TO ACHIEVE PERFEC-
TION. IT'S EVEN BETTER WHEN
YOU CAN HEAR IT AS WELL.





_____I have a small confession to make from the start: Around 25 years ago, I visited two hi-fi shows in quick succession that didn't exactly go so well for everyone involved. It was the first time I would come across two Wilson Audio models. Yet nothing would come of us, the German hobby rock 'n' roller in love with all things from Great Britain, and the US speakers from David Wilson, a guy on a fanatical quest to achieve acoustic truth. I quickly dismissed Wilson Audio as "pretentious" and "inappropriately ambitious." Even after I had met the love of my life and

also philandered with "classical music" in the broader sense, Wilson Audio had still not attracted my audiophile attention. In hindsight, this is really strange; but I can't change it now. My personal interest was first aroused when my colleague Ingo Schulz pulled out a pair of WATT Puppy speakers from his collection and played them for me— in private and without all the hustle and bustle of a trade fair. And then it suddenly dawned on me that maybe I had missed out on some important moments in high-end audio history. I put Wilson Audio high up

on my "must explore more closely!" list, but first got a chance to fulfill the self-imposed challenge in another three years. That was the day a gentleman named Peter McGrath presented the Alexia, a brand-new model at the time. I was swept off my feet not just on one account but two: the speaker's sensationally impressive performance and the exquisite choice of music. Shortly after that, Messrs. Schulz and Brockmann met the entire Wilson family at the Vienna State Opera ("Closer to the real thing," FIDELITY No. 7, issue 4/2013). Besides all ►

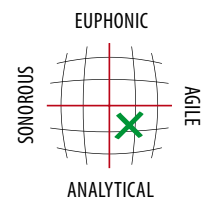


ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

Turntables: AMG Viella V12, Clearaudio Innovation, EnVogue Astra | **Tonearms:** AMG JT12 Turbo, Clearaudio TT-II and Universal, Nottingham Analogue AnnaArm 12" | **Pickups:** Clearaudio DaVinci, DS Audio Master 1, EMT JSD S75 | **MC transformer:** Audio Note S2 | **Phono stages:** Clearaudio Absolute Phono, DS Audio Master 1 EQ, Synthesis Roma 79DC | **Digital players:** Audio Note CDT-3/DAC 3, T+A PDP 3000 HV | **Preamplifiers:** Primare Pre60, Soullution 560, Tidal Preos | **Power amplifiers:** Amplifon SET 140, Audia Flight FLS4, Musical Fidelity M8 500s, Primare A60, Soullution 511 | **Integrated amplifier:** T+A PA 3100 HV | **Cables:** AudioQuest, Audio Note, HMS, Refine Audio, Vovox | **Power conditioning:** IsoTek, Gecom | **Accessories, mounting surfaces, and furniture:** various products from Subbase Audio and Harmonix, LignoLab TT100, and "Die Bank" ("The Bench"), Solidsteel HS Series

Wilson Audio Yvette

If source program and players are good enough, the Yvette takes music, music, music to an indescribably high level. Typical Wilson Audio: Extensive know-how and impeccable workmanship down to the very last detail as standard.



© FIDELITY MAGAZINE



the astoundingly deep conversations we had, we were also really impressed with how clearly both Dave Wilson and his son Daryl understood music and music playback.

Daryl has since taken the reins from his father at Wilson Audio, and we're pleased to see the company's aspirations have not changed at all. At Wilson Audio, they remain steadfast in their quest to ensure no detail, however slight, slips through their fingers that could bring them a little bit closer to achieving live-concert sound quality. For that reason alone, the Wilsons visit concert halls all around the world, dip into a huge back catalog of self-made recordings, and attend to the tiniest of details when developing, producing,

and even setting up speakers for a customer. It's always all about the music; it's that simple. Particularly well-produced music, I should add just to be fair. "The real thing" is not an MP3 file that's been optimized for a laptop rather everything that's been recorded and preserved by experts or has at least been produced to audiophile standards. For rough-edged rock and mediocre or poor music, please look elsewhere for ordinary "boxes."

And so that finally brings us to the latest Wilson Audio model: My first impression of the Yvette, with its typical Wilson Audio stature, was clearly not of a "box." And there's nothing ordinary about the model at all. For example, the built-in, very familiar-looking

drivers are specially manufactured for Wilson Audio according to their exact specifications. At Wilson Audio in Provo, Utah, they are then selected and compiled for even tighter tolerances, first in pairs then in the entire set with all other drivers. After that, they are coupled with super-fine-tuned and molded crossovers. Next, they are built into highly engineered, absolutely immaculately made, material-intensive, and maximally low-resonance housing. Then, as a finished manufactured product, each Yvette is expertly integrated into its new home by a trained Wilson Audio dealer. And there the new owner is mostly likely to be found waiting anxiously to get his or her hands on the speakers. After all, Wilson Audio ▶





The Yvette is Wilson Audio's biggest "single enclosure" loudspeaker: Different angled curves on the front section guarantee the brand's typical time alignment of all chassis is achieved in terms of the practical listening distance.



doesn't begin the manufacturing process until the company receives an order. There is no "off-the-rack" purchases at Wilson Audio.

The new pair of Yvettes fresh of the boat from the US make their new home in the FIDELITY listening room, where a gentleman named Peter McGrath has moved in as well. We're very pleased to see each other again. The official Wilson Audio brand ambassador and former head of Harmonia Mundi USA is not only a renowned music expert and much sought-after sound engineer, but also *the* expert for the ideal installation of Wilson Audio products in given spaces.

In the listening room, large furniture glides are placed under the spikes, which are supplied as standard, to help ensure the elephantine loudspeakers can at least be moved. The 80-kilo

boulders perched on them can be pushed centimeter by centimeter back and forth until the optimum position has been found. McGrath notes the positions of each loudspeaker in the room with the help of a calibration sheet; then, using very well-known test tracks, he rates the speakers' performance in seven individual disciplines. It's pretty obvious, incidentally, that these are the musical criteria of a trained sound engineer's ear — low bass expansion, fundamental tone quality, spatial impressions (soundstage center focus and ambient bloom), tonal balance, dynamic impression, and musical flow... this has to be the most music-oriented as well as the most professional and accurate approach for obtaining the best possible results from a loudspeaker located in unfamiliar surroundings. McGrath actually estimated it would

take a whopping 1.5 days (!) to situate the Yvette in the FIDELITY listening room. A big pile of CDs and the sound engineer's digital recorder with its own high-res recordings lie there ready to go. Yet after three hours of "critical listening and fiddling," McGrath is visibly pleased with the resulting sound and asks us to "inspect and approve" his work in the listening room. A closer look at the tape measures still lying about tells me the sound expert has declared the mathematically determined second-best total on the calibration sheet as the favorite sound. "Well, it's the overall performance that counts," McGrath says as he starts the first track on the Wilson Audio Yvette set up in the FIDELITY listening room. It's a good thing I'm sitting down, otherwise I'd have been knocked off my feet. I can clearly and distinctly "see" ►



the “living and breathing” recording room all around me, even before an instrument has uttered a peep. The Yvette instantly conveys a sense of magnitude and volume. And after the first few beats of Holst’s *The Planets*, I am secretly in love. Not with the most beautiful looking loudspeakers in the world and not with the most expensive speakers of all time, and not with the deal of the century, but with an inexplicably well-balanced piece of “sound furniture.” Yvette and I fall for each other at the skip of a heartbeat. Maybe because the lady is so stable, consistent, and pleasant? Yvette is the largest single-enclosure loudspeaker

that Wilson Audio makes; as a result, there’s *no* option to adjust it as there is with the company’s larger models. Their separate mid and treble modules can be meticulously adjusted to achieve the right phase-related (time-coherent) emission of all chassis for a specific listening position. The mechanically invariable one-body design of the Yvette does, however, mean the speakers need to be a particular distance from the listening position—in this case approximately 2.75 meters at an ear height of between 96 and 102 centimeters. They work perfectly, for example, in the 33-square-meter FIDELITY listening room.

In terms of its shape, the Yvette is the successor to the Sophia. The Yvette, however, features significant technical improvements that Wilson Audio has also added to recent larger models—models whose designs Daryl Wilson has been contributing to since 2002, by the way. The Yvette naturally also benefits from the knowledge that resulted from developing the preeminent flagship WAMM Master Chronosonic (see FIDELITY No. 30, issue 2/2017). The most outstanding part of all this high-precision work is not visible, but rather an integral component of one large overall concept that manifests itself in the Yvette’s amazingly ▶



Manufactured according to Wilson Audio's exact specifications:

1. Convergent Synergy Tweeter MkIII with silk dome.
2. 18-cm midrange with reinforced cellulose pulp, a "favorite chassis" of Daryl and Dave Wilson.
3. Woofer with paper pulp, a "cousin" of the 10-incher, which is also used in the WAMM Master Chronosonic.



Precisely cut felt plates surrounding all drivers are no expensive gimmick but support the overall sound tuning—from which the spatial reproduction and virtual holographic clarity, in particular, audibly benefit. There are, of course, also covers for the Yvette's drivers, which are said to be acoustically harmless, however we haven't ever uses them.

low-resonance housing. As already stated, it's not spectacular components or super-high-tech drivers (alone) that make the difference in terms of good or bad performance, but the best possible coordinated and integrative interplay among all components to produce the most time-coherent sound emission.

My colleagues who are listening with me can also hear it now. We each take our turn in the sweet spot and are rewarded with an overwhelmingly all-encompassing impression of acoustic holography.

That evening I get some alone time with Yvette. Now is my chance to take my time and delight her with the only symphony written by Erich Wolfgang Korngold (Chandos 9171), one of my all-time favorite works scored for a large

orchestra. The recording was made in 1993 in the concert hall of New Broadcasting House, Manchester, with the BBC Philharmonic under the direction of Sir Edward Downes. Within just a few seconds, the loudspeaker whisks me off into the wonderful world of skilfully arranged dissonances and arcs of suspense, and effortlessly transports the rather well-manned orchestra into the listening room —even exceeding beyond the boundary of the walls with ease. The three-dimensional impression is simply mind-blowing! I am completely immersed in the music. The Yvette transmits the dynamic outbursts and eruptions from the beefed-up percussion section into the room with unbridled fervor. Thunderous and threatening, the bass notes are not just

simply “there” but take on a discernible shape and contour; and when the perhaps most beautiful key changes to grace recent musical history unfold, tears welled up in my eyes—what a fantastic music emissary Yvette is! Good job, Peter, Dave, and Daryl. Even better job, Yvette. And thank you all, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Frank Zappa, Oscar Peterson, Malia, Marc-André Hamelin, Pink Floyd, Ella Fitzgerald, David Crosby, Yello, ...

And *rather* than thank, I'm going to complain about Beth Hart, Motörhead, and ZZ Top, to name just a few, for issuing seriously mediocre productions. Oh, and don't let me forget to mention AC/DC, too (except for *Ballbreaker*, which is really good). Thanks to my new friend, Yvette, I now know ▶





very well where, in technical recording terms, things got snagged and stuck and where things got simply really sloppy. The same goes for all hardware players, from the source to selection of the amplifier (these Amplifon tube monos!) to all cables with supporting accessories: a fantastic tool for music lovers and audiophiles! And don't think the Yvette, which, by Wilson Audio standards, is considered compact, is in any way compact when it comes to sound—quite the opposite in fact! Thankfully, the Yvette not only has an insane broad band (including low bass!), but also boasts such seamless

and homogeneous performance there is enough to discover even with poor recordings. However, the Yvette demonstrates its true purpose with superbly produced works. This is when Wilson Audio's biggest single-enclosure loudspeaker really comes into its own, and you to forget time and space. And the price for the pair, too: When a hi-fi component manages to completely let itself go in the music and take its listeners with it, that component can demand practically whatever it likes. Attention for example, and respect. ▀

Loudspeaker | Wilson Audio Yvette

Functional principle: three-way floor-standing loudspeaker, bass reflex | **Efficiency:** 86 dB | **Nominal impedance:** 4 ohms | **Equipment:** 1 x 25-cm woofer, 1 x 18-cm midrange, 1 x 25-mm dome tweeter | **Special features:** Extremely low-resonance housing made of Wilson Audio X-Material and S-Material; vented midrange enclosure, tunable crossover, time-coherent emission | **Finishes:** Various colors and high-gloss varnishes, also according to customer's wishes | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 34/110/51 cm | **Weight:** 80 kg | **Warranty period:** five years | **Price for two:** €31,000

Audio Components Vertriebs GmbH |
Harderweg 1 | 22549 Hamburg | Ger-
many | Telephone +49 40 401130380 |
www.wilsonaudio.com

The absolutely impeccably varnished, almost ceramic-looking, and super-heavy housing consists of three modules on the inside that were manufactured in-house from various materials. The midrange breathes through a rear vent, and the bass reflex tube was milled from a solid block of aluminum. Fashionable twin terminals have no place in the Yvette's very homogeneous overall design. Single wiring along with single amping are the choice here.



LISTENING TO YVETTE

Commentary from Hans von Draminski

“Perfection is not achieved when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.” These were not the words of a hi-fi engineer or a loudspeaker developer but the French writer, philosopher, and pioneering aviator Antoine Marie Jean-Baptiste Roger Vicomte de Saint-Exupéry (1900–1944). The contemplative author, who blessed us with such works as *The Little Prince*, also added that a machine is inconspicuous in its greatest form. This idea really rings true with the Wilson Audio Yvette.

No, this is not a mini-loudspeaker or a wall panel speaker. These streamlined sculptures transform into inconspicuous workhorses when the music starts to play—in no time you forget that loudspeakers are at work here, busy playing back a saved recording. From the orchestra’s very first note, from the very first pressing of a key, from the very first pianissimo aspirated D in the bass range, the Wilson Audio Yvette grows invisible, dematerializes, simply disappears and just lets the music flow unhindered. It manages to do this best with sound events that have been produced naturally, whether in classical pieces, jazz numbers, or sudden flashes of vocal genius by singers and songwriters.

If you sit with Peter McGrath on the couch, then such materials are in no short supply. After all, during his lifetime this highly talented sound engineer has created and/or been responsible for some very noteworthy recordings, mainly in the classical sector. It’s only logical that someone like him should work for Wilson Audio: McGrath is also a fan of puristic configurations, especially when it comes to recording music. No multiple microphone setups, but rather pared-back, simple configurations where the sound expert McGrath always ensures a balanced proportion of the room where the recording took place comes with him. To showcase “his” loudspeakers properly, McGrath has a few “work samples” (sadly not freely available on the market) saved on the SSD of a very handy hard-disc recorder that he modified himself: On it, a small church choir sings Bach—their voices youthful and unspent, and the church almost the perfect setting for the vocal ensemble that partly consists of soloists. McGrath’s recording, played back using the test Yvette in the FIDELITY listening room, allows you to actually pinpoint each singer in the room. And they don’t drift when the pitch changes (which is a problem of many, even very good, multiway systems).

McGrath has an unmistakable soft spot for the exceptional, for musical excursions into realms beyond the norm. The genre of the male alto, sometimes also referred to as a countertenor or alto (with different timbre and pitch range), has now also become well-known on this side of the early-music scene because of crossover experts such as Andreas Scholl. The high-resolution file that lies slumbering on McGrath’s hard disk seriously ratchets things up another notch: A male soprano voice serves up early Baroque arias with wonderful subtlety and sense of timing and phrasing. With a comparatively dry recording, the Wilson Audio Yvette not only delivers a fully untainted voice profile, but enhances the audio picture with so many details that trained listeners would never think for a second that a woman was singing.

In the days and weeks following McGrath’s visit, many silver and black disks grace player spindles and turntables. The Wilson Audio Yvette always stays well away from any musical happenings and demonstrates perfection in the sense depicted by Saint-Exupéry: It produces absolutely no sound of its own because the straight and narrow is what is called for here, not razzle-dazzle. Whatever is on the vinyl, CD, or file is reproduced unfiltered and unadorned. The Finnish composer Jean Sibelius once promised to pour clear spring water at a time when other colorful music cocktails were being mixed. The Wilson Audio Yvette takes a similar puristic approach but without behaving like a Spartan. Here, the color palette of tones is, for example, a luminous rainbow, but one that hasn’t had its color intensity subsequently accentuated in the image-editing process. In the virtual creation of real-seeming rooms, the high priority that perfectly timed playback enjoys with the Wilson becomes apparent. Precisely calculated phantom acoustic sources—a singer at the altar of a tiny chapel, a double bass directly next to the jazz club wall—are given so much energy that they start to shine from the inside out, so to speak.

If something went wrong when the microphones were being set up, if the sound-engineering team was still not really able to handle the specific features of a recording location, the Wilson Audio Yvette will convey this to listeners without annoying them more than necessary. With the “First Recording” from the new Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, even the Yvettes are unable to conjure up any three-dimensionality or reasonable depth

gradation from the NDR Orchestra. For this they recount a story of rhythmic stringency and clear accentuation. An imaginary concert film that also remains sharp on the edges and doesn’t flicker.

A large part of the Wilson fascination is that this loudspeaker gets on best with music for which it was not primarily intended. An amused and grinning McGrath puts on the album *Convergence* from Malawian-British jazz and soul singer Malia, which she recorded with sound enthusiast and electronic guru Boris Blank known for his work in the musical duo Yello. Here there is an overdose of what’s a litmus test for any loudspeaker: a complex and versatile female voice full of nuances coupled with stone-cold computer beats. The Wilsons transform into fiery groove machines with this superb studio album, make the very stable listening-room floor vibrate, and, from a level that your ears don’t find excessive, make the doors and window panes rattle. Only when FIDELITY colleagues glance into the listening room with very annoyed looks on their faces does it become clear just how very loud the music has been that the two gentlemen on the couch have been listening to. The fact that the Wilson Audio Yvette functions without any distortion or limitations even at levels way above the threshold conducive for hearing tells you that this is a world-class design.

Especially as it also masters the complete opposite. Sometimes, you want to listen to a bit of music at night and treat your ears, for example, to a bit of Gustav Mahler’s Symphony No. 10 recorded by Wergo. The Israeli-American composer and conductor Yoel Gamzou took the unfinished piece and in 2010, then just 22 years old, recorded a reconstructed version with the International Mahler Orchestra that he founded. It’s a version with massive input from the wind section and opulent string passages, one that demonstrates pioneering spirit and a touch of nonconformity. Gamzou’s dense intertwined mesh of leitmotif correspondences, his wide dynamic arcs, and his confident buildup of tension “work” on the Wilson Audio Yvette even at room volume and slightly below because this furious exceptional loudspeaker never loses balance even at low levels, and it never forfeits its stringency or ventures off the straight and narrow. It is free from dead weight and therefore perfect. At least for all intents and purposes. After all, Yvette has a pair of big siblings, whom I would also like to hear—as a friend of the family, let’s say... ■



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



Sugden Audio IA-4

HERE TO STAY

By Michael Vrzal. Photos: Ingo Schulz



WHO SAYS YOU CAN ONLY DISCOVER
WHAT'S NEW? THIS IS A SUPERB BRITISH
INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER WITH ROOTS
REACHING BACK TO 1967.



James Edward Sugden was born in 1936 in Cleckheaton in West Yorkshire, northern England. He completed his vocational training at the EMI College of Electronics in London before quickly and easily landing a job as a junior engineer at EMI. After spending some time in weapons development, he ended up in the Broadcast Equipment Division of the company where he worked on sound systems for television stations.

At the beginning of the 1960s, Sugden's interest in metrology for nuclear research led him to found his own company, Research Electronics Ltd. His professional experience with audio amplifiers and success with transistor circuits in the then unusual Class A operating mode led the founding of J E Sugden & Co



Ltd in 1967. Sugden subsequently sold the company in 1980 to its current owner Tony Miller, retrained as a math and computer science teacher, and has since dedicated any spare time he has had to his new hobby, canal boating.

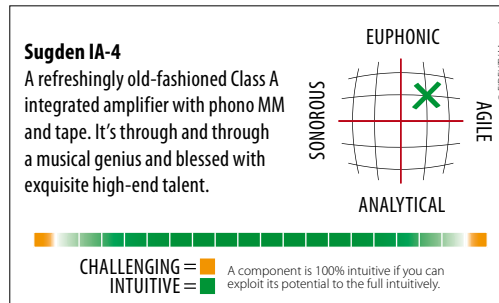
Perhaps somewhere in this meandering corporate history lies the reason why Sugden devices are relatively unknown in Germany. Perhaps it also comes down to the lack of brand identity. You see, no Sugden amplifier from the last 50 years resembles its predecessor, not even remotely. Anyway, I have the IA-4 integrated amplifier in front of me now. This is my first contact with the long-established British manufacturer. I'm delighted, not to say addicted, to the musicality of this chunky hunk of a transistor. While at the same ▶

Sugden IA-4
A refreshingly old-fashioned Class A integrated amplifier with phono MM and tape. It's through and through a musical genius and blessed with exquisite high-end talent.

EUPHONIC
SONOROUS
AGILE
ANALYTICAL

© FIDELITY MAGAZINE

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

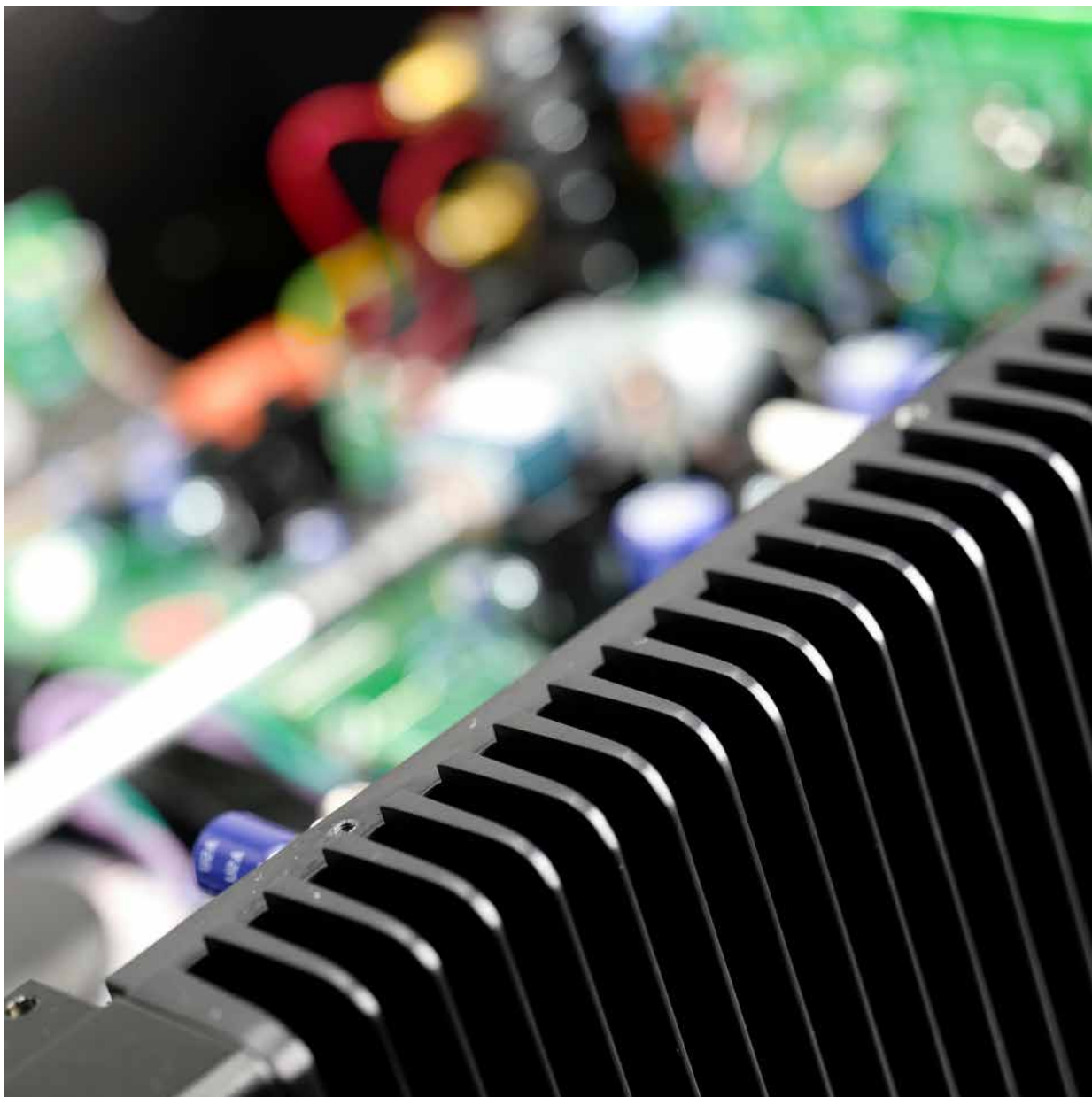



time a bit confused: Have I been on a desert island for the last few decades?

The Sugden IA-4 is the brand's top integrated amplifier model. As tradition would have it, it is a Class A design. James Sugden is credited with being the first person in the world to have ever introduced a Class A transistor amplifier on the market. He had determined very early on that the crossover distortion of popular transistorized Class B amplifier circuits heavily impaired the sound profile. This distortion does not exist in Class A operation because, the transistor put simply, does not turn off each time after passing through a wave form. Instead, true Class A designs have a bias current that increases so much that the operating point lands in the middle of the performance

curve and the music signal to be amplified no longer passes from one switching transistor to the other. This lack of distortion does, however, come at a price: high power consumption and tremendous heat generation since such amplifiers are almost always operating at full throttle. For this reason, Class A amps are never high-performance monsters, but usually have low double-digit wattage figures. With its 33 watts, the Sugden IA-4 has enough under the hood to comfortably drive normal loudspeakers in normal living rooms to deafening levels.

Sugden Audio's current tagline reads "Rescuing Music from Technology." In fact, this British company is not one of those manufacturers that offer downloadable white papers without inquiring first. But after ►

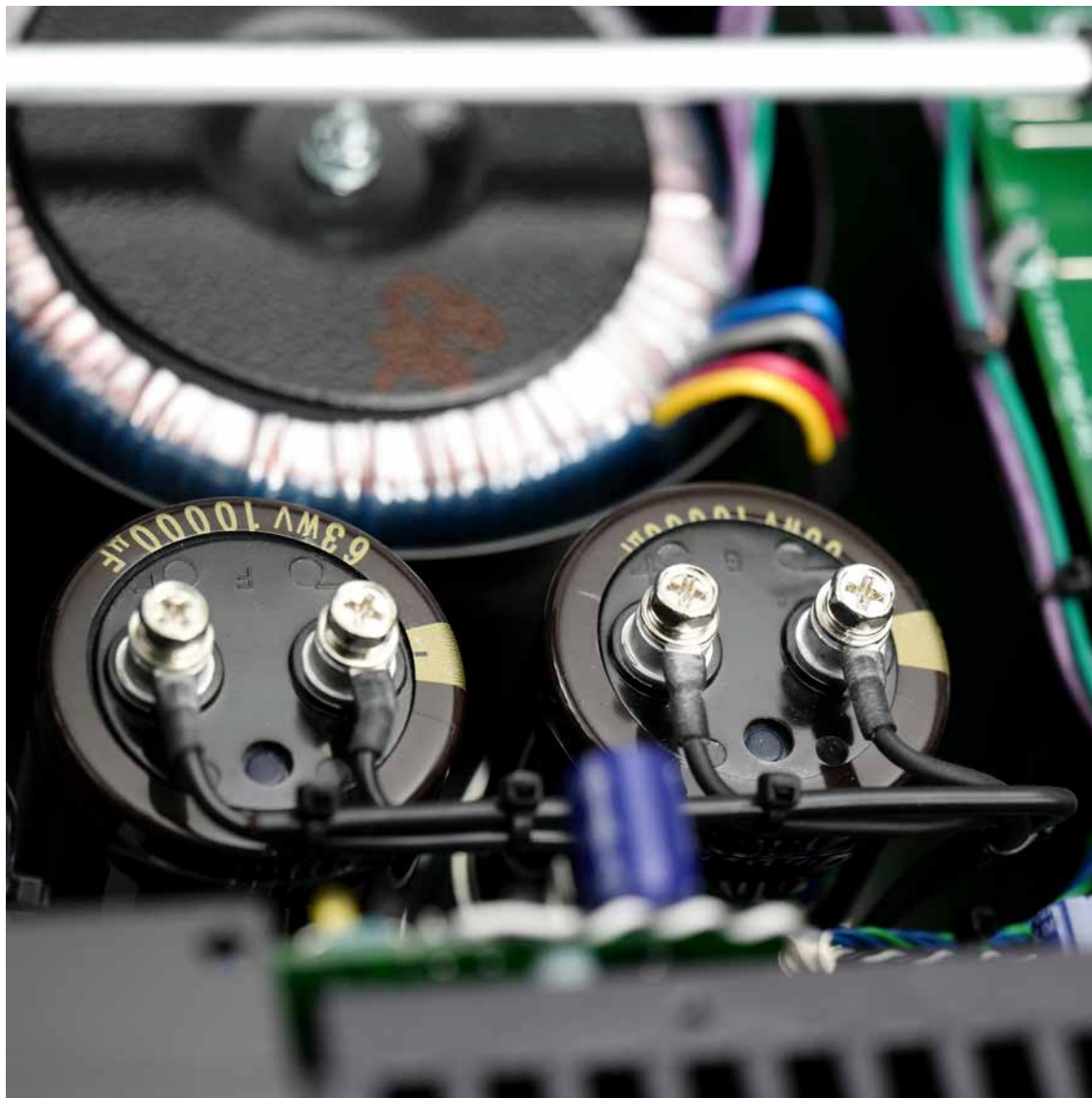


asking, I was able to learn that the IA-4 has nothing in common with Sugden's first integrated amplifier, the A21, which is still available to this day, apart from the Class A principle. Right from the outset, the IA-4 was designed to be the flagship model and is an autonomous development that meets the highest standards. Behind the inch-thick aluminum front, you'll find gold-plated circuit boards, silver cables, a custom-made 350-watt toroidal transformer, and more. The statements on the circuit technology are more general than detailed: Current feedback is used in the output stage to stabilize the operating point; the input section is DC coupled. The overall concept has been designed with a high bandwidth, with the official specifications indicating 14 hertz to 200 kilohertz (–1 decibel point).

The IA-4 is a conservative integrated amplifier in the best sense of the term. There's no point looking for any digital functionality. For that, a phono input suitable for MM cartridges expands the available options and there's a tape loop along with a monitor switch. A (sadly plastic) remote control streamlines operations, but I found using the actual volume control on the device (a classic ALPS potentiometer putters about inside) more fun. The overall impression I get is that of a robust, well-thought-out, no-nonsense device that prefers to keep a low profile in the interests of doing its job properly.

Perhaps my oldest "utility CD" is the sampler *The Collection* from New York label Chesky. The music is great, but it's not something I sit around and listen to these days—the disc rather serves as a





ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

Turntables: Bauer Audio dps 3 | **Tonearm:** Bauer Audio tonearm | **Cartridge:** Lyra Kleos | **Phono preamplifier:** Bauer Audio Phono | **CD player:** Electrocompaniet EMC 1 UP | **DAC converter:** Mytek Brooklyn | **Speakers:** Ayon Seagull/c, Dynaudio Contour 30 | **Cables:** Naim, Fadel, Chord | **Power supply:** Music Line Powerigel | **Accessories:** Bauer Audio Rack, granite slabs

toolbox with exactly everything I need. This time, I listened to all 16 tracks in sequence and felt like I really heard them for once. The Sugden has a light and airy resolution that makes listening to this disc, which I know inside out, a refreshing experience. Starting in the first few milliseconds as each track projects a new recording room into the listening room is truly delightful. Class A sounds like that, does it? Is this the

much-lauded lack of distortion this operating mode is famous for? If it is, count me in as a fan. I want more! Since the piano and cello produce the sounds I'm most at home with, I run the Sugden through the paces with Truls Mørk and Murray Perahia. Mørk's phenomenal cello from Domenico Montagnana's workshop (Venice, 18th century), which Mørk plays in his recording of Prokofiev's *Sinfonia Concertante* (Virgin Classics 5 45282 2), shines full of noblesse, open and free. The IA-4 reproduces it in realistic size and three-dimensionality at a precisely defined distance behind the speakers. The grand piano, which Murray Perahia also used for his recording of Mendelssohn's works (CBS IM 37838) in a subpar recording room poorly isolated from the ▶

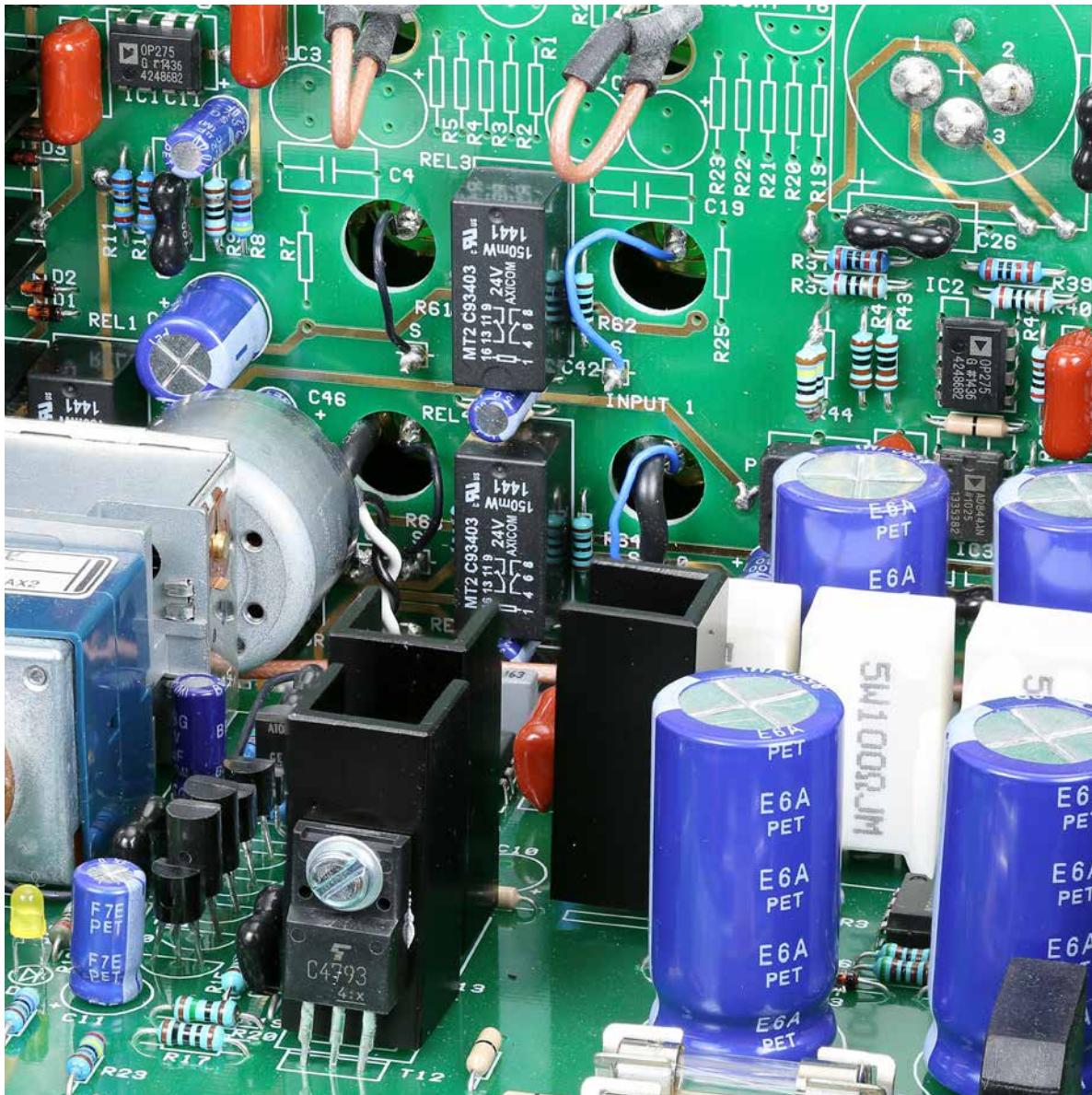
Shrouded in British innocence is a well-known analog circuit concept with almost 50 years of continuous refinement under its belt.



outside world (you can hear the unmistakable rumble of trucks passing by outside), comes across as brightly polished as if it has gained more overtones. It's almost too much clarity for me. I pull out the balanced XLR cables from the connections of my Electrocompaniet player and plug them into the analog outputs of a Mytek Brooklyn DAC converter (more on that soon in FIDELITY). A digital S/PDIF cable now connects this with the player's corresponding output. And lo and behold, the cello also gains warmth and body. So for continued digital listening, I stick with the Polish-American DAC. I move on to Johnny Cash, *American Recordings IV*. Cash's charisma along with the morbid and minimalist

arrangements more than make up for the vigorous compression of his brutally clipped creaky voice. This is not really audiophile quality. But it's great fun when such a subtle "unraveler" like the Sugden sinks its teeth into the record expertly produced by Rick Rubin. The amp doesn't zap you in the face with shortcomings, in this case the "in-your-face" overpowering presence of all the players involved. No, a constructive music lover is at work here, which depicts Cash and the like as the thoroughbred musicians that they are and who only need one note and one tone to hypnotically place the listener under their spell. Some of the best concertmaster solos ever can be found in Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's





monumental symphonic suite *Scheherazade*. In technical recording terms, this poses a real challenge as showcasing the individual violin is important while not neglecting to treat it as a part of the overall string section of the orchestra. The recording with the Paris Opéra Bastille Orchestra under Myung-Whun Chung (DG 437 818-2) is a very finely calibrated measuring device in this sense. And the Sugden doesn't disappoint: Like a shining silver thread, it gives the violin presence while immediately also taking care of the many other orchestra soloists—the drum, the triangle, a bassoon, a cello—with the same flair and dexterity. The secret to this success is the delicate cloak of air

enveloping each instrument. The Brit doesn't package the orchestra into one compact, multifaceted sound, but retains the diversity and the resulting broad color palette of tones. When the dramatic action (Sinbad the Sailor! The sea!! The storm!!!) gains momentum, the orchestra nimbly leaps into the *fortissimi*. The Putumayo sampler *Swing Around The World* gives the Sugden more opportunities to showcase spirited enthusiasm and a wealth of wonderful details. This is mostly a collection of small ensembles captured with exquisite recording quality. Here, a device has to lay all its cards on the table in terms of spatial expression and dynamics. The Brit emphatically demonstrates ▶



just how precisely it can divide a recording room into depth, height, and breadth. In the vocal numbers, it impressively retains the dynamics of the human voice—there is good reason why the words “(ex)plusive sounds” are used as a description ...

The Sugden IA-4 finally won me over with an ECM record: *Sangam*, a live recording of the Charles Lloyd (saxophone), Zakir Hussain (tabla), and Eric Harland (drums) trio. This is no light meal to easily digest as Lloyd unleashes some mind-blowing solos, and Hussain fires a barrage of fiery beats from his tabla. Actually, I only occasionally allow myself to listen to the incredible drum solo on the first track, otherwise the whole house would join in the party. The wealth of nuances and joyous details that the Sugden presents seems to seriously light up the highly complex music. It’s astonishing how easy it suddenly becomes to understand the dense rhythmic textures. And I have absolutely no desire to crank up the volume, as the

three musicians’ musical passion gives me an endorphin rush just at room volume.

Wow! So much fun, and all it is is a well-known analog circuit principle with almost 50 years of continuous refinement under its belt. The Sugden IA-4 may project an air of typical British innocence on the outside, but there’s an unmistakably big beating heart under the cover that’s designed to do music some justice. This integrated amplifier is able to match up to the industry’s big hitters. And then some. I am extremely impressed. ■

Integrated amplifier | Sugden IA-4

Output power (4 ohms): 2 x 33 W | **Inputs:** 4 x line unbalanced, 1 x phono MM (RCA), 1 x line balanced (XLR) | **Outputs:** 1 x speaker, 1 x tape out, 1 x pre out | **Special features:** remote control | **Finishes:** brushed aluminum, black aluminum | **Dimensions (W/D/H):** 43/16.5/44 cm | **Weight:** 20 kg | **Warranty period:** Two years | **Price:** €5500

Gaudios KG | Brandhofgasse 11 | 8010 Graz | Austria | www.sugdenaudio.com

Bluetooth Podspeakers

With their cute and cuddly curves, these colorful Podspeakers from Denmark have won the hearts of many music and design lovers. The company has now released the helpfully wireless two-way minimonitors with class D amplifier and Bluetooth connectivity for around €250. A list of dealers can be found on the company's website.

www.podspeakers.dk

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BROWSER N° 02



BROWSER N° 02

Handmade

From the creative think tank of Holger Stein comes an unusual turntable mat made of Japanese Washi paper. Called Pi, the mat is extremely thin and features an informed E-Pad. Pi will soon be available in several variations.

www.steinmusic.de

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BROWSER

Nº 02



The Marshall

Marshall Headphones are extremely proud to present the latest member of their headphone family: the Marshall MID Bluetooth. These premium Bluetooth headphones provide formidable sound quality and let the user enjoy more than 30 hours of wireless operation. The classically cool, timeless roadie look can be yours for just €200.

www.marshallheadphones.com

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BROWSER Nº 02

On the Go with Sennheiser

Audio specialist Sennheiser's PXC 480 wired travel headphones feature outstanding active noise-canceling technology in a package that's extremely comfortable to wear and has an impressive battery life. This means the headphones have everything offered in the recently released PXC 550 Wireless, just in a wired version.

www.sennheiser.com

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BROWSER N° 02



Digital Duo

Once again, Accuphase is aiming to set a new benchmark in sound quality with their fourth generation of digital SACD and CD drives and designated DAC converters. The combination of DP-950 and DC-950 with MDS++ technology handles PCM up to 32 bits at 384 kilohertz and 5.6 megahertz DSD. Both units feature a highly rigid construction that uses an improved version of the famous HS-LINK interface. Together, the pair of DP-950 and DC-950 cost about €45,000.

www.accuphase.com

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WHEN HMS LAUNCHES A NEW SERIES OF CABLES, HIGH-END MUSIC AFICIONADOS SIT UP AND LISTEN—



AND FOR GOOD REASON.



HMS Armonia

IN PERFECT HARMONY

By Claus Volke. Photos: Ingo Schulz, Claus Volke







MANY MUSIC
FANS DEMAND
ABSOLUTE NEU-
TRALITY AND AS
FAULTLESS AS
POSSIBLE SIGNAL
TRANSMISSION.



HMS Armonia
 Plug in, play, have fun: You don't need an engineering degree or specific sound preferences to enjoy the HMS Armonia cables. They perform their task with exemplary neutrality.

© FIDELITY Magazine

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

_____ For me, cables are not primarily a technical requirement for connecting devices and loudspeakers. Instead, they represent, first and foremost, a great opportunity to get just a little bit closer to achieving my very own personal ideal sound. I'm therefore also not interested in DIN, hi-fi, or other standards or technical specifications, just my idea of what constitutes great sound.

It's always been clear to me that all music lovers have different preferences, listening rooms, and very personal ideas about how their music should sound. However, one important requirement that many music fans have in common is the demand for absolute neutrality and as faultless as possible signal transmission. For exactly that reason—that is, to be sure I achieve neutrality of sound, I have been regularly using the products of the Leverkusen-based manufacturer HMS for the routine tests I've been carrying out for well over a decade now. This especially holds for test devices I am totally unfamiliar

with and want to know exactly how they sound.

No matter whether it's aerial, LF, signal, or loudspeaker cables, with HMS's products I can always be certain I am hearing only what's coming out of the devices. I'm sure the connectors don't "muddy the waters" and know it's practically impossible for external interferences such as magnetic fields and the like to affect the signal transmission. I'm now so well acquainted with the Gran Finale Jubilee product line from HMS that I can use these premium conductors to be absolutely sure my ears receive only what the designers of the devices in question intended—nothing more, nothing less. So, I would always be happy to recommend HMS cables to anyone.

And now there's a brand-new, middle-of-the-range cable series which, according to HMS head Hans M. Strassner, benefits from the technology found in the Gran Finale Jubilee line and all for a much more affordable price. Anyone who knows Hans M. Strassner, knows that exaggeration and

showy behavior are as alien to him as it would be to Boston Red Sox fans who would objectively praise a strong performance by the New York Yankees (and vice versa).

The new HMS line Armonia consists of small signal cables and loudspeaker connectors (single and bi-wiring versions). The fully redeveloped RCA connector has a parallel-balanced design consisting of two bundles of three HF braid wire OFCuLs on a central hollow core with a new antimicrophonic screen and a highly efficient double shielding made of oxygen-free silver. The cable is therefore immune to both sound vibrations and interference from electromagnetic fields.

One of the series' stand-out features is the virtually complete ferrite coating that quickly blocks any high-frequency interference. As with the loudspeaker cables, the outer sheath of the signal cables consists of a nylon fabric mixed with carbon that suppresses virtually all electrostatic influences. Starting at 1.5 meters in length, the loudspeaker cables ▶



SEEMINGLY LIMITLESS DYNAMICS AND PLAYBACK THAT'S COMPLETELY FREE FROM EXTERNAL INTERFERENCE.

are made to order and available in 50-centimeter increments. They also come supplied with 4-millimeter NextGen angled banana plugs or 6/8-millimeter WBT cable lugs, depending on the customer's desired connection option.

The RCA connectors come supplied with the famously good low-metal-content WBT Next-Gen plugs; the fully balanced XLR assembly comes in the form of XLR plugs and/or connectors from Neutrik (three pin and gold plated). Here as well, you only have to buy the length you actually need: For less than one meter, you have two options: 50 centimeters and 75 centimeters. Anything longer can be had in 50-centimeter increments.

The promised technology transfer from the Gran Finale Jubilee series is audibly noticeable right away in practically all device setups. This also holds true regardless of what is involved in terms of sources, transistors versus tube amplifiers, and quiet versus loud loudspeakers. The cables' signature properties include seemingly limitless dynamics and playback that's completely free from external interference. As a result, interference from sources

like, say, your neighbor's washing machine, are a thing of the past ... The wonderful recording of Mozart's opera *Idomeneo* with the historical music conductor René Jacobs, the RIAS Chamber Choir, the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, and famous soloists (Harmonia Mundi) from 2009 immediately showcases one of the Armonia series' exceptional capabilities. The outstanding soprano Sunhae Im sings the part of the Trojan princess Ilija, and although you would normally think it would be difficult to reproduce the rich tones of this soprano's voice, the HMS connectors demonstrate that they are more than capable of recreating in the room the immense energy and stupendous charisma with very refined differentiation and very clear articulation, all without creating any glassy hardness. The playback is also free from any superficial effects, which shows a clear contrast to cables that "tease" listeners with warped, unilaterally emphasized frequency responses but after a short time become annoying because their playback isn't exactly au fait with the truth. In comparison, however, listening to music with the Armonia line from HMS is a completely different experience:

The music reaches the listener with no airs and graces, just pure authenticity and an intoxicating level of intensity.

In Isabelle Faust's 2001 recording of Gabriel Fauré's violin sonata in A major, Opus 13, with Florent Boffard on the piano (Harmonia Mundi), the Armonia cables demonstrate just how much charm can be found in noble restraint. Chamber music is also reproduced with great authenticity. If cables transmit the signals with imperfections here, even if they are only tiny imperfections, or if they incorrectly emphasize individual frequency ranges, the melancholic and intimate dialogue between the two instruments can quickly turn into a musical conflict. The Armonia cables rely on balance and expressive implementation of the emotional depths of the as-yet uncontentious piece.

A slight detour into the timeless, fantastic live recording *EnRoute* (Verve) of the John Scofield Trio with Steve Swallow on bass and Bill Stewart on drums along with, of course, John Scofield on his semiacoustic guitar from 2004: Right from the opening track "WEE," the Armonias demonstrate how the solo ▶



THE MUSIC REACHES THE LISTENER WITH NO AIRS AND GRACES, JUST PURE AUTHENTICITY.

improvisations melt and blend with the underlying driving grooves to form an orgiastic tapestry of sound. The ensemble's sound, which sometimes seems almost physical in its changing configurations is, in spite of the fullness and density of the musical figuration, always nicely outlined and reproduced transparently without the homogeneity of the musical performance ever being threatened.

In conclusion: Both in terms of the LF and the loudspeaker cables, the new Armonia series is by far the most reasonably priced among the world's best connectors. You just can't get any more sound for less money right now. ■

LF and loudspeaker cables |
HMS Armonia

Assembly: LF cable with Neutrik XLR or WBT RCA plugs, LS cable in single or bi-wiring version with angled banana plugs or cable lugs from WBT |

Finish: Black braided fabric | **Warranty period:** five years upon registration | **Examples of prices for LF cable (2 x 0.5/0.75/1 m):** €775/€818/€860 (each additional 50 cm: an extra €85 | **Example of price for LS cable (2 x 1.5 m):** €1,190 (each additional 50 cm: an extra €190), surcharge for bi-wiring €160

HMS Elektronik | Hans M. Strassner GmbH | Am Arenzberg 42 | 51381 Leverkusen | Germany | Telephone +49 2171 734006 | www.hmselektronik.com



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

MILES, MILES AND GEILS

By Hans-Jürgen Schaal—Part I

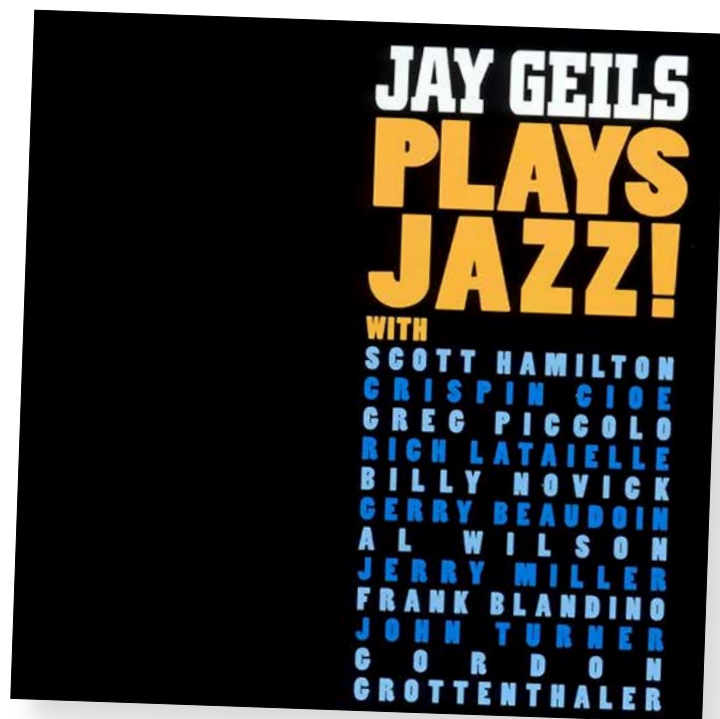


Covering normally refers to songs being performed by other artists, but actual album covers attract their share of impersonators, too. The covered cover: Is it a witty reference, respectful homage or parody? Or is there a deeper meaning behind it?

_____The New York advertising graphic designer John Hermansader also used to design vinyl covers every so often, for example for the jazz label Blue Note. He would usually place large letters at the top and small pictures of musicians underneath. At some point along the way, he passed this work on to an employee named Reid Miles. His first projects for Blue Note were the sleeves for some 12-inch reissues, among them the red and the yellow Monk album (*Genius Of Modern Music*). Reid Miles (1927–1993) became the label's go-to graphic designer, and for 15 years he designed almost every Blue Note cover, creating iconic pieces of commercial art in the process. Even when he moved to *Esquire* magazine and subsequently to other employers, he continued to execute the Blue Note covers on the side—for \$50 each. Miles was actually no jazz fan though. He very seldom listened to the recordings and relied on the eulogistic music descriptions of producer Alfred Lion for the cover designs. He swapped the Blue Note vinyls in second-hand stores for classical LPs. The eye-catching power of the legendary Blue Note covers typically stems from the interplay between typography and photography. Sometimes, photos served as just small components of the design, and sometimes Miles didn't use any photos at all. However, a large black area was rarely used—probably because it was used for the album *Somethin' Else*. And the album title wasn't at all misleading: This record really was

something else and became somewhat of a turning point in Cannonball Adderley's music career, which had begun three years earlier in a rather spontaneous and random manner, incidentally. Adderley had traveled to New York in 1955 only to enroll for graduate studies as he was rather happy with his job as a music teacher in balmy Florida. Legend has it that on his very first evening in New York, he headed out to the jazz club Café Bohemia, bringing along his alto saxophone as you wouldn't, of course, leave an expensive instrument like that in your car at night in New York. Oscar Pettiford's house band brought the unknown saxophonist up on stage, giving Adderley a baptism by fire and helping him make a breakthrough overnight. The music teacher from Florida was celebrated on the New York jazz scene as a sensation and hailed as the next Charlie Parker!

Whether a good decision or not, Adderley then set up a band. The record companies all scrambled to sign him but didn't support the band performances and after two years the saxophonist went bankrupt. The legendary trumpeter Miles Davis seemed to have been waiting to seize this moment. He had taken a real shine to Adderley: "He wasn't only an incredible alto saxophonist but also a really nice guy." Davis persuaded the heavyset and talkative Adderley to join his band, together with John Coltrane, and the sextet made the albums *Milestones* ▶



MILES, MILES AND GEILS

Part II

and *Kind of Blue*, which to this day are still considered the launchpads of modal jazz. In between, *Somethin' Else* was released: Davis had arranged a private studio date at Blue Note for Adderley. The trumpeter would have happily made his record there himself, had he not been under contract with the industry giant Columbia.

Davis therefore served as the “agent” for this recording as well as the artistic director. The choice and arrangement of the tracks are largely his. For Cannonball Adderley, he even departed from his basic principle of no longer making any recordings involving a sideman. In terms of the overall mood, *Somethin' Else* is a Miles Davis album: The muted trumpet provides the “cool” tone, and Adderley’s funky hard bop style subsequently comes across even stronger. With the arrangements for “Autumn Leaves” and “Love For Sale,” Davis would shape the further interpretation of these tracks—as with so many other standards. Even the ballad feature for Cannonball (“Dancing In The Dark”) was a suggestion from Miles. And the trumpeter wrote the title track personally—as really “something else,” namely a modal piece. The album *Somethin' Else* is a real milestone of modern jazz.

If, after almost 40 years as a blues rocker, a musician one day decides to make a jazz album, the outward allusion to a jazz classic is a meaningful signal to his fans: Watch out . Unusual content inside! In musical terms the album by the guitarist Jay Geils, well-known from his J. Geils Band, has little to do with *Somethin' Else*, even though he was a fan of Cannonball and Miles when he was teenager. *Jay Geils Plays Jazz* is a nostalgic album with catchy swing tracks, blues numbers, and ballads from back in the day. It is Jay Geils’ homage to his biographical roots and to legendary guitarists like Charlie Christian, Bill Jennings, and Billy Butler. A couple of prominent guests feature on it, especially worth mentioning are saxophonist Scott Hamilton (a hero of the Swing Revival of 1980) and Crispin Cioe (from the crossover band *Uptown Horns*). The result is no milestone for jazz. The witty point of the album lies in it evoking a time when jazz and rock ‘n’ roll and schmaltz were still somehow on good terms with one another. A charming trip down memory lane. ■

Cannonball Adderley: *Somethin' Else* (Blue Note CDP 746338 2)

Jay Geils Plays Jazz: (Stony Plain Records SPCD 1306)

Photo: Michael Zapf



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.

HAMBURG ELBPHILHARMONIE

Imagine you're designing a new car. You spend years running computer simulations, construct individual component groups and put them through their paces on test benches, inspect materials, and so on and so forth. After a few years, you've got to where you need to be: All the available components at the final design stage are pieced together to form the first drivable prototype.

What would be your next move? It's sure to entail completing numerous test drives, collecting measured values, making some changes, performing some major or small adjustments, carrying out the last test runs and then, and only then, unveiling the vehicle to the public. It's only at this point you'd let others drive it and the press get their hands on it.

A concert hall, which is at least as complex as a modern car, works a bit differently—especially if public pressure has ballooned out of all proportion due to the lengthy construction time and huge costs. In this case, the prototype's first test drive would be the actual public unveiling. I don't even want to think about how nerve-racking that must have been for the constructors.

The problem is you can't fine-tune a hall without doing it publicly as each hall sounds different with and without an audience in it. It also sounds different if the orchestra is large or small or if a string quartet or just one soloist is on stage. You need a broad range of regular concert performances to really get to know the hall properly—and then make the acoustical fine-tuning adjustments. This is standard. All large modern concert halls have had to go through a similar adjustment period, whether it's the KKL (Culture and Convention Center, Lucerne) or the Gasteig. The Berliner

Philharmonie also wasn't quite "ready to go" right after its renovation in the 1990s.

That's why we should all take a step back and demonstrate a bit of discretion when considering comments about the Elbphilharmonie's acoustics. I assume this breathtakingly gorgeous concert hall will sound significantly different again in one or two years' time.

And that also applies to recordings made here, too, which wouldn't exactly be very clever at this point. In any case, orchestras and sound engineers need to first get to know the concert hall. Recordings released so far sound rather flat, unbalanced and like they have poorly integrated supports. So we should give it all some time.

Unfortunately, I've not yet held a concert in the Elbphilharmonie, but I have had some rehearsals here. And I've heard rehearsals as well—when the hall was empty. This, of course, only tells half the story. I will actually play my first concerts here during the coming year, and then I'll have much more to say. At the moment, however, I can only share my first impressions.

The initial acoustic impression on the stage and in the hall is one of rare transparency and resolution. For those on stage that's good because you can really hear all your colleagues, which enables you to easily obtain all the information relevant to your musical interaction—you do, however, also unfortunately get the less important information from within the hall itself. If people blow their noses in the ninth row, it almost sounds like they're right next to you.

You get the same experience within the hall: In a good seat (I haven't wandered around the whole hall), you can really hear everything. ▶

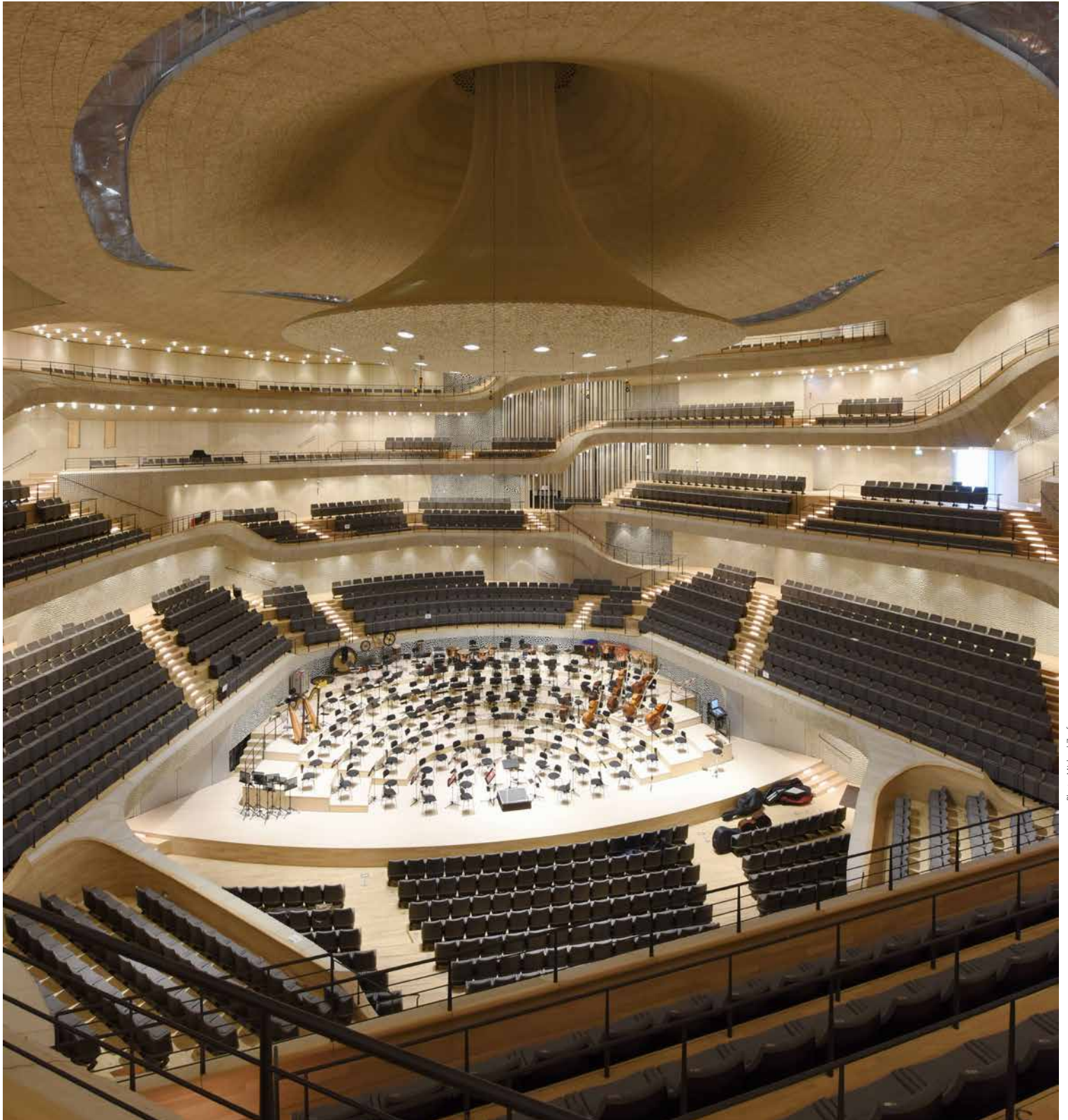


Photo: Michael Zapf

For complex, modern music, the sound is spectacular as not one single tiny detail gets lost in the commotion. On the flip side, however, the orchestra struggles to combine 12 to 20 first violins to form a cohesive whole. It's also fascinating to see how much volume the hall can tolerate: Even at high levels, things don't get "dense," only louder; yet everything remains transparent.

I'm excited about what will happen in the Elbphilharmonie in the future— how the acoustic specialists will successfully address the hall's weaknesses without jeopardizing any of its phenomenal strengths. But it is already one of the most exciting and stunning concert halls in the world. ■

Hamburg Elbphilharmonie | Platz der Deutschen Einheit 4 | 20457 Hamburg | Germany | www.elbphilharmonie.de



Various artists
Scratch My Back—Pye
Beat Girls 1963–1968
Label: Ace/Soulfood
Format: CD

THAT'S THE SPOT!

FORGET ABOUT SANDIE SHAW'S
LEGS AND FOCUS ON THE CD'S
SUBHEADING: PYE BEAT GIRLS! ▶



Nick Robbins has remastered 24 tracks by British girls who sang for the Pye label in the 1960s.



_____Pye & Co. Ltd. enjoyed commercial success during World War I supplying electronics to the British Army. During peacetime, Pye Radio Ltd. developed a television set; subsequently the market primarily called for radar technology and other military items. After that whole business of World War II and the reconstruction of the technical communications infrastructure had been done and dusted, the company branched out into the music industry and founded Pye Records in 1955.

Beat was a style of pop music in the 1960s. Skiffle, a poor man's rock 'n' roll that even the Beatles had experimented with as pimple-faced teens, had been all the rage before. After the beat boom came folk, psychedelic, blues revival, fusion, hard rock, disco, metal, and so on and so forth. As televisions became increasingly popular, it became more and more important to have girls on screen. With their jerking and twitching all over the place, the sweaty boys thrashing around on guitars and drums were in their element in muggy beat joints, but the camera never lies and inner beauty just wasn't shining through on TV.

In 1964, the BBC aired its first-ever episode of the weekly TV show *Top of the Pops* (*TOTP*). The Pye talent scouts were very much aware of how this concept depended on new and happy fresh faces and, in particular, attractive pairs of legs. In 1965, the German equivalent of *TOTP*, *Beat Club*, made its TV debut; the financially troubled ARD broadcaster Radio Bremen was unable to afford any expensive go-go prancers and so pointed the cameras at a performer like certain Jimi Hendrix (a letter written to *Hör Zu* by a member of the public after Hendrix's first appearance on *Beat Club* read: "Who on earth lured this ape out from the jungle with a banana?").

The 24 tracks on *Scratch My Back—Pye Beat Girls 1963–1968* were actually produced as playback material for girls in miniskirts to lip-sync along to; but as Nick Robbins began to remaster the compilation, he was pleasantly surprised by the sound quality of the recordings. "With at least every other song I got the feeling that the producer was an admirer of Phil Spector," Robbins recalls. "But they kept enough critical distance from their role model and didn't blindly copy his Wall of Sound. After all, Spector records with several drummers and heavy reverb effects do sound exciting, but are also exhausting."

The Pye producers saw to it that listeners had sufficient excitement à la Phil Spector by integrating the tintinnabulation of cymbals along with a few other sounds from folklore instruments that back in the day sounded exotic to the ears of *TOTP*'s regular viewers. Not only do Pye-label favorite Petula Clark and subsequent Eurovision Song Contest winner Sandie Shaw benefit from such attention to detail on this CD, but also, for example, Jan Panter, whose light and airy voice has been tenderly interwoven with distorted guitar sound.

If this CD hadn't been released, no golden-oldie fan would really miss these blond bombshells. Panter promoted her only Pye single in 1966 by throwing everything she had into it. Since the music journalists ignored her, she played for her target audience in small pubs and clubs in the of the far reaches of Britain and posed in a bikini for a glamor magazine—a style of promotion that still reliably boosts sales today. Luckily for us high-enders, such charms just don't work with us. Hey, excuse me! Would you please be so kind as to stop looking at Sandie Shaw's legs? I haven't quite finished yet. Ah, okay. I can't concentrate any longer now anyway. ■

Winfried Dulisch



Clearaudio / Peter Suchy

IN
SEARCH
OF
PRO-
FOUND
VINYL
TRUTH

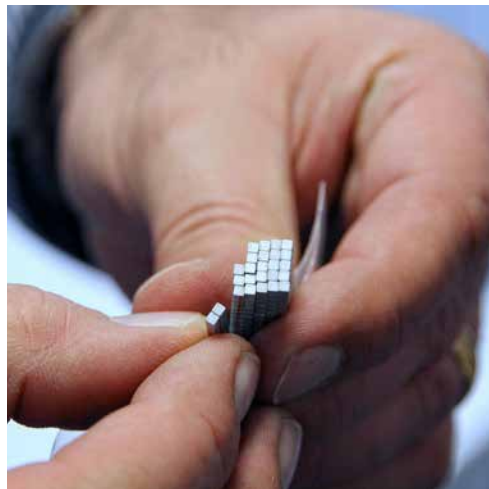
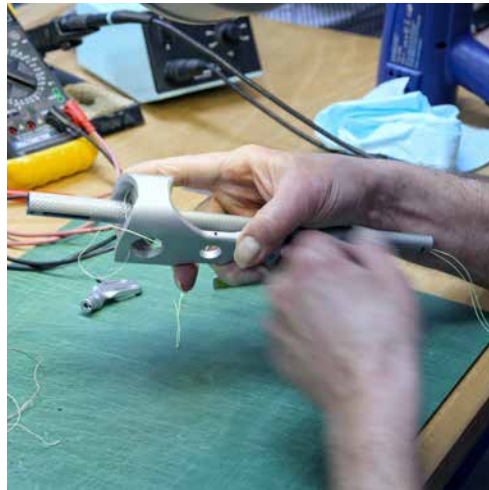
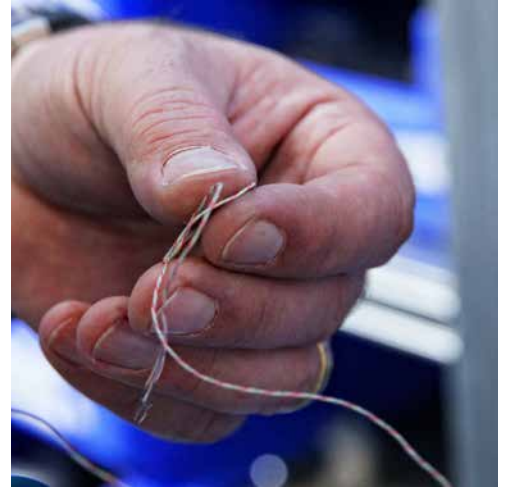
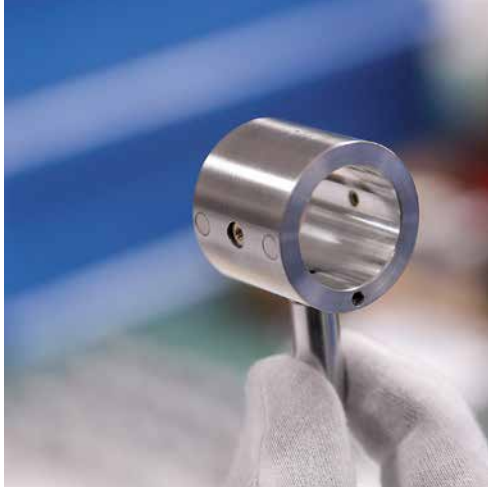
By: Patrick Pohlmann. Photos: Clearaudio, Ingo Schulz





Peter Suchy







The way the history of analog technology has panned out in Germany is linked to a certain extent to the Prague Spring. Had Peter Suchy not been permitted to leave the former CSSR in 1969 to settle in the Federal Republic of Germany, shortly before the

Iron Curtain was sealed tight once again, Clearaudio electronic GmbH would not have been established nine years later.

Suchy, an atomic physics graduate, had previously devoted his time to the fuel assemblies used in nuclear reactors. When he was a teenager, he put his fascination with physical

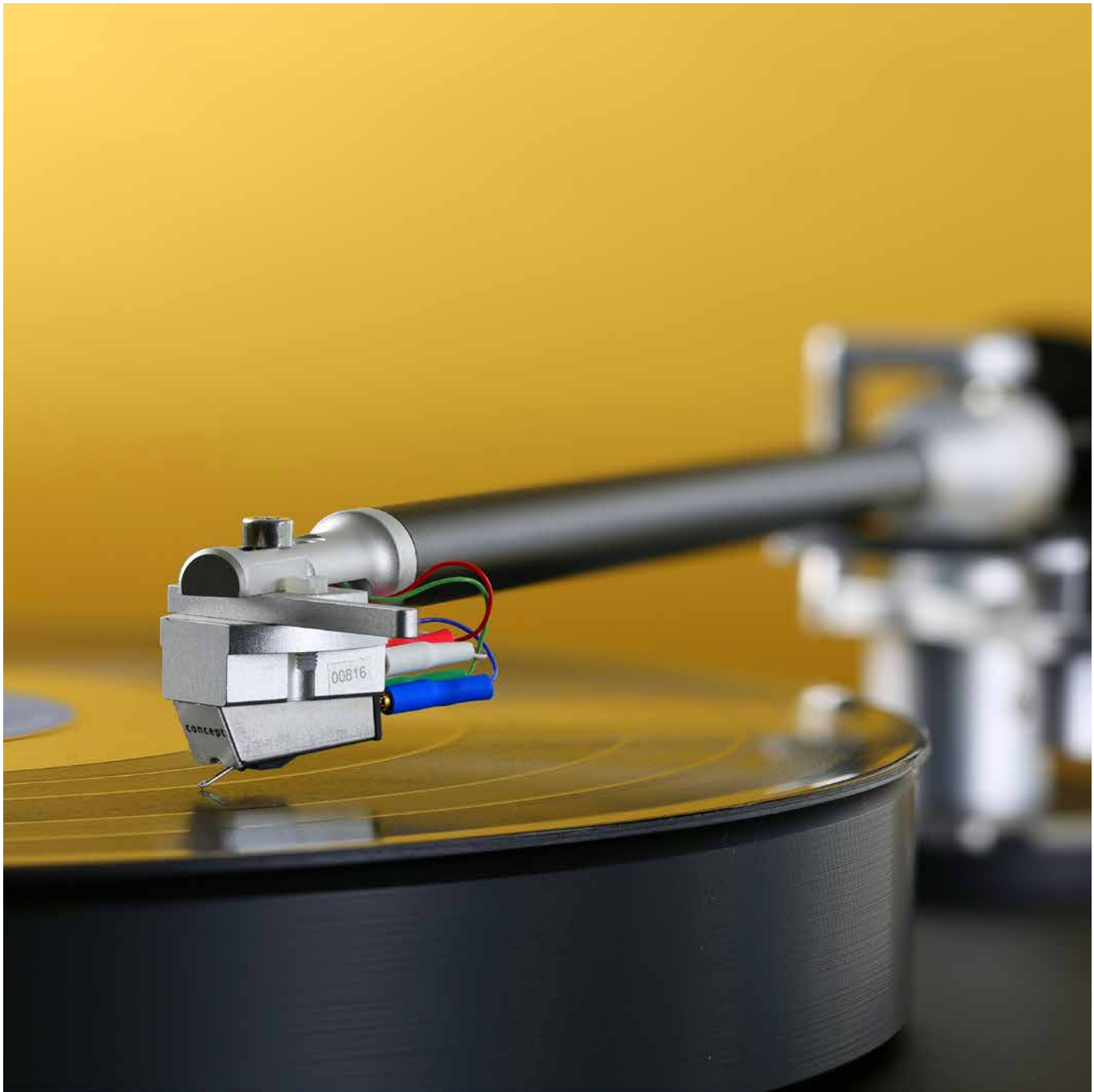
interrelationships into practice by assembling rockets. At the same time he had always had a passion for music, which he initially indulged in a very practical way: Whilst studying at the University of Prague, he played guitar in a rock band, covering hits by the Beatles, Shadows and Stones. The knowledge about what ▶



constitutes the right sound that he acquired as a musician and his natural inclination as a scientist to get to the bottom of issues, led him to concern himself with the question of how music can be reproduced on a sound medium without any loss of sound quality compared to a live performance. The search for a preserved-in-vinyl “musical truth”

initially led to his designing and developing two-way loudspeaker systems. Yet Suchy soon came to the conclusion that key sound-impairing influences occur where the record’s mechanical data is transformed into electrical information. Important milestones in the history of Clearaudio’s analog sound reproduction technology include the

first ever fully symmetrical moving-coil system, launched back in 1978, which provides almost infinite spatial three-dimensionality during stereo reproduction, the magnetic platter bearing that decouples the turntable platter from the turntable chassis and the recent Absolute Phono preamp, installed in the tonearm directly behind ▶

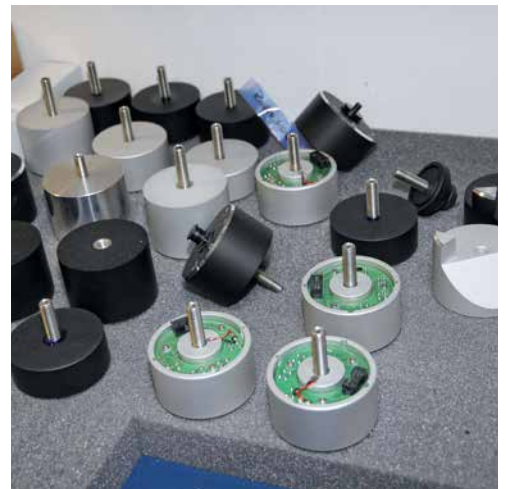
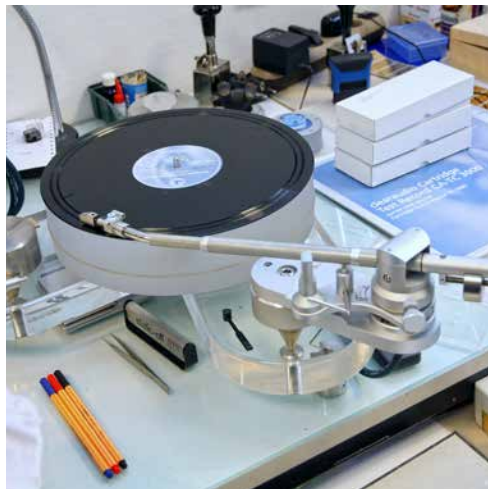
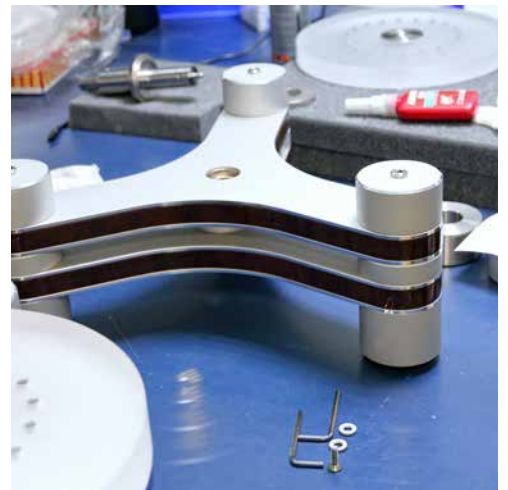
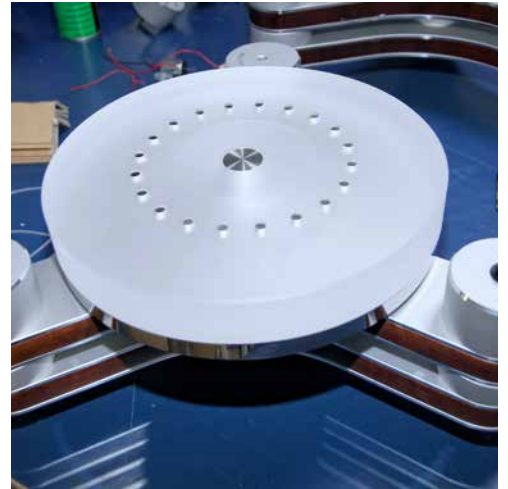


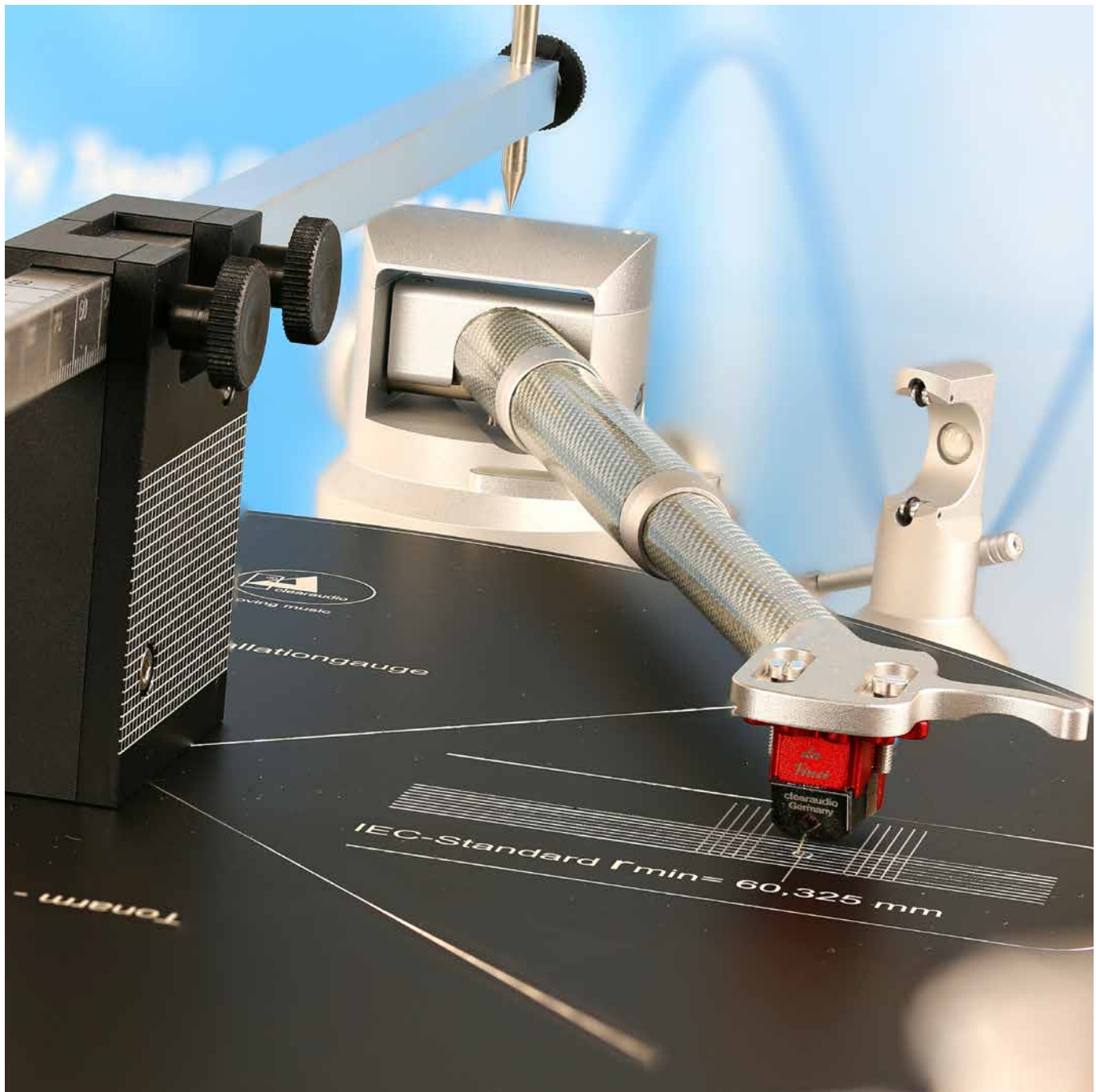
the MC system, which minimizes interference impacting on the electrical signals generated during sampling. Given the higher resolution level, all the more original sound information can be coaxed out of the grooves in the vinyl. In terms of zero-loss sound storage and reproduction, Peter Suchy is firmly

convinced that analog technology will continue to be far superior to digital for the foreseeable future, considering the former's distinctly higher signal resolution.

Given such a high degree of perfectionism, it is only logical that Clearaudio is dedicated both to producing phono

components and accessories as well as records and even music: a custom label publishes licensed and proprietary classical music, jazz and blues tracks on records made of a special anti-static vinyl. Suchy's plans for the future include other technical innovations as well as enhancements to the cutting ►





heads used in record-cutting machines. Clearaudio's claim to absolute timbral truth is also expressed in the company's logo, designed by Suchy: the Greek letter Delta, which stands for the "fourth music reproduction dimension", in combination with a rectangle that

symbolizes a loudspeaker magnet and at the same time embodies the four elements, fire, air, water and earth. The company, which now has a headcount of more than 40, has been managed by Peter Suchy's children, Veronika, Robert and Patrick since 2005.

In 2000 the company's headquarters were relocated from Fürth to a former Siemens plant in the Meilwald conservation area in Erlangen, where the bulk of the product components are also made. Today Clearaudio is represented in more than 80 countries. The ▶



Robert,
Veronika
and Patrick
Suchy

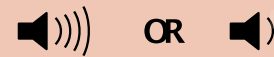


company's most important markets include the USA, Asia, Russia and then Europe. Another important business activity evolved from contract manufacturing on behalf of other providers. By launching neXtPEM in 2012, the family business is now actively involved in a completely different segment—regenerative energies. In partnership with the University of Erlangen the

firm is developing innovative proton exchange membrane (PEM) fuel cells and electrolyzers, applications for which include energy-self-sufficient homes. Former nuclear engineer Suchy has therefore come full circle to some extent in both career and scientific terms. ■

www.clearaudio.de

Volume up or down? A very quick interview with Peter Suchy where we wanted him to respond as fast as possible.



Volume up or down? *Up or down to match the music.*

Analog or digital? *Analog.*

Tube or transistor? *Transistor.*

Vinyl or download? *Vinyl.*

Cross-country run or gym?

Cross-country run.

Trends or tradition? *Tradition.*

Tea or coffee? *Coffee.*

Salad or steak? *Steak.*

Wine or beer? *Wine.*

Mountains or the sea? *Both.*

Book or screen? *Book.*

Jazz club or opera house? *Both.*

Bach or Beatles? *Both.*

Wagner or Wacken? *Wagner.*

Stand-by or plug out? *Stand-by.*

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.

BEYERDYNAMIC T5P

By Harald Wittig. Photos: Harald Wittig



Beyerdynamic T 5 p





_____Beyerdynamic's top-of-the-range T models, the T 1 and T 5, showcase the Heilbronn-based company's patented Tesla technology with sophistication and elegance. Recently, the company updated these models and launched a second-generation line. Together with its semiopen sibling, the T 1, the closed-back T 5 p also holds a top position on the portfolio's price list, although the T 5 p also targets mobile listeners in particular with great sound quality. This is the reason the T 5 p, with its 32 ohms, is a set of low-ohm headphones that really deliver: They are sensitive enough to still be able to play dynamically on feeble headphone amplifiers as well. Consequently, Beyerdynamic says they are (also) suitable for use with mobile devices. That doesn't necessarily have to, nor should it necessarily be, tinny, screechy cell

phones, but rather more appropriate high-res players. After all, high-quality headphones should be involved with reproducing high-quality music to serve audiophile ears properly.

Even from the dual-sided connection cable, which features a nice textile coating and is linked to the headphones using minijacks, it's clear to see that the T 5 p model is super dynamic. The conductor material is actually specially made from OCC (Ohno Continuous Casting) 7N copper known for its outstanding transmission quality. Any contemporary audiophiles will know that OCC-processed conductor material is only used in high-quality sound conductors and that Beyerdynamic is therefore not messing around with the T 5 p! The cable has been purposefully kept comparatively short for on-the-go ▶



listening. Longer connection cables, including a balanced cable for connecting to high-end headphone amplifiers, are also available starting at about €120.

In terms of the sound transducers' design, the new model is radically different from its predecessor, which itself received rave reviews. To start with, newly developed additional diaphragm damping has been designed to effectively reduce any sound-distorting treble frequency resonance. On top of that, Beyerdynamic has optimized the geometry of the sound transducers: Instead of the old single-layer construction, the new design uses a stable high-tech compound material. Together with the well-established Tesla technology, this results in sound precision that's particularly pleasing to the ear.

The T 5 p headphones are handcrafted in accordance with Beyerdynamic's high manufacturing standards. The workmanship, it has to be said, is absolutely top-notch. It doesn't get better than this—it just gets different. The super-soft headband and ear cups are made from high-quality synthetic leather with a protein-coated surface, and they fit snugly and softly over your head and ears. Although, these 350-gram headphones are not the lightest models out there, the carefully selected materials make them extremely comfortable to wear. The T 5 p doesn't push or pinch you, and even the dreaded heat buildup—a well-known problem with closed-back headphones—is a thing of the past. And it goes without saying that the Beyerdynamic's fit ensures excellent isolation, which helps achieve optimum bass reproduction. ▶



The T 5 p's sound is awesome as well: When connected to the headphone jack of the Pioneer XDP-100 R high-res player, the high-end headphones immediately reproduce a very dynamic and lively performance full of beautiful little details. When The Singers Unlimited start to sing their refined a capella arrangements sotto voce and bring their own bodies to vibrating in the crescendo, any aficionado will realize they have a really masterful set of headphones covering their ears. As is standard with Beyerdynamic, the neutral matching does not lay on the bass too thick or there's no over-the-top accentuation of presence. a gentle bump in terms of presence range is not at odds with this, rather it ensures a welcome freshness. Only when connected to a premier-league headphone amplifier does the T 5 p really soar to its full sound power potential,

however. With the Violectric HPA V200, the sound profile is incredibly stable and audibly more balanced with even more refined resolution. No matter whether its rock, jazz, or classical music, when connected to a headphone amplifier of similar standing, these high-quality headphones really are sensational and provide the listener with a wonderfully crystal-clear sound. ■

Closed-Back Headphones | Beyerdynamic T 5 p | Price: €1,200
 Beyerdynamic GmbH & Co. KG | Theresienstr. 8 |
 74072 Heilbronn | Germany | Telephone: +49 7131 6170 |
www.beyerdynamic.de

photo: by courtesy of AFP/Getty Images/BR, Fotograf Joe Raedle



History is made: On March 25, 2016, the Rolling Stones played their first-ever concert in socialist Cuba. In fact, it was the first concert ever in Havana by a band from the class enemy!... →

<p>Nov 9, 1976: First of several concerts by East German rockers Puhdys in the FRG at Hamburg's Fabrik.</p>	<p>Oct 25, 1983: Udo Lindenberg headlines at the Palace of the Republic in East Berlin</p>	<p>1988: The Scorpions play 10 concerts in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), Russia</p>	<p>Aug 12–13, 1989: Moscow Music Peace Festival, the "Woodstock of the USSR," w/ Bon Jovi, Mötley Crüe, Ozzy Osbourne, Scorpions a.o.</p>	
<p>1970</p>	<p>1975</p>	<p>1980</p>	<p>1985</p>	<p>1990</p>
<p>Nov 13, 1976: Wolf Biermann plays at Cologne's Sporthalle</p>	<p>Apr 7, 1985: Wham! becomes the first Western pop group to play in Beijing</p>	<p>Oct 17, 1987: Bob Dylan plays at Treptower Park (East Berlin)</p>	<p>Jun 16–19, 1988: The GDR's largest rock festival features Joe Cocker, The Wailers, James Brown and more</p>	<p>Jul 19, 1988: Bruce Springsteen appears at the Radrennbahn Weißensee cycling track</p>

photo: by courtesy of AFP/Getty Images/BR, Fotograf YAMIL LAGE

—>...A good six months after this scandal, eternal revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, who saw to it under his regime that rock music was banned, died. The concert DVD *Havana Moon* was released in November 2016 from Eagle Rock Entertainment.



1995

2000

2005

2010

2015

August 19, 2015: Lai-bach is in Pyongyang

March 25, 2016: Rolling Stones' album "Havana Moon" is recorded



PREVIEW

FIDELITY international No. 06

For the next edition of FIDELITY international, we've selected some really tasty dishes for you from the cornucopia of choices on the hi-fi menu. Take a look at the fantastic **Air Force III** from **TechDAS**, powered by the engineering know-how at Japan's legendary drive manufacturer Micro Seiki.

You can practically hear the craftsmanship!

"More light." These two words are said to be among the last spoken by the German poet and dramatist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Although it's unlikely he was sitting in front of a turntable at the time, we are taking

a look at a cartridge that exudes the spirit of Goethe’s words: a technically sophisticated “light saber” instead of the usual “scimitar.” Light up your hi-fi life by reading about the **DS Audio Master 1** optical cartridge. Our music tip: *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. Likewise analog, but considerably cheaper: the excellent new **Charisma** MM system from **Clearaudio**. Headphone fans can look forward to an in-depth test of the **Focal Utopia**. Moving away from the big names, we continue to find newcomers offering reasonably priced but surprisingly high-quality products. The **Maestro 116**, a speaker made by the Estonian company **Audes**, is a great example of just such a product. You will find these and many other interesting stories in FIDELITY international 06. It’s well worth the wait. The next edition of FIDELITY’s free English-language online magazine will appear at the end of August 2017.





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THE END

Thanks for reading issue 05 of FIDELITY international. Issue 06 will be put online by August 2017 or when ready. Be prepared and subscribe to our newsletter to get the latest news at first.