

FIDELITY

international | 09

english



09

02/2018 • May/June/July 2018

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



QUIETER AND STRONGER



In many audiophile circles, it is commonly believed that power conditioners and various other power-line accessories often do more harm than good, robbing the music of its vitality, color, and that oh-so-important, wildly intangible “boogie factor.”

AudioQuest’s **Niagara Low-Z Power Noise-Dissipation Systems** are designed to do the exact opposite. Niagara kills the noise while *honoring* the music, so that the listening experience can be exactly as it should be: compelling, immersive, *fun*.

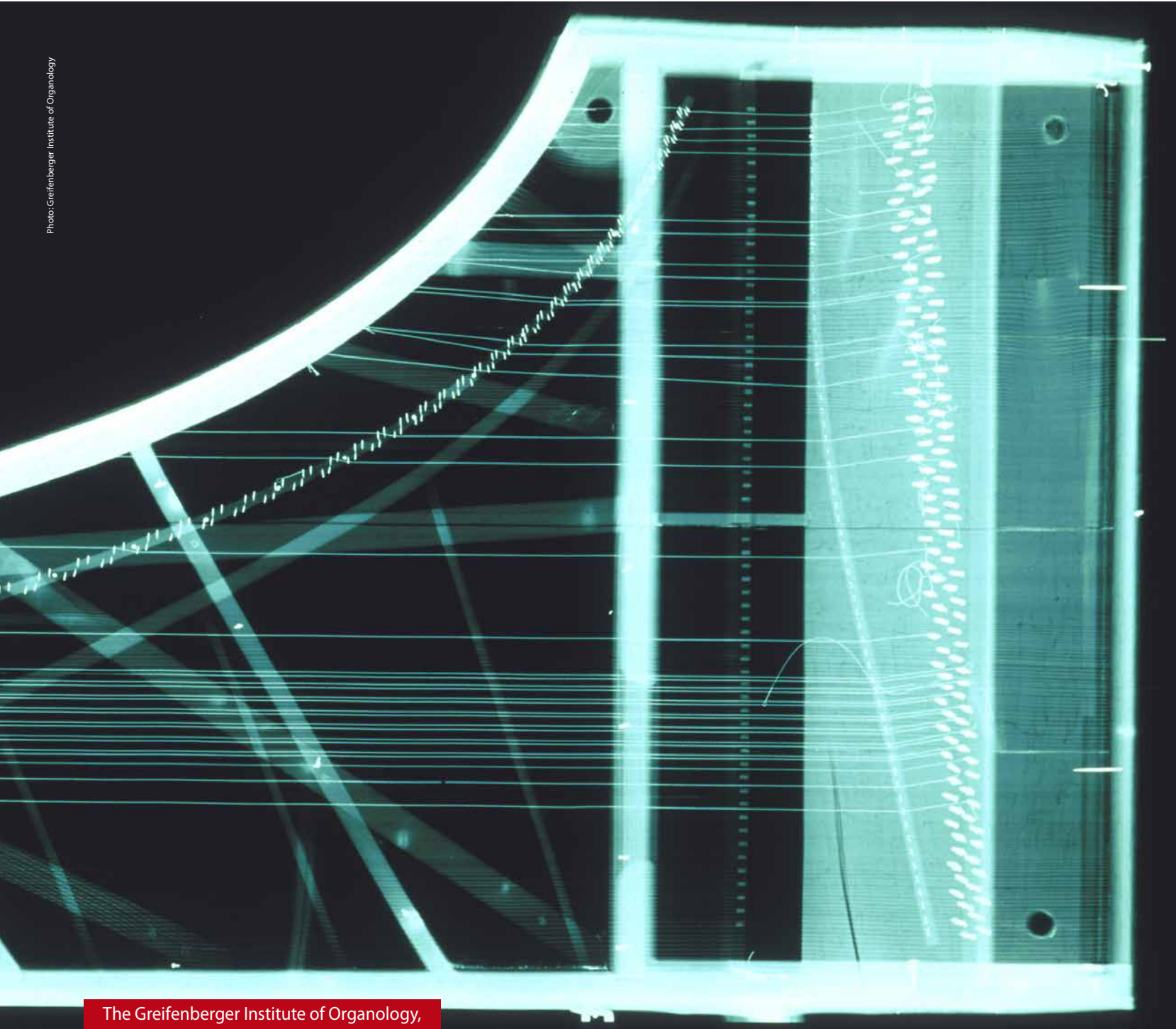
“The difference was huge. AudioQuest’s Niagara 1000 not only cleaned up the power, it did everything that is the *opposite* of killing the boogie.... It was as if my system had gotten a heart-shot of adrenaline.”

— Herb Reichert,
Stereophile,
April 2017

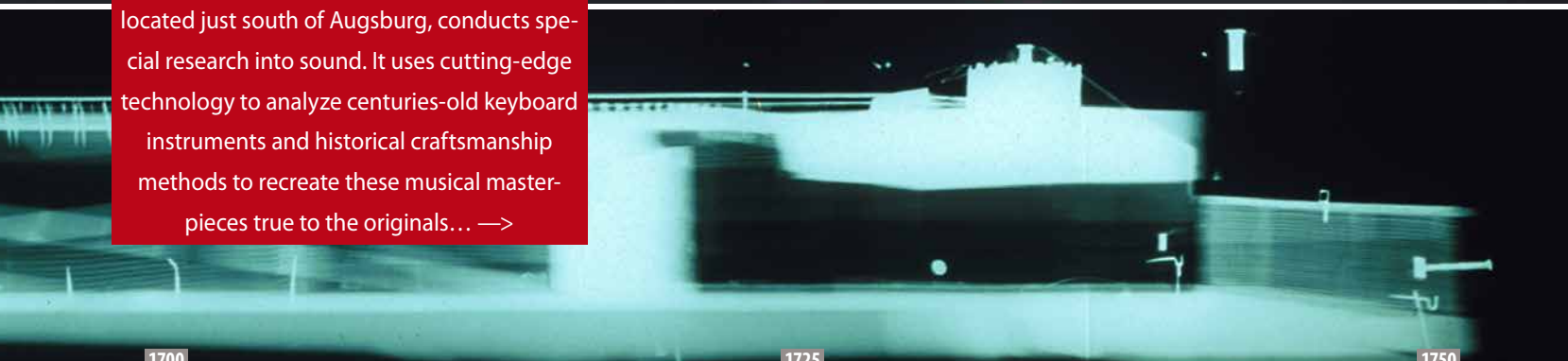


audioquest®

Photo: Greifenberger Institute of Organology

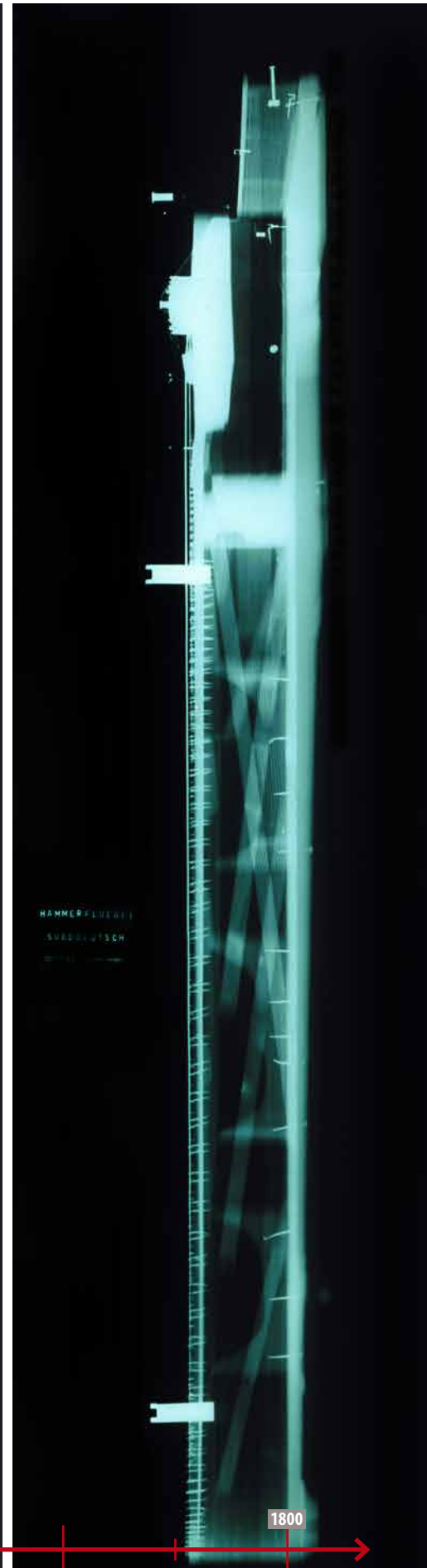
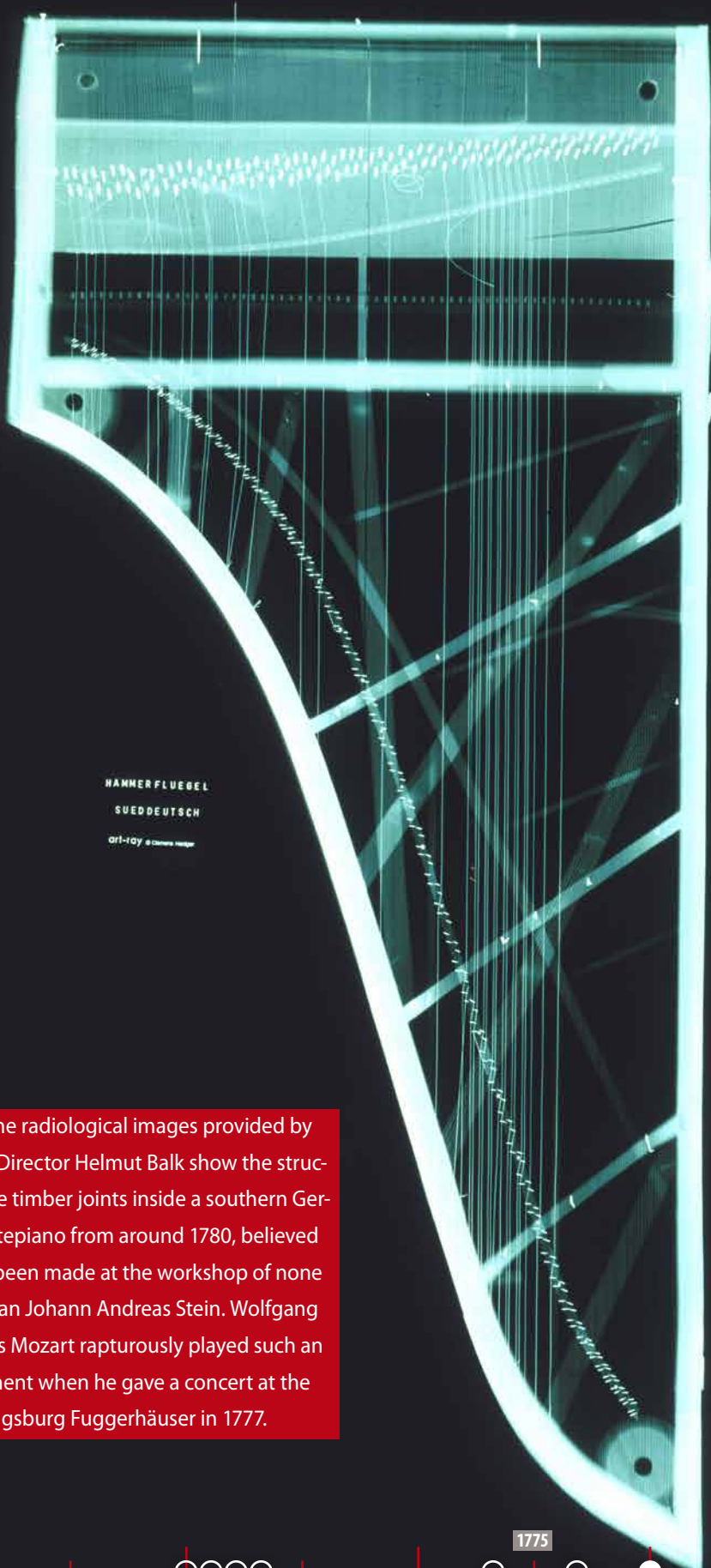


The Greifenberger Institute of Organology, located just south of Augsburg, conducts special research into sound. It uses cutting-edge technology to analyze centuries-old keyboard instruments and historical craftsmanship methods to recreate these musical masterpieces true to the originals... —>



1700	1725	1750
End of the 17th century: Bartolomeo Cristofori invents the pianoforte in Florence	1719: Leopold Mozart is born in Augsburg	1751: Johann Andreas Stein moves to Augsburg
	1756: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is born in Salzburg	1760: W.A. Mozart receives music lessons from his father Leopold
		1761: W.A. Mozart starts to compose

Photo: Greifenberger Institute of Organology



—>...The radiological images provided by Institute Director Helmut Balk show the structure of the timber joints inside a southern German fortepiano from around 1780, believed to have been made at the workshop of none other than Johann Andreas Stein. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart rapturously played such an instrument when he gave a concert at the Augsburg Fuggerhäuser in 1777.

1750

1775

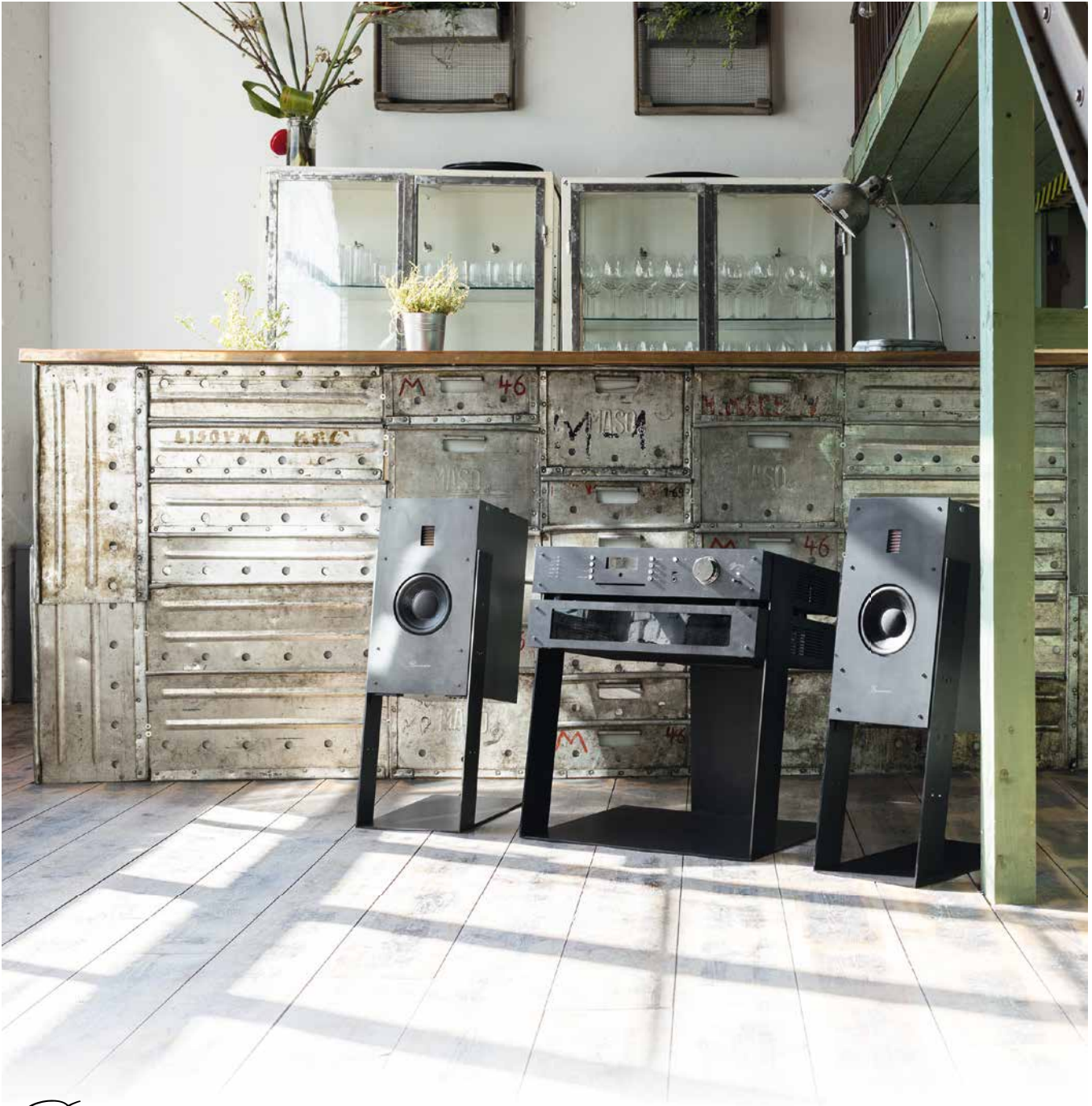
1800

1762: First concert tour of siblings "Wolferl" and "Nannerl"

1763: Leopold Mozart buys his son a travel piano from J.A. Stein

1773: J.A. Stein significantly improves the pianoforte's action mechanism

1777: Mozart's Concerto for Three Pianos and Orchestra, K. 242, is performed in Augsburg on three Stein grand pianos



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 designoriented concept incarnates both the timelessness of the Bauhaus style steel tube furniture and the industrial charm of modern lofts.

Cai Brockmann



picture: Ingo Schulz

DEAR READERS,

What do you think of when you hear the term “Scandinavian design”? For most of you, this will probably conjure images of functional, no-frills items of furnishing such as bookcases, lamps, and tableware. Maybe visions of B&O products also appear before your mind’s eye. Then again—if the tested equipment from Gate Audio is anything to go by—Scandinavian hi-fi can also mean sensual, bold design. Besides their sound, these Danish products impressed us on other levels, too.

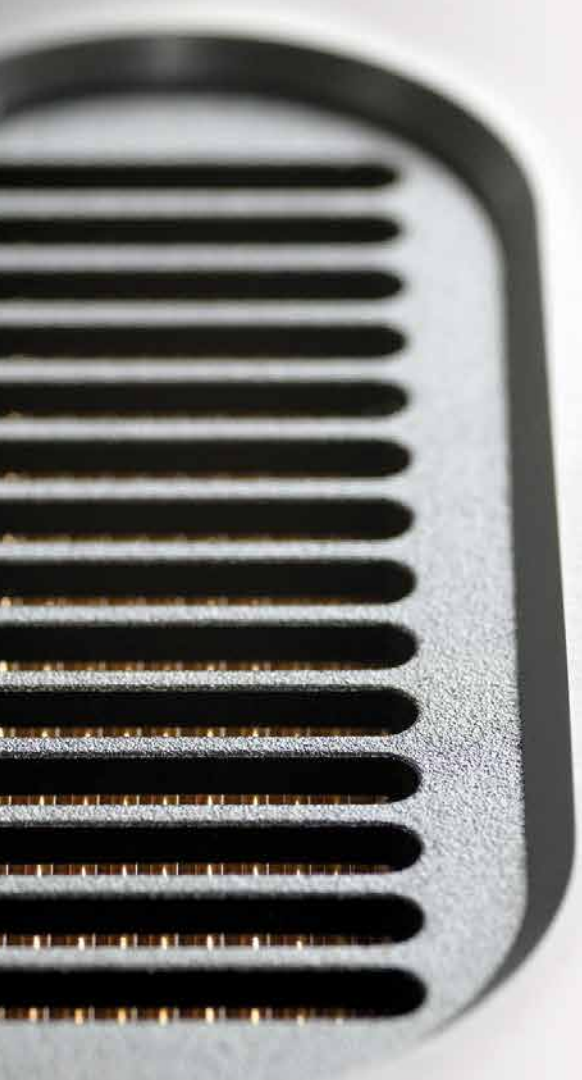
On the analog technology side, Transrotor is represented in this edition by a sensational MC cartridge with Japanese origins. SRA, a small Austrian manufacturer, sent us a “double-decker” turntable with the auspicious name of Seismograph. An ultramodern but reasonably priced combination of DAC-preamp and class-D amplifier made its way to us all the way from Boulder in the beautiful US state of

Colorado. With its MP 3100 HV Multi Source Player, T+A provided us with an example of superb engineering “Made in Germany,” as did Valvet with its small but powerful mono power amplifiers.

We visited the Axpona in Chicago, one of the leading hi-fi trade shows in the world, and were in Los Angeles when the high-end Technics SL-1000R was unveiled in Los Angeles. On top of all this, we take a look behind the scenes at the Philharmonie de Paris and report on the well-known cable specialist HMS. We hope you enjoy the ninth edition of FIDELITY INTERNATIONAL—the German Voice of Premium Audio.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cai Brockmann". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.



When
science,
engineering
and
emotion
meet.

in
ATRIUM 4.1
ROOM E 117



CONTENT № 09

02/2018
May/June/July



Equipment

- 010 Preamplifier, Mono Power Amplifiers and CD Player
Gato Audio PRD-3S, PWR-222 and CDD-1
- 028 Turntable
SoReal Audio Seismograph II
- 043 Multisource SACD Player
T+A MP 3100 HV
- 073 Mono Power Amplifiers
Valvet A4e
- 092 Cartridge
Transrotor Tamino
- 120 DAC with Power Amplifier
PS Audio Stellar Gain Cell DAC + Stellar S300
- 133 Record Weight
Subbase Audio Vinyl Harmony Clamp

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

Standards

- 003 Fanfare
- 006 Editorial
- 024 Browser No. 1
- 067 Browser No. 2
- 141 Finale
- 143 Preview
- 145 Imprint



CONTENT № 09



Stories

- 057 Report
Hi-Fi Show Axpona 2018, Schaumburg, IL
- 110 Report
HMS elektronik / Hans M. Strassner
- 078 **The American Corner**
Triple Whammy. Danny Kaey on How to Retail in Hi-Fi

Music

- 103 **Covered Album**
All in Black. Queen vs. The Verve
- 105 **Concert Halls of the World**
Philharmonie de Paris
- 107 **Longtrack**
The Beatles. Abbey Road Medley

FIDELITY Award 2018

- 042 Saxx CoolSound CX 30
- 072 HMS Energia Suprema
- 101 Valvet A4
- 109 Audiospecials Phonolab

Reviews in this Issue

- 010 **Gato Audio**
PRD-3S, PWR-222 and CDD-1: Preamplifier,
Mono Power Amplifiers and CD Player
- 120 **PS Audio**
Stellar Gain Cell DAC + Stellar S300:
DAC with Power Amplifier
- 028 **SoReal Audio**
Seismograph II: Turntable
- 133 **Subbase Audio**
Vinyl Harmony Clamp: Record Weight
- 043 **T+A**
MP 3100 HV: Multisource SACD Player
- 092 **Transrotor**
Tamino: Cartridge
- 073 **Valvet**
A4e: Mono Power Amplifiers



Gato Audio is looking to combine the virtues of classic design with modern soundscapes.



So just how well does this sweeping electronic ensemble from the Danes really fare?





Gato Audio PRD-3S, PWR-222 and CDD-1

ENHANCED LISTENING

By Roland Schmenner. Photography: Ingo Schulz









The words “Danish design” tend to conjure up images of homes both functionalist and minimalist in the tradition of classic modernism that still maintain a certain cheerful playfulness about them and keep décor to a minimum. This association sprang to mind when the FIDELITY editorial team announced it would be receiving a preamp and power amp combo plus CD player from Copenhagen-based, small-scale manufacturer Gato Audio. To cut a long story short: My expectations weren’t disappointed. After all, Danish design doesn’t stop at form following function. No, the Danes pair form and function with a generous slice of sophistication and a high-class, high-quality look and feel.

Many audiophiles will have undoubtedly already heard of Thule Audio and GamuT. Sound wizards Kresten Dinesen and Frederik Johansen both played leading roles at these small-scale manufacturers before they joined forces to create Gato Audio in 2007, bringing another pioneering Danish developer on board in the form of Rasmus Holm. The company is headquartered in the small town of Herlev near Copenhagen. There, a development department and extensive testing and quality assurance facilities could be set up and final assembly of the devices carried out.

Four devices sat in front of me, all with the same shape and elegant curves. Only their displays and an obvious rotary dial on the preamp helped me to distinguish them from one another. It has to be said that they’re definitely too attractive to be hidden away somewhere, a fate you might swiftly impose on some monoblocks that, when positioned behind the loudspeaker, would help you save an arm’s length of loudspeaker cable. Speaking of cables, Karsten Grämkow from Phonar (Gato

Audio’s distributor in Germany) recommends balanced cabling between the preamp and the power amp and, where possible, also from the source devices to the preamp, which is par for the course in my household anyway.

Warm-up exercises

Bursting with curiosity as to how these visually stunning specimens would sound, I threw all my hi-fi wisdom out the window and connected the combo straight “out of the box” and fired up the devices with the scherzo from Mahler’s *Symphony No. 2* conducted by Pierre Boulez. A large-orchestra piece is always a great litmus test the first time you get your hands on new components, but here the off-colors among the woodwinds and the limited dynamic range of the basses and drums were hard to miss. After barely 10 minutes, I had to throw in the towel and acknowledge I had shot myself in the foot. The golden rule is right: Even transistor power amps need at least a good hour or so to reach their full sound potential. The PWR-222’s round temperature gauge is a handy gadget in this regard. It both helps you identify the optimum operating temperature and warns you of any potential overheating. It took a good 15 minutes before the gauge, now at about the 9 o’clock position, signaled an initially acceptable audio output. My experience tinkering with these Danish design pieces over the next few weeks would reveal that they need around 60 minutes to reach their full power and sound potential—that is, when the needle had reached about the 12 o’clock position. Incidentally, this temperature is maintained almost all the time at normal load. Anyone who finds this too monotonous after awhile can also switch from the round display field to the VU meter, which is exceptionally sensitive

and practical to use and neither permanently fidgets in the red zone nor requires excessive volume to really take off from the zero position. Anyone who doesn’t want any distractions at all can simply turn the display off altogether.

But back to my initial audio experiments. I first turned my attention to the PRD-3S preamp with the integrated DAC and connected it to my standard studio power amp. The Vienna Philharmonic woodwinds made it clear that the preamp incorruptibly errs on the clean side as I didn’t pick up on any discernible off-colors. Oboes and clarinets sounded just as they should, with no trace of euphony. The impression of a light, audible warmth setting in stems from Gato considering the whole affair when producing a wonderfully uniform sound. If my own preamp functions a bit more like a surgical knife performing an autopsy where instruments are assigned to their set location with unflappable holography, the Gato PRD-3S impressively produces an inimitable flow, a richness of sound that remains continuously audible and acoustically transparent.

Digitalitis

In light of the price-performance ratio, there’s no doubt the Gato preamp is a veritable bargain, in particular when you take into consideration the formidable qualities of the integrated DAC that’s based on a PCM1794 chip from Burr-Brown and internally processes all incoming digital signals with 24 bits or 192 kilohertz. Not only are all current standard inputs covered with RCA, Toslink and USB, but the Gato PRD-3S has even been equipped with aptX Bluetooth 4.0 to meet future mobile requirements. The conversion using a MacMini with material played through Audirvana was so perfect I sometimes felt I was listening to an ▶







analog source. Never sharp in the treble range and the obligatory richness and power in the upper bass realm: An album like Lambchop's *Mr. M* could even draw in an audiophile like me listening at low volume—a feat not all converters can automatically pull off. This would be a real stretch for some of its competitors, even those with much heftier price tags. Gleefully I scoured the Audirvana library. I wanted to dive into music like the peppered deep bass and soaring vocals on the new album from drum and bass legend Goldie then let myself be blown away by

the creaking, whipping double bass twists and turns of the free jazz maestro Jan Roder—all immediately tangible in the room, demonstrating the perfect match of DAC and preamp.

Gentle dominance

The temperature gauges of the two PWR-222s had reached the 12 o'clock position and the monoblocks could now use my Magnepans to demonstrate if the Danish engineering artistry could really work some magic. It's common knowledge that

Maggies need a firm hand; but with certain notably boisterous power amps, they deliver a slightly exaggerated sharpness and extremely dry bass. In an effort to provoke the Gatos a bit this way, I went to the CD rack and pulled out some daunting digital recordings from the late 80s and early 90s. But neither with U2's *Achtung Baby* nor Japan's *Oil On Canvas* could I tempt the monoblocks to tease out the Maggies' audio shenanigans. Adam Clayton's bass pulsed deeply with just the right reverberation to match Bono's falsetto in "The Fly." Gently thrusting ▶



piano chords accompanied David Sylvian's deep tenor in "Nightporter," perhaps one of the most beautiful pop ballads ever given how delightfully unsentimental it is. And while the power amps effortlessly sustained the acoustic merits of the mid-and-high-frequency range that I had already heard the preamp reveal, a very distinct quality now emerged in the bass range that perfectly amplified the entire spectrum. The Gato twins do not tend in any way whatsoever to show off with their 450-watt

output power or to ostentatiously flex their muscles. No, with them it's more a case of having the reserves available if and when they're needed—and that's whether they're connected to the magentostats or even the Mission 751s, which, after 25 years, I turn to when I want to indulge in a little bit of nostalgia. In standard operation (what is that anyway?), the monoblocks direct "their" loudspeakers with gentle yet firm authority, keeping them precisely on track.

In-house innovation

During all this, I took a moment to contact the distributor and dig a little deeper into what exactly makes the circuitry of the Gato monoblock so special. After all, it fundamentally differs from the class-D technology that features in most of the company's integrated amplifiers. The developers in Copenhagen responded to say it was the in-house developed Twin-FET technology. Whereas ordinary ▶

ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

Turntable: TW-Acoustic Raven .5 | **Tonearm:** SME 309 | **Cartridge:** Clearaudio Concept MC | **Streaming:** MiniMac with Audirvana Plus | **SACD player:** Denon DCD 2000AE | **Preamplifier/DAC/headphone amplifier:** Grace Design M 903 | **Power amplifier:** Yamaha P2500S | **Loudspeakers:** Magneplanar Magnepan 1.5, Mission 751 | **Headphones:** Focal Utopia | **Cables:** Cardas, Voxox, Sommer Cable | **Accessories:** Oyaide, Oehlbach

amplifiers in standardized MOSFET push-pull operation find it difficult to generate a perfectly balanced signal, Gato's TwinFET achieves this effortlessly thanks to two identical and perfectly matched transistors. This, according to the Danes, is why this natural, never lackluster sound can be achieved, a sound that positively sets itself apart from what ordinary transistor power amps can produce.

Should you decide to opt for vinyls as your source material, the Gato trio of amplifiers will provide ample reward by bathing you in full-bodied sonority, reproducing the sound of the good old analog days in perfect harmony but without sounding the least bit outdated, as was the case as I listened to the new MFSL reissue of Miles Davis' *E.S.P.* The Gato sound embodies an altogether classic timelessness.

Player or converter?

Gato itself describes the CDD-1 top loader—which, apart from the display, is the spitting image of the company's other devices—as a “DAC with a drive.” A cross-comparison with the preamp-integrated converter reveals that the player's DAC does its job a little more transparently, giving tracks slightly more weight in terms of the fundamental tone. Then there's the fact that the digital section of the CDD-1 doesn't have the fundamental upsampling of the PRD-3S and “only” plays the exact file format. However, I

found it just as interesting to investigate the player's disk drive features and how the digital machine integrates into the overall context of the ensemble when it functions solely as a CD player.

To come straight to the point: Only on rare occasions have I ever come across such an “analog” sounding CD player! And as such, the CDD-1 fits in perfectly as well as seamlessly into the overall signature sound of the Gato family. Unlike what happens with directly streamed files, music from CDs sounds a tad more full-bodied and captivating. As a result, I felt the Emerson String Quartet's nonstop pizzicati in the penultimate movement of Bartók's *String Quartet No. 4* more palpably in the room with the directly played CD than with the ripped version. Here, the plucked strings sounded somewhat harder but also more precise, which ultimately boils down to a question of personal taste. What does, however, take some getting used to is the CDD-1's display: It simply shows the running progress of the CD (or track) in a “porthole” window but not the elapsed minutes and seconds—it's comparable with the position of a tonearm on an LP. Another nod to the vinyl turntable is the partially open top loader cover that let's you enjoy the wonderful experience of watching colorfully adorned CD faces spinning around and around. A nice, unusual idea conjured up by the Gato developers, but it does mean you have to carefully dust the drive's lens from time

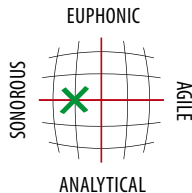
to time as the drive is not fully closed. All in all, the “DAC with a drive” is not just a pretty face; the preamp–power amp (PRD-3S–PWR-222) combo is an ideally harmonized complete system. As the saying goes, three's a charm; or, if we count the Gato monos twice, perhaps four is.

Ready for the future

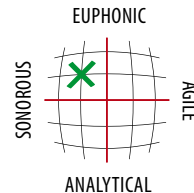
Since we started with a look at the specific design and the specific look and feel of the devices, let's end on that note, too. You see, several color options are available for the housing covers for all the components. The authorized Gato retailer sells interchangeable modules in high-gloss black, white, and walnut veneer for a very reasonable €150. This means you'll never tire of looking at the devices, and, if you change the wallpaper in your living room or music room, you can change them to match, too. From a musical and technical perspective, you can rest assured the three (or four) Gato devices are ready for whatever the future throws at them: With the latest digital technology in the preamp and the CD player, the innovative TwinFET circuitry in the power amp, and sound that seems altogether timeless in its balanced overall characteristics, the Danes have a huge success on their hands. And it's a success that will be able to satisfy the need for outstanding sound and outstanding design for years, if not decades, to come. ■

**Gato PRD-35**

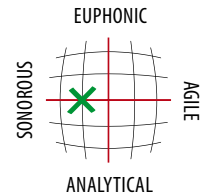
Preamp and DAC in perfect harmony, a tonally incorruptible command center with perfectly graduated three-dimensionality.

**Gato PWR-222**

Gato's monoblocks provide energy for every conceivable loudspeaker, and sound classy, sonorous and unflappable—and are far too beautiful to be hidden away!

**Gato CDD-1**

Gato's combo-player celebrates the finest sound with CDs and hi-res files and, thanks to its various connections, is optimally equipped for the digital future.

**Gato Audio PRD-35**

Functional principle: Preamplifier/DAC | **Analog inputs:** 2 x unbalanced (RCA), 1 x balanced (XLR) | **Digital inputs:** each 1 x USB (B), optical (Toslink), coaxial (RCA), Bluetooth (aptX) | **Analog input impedance unbalanced/balanced:** 20 k Ω /40 k Ω | **Analog outputs:** 1 x unbalanced (RCA), 2 x balanced (XLR) | **Output voltage unbalanced/balanced:** 6.5 V/13 V | **Output impedance:** 75 Ω | **Finishes:** aluminum silver with housing cover in high-gloss black, white or walnut veneer | **Special features:** digital data processing with 24 bit/192 kHz (automatic upsampling), interchangeable housing covers (€150), 12-volt standby trigger | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 32.5/10.5/42 cm | **Weight:** 7 kg | **Warranty period:** two years | **Price:** €2,990

Gato Audio PWR-222

Functional principle: Mono power amplifier | **Output power (8/4 Ω):** 250 W/450 W | **Inputs:** 1 x unbalanced (RCA), 1 x balanced (XLR) | **Input impedance:** 100 k Ω | **Output:** 1 x loudspeaker (WBT NextGen) | **Finishes:** aluminum silver with housing cover in high-gloss black, white or walnut veneer | **Special features:** Interchangeable housing covers (€150), 12-volt standby trigger | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 32.5 cm/10.5 cm/40 cm | **Weight:** 16 kg | **Warranty period:** two years | **Price for pair:** €13,980

Gato Audio CDD-1

Functional principle: CD player + DAC | **CD formats:** CD, CD-R | **Digital inputs:** USB (B), S/PDIF (coaxial) with max. 2 bit/192 kHz | **Analog outputs:** unbalanced (RCA), balanced (XLR) | **Digital output:** S/PDIF (coaxial) | **Finishes:** aluminum silver with housing cover in high-gloss black, white or walnut veneer | **Special features:** Interchangeable housing covers (€150), 12-volt standby trigger | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 32.5 cm/10.5 cm/37.5 cm | **Weight:** 10 kg | **Warranty period:** two years | **Price:** €6,990

Phonar Akustik GmbH | Industriestr. 8–10 | 24963 Tarp | Germany | Telephone +49 4638 8924-0 | www.phonar.de

BROWSER

Nº 01



Aurum Integrated Amplifier with Audio Streaming

While amplifiers and network players capable of streaming offer flexibility in terms of their use, their sound quality frequently leaves something to be desired. With its new stereo-integrated amplifier A10S, Quadral takes a different approach and combines state-of-the-art streaming technology with the exemplary acoustic virtues of the Aurum integrated amplifier. Based on the Aurum A8 and priced at €3,200, the A10S comes with the Aurum app, a Wi-Fi module, Ethernet, USB-A and a new remote control.

www.aurumspeakers.com

+++

BROWSER

Nº 01



Back in Black

KEF's familiar R700 has been available since last December in a limited black edition for the pair price of just under €3,000. The special limited series of 500 numbered sets features a muted, all-black Uni-Q driver, black trim rings, black chromed ports and feet in matte black.

www.kef.com

+++

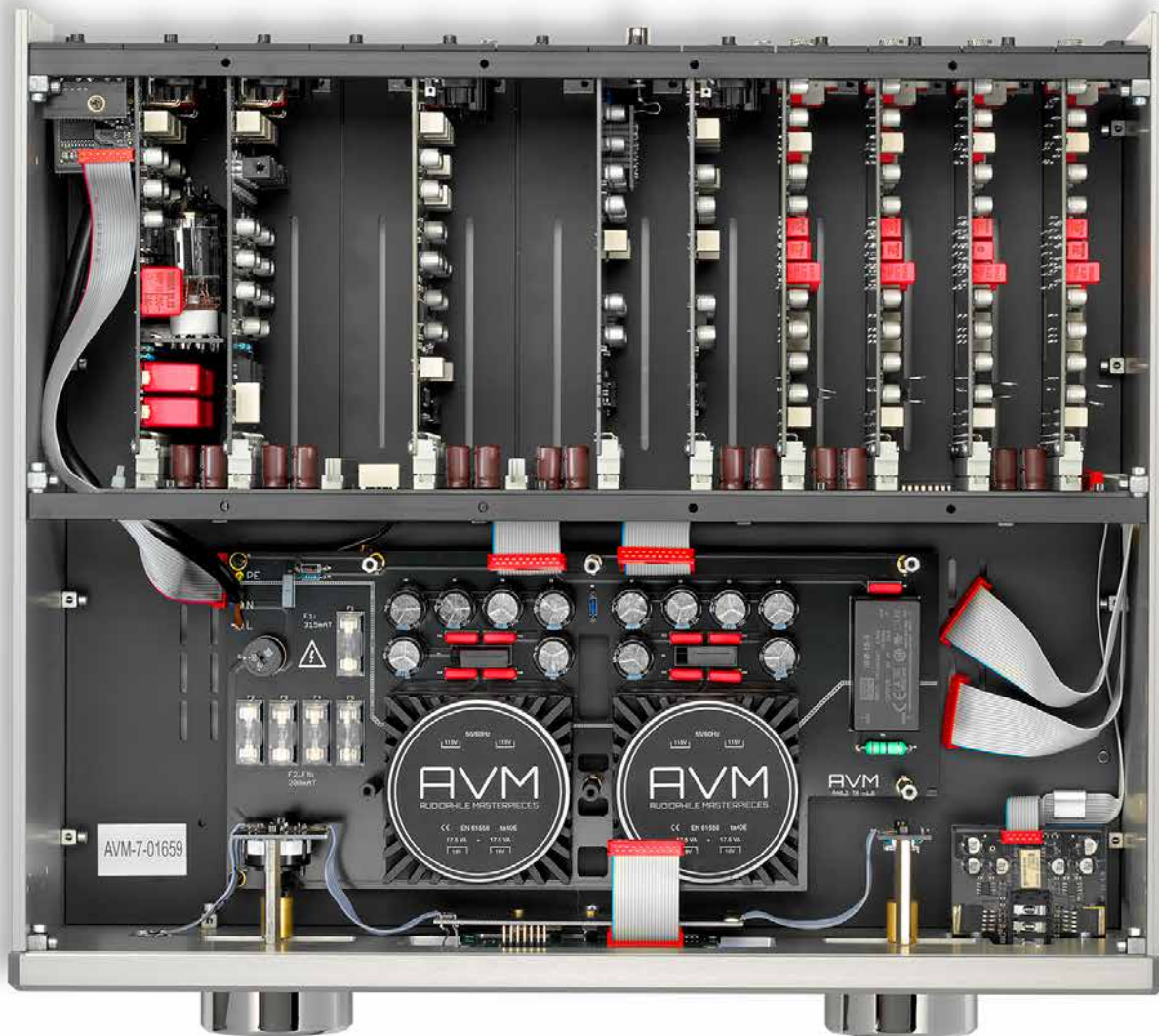
Flexible Modular Concept

AVM has thoroughly overhauled its flagship preamplifier. The modular concept of the Ovation PA 8.2 now enables customized configuration of the inputs and outputs through new plug-in cards that are compatible with predecessor model PA 8. A tube output module and a tone controller are also available. The price for the base unit is approx. €6,000.

www.avm-audio.com

+++

BROWSER Nº 01



BROWSER Nº 01



An Eternal Reference

Refinement of the TALIS loudspeaker series from T&A has been ongoing for almost 20 years. The speakers' housing, crafted from extruded aluminum profiles, provides not only a superior design, it also offers incredible stability thanks to the body's sophisticated structure. Highly refined, latest-generation chassis and crossover filters form the basis for the excellent sound characteristics of the new TALIS speakers, which represent the perfect symbiosis of German engineering expertise, design, and performance.

www.ta-hifi.de

+++

SoReal Audio Seismograph II:

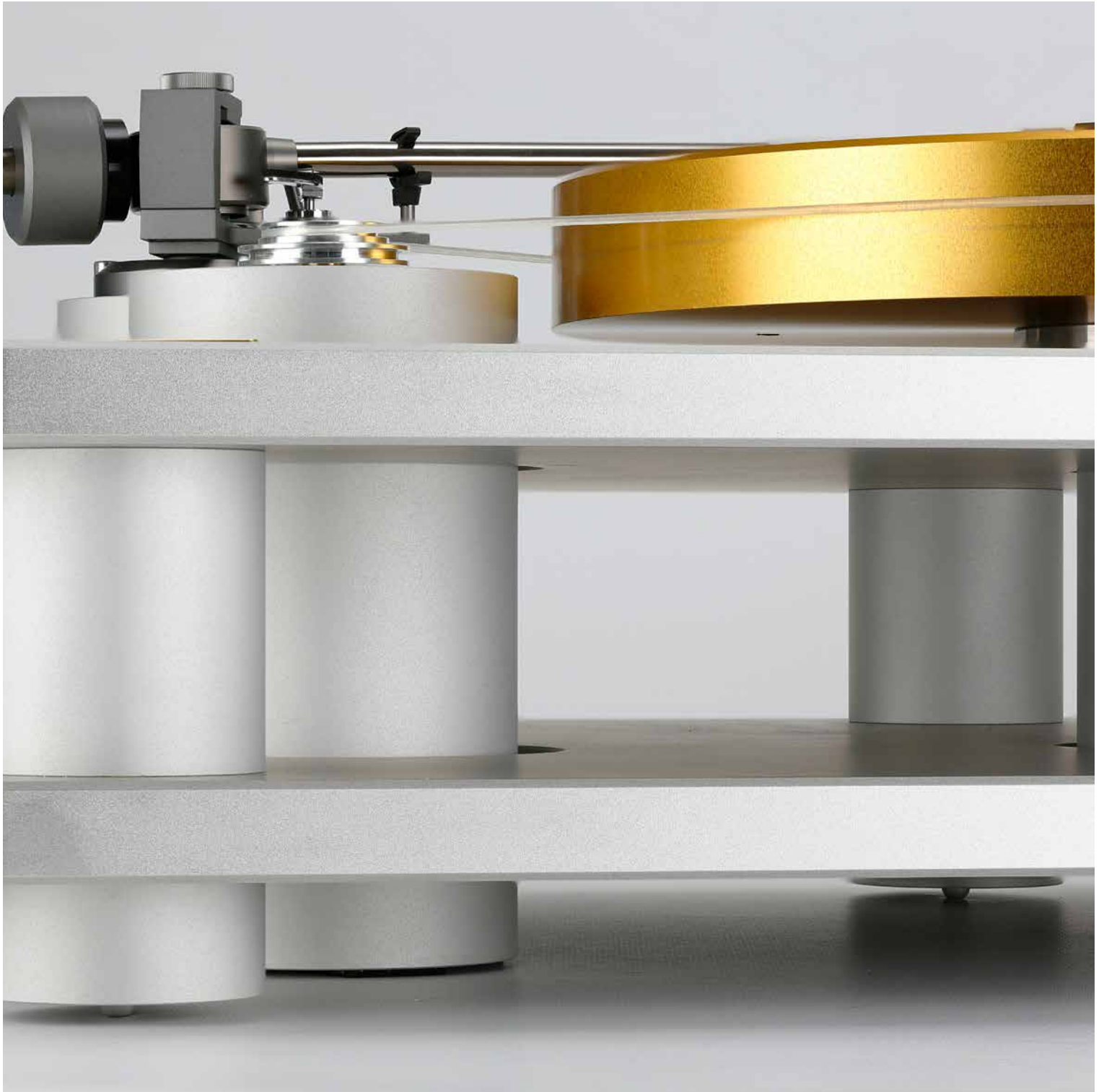
FLYING ON THE WINGS OF MUSIC

By FIDELITY online editorial team. Photography: Ingo Schulz, manufacturer



THIS DOUBLE-DECKER IS RIDICU-
LOUSLY HEAVY, BUT IT CAN STILL
SOAR TO DIZZYING HEIGHTS.







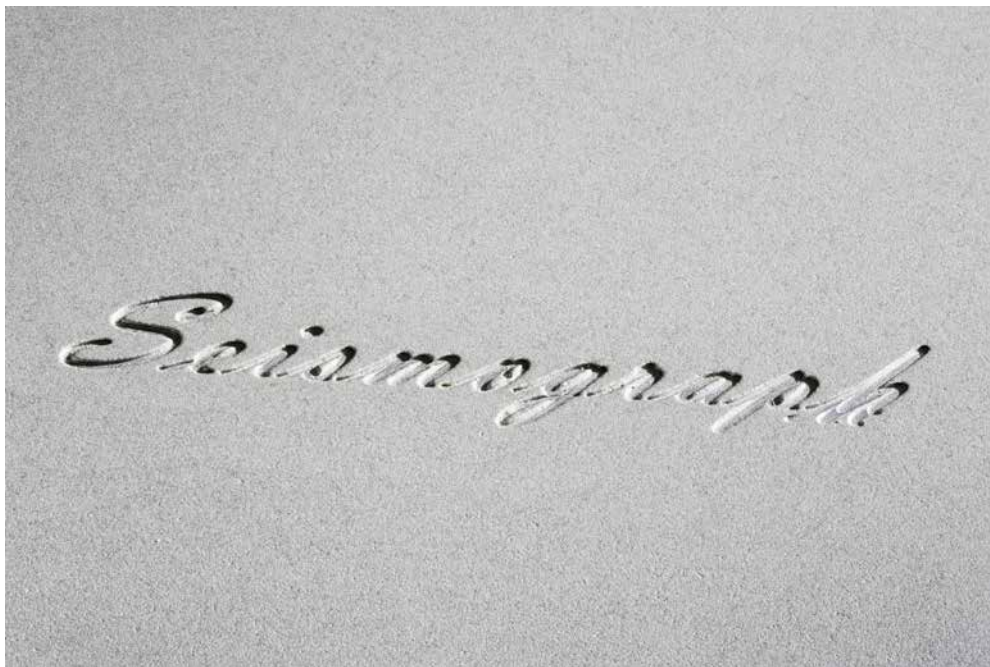


_____“Aircraft-grade aluminum” yes—but make it the durable kind: Everything about the SoReal Audio Seismograph II is so stable that it gives new meaning to the expression “built to last.” Austrian developer Othmar Spitaler wants his turntable to be “as solid as a rock,” as he puts it. He’s managed to achieve just that by applying the principles of classic nonsuspended turntable construction: This machine, which costs €22,000, is essentially made from two 21-millimeter thick anodized aluminum plates milled from solid material into the XL dimensions of 63 centimeters by 46 centimeters. The two plates are immovably interconnected with solid cylinders. The top level includes the ultraprecise platter bearing (with self-lubricating bronze bushing) and

the tonearm bases. The cylindrical drive unit with motor and pulley rests on its own feet, protrudes upward through corresponding cut-outs in the double-decker, and has no direct mechanical contact with the Seismograph’s load-bearing surfaces. Incidentally, the “II” in the model name indicates the FIDELITY test device can accommodate two 12-inch tonearms. It’s best to go ahead and place the order at the same time for the version of the tonearm base that fits with the types of tonearms you already have at home. In terms of equipment, SoReal Audio boss Danyel Rondthaler opts for the high-class workmanship of Jelco paired with the refined MC system Etsuro Urushi—a combination that sounded marvelously grandiose, rather “matter of fact,” and, in line

with the visual appearance of the heavyweight, quite grounded in the FIDELITY listening room. Othmar Spitaler clearly didn’t pluck the name “Seismograph” out of thin air: Rondthaler sees his handmade turntable as a kind of measuring device that isn’t allowed to lead a life of its own and fully refrains from interfering in musical performances—and therefore is able to not only cope with just about any vinyl but also provide the ideal playground for exploring the sound characteristics of various tonearms and cartridges. And to ensure this happens, the mounting surface should also be as good as it possibly can be. This was also a valuable factor during our audio tests, particularly combined with the fact that the Jelco tonearms, which are supplied as standard ▶





equipment, feature the SME mounting for headshells—still incredibly practical, even decades after its invention: All you have to do is unscrew the coupling nut, fully remove the mounted cartridge, install another one, and adjust the tracking force—job done! And because the editorial team always has access to various mint-condition legendary cartridges, the fine-tracing Etsuro Urushi, light and airy in the treble and precise in the bass, was swapped for an Ortofon SPU #1 in just a few quick and easy steps that seriously highlighted the turntable’s merits but also completely changed the signature sound of the SRA Seismograph II. If the Urushi erred more toward a pastel palette, the comparably inexpensive SPU countered with an explosion of bright colors. It would

be like holding up a Monet next to a Van Gogh. It did wonders for Madeleine Peyroux’s voice on the brilliantly mixed MFSL version of *Careless Love*, one of the best albums of the century, whereby the focus was now more clearly on authority, luminosity, and emotional energy without losing any of the Billie Holiday–like fragility.

The Seismograph II came across as a fully relaxed architect of large, precisely measured spaces where every sound has its own place.

And it did this with great enthusiasm, which is definitely not par for the course for large nonsuspended turntables—there wasn’t even the slightest trace of fatigue or sluggishness. This becomes particularly apparent when you stick with the same musical genre

but switch from upbeat chamber jazz to bold big-band sounds: Large-scale bands aren’t just about having the proper arrangement, they also have proper potential to get your fingers snapping and your toes tapping. Spitaler is, by his own admission, a fan of classical music and jazz, and he always prefers “acoustic” vinyl productions over any other kind of electronic experiment. However, we couldn’t resist the temptation to feed the German-Austrian turntable creation with some of the “harder” stuff and stuck a few typical DJ vinyls on the eight-kilo platter, which, by the way, is also lathed and/or milled from solid material like the rest of the turntable.

Incidentally, Spitaler’s construction uses a conventional—of course, intentionally selected—synchronous ▶





motor without any elaborate electronic control: “The weight of the platter is enough to ensure that even the slightest fluctuations in the power supply do not audibly impact the turntable’s speed,” the developer states with conviction, selecting the last recital by Vladimir Horowitz, which the highly gifted Ukrainian piano virtuoso recorded shortly before passing away in 1989, as evidence and placing it on the turntable. Anyone who knows a thing or two about piano music and vinyls will know how precarious and touchy playback of slow passages can be if the turntable’s synchronization isn’t 100% on the money. As expected, the SoReal Audio Seismograph II continues to display a sense of stoic calm, portraying fading chords just as organically

and fluently as it replicates Horowitz’s überprecise attention to rhythm.

The more-than-obvious claim that a drive’s design accounts for the lion’s share of a turntable’s sound quality was fully confirmed. When we changed the tonearms and cartridges as part of our extensive test runs (the Seismograph got on famously well with the large SME V; we screwed in MCs and MMs from EMT to Koetsu and from Grado to Clearaudio), the character could be changed very delicately and at times excitingly in line with personal preferences, but the Seismograph always retained a real sense of composure and authority. Also contributing to this is the fact that distortion and interference, which can never really be fully avoided with analog playback, appears

to be so far in the background with the SoReal Audio Seismograph that playback seems almost digital—and I really mean that as a compliment here. It’s important to Spitaler that his drive “sounds great with quite normally recorded vinyls,” a point he keenly stresses. After all, music lovers and vinyl collectors don’t usually limit their music to just “audiophile stuff.” No, their shelves typically hold collections that reflect musical spectrums spanning whole lifetimes. It’s been sometimes very surprising to see what this drive has been capable of extracting from the grooves of heavily played vinyls and how gracefully it deals with the acoustic traces of decades of use. While there’s no denying the scratches and clicks, these—like all other types of interference— never push ▶









SoReal Audio Seismograph II
Down to the smallest detail consistently puristic, the Seismograph is an uncompromisingly musical record player. This double-decker turntable perfectly supports any tonearm.

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

EUPHONIC

SONOROUS

AGILE

ANALYTICAL

© FIDELITY Magazine

ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT
Digitalquellen: Audio Note CDP-2.1x, CDT-3 + DAC-3, Marantz SA-10, Musical Fidelity M1 CLIC, Mark Levinson 390s | **Tonarme:** Jelco SA 750L, SME V | **Tonabnehmer:** Audio Technica AT33 Mono, Clearaudio DaVinci V2, EMT JSD S75, Etsuro Urushi, Grado Reference Master 2, Ortofon SPU #1, | **Phonoentzerrer:** Audiospecials Phonolab 1.0, Clearaudio Absolute Phono, Esoteric E-02, Pass XP17 | **Vorverstärker:** Mark Levinson No. 38s, Musical Fidelity M1 CLIC, Pass XP-12 | **Endverstärker:** Mark Levinson No. 27, Musical Fidelity M1 PWR, Pass XA25 | **Vollverstärker:** Hegel H360, Marantz PM-10 und HD-AMP1, NAD M32, Vincent SV-238 MK | **Kabel:** Audio Note, Audio-Quest, HMS, In-Akustik, Vovox | **Zubehör:** Audio Replas, Subbase Audio

into the foreground. And because the SoReal Audio Seismograph has been designed with extreme stability in mind, it even manages to read battered vinyls with nonchalance. The only real challenge you'll have is in adjusting the super-low-resonance mounting surface so it's meticulously horizontal when you set up the anodized drive, which is available standard in black, silver, or gold. But this is something that just purely and simply needs to be done for all serious turntables. What we determined, once again, was that a base from Subbase Audio provided the perfect foundation for achieving optimum sound quality.

You can change the speed of the Seismograph by manually repositioning the drive band on the motor pulley. Even a limit switch would have diluted SRA's deliberately puristic design. Seismograph owners will be happy to

do without such a luxury, however, as they'll be rewarded with a richness of sound that simply could not be achieved with a lightweight full player. The musical Seismograph also lives up to its name by even delicately and neatly reproducing every little subtle sound difference that may exist—for example between different (and highly recommendable) turntable mats. At the end of one of the listening sessions, after my "obligatory" work for the day was done, I went to the shelf and pulled out my favorite pop vinyl, which still hasn't lost any of its freshness or charm even after 33 years: Paul Simon's *Graceland*. And with this premium-grade fuel on the platter, the splendid Seismograph double-decker took off and left the ground at lightning speed, reducing the gravitational force to zero, and started to fly—with us on board. Within a few split seconds, we found ourselves in a South

African recording studio where the powerful voices of the all-male choral group Ladysmith Black Mambazo could be heard recording the extremely melancholic and emotionally powerful tribal hymn "Homeless" with Paul Simon. It's 1985 again and this glorious moment in world music history is playing out right now. Sublime! ■

Turntable | SoReal Audio Seismograph II

Functional principle: Nonsuspended turntable with belt drive | **Special features:** Manual speed selection, tonearm mounting bases per customer request | **Finishes:** Duralumin, anodized in black, silver, or gold, all two-tone combinations for base unit and platter possible; other finishes available for an additional fee | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 63/21/46 cm | **Weight:** approximately 38 kg | **Warranty period:** 10 years | **Price:** €22,000

SoReal Audio Sales, Danyel Rondthaler | Aresinger Str, 36 | 86561 Unterweilmbach | Germany | +49 (0) 8445 2670030 | www.soreal-audio.de



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



The chic CX 30 made by SaxxTec certainly caught our eye when we saw it. And at a price of just €650, the elegant speakers, which also come in high-gloss black, sound fantastic, too. Their fine AMT tweeter certainly has something to do with it. Right on the money!

T+A MP 3100 HV

TRUE
VIRTU-
OSO

By Harald Wittig. Photography: Harald Wittig, Ingo Schulz



A TRUE VIRTUOSO
THAT CAN CON-
VINCINGLY REN-
DER EVERY IMAGIN-
ABLE PIECE THANKS
TO ITS SUPERIOR
TECHNIQUE AND
MUSICALITY. THIS
MULTIMEDIA PLAY-
ER FROM T+A IS
IDEALLY SUITED AS
A DISTINGUISHED
REPRESENTATIVE OF
TRUE VIRTUOSITY.



Use the Source knob to select the source or operating mode of the unit. All of the current settings are continuously indicated on the display. The USB In port (on the right) is intended for USB drives to play hi-res files in the USB device mode.



———“Theory and application”—that’s the meaning behind the two-letter name T+A, the high-end manufacturer based in the eastern Westphalia city of Herford that has developed and produced premium-class playback systems for more than four decades. The company’s superstars are the eight devices from the HV series: equipment uncompromisingly dedicated to peak performance and zealously celebrated

by both hi-fi enthusiasts and the trade press. The youngest member of the elite HV family is the MP 3100 HV, offered at the princely sum of about €13,500. The multisource SACD player, an “(almost) anything player,” can handle all the digital audio world’s relevant formats and signal sources. Unlike its brother the MP 3000 HV, the new player also masters signal processing from DSD bitstream files thanks to the MP

3100 HV’s new SACD drive. Stemming from T+A’s proprietary development, it reads CDs and SACDs with the highest possible quality. But that’s far from all: The noble unit offers the new T+A hi-res streaming board that lets audiophile digitalists use music services such as Tidal and Internet radio as well as “USM Master Mode” and HD streaming from network servers, and enables the connection to a home network ▶

DESPITE ITS MANY PORTS AND CONNECTION OPTIONS, THE BACK PANEL IS NEATLY ARRANGED. THE TWO SEPARATE POWER CABLES, ONE EACH FOR THE DIGITAL AND ANALOG UNITS, ARE NOTEWORTHY.

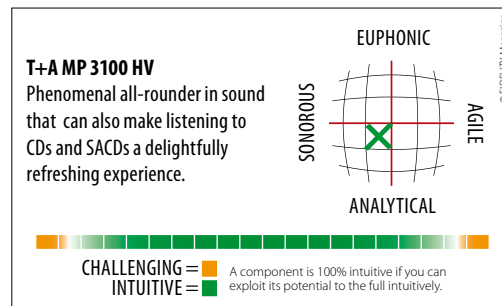




The interior is meticulously tidy: Five clearly defined sections along the unit's sides accommodate both the switched-mode power supply for the digital unit and the linear power supply, which has been upgraded with two toroidal transformers for the analog unit.







via LAN and WLAN. The player also features a versatile tuner that can handle FM, FM HD, and DAB+ as well as a Bluetooth streaming module with state-of-the-art wireless technology for those constantly on the go. Whew. Taking a moment to process all that makes you realize the MP 3100 HV can apparently make multiple devices obsolete.

Weighing in at 26 kilos and possessing a size reminiscent of American-proportioned integrated amplifiers, the MP 3100 HV requires a rock-solid location with ample dimensions. Once it's been set up, the device reigns commandingly over your listening room and, thanks to the tasteful exterior, offers visual appeal. It goes without saying that, even when scrutinized with a very critical eye, the workmanship is absolutely flawless, so we'll not waste another word on this topic. Glancing at the front, we spot the two large buttons helpfully labeled Source and Select that feature a push-turn mechanism. We also see a central touch-sensitive display where all the settings can be adjusted. The buttons themselves are precision masterpieces that pleasingly caresses the user's hand, and the easy-to-read display is satisfyingly complemented by the well-thought-out menu navigation. The elegant FD100 remote control included with delivery enhances ease of operation, thanks in part to its

handsome display. Those who find the remote too old-fashioned can also control the unit using the TA Control 2 or TA Control app, which ideally should be installed on a tablet and is available for iOS and Android.

Now let's have a look at what's inside the unit: With its drive carrier milled from a solid block of aluminum, the impressive SACD drive is, mechanically speaking, a good match for the 40-millimeter-thick aluminum front panel and the thick-walled housing sides. The interior is meticulously tidy. Five clearly defined sections along the unit's sides accommodate both the switched-mode power supply for the digital unit and the linear power supply, which has been upgraded with two toroidal transformers, for the analog unit. Yes, you guessed correctly: Each unit has its own lead line to the power supply, which means there are two connecting sockets and power cables. T+A uses this setup because it wants to prevent reciprocal interference—and the company has rigorously implemented this high-end standard. This is also why the MP 3100 HV doesn't have a power switch: This would make a mockery of the benefits derived from strictly separating the power supply. In consideration of current environmental issues, the MP 3100 HV features an energy-saver function that reduces power consumption in standby to less than .5 watts.

It also comes as no surprise then that the drive, digital unit, DA converter, and analog output stages are strictly separated and that only premium components have been used.

The proprietary high-voltage technology—the term behind the “HV” in the units' names—enables a higher closed-current supply compared with conventional solutions and class A operation, which shines with its extraordinarily low distortion. Altogether, the technology could also produce a superior pre-mp. But T+A has consistently avoided taking this step. Consumers who prefer their high-end equipment from a single source will find tailored solutions in the amplifier siblings from the HV family.

Because the MP 3100 HV is a digital device, the signal processing designed by T+A deserves more detailed examination: To achieve the best possible conversion results, DSD and PCM are processed by separate converters with independent, completely distinct signal paths. According to head developer Lothar Wiemann, the resulting isolation of the analog and digital parts eliminates any digital interference. The converters themselves are proprietary developments created by the minds at T+A: For DSD signals, the manufacturer relies on its own fully discrete True 1 Bit DSD converter, which is operated either completely without filtering and noise shaping that ▶

VERY SOLID WORKMANSHIP BASED ON THE VERY LATEST T+A DEVELOPMENT: THE BUILT-IN CD/SACD DRIVE IS EQUIPPED WITH A STATE-OF-THE-ART DECODER TO OPTIMALLY READ THE SOUND CARRIERS.



The front display is literally the main control element, touch sensitive, and very easy to read. A user-friendly menu structure makes it easy to adjust even the more complex settings.



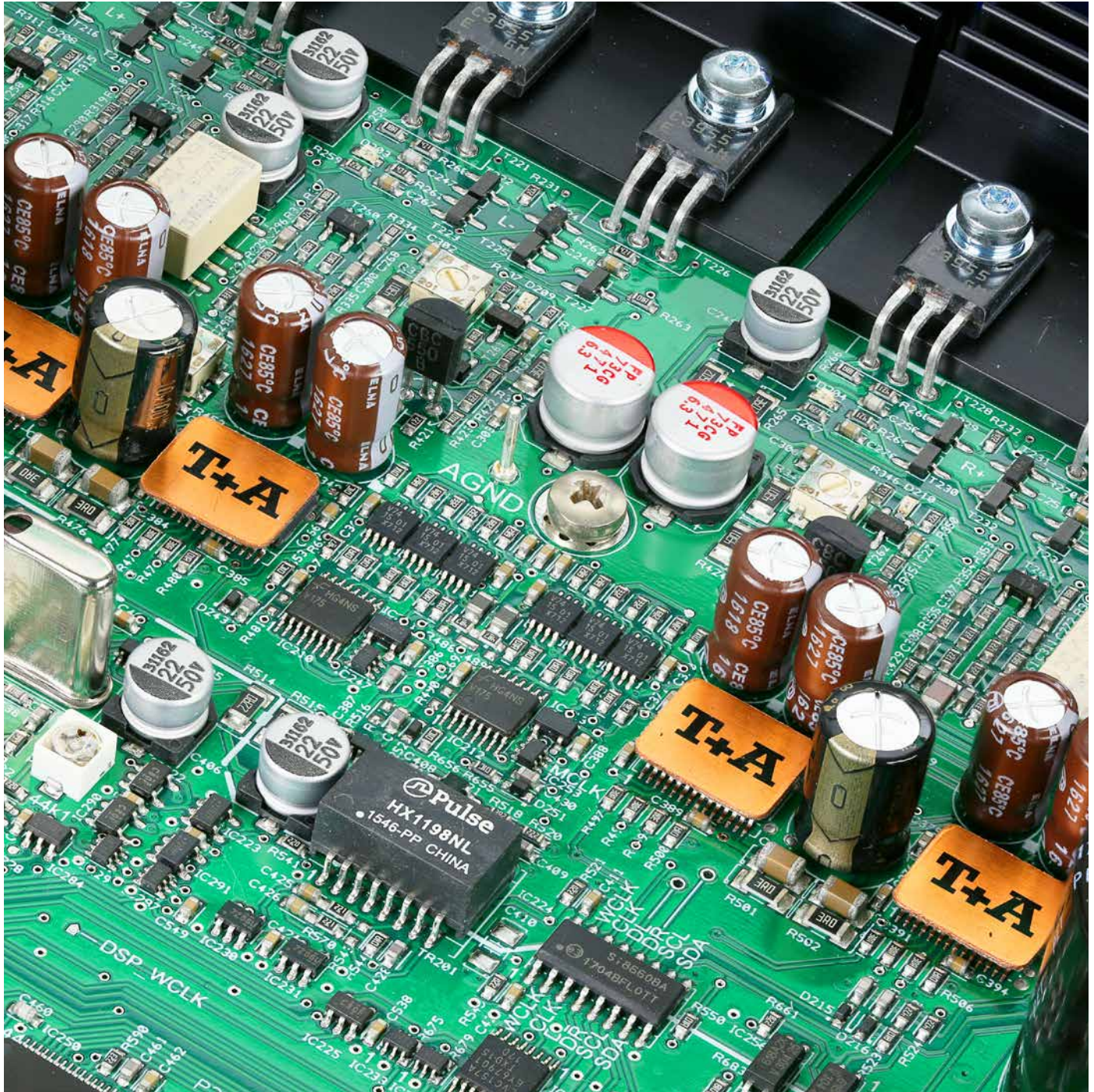
impact sound quality or, as an alternative to suppressing the inevitable noise floor, with analog reconstruction filters employing switchable bandwidth. PCM processing is handled by the innovative DCA converter T+A Quadrupel that, simply put, improves the precision of conventional converters by a factor of four. To ensure a curve progression that closely approximates the analog source signal, the MP 3100 HV also uses a proprietary, DSP-supported polynomial interpolation process. Bezier polynomial interpolation produces much smoother curves, in a mathematical sense, through a given number of grid points—or, that is, scanning points. Compared with the conventional oversampling method, digital artifacts such as pre- and post-ringing are excluded. It's well known that to produce optimal playback data needs to be cleansed of the notorious jitter before DCA conversion, so it's not surprising T+A relies on its own concept for jitter elimination. This works in two stages: In the first, the data received is processed and decoded. In the process, a rough pulse is taken from the received data, and this is relieved of heavy jitter from the source device and transmission path by means of a PLL switch. Afterward, the integrated microprocessor analyzes the pulse. If it meets certain minimum criteria, the DCA converters are switched to an internally

generated “highly precise” master clock with extremely low phase noise. This pulse is completely decoupled from the source and jitter interference from the source and transmissions is totally eliminated. If a rough pulse does not meet the minimum requirements, a second PLL stage comes into play—a second “jitterbug” that perfects the first PLL stage and reduces residual jitter by a factor of four. In explaining the process, Wiemann indicated he considered this method, which effectively represents a three-stage reclocking approach, superior to all solutions with external reclockers, stating: “In the MP 3100 HV, the converter master clock is produced directly at the converter and doesn't have to be transported over long distances. After all, every centimeter of signal path between the clock and the DAC converter significantly diminishes the result.”

The MP 3100 HV is indeed packed with sophisticated technology and an almost shameless abundance of lavish features—but to use it is child's play: simply connect it, have it play something, and enjoy the music. Rarely has a device required so little programming and user-manual reading. Sure, if the unit is meant to be used as a USB DAC together with a Windows PC, a customized ASIO driver, available for download on the T+A website, has to be installed

first. When used with a good software player such as the Foobar 2000, the sound expertise of the company based in Herford, Germany, -immediately comes alive.

The impressive sound experience the MP 3100 HV delivers as a CD and SACD player will have already won over High-end listeners, however. High-resolution digital music is great, but there are also those audiophile CDs that hold an abundance of fine music of their own. Outstanding productions include *One Day In My Life*, the 2016 Beatles project from leading German Latin-Jazz guitarist Martin Müller, and the 1983 *Standards Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2* by the Keith Jarrett Trio. It must be the phenomenal T+A converter that gives a previously unimaginable sound dimension to Müller's guitar, articulating it in rich colors and the noble sound of the finest classic jazz, as well as to Jarrett's exceedingly lyrical Steinway acoustics: Everything sounds softer, fuller, and more natural. In contrast, even very good converters such as the Mytek Digital Stereo192-DSD DAC produce a sound image clouded by digital haze. These differences are so obvious to the ear that comparison tests with the MP 3100 HV don't need to go on for days like with others. Instead, the virtuoso from North Rhine-Westphalia creates an entertaining session with the SACD *J. S. Bach* from ▶







The best-in-its-class FD100 remote control is included with delivery; its installed battery is charged over the USB connection.



expert guitar duo Katona Twins and the always phenomenal Van Cliburn live recording of Rachmaninoff's third piano concerto. Incidentally, the latter is a three-track recording and proves that audio masterpieces could also be created back in high fidelity's "prehistoric" times. But even when playing today's choices in sound, from online streaming to hi-res files played on a home network, the master from Herford captivates with thrilling virtuosity. Bravissimo! Yes, it's always difficult to let go of a good test unit and in the case of the MP 3100 HV, it's certainly a tearful goodbye. What remains, though, is the vivid memory of

an extraordinary musical performance from a true virtuoso. ■

Digital multisource SACD player with USB DAC, network functionality, Bluetooth streaming module, and FM tuner | T+A MP 3100 HV

Drive: Proprietary SACD/CD precision drive with dual laser technology | **Digital inputs:** 1 x AES/EBU (XLR, 24 bit/192 kHz), 5 x S/PDIF (1 x coaxial, 2 x BNC, 2 x Toslink, 24 bit/192 kHz, and 24 bit/96 kHz) | **Digital output:** S/PDIF (cinch) | **Analog outputs:** 2 x symmetric XLR, 2 x asymmetric cinch | **Other connections:** LAN network, 2 x HLink, 2 x USB; radio, remote-control, and WLAN antenna | **Maximal resolution DAC:** 32 bit/384 kHz and DSD512 (in USB device mode and only on Windows systems with appropriate driver) | **Other equipment**

ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

USB interface and DAC converter: Mutec MC-3+ USB, Mytek Digital Stereo 192-DSD DAC, Violectric V800 | **Computer:** MacBook Pro/Wortmann MultiBook | **Software player:** Audirvana Plus 2/Foobar 2000 | **Active speakers:** Nubert NuPro A 200, ME Geithain RL 906 | **Cables:** Vovox, AudioQuest

and accessories: Remote-control FD100; remote, WLAN, Bluetooth, and cable antenna included with delivery | **Finish:** Silver or titanium housing, black cooling element, customization options available with a surcharge | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 46/17/46 cm | **Weight:** 26 kg | **Warranty period:** two years | **Price:** €13,500
T+A elektroakustik | Planckstr. 9–11 | 32052 Herford | Germany | Telephone: +49 (0) 5221 76760 | www.ta-hifi.de

innuos

ADVERT

One Server.
Zero compromise.
Beyond Digital.



ZENITH STATEMENT

The new music server takes Digital Audio to a new level, building on the award-winning ZENith Special Edition

Innovative 8-linear power supply architecture • Custom-designed motherboard

Independently powered 3ppb OCXO clocking

 **HIGH END**
MUNICH 2018

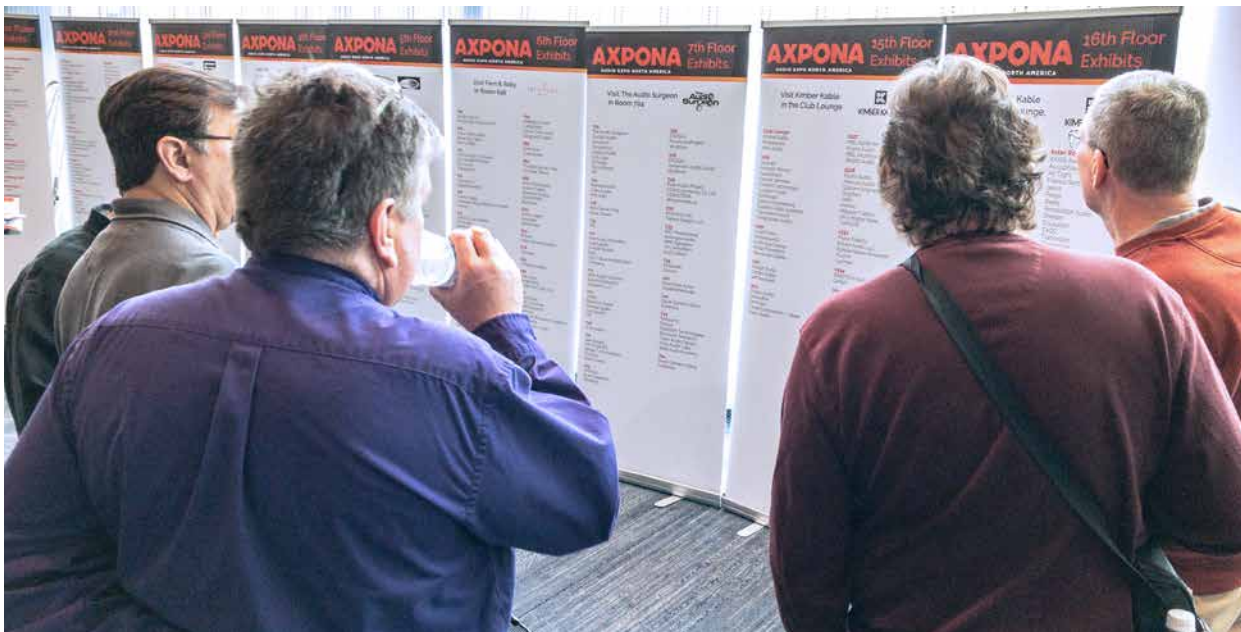
May 10 – 13th 2018
Munich • Germany

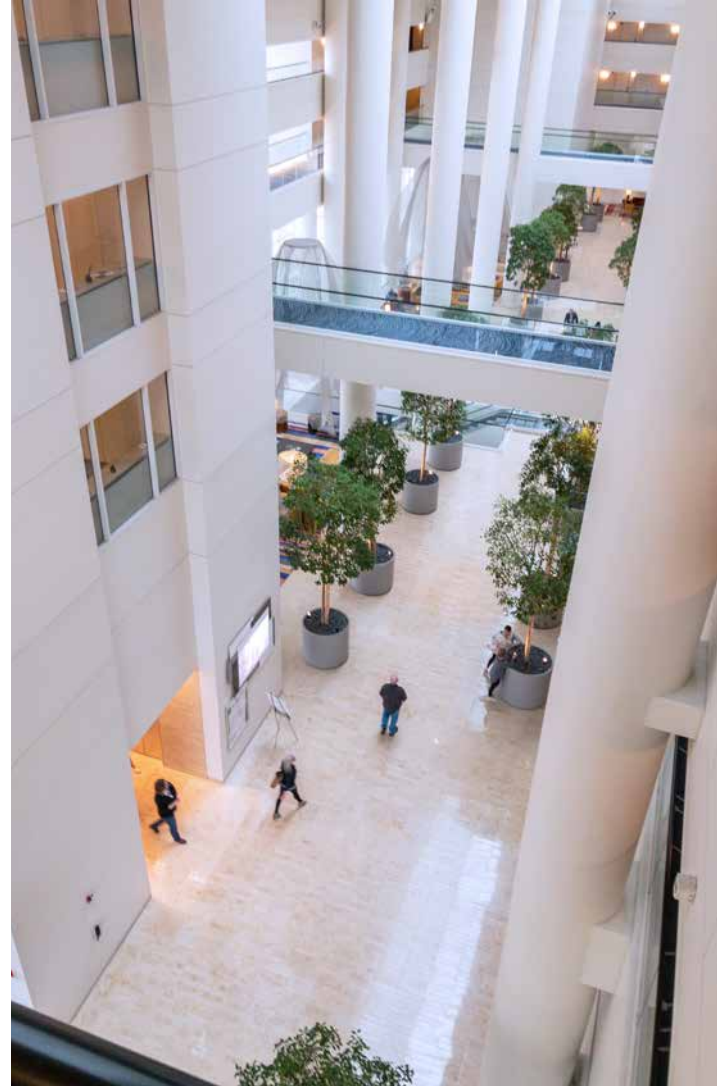
Visit us at Halle 1,
Cabin B12 and Stand CO7

Axpona 2018, Schaumburg, IL

A MINI-MUNICH?

By Danny Kaey. Photography: Danny Kaey

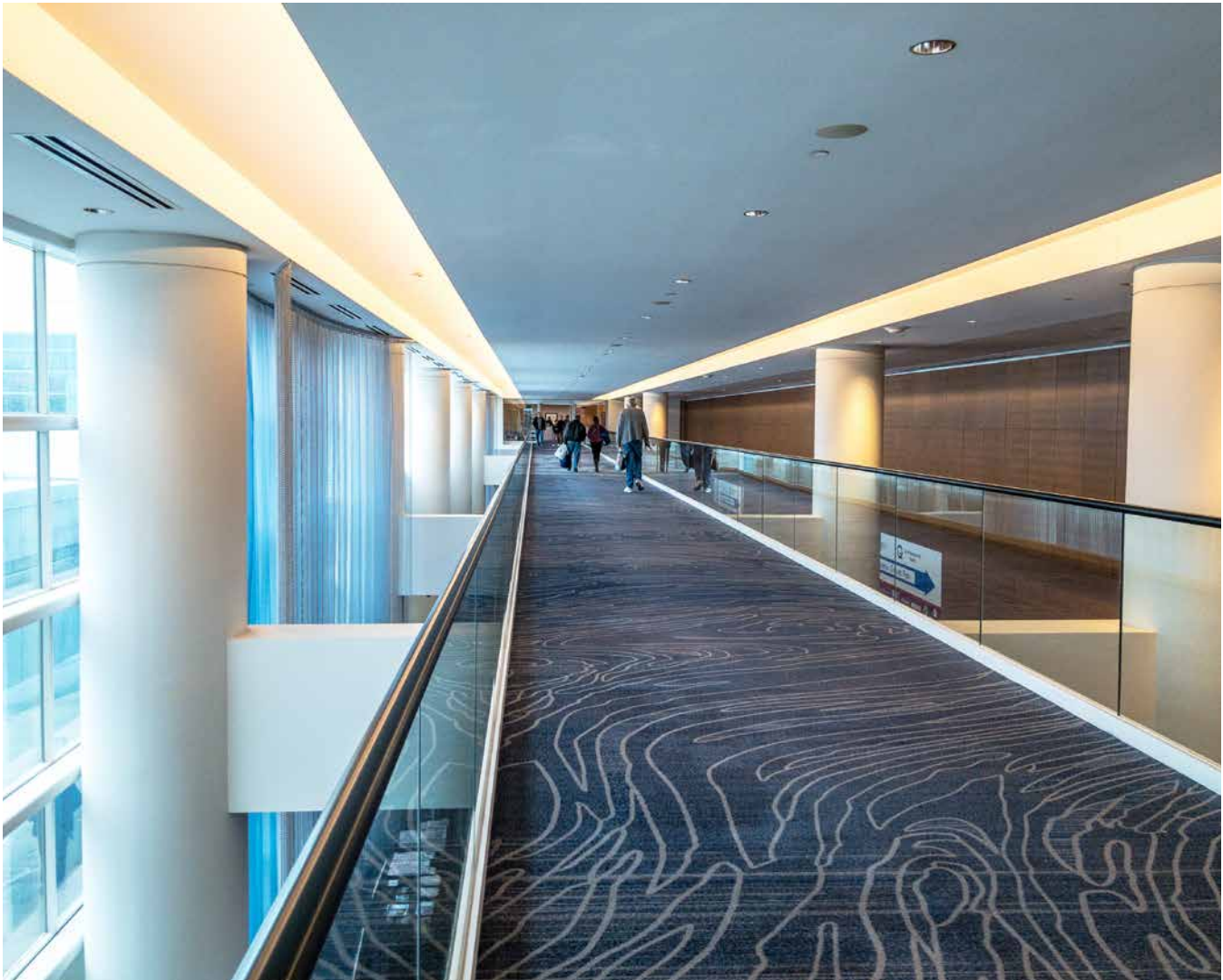




———Another year, another show. At least that’s the prevailing theorem making the current show circus news. Not quite. Axpona (Audio Expo North America) 2018 seemed to have broken several records it would appear. According to Stereophile’s Jason Victor Serinus’ show report recap, JD Events cataloged a total of 8134 tickets sold which was a plus of 21% (year over year) with a total of—whopper alert—165 exhibitors making their rounds around the newly sourced venue, Schaumburg’s Renaissance Hotel and Convention Center. Indeed, over the past few years

I’ve heard here and there that Axpona was quickly establishing itself as the defacto North American premier hi-fi show, a Mini-Munich some even called it. Though that is perhaps somewhat of a stretch, I felt it necessary, nay, urgently important to make my way out to Chicago for Axpona 2018.

In fairness to Axpona, one did immediately notice a certain level of experience and organization prowess gracing the show. Clearly labeled signage, friendly staff, all spoke of a genuinely well-planned event. ▶



The show essentially took over much of the Renaissance Hotel space and parts of the Convention Center with the latter being a short dash away from the main hotel exhibits. A centrally located bar with grub food and drinks served as a congested meeting spot throughout the day; strategically located snack places for quick grabs certainly helped adding some fuel to your day's work, though obviously those knickknack stands were far from the generally well received comfort food the bar served. Frankly, I, for one, was grateful that \$22 chicken sandwiches simply didn't exist at Axpona, instead, one found decent grub for around the \$10 mark. Who knows, maybe next year

they'll add quick serve espresso bars on every floor or at least some sort of refreshment opportunity along those lines.

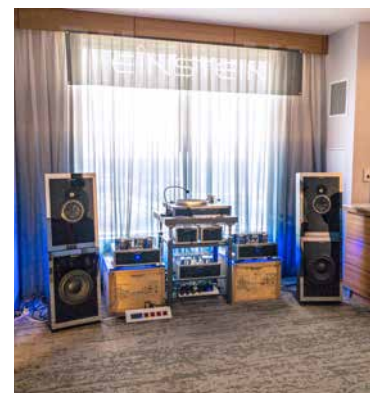
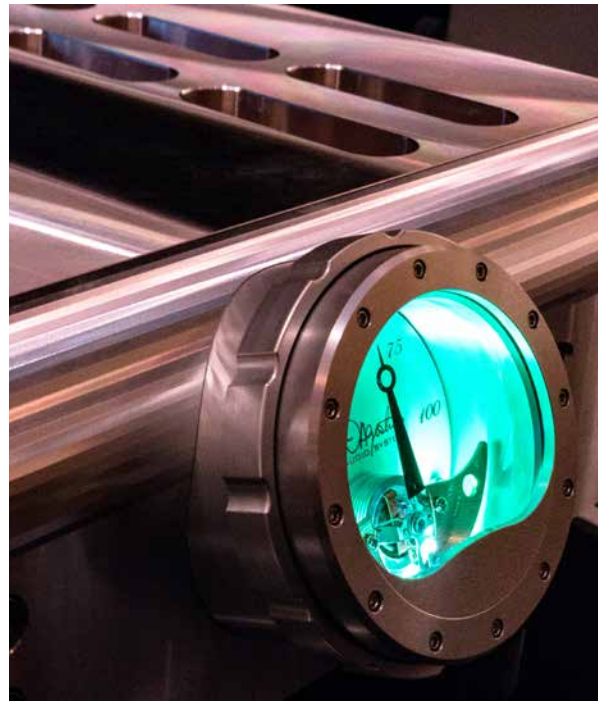
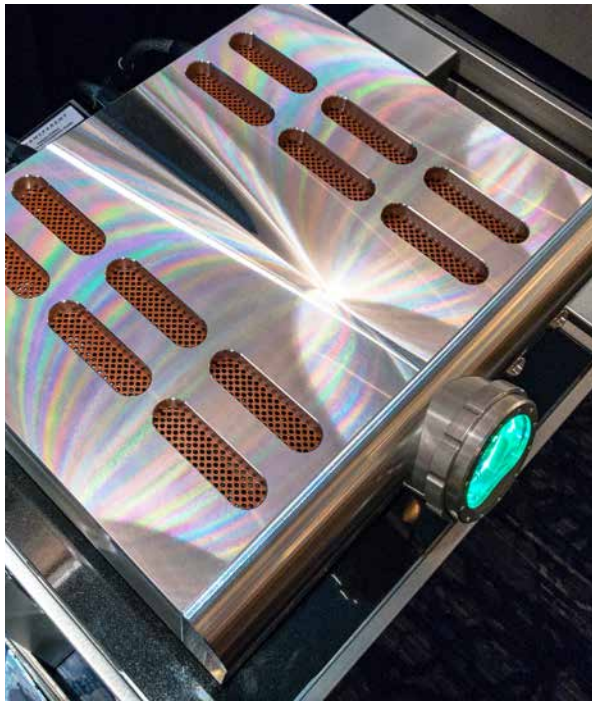
In other news, lets face it, the real news, there appeared no shortage of seeing and hearing at Axpona 2018. Even as most of the press had the usual wranglings about this that and the other—hey, it is a hotel based hi-fi show after all—I took a distinctly different look to the show's exhibitors. Based on my recent articles around the certain state of the union, I felt this show was exactly what a hi-fi show for those already initiated ought to be: well organized, with lots ▶



of toys to see and hear; a market place full of even more toys than fit under Trump Plaza’s annual Christmas tree. What was missing—through no fault of this show really—was the certain level of exclusiveness, true high-end feel that say Pebble Beach’s Concourse d’Elegance has to offer. Particularly the aforementioned market place had a bit too much in the way of grown men wearing white lab coats, presumably to come off more scientific when pitching their various gizmos, gadgets and Gaudi apparatuses. Fair enough, they ought to be able to sell their stuff too I say.

Contrasting the oversized behemoth rooms were the small-ish hotel rooms and suites on the Renaissance

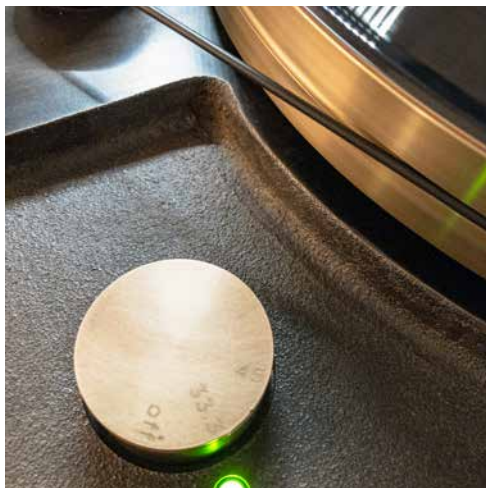
side. Given the issues that hotel rooms bring about, from shady power to unfamiliar settings, I was positively surprised at how well some rooms sounded. From Andreas Koch’s latest Playback Designs offer in form of the Dream Series MPS-8 and its various iterations, YG’s Carmel speakers driven by Playback Design’s IPS 3 integrate amplifier/DAC combo, the sound was smooth, lively, dynamic and downright gorgeous sounding. Featuring Lynn Stanley in person and on premium digital, both co-hosts managed to elicit excitement, fun and a generally positive vibe. Several times during the show’s many trips up and down the elevators, I heard people comment on how great this room sounded. Well done! ▶

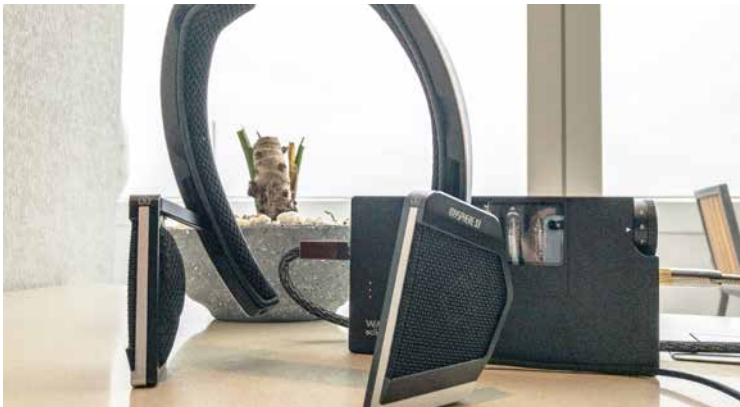




Another standout room was GTT's grand suite featuring YG's latest Sonja XV Junior speakers, AudioNet's Stern and Heisenberg pre and power combo all leashed together via Kubala-Sosna's exquisite Realization line of cables (side note: I have been using Kubala-Sosna's Elation! cables these past few months and am frankly so giddy over these that in a first for me, I will be penning a preview for the complete loom of Elation! shortly). Source was a fully tricked out Kronos deck which, when playing Carmen's Overture on RCA, produced such utterly fantastic sound that I wished I could have sat there all day. Extended, dynamic, panoramic, the sheer depth and scale of the recording seemed to find no bounds. A definite highlight of the show.

Einstein Audio Components, no stranger to outstanding shows, cleared the hurdles yet again and equally managed to also raise their bars higher still, however difficult it may be for others to follow. A far smaller suite compared to GTT's, Einstein nevertheless managed to elicit similar levels of grandeur and excitement. Celebrating now 30 years in business (!), Einstein used the Axpona show to launch three critical new components: first up was their all new and rather legitimate looking and indeed very fine sounding turntable, aptly named "The Record Player". Unique to this turntable are the platter's pulley with built in bearing to remove nasty cogging effects right at the source, namely the motor. A precision machined aluminum bar connects the substantial bearing to the deck's ▶

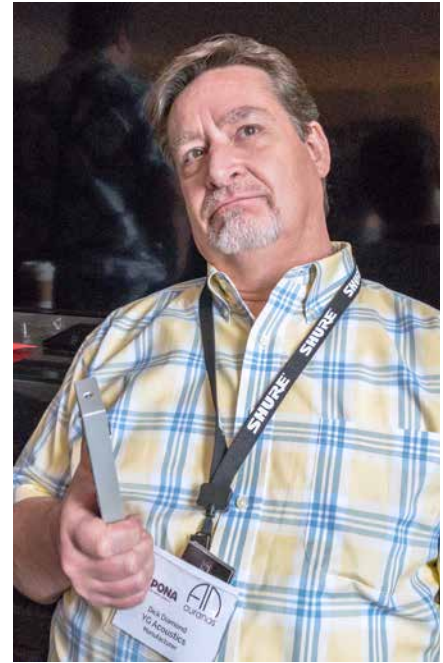




arm board, providing additional levels of stiffness for this critical junction. Completing the second announcement was the launch of the 12" version of "The Tonearm", a follow-up to the acclaimed 9" version, which was announced last year. Lastly, perhaps most surprisingly, Einstein also announced a late pre-production prototype of an all new current source MC phono stage. In typical Einstein fashion, good simply isn't good enough, thus this little guy is housed in a machined aluminum enclosure in full dual-mono configuration and outboard dual mono power supply. An auto-tuning current sensing circuit, the total price for this will be around \$2900 USD. Can you say wow?

Sonically, this room proved quite amazing, even as I am the owner of practically every piece of gear Einstein makes and thus intimately familiar with its sonic footprint. Add to that Volker Bohlmeier's terrific music selection—Talking Heads' live album *Stop Making Sense* was in very heavy rotation—and you have a receipt for musical perfection, at a show no less.

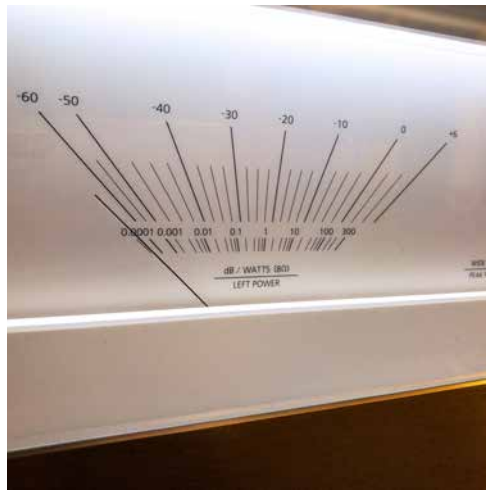
Finally, no show would be complete without more than a mention of Wilson Audio's legendary show appearances and demos, courtesy of the brand's ultimate debonair gentleman, Peter McGrath, maestro extraordinaire. Showcasing his absolutely fabulous ▶



recordings of exquisite classical music, each of the Wilson rooms proved uniquely experiential in their own right. No matter if Sasha 2, XLF or Alexia Series II were playing, the sound was uniquely Wilson, uniquely present and uniquely grand. That each of these setups differed rather greatly from one to the next, with Dan D'Agostino's Momentum series powering the mighty XLFs, to Audio Research's latest amps driving Alexia Series II, neither fact would ultimately sway from the sublime experience these rooms offered. No matter the source—analogue, digital, or

tape—these Axpona demos uniquely identified the at times—show times! amazing—Wilson Audio sound.

With other brands like Auralic, Woo Audio, PS Audio, Gryphon, also making their various debuts, as a one man show, there simply isn't enough time to see all that you wanted to see. Pit stops at Technics, to visit front man Bill Voss, delivered the goods and then some. To say that the all new for 2018 SP-10R and SL-1000R are smashing sales records would be an understatement; when you consider that these ▶



are premium offerings at premium prices (\$10k and \$18k USD, respectively) these stats seem that much more positively impressive. Elsewhere at the show Chad Kassem of Acoustic Sounds fame, previewed the new UHQR Jimi Hendrix release on his company's latest premium clarity vinyl formula. That—at \$100—these super premium titles will sell out fast (the Mono version already has!) is a given. The sound, mastered by Bernie Grundman himself, is sublime, to die for.

Prepare for some major magic coming to your own personal show room later this summer.

All in, Axpona 2018 proved giant and superbly organized at that. With 2019 rooms already being booked, next year's show looks to be even bigger, better and more giant. To the team at JD Events a congratulatory note is due. Well done and we can't wait to be back! Cheers! ■

BROWSER

Nº 02

Papa's Got a Brand New Bag

Who doesn't dream of making a stylish entrance to the Phonostage Shootout or trade fair demo and letting those printed jute bags look completely outdated? The new record bag from Clearaudio practically guarantees envious looks, especially given the space in the transparent flap to display your favorite LP. The best thing about the record bag, which also features a seatbelt as the carrying strap: It only costs about as much as a first pressing from the Stones.

www.analogshop.de

+++





BROWSER Nº 02

Headphone DAC

The new Impacto universal from Beyerdynamic is integrated into the headphone cable and makes the most of digital signals up to 32 bits and 384 kilohertz or DSD 5.6 megahertz, enhancing them to audiophile standards. The DAC, weighing only 12 grams, and headphone amplifiers are ideal complements to the Beyerdynamic headphones T1 (second generation), T5 p and Amiron. Price: €380

www.beyerdynamic.de

+++

BROWSER № 02



The Legend Lives

In 1970, Technics presented the analog drive SP-10 and thereby ushered in the direct-drive turntable revolution. With the SP-10R—the abbreviation stands for the plain drive—and the SL-1000R turntable system, the company is taking the virtues of the direct drive to a new, modern level. The components' dimensions, including frame, drive unit, disc, and the like, are directly compatible with older models, so they can breathe new life into the classics. Prices had not yet been determined at the time of publication.

www.technics.com

+++



Key Technology

No larger than a USB drive, a small lighter, or a key—that's the new Soundkey DAC from Cyrus: The tiny data chip is just 5.4 centimeters by .8 centimeters but nevertheless uses asynchronous 24/96 resolution that can even power serious hi-fi headphones. The Soundkey is plug-and-play ready for Android smartphones and laptops or PCs; Apple users can put them to work with an intermediate step. Price: €140

www.bellevueaudio.de

+++

BROWSER Nº 02



BROWSER Nº 02



Sufficient Power

McIntosh is replacing its flagship mono power amp MC1.2KW AC with the more impulse-resilient MC1.25KW AC. Weighing nearly 72 kilos and producing an output of 1,200 watts, the amp creates nearly imperceptible total harmonic distortion of 0.005% on any load and sends an unequivocal message. Fortunately, the price has remained about the same: An MC1.2KW AC costs €16,900.

www.audio-components.de

+++



With a cross-section of a full 7.5 square millimeters, the Energia Suprema outfitted with take-hold-of Furutech connectors is hardly one of the most easy-to-install and unobtrusive cables that you will ever come across. But we can still strongly recommend the cable because of the reward you get for all of your effort: Your system will sound better than ever once you are done.



Never fade—cable from HMS

VALVET A4E

By Jochen Reinecke. Photography: Ingo Schulz



ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

Digital: C.E.C. CD 5, iPod classic 5 160GB + Pro-Ject Dock-Box S digital, Samsung Notebook with SSD, foobar and Logitech Squeezebox | **Analog:** Rega Planar 3 + Rega Exact MM | **Phonopreamps:** Pro-Ject Phonobox MM, Pro-Ject Phonobox DS+ | **Preamp:** Abacus Preamp 14 | **Power Amps:** Audreal MS-3 (monos) | **Integrated Amp:** Hegel H90 | **Speakers:** Audes 116, Harbeth 30.1, Quadral Rondo, Nubert nuPro A-100 | **Cables:** Goldkabel Profi (interconnects), Oehlbach XXL Series 7 MkII (digital koaxial), Oehlbach XXL Series 80 (digital Toslink), Ortofon SPK 500, Real Cable OFC 400 (speakers)





Valvet A4e
 The small „e“ in A4e not only stands for „external power supply“ but also for evolution, extra power, excellence—and extraordinary performance!

© FIDELITY Magazine

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





———The term 'déjà vu' is not generally seen in a positive light. Many a déjà vu experience can irritate or make you dizzy. But it's quite different in the case of a revenant that entered my listening room shortly before Christmas 2017: the pumped-up successor of the Class-A mono amps A4 from Bargteheide manufacturer Valvet which I was privileged to review two years ago.

Knut Cornils, the developer and owner of the company, has significantly pimped the power amps which had already been highly impressive then. So what's new?

For a start, the power amps are now called A4e—the small 'e' stands for 'external power supply'. This means that when unpacking the eager listener now has to heave two heavy items per channel out of the box: the power supplies have been outsourced into external cases and now enter the fray with a 500-VA toroidal transformer each. The amps as well as the power supplies are equipped

with expensive supports made by bFly-audio and are thus not only stably positioned but also perfectly de-coupled from the surface they are sitting on. Compared to their predecessors, the continuous output has been raised from 55 Watts to 65 Watts into 8 Ohms. Speaking of increase: the price has also been raised from 4750 Euros for the A4 to 6900 Euros—and that, according to Valvet, is the introductory price.

Generally speaking I am rather sceptical when re-worked 'Mk2' variants of components or speakers are introduced to the market. Quite often the improvements promised by the brochures turn out to be minimal. It seems as if the some manufacturers want to create the impression of constant development or—honi soi qui mal y pense—make a few extra Euros in the process.

The good news: the Valvet mono-amps are actually better! Better to such an extent that the price difference is entirely justified. This ►



can be seen in three different areas: First, micro-resolution in the upper treble has markedly improved: for example, depending on where and how hard a ride cymbal is hit, the upper harmonics are now much more clearly differentiated. In the case of the delicate radio-ballad 'Sail to the Moon', the listener now feels he or she is sitting where the drummer sits, with the silvery-metallic and golden darkened cymbal sounds clearly audible. Second, there is a marked improvement in locatability. Pin-point spatial orientation of instruments in the „background corners“ has increased, but also micro-orientation within the plane. Staying with the example of the drum-kit: it now seems actually possible to precisely localise the position of the drum sticks on the cymbals. Astonishing!

Finally, the Valvet mono-power amps have become even faster: their ability to mobilise enormous energy from a moment of absolute stillness - without limits, compression or distortion. This can be nicely observed with the Talk-Talk

classic „Chameleon Day“. Exactly in the middle of this already quite soft and gentle song there is a moment of stillness—out of which the singer Mark Hollis explodes with immense fervour: „Breathe on me—eclipse my mind!“, he mourns. Those who do not get goose bumps at what the Valvet mono amps offer in terms of drive, transparency and clarity at this point should urgently make an appointment to see a doctor. My conclusion: Valvet have managed to significantly improve an already great product. Congratulations! ■

Mono power amplifiers | Valvet A4e

Power output (8/4 ohms): 65/105 W | **Inputs:** unbalanced (RCA), balanced (XLR) | **Outputs:** 1 x speaker | **Special features:** separate Power Supply Unit (PSU), bFly-audio supporting feet, WBT and Neutrik connectors | **Finishes:** Aluminium silver or black anodized, faceplate polished chrome (extra charge) | **Dimensions Amp (W/D/H):** 23/33/11 cm | **Dimensions PSU (W/D/H):** 23/31/11 cm | **Weight Amp:** approx. 9 kg | **Weight PSU:** 10 kg | **Warranty period:** 3 years | **Price (pair):** € 6900
 Valvet | Fliederbogen 8a | 22941 Bargteheide | Germany | Telephone +49 4532 267651 | www.valvet.de



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



The American Corner

TRIPLE WHAMMY

OR, HOW TO RETAIL IN HI-FI

By Danny Kaey





Now on to something completely different. Not really. More of a revisit to a subject near and dear to me. As I had originally outlined in my previous article and featured visit to Alma Music & Audio for the Wilson Audio and MSB event a few months ago, I have for some time now lamented the

fact that while coverage in magazines has rightfully focused on our beloved hi-fi toys, little to no attention had been paid to the actual retailers of such fine brands. Fact is that it is precisely these retailers who carry the highest burden and generally most risk. Think not? Think different. Retail offices, preferably in a well to do, demographically speaking, area? ▶



Check. Payroll for a few well informed, honest consultants? Check. Bankroll several high-end equipment lines? Check. Earn a living whilst performing Herculean efforts in an ever shrinking, yet ever more demanding market place? Check. Still keen on this type of income? Read on.

New—old—legends

To wit, our first visit as part of this triple whammy, brings us back to where it all started: Alma Music & Audio in gorgeous San Diego. This time featuring the latest and indeed greatest from the one brand that few expected to bring us hi-fi's *Art of the Comeback*[™], none other than genuinely on a roll Technics. When,

in 2010, Technics decided to cease production of the most quintessential of all turntables the world had ever seen, the 1200 Mk V, many, myself included, collectively sighed. An era seemed lost. Replaced by, well, not much really. Sure, many copied the Technics 1200 model, but no one ever actually managed a perfect copy. Kind of like the iPhone really. Then, practically from nowhere, 2016 saw the light of a cryptic message “this coming summer, please join us for a preview of the all new Technics 1200G”. Wait, what just happened? That Technics had been plotting a major hi-fi comeback since 2010 could have been easily seen by the stacked announcements of various genuinely all new components, many eschewing that which made Technics famous in the early 70s. Quality sound at ▶

prices within reach of many keen to enter or re-enter the hobby again. That these announcements would then have included such a profound and historic re-release of the 1200 platform, left many in the industry snookered and shocked. Myself included.

Rather than merely re-spin production of the old 1200 parts, Technics engineers went full scale frontal assault. No doubt the deep pockets of parent company Panasonic/Matsushita enabled certain engineering feats that your typical *little* guy simply can't afford: take a great design, apply ca. 2016-17 engineering and scale it to production. Voila, a new—old—legend is born. Indeed, looking at the *new* 1200G (which I

reviewed and promptly purchased), one can't help notice that while this deck may *look* like the previous generation deck, all parts are indeed new and have effectively been re-engineered from ground up with modern technology and far higher manufacturing tolerances. That alone ought to have improved the sound compared to the old series; adding fresh engineering solutions to the design simply took the deck to a level no previous 1200 could ever have dreamed of. Explosively dynamic, resolved, absolutely pitch perfect and playing far in advance of its new retail price of \$4400, the 1200 has become my go to recommended deck for anyone seeking to get into vinyl on a serious level. Case closed. Or so it seemed. ▶





“R” is for racing

Within days of the 1200 announcement, I, while on a call with a longtime vinyl connoisseur discussing the new Technics deck, proclaimed that it would be no more than one or two years following this release that the world would see the rebirth of the king of kings analog decks, coveted by many, afforded by few, the SP10 Mk III. Naysayers of course said what they always say: “No-way Hans Rey”. Too much, too this, too that, too the other. I kept my cool. Wait and see, I said. The 1200 will sell very well, which will help fund exactly such a project. Funny enough, summer 2017 came and what came knocking on the cable? Indeed, the announcement that Technics would indeed bring back—bigger and badder than ever—the awe inspiring SP10 deck, simply labeled SP10R (no doubt R

standing in for Racing). But that wasn’t all. While the SP10R caters to the aficionados who wish to assemble their own *best*, Technics also thought of customers who simply wanted the best Technics had to offer in a package that’s accessible and turnkey: welcome the SL1000R. Armed with an appetite to showcase the new series of decks anywhere it made sense—read: hi-fi retailers that *get it*—you can only win genuine brand ambassadors and a healthy, growing customer base. At least that’s how affable and always on Technics front man, William Voss sees it. Burning the candle on both ends, I’ve seen and heard of Bill trekking criss-cross the country seemingly every time I clicked refresh on Twitter. *Great*, I thought as I was plotting a cunning intercept. It was only a matter of time and here we are, back at Alma Audio, with Fabio and Alex hosting a Technics SP10R/SL1000R launch event. ▶





No faux glitz here

Also in toe was the ever visible and gracious Lynn Stanley, an audiophile's ever present gift that keeps on giving. While there was no live performance of her songbook, she did play the latest 1 step pressings and happily signed and autographed copies of her latest releases. Judging by the audience that came, Lynn's audiophile fame certainly carries over far more than just a local call with MaBell. Well earned I say, since seemingly like Technics, Lynn is omnipresent. The event was pretty much standard faire, with Bill doing three tours of demos throughout the busy day. Each demo was kicked-off with a thorough background on Technics, the resurgence of their analog domain and a discussion around the crowning achievement, the SP10R/SL1000R series. Having self appointed

Analog Guru, Michael Fremer, discuss, nay, preview, the SL1000R deck a few weeks prior to this event on his blog, no doubt helped feed the frenzy even more. So profound was the deck for him that he voiced many a superlative which he usually keeps for only the best.

No faux glitz here apparently, this is the real deal. As I had known the 1200G intimately, I could easily have written the preview myself for I knew that if the 1200G was as good as it was, the new SP10R would be better still. Add a surprisingly reachable retail price of \$17999 for the complete SL1000R and \$9999 for the SP10R "drop-in" deck, i.e fully compatible with existing, new and old SP10 plinths and bases. Where's the SP10R is truly the *naked* motor unit and power supply only, the SL1000R is the real deal. Complete with and all new and updated triple layer plinth, the ▶



SL1000R also comes with an updated 10" version of the now classic Technics arm. While not the replacement for the infamously and obscenely overdone cost no object EPA-100 that many of us had really hoped for, this 10" arm does in fact include the latest and highest tolerance bearings and magnesium upgrades, including a big-boy obligatory 5 pin DIN connector for your favorite tonearm cable. My bold prediction for 2018/19 is yet another early Christmas gift in form of an all new EPA 100 arm. Mind you, I have no inside knowledge, nor scoop to affirm that other than just a good old fashioned hunch. We shall see.

Coupled with Dan D'agostino's awesome Momentum M400 monoblock amplifiers, Momentum phono stage, and Wilson Audio's to die for Alexia Series II loudspeakers, the SL1000R fronted by Ortofon's A95,

produced a sound so delightful, I jokingly asked Fabio if I could spend the night, deluxe sleeping bag and tuck-in service accommodations included. Intimately familiar as I am with Alexia's sound and Momentum setup, Lynn Stanley's 1-step produced a svelte, resolved mid range with focused, yet well beyond the audible range extended highs. As mentioned, bass and dynamics had been checked already. Think tight, low and fully in control. Frankly, I was smitten as a kitten. To my mind and humble knowledge, no other deck that I am familiar with exists that as a complete package comes close to what I heard at Alma Audio. Even bolder, even more refined, even more explosive was the sound compared to my 1200G, that I simply felt Framer's preview nailed it: this thing is truly killer, chiller. Build quality, a definitive north star for high-end at this price point, is indeed superb, truly ▶

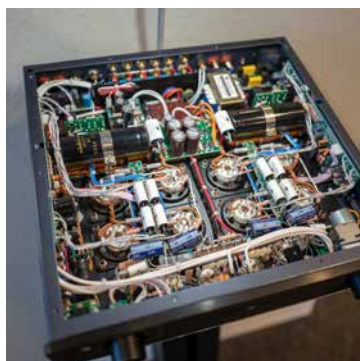
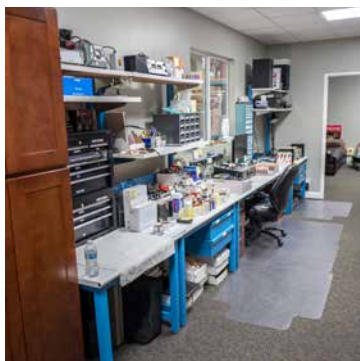


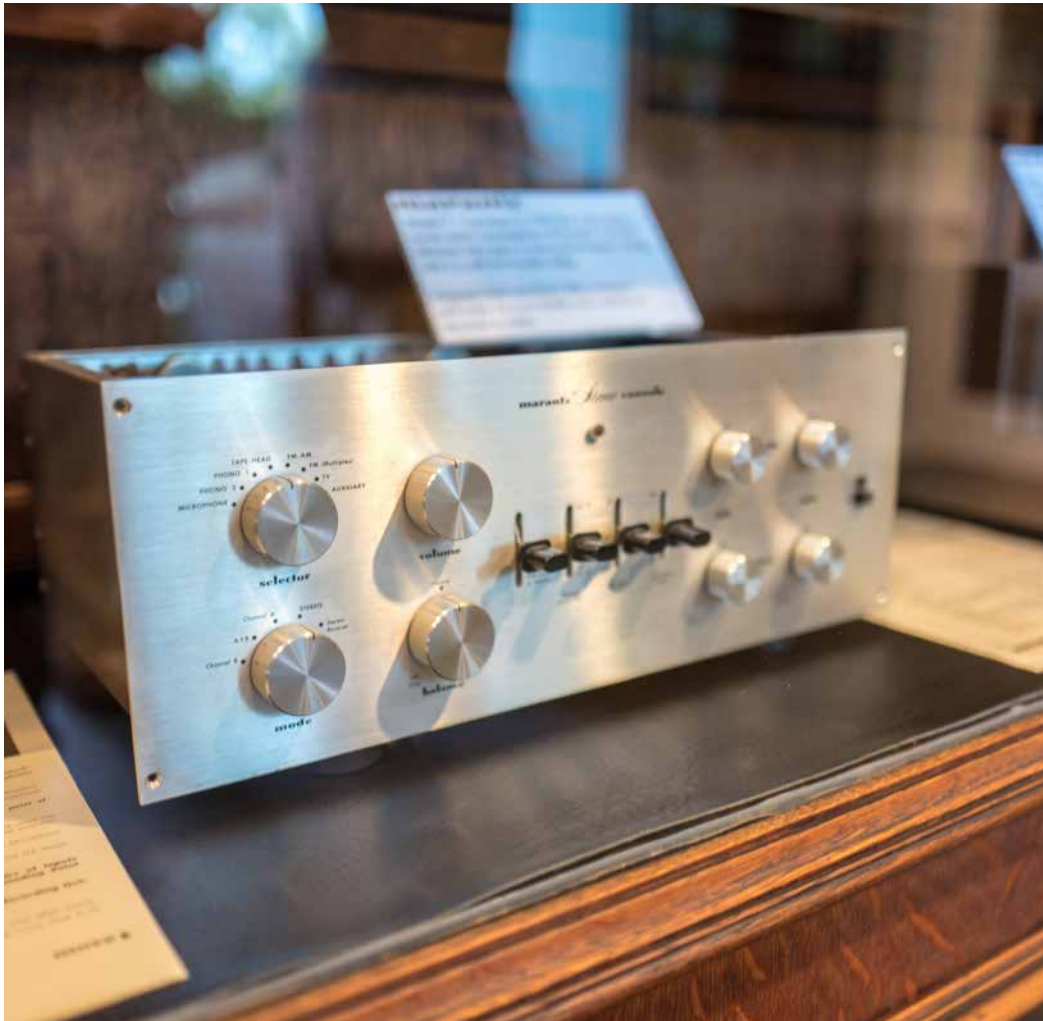
bespoke. To competitors seeking to upend this feat, dress warm. I think anyone visiting with Bill Voss and Alma that day saw what I saw. Naturally, this fine scribe already requested a review sample which Bill promptly penciled into his already rather full review calendar. Viennese Sacher tortes as shameless bribes notwithstanding, I would expect to get a review sample soon-ish, thereby taking a full, deep-dive front row seat into this platform in due time. Stay tuned, this will be foundational.

Bob Levi at Upscale Audio

As luck would have it, the very next day saw a birthday bash of none other than Bob Levi, currently serving president to the world's largest, ehem, audio society, the Los Angeles and Orange County Audio Society.

A former network executive, more importantly, Ted Turner's right hand man since the launch of Turner broadcasting, Bob has over the years since he took over as president, managed to build up the LAOC Society to what it is today. Vibrant, home to 2400+ *paying* members, the LAOC Society has seen its fair share of the hi-fi circus, nay, circuit over its 25 years in business. Each month, the society visits the dealer circuit of the greater LA area, with fine salons and retails such as Sunny's Home Audio and Video, Santa Monica's premium establishment, The Audio Salon and many, many others. As it so happened, the society wanted to honor its current president with a birthday bash that befits the one and only Bob Levi. Host of ceremonies and overall hi-fi ambassador extraordinaire, Kevin Deal, of Upscale Audio, opened up his supreme salon of tube heaven to flocking masses. ▶

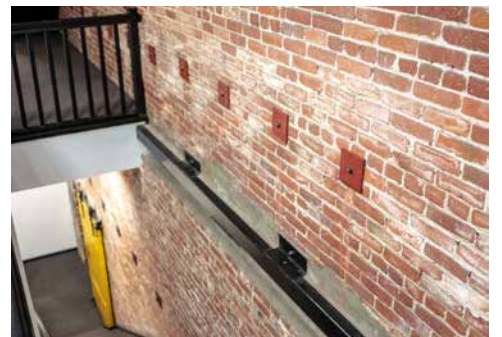
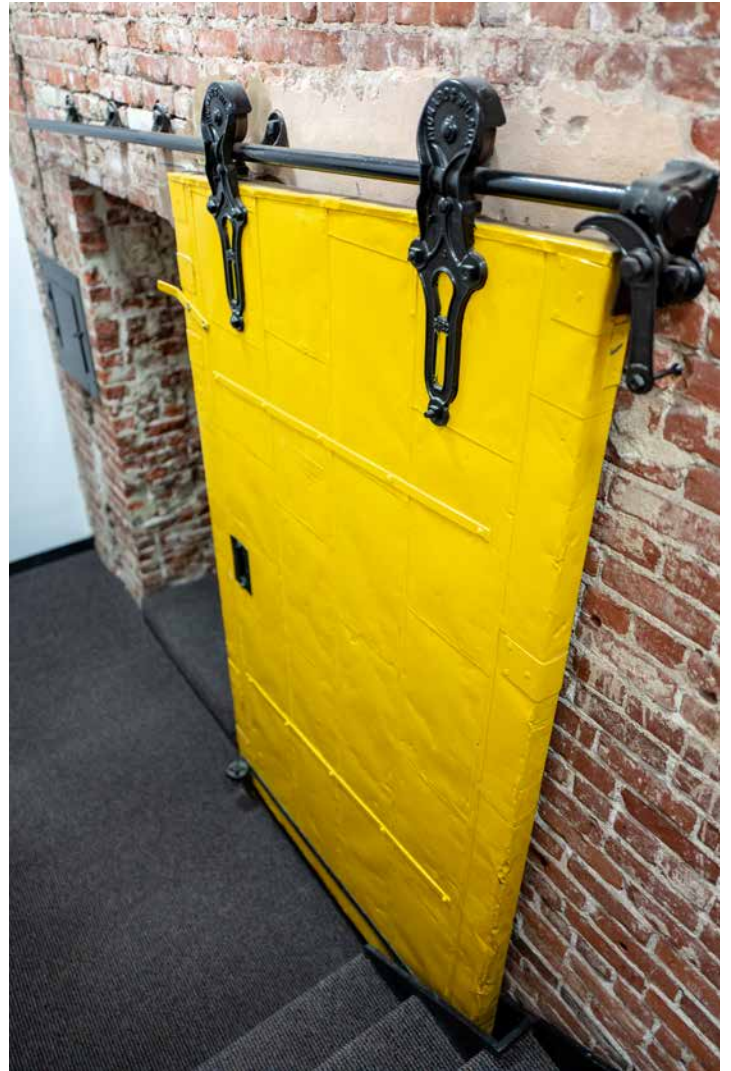




Looking for that oh so special NOS Telefunken? Siemens? GE? RCA? You'll find it here. Naturally, at current market rates. Kevin spent years hunting the world for tubes. No really. Think Indian Jones for tubes. Upscale Audio features a fine retail environment with several audition rooms and oh so many brands to choose from. While this event wasn't a listening type event like Alma's, you none the less felt the powerful presence of the hi-fi force. Kevin has cultivated a large clientele and has very successfully themed a niche in the crowded Los Angeles hi-fi retail market. If you are in the LA area, I would recommend stopping by to visit Kevin and his team. If you are into tubes or need tubes for any reason or no reason at all, a visit to Kevin is simply a *must*.

LA's genuine gentleman's club: Pitch Perfect

Finally, as part of this triple whammy, a lazy Saturday LA afternoon—the clock striking about 2PM—I waltzed into the one genuine gentleman's club in Los Angeles, I can recommend without hesitation. Welcome to Pitch Perfect Audio. To wit, the salon's proprietor, Matt Rotunda, is perhaps the most quintessential gentlemen's club owner I know of. Not satisfied with selling merely the normative HiFi goods, Pitch Perfect focuses and specializes on the truly musical and more exotic lineup of modern day HiFi. Think Leben, think Shindo, think J.C. Verdier, think DeVore Fidelity, think EMT and Grado Labs. Generally ▶





speaking, Matt is into all the hallmarks that make up parts of the industry I often find association with: the finer, bespoke, family heirloom type components that find value in their lasting design, not necessarily chasing the latest and greatest for just the sake of it. Undoubtedly, the typical acquisition at chez Rotunda will yield a lifetime of musical enjoyment, a lifetime of musical fondue.

Likewise, even as Matt obviously has a business to run, e.g. earn money like any other small business owner, he will never come across as abrasive, pushy or otherwise obnoxiously annoying. At Pitch Perfect, one is treated to one thing, and one thing only: the quiet, definitive and straightforward task of seeking

out musical enjoyment. Think fine time piece shop in Schaffhausen, think Saville Row. Pitch Perfect finds its current address in a vintage Angelean brick building, complete with wood beam and all brick interior and of course, the requisite old school service elevator the size of a typical New York apartment. Once inside, the focus, even as Matt also sells digital, clearly is on analog: one immediately notices the rows of vinyl, some neatly stashed, some just stashed, most of it in heavy rotation. Several premium decks serve the client's playlist of choice: care for a fine Shindo Garrard, or a loaded Spec? No problem. Want something equally exclusive, yet more European? Matt just recently signed on with French analog couturier, J.C. Verdier and their line of La Platine Verdier decks. ▶



Naturally, each deck runs classic, “vintage” inspired cartridges and arms; from EMT to Ortofon and anything in between—no matter your preference, the sound is always welcoming and musical. You won’t find Shakti stones, magic dots or other such wizardry; likewise, those seeking to pixel-peep should probably also look elsewhere. Saturday’s session left little to add to your want list. Expressive, *musical* and emotional is probably the best descriptor for what I heard. To quote a friend who visited with me, “you listen to this [system] and it refocuses you on what’s really important”. *Indeed.*

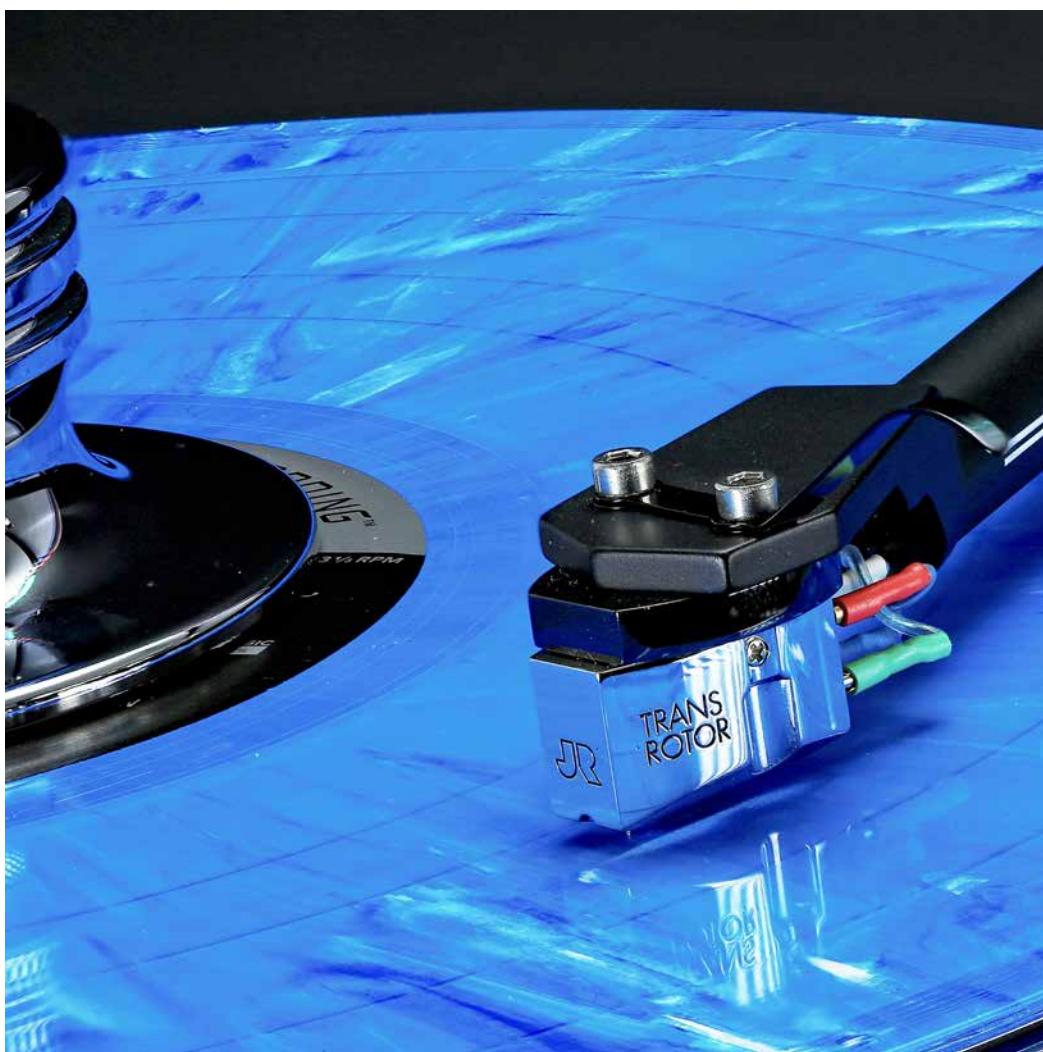
A full service, by appointment only salon, Pitch Perfect is without question worth a visit or *four*. For any connoisseur of fine hi-fi a must visit; for everyone else perhaps the beginning of the enlightenment period. A+++ ▪

www.almaaudio.com
www.upscaleaudio.com
www.pitchperfectaudio.com

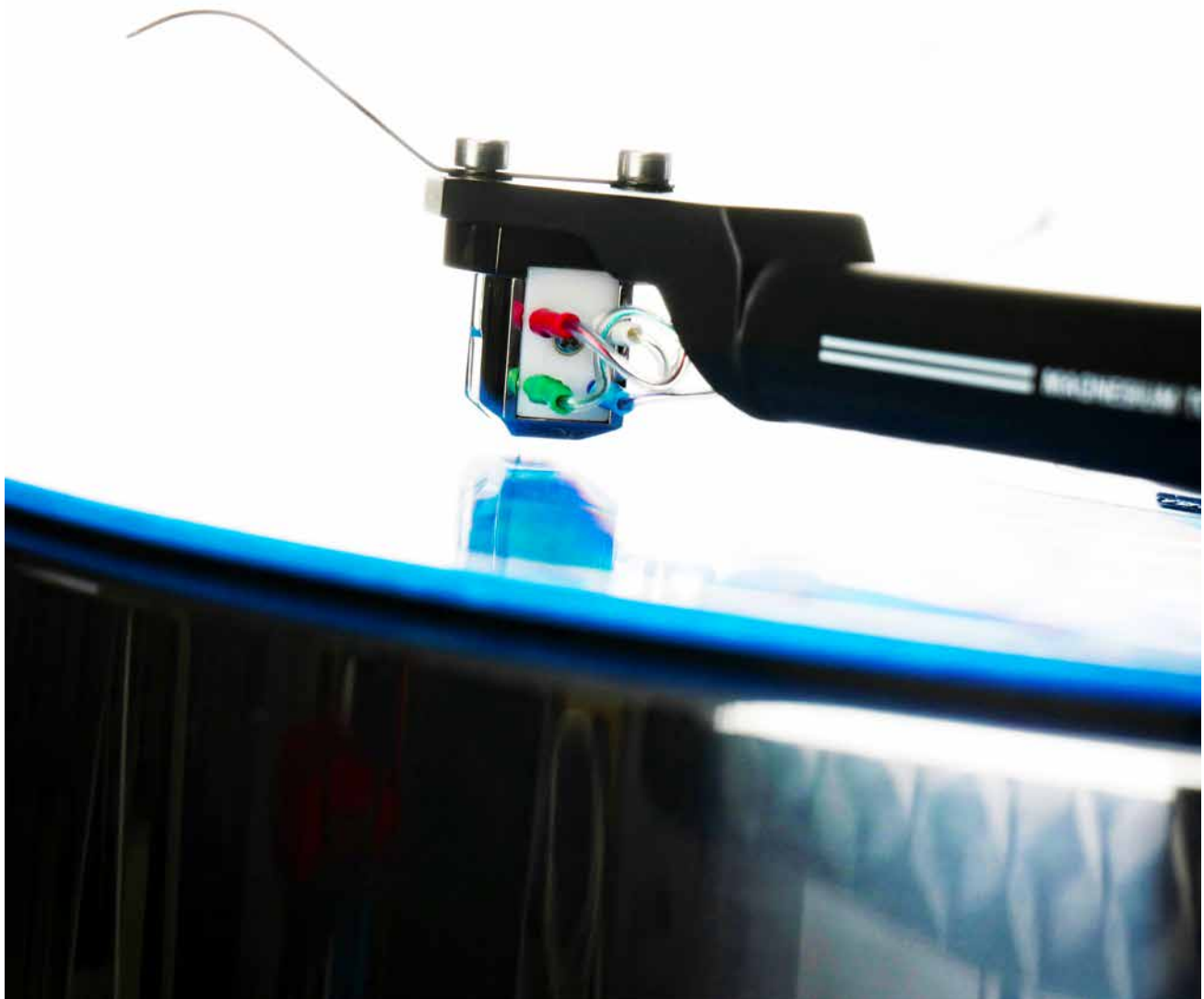
Transrotor Tamino

A MUSICAL PRINCE

By Roland Schmenner. Photography: Ingo Schulz



TRANSROTOR'S NEW CARTRIDGE
UNDERScores THE IDEALS OF
CLASSICAL HARMONY THROUGH
MORE THAN JUST ITS NAME.









_____ “This image is enchantingly lovely, like no eye has ever beheld,” declares the noble young prince Tamino in Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* when he sees the image of the lovely Pamina for the first time. A broad range of inevitable parallels can be drawn when you first set eyes on Transrotor’s new benchmark-setting cartridge, which shares its name with Mozart’s enamored prince. This cartridge is impeccable. Noble both in terms of its silvery shimmer and the sense of Apollonian serenity expressed through its straight lines, the Tamino strikes a resonating cord reminiscent of Mozart’s music. and shows it has earned its name.

<Subheading>

Japan Meets Bergisch Gladbach
Let’s take a look at the technical facts first. Yoshiaki Matsudaira’s company, known and loved by many high-end fans under the trade names MY Sonic Lab and Air Tight, manufactures the Tamino. The design for the cartridge draws from the top-of-the-range Signature Platinum model produced by the Sonic Lab division, which, according to Dirk Råke, has been both visually harmonized with Transrotor’s turntables and significantly adapted in terms of

the signature sound. These adaptations include freeing the frequency response of the original sound’s slight projections in the bass and, in particular, in the treble so as to avoid any overemphasis in the treble range—an adjustment that’s part and parcel of the fine-tuning done to many loudspeaker models anyway. Råke’s company was intent on counteracting the threatening potentiation of this frequency range. An understandable stance that reflects the company’s sound-quality policy, especially if you consider that the “smaller” top-of-the-range Figaro and Merlot Reference models are also exceptionally well-balanced, laid-back systems particularly well suited to long listening sessions. Also adopted were the specifications for the Signature Platinum, known for its extremely low impedance of just 1.4 ohm and output level of 0.5 millivolts, which is really quite reasonable for a high-quality MC. For this, Matsudaira-san uses strong neodymium magnets and the in-house developed coil core material SH- μ X made from the purest copper. That pure boron is used for the cantilever comes then as no surprise, in the same way as the special semi-line contact cut.

Plug ‘n’ Play

As everyone knows all too well, when it comes to changing cartridges, the God of all things high-end declared that a considerable amount of dexterity and the odd bead of sweat are both required before any listening enjoyment can be had. And a whole arsenal of cartridge leads also has to be sacrificed to the God of analog listening pleasure. However, for the Tamino the cartridge’s developers thankfully refrained from the kinds of exotic design antics that sometimes feature in other cartridges. These rounded sections, asymmetrical bulges, and bizarre side surfaces make installation and adjustment an almost insurmountable feat, especially if you need to slot fiddly little gems, which carry upward of four- or even five-figure price tags, in the tonearm. The clean edges, sturdy weight, protected stylus located under the system casing, and the perfectly sized threaded hole ensure adjustments in the SME tonearm are largely stress free and won’t cause you to break into a sweat. Even the inner qualities are quite pleasantly “normal” for a top-of-the-range MC, which means you don’t have to resort to ▶



using specially adapted transformers or phono stages with obscure impedance options: The Tamino is more or less a plug-and-play model, which, when combined with an Audionet PAM and a standard 100-ohm termination resistor, starts to really shine without any need to acclimatize whatsoever. Alignment on medium-mass tonearms, such as those in the SME IV/V class, also seems ideal; even more muscular arms in the higher mass categories should also pose no problem for the Tamino.

A Distinct Flair for Unearthing Subtle Nuances

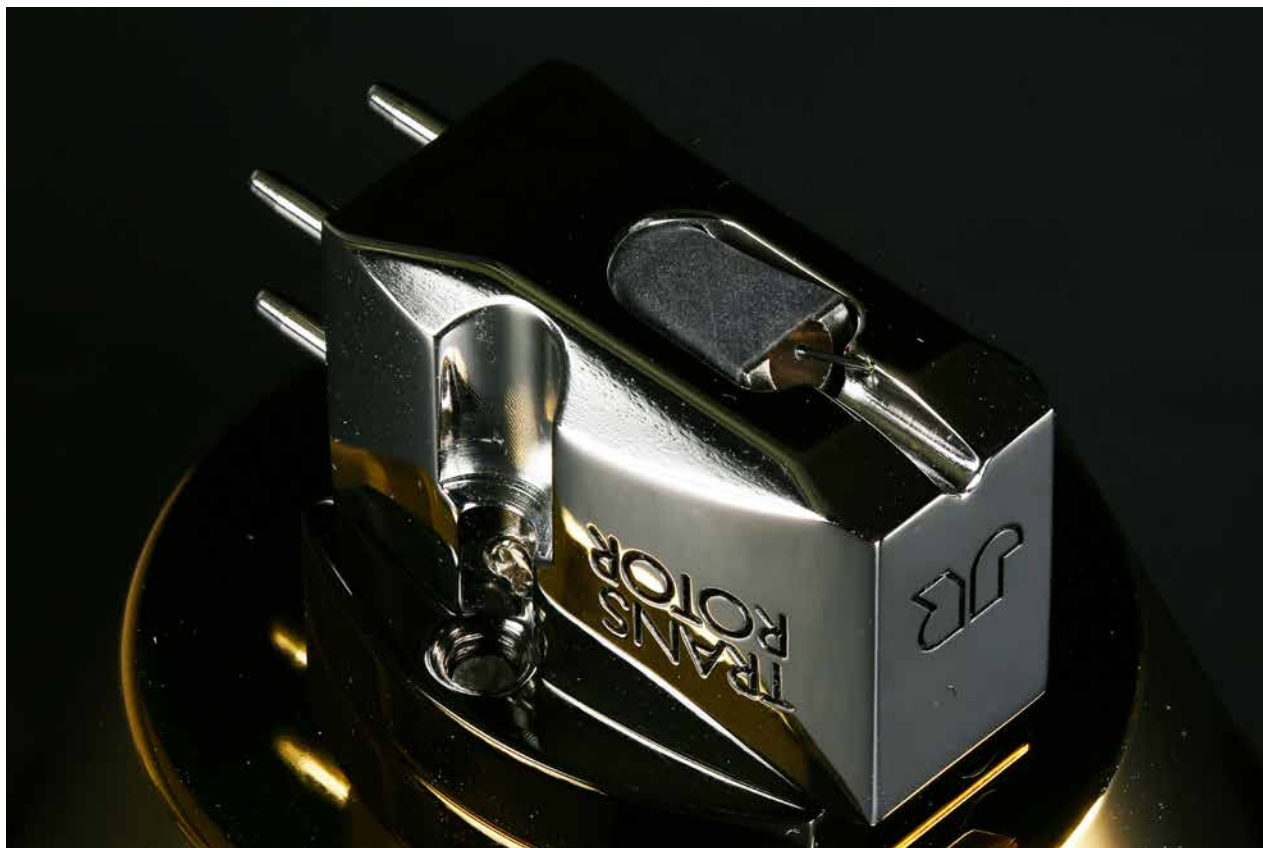
The tough question about which LP should be played first in the test session was, of course, an easy one to answer. Part two of my assessment of the Tamino kicked off with the overture to Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. What else could I've chosen? This version features James Levine conducting the Vienna Philharmonic in an earlier RCA Red Seal digital recording from

1981. It's far from being pointedly or sharply exaggerated in the treble range as is so often the case with productions from early in the digital era. On the contrary, it sounds a little less brilliant with darker tones. It would also be a massive overstatement to describe the four LPs as exceptionally dynamic. So what would the Tamino do with this rather mediocre recording, I wondered. To start with, it didn't attempt to artificially flood the darkness with light. The frequency range's linearity that Råke had touched on was clear, and no high-frequency accentuation was used to polish the recording's blunt fundamental sound. But something else happened to make this Mozart recording an absolute joy to listen to: The Tamino accurately selected the instruments, superbly positioned them on the stage, and gave them enough air and room to breathe that suddenly new dynamics emerged that would have otherwise remained somewhat diluted and blurred. Casually, without any pomp or ceremony, dynamic nuances and tonal subtleties emerged that were always somehow

“there” but never really “present.” Transrotor's newcomer in no way depends on fancy, overdeveloped vinyls, but instead demonstrates a distinct flair for unearthing previously unheard subtle nuances, even in run-of-the-mill productions.

Squaring the Circle

Despite the cartridge's name, I didn't want to just stick to classical music. The rich-sounding CMP production *Next Adventure* by the Theo Jörgensmann Quartet is, from a technical sound perspective, pretty much a representative vinyl: warm, smooth, bursting with dynamism, and, from a technical production perspective, perfect. And even after more than 35 years, Jörgensmann's signature blend of free jazz, fusion, and hard bop still sounds as fresh and timeless as ever. It may sound like a cliché coming from a critic, but I really did feel like I was listening to this for the first time. Cymbals and hi-hats emitted tonal nuances I had never heard before, and individual sound elements were ▶



distinct yet integrated into a harmonious overarching context in such a way that the cartridge nimbly managed to illustrate the music's formal structure, clearly one of the Tamino's main features. When, for example, a ritardando from the clarinet melts into the swirling reverberations from a cymbal that then seamlessly transition into a piano trill, the sound events produce their own unique sound signature in the room yet so coherently intertwine that you can only describe the effect as the musical equivalent of squaring the circle. There's no doubt in my mind that the Tamino is setting new sound quality standards for cartridges. Starting to feel really hooked, the urge to play with analog equipment then kicked in, driving me to tinker with different impedance termination resistors, various tracking forces, and slight modifications to the VTA. The

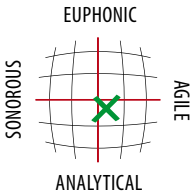
Tamino always reacted sensitively and, even in the case of extreme impedance values, it never buckled; and even in the face of considerable increases and decreases in the VTA, it never threw in the musical towel. It's very hard to make any concrete recommendations here. Instead, I'd simply recommend you let yourself be guided by the basic configuration of your overall setup when you go about fine-tuning your system. Nothing can go wrong with a setup tuned to be largely neutral using a slightly analytical phono stage, at least with the classic standard of a 100-ohm termination resistor and a straight VTA anyway. Just Plug 'n' Play

Let's Party



And how suitable is the Tamino for parties? No, I'm not suggesting for a second you should use the Tamino

in conjunction with your Technics 1210 decks to get your upcoming garden party in full swing. But a system with a five-figure price tag should at least be a real all-rounder as well. This is why the fabulous, recently released sampler *Divine Disco—American Gospel Disco 1974 to 1984* found its way onto my Raven turntable. Soon enough tantalizing funky beats were booming through my listening room, enriched with wonderfully smooth vocals from the choir. This, it has to be said, quickly and positively put the all-rounder question to bed. To wrap things up, let's invite Tamino himself to have a say in the form of his famous aria. "Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön" (This image is enchantingly lovely"): Éric Tappy's smooth and lyrical tenor voice on the RCA recording mentioned above conveys how ▶

Transrotor Tamino
Easy-to-use plug-and-play system, technical perfection, easy listening, and breathtaking attention to detail: Transrotor's Tamino manages to square the audiophile circle—you can't get more analog than this!



© FIDELITY MAGAZINE

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



enraptured the prince when he sets eyes on Pamina, and Transrotor's Tamino lets me directly share in this rapture. I experience the aria as solid, fully transparent, and with no sharpness whatsoever; The Apollonian notion of pure love, as Mozart again and again composed in his operas, irresistibly unfolds before my ears and I feel compelled to recast the line "like no eye has ever beheld" as "like no ear has ever heard."

Classic Perfection

Before I have to reluctantly send the system back to Bergisch Gladbach, I'm tempted to summarize what I experienced with my vinyl collection

at home over the last few weeks. It will, without doubt, be the most expensive cartridge I've mounted in a tonearm or a long time to come. Yet the hefty price tag was, without a doubt, reflected in the exceptional sound quality—but not by exhibiting any showy or strikingly spectacular effects. The stylus wasn't made to do any circus acrobatics. No, the Tamino's perfect musical coherence is what makes it so fascinating. With every beat, no matter what musical genre, I get the urge to say: That's right on the money! And what's the point of a musical performance if not musical perfection? Transrotor's Tamino definitely achieves such perfection for analog music playback. ■

ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

Turntable: TW-Acoustic Raven 0.5 | **Tonearm:** SME 309 | **Cartridge:** Clearaudio Concept MC | **Phono amplifier:** Audionet PAM V2 | **SACD player:** Denon DCD 2000AE | **D/A converter:** Grace Design M 903 | **Preamplifier:** Grace Design M 903 | **Power amplifier:** Yamaha P2500S | **Loudspeakers:** Magnepan 1.6 | **Headphone amplifier:** Grace Design M 903 | **Headphones:** Denon AH-D 5000 | **Cables:** Cardas, Vovox, Sommer | **Accessories:** Oyaide

Cartridge | Transrotor Tamino

Functional principle: Moving coil | **Housing material:** Titanium | **Cantilever:** Boron | **Stylus cut:** Semi-line contact | **Output voltage:** 0.5 mV | **Recommended tracking force:** 19-22 mN | **Recommended terminating impedance:** 100 Ω | **Weight:** 10 grams | **Warranty period:** Two years | **Price:** €12,000

Räke Hifi/Vertrieb GmbH | Irlenfelder Weg 43 | 51467 Bergisch Gladbach | Germany | Telephone +49 (0) 2202 31046 | www.transrotor.de



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



A sweet little thing—and assertively strong:
55 class-A watts per unit that sound like a
whole lot more.



AWARD
FIDELITY
WINNER
2018

CATEGORY: MONO POWER AMPLIFIER
SUBCATEGORY: TRANSISTOR.
AWARD: SMART
Valvet A4



V as in very exquisite, very good, or just plain Valvet.



YOUR

MUSIC

YOUR

TASTE



AMERICA'S LARGEST CONSUMER AUDIO SHOW
15TH ANNUAL ROCKY MOUNTAIN
INTERNATIONAL AUDIO FEST

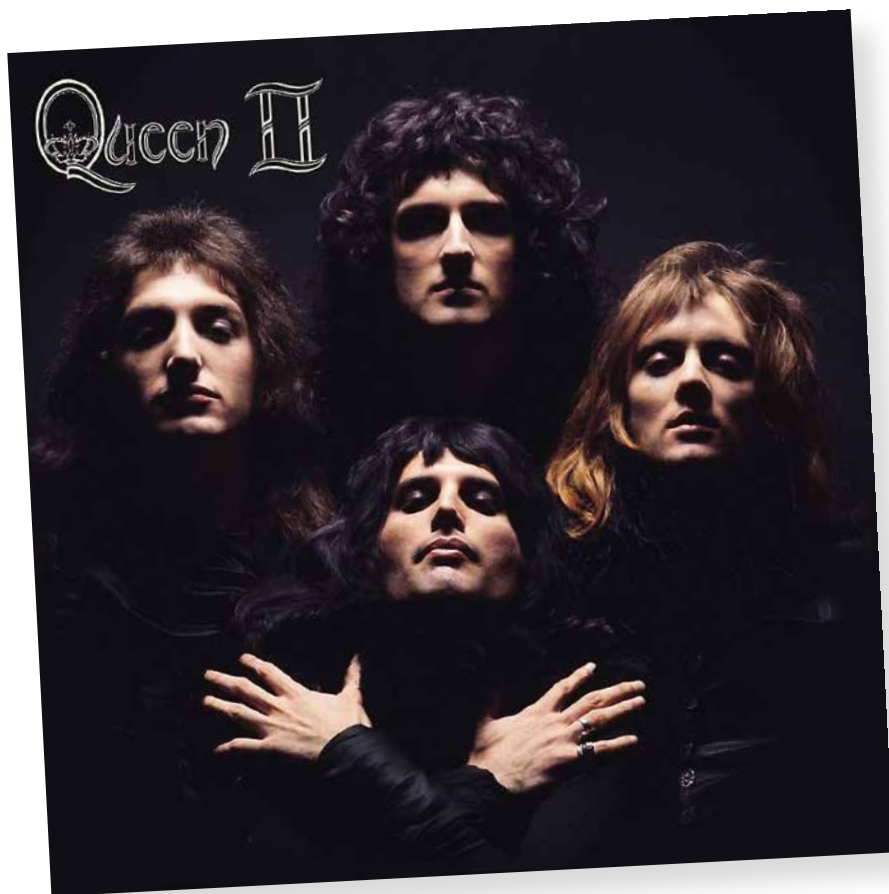
05-07 OCTOBER 2018 · DENVER, COLORADO

www.audiofest.net



ALL IN BLACK

By Hans-Jürgen Schaal—Part I



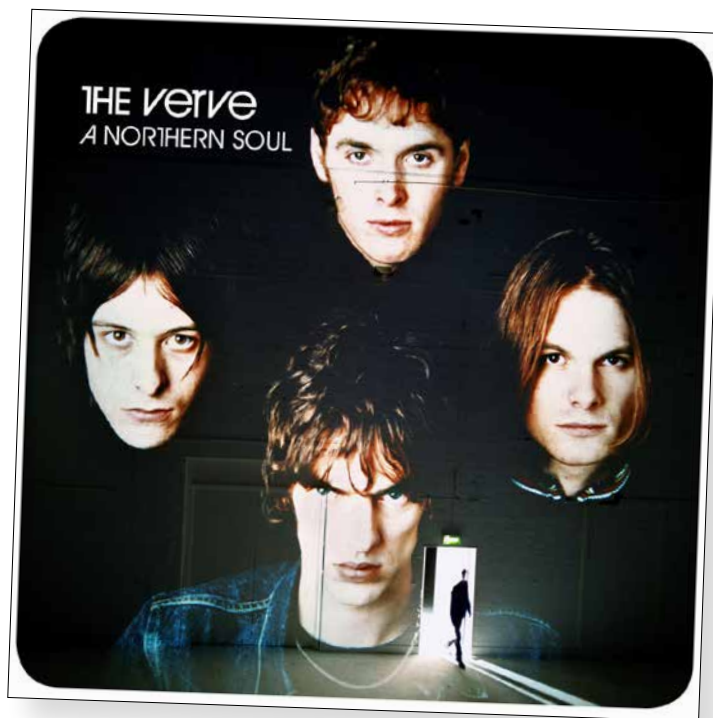
Covering normally refers to songs being performed by other artists, but actual album covers attract their share of impersonators, too. The covered cover: Is it a witty reference, respectful homage or parody? Or is there a deeper meaning behind it?

_____A touch of glamor was called for in 1974, so the members of the then still fledgling band Queen turned to photographer Mick Rock, who had made a name for himself with stylish photos of David Bowie and Iggy Pop. They wanted something eye-catching and exquisite for the cover of their second studio album, something that'd also reflect the content of the record. The A side, primarily the work of guitarist Brian May, was the "Side White.. The B side, which only featured compositions by Freddie Mercury, was the "Side Black." The A side contained the track "White Queen;" the B side, "The March of the Black Queen." Rock therefore shot the band in white and in black. The "white photo" found its way onto the inside of the flip cover and shows the four musicians all dressed in white in front of a white background. The "black photo" was used on the front. Only their four heads (and Freddy Mercury's hands crossed over his chest) are visible in the black space.

The photo became a classic: the light shining from above, the musicians' eye sockets dark from the shadows cast, and their four heads arranged in a diamond formation—upright like "Easter Island statues," according to one journalist. Rock had taken inspiration for this image from PR shots of Marlene Dietrich, legendary artistic photos shot in black and white. A portrait for the Sternberg film Shanghai Express had particularly caught

his eye. In it, Dietrich is looking upward with her fingers on her lower jaw, holding a cigarette in her left hand, while everything around her is dark. Rock's photo of the Queen band members became hugely famous when it served as the concept for the video of the smash hit "Bohemian Rhapsody" in 1975. Yet just one year earlier, the glamor effect of the record cover had been seen as rather overstated. Back in 1974 hardly anyone knew this band, let alone recognized their faces. Their first studio album hadn't even made it into the charts in Germany. The musicians even raised concerns themselves that the photo could come across as too pretentious for a second album. "The image made them look like much more than they were back then," Rock said. He was, however, able to allay their concerns.

The band made huge headway with Queen II, which reached No. 5 in the British album charts. The critics, however, remained skeptical. Melody Maker wrote: "It remains to be seen whether this band will manage to break through. If they do, I'll eat my hat or something. Maybe they're just too hungry for success. There's no depth to the sound or feel." However, the major breakthrough did come, at the latest with the fourth LP, the No. 1 album A Night At The Opera (in Germany No. 5 in the charts) and its No. 1 single, "Bohemian Rhapsody" (in Germany No. 7 in the ►



ALL IN BLACK

Part II

charts). You can actually find the ingredients for their recipe for success in Queen II. “The March of the Black Queen” is a kind of practice run for “Bohemian Rhapsody.” “The Fairy Feller’s Master-Stroke” is like a prequel to “Seaside Rendezvous.” “Procession” is the prototype for “God Save The Queen,” and “Nevermore” a lead-up to “Love Of My Life.” In 1974, all that was missing was simply the clarity, the emotiveness, and the courage to display unbridled pretentious swank. The album cover, however, was a good start.

Around 20 years later, The Verve were also about to record their second studio album. The band’s Freddie Mercury was Richard Ashcroft, and their Brian May was Nick McCabe. As was the case with Queen, The Verve needed to somewhat reset the musical direction their debut album had taken. Even the band’s name, which originally had no article, had to be slightly changed as the label Verve had threatened a lawsuit. And, as with Queen, the band’s real breakthrough came some time later. The album cover was produced in several stages. First, the band members were photographed in black and white, then color was later added to the photos. The portraits were then projected, in the well-established diamond formation, on wall inside a London warehouse —hence the lines on the musicians’ faces, which are the result of the wall structure. At the

bottom you can see the open door to the warehouse with the silhouette of drummer Pete Salisbury.

The studio recordings for A Northern Soul were also laborious as a lot of time, drugs, and emotions were involved. The ecstasy party to open the sessions alone lasted two weeks. Ashcroft’s little detour to London for “affairs of the heart” resulted in a three-month absence. Experienced producer Owen Morris said afterward: “It’s not a process that I’d ever want to go through again.” The super-talented guitarist McCabe called it “a complete and utter nightmare.” In 1995, bands such as Oasis, Blur, and Pulp were the new kids in town. Alternative rock in Britain had a new name: “Britpop.” The Verve brought a psychedelic and soulful undertone to this scene—a hypnotic pull with billowing guitar riffs and vocals that were sometimes reminiscent of Jim Morrison and Mick Jagger. This album gets better and better each time you listen to it. However, it doesn’t offer much in the way of variety as the William Blake–induced sentiment runs through all 12 tracks. These are “songs in the key of pain,” as critic Nick Southall once wrote. The band broke up for awhile after this experience in the studio. They must have all been pretty exhausted. ■

Queen: II (EMI 1575531)

The Verve: A Northern Soul (Hut CDHUT 27)



Photo: Stefan Gawlick

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

Great Concerto Hall

PHILHARMONIE DE PARIS

After Beijing (see FIDELITY international No. 07), it seems another spaceship has now landed in Paris. The new philharmonic hall looks like it had been sent hurtling through outer space only to then touch down on the Cité de la Musique grounds and come to a rest between old indoor markets, apartment buildings, and the Périphérique. Regardless from which side you approach the futuristic building, it always looks magnificent, mysterious, fascinating, disturbing—and as if it's from another world. But that's what great architecture is all about.

A downside to the hall though—just to start things off with my pet peeves—is its surroundings. Sadly, there aren't as many good restaurants here as there are in other arrondissements of the French capital. Guest performances in the Salle Pleyel, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and the Opéra Bastille are altogether more joyous affairs from a culinary perspective.

Musicians enter the Philharmonie's complex through a standard side entrance and have to undergo various security checks, much

like those you find at airports these days. The corridors behind the stage are expansive, confusing, and still only partially signposted—but at some point you eventually manage to make your way to the stage area. The backstage area has a huge amount of space for instrument cases, spare parts, and beverages as well as for the offstage musicians, instruments, and singers. Any annoyances are, however, quickly forgotten once you step out onto the stage. This softly floating, round, playful room is truly awe-inspiring and will take your breath away the moment you first set eyes on it. Too many materials, colors, and shapes clash here, however.

When we played in the Philharmonie de Paris for the first time back in May 2015, it hadn't been open very long. The Philharmonie had been hit by some construction delays (a problem that hasn't just plagued Berlin or Hamburg), and work was finished as quickly as possible following orders issued from the top—and with precisely the consequences you might imagine. The ceiling-mounted lighting wasn't the LED spotlights that have since been installed, but ▶



Photo: Stefan Gawlick

rather conventional lights that made the stage area unbearably hot. Even the stage machinery still wasn't fully ready: Individual stage elements had simply been screwed into the framework, and it still wasn't possible to adjust the height of the stage. The whole construction was so unstable that every time I played the timpani just a bit louder, the mouthpieces of my brass-playing colleagues jiggled out of their mouths. That issue has been consigned to the history books as well, and now everything works just as it should.

The sound produced in this hall is nothing short of spellbinding. Just like its shape, the hall's sound is unusual and not what you're accustomed to as a musician. Typically, you hear reverberation emanating from the depths of the room. This makes its way back to the stage from the rear wall, which usually means you can get a real understanding of how things sound on stage. The mixture in "normal"

halls is always more or less the same. Here in Paris, it truly depends on where you're sitting on stage as the irregular shapes in the room reflect differently weighted information back to those on stage. For musicians, this is both confusing and thrilling at the same time. The hall's sound is quintessentially transparent but not as easy to dissect as in the Elbphilharmonie. The Philharmonie de Paris audience is served a solid, modern mixture of sound that may not generate the feel-good style of Amsterdam or Vienna, but does, as a result, create a more universal sound that doesn't immediately throw in the towel on the acoustics, even with a Shostakovich piece.

Philharmonie de Paris | <https://philharmoniedeparis.fr>

Music tips | Recordings with characteristic concert-hall sound: Recordings from the Philharmonie de Paris are very rare as SFR never, or only very rarely, cooperates with labels. The resident Orchestre National de France (ONF) is also not exactly one of the top recording orchestras.



The Beatles, 1969

ABBEY ROAD MEDLEY

Prog rock features tempo changes, hints of classical music and jazz, extensive instrumentals, and surprising instruments. Since that's too much to cram into a three-minute song, there's a long track.

_____ Pretentious artists might have decided to call it “The Abbey Road Suite,” however The Beatles only called it a “long medley,”—“medley” meaning nothing more than something containing a bit of this and that and odds and ends. The only true Beatles long track, their parting gift to their fans, is actually just recycled fragments of songs. This band was never short of musical ideas, but thrashing out ideas to make sure everyone involved was happy with the results sometimes led to clashes. And in 1969, when they had finally had enough of each other, the clashes grew worse than ever. Paul McCartney’s suggestion to simply link the existing, pretty much undeveloped, track ideas together was therefore acceptable to everyone.

The musical smorgasbord isn’t at all recognizable as a medley on the album cover of Abbey Road. Only individual fragments are listed there: “You Never Give Me Your Money,” “Sun King,” “Mean Mr Mustard,” “Polythene Pam,” “She Came In Through The Bathroom Window,” “Golden Slumbers,” “Carry That Weight,” and “The End.” Most of these eight half-baked songs (five by McCartney, three by John Lennon) don’t even reach the two-minute mark. A ninth song, “Her Majesty,” is just 26 seconds long and wasn’t listed at all on the original album; it followed the other songs as a “hidden track.” The

song directly before the medley, “Because,” could be seen as a kind of overture: It doesn’t end on the keynote, but cries out to be continued. So, depending on the definition used, the medley lasts between 16:17 minutes and 19:30 minutes. The fragments were recorded individually or two at a time between May and August 1969 and then strung together more or less imaginatively with the help of chord transitions and interval sounds. As the shape of the medley began to take form, a melody could also be repeated from the top in “Carry That Weight.” The first track, “You Never Give Me Your Money,” is the longest in the medley and sounds as if it had been pieced together from disparate song fragments. The following track, “Sun King,” is a parody of Mediterranean clichés and begins reminiscent of Fleetwood Mac’s “Albatross” and ends in a kind of imaginative Italian flair. “Golden Slumbers” contains some melancholy strings again, while “The End” is a final goodbye: Here, Ringo Starr plays his first and last drum solo on a Beatles record, after which McCartney, George Harrison, and Lennon alternately play solos on their guitars in two-bar intervals. Some pieces of text in the medley openly mention the band coming to an end. But through to the very end, the Fab Four approached their work with a love for the music: wonderful choruses and great guitar parts—a veritable feast of original details. ■

Adrian Teufelhart



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



From pros for discerning aficionados: The phono preamp hailing from Germany features sound and technical qualities that place it among the international avant-garde—plus its equipped with the one-of-a-kind “recompizer.”



The patented recompizer switch continuously and effectively enhances the dynamics of vinyl recordings with tonal weaknesses. The robust power supply also effortlessly supplies a second Phonolab.

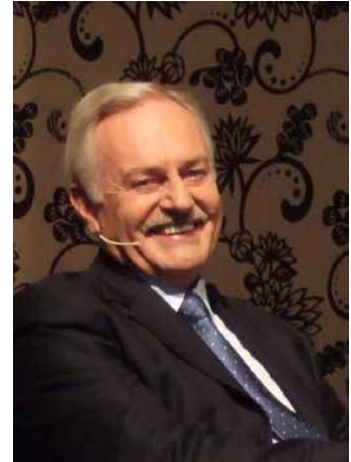




PHYSICS— THAT'S WHERE THE (MUSICAL) ACTION IS!

By Bernhard Galler





Volume up or down?
A very quick interview with Hans M. Strassner, CEO of HMS Elektronik, where we wanted him to respond as fast as possible.



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



FOR MANY PEOPLE STARTING UP THEIR OWN BUSINESSES, USING THEIR OWN INITIALS IN THE COMPANY NAME WOULD SEEM THE OBVIOUS THING TO DO.



HANS M. STRASSNER ALSO OPT-
ED FOR HMS. BACK THEN HE DIDN'T
KNOW THAT HMS STANDS FOR
“HER MAJESTY’S SHIP” IN THE CON-
TEXT OF BRITISH NAVAL VESSELS.







Nonetheless it is a coincidence that couldn't be more apt, since a similarly illustrious reputation precedes HMS products in the hi-fi industry. After working for twenty years in industrial metrology R&D, Strassner joined the high-end community in 1993 and got established from a standing start. Hans M. Strassner was born in Landes-
hut (Kamienna Gora) in what is now Poland and grew up in Lüdenscheid.

Mother's modern Grundig music chest really impressed a young boy growing up in post-war Germany; Verdi's *La Traviata* was played on it "ad nauseam". This initial musical spark was soon followed by his first electrical engineering efforts involving tube amplifiers and loudspeakers. He maintained his course by doing an engineering degree in Technical Physics, majoring in Electrical Engineering. HMS was soon selling and modifying so-called lock-in amplifiers made by a leading US manufacturer. This is a category of

device used in basic physics research to measure the faintest of voltages and currents. We are talking twelve to fifteen zeros after the decimal point here, i.e. picovolts and femtoamperes—in figures that is: 0.000 000 000 001 volts or 0.000 000 000 000 001 amperes. A single story was all it took to change the course of HMS Elektronik's history. Back then FIDELITY writer Jürgen Schröder had written an article about cables for another magazine. Hans M. Strassner was also experimenting with new loudspeaker wiring at the same ▶



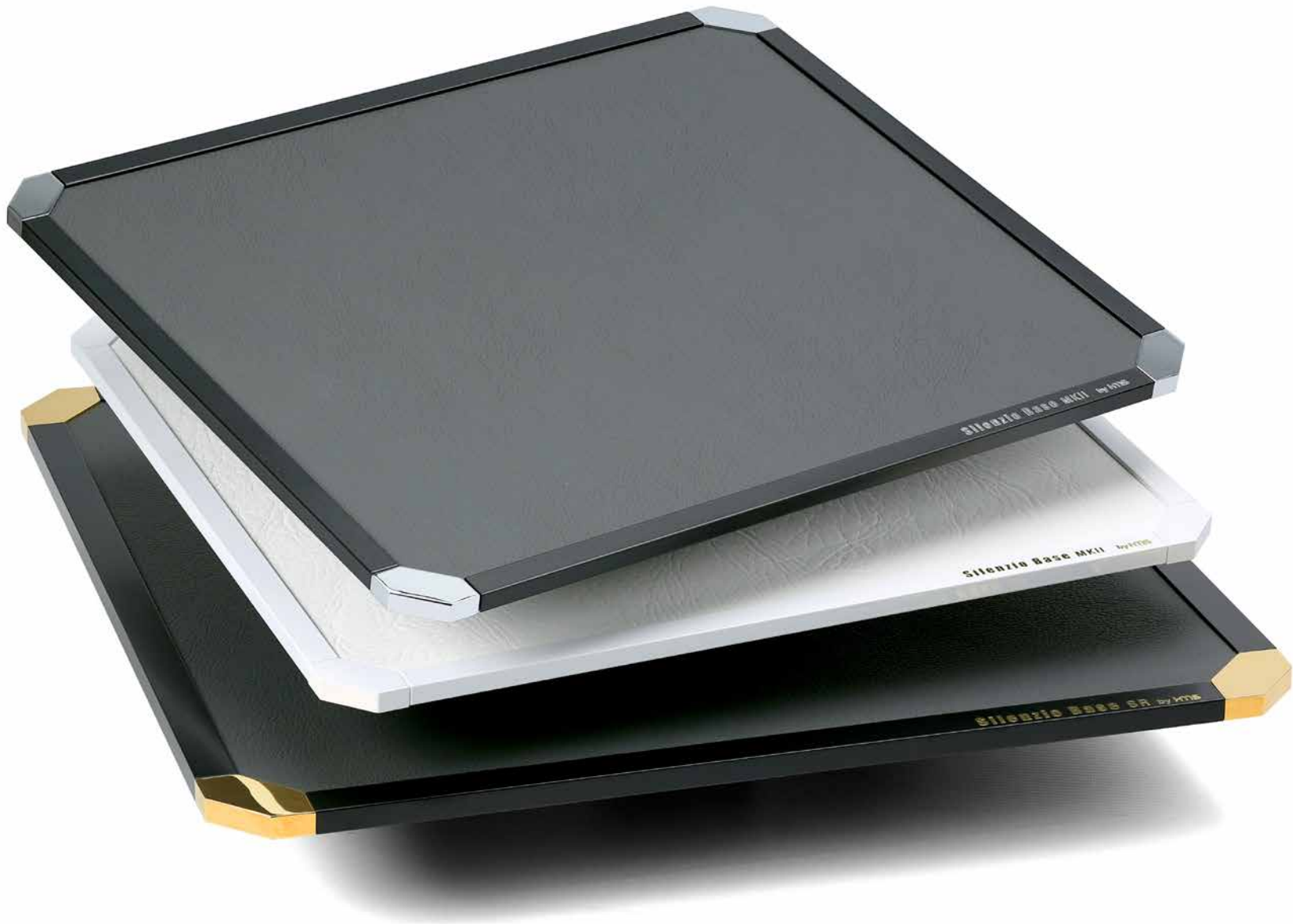
time and came across that article. He sent our man Schröder a low-inductance, highly interference-proof cable right away—it was worth trying it out as a loudspeaker cable. This cable was originally designed for use in high-temperature superconductor measuring units. Nevertheless its audio environment impact was amazing; during the audio test they conducted together, Schröder and Strassner were thoroughly impressed by an auditory vividness and three-dimensional sound image that they had never encountered to that extent before. The test report that followed literally caused “the phone to ring non-stop for weeks.” Two decades

of R&D experience meant that HMS was to a certain extent an expert in the subject, and from that point on it was a piece of cake to design and develop custom products for the audio industry as well.

Nowadays the company’s product range includes everything that paves the way for a great sound experience from the building’s electrics to the loudspeakers. The objective is “to get cables out of the wastage habit.” Hans M. Strassner believes that the listening public is well aware of how crucially important cables are; awareness of the issue has even increased. Over the final couple of yards, an unsuitable choice of

cable can practically ruin the performance of premium hi-fi components. HMS’ latest sensation, the Energia Supréma power cable, is likely to prevent that kind of thing happening. Here HMS has worked towards delivering a zero-loss design, with the result that cable is being touted everywhere as an industry gold standard.

A mere half a dozen employees focus at HMS Elektronik on German-speaking markets. Whilst the other side of the Pond is a very tempting prospect, that market is too much of a challenge for an SME. Hans M. Strassner prefers to maintain his ties with the scientific community: He continues to ▶





take on consultancy assignments, on behalf of clients like the Fraunhofer Institute. Physics is also a part of his private life. Whilst he is keen on sailing and at a younger age he also rowed and occasionally ventured to do a tandem parachute jump, what really gets Strassner going are scientific papers on astrophysics and cosmology. Is there any room for music at all in a life characterized by such scientific endeavor? Very much so! Soft sounds from singer-songwriters like Fabrizio De André or Allan Taylor, smaller classical music ensembles for preference, because it's

easier to discern those subtle sound details like the movement of a bow across a violin string or a musician blowing into a wind instrument. Strassner, master of the cable, calls "When I Need You" by jazz singer Jocelyn B. Smith his favorite song. An emotional song indeed. Like when customers often react emotionally, even if only technical or pragmatic issues like cables are involved. One caller literally said, "Last night my system sounded simply divine and that wasn't down to the wine or my wife beside me. Early this afternoon it sounded like you could give it away.

How is that possible?" After fitting a set of HMS cables, the fresh feedback from the customer sounded more positive: "Now my system sounds like it does every Sunday evening." ■

**HMS elektronik | Hans M. Strassner GmbH |
Am Arenzberg 42 | 51381 Leverkusen |
Germany | Telefon +49 (0)2171 734006 |
www.hmselektronik.de**

This is a reprint from "WHO IS WHO IN HIGH FIDELITY"—Vol. 1, the compendium from FIDELITY MEDIA 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.

OUR STORY, OUR TRADEMARK.



solidsteel

HI-FI RACKS, SPEAKER STANDS, WALL-SHELVES AND FURNITURE

 MADE IN ITALY SINCE 1990

SOLIDSTEEL MC GROUP ^{SRLS}

WWW.SOLIDSTEEL.IT

ANYONE CAN MAKE BIG, EXPENSIVE DEVICES: EVERY YEAR YOU SEE THEM AT HIGH END, THE INTERNATIONAL HI-FI TRADE SHOW.



BUT, WHEN NEW PRODUCTS ARE BET-
TER AND LESS EXPENSIVE AND THEY
DON'T GIVE TWO HOOTS ABOUT
HIGH-END PRECONCEPTIONS,



THEY'RE DEFINITELY WORTH
A CLOSER LOOK.





PS Audio Stellar Gain Cell DAC + Stellar S300

SMART MOVE

By Stefan Gawlick. Photography: Ingo Schulz

_____ PS Audio has been a permanent fixture on the high-end scene for many years now. I've had the pleasure of listening to a few fascinating DACs from the US company and some really good phono preamps, too. And it's still the most impressive aspect of all to listen to the very same system with and without a

PS Audio Power Plant. For me, this power synthesizer, which regenerates a completely new AC with 230 volts and 50 hertz, is by far and away the most important "accessory" for a stereo system if you want it to sound really, really good. This, in my opinion, ties in nicely with the company's very

professional image of always striving to provide technically solid solutions without attempting to perform any voodoo. Paul McGowan, CEO of PS Audio, clearly doesn't invest his money in philosophies and "bling," but rather in proper, decent electrical engineering. If you take the time to read the myriad of ▶

THE FRONT OF BOTH STELLAR MODELS IS NEAT, UNCLUTTERED, AND MODEST, AND THE REAR OFFERS EVERYTHING AN AUDIOPHILE COULD NEED.



based on sound reasoning; there's clarity and transparency wherever you look. The fact that manufacturing is carried out in Boulder in the US state of Colorado and not been outsourced to the Far East

As everything ultimately comes at a price, PS Audio is not exactly the kind of company that would spring to mind for bargain hunters looking to snap up a deal. Considering the prices of

even €1,700 is a hefty price to pay for a stereo power amplifier and in no way can be considered a bargain. But having heard over the last few days how easily the S300 blows out of the water ▶



IF YOU OPEN UP THE COVER OF THE S300 POWER AMPLIFIER, YOU'LL SEE SOME OLD FRIENDS:

even considerably more expensive competitors, I'm sticking to my guns: These devices are real bargains. In the best sense of the word!

When you unpack the S300 power amplifier and its partner, the Gain Cell DAC (a DAC-pre-amp combo), you're immediately blown away by how lightweight they are—when was the last time I managed to put a formidable power amplifier on a shelf using just one hand? Naturally, powerhouse devices can't be milled from solid pieces of aluminum when costs need to be kept to a minimum; this is, of course, precisely where most production costs are incurred. But with the sound quality ultimately depending on the thickness of the front panel and the weight of the switches, it makes smart sense not to cut corners here. The aluminum shells of the Stellar duo, which together with the sidewalls form the housing, are definitely not what people would call to mind when thinking of real high-end heavyweights, but their clear

no-nonsense design is fully to my taste. It's fair to say there's surely better clearances and fits on other top-end products on the market, but the ones here are perfectly fine in my opinion.

The front of both Stellar models is neat, uncluttered, and modest, and the rear offers everything an audiophile could need. The S300 power amplifier has inherently fewer bells and whistles: An illuminated standby switch is located on the front ... and that's it. The rear features balanced and unbalanced inputs, two pairs of stable binding posts per channel for loudspeaker cables, the power jack, and a "hard" power switch. That's all you need anyway.

Things get a little more lavish with the DAC preamplifier, though: four analog inputs (one of which is balanced), both versions of outputs, and a whole host of digital inputs, some necessary, some nice to have. Incidentally, when it comes to the PS Audio Stellar devices, balanced connections are worth their weight in gold as both models are actually

designed to be permanently balanced.

If you open up the cover of the S300 power amplifier, you'll see some old friends: two output stage modules from the ICEpower range. However, McGowan combines these with an in-house class A input stage that's equipped with PS Audio's typical molded Gain Cell modules. The entire power supply runs through the switched-mode power-supply units of the output stages, making any search for heavy metal one done in vain. So, it's a flyweight—but one that packs a punch, as you'll soon see ...

The Gain Cell modules developed by McGowan also feature in the preamplifier. In addition to a discrete class A amplifier circuit, which can work at stable temperatures in the small molded boxes, the Gain Cells enable volume control without the need for any further circuits. This is achieved by driving the actual amplifier circuits differently depending on the required volume, causing ▶

With the PS Audio Stellar, a balanced connection type is worthwhile, as both components are in fact continuously symmetrical.



Hi-fi upside down: the big toroidal transformer is housed in the preamp.



WHEN PAIRED WITH THE GAIN CELL DAC PREAMPLIFIER, THESE SYNERGIES REALLY CAME TO LIFE.

them to then emit the corresponding level. A rather cunning and smart system that keeps its cards close to its chest—and explains the casting compound. The converter is an old friend from the PS Audio range: an updated version of the Nu-Wave DSD. This board processes all PCM and DSD data rates and, I thought to myself, it would presumably sound very clear and detailed with a knack for tones and the flow of the music, provided not a great deal had changed since my last encounter with a PS Audio DAC. I was eager to find out.

At the start of our time together, I connected the S300 power amplifier to the primary monitors in my studio. The first piece of good news: no whooshes and no crackles. The power amplifier only lets you know it's idle by shining its standby switch light. After a delightfully short “warm-up” lasting around 10 minutes, the S300 really kicked in and started to show what's got. Initially I was struck with the edge sharpness (acutance) of the overall sound image, which is typical of really good class D

amplifiers. Individual instruments were even more precisely defined in the panorama (my colleague Cai Brockmann, who knows my room well, will no doubt be wondering right now how that could be possible), detaching themselves from the background in an incredibly organic way. That made it very easy to assess the settings of individual tracks' equalizers and compressors even in complex mixes. However, this outstanding resolution was not only offered in the mid-frequency range, but across the entire frequency range as well, although it did emerge in the lowest regions at the cost of a certain richness or warmth. But with most loudspeakers and (in particular!) rooms, this clarity in the bass is a distinct advantage. I noticed this later when I tested the power amplifier one story higher in the living room. Here, in a standard consumer acoustic setting so to speak, I no longer noticed any leanness and everything sounded just like it should. Back in the studio, though, I also stopped hearing it as soon as the subwoofers kicked in. I was particularly impressed when I connected the duo to my old Spendor S3/SSEs: Controlled

by the PS Audio machines, the sound they produced went well beyond my expectations. With my eyes closed, it was suddenly impossible to locate the loudspeakers in the room; seldom have I heard the Spondors play so weightlessly and effortlessly. They've achieved similar qualities before with other class D power amplifiers, but in the process they weren't able to conceal a certain hardness or, perhaps better, brittleness. In this case, everything remained fluid and smooth, despite the abundance of details. I suspect now this can be traced to the company's class A input stages. Incidentally, the Stellar S300 gets on famously well with class A preamplifiers: In the studio, I found it worked significantly better with a Crane Song Avocet than with any other equipment.

When paired with the Gain Cell DAC preamplifier, these synergies really came to life. I could hear everything kind of “fall into place.” It's hard to describe, yet I'm confident that most of you know exactly what I mean. Incidentally, it doesn't really matter whether the preamplifier operates as a purely analog ▶

PS Audio's proprietary „Analog Cells“ turn the ICE power modules of the power amp into good sounding devices. The preamp/DAC features showy blue bits as well: the all analog „Gain Cell“ is a spin-off of vintage studio gear (also see „PS Audio special features: Gain Cell and Analog Cell“ on page 131).

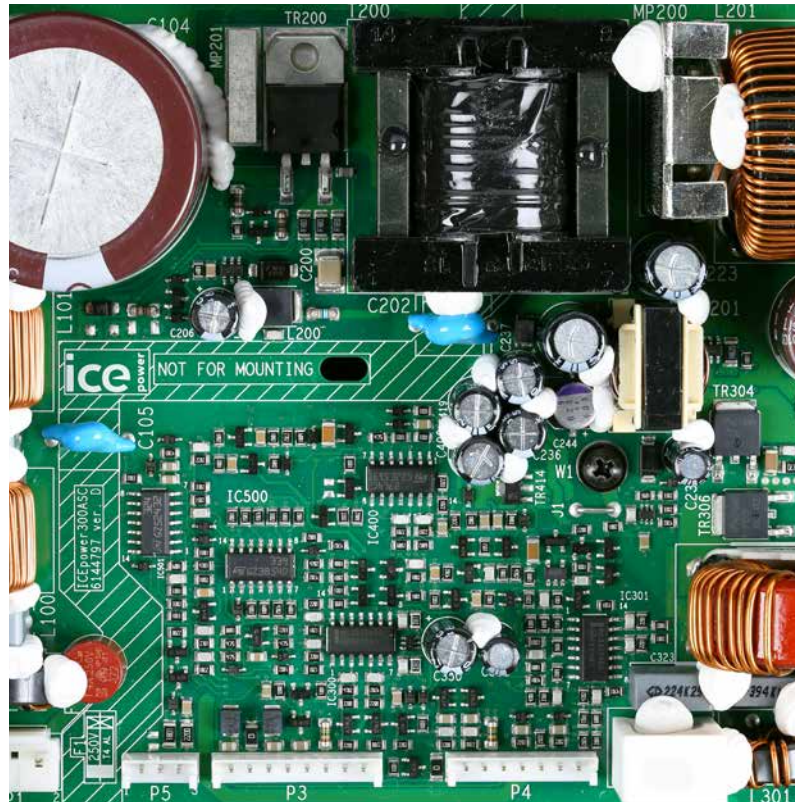




preamp or as a DAC as well. It's easiest to describe using a CD: With their dynamic range and abrupt volume changes, the incredibly stunning recordings of Ludwig van Beethoven's piano sonatas played by András Schiff have a tendency to push unstable systems to their limits. Although this was clearly not something I had to worry about here, these CDs can be a real challenge, even for bigger beasts. When combined with other equipment, the PS Audio duo is able deliver everything you need. Details, information, tones, and flow—nothing is missing as long as all the other devices in the rest of

the chain do their job equally well. When the two devices work together though, none of these parameters even enter your head. Everything works so smoothly, you just don't pay attention to that sort of thing. Then a particular skill of Schiff, which you actually only notice if everything else around is just right and all disruptions have disappeared, suddenly emerges: He's able to dissect complex pieces into their individual constituent parts without undoing the overall coherence holding them all together. Just like in an exploded-view drawing used in mechanical engineering, spaces are suddenly

created in front of, next to, and behind the notes: As you listen, you feel like you could be walking through the architectural structure of the piece, like walking through a cathedral. You hardly notice it as you listen, because it comes across so naturally. But when you listen to the same piece played by another (actually, almost any other) pianist, you're startled by how small and two-dimensional everything suddenly sounds. The loss hurts. You can only experience such moments outside the concert hall, however, if absolutely everything in the stereo system is just right, regardless of the price category. ■



Apparently Paul McGowan doesn't invest his money in philosophies and blingbling, but in clean electrical engineering.

PS Audio special features:

GAIN CELL AND ANALOG CELL

Volume control that sits in the signal path distorts the signal regardless of how elaborately it's put together. This is why PS Audio Founder Paul McGowan came up with another approach to tackling the problem around one and a half decades ago. Instead of using potentiometers, circuit switching networks, transformers, or resistor cascades to control the output volume, McGowan created the "Gain Cell", which relies on a different principle: the

"variable gain amplifier" developed by Howard Jones and Gilbert Cell back in the 1960s. In the golden era of analog recording technology, this principle was very common in recording-studio equipment as it also turned out to be superior in terms of sound quality. When the volume control is turned, PS Audio's Gain Cell modifies the gain instead of influencing the signal itself. By using the "variable gain amplifier," PS Audio eliminates the need

for additional circuits in the signal path and achieves an exceptionally neat control range of over 80 decibels. The Gain Cell also works in purely analog form in the Stellar Gain Cell DAC: It switches the preamplifier's inputs without ever abandoning the analog level. It also has a fully balanced circuitry layout to minimize interference and crosstalk.

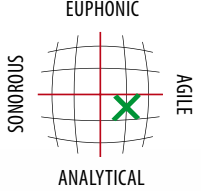
To also ensure that, where possible, no sound gets lost in the power amplifier's



signal path, PS Audio uses an "Analog Cell" in the Stellar S300 power amplifier, which was developed by Darren Myers, the chief designer of the Stellar series. The Analog Cell represents a negative-feedback-free, balanced MOSFET input stage, which runs in class A operation. It's designed to be especially similar in terms of tonal characteristics to a tube, and enables the developer to "voice" the power amplifier. ■

Hans von Draminski

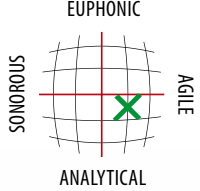




PS Audio Stellar Gain Cell DAC
A wealth of connections, all possible data rates, and top-class sound quality: Who offers more for the same price?



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

PS Audio Stellar S300
An abundance of smooth details, flow without muddying the waters, and enough control for most loudspeakers: That's what a seriously good power amplifier should provide.



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



Preamplifier-DAC | PS Audio Stellar Gain Cell DAC

Analog inputs: 1 x line in balanced (XLR), 3 x line in unbalanced (RCA) | **Digital inputs:** 2 x coaxial (asynchron, max. 192 kHz), USB (asynchron, max. 192 kHz), optical (asynchron, max. 96 kHz), I2S (max. DSD128, PCM 384 kHz) | **Analog outputs:** each 1 x balanced (XLR), unbalanced (XLR), headphones (6.3-mm jack) | **Special features:** CPLD input (FPGA) reduces jitter and propagation delays,

three digital filters for PCM signals, "Native Mode" for digital signals, fully balanced analog circuitry, passive output filter, remote control | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 43.5/8/31 cm | **Weight:** 6 kg | **Warranty period:** three years (if registered) | **Price:** €2,000

Stereo power amplifier | PS Audio Stellar S300

Power output (8/4 Ω): 2 x 140/300 W | **Inputs:** Balanced (XLR), unbalanced (RCA) | **Outputs:** 2 x loudspeakers | **Special features:** fully balanced, up

to 2 Ω stable circuitry, dual mono each with own power supply, output binding posts made from solid gold-plated copper | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 43.5/8/31 cm | **Weight:** 6 kg | **Warranty period:** three years (if registered) | **Price:** €1,700

HiFi2die4 | Jürgen Sachweh | Austr. 9 | 73575 Leinzell | Germany | Telephone +49 (0) 7175 909032 | www.hifi2die4.de

SUBBASE AUDIO VINYL HARMONY CLAMP

By Helmut Hack.





Subbase Audio may not be one of the cheapest suppliers on the accessory market, and the products created by Thomas Schlipper are often disproportionately heavy. Nevertheless, here at FIDELITY, we like them a lot. There are two main reasons for our enthusiasm: The products are always top-notch in terms of workmanship, and they offset their high price with excellent sound quality. Weighing in at 460 grams, the Vinyl Harmony Clamp is also a relatively heavy product for its type, but it's a featherweight in comparison with this manufacturer's bases for devices and speakers. There's a second version of the

clamp that weighs only 200 grams—probably just light enough for most subchassis turntables to deal with. The impeccable ebony disk comes nestled in an exceptionally robust hard plastic case and peeks out at you from the foam lining. A first glimpse tells you the label is slightly misleading: It's not a record clamp at all; it's more of a record weight that slides over the spindle to sit on top of a record. But, in light of the nearly half kilo pressing down on the record label, the difference is pretty academic. The Harmony Clamp bears down on the vinyl with a layer of ebony containing sunken titanium screws and ▶



a high-density chrome platter made of aluminum or a bronze alloy (200 or 460 grams). The ergonomic handle has inlaid rubber rings to ensure a secure grip. A high-gloss, black LFG432 lens on the upper side is designed to harmonize electromagnetic fields. Schlipper claims this innovative technology works in a radically different way compared with other sound-tuning products on the market.

Record weights are normally a good idea for nonsuspended turntables such as my Feickert Firebird because they almost always bring some sort of improvement.

The vinyl is more firmly stabilized and vibrations during playback are more effectively transferred. But significant sound differences exist among the various record weights out there, probably due to the way they deal with the absorbed vibrations. In my view, using ebony for dampening purposes seems a promising approach. Schlipper, however, asserts the secret to the Harmony Clamp lies in the combination of materials, which has more of a harmonizing than a dampening effect.

No matter: The first impression I get is of a more firmly rooted, earthier, woodsier playback with the double ▶



basses and violins. But this first impression falls somewhat short of the mark. In point of fact, the signal-to-noise ratio appears to be higher, bringing a clearer, more compact sound across the entire frequency range. Powerful voices, such as Etta James's on the *At Last* album, are given greater emphasis. But it's easier to locate the rhythm group in the background as well, with the orchestral parts also given better definition and greater depth. Unfortunately, it remains unclear whether the Harmony Clamp's magical LFG432 lens makes any real contribution to the

end result. But it doesn't seem to have any negative effects either. As far as the overall sound is concerned, there's no doubt in my mind that the Harmony Clamp has a positive impact. Why not give it a try. You'll definitely hear the difference! ■

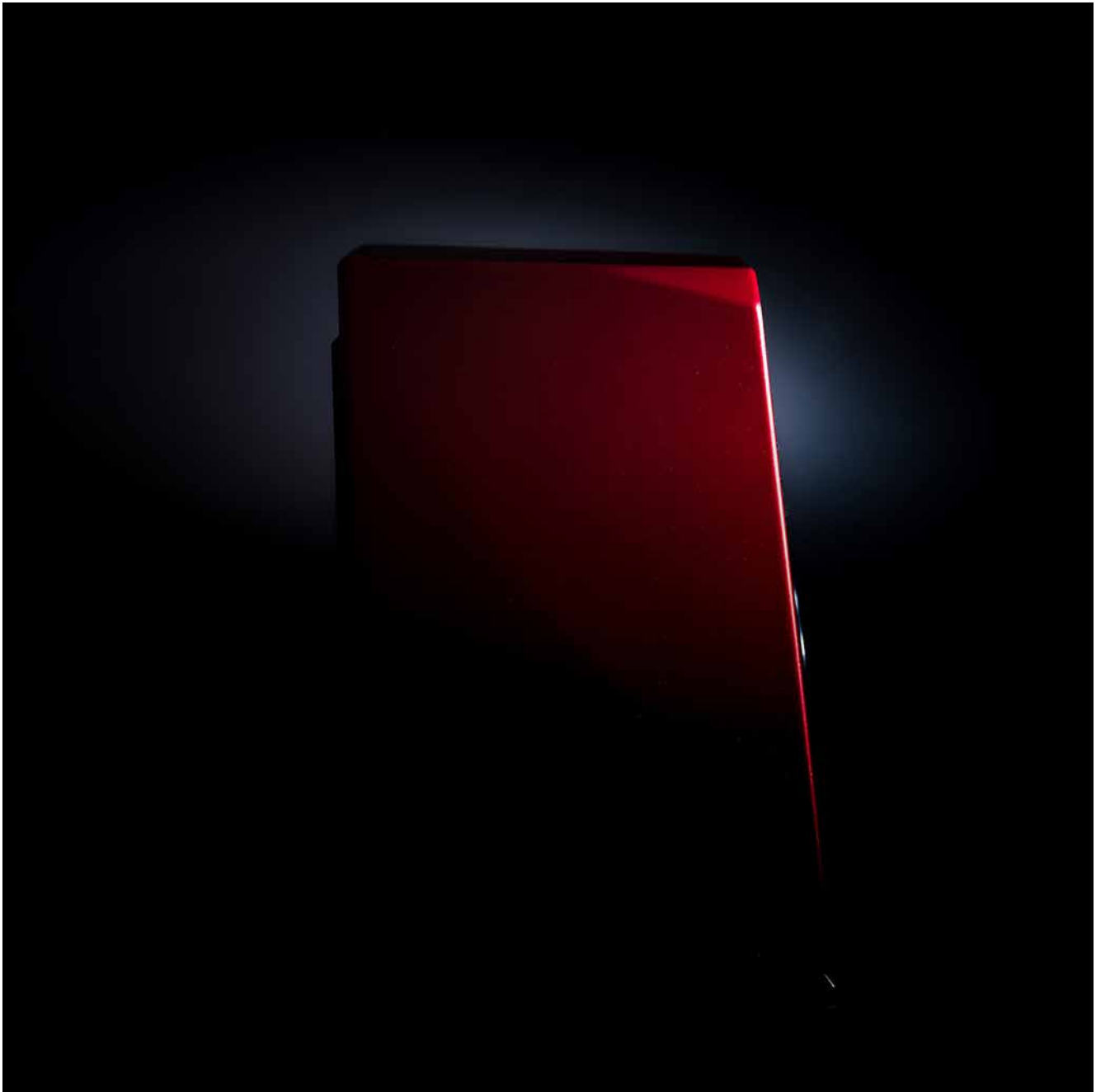
Subbase Audio Vinyl Harmony Clamp | record weight €690 (200 grams) | €750 (460 grams)

Subbase Audio Manufaktur | Gut Vellbrüggen 7 | 41469 Neuss | Germany | phone +49 (0) 178 3410431 | www.subbase-audio.de

May 3, 2018

WILSON AUDIO TUNETOT

By Danny Kaey. Photography: Wilson Audio

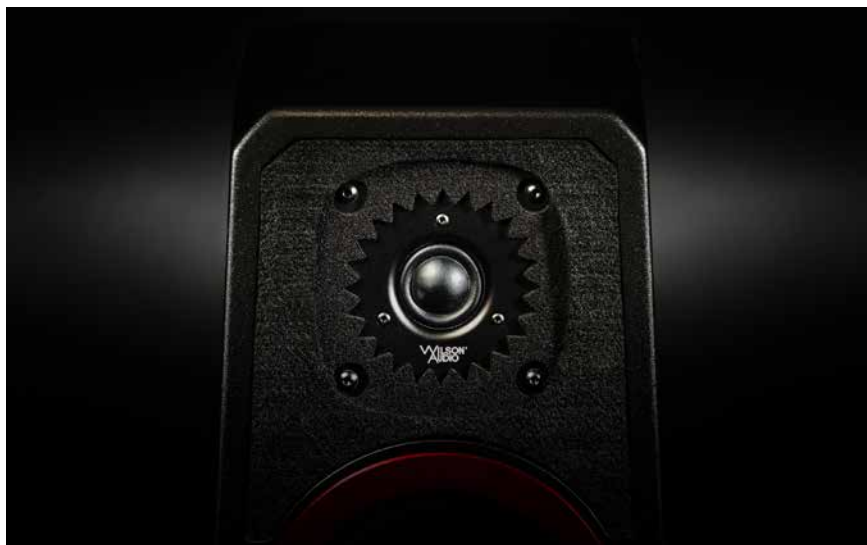


QUESTION:
HOW OFTEN
DOES WIL-
SON AUDIO
ANNOUNCE
A NEW
SPEAKER?

▶

ANSWER:
NOT VERY
OFTEN. EX-
CEPT TODAY
OF COURSE.

▶



Since I first heard of this, all new design, I have genuinely been biting my tongue not to spill the beans. Wouldn't want to spoil an early Christmas and all. Fact is, Wilson Audio has been on a roll these past few years. Alexx, Sabrina, Yvette, Alexia Series 2—undeniably, that's a whole lot of development, engineering and design time over just the past two, three years. Add to that all other work associated with a new speaker launch and one quickly sees the Herculean effort needed to accomplish such feats. Fortunately, Wilson Audio isn't just any high-end speaker manufacturer, so if anyone could pull this off, my wager would be on precisely the Provo, Utah based team to do so.

What makes these developments even more praise worthy is that during this time, Dave Wilson retired and the reigns of the company were handed over to his son, Daryl Wilson. No stranger to the company's business, Daryl had been his dad's sidekick since before he was even a teenager. Things always come full circle. In the case of this all new loudspeaker, this circle spans a giant ark, since Wilson's latest is in many ways a direct descendent of Dave Wilson's very first speaker built exclusively as a location monitor for his now legendary recordings. What came next was genuinely historic in the world of high-end audio: the WATT / Puppy speaker system which across all of its iterations is by far the single best selling high-end loudspeaker of all times. To those who perhaps are reading about Wilson Audio for the very first time, the who, the WATT, refers to Wilson Audio Tiny Tot. As mentioned, it was born out of necessity: Dave Wilson needed a reference quality monitor for his location recordings and nothing available on the market proved worthy for the challenge.

Today's speaker landscape looks rather different than back in the 70s, Wilson Audio literally having given birth to the concept of a very high-end, very high-quality loudspeaker

system. Competitors have come and gone; yet, undeniably, today's high-end speaker market is larger and more segmented than ever before. New technologies, manufacturing and materials sciences, have enabled speaker designs that are quite literally able to transform your own personal listening studio into a full scale musical nightclub. Listening habits have also grown and changed significantly: with dramatically increased fundamental wealth across the globe since the 1970s, HiFi aficionados have grown accustomed to having not one but sometimes even two or three different "systems" to enjoy their favorite music. A "main" living room or dedicated listening room setup has been augmented with an office or even bedroom system. Whereas there are obvious choices to be had for any of these secondary HiFis, in Wilson lingo, even Duetto is quite a large loudspeaker. Was it genuinely possible to scale the Wilson sound of say Alexx, Alexia, to something even more compact, even more potent in a small space? For such a speaker to make sense, it would have to bear all of the hallmark technologies Wilson Audio is famous for: time alignment, phase coherence, advancing both materials and manufacturing sciences and of course built to Wilson's incredibly demanding and high-end standards.

Just how much can you shrink such extraordinary high expectations? How far could you take this model? Where would this road lead to? Well, friends, the wait is almost over and it's time for the cat to come out of the bag: please welcome Wilson Audio's latest and most compact loudspeaker to date, TuneTot. Based on what I know today, and what I will be able to share May 10 and beyond, I genuinely feel this to be a breakthrough speaker in more ways than it would speak to just us, the initiated HiFi aficionados. TuneTot is by no means entry level: it is a genuine Wilson Audio loudspeaker built for a new generation of HiFi. With that, Frankie can say no more. Tune in to the Tot next Thursday, May 10. ■

Johnny Cash At Folsom Prison | Columbia, Legacy, Sony Music (Innencover)

According to the man himself, it was the best day of Glen Milborn Sherley's life when Johnny Cash performed the inmate's song "Greystone Chapel" at Folsom State Prison on January 13, 1968. Sherley, who was serving time for armed robbery, was unable to conceal his astonishment as the great Johnny Cash personally greeted him from the stage... —>



1915 Lead Belly, two years for murder
1918 Lead Belly, seven years for murder

1944 Chuck Berry, three years for armed robbery
1949 James Brown, two years for robbery

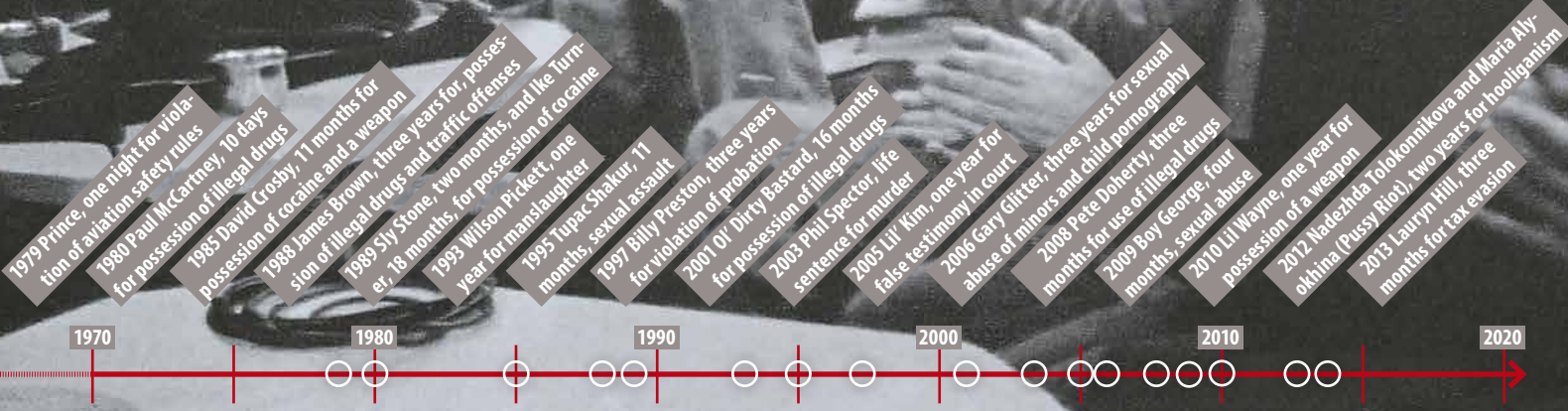
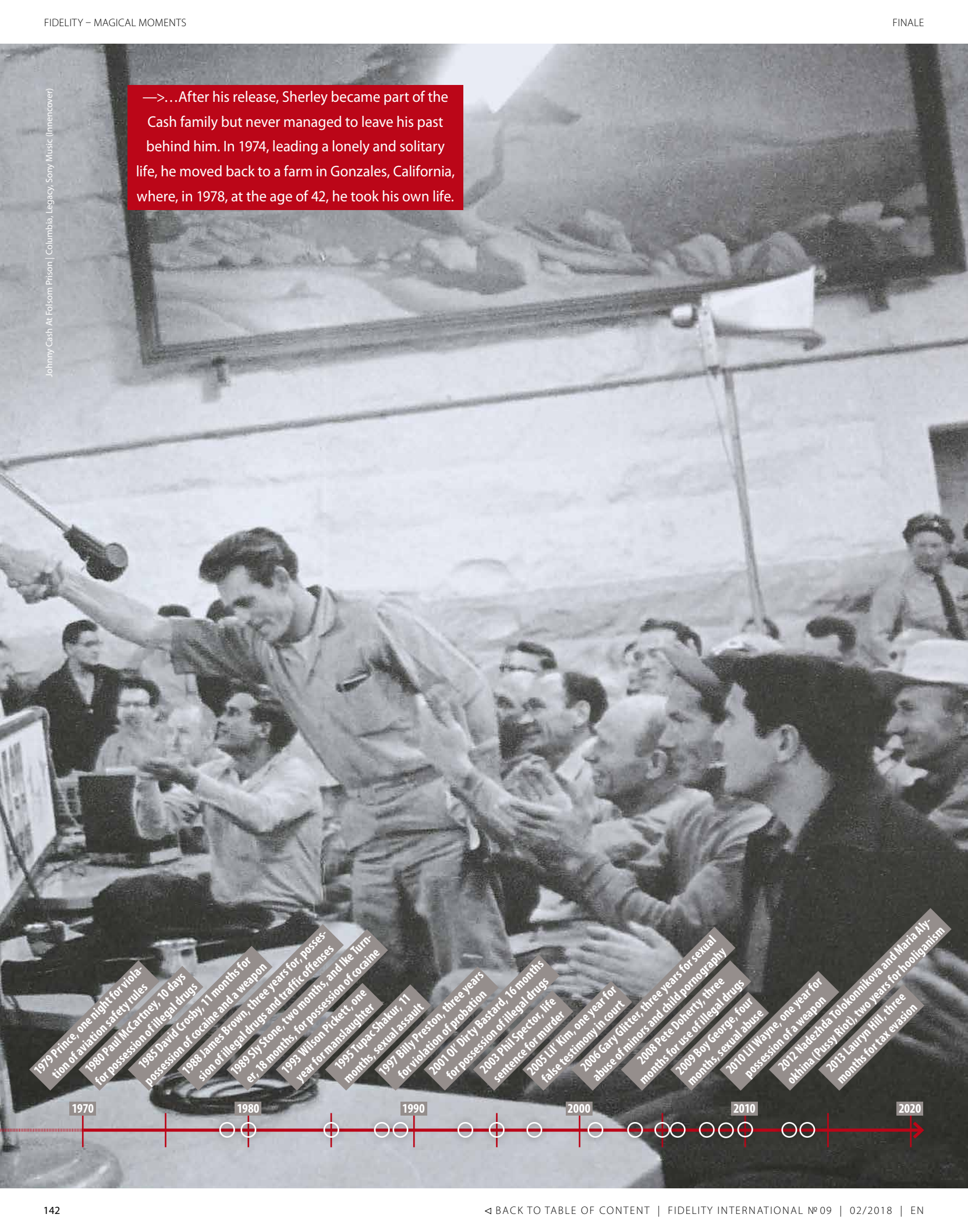
1961 Chuck Berry, two years for promotion of prostitution in violation of the Mann Act
1966 Orzy Osbourne, six weeks for burglary
1967 Mick Jagger and Keith Richards, three months for possession of illegal drugs
1967 Glen Sherley, five years for armed robbery



Musicians behind bars: (not shown here) 1717 Johann Sebastian Bach, 4 weeks, "Stubbornness"

Johnny Cash At Folsom Prison | Columbia, Legacy, Sony Music (Immencover)

—>...After his release, Sherley became part of the Cash family but never managed to leave his past behind him. In 1974, leading a lonely and solitary life, he moved back to a farm in Gonzales, California, where, in 1978, at the age of 42, he took his own life.

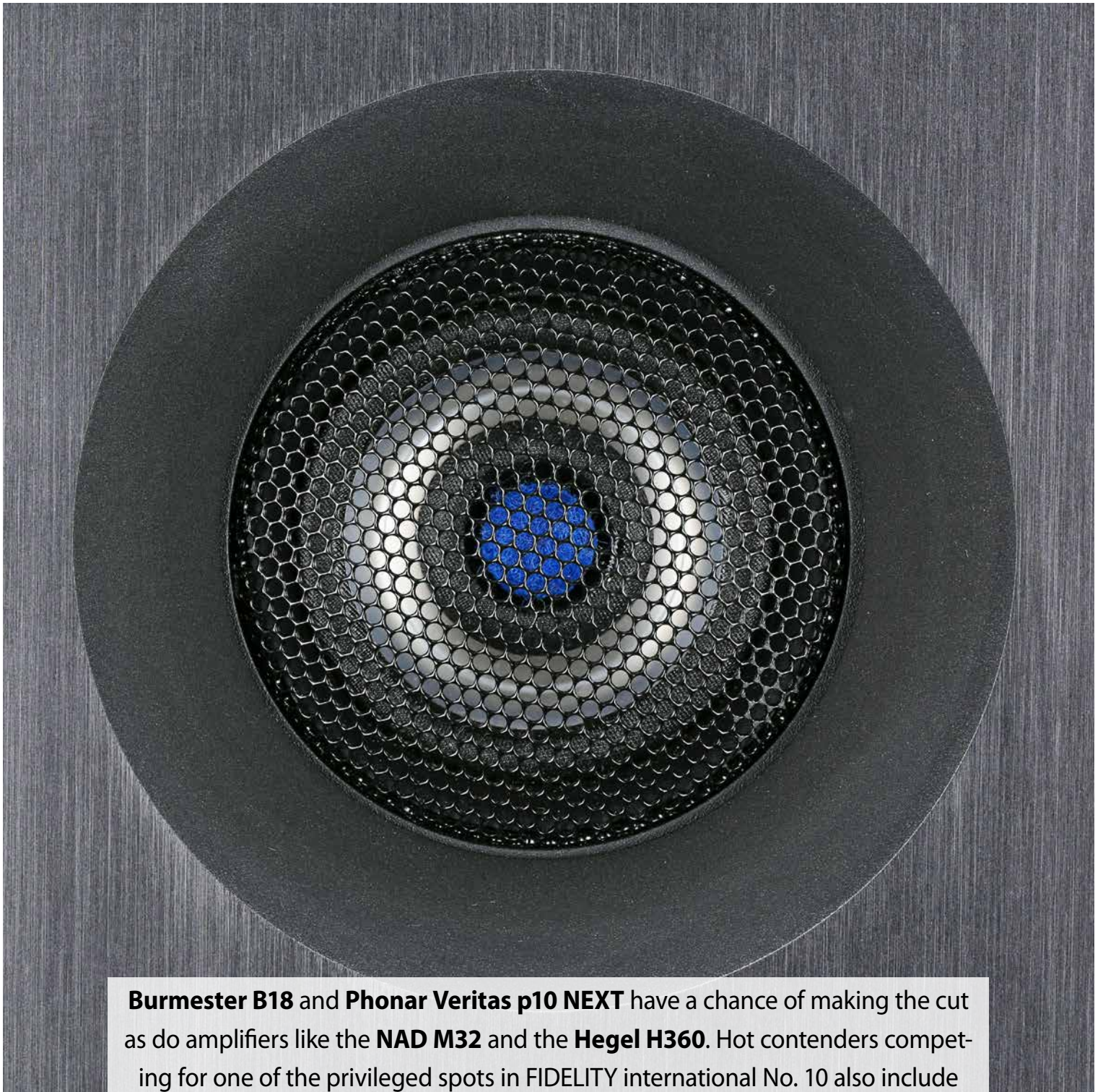


PREVIEW

FIDELITY international No. 10

Dear Readers the world over,
We've planned a few exceptionally tasty treats for the next, (as always) free international edition of our magazine. In fact, it'll be our 10th edition, so we're celebrating our first small anniversary. We'll be giving you the low-down from the trade fair in Munich, focusing in particular on the reactions from the winners of the first-ever FIDELITY Award. We will also, of course, be featuring some exquisite bits of equipment: Loudspeakers such as the ▶





Burmester B18 and **Phonar Veritas p10 NEXT** have a chance of making the cut as do amplifiers like the **NAD M32** and the **Hegel H360**. Hot contenders competing for one of the privileged spots in FIDELITY international No. 10 also include the **Dark Star Silver Shadow** analog super turntable from **Transrotor** and some fantastic reports as well. We hope you're as excited as we are. Stay tuned! FIDELITY international No. 10 will be available at the end of August 2018.



Imprint

FIDELITY® international (en)

FIDELITY® international is a free online magazine and published four times a year

private use only

Editor: Ingo Schulz

Publisher: FIDELITY Media GmbH,
Gutenbergstraße 1, 85737 Ismaning,
Germany

Telephone: +49 89 416 158 290

Email: info@fidelity-magazine.com

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

Authors: Cai Brockmann, Winfried Dulisch,
Hans von Draminski, Stefan Gawlick, Helmut
Hack, Georg-Cölestin Jatta, Danny Kaey, Patrick
Pohlmann, Hans-Jürgen Schaal, Ingo Schulz,
Claus Volke, Harald Wittig, Michael Vrzal a. o.

Transcreation: Leinhäuser Language Services
GmbH, Munich-Unterhaching, Germany

Photo Title: Ingo Schulz

Art Director: Ralf Wolff-Boenisch

Advertising: If you are interested in advertising
please feel free to contact, give us a call
+49 89 416 158 290 or send us an email to
info@fidelity-magazine.com

Ordering and dispatch service:

FIDELITY Media GmbH

Telephone: +49 89 416 158 290

Email: info@fidelity-magazine.com

www.fidelity-magazine.com

DON'T MISS: "Who is Who in High Fidelity" —
Personalities, Stories, Enterprises. Vol. 1.
Bilingual english and german. 368 pages full
color. Only €49.90 plus shipping.

Who is Who in High Fidelity Vol. 2: 464 pages,
full color, bilingual english and german, only
€39.90 plus shipping.

<https://shop.fidelity-magazin.de/>

Copyright © 2018 FIDELITY® Media GmbH

All rights pertaining to publishing,
duplication, electronic storage and any

form of reproduction, in whole or in part,
require written consent from the publisher.
Some articles refer (without any special
indication) to products covered by laws
protecting goods or patents. Commercial
use of third parties' rights or third parties'
technical know-how require the consent
of the respective owner. No guarantee of
functionality is provided with regard to
technical notes, instructions or suggestions.
The author and publisher do not accept any
liability or responsibility vis-à-vis individuals
or legal entities, regarding actual or alleged
damages that can be indirectly or directly
traced back to information from this booklet.
The text contains specifications that can
only be considered up to date at the time
of printing. With regard to rights associated
with supplied images, the supplier accepts
responsibility for authorized dissemination.
The editor does not provide purchasing
advice. The publisher is not obliged to
observe the delivery deadline in cases of
force majeure. In such cases, compensation
claims cannot be recognized. All rights
reserved.

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

THE END

Thanks for reading issue 09 of FIDELITY international. Issue10 will be put online by August 2018 or when ready. Be prepared and subscribe to our newsletter to get the latest news at first.