

# TED

TRENDS, ELECTRONICS & DESIGN

HI-FI • HOME THEATRE • SMART HOME | JULY / AUGUST 2020  
EVENTS • WHAT'S NEW? • & MORE | VOLUME 1, EDITION 01

»»» DIGITAL EDITION

## 250<sup>th</sup> Ludwig van Beethoven

— By Christophe Huss

- **Naim Audio**, Supernait 3
- **Verity Audio**, DAC and AMP 45
- **Bryston Ltd**, BDA-3.14
- **Linn Audio**, Selekt DSM with Katalyst
- **Focal**, Astral 16
- **Simaudio**, MOON 680D



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# TED

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# Humanity and Compassion

Since February 2020, the whole of humanity has been shaken by this health crisis, named COVID-19. Whether we like it or not, it is clear from the data on this pandemic that government health authorities had no choice but to invite those at risk to confine themselves. In the days that followed, all citizens, except essential service workers, were required to confine themselves as well. We all figured we don't have a choice, we have to stay home. We have to.

We started doing things differently. We learned to wash our hands almost surgically, to make a little more home-cooked meals, to learn, or relearn how to make bread, to work remotely using the Internet, e-mail, text messages, telephone, etc., and to work at a distance. We also had to make sure that the children and/or teenagers do their school learning differently. That's a lot of changes that had to be made fairly quickly, to say the least.

Fortunately, as human beings, we have this adaptability. We already had the following human qualities, and there we demonstrated them all, including understanding and compassion for our fellow human beings. We help each other, even with a simple phone call when possible. Some of us were already doing it, but not as systematically, because more often than not we were running out of time.

Technology helps us to keep in touch with others, to inform us, to entertain us (yes, sometimes through old programs or other types of programs). Our electronic devices (streamers, vinyl turntables, televisions, CD players, speakers, smart phones, etc.) have been a great help when it comes to entertainment, whether it's for fun or relaxation, because yes, music and entertainment help keep your spirits up.

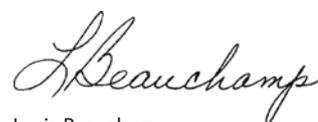
So, spring went by and summer is here despite all the anxiety that this great health crisis may have caused. The

sun rises and sets every day, and we realize that human beings have adapted.

For our team, a challenge had to be met and it was met by virtue of what was possible. It goes without saying that no one can ask for more in these circumstances. We faced many obstacles, but we did so with hope and imagination. We have therefore prepared a digital version (*PDF* and *Zinio* format) for the July-August 2020 edition, which could not be printed on paper. The articles are all equally interesting. This edition is offered to you free of charge through the website and social networks. What unites us is the love of music and the need for it to be reproduced on the best possible equipment.

You are encouraged to contact local retailers (containment lifted or not, as they take their phone messages) and they will do their utmost to accommodate you while still respecting the rules of physical distancing). It's time to stand together and encourage our people where we can.

Will the next edition be digital only or both printed and digital? At this point in time, we are navigating as best we can in an unknown period and we are adapting as we go along. Hoping you'll be at the electronic rendezvous. Maybe the Sept.-Oct. 2020 edition will return to paper format, who knows! Let's live this period of adaptation together in good health, and let's use reading, listening to music and any other means to entertain and relax. Summer is here and fall will follow as well! Cheer up! All of us together, I hope we'll get through this and get better, even if it is in a different way!



Lucie Beauchamp  
Co-editor and Public Relations Manager

TRENDS ELECTRONICS & DESIGN

# A HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD HOUSE BROUGHT UP-TO-DATE...

Photos: Guevremont photographie



By Lucie Beauchamp

For this edition of **TED Magazine**, we present the renovation of a century-old house located in an urban area. During the renovation, the owners of this residence chose **Exact Audio Video** to relocate some of the automation elements, as they had decided to redo some of the ground-floor rooms including the entrance, dining room and living room, as well as to change the function of one element of the kitchen (installation of a glass pantry instead of a pantry). Since Exact Audio Video had already done some home automation work at this location, they, of course, accepted this new mission, which brought some challenges. The renovation work was extensive in terms of the various parties involved: the designer, the contractor and the installer. All in all, it took almost a year. But the result is all the more spectacular. Discover, through this photo-reportage, the beauty of a clever marriage of skills of which the final result offers, to the family currently occupying this residence, a haven of peace, serenity and calm.



**T**HIS LARGE RESIDENCE IS LOCATED on a large piece of land. A magnificent view of the city is offered to the occupants from various locations both inside and outside the residence. A huge outdoor garden with hedges, various shrubs, flowers and majestic mature trees has been laid out by the successive owners of this small estate. You can walk there in peace and quiet and/or rest while reading or just thinking, the garden invites you to do so. You will notice that outside speakers and subwoofers are either concealed in the flower beds or hidden in the ground and/or in some stones on the outside walls. The granite stone house is imposing yet sober.

### Let's go into the house

Passing the entrance, with its coat closet, one enters the vestibule furnished with a round glass table with a base composed of curved wooden supports painted in gold colour on which a glass vase with a gilded rim is placed. Two magnificent porcelain statuettes, of substantial size, were placed one on a wall shelf and the other on a black granite base. These seem to invite visitors to a certain mischievousness, and to feast in the company of the family. The side walls are furnished with two large canvases that enhance the sum. I must point out the magnificent marble floor in shades of beige and light brown that perfectly matches the soft colours used inside the house. Once in this vestibule, one can easily reach the upper floors by a staircase demonstrating, once again, the impeccable work of the craftsmen who integrated custom-made plaster mouldings on the walls and ceilings. An ancient art that is somewhat lost because of what is easily available in big-box stores.

On the right, we move to the main dining room where ten people can easily sit. As you can see from the photos, the choice of materials (glass, wood, marble, metal, etc.) as well as the colours, convey a soft and muffled atmosphere. The beauty of the objects is enhanced without being intimidating. Once again, in this room, we find original plaster mouldings on the ceiling and on the top of the walls. The pattern of the walls (which is a set of small raised up circles) was also made of plaster. Still on the ceiling, you can't see them, but invisible speakers have been installed, hidden behind a thin layer of

plaster. Ambient music enhances the pleasant atmosphere during meals.

To the left of the vestibule is the main living room, which has a 3-section built-in library with shelves filled with vases, trinkets, sculptures and large books. At the bottom of this bookcase, cupboards are available

for storage on both the left and right-hand sides. In the middle cabinet, **Exact Audio Video** has cleverly installed a Triad subwoofer. The lower part of this cabinet has been altered to allow low frequencies to pass through the hole made for them. Ingenious! From the outside you can't see anything, but the family can listen to a 5.1 home theatre



# TRENDS, ELECTRONICS & DESIGN



movie, thanks to three channels provided by the **Golden Ear** sound bar, in-ceiling rear speakers, a subwoofer stowed in the cabinet including the **Pioneer Elite Blu-ray** player. The design of the ceiling is very interesting, as it is quite different from the one with coffers, commonly used in decoration.

Note the designer's guiding thread in advising the family on the selection of materials (glass, wood, brass, metal, velvet, silk, etc.) as well as the combination of soft, inviting colours – creamy white, brown, bronze, gold, white barely tinged with green, green-grey, etc. – that contribute to and invite relaxation.

Of course, the masonry fireplace is another element that adds to everyone's comfort. Since the family decided to eliminate a pantry from the kitchen, and since this pantry housed all the wiring required by the previous owners, **Exact Audio Video** had to rewire some of the wiring elsewhere, such as around the masonry fireplace mantel, while making sure to maintain the beauty of the fireplace.



### **Moving on to the family room now**

Although this house is well lit with a lot of light coming in through many glass doors and large windows, the family, having had a bad experience with lighting control in a previous residence, requested lighting control from wall-mounted key-pads to which they eventually added control of ambient music and video. As needs change, so does the importance of opting for a control system such as **Control4**, which allows to respond very well to an evolving installation.

In this very large room annexed to the kitchen, we find the section devoted to everyday meals, while the other portion of the room meets the needs for home entertainment and/or for a convivial and unpretentious evening. A large television set has been installed in a built-in cabinet and you can also enjoy home cinema thanks, among other things, to the ceiling-mounted speakers. Inside this same cabinet, all the equipment necessary for the wireless service of the house was also installed. Integration at its best!

### **Let's go to the garden level...**

On this floor, family members keep in shape with a variety of gymnastics, aerobics and weight training equipment. It's all set up so you don't miss a thing thanks to a large TV that allows you

to watch exercise videos or simply listen to the TV while continuing your daily exercise program. Through the corridor, during the season we can also go outside where a pool awaits us to refresh us once the training session is over.

### **The attention to detail...**

During the course of the work, **Exact Audio Video** installers had noticed that occasionally their cell phones (as well as those of the family occupying this house) were not working properly (missed calls, calls going straight to voicemail, lack of signal, calls not received, etc.). They soon realized that there was interference from another cell phone service provider. The solution was to install a two-way antenna on the roof of the house, properly orient it to the cell phone service provider with which the family does business, and add signal repeaters for the majority of the rooms in the house and the problem was solved.

**Exact Audio Video** also installed an intercom system that allows family members to easily answer the front door, regardless of which floor of the house they are on. At the main entrance door, a tiny shelf was fabricated in the doorframe to support the intercom unit, and a tiny roof was installed to protect the unit from the elements (rain and snow) and to ensure the proper operation of the unit.





As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, all the craftsmen (the designer, the contractor, the plasterer, and the installers) did an impeccable job. The attention to every detail and the professionalism demonstrated by everyone is, without a doubt, one of the keys to the success of this century-old house that has been renovated in line with current tastes. Congratulations to all the contributors! Mission accomplished! We can only congratulate the owners for an impeccable and inviting residence, and we would like to sincerely thank them for their warm welcome during our visit.

**Craftsmen retained for the project**

**Designer:**

Mario Junuario

**Contractor:**

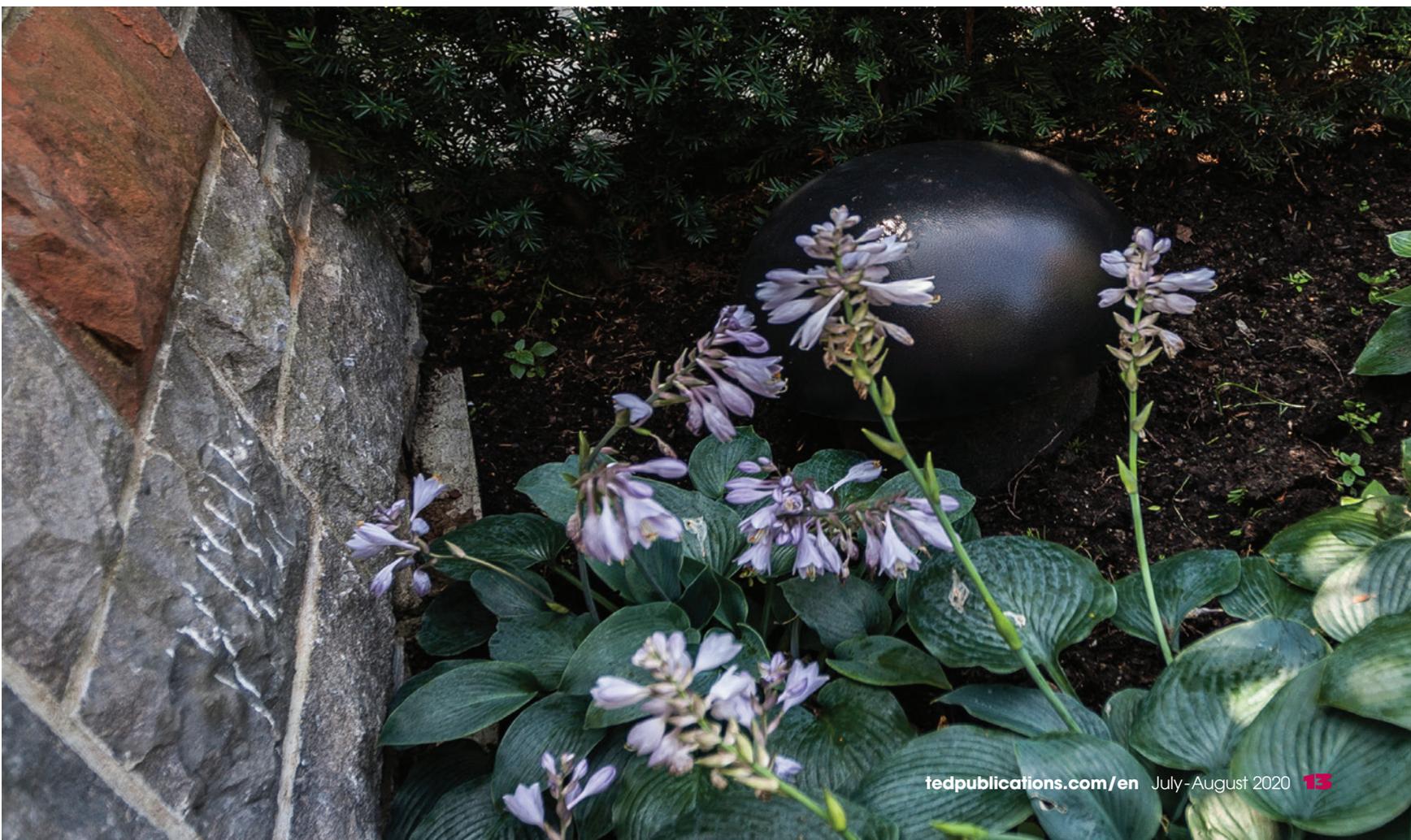
Lakeshore Construction and Rénovation

**Chief Technicien and Programmer:**

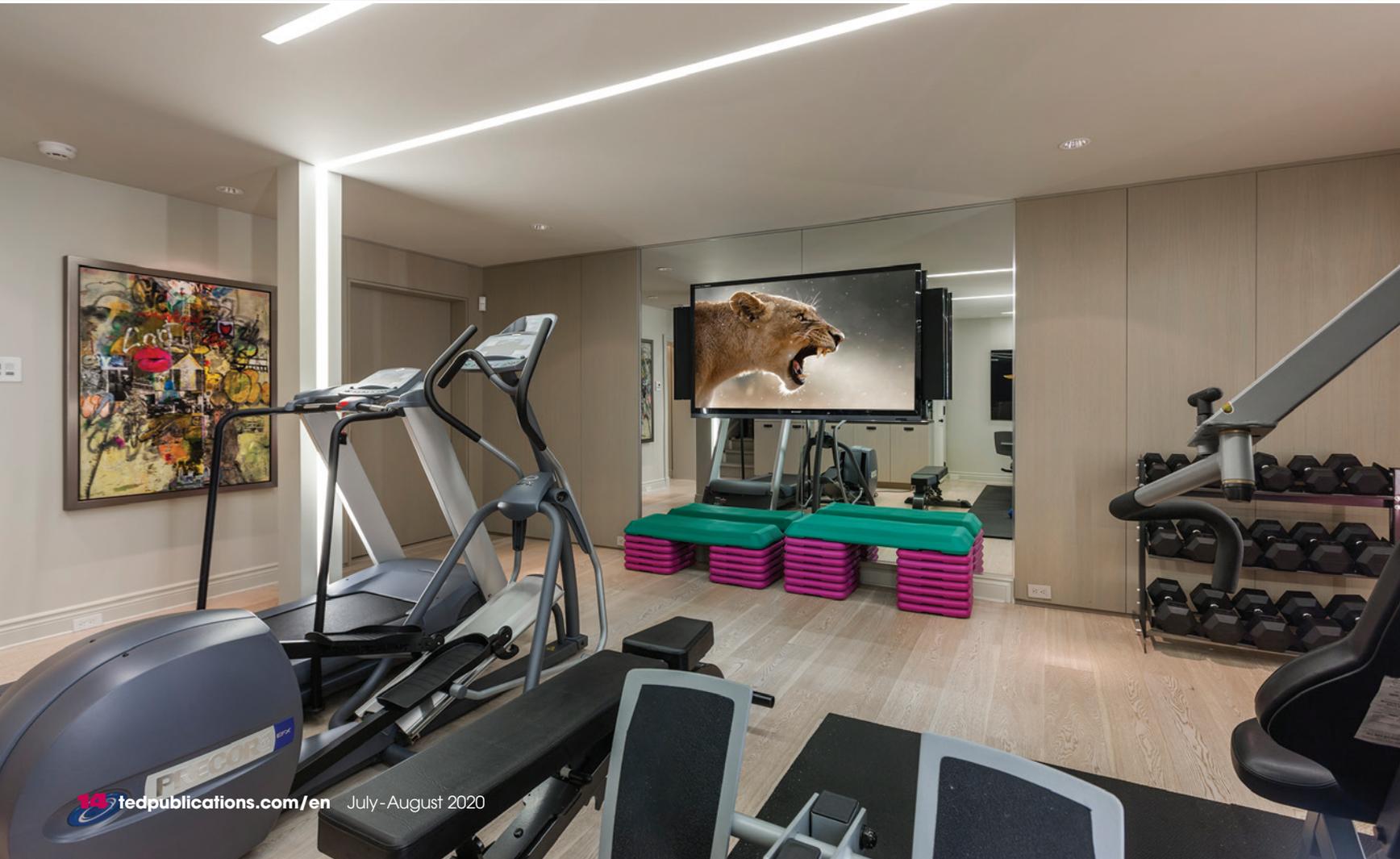
Gaétan Bizier

**Project Design and Management:**

Robert de Bellefeuille



# TRENDS, ELECTRONICS & DESIGN





## Equipment provided

by **Exact Audio Vidéo**

### LIVING ROOM

**GoldenEar Technology** *SuperCinema XXL* Soundbar;  
**Stealth Acoustics** *Invisibles* surround speakers;  
**Triad** *FlexSub Mini* subwoofer (built into custom furniture);  
**Samsung** *UN60*, 60 inches TV;  
**Control4** *SR-250* Remote control;  
**Control4** Configurable control keypad.

### Family Room

**Niles** *DS Series* in-wall speakers (front and surrounds);  
**Episode** *In-wall* subwoofer;  
**Samsung** *UN65*, 65 inches TV;  
**Control4** *SR-250* Remote control;  
**Control4** Configurable control keypad.

### KITCHEN

**Niles** *HD Series* in-wall speakers;  
**Control4** Configurable control keypad.

### VESTIBULE

**Stealth Acoustics** *Invisibles* speakers;  
**Control4** Configurable control keypad.

### DINING ROOM

**Stealth Acoustics** *Invisibles* speakers;  
**Control4** Configurable control keypad.

### PATIO

**Niles** *OS Series* *Outdoor* speakers;  
**Control4** Configurable control keypad.

### GYM

**Yamaha** *RXV 377* Receiver and customer's existing equipment.

### OFFICE

**Samsung** *UN60*, 60 inches TV;  
**Episode** *URC* Remote control and infrared repeater system.

### FOUR BEDROOMS

**Samsung** *UN50*, 50 inches TV;  
**Episode** *URC* Remote control and infrared repeater system.

### Centralized Equipment

**Control4** *HC-800* and *HC 250* Controllers;  
**Control4** *IOX* Expansion Module;  
**Russound** *CAA66*, 6 zone Amplifier;  
**Sanus** *CFR-2136* Equipment Stand;  
**Triad** Amplifier, 350 watts (for the subwoofer);  
**Videotron** *X8 Illico* Recorders (8).

### CELLULAR AMPLIFICATION

**Wilson** *WL3000*.

### Interphone

**On-Q** *IC-5000* intercom system with 2 outdoor and 8 indoor stations.

### CUSTOMER-SUPPLIED EQUIPMENT AND INTEGRATED BY EXACT AV

**Pioneer** *Elite surround sound* Receiver and *Blu-ray* Player (living room);  
**Samsung** *surround sound* Receiver and *Blu-ray player* (family room)  
**Sharp** 70 inch TV de **Sharp** and **Definitive Technology** *Mythos* (gym);  
**Sonance** *Sonarray* outdoor speaker system and  
**NAD** power amplifier (pool).

## Beni di Batasiolo Langhe

### Above all, my memory of a beautiful meeting

My first meeting with **Fiorenzo Dogliani** dates back to 2008, in La Morra, a town in northern Italy in Piedmont. This small town offers a breathtaking landscape with the snow-covered Alps as a backdrop. As soon as he arrived, **Fiorenzo Dogliani** asked me that first question: Have you ever eaten truffles? I told him no. He asked me to try some. Like I'm gonna say no to that offer! At the restaurant, we enjoyed several dishes with white truffles from Alba, accompanied by some bottles of *Barolo* from the different estates of the **Dogliani** family. It was an enjoyable and memorable experience.

The next day I was lucky enough to spend the day with **Fiorenzo** who took me on a tour of some of his estates. He told me about the history of the family, a history that began in 1978, when they bought the **Cantina Chiola** in the municipality of La Morra in Piedmont. Then, the territory gradually expanded. Today, the family owns nine vineyards, 120 hectares of vines located in the best wine-growing areas of *Barolo* including La Morra, Corda Della Briccolina, Serralunga and Bofani in Monforte d'Alba.

My host also told me that in his early days he had met a lady who owned two restaurants in Milan. The latter offered him to go and visit her to taste her wines. It was a dream for **Fiorenzo**, but he didn't dare tell his father. In those days, paternal authority was very great, and father Antonio did not like his sons to be away from the property because he lacked hands. So **Fiorenzo** sneaked away with the small family car and a few cases of wine in the back trunk. The lady was delighted to see him again, the wine tasting was so interesting that the restaurateur called some restaurant friends with whom she shared her discovery. Several orders followed and this visit developed beautiful collaborations. Today, **Fiorenzo** travels the world to promote the family's wines. I've had the chance to see **Fiorenzo** on several occasions and our meetings have always been very pleasant.

### Beni di Batasiolo Barolo 2015

A modern *Barolo*, aged in Slavonian oak barrels for two years, then in stainless steel tanks for one year. A light ruby colour with garnet reflections, aromas of plums, black cherries and tobacco, on the palate tight tannins, beautiful finesse and a pleasant finish. You can let him sleep in your pantry for four to five years.

An affordable price for this famous appellation!

### Beni di Batasiolo Barolo 2015

Red wine, 750 ml  
Italy, Piedmont DOCG  
**Grape Variety:** Nebiolo  
**SAQ Code:** 10856777  
**Price:** \$30.85



# Barone Ricasoli

## Brolio Chianti Classico

The Brolio Chianti Classico is a superb Italian wine that has been produced for centuries by the Ricasoli family on the grounds of Castle Brolio. This magnificent castle is located in the heart of Tuscany, between Florence and Siena, in the commune of Gaiole in Chianti.

The first to develop the formula for assembling chianti classico was Baron Bettini Ricasoli in 1872. After 30 years of research, the latter brings to light the famous chianti composed of the Sangiovese and Canaiolo grape varieties. Today, the Barone Ricasoli Castello di Brolio vineyard produces three million bottles a year in ultra-modern winery facilities and its wines are exported all over the world.

I had the chance to visit the estate, accompanied by the current Baron's niece, Francesco Ricasoli. During this visit, she told me the story of the family that still lives in the castle since 1141. The walk through the gardens of the château offers us, from the ramparts, a breathtaking view of the surrounding countryside and its 230 hectares of vines. Then, inside the apartments of the castle, there is the museum that houses the impressive collection of weapons of the Ricasoli family. We continued the visit to the chapel of San Jacopo, which has a small crypt housing the family tombs.

And finally, a pleasant wine tasting awaited me, the highlight of the visit, as it took place in one of the oldest cellars in Italy. I also had the chance to taste the estate's award-winning selections. Back in Canada, to mark my birthday, I enjoyed a Castello du Brolio offered by the Baron himself. In addition to enjoying this wonderful gift, I was remembering this wonderful day.

### Barone Ricasoli Brolio Chianti-Classico

It is a very good chianti with a deep garnet colour. On the nose, aromas of red fruits and dried figs, the mouth is very supple and velvety, the tannins are silky and well blended, and an acidity brings a nice freshness. Perfect with Ragù pasta or Milanese Osso buco. Serve at a temperature of 16°C, and don't hesitate to take the decanter out. Enjoy the tasting!

### Barone Ricasoli Brolio Chianti-Classico

Red wines, 750 ml

Italy, Tuscany

Grape varieties: 80% Sangiovese, 15% Merlot, 5% Cabernet

Sauvignon

SAQ Code: 3962

Price: \$23.55



# MUSIC LOVERS' SUPER CHAMPION

By Jean-Denis Doyle

Legendary British manufacturer Naim Audio continues to renew its popular Nait range of integrated amplifiers. It's now the Supernait's turn to undergo a complete overhaul and it's safe to say that Naim's engineers have done an outstanding job. Now known as the Supernait 3, this device offers a phono stage for vinyl turntables. Its predecessor, the Supernait 2, was already an excellent starting point and many improvements were made to it. Offered in a price category where demand is high and there is no shortage of competition, the Supernait 3 has become a mature and very competitive product. So let's take the time to discover together an amplifier which, like some great wines, has been able to age well and improve with time.

In 2007 **Naim** introduced the first version of the *Supernait*. This was intended to be an integrated version of the *NAC-202* pre-amplifier and the *NAP-200* power amplifier. The first version also had a digital-to-analogue conversion section that disappeared with the introduction of the *Supernait 2*. Designed and intended as a **Naim** style super integrated amplifier, the first *Supernait* never managed to charm me. With the arrival of the *Supernait 2*, things improved radically thanks to a much more refined sound, and it was a great success. Despite all its beautiful qualities, there was something cruelly missing from the *Supernait 2*, namely a phono input for a vinyl turntable. As it is not uncommon for **Naim's** traditional clientele to own a quality vinyl turntable, the *Supernait 3*, with its phono input, comes at just the right time. The **Naim Supernait 3** is in a very



special price category. Offered at around \$6,000, the *Supernait 3* is playing in a very competitive market sector. This category is on the borderline between affordable audiophile equipment and high-end products for more affluent audiophiles. Many serious manufacturers such as **Luxman**, **MOON**, **McIntosh** and many others have well understood the importance of this highly competitive sector and offer consumers real technological jewels. As we'll see later in the listening impressions section, the **Naim Supernait 3** has some trump cards up its sleeve and is doing very well.

### Technical description

The **Naim Supernait 3** is obviously a high quality device. From the moment you unpack this magnificent object, you have an impression of solidity and sobriety. It feels like we're dealing with a timeless product, a bit like a **Leica** camera. The *Supernait 3* is a massive *heavyweight* and leaves no doubt as to the disproportionate size of its transformer. It occupies almost the entire right half of the device and is the piece of resistance. This giant transformer is made in Ireland specifically for the *Supernait 3*, and is toroidal type. Equipped with numerous filter capacitors, this amplifier, which has a power output of only 90 W, will not fear any speaker. It will be able to follow you in your delirium of listening at high volume without any problem. The back of the unit is packed with attractively designed connectors for all necessary connections and, as usual, covers **RCA** and **DIN** formats. These connectors are not directly mounted on the circuit, but rather connected by means of small soldered cables with almost maniacal care. This, according to **Naim**,

avoids the transmission of vibrations from the connecting cables to the **PCB**. Interestingly enough, everything, but absolutely everything, is welded inside this unit. A single ribbon cable, affixed by insertion, is only used to carry the signal for the device functions. Any signal, which is called music, circulates on the printed circuit board and only passes through a minimum of components, therefore only through soldered contacts. The cabling is a true work of art from input to output to speaker terminal blocks that use a minimum of metal and accommodate only banana connectors.

The phono stage for turntables is the same excellent circuit already present in the *Nait XS3*, but it now has a more substantial power supply thanks to the presence of the huge transformer that equips the *Supernait 3*. Numerous improvements have been made to the amplification circuit, thanks to the simplification of certain stages to increase their transparency. As is usual for **Naim**, only two pairs of transistors provide the necessary power for the speakers. Polarized in class **B**, they are installed on small ceramic coolers and generate little heat.

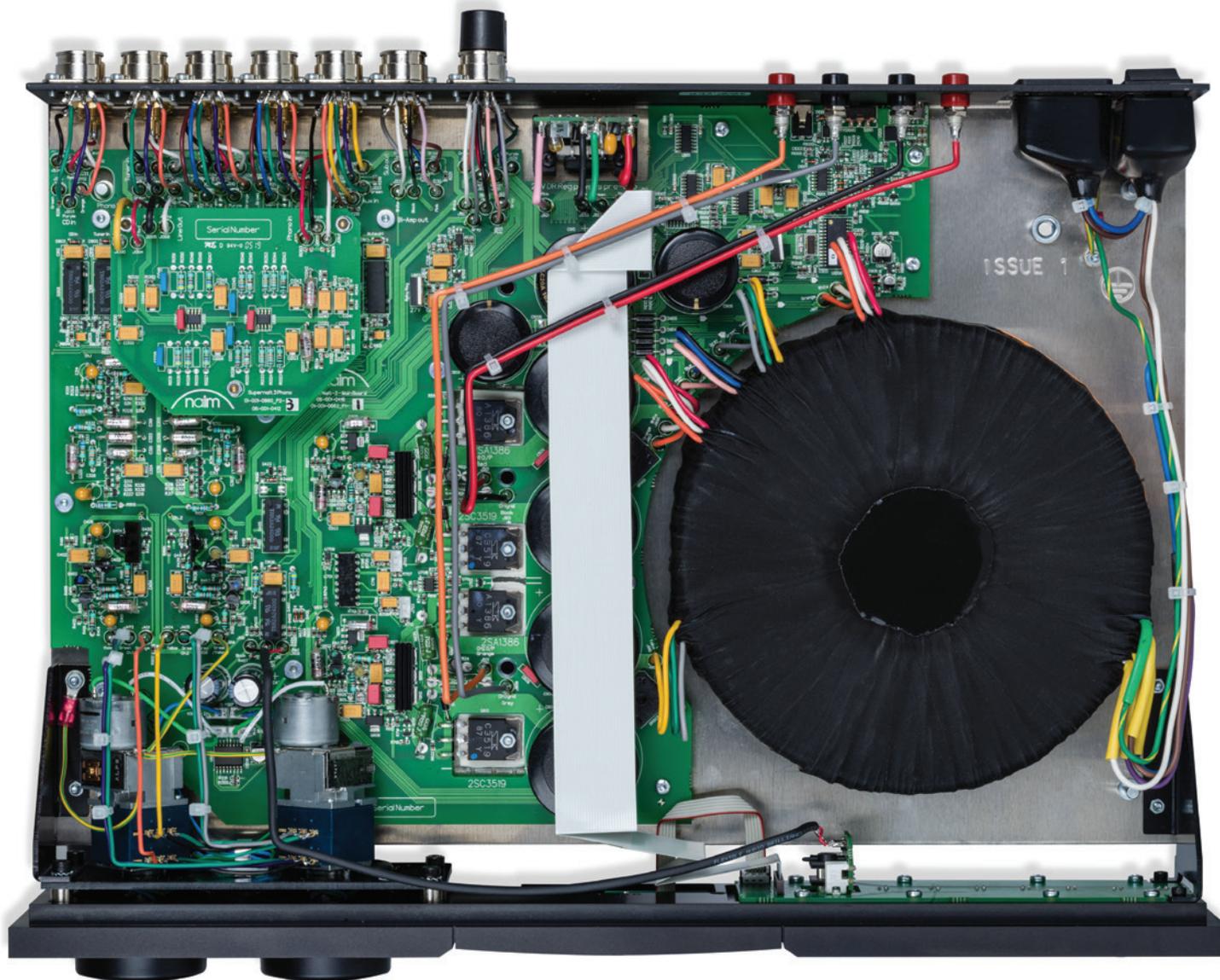
The front panel is very sober and reassuringly simple. It has buttons to select inputs, a headphone jack, and volume and balance controls. These come from **Alps** and are part of the *Blue Velvet* series. They are motorized, which makes it possible to control them with the remote control. From my audiophile memory, this is indeed the first time I have had the opportunity to use a balance control accessible through a remote control. I must confess that it's quite practical, especially when you find yourself crushed in the couch with your tablet, not really in the middle of the two speakers. One little tap on the remote and it's done. This remote has a function to switch off all front panel indicator lights except the **Naim** logo. This way you will never forget that you are the owner of a real **Naim**. And this *Supernait 3* is the real deal!

### Installation and connection

I proceeded to install the *Supernait 3* in my sound system which is not **Naim** at all, nor even made up of audio products from England. As usual I ignored the manufacturer's instructions to use **Naim** cables exclusively. I connected my sources using the **RCA** inputs with **Mogami** cables, and my speakers with **Van Den Hul D352** wires. Oddly enough, and against **Naim's** recommendations, the *Supernait 3* loved the **Audioquest Monsoon** power cable as well as my **Audioquest Niagara 1000** power conditioner. This confirms that **Naim** equipment is now compatible with the majority of popular audio products. To all those who believe that **Naim** products only work well with other **Naim** products, this is not the case!

The remote control is a rather ordinary object made of luxurious matte plastic. It will require a little exploration of the instruction manual to understand such mundane functions as input selection. Compared to the metal remote control offered with my **Luxman**, which is easy to understand the first time you use it, there are some industrial design lessons that get lost.





«It's Wilco with their album *Sky Blue Sky* that has the honour to be the first to enjoy the Naim *Supernait 3*'s phono stage. If the *Nait XS-3* had given us a taste of it, with the *Supernait 3*, the pleasure is tenfold. Thanks to its much more substantial power supply, listening to vinyl records is enhanced. [...] Really, this amplifier is a pure delight for vinyl lovers, and its phono section is far from being just a convenience. In fact, this is the best phono stage I've ever heard on an amplifier in this price range by far.»

#### Listening impressions

##### **A heavyweight which makes its presence felt**

From the first moments of listening, one immediately feels an impression of weight, of substance. Somewhat like a preamplifier and amplifier in separate elements, the *Supernait 3* controls

the speakers with an iron fist by adding material to them. It's as if we've just added a big subwoofer, while keeping the speed and coherence of the speakers. With Emanuel Bex's album, *B2Bill-A Modern Tribute to Bill Evans*, the bass lines drop to the lowest point my speakers can reach, flooding my room with a wave of low frequencies. This provides a solid foundation for the rest of the sound spectrum. The timbres of the piano and the Hammond B3 organ, present on the album, take on a magnificent colour and have nothing to envy to what separate device combos are able to render. Compared to its little brother, the *Nait XS-3*, the improvement is completely obvious and leaves no doubt as to the validity of the extra charge. Let's be clear, after having had the chance to test the *Nait XS-3* on a test bench that appeared in the previous issue, the *Nait XS-3* is an excellent amplifier for its price (around \$6,500). On the other hand, the *Supernait 3* plays in a completely different league and if your budget allows you the price difference, then take the time to try it out.

##### **Everything in its place and the image will be perfect.**

The Naim *Supernait 3* has this rather singular ability to present the music in a particularly realistic perspective. With Wolfgang



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Haffner's excellent album, *Heart of the Matter*, the depth of the stereophonic image keeps realistic and credible proportions. On the *Bing* track, the voices are far behind the speakers, but the rhythm section is slightly in front and the other instruments are in the middle. This amplifier gives an accurate impression, both in terms of the dimensions and the timing of the music. The *Supernait 3* reproduces music in a very orderly and precise manner, which I think is not unrelated to the stability of its power supply. This way of seeing and reproducing music quickly became rather addictive and the return to my usual amplifier left me with a feeling of blur and lack of focus. What's more, the *Supernait 3* has an uncommon ability to keep up with the rhythm and get the foot tapping. Again, each of the sound elements takes its rightful place at just the right time, making the melody easy to follow and interesting.

### A champion for your turntable

It's *Wilco* with their album *Sky Blue Sky* that has the honour to be the first to enjoy the *Naim Supernait 3*'s phono stage. If the *Nait XS-3* had given us a taste of it, with the *Supernait 3*, the pleasure is tenfold. Thanks to its much more substantial power supply, listening to vinyl records is enhanced. The tonal richness of the guitars on *Impossible Germany* comes in an infinite variety of colours and textures. The rhythm is wonderfully easy to follow and makes the song even better, thanks to solid support in the bass. The singer's slightly hoarse voice is rendered with warmth and remains as discreet as one could wish, without any unpleasant sibilance. Really, this amplifier is a pure delight for vinyl lovers, and its phono stage is far from being just a convenience. In fact, this is the best phono stage I've ever heard on





an amplifier in this price range by far. The **Naim Supernait 3** will assemble a superb sound system consisting of a high quality vinyl turntable and a good pair of speakers for listening to your favourite records.

#### Conclusion

**Naim** just hit the middle of the target with their *Supernait 3*. Powerful, built like a tank and backed by a reputation for unparalleled reliability, it has everything to please. Its sound quality is magnificent and is reminiscent of amplifiers offered in separate components at a much higher price. In its price category, it is a formidable competitor that puts the reproduction of music and its enjoyment at the forefront. If you are on the market looking for a new amplifier and are shopping for a **Luxman, McIntosh, MOON** or other product of this level of quality you will need to add this **Naim Supernait 3** to your list. It

stands out above all for its phono stage, its exceptional sense of rhythm and its superb tonal balance. A super champion for all music lovers!

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$6,490

Warranty: 2 years for mechanics and 5 years for electronics, parts and labour

Manufacturer-Distributor: Focal Naim Canada, Tel: 1 866 271.5689, [www.focalnaim.com](http://www.focalnaim.com); [www.naimaudio.com](http://www.naimaudio.com)

#### Mediagraphy

Emmanuel Bex, B2Bill-a Modern Tribute to Bill Evans, Bonsai Music, BON 30401

Wolfgang Haffner, Heart of the Matter, Act, ACT 9535-2

Wilco, Sky Blue Sky, Nonesuch, 131388-1

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# CLASSICAL MUSIC

By Christophe Huss

## The Beethoven Year: Legacy and novelties

The year 2020 marks the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of **Ludwig van Beethoven**. All over the world the composer was to be celebrated, for example in Lanaudière, which had hired the Académie für alte Musik Berlin to celebrate his symphonies. For us, at home, confined or not, what are the beacons to meditate on the lessons of this revolutionary in the history of music

### BEETHOVEN

The milestones of a discography: our reference versions

#### The Complete Works

Warner, 80 CD, 0190295398828.

Interpretations: ★★★★★ to ★★★★★

Technique: ★★★ to ★★★★★

Four sets of complete works by **Beethoven** compete for the market (**Warner** and **Universal** standing out from **Naxos** and **Brilliant**). The big **Universal** box is the most luxurious edition, but does not really make editorial choices and multiplies the aesthetic mixes. For half the price, the **Warner** box set fulfills its mission, because it makes choices and they are the right ones. *Symphonies* by **Harnoncourt**, *Concertos* by **Schiff-Haitink** and **Perlman-Giulini**, *Sonatas* by **Stephen Kovacevich**, *Quartets* by the **Artemis**, *Trios* by **Barenboim Zukerman & Du Pré** and *Violin Sonatas* with **Capuçon** and **Braley**. With **Otto Klemperer** for *Fidelio* and the *Missa solemnis* and **Carlo Maria Giulini** for the *Mass in C*, what more could one wish for? Some of the recordings are new, including minor piano works by **Aurélien Pontier**, choral mignardises by **Accentus**, and Scottish, Welsh and Irish melodies.

### BEETHOVEN

#### The 9 Symphonies

Minnesota Orchestra, **Osmo Vänskä**. BIS, 5 SACD, 1825/26.

Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, **Riccardo Chailly**.

Decca, 5 CD, 478 2721.

Interpretations: ★★★★★

Technique: ★★★★★

If you look hard enough, you'll find, at around \$40, two of the five most eminent **Beethoven** integrals of the last twenty years (the others being

**Jansons, Blomstedt and Järvi**). Both are opposed to the great romantic tradition, of which **Daniel Barenboim** is the best modern representative, but whose **Warner** box set is unavailable these days. What is the reason for this opposition? **Chailly** and **Vänskä** attempt to apply to the symphony orchestra the stylistic precepts advocated by performers from the baroque world. The process is therefore nervous in terms of tempos, scathing in terms of accents, while **Barenboim** breathes more widely with a more opulent sound. **Osmo Vänskä** on the **BIS** label is available in multi-channel SACD and aims for roundness and elegance in the bite. The Italian appears more radical.

### BEETHOVEN

#### The 32 Piano Sonatas

Igor Levit. Sony, 9 CD, 19075843182.

#### Stephen Kovacevich.

Warner, 9 CD, 0190295869229.

Interpretations: ★★★★★

Technique: ★★★ to ★★★★★

In terms of his palette of touch and awareness of sound, **Igor Levit** is phenomenal. The risk with pianists endowed with such faculties is to see the quest for sound hedonism replace the search for musical line and logic. But **Igor Levit** builds architecture and masters form ideally. **Igor Levit's** integral is therefore based on the following qualities: structure, rigour, firmness, determination, imagination and poetry. **Levit**, released at the end of 2019, competes with the best choice so far, **Stephen Kovacevich**, an integral sold for half the price of **Warner**, but recorded with less consistency and precision.

### BEETHOVEN

#### The String Quartets

Quatuor Artemis.

Warner, 7 CD, 0708582.

Interpretation: ★★★★★

Technique: ★★★★★

The choice may come as a surprise, but the recital gives us comfort. More biting and present than the **Emerson (DG)**, and playing on a par with the **Takács (Decca)** in terms of finesse and precision, the **Artemis Quartet** prevails over the latter thanks to a much more precise sound capture, while the sound of the **Takács** floats in too vast a space. What's more, success is very equal throughout the cycle and the game does not suffer from any expressive exaggeration, the sweet sin of modern integrals.

### BEETHOVEN

#### The 5 Piano Concertos

Stephen Kovacevich, London and BBC Symphony Orchestra, **Colin Davis**.

Decca, 6 CD, 478 6452.

Interpretation: ★★★★★

Technique: ★★★★★

As the **Bronfman-Zinman** integral is not available at the moment, the best choice is this box set from the **Decca Collector Edition** series which is no more expensive than other integrals and adds 3 CDs with the *Diabelli Variations* and beautifully performed sonatas. The performance by **Kovacevich** and **Davis** is frank, direct, fair and is not lost in any heaviness or boastfulness. It is **Beethoven** raw, muscular and impeccably balanced.

## New features spring 2020

### BEETHOVEN

Concertos for piano No. 1 and 4  
Martin Helmchen,  
Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester  
Berlin, **Andrew Manze**.

Alpha, 575.

Interpretation: ★★★★★

Technique: ★★★★★

Since **Bronfman-Zinman**, we hadn't felt such a shock. What's happening here is extraordinary, because if you listen carefully you realize that, without playing the marionette like **Pletnev**, who, in **Beethoven**, invented things just to stand out, there is a way, through the phrasing, the accents and the balance between the instruments, to bring a fresh look at works that everyone thinks they know by heart.

**Andrew Manze**, who comes from the baroque sphere, conducts here a symphony orchestra with a lot of bite, and **Martin Helmchen** is definitely one of the two or three most exciting **Beethovenians** since **Brendel** and **Kovacevich**. A volume with the *Concertos No. 2 and 5* had already been published. The last one is eagerly awaited.

### BEETHOVEN

#### Melodies

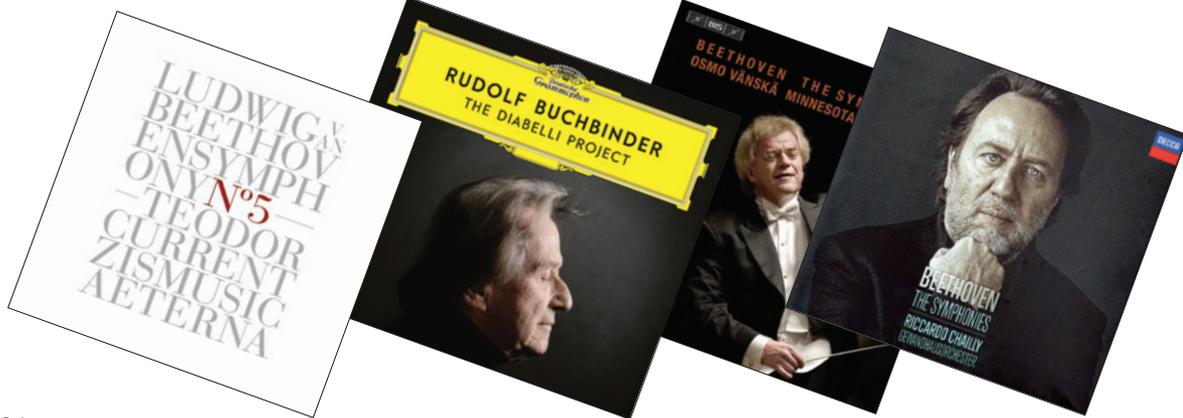
Matthias Goerne (baritone), **Jan Lisiecki** (piano).

Deutsche Grammophon, 483 8351.

Interpretation: ★★★

Technique: ★★★

Canadian pianist **Jan Lisiecki** is decidedly on course at **Deutsche**



**Grammophon**, which, after having recorded the complete *Piano Concertos* for him, associates him with the star baritone **Matthias Goerne** for a program of 23 *Lieder*, or more precisely the two cycles of the *Six Lieder*, op. 48, and the *Six Lieder* "To the Distant Beloved", Op. 98, accompanied by eleven other *Lieder*, including the famous *Adelaide*. For a pianist who is not very familiar with the accompaniment of melodies, **Lisiecki** is very favorably surprising (cf. the dosages of *An die Hoffnung*, track 13). As for **Goerne's** timbre, he has nearly 90% of fans worldwide who consider him to be the greatest *Lieder* singer on the planet. We're of the remaining 10%, not liking the slightly nasal side of the emission. Quite a close capture, which makes the singer's breathing quite indiscreet.

## BEETHOVEN

### Kaleidoscope

Transcription of Beethoven's works by Saint-Saëns, Mussorgsky, Balakirev... Mari Kodama (piano).

Pentatone, PTC 5186841.

Interpretation: ★★★★★

Technique: ★★★★★

This highly original disc features piano transcriptions of movements from **Beethoven's** quartets, some of which are world premieres. **Mari Kodama**, the wife of **Kent Nagano**, whom COVID-19 will deprive of playing with her husband during the last *Classical Journey* this summer, has chosen intermediate movements from *Op. 18 No. 6*, *Op. 59 Nos. 1 and 2*, *Op. 130* and *Op. 135*. The disc is augmented by **Beethoven's** transcription of **Mozart's Allegro** à variations from the *Quintet* with clarinet. **Mari Kodama** rightly points out that it is not a question of wanting to imitate the strings on the piano. Moreover, the piano is a very

pertinent, even irresistible, choice in the *Allegretto vivace* of *Opus 59 No. 1 (Saint-Saëns)* and the *Vivace* of *Opus 135 (Mussorgsky)*. At the time, the aim of the transcriptions was to disseminate the music, which today is ensured by disc and digital means, but these transcriptions plunge us into another, very interesting universe.

## BEETHOVEN

### Beethoven around the world

4th stage: São Paulo—String Quartets op. 18 No. 6 and op. 127. Quatuor Ébène.

Warner (download and streaming), 9029532976.

Interpretation: ★★★

Technique: ★★

This is the new **Warner All-Star** set to compete with the **Artemis**. The project is flamboyant: seven concerts in seven cities around the world, as part of a 120-concert tour encompassing 21 countries. Isolated volumes (this one is the latest) published in download and streaming only, with the boxed set of the complete set in 7 CDs (reference 9029533981) arriving on May 15<sup>th</sup>. If we talk about this fourth stage, it is because it ideally illustrates all the pitfalls that make the discographies of the *Quartets* or the *Sonatas* for violin and piano both rich and sinister. This recording is aggressive and stifling. Not only do a few seconds of a movement sometimes suffice (3<sup>rd</sup> movement of *Opus 18 No. 6*) to determine the dazzling superiority of the **Artemis**, but the very logic of the integral will be elusive, for there will be no sound aesthetics (cf. comparison of São Paulo with Vienna and Philadelphia) other than a kind of tiresome close up. Poof, even before the CDs come out!

## BEETHOVEN

### Ein neuer Weg

Sonatas for piano opus 31.

Variations op. 34 et 35.

Andreas Staier (pianoforte).

Harmonia Mundi, 2 CD, HMM 90232728.

Interpretation: ★★★★★

Technique: ★★★★★

Light years ahead of the **Quatuor Ébène's** project, **Andreas Staier's** journey will not please everyone, since it involves the use of an old instrument, an 1810 pianoforte, to demonstrate the audacity of **Beethoven's** writing, the new path (*neuer Weg*) that he had the piano take, whose craftsmanship was developing. The choice is judicious, with important sonatas (*nos. 16, 17, 18*) from the middle period and variations from the same period. Captured with the necessary space and hindsight, **Staier's** fortepiano is a pure marvel for those who are not resistant to ancient instruments, the musician having shown for many years that he was of the caliber of the greatest, that is to say **Kovacevich** or **Brendel** in this *Opus 31*.

## BEETHOVEN

Triple Concerto. Symphony No. 7.

Anne-Sophie Mutter, Daniel

Barenboim, Yo-Yo Ma, West-Eastern

Divan Orchestra.

Deutsche Grammophon, 483 8242.

Interpretation: ★★★★★

Technique: ★★★★★

Ever since one of the biggest disasters in the history of the record, the *Triple Concerto* by the millionaire trio **Oistrakh, Richter, Rostropovitch**, conducted by **Karajan**, we have been haunted to see *All Stars* lineups in this work. This one, which brings together more or less the best paid soloists on the planet, therefore feels like a flop. Well, it's not! It's a very nice version, inventive, luxurious, friendly, happy and full of panache. As for the 7<sup>th</sup> *Symphony*, it has always succeeded in **Barenboim**, which here does not equal his version of the fall of the Berlin Wall (**Sony**), but cleverly enriches the programme.

## RUDOLF BUCHBINDER

### The Diabelli Project

Diabelli Variations Eleven new

Diabelli Variations. Eight variations.

Rudolf Buchbinder.

Deutsche Grammophon, 2 CD, 483 7707.

Interpretation: ★★★★★

Technique: ★★★★★

Austrian pianist **Rudolf Buchbinder** is, at the age of 73, a newcomer to **Deutsche Grammophon**. He has already recorded for **Teldec** not only **Beethoven's 33 Diabelli Variations**, but also the variations of the 50 composers asked in 1819 by the publisher **Anton Diabelli** (1781–1858) to write variations on a waltz of his own. Here **Buchbinder** plays **Beethoven's Diabelli** in a very straightforward, slightly stiff manner, but adds above all a second exciting disc for which he asked twelve contemporary composers (**Krzysztof Penderecki** died before delivering his own) to compose new variations. In addition, he wisely selected eight of the forgotten 1819 variations by **Hummel, Kalkbrenner, Kreutzer, Liszt, Schubert, Moscheles, Mozart Jr. and Czerny**. The work of contemporaries is dominated by **Toshio Hosokawa, Rodion Chtrédine, Brett Dean** and **Jörg Widmann**.

## BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 5

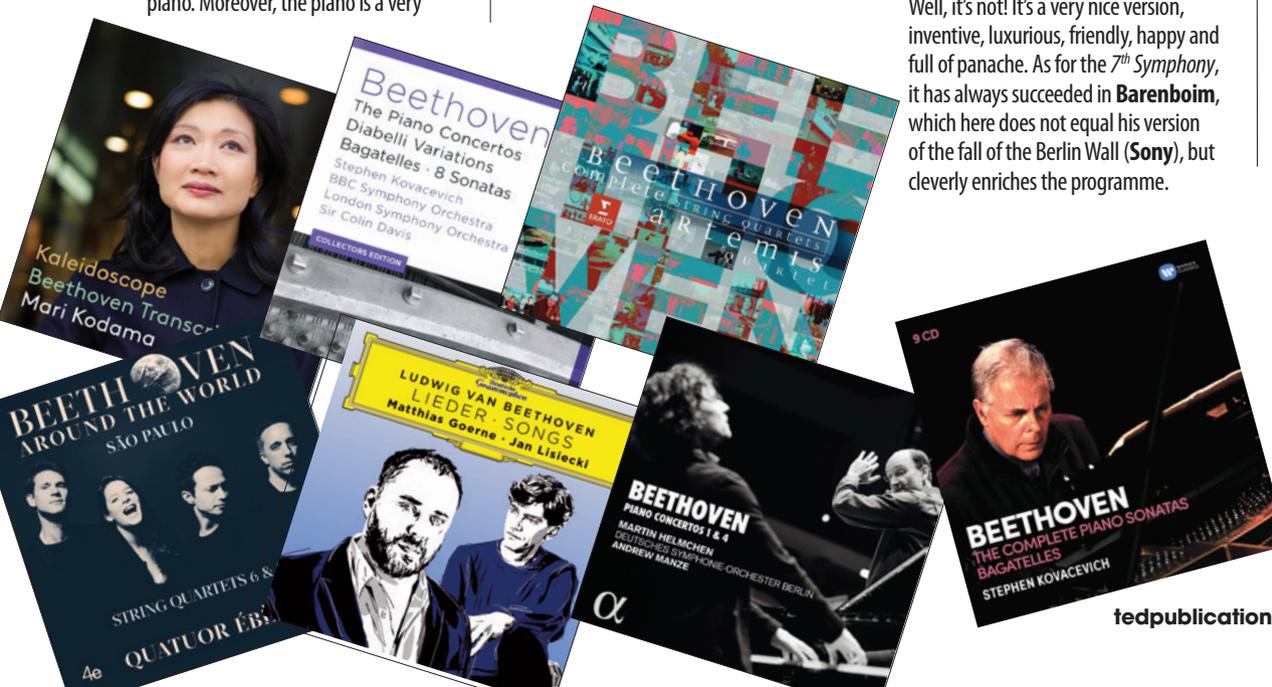
MusicaAeterna, Teodor Currentzis.

Sony, 19075884972.

Interpretation: ★★

Technique: ★★★★★

With delivery delays due to COVID, this eye-catching release is now scheduled for May 22<sup>nd</sup> on CD (it will be available digitally by then). All eyes, because **Teodor Currentzis** is the troublemaker of orchestral conducting. As it is, a priori, twice as interesting as everyone else, please don't be offended to pay full price for a 30 minutes and 34 seconds CD! So what happened with **Beethoven** is what happened with **Rameau**: every corner of the measure is interpreted, charged with an intention. There are exasperating things (1<sup>st</sup> movement) and fascinating things (3<sup>rd</sup> movement). The whole thing is pretty experimental. A muscular and nervous **Beethoven** can be conducted in a less exhibitionist manner. **Lorin Maazel** in Berlin in 1959 or **Paavo Järvi** showed it to us.



# HIGH-CALIBRE ELECTRONICS ALLOW MUSIC TO BE HEARD IN THE MOST NATURAL WAY...



By Michel Dallaire

The manufacturer Verity Audio is located in Quebec City and has been in the speaker business since the mid-1990s. Its products are now recognized worldwide for their manufacturing quality and attention to detail. At the High End Show 2017 in Munich, electronic devices of the same brand were presented, including the PRO-2 preamplifier and the AMP-60 amplifier. Later, at the Rocky Mountain Show in Denver, the complete Monsalvat system was presented with superb speakers and subwoofers, powered by the PRO-6 preamplifier and AMP-60 amplifiers. In 2018, two more devices were introduced. These are Verity Audio's DAC (digital to analog converter) and AMP-45 amplifier. These are the subject of this test bench, and it is with great interest that I welcome Verity Audio electronics to my home for the first time.

#### The Verity Audio design

The outward appearance has always been a concern for the designers of Verity Audio products. For the electronic circuits,

they called upon an engineering technologist in the person of **Maxime Julien**. For the external appearance of the casings, they hired industrial designer **Simon Choquette**. He also participated in the design of the new *Lakmé* speaker that I would have liked to have had on hand to carry out this test bench. Being a trained industrial designer myself, I find Verity Audio's speakers and devices to be among the most successful in terms of aesthetics.

The electronics housings are made of thick aluminum plates finely sculpted on the sides and without visible screws. The weight of the units shows that particular attention has been paid to the phenomenon of vibrations induced by microphony and/or external sources. All printed circuit boards are six-layered, whereas most manufacturers are content with two to four layers. The traces of these Verity Audio circuit boards are made of very thick 2-ounce copper. All of these precautions are designed to eliminate as much of the internal wiring as possible, which can act as an opened antenna to interference. The finish of the housings is protected by a two-tone anodizing process of the most beautiful effect, and the quality of the rear

connectors is irreproachable. **Verity DAC** and **AMP-45** units come with large absorbent feet and an optional insulation platform.

### The Verity DAC

The **Verity DAC** is equipped with variable gain analogue outputs. These outputs are available on **RCA** and **XLR** connectors. They are controlled by a superb hoop-shaped volume knob, inlaid in the front plate. The **Verity DAC** can therefore directly drive a stereo power amplifier. On its front panel, you can see an **LCD** display whose size allows a good readability of the numbers from a listening distance. On the right side of this display there are four small recessed buttons for switching on the unit and providing access to the menu for the various functions. Volume control and many of these functions are made as simple as possible, while they can be performed using a simple and pretty **Apple** remote control with a very user-friendly interface.

The **Verity DAC** has no analogue inputs, but its digital inputs include an **AES/EBU** on an **XLR** connector, an **S/PDIF** on a **RCA** coaxial connector and a **USB type B** for connection to a computer. All these inputs can handle **PCM** files with a resolution of up to 32 bits / 384 kHz as well as **DSD 256** formats.

The internal architecture of the **Verity DAC** is a dual mono circuit with the left and right channels being completely independent. Each channel has a digital-to-analogue conversion section provided by an **ESS Sabre (ES9018)** 32-bit *Hyper Stream*

delta-sigma technology chip. Each chip is equipped with 8 channels which are, in this case, configured in differential mode in order to obtain a perfectly balanced and noise-free output for each channel. The volume is controlled by these 32-bit chips and, according to the manufacturer, above -60 dB there is no crosstalk or loss of definition.

Digital filtering, prior to *D-A* conversion, is performed on 72 bits using a **Xilinx 7 FPGA** chip that has a computing potential of nearly 100 billion operations per second. **Verity Audio** offers a single digital filter option rather than offering several with different slopes as some manufacturers do. In general, the difference in sound between these filters is so subtle that these multiple choices become more confusing to the user than anything else.

In the **Verity DAC**, voltages are supplied by a total of 26 independent regulators. For each channel, there are 7 for the analogue outputs and 6 for the digital circuits.

### The Verity AMP-45

The latter comes in the same housing format as the **Verity DAC**, but with an immaculate front panel with only one power button. Its concept is based on the principle that when listening to music, what matters is not so much the power as the speed with which that power must be delivered in real time. The dynamics contained in the music require that this power be available instantly, on demand and repeatedly. To do so, **Verity Audio** relied on a power supply circuit based on a huge 800 VA



toroidal transformer that could easily equip a 200 W per channel amplifier. The parts used are, of course, of audiophile quality such as **Mundorf** capacitors with a total energy storage capacity of 44,000 uF. The amplification circuit operates in class A/B and has been designed to eliminate inductance phenomena, capacitance phenomena and signal loss as much as possible. In

« This vocal ensemble accompanied by excellent musicians is of a sidereal beauty. Reproduced by **Verity Audio** devices, the first words that come to mind are sweetness, smoothness, sumptuousness, not to say voluptuousness. The **Verity DAC** and **AMP-45** duo isn't trying to fill my ears, but rather to make me hear, in the most natural way possible, the space contained on this album.»

the output stage, only two **MOSFET (Metal Oxide Semiconductor Field Effect Transistors)** are used per channel. For grounding and shielding against interference, on the 6-layer printed circuit board, one of the 6 layers is reserved specifically for this purpose. The **Verity AMP-45** has unbalanced inputs on **RCA** connectors and balanced inputs on **XLR** connectors. A toggle switch on the back of the unit allows you to specifically select one or the other of these inputs.

#### Installation and advice for use

Since both devices give off very little heat, I installed it in my audio cabinet for space reasons. However, their appearance,

as an object, allows them to be left in the open air without any problem. The sources used are, as usual, my music player using the **USB** connection and my **CD** player using the coaxial **S/PDIF** connection on a **RCA** connector. All the cables, including those for the power supply, are **Nordost Heimdall 2** that I still have after a previous test bench. My speakers are the ones I use regularly and are relatively easy to power with amplifiers as low as 30 W per channel.

#### Telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth

I must first specify that the **Verity DAC's** volume control offers a very progressive stroke in 0.5 dB increments, allowing you to finely adjust the listening level, which differs from one album to another. Secondly, its quiet operation is such that even with the volume control at maximum, I can hardly hear any background noise. This is exceptional, especially on a **USB** input that is most often connected to noisy computer sources. Subjectively, the distortion rates seem so low that I feel like I can turn the volume up indefinitely. So I started listening to a recent double album by the group **Ensemble Correspondances** directed by **Sébastien Daucé**. This recording of *Histoires Sacrées* by composer **Marc-Antoine Charpentier** received a **Diapason d'Or** as well as several other mentions such as *Album of the Year* by **Gramophone Magazine**. This vocal ensemble accompanied by excellent musicians is of a sidereal beauty. Reproduced by **Verity Audio** devices, the first words that come to mind are sweetness, smoothness, sumptuousness, not to say voluptuousness. The **Verity DAC** and **AMP-45** duo isn't trying to fill my ears, but rather to make me hear, in the most natural way possible, the space contained on this album. The high frequencies are luminous and leave a beautiful feeling of air around the performers without any artificial emphasis of the high register.





The voices are expressive while all the instruments are subtly modulated, with timbres scrupulously respected. For its part, the **Verity AMP-45** lets the music flow smoothly and in fine detail. In this sense, I find that the elegant sound is very close to the best achievements with tubes configured in *Single Ended Triode* mode. Thanks to its *MOSFET* output transistors and their generous power supply, the **Verity AMP-45** amplifier has the musical qualities of this *SET* operating mode, without the disadvantages of low power and high heat output.

I continue with the British jazz trio **Gogo Penguin** and their excellent album *A Humdrum Star* on the **Blue Note** label. This band stands out for their infectious piano melodies, the power of the double bassist's playing and the unpredictable rhythms of the drummer. With this **Verity Audio** duo, the reproduction of this album is so coherent that I'm forced to stop analyzing the sound of these devices in a sectorial way like, for example, bass, medium and high frequencies. Yes, the medium is shimmering and alive. Yes, the bass is generous and without exaggeration. And yes, the stereophonic image is perceptible in all three dimensions. But beyond all these audiophile considerations, the **Verity DAC** and the **AMP-45** amplifier are among the few devices that force me to leave my analysis mode and simply let myself be lulled by the music without asking questions. In other words, when the sound of high-fidelity components sounds fundamentally right and this impression becomes stronger as you listen to music, you are definitely in the presence of exceptional devices.

And therein lies the whole dilemma of high-fidelity columnists. We sometimes have to test equipment that does so well what it is supposed to do that it leaves little to criticize, at least on the sound aspect. But to remain credible, I'm going to talk about two small disappointments with the **Verity DAC**. This is the omission of an optical input, *Bluetooth* reception and an output for a headset. But then again, my needs as an audio columnist aren't necessarily everyone's needs. Since **Verity Audio** devices take a rather purist approach to music reproduction, they are aimed at a specific clientele for whom these secondary functions are less important.

### Conclusion

It is always difficult to justify the price of top-of-the-range equipment, which has to face a lot of cheaper competition. The **Verity DAC** converter and the **Verity AMP-45** amplifier each cost

about \$33,000 CDN. This is considerable, but these exceptional devices are not unique, because our Quebec manufacturers also include **Artist Cloner**, **Eon Art**, **Simaudio**, **Tenor Audio** and **Kronos** turntables, which offer devices in this price range. On the U.S. and European manufacturers' side, it is not uncommon to see units costing more than \$100,000 each. In such an international market context, it can be concluded that **Verity Audio** devices are not the most expensive in the industry. But according to my tastes as a retired industrial designer, the **Verity DAC** and **AMP-45** duo is among the most beautiful devices I've ever seen and heard. It should be kept in mind that in high-fidelity reproduction, the latest definition and transparency issues require manufacturing costs that are increasing exponentially. This duo of **Verity Audio** devices is aimed at a special clientele, for whom criteria such as musicality and manufacturing quality take precedence over any other consideration. With this in mind, and given their highly accomplished sound, the **Verity DAC** and **Verity AMP-45** duo is definitely a serious option to consider. What's more, their local manufacturing encourages our economy while being a more eco-responsible choice.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

#### DAC converter

Price: \$31,250

Warranty: 2 years, parts and labour

#### AMP-45 power amplifier

Price: \$31,250

Warranty: 2 years, parts and labour

Manufacturer distributor: Verity Audio, Tel : 418.682.9940, [www.verityaudio.com](http://www.verityaudio.com)

#### Mediagraphy

Ensemble Correspondances, Histoires Sacrées, HMM902280.81

GoGo Penguin, A Humdrum Star, Blue Note, 6,716,431

Isabeau Corriveau, A Leap of Faith, CA-LMJ-19-40000

Nils Frahm, All Melody, Erased Tapes

Mercan Dede, Breath, White Swan Records, WS0078

#### THANKS

The editors would like to warmly thank Verity Audio as well as Mr. Maxime Julien for the loan of the equipment and technical support.

# THE **HI-FI** SWISS KNIFE!

By Guillaume Brunet

Since streaming began, manufacturers such as Bryston have created different devices to make this new reality possible and easier to access. Until now, several devices were needed to achieve this. It was necessary to ensure the compatibility and optimization of the various configuration parameters in order to obtain a high-performance solution, not to mention the different cables required. The current trend among manufacturers is to further simplify the process by consolidating the network streamer player and digital-to-analogue conversion sections into a single device. Bryston follows suit with its newest comer, the BDA-3.14. This one was born from the fusion of two already existing devices, the network streamer player BDP-Pi and the famous digital-to-analogue converter, the BDA-3. With the addition of a digital preamplifier with digital volume control, the

all-new Bryston BDA-3.14 has, on paper at least, everything to please and make its mark in the industry. It is with great interest that I approach this device.

**Bryston** is a Canadian company that has been designing and manufacturing audio devices for over 35 years. First recognized for its power amplifiers sold and used all over the world by audio professionals, **Bryston** has been offering, for several years, a complete range of products dedicated to personal use. **Bryston** manufactures products for both stereophonic audiophiles and multichannel home movie enthusiasts. Their range of devices is truly complete and covers the entire signal chain. It extends from preamplification to loudspeakers, to electrical insulation transformers and to connecting cables. All manufacturing is done entirely by hand, here in Canada, which is quite rare nowadays when everyone tries to reduce costs by having the product manufactured overseas, to the detriment of the quality of the product itself. Not at **Bryston**, quite the contrary!





The company challenges its engineers to create the best possible products, find and use the best components to create equipment as close to perfection as possible, while maximizing performance and reliability. This rigour bears fruit and **Bryston** is proud of it. It offers the most comprehensive warranty in the industry, 20 years for analogue products and 5 years for digital devices.

### Unpacking and Starting

It's a brand-new model that was delivered to me, box sealed. In the packaging, however, there was unfortunately no remote control. After talking to my publisher, he confirmed that I would have it soon, because the production was not finished, he explained. Being a good student, and upon receiving a brand new device, it is obviously the reading of the user guide that is required before anything else. So I begin my reading. The next day, after downloading and reading the *Manic Moose* guide, I felt equipped to go on the attack. The **Bryston BDA-3.14** can be accessed on a page Web and typing [my.bryston.com](http://my.bryston.com) or by typing its address IP directly into the browser. There are no apps to download. Once the page is displayed, network configurations appear. Once the basic setup is complete, the machine restarts. Next, it is recommended to update the *Manic Moose* operating system.

Once done, the dashboard appears and provides access to a variety of information and settings such as input selection,

paths to network drives and share folders as well as the drive of different media. It is through him that we have access to various sources including streaming music services such as **Tidal** and Qobuz and Internet radio. A very important parameter to configure is under *Audio Devices*. By default, when powering on, the volume of the *BDA-3.14* is set to -60 dB. Depending on whether you want to use it as a preamplifier or as a fixed volume source, this is where you can configure it. For optimal playback, in *Bit Perfect*, it is imperative to set the volume to 0 dB. In the menus of the *Services* tab, are all the operation possibilities of the *BDA-3.14* in the form of checkable drop-down menus. Unfortunately, it is impossible to select all of them, you have to choose. One cannot select *MPD (Music Player Daemon)* — the internal music player, and *Shareport-Sync* — a utility allowing the use of the recognized function *Air Play* at the same time. If you want to have access to music, on a hard disk, on the local network or on a computer, you must first have selected *SAMBA Server*. To be able to plug a hard drive or USB drive directly into the *BDA-3.14* and access it using the media player, you must have previously checked *USB Mount* otherwise it will not appear. It sounds complicated at first, but we get used to it quickly.

The only irritant for me is the inability of the system to switch from playback to streaming using a mobile device without going through the *Services* menu to activate these functions.

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## Technical description

The **Bryston BDA-3.14** is really a very complete device. Born from the fusion of the *BDP-Pi* network player and the *BDA-3* digital-to-analogue converter, and interconnected with an *I<sup>2</sup>S*, protocol that separates the clock signal from the *PCM* stream (**Pulse Code Modulation**), the *BDA-3.14* is also a digital preamplifier with digital volume control. This feature is more a useful addition for background music and *TV* than for serious listening, since it removes bits in order to attenuate the signal.

The case, with its brushed aluminum front panel, is superb and identical to the *BDA-3*. The rear panel has ten digital inputs, four *HDMI* stereo audio only, two *USB* type *B* inputs for connecting a computer, two inputs *S/PDIF* — one on connector *BNC* and the other on connector *RCA*, one input *AES/EBU* and one optical input.

The network player part has the wired network input and four *USB* type *A* inputs. To the latter, one can connect either hard disks or *USB* keys, an optical drive like the **Bryston BOT-1** or an adapter to create a wireless network. The *BDA-3.14* has two pairs of analogue outputs, one balanced at *XLR* and one unbalanced at *RCA*. The *HDMI* output, digital audio, can pass video (*Video Passthrough*) from the selected *HDMI* input and be used to power a home theatre decoder, receiver or *TV*. The rest of the connectors allow integration into home automation or other **Bryston** devices, of which some are reserved to maintenance. The front panel has eleven push buttons, two of which have a dual function, one for *Up Sampling* or *Mute*, and the other to select the optical input or network player alternately, and for the other buttons, one per input.

No access to volume control. Either the remote control or the *Web* page must be used. Once the volume is activated, the *LED* of inputs will change from green to yellow, indicating the output level.

On the left, the twelve *LED* lights tell us the type of file and the sampling frequency of the current playback. The last one is intended to validate that the signal is properly engaged. Even

though the *BDA-3.14* can read the *PCM* format up to 384 kHz and *DSD 4x* or *DSD256* (256 times 44,1 kHz or 11,2896 MHz), the integrated network player is, however, limited to reading *PCM* at 192 kHz. All files with a higher sampling rate, including *DSDs*, will be played at 192 kHz. The only way to read in an original way (or *native*) this type of file with the *BDA-3.14* is to use an external drive. There are three possibilities, either with a *SACD* drive connected in *HDMI*, or with a computer connected through *USB* and equipped with a software allowing it, like *Foobar 2000*, *JRiver*, **Audirvana** or with *ROON* through a *USB* or network connection.

The oversampling function respects the base frequency of the input signal and multiplies it by two or four, depending on the input signal. 44.1 or 88.2 kHz will therefore become 176.4 kHz, and 48 or 96 kHz will become 192 kHz. A peculiarity of this option is that it is possible only on so-called conventional digital inputs. It is not available on *USB* and *HDMI* sources or inputs, or on those that use the internal music streamer. And it's also impossible using *Wi-Fi* streaming with a smartphone or tablet. I question the relevance and the addition of this function given the impossibility of using it with the sources that could benefit most from it.

## Introduction and Background

Given the great potential for use of the **Bryston BDA-3.14**, I couldn't test all options. On the other hand, I tried everything possible with my configuration. So I used the *BDA-3.14* first as an analogue-to-digital converter with my integrated amplifier and then as a digital preamplifier directly in a power amplifier. To do this, I used the entries *S/PIDF RCA* and *BNC*, the *AES/EBU* input and the *TOSLINK* optical input. I also forwarded **YouTube** to my cell phone using *AirPlay*. I also used it as a music streamer with and without the preamplifier function. In these configurations, I read files from a *USB* drive and a hard drive through *USB*, and I played files, coming from a hard disk, through the wired network with the *Services SAMBA Server*. I also used the **Tidal** music streaming service as a source as well as some



Internet radio channels. With my computer and the *Foobar 2000* software, I was able to test the *DLNA Client* function under the *Services* tab. This way, the **Bryston** appeared directly in the possible outputs of *Foobar 2000* software, even with 24-bit files in 192 kHz. I finally plugged the *BDA-3.14* directly to my computer using *USB*, which was the only possibility I had to read *DSD* files. In all these configurations, I have had excellent results and a very high quality sound. I've only encountered two problems, a small click occurring when switching inputs and a big ploc when switching from a streaming input to any of the other inputs receiving a signal simultaneously, which will inevitably happen if you don't go through *Stop* beforehand. This becomes a real problem when the *BDA-3.14* is used as a preamplifier coupled to a power amplifier or active monitors, since the ploc arrives at full volume. Most of the time, I used *Manic Moose* with my computer instead of my cell phone because I found navigation difficult. The space allocated to **Tidal** is very small and some operations became quite difficult. Otherwise, everything went well. All inputs tested gave an excellent rendering, regardless of the file type.

### Listening Impressions

I start my listening with baroque music. I'm far from a connoisseur, but I appreciate it. I particularly like the cello. I discovered **Elinor Frey** at a very intimate concert in a loft a few weeks ago. I immediately fell under the spell and bought the two *CDs* she was selling on the spot. The *Voce Del Violoncello*, her first album, is, in my opinion, a perfect introduction to the style and to her instrument, the baroque cello. It differs from the classic cello in, among other things, the lower tension of its strings and its lower tone. It is most often tuned to *A* at 415 Hz rather than the normal 440 Hz. This means that the music broadcasted is very different from what you are used to hearing. The album is an easy listening experience from beginning to end, sweet on the soul and the ears. The *BDA-3.14* perfectly reproduces the instrument's timbres and harmonics. In the very fast passages, it reproduces all the plays and accents in a disconcertingly loose style. I was amazed by the sound quality from reading files in *DSD* format with the **Bryston BDA-3.14**. This is the very first time I experimented with this type of file at home and I am frankly conquered by the dynamics and the smoothness of presentation of this format.

The chosen file comes from the label **2L** — **The Nordic Sound**, more precisely from their selection of test files and is available in almost all formats called *Lossless*. I chose the *Blågutten* on the album *Quiet Winter Night* by **Hoff Ensemble** in *DSD128*, an exceptional production. The **Hoff Ensemble** consists of some of Norway's best jazz musicians, including **Gunnar Hoff** on piano and **Mathias Eick** on trumpet. What struck me right away was how much space was captured on this recording. You feel like you're attending a live performance in private. I wouldn't say it's better than the *PCM* versions, but let's just say it's more romantic, cozier. To give a simple picture, let's say it's as if you've

dimmed the lights, had a few drinks with your better half and the performance begins — it's spellbinding, like a dream. With **Billie Eilish** and *No Time To Die*, the title piece of the next *James Bond*, we are completely in another universe. A solitary, dark and tormented universe to which **Daniel Craig's** interpretation from the last episodes have accustomed us. The style of **Billie Eilish** fits perfectly with this vision. The fragile, bumpy and emotional voice accompanies a great orchestration punctuated by a well-dosed electro atmosphere. The effect is multiplied tenfold by a very close and perfectly controlled vocal capture. Definitely dark. The *BDA-3.14* swims here like a fish in the water. It succeeds in reproducing everything and highlighting the details even in the busiest passages, and does so smoothly, without forcing anything. A real delight.

### Conclusion

With this brand new model, **Bryston** has met the challenge, in my opinion, of creating a simple and complete device for barely more than the *BDA-3*. Indeed, the *BDA-3.14* from **Bryston** is a whole electronic system, from the point of view of its construction as well as its functionalities and sound quality. It has just about everything you want in this type of device, including a network player, a variety of inputs, a volume control, and enormous usability and integration capabilities. Perfect, almost! I would have liked a device allowing the reading of files *DSD*, an application a little sexier and especially reorganized for portable devices. I would have really liked to be able to test the integration with *ROON*, because this application allows to take full advantage of all the announced possibilities.



### GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$4,195

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Manufacturer-Distributor: Bryston Ltd., Tel: 1-800-632.8217

or in Quebec, on 450.415.0591; www.bryston.com

### Mediagraphy

Elinor Frey, *La Voce Del Violoncello*, Passacaille 993

Billie Eilish, *No Time To Die*, Darkroom, Interscope Record

Hoff Ensemble, *Quiet Winter Night*, 2L — The Nordic Sound

# AMAZING FEATURES — AESTHETICS, EASE OF USE, EXCELLENT SOUND AND GREAT VERSATILITY

By Richard Schneider

Like a few colleagues, I have to admit that the English manufacturer Linn has been rather discreet recently. However, let us not be afraid, because the firm has not fallen into inaction, quite the contrary. For many years, Linn has been at the forefront of digital audio and networking, as its team is composed not only of audio design experts, but also of computer specialists. I remember a long conversation with Gilad Tiefenbrun, the head of the firm who, without a shadow of a doubt, told me that the future of audio would pass through dematerialization. In the same breath, he announced the imminent death of CD players. I was very skeptical, but we know what happened. In 2009 the production of CD players ended at Linn.

The firm introduced its first network music player, the Klimax DS in 2007. The digital signal came from a home network rather than a physical medium. It was the first component of the company to support playback of 24 bit / 192 kHz Studio Masters recordings which for the record, at the time, were only available for download without DRM at Linn Records. In 2008, I bought a digital server, a Linn Sneaky as well as a NAS (a little-known object at the time) and finally a small software to convert my CDs into digital files. Afterwards, I dumped my records in the secondhand market. I can tell you I sounded a little crazy at the time, but I never regretted it. To cut a long story short, the long road travelled by Linn leads us to a new product that is very appropriate because it provides solutions that consumers demand. Upgradeable, modern and affordable products. This is



the Selekt product line. In this article we will focus on the Selekt DSM Katalyst with an integrated amplifier.

I cannot, however, overlook the fact that this device is in fact the big brother of the *Selekt* series. Here is a brief overview of the other devices in the series. Let's start with the *Selekt DSM* (in stereo and/or surround) which is a digital converter. Next is the *Selekt DSM Network Music Player* (in stereo and/or surround sound). It is a converter with an integrated amplifier to which you will connect your loudspeakers. The series continues with the *Selekt DSM with Katalyst* (in stereo and/or surround sound). Katalyst is Linn's new high-end digital file conversion process. Finally, the last device is the one we will review in this article, the *Selekt DSM with Katalyst* and integrated amplifier (in stereo and/or surround sound).

The appeal of this series lies in the fact that it is possible to obtain the model that suits each person's budget, starting with the simplest one, and to develop it over time by adding new modules, one at a time, if necessary. The evolutionary nature of this series will eventually lead to the ultimate level of the group, i.e. the equivalent of the *Selekt DSM Katalyst* with an integrated amplifier. To paraphrase Mr. Tiefenbrun *Our hardware is modular, our software is scalable, and we look to the future.*

### The Selekt series is in the middle of the range.

All Linn devices share one really interesting technology: *Space Optimization*. With his help, you'll be able to customize the musical rendering of your system according to the constraints of your listening room and the ideal location of your speakers, which, most of the time, is problematic. This way, you'll enjoy an improved listening environment at home. The software is available with *DSP* presets for over 400 speaker models. It still takes time and some effort, but in the end, the results are there, bringing noticeable improvements to the bass. In short, the software will try to correct inconsistencies as much as possible when speakers have to be placed in less than ideal positions or in rooms where bass reproduction is



problematic in either direction. You can set the frequency response. The software can be configured either via a tablet or a computer (laptop or desktop) with the help of the downloadable *Linn Konfig* application. If, however, you are not satisfied with the results at first glance, don't worry, as it is always possible to return to the original settings.

### Physical Aspect

The stylish aluminum housing of the device is unlike anything the Scottish company has ever made before. In fact, it's a commendable change compared to the redundant style Linn has adopted over the years. At the top towards the front, there is a very classy glass wheel that serves both as a volume control and to turn on the device without the need for software. It is also used to activate the stations that have been programmed, to access all of its sources, to control the balance of its speakers, and so forth. Underneath this roulette wheel, there are six press buttons for direct access to favourites such as playlists and favourite radio channels. Note that the keys are fully customizable. The challenge for the designers was to offer a playful product that you could interact with, much like you would

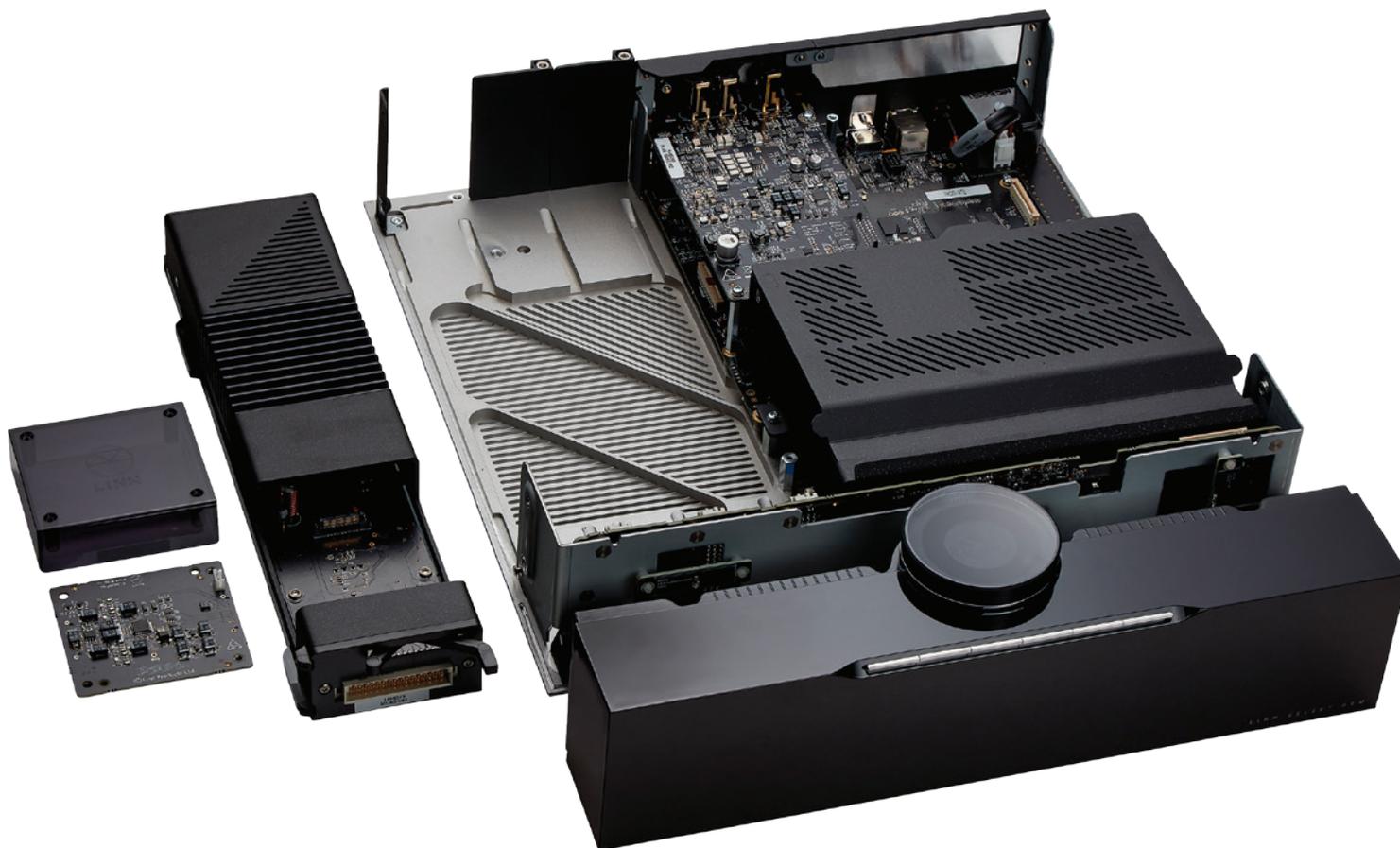
with an analogue turntable. With the advent of digital technology and the gradual disappearance of *CD* players, it is good to regain some physical contact with our devices.

### Connectivity

The choice of connectors brings together everything that shines under the sun: a coaxial input, an *S/PDIF* input, a *USB* input (a long-awaited novelty that was long overdue at Linn), 2 *Toslink* inputs, a *Line Level* input (24 bits / 192 kHz), an *HDMI ARC* socket, *Exakt Link*, a *MM* phono input (24 bits / 192 kHz) and finally an *MC* phono input (24 bits / 192 kHz). The *Ethernet* socket is used to connect the device to the home network, which is essential for use as it must be used in order to be able to connect the entire system.

If I may be permitted to add one important technical detail, it would be the following. Often, connecting the device to the router will seem impossible because it is located too far away and dislodging it is not a viable option. There is a very simple, inexpensive, but very effective solution that I have been using for a long time. You can get adapters, one of which will connect your router to an electrical outlet using a network cable.

This way, you will have access to an *Ethernet*



connection anywhere in the house where you have installed an adapter in any electrical outlet. It is easy to get them from a place like **Addison Electronics** for reference. For the rest, connect your NAS or digital server to the network and you're done.

### Streaming

The main streaming services to which you subscribe such as **Qobuz** and **Tidal**, for those who prefer a higher resolution of

«The sound result was smoother and more natural to the ear without compromising details such as low frequency rendering and high midrange, so important to overall consistency. The S's have faded considerably without affecting the dynamic ranges. The amplification was solid and fast with sufficient reserve during vigorous passages.»

digital files, are easily accessible as is **TuneIn** for Internet radio lovers which, by the way, includes the majority of local radio channels. Interested parties will be happy to know that Selekt devices are compatible with Roon as well as **Apple AirPlay**, except for version 2 for the moment.

The **Linn Selekt** supports the following formats: **FLAC**, **Apple Lossless**, **WAV**, **MP3**, **WMA**, **AIFF**, **AAC**, **OGG** as well as a great novelty, the **DSD** format (64/128) thanks to the new **USB** input whereas until recently Linn had always refused to support **DSD**. That's great news. In surround mode, it supports the following formats: **DTS-HD**, **DTS-HD High Resolution Audio**, **DTS 96/24**, **DTS**, **Dolby TrueHD**, **Dolby Digital Plus**, **Dolby Digital**, **PCM**.

Starting the *Selekt* requires the free download of the **Linn Konfig** software for tablets and / or *Windows* or *Mac* computers. Konfig provides access to advanced configuration settings and informs the user about software and device updates. With regard to the management of its music library, Linn makes available, completely free of charge, two software, **Linn App** for *iOS* or *Kazoo*. Personally, I have a clear preference for *Kazoo*, available on *iPad*, *iPhone*, *Android*, *Windows* or *Mac*. It is very intuitive and offers a host of features including access to different sources.

### The Catalyst Converter

A few words about the *Catalyst* digital audio converter. Basically, it is a new architecture that performs Linn's most powerful digital-to-analogue conversion to date. It uses a high level chip by **AKM**, the 4497, while the other series use the 4493 chip. The *Catalyst* offers superior performance because it is fully isolated from the rest of the unit and the signal amplitude is very stable. Its power supplies are isolated from each other to minimize contamination as well as the level of distortion.

Its high-precision clock has its own power supply, which ensures greater synchronization accuracy throughout the conversion process. The analogue output driver, which has a very low level of distortion, prepares the analogue signal for transmission upstream, out of the device, making it less susceptible to degradation. The data optimization phase that prepares the conversion of the digital signal acts with greater precision in order to minimize errors at the very beginning of the process.

### The Integrated Power Amplifier

The amplification in class *D* is 50 W per channel in 8 ohms and naturally, double this power in 4 ohms. The amplification has



been enhanced with an additional feedback loop around the *low-pass* filter. Apparently, this significantly improves its performance compared to conventional class *D* models, while maintaining the desired advantages of compact size and minimized heat dissipation.

### Installation

The physical start-up of the *Selekt DSM Katalyst* with integrated amplifier is disconcertingly simple. Apart, of course, from installing the required software and connecting to the home network, you just have to plug in your speakers and that's it. That's all. If a 5.1 *Surround Sound* installation is preferred, *Selekt* is a wise choice. Please note, if necessary, that in order to finalize this configuration, additional components will have to be added. The Linn retailer will be able to guide the consumer in this regard.

### My Listening Experience

Having this device for a few days was very pleasant. With its impeccable aesthetics, it

blends in perfectly with your environment. It is very easy to use. The supplied controller is handy for the basic functions, but I preferred by far to use my tablet, both for the settings and to access the different music sources.

I use a digital server that contains my music library. It has its own operating software that I manage through my tablet. With both devices connected to my network, the *Selekt* immediately recognized everything and collected all the data thanks to *Linn Kazoo* without any manipulation on my part.

The sound is truly typical of *Linn DSM* products, i.e. excellent, but the use of *Space Optimization* significantly increases listening pleasure. I would be lying if I told you that the optimization process was quick and easy, but the result was convincing. The sound result was smoother and more natural to the ear without compromising details such as low frequency rendering and high midrange, so important to overall consistency. The *S's* have faded considerably without affecting the dynamic ranges. The

amplification was solid and fast with sufficient reserve during vigorous passages. The phono input is flawless. The quality of the phono sector lies in the fact that the distance travelled by the signal is very short, ensuring a signal with little or no contamination by various external factors.

### Conclusion

More and more people are looking for quality all-in-one devices for their convenience and user-friendliness. *Linn* is a forerunner in the field of digital audio and with this device, the company is not in danger of being dethroned any time soon, because the sound is of a high standard and the multiple functionalities of this device are likely to seduce you every time.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: to be obtained from your retailer

Warranty: to be obtained from your retailer

Available in Montreal at: Codell Audio,  
Tel. 514.737.4531; [www.codellaudio.com](http://www.codellaudio.com);  
[www.linn.co.uk](http://www.linn.co.uk)

# TRANSPARENT AND FLUID, IT LEAVES PLENTY OF ROOM FOR MUSIC

By Michel Dallaire

The manufacturer Simaudio located in Boucherville is one of our few Quebec jewels recognized worldwide for their specialized high-fidelity products. In the pages of this magazine, we have had the opportunity to test several devices from this manufacturer, and it is always with interest and pride that we welcome their novelties. For this test bench, I will be looking at the new MOON 680D digital-to-analogue converter which also integrates a MIND 2 network music playback module. This D-A converter, and network drive, is in a way a variation of the MOON 780D which has recently been upgraded to version v2 including some updates and modifications. The MOON 780D v2 is still the ultimate digital-to-analogue converter from this manufacturer. Let's take a look at how the technologies developed for the MOON 780D v2 have been applied to get the brand

new MOON 680D converter at a softer price and without too many compromises.

## The MOON 680D

The MOON 680D digital-to-analogue converter was introduced to the market in 2019. Its sturdy housing is machined from an aerospace-grade aluminum alloy as are the other units in the MOON Evolution series. Its height makes it almost identical to the housing of the MOON 600i V2 integrated amplifier, making it perfect companions in the Simaudio catalogue. The all-new 680D does not replace any other MOON converter, but its technology is directly derived from that of its big brother, the 780D v2. In this sense, the 680D is equipped with one of the latest ES9028 Pro conversion chips from the renowned manufacturer ESS Sabre. This chip has eight independent channels, four of which are used to independently process the left and right sides of the audio signal. Each of the channels on the chip is calibrated differently to converge to a stereo output



free of distortion and background noise. Everything is regulated by a precision clock with picosecond jitter and significantly reduced distortion.

The architecture of the *MOON 680D* converter and its *MiND 2* module supports *DSD256* files and *PCMs* up to 32 bits / 384 kHz resolution from the *USB* input or the *Ethernet* connection to an *RJ45* socket. These two inputs are complemented by seven others including an *AES/EBU* on a *XLR* connector, three *S/PDIF* on *RCA/BNC* connectors, two optical on a *Toslink* connector and a **Qualcomm aptX Bluetooth** wireless input. The internal configuration of the *MOON 680D* is based on modular cards that allow updates over the years and protects this *D/A* converter from becoming obsolete too quickly.

### **MOON Hybrid Power**

One of the new features of the *MOON 780D v2* is the new *MHP (Moon Hybrid Power)* power supply developed by **Simaudio**. The traditional toroidal transformer has been replaced by a universal power supply (100/240 V – 50/60 Hz) with high-speed switching. This is combined with linear regulators with polypropylene capacitors that provide an ultra stable direct current (*DC*) with a very low noise level. This hybrid power supply is much less sensitive to variations in mains (*AC*) current. The *MOON 680D* includes a total of 12 voltage regulation (*DC*) stages involving two stages

of *M-LoVo (MOON Low Voltage Regulation)* and four stages of *i2DCf (Independent Inductive DC Filtering)*. All these in-house technologies provide the various circuits with a very fast, very precise and stable supply of direct current (*DC*) over time.

### **The MiND app**

**Simaudio** engineers have developed their own application for the *MiN 2* network playback module. It is available free of charge for *Android* or *iOS* devices. It turns your tablet or smartphone into a full-control centre for the *MOON 680D*. Its interface makes it possible, among other things, to select the multiple digital inputs of the *MOON 680D*, including the *MiND 2* module. Its *MiND* application offers, among other things, the ability to browse through music directories stored on computers or servers connected to an Internet network. Streaming music on sites such as **Tidal Masters**, **Qobuz Sublime+** and **Deezer Hi-Fi** becomes possible when the *MOON 680D* is connected to a router, either via a wired *Ethernet* or *WiFi* connection. The *MOON 680D* is also compatible with the *ROON* playback software. In this case, simply download the software to a computer and the *ROON* application to a tablet to obtain the same ease of use. The *MOON 680D* is also licensed to stream master-quality *MQA* files.

The superb backlit remote control is always part of the accessories. However, the buttons on the front panel of the *MOON 680D* give access to more configurable adjustments such as, for example, renaming each input or even disabling unused ones. The adjustments of the *MOON 680D* are too numerous to make an exhaustive list here, but be aware that in daily use, the majority of useful commands are available in the *MiND* application. Thanks to the *MiND 2* network playback module, the *MOON 680D* can be connected to other external *MiND 2* modules for listening in several rooms in your home.

### **Implementation of the MOON 680D**

I connected the output of the *MOON 680D* to my integrated amplifier using the *RCA* and *XLR* connections. As with **Simaudio**, these two types of connections are adjusted to have the same gain at 2 volts, and I decided to continue my listening with the *RCA* output which is just as good as the balanced

*XLR* connection. My *CD* player was used as a digital transport via its coaxial output. The *MOON 680D's* *Toslink* optical input has been tested with my *PS3* game console. My music server was used as the main source, connected directly to the *MOON 680D* via its asynchronous *USB* port. As this server was also connected to my wired *Ethernet* network, I was able to access its contents using the *MiND 2* module and its application on my **Apple** tablet. I have also obtained very good results with the *ROON* playback software and its application, which are extremely user-friendly. Using *USB* and *Ethernet* connections as well as the *MiND* and *ROON* platforms, I did not notice any significant difference between them, both in signal stability and sound. I used, as usual, my own speakers.

### **And the music in all this!**

First of all, I have to say that all my music files, whether *PCM* or *DSD*, have been processed by the *MOON 680D* without any problems, always with an accurate display of the sample rates. I begin my listening with the latest album of the Swiss artist **Stephan Eicher**. This opus entitled *Hüh!* pays tribute to the late **Alain Bashung** and his 1998 album *Fantaisie Militaire*. *Stephan Eicher* is accompanied by the group **Traktorkestar**, a brass band from Bern consisting of three drummers / percussionists, nine brass blowers and the singer **Claire Huguenin**. This music, inspired by the Balkans, is lively, catchy and full of a contagious rage for life. Through the *MOON 680D*, the brass is gleaming and I lose nothing of the overflowing energy of this ensemble. I can easily perceive that **Stephan Eicher's** voice is well highlighted, a characteristic often found in European recordings.

As I listen to it, I find the **Simaudio** sound that I'm quite familiar with. Subjectively, the frequency response curve is quite linear, with no dips or bumps, with a nice extension in the extremities of the sound spectrum. The distortion level seems very low, so it gives me the impression that I can raise the volume even more than usual and without any compression effect. The high frequencies are soft, airy and without any harshness unless, of course, you are dealing with a very bad recording. The basses are deep and generous without any exaggerated swelling in the lower midrange. The





medium is open, it offers me a beautiful presence of the voices and a good impact on the percussions.

I continue with the *Magnum Mystrium* album by jazz pianist **Jan Lundgren** in which he is accompanied by cellist-bass player **Lars Danielsson** and the **Gustaf Sjökvist Chamber Choir**. In this recording, on the **ACT** label, jazzman **Lundgren** pays tribute to **Renaissance** choral music with pieces by composers such as **Monteverdi**, **Byrd** and **De Morales**. This album was recorded in 2007, at the Cathedral of Stockholm, and you can feel the solemn side of this music, which blends perfectly

with the playing of the two musicians. The **MOON 680D** lets me enter this atmosphere as if I were sitting in the first pews of the cathedral. The interpretation of the choir is well restored in all these nuances with the natural reverberation of the place of capture. **Jan Lundgren's** instrument is precisely located in front of the **Gustaf Sjökvist** choir, while the piano notes literally float in this immense space. Bassist **Danielsson's** playing is subtle and only intervenes to ensure a foundation for these arrangements without stealing the spotlight. On the piece *Kyrie* composed by **Franchino Gaffurio**, pianist **Jan Lundgren** uses an electronic keyboard

while **Lars Danielsson** accompanies him on the cello. When the voices of the choir are added to the performance, I am transported into an atmosphere that is different from the other pieces. This recording is sublime, and perceiving all the inflections as well as the subtleties of the different performers is exactly the role that a high performance device like the **MOON 680D** must play. I end my listening with **Joëlle Saint-Pierre**, a young singer-songwriter from Chicoutimi. She has a classical training, but she has rather turned towards a career as a solo singer ... while forming a duo with her favourite instruments, the vibraphone and



the marimba. With her four sticks and her warm voice accentuated by a slight tremolo, she sometimes gives me the impression of a **Barbara** accompanying herself on the vibraphone. Her album *Et toi, tu fais quoi?* is a first opportunity for her to present us her repertoire of sweet and uplifting songs. She is accompanied by various musicians including a drummer, a double bassist, a keyboardist, a guitarist and a French horn. The harmonics of the metallic instrument bring to her compositions a slight impression of mystery and a somewhat hypnotic effect. The *MOON 680D* presents me, without restraint, the universe of this artist in all its candour and freshness. This album was recorded in different studios and has good dynamic gaps. The *MOON 680D* converter allows me to detect changes in atmosphere from one track to another while preserving the intrinsic nature of each instrument. In other words, the *MOON 680D* has a transparency and fluidity that makes its performance as a music broadcaster authentic.

### Conclusion

The *MOON 680D* network music converter/player is a welcome addition to the **Simaudio** catalogue. Even if I haven't yet had the opportunity to listen to its big



brother, the *MOON 780D v2*, my little finger tells me that for almost half the price of the latter, the *680D* should approach it advantageously. The technology and innovations used to design the *780D v2* are carried over into the *680D* without too many compromises. Musically, he is more than satisfying and he is totally indifferent to the type of music that is submitted to him. In my opinion, it compares to many of the high-end converters I've been able to test in the last few months, some of which were at least three times more expensive. Its

*MiND 2* streaming module and application have been greatly improved since the first version. The fact that it can be used with the **ROON** playback software is an undeniable advantage, while its *aptX Bluetooth* wireless receiver confirms its user-friendliness with today's, and possibly future, multiple digital sources. As with all **Simaudio** products, warranty and after-sales service are provided by a local manufacturer with an international reputation. This is another highly desirable device that will, once again, leave me with a twinge in my heart.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$11,500

Warranty: 10 years, if the unit was purchased new from an authorized **MOON** store and under certain conditions.

Manufacturer / Distributor: Simaudio,  
Phone: 450.449.2212, [www.simaudio.com](http://www.simaudio.com)

### Mediagraphy

Stephan Eicher & Traktorkestar, Hüh!, Polydor, 6791316

Jan Lundgren, Magnum Mysterium, ACT, 9457-2

Joëlle Saint-Pierre, Et toi, Tu Fais Quoi?, Coyote Records

Gavin Bryars, Vita Nova, ECM, New Series, 1533 78118-21533-2

Alice Jemima, Alice Jemima, FLAC 24 / 96, ProStudioMaster

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# What's New?

## AADAC, A NEW AUDIO ANALOGUE CONVERTER



By Michel Dallaire

In one of the editions of **TED Magazine** published a little while ago, we had the pleasure to test two integrated amplifiers from the manufacturer **Audio Analogue**. These were the *Puccini* and the *Maestro Anniversary*, which would commemorate, in 2016–2017, the twentieth anniversary of this Italian manufacturer. Since then, the **Audio Analogue** products have been the result of a close partnership with **Airtech Laboratories**, which has made it possible to further develop their technical aspect and their manufacture entirely made in Italy.

The latest addition to the **Audio Analogue** catalogue is a new *D-A* converter that is part of the *PureAA* family. The *AA DAC*, as it is called, is a superb half-format device that combines the functions of preamplifier and headphone amplifier. Its digital-to-analogue conversion section uses the renowned **Sabre ES9038** chip as well as an **Amanero USB** receiver circuit. This technology can process *PCM* signals up to a resolution of 32 bits/392 kHz, as well as original *DSD512* files.

The digital inputs are the most complete with *Bluetooth aptX* wireless reception. An independent power supply is provided for the analogue and digital sections as well as a circuit board for each channel.

The output stage is fully balanced with *XLR* connectors, or on unbalanced *RCA* connectors. It's all made from discreet, audiophile-quality parts. This stage also includes a quality output circuit for headphones with a 6.35 mm jack on the front of the unit.

The *AA DAC* comes with a nice remote control, and the available finishes are brushed metal grey or anodized black.

At the time of writing, the retail price and availability of the *AA DAC* in Canada are not yet known, but in England it is £3,300 including tax. More information can be found at **audioanalogue.com**



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