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ÉDITORIAL

Kindness...

Recently, a member of our family was taken rather quickly by cancer, one of the diseases of the century. He was my brother-in-law. A kind and good man. One of this wonderful man's great qualities was his kindness to everyone he met. He loved everyone around him and made sure everyone was at their best. He helped others without expecting anything in return. His kindness and generosity were natural. He encouraged us in our best qualities. Don't go thinking he was a wimp, no sir! not at all. I believe he personified the Bible verse about *being kind to one another* (Ephesians 4:32). He is no longer with us, but I know he is watching over us all. Rest in peace, dear Brother-in-law.

If we could all be a little more kind to each other, many problems would be solved in no time. Finally, we can only try to develop this reflex more and more, because these days, this *Every man for himself* must change in *How can I be better and do better*. The world, as a whole, would then be better and better.

Covid-19 has succeeded in getting many countries to work together to produce a vaccine that gives some relief to the world by protecting people and increasingly reducing the number of new cases. Again, we must all work together until we eradicate this virus that has taken so many lives. And then we can all breathe a little easier.

In the meantime, I invite you to read all our articles from the current issue on many devices of all kinds, which will allow you to better enjoy listening to music and thus improve your well-being. A lifestyle article, *Buon Gusto*, about wines, is also offered. The *Mischievous cook* is taking time off for this issue, but will hopefully be back soon. You will feast on reviews of musical records of all genres, from classical to progressive rock, of course. We also present some new features under the *What's new?* heading.

Always with the aim of offering you *a little of everything*, I invite you to read attentively, from the website (www.tedpublications.com/en), articles by **Michel Rochon**, scientific journalist who published a book titled *Le Cerveau & la Musique* in 2019. Part I deals with *the benefits of listening to music* while Part II focuses on *the impact of playing music on the brain*. I really believe that you will find these writings very interesting. When we listen to the soundtrack of our choice, we certainly don't dwell on what wonderful things are happening from the sounds we hear, nor on all the pathways to the different parts of the brain that actually interpret everything at lightning speed. Wow, what wonders the human body and brain are. If you haven't had the time, or the chance, to read these first two articles yet, go ahead! These articles are very easy to read and teach us something about a hobby we all enjoy, listening to music. Part III, entitled *Music for Healing*, will be released shortly. To be continued!

On that note, I wish you health and safety, and for the summer, which will arrive soon, to be most pleasant!

Beauchamp

Lucie Beauchamp
Co-publisher and Public Relations Manager

BUON GUSTO

By CLAUDE LALONDE

LE CLOS JORDANNE WINES, A MASTERPIECE BY THOMAS BACHELDER!



Le **Clos Jordanne** was created in 2000 through a partnership between **Vincor** and **Bosset**. The estate, which sits on the escarpment of the Niagara Peninsula, was under the guidance of **Thomas Bachelder**, *winemaker* extraordinaire. This mythical wine, praised by all wine critics, was produced until the 2012 vintage, and it took until 2017 for its comeback. It was said last year that, like the *Phoenix*, it had just *risen from its ashes*. **Thomas Bachelder** is still this magical wine's master maker. **Vincor** was absorbed by **Constellation**, which later created **Arterra**. **Thomas Bachelder**, a native of Montreal, creates Burgundian-style wines in Burgundy, Niagara, Oregon and Chile.

I had the pleasure of visiting his home about 5 years ago with the sommelier students of the *École Hôtelière des Laurentides* located in Sainte-Adèle, where we proceeded to a blending exercise of his various personal vintages. What a pleasure!

Le Clos Jordanne Vineyard

The **Le Clos Jordanne** vineyard is located on the best plot of the **Jordan Bench**, on a natural plateau near the escarpment's slope. With a surface area of 10.45 ha, it benefits from light limestone soils created by the ancient ice shield and its rich sediments, and produces the most complete expressions of the terroir.

Planted with both Chardonnay and Pinot Noir between 2000 and 2001, it is surrounded on three sides by natural areas of forest, woods, and an environmentally protected pond, which have been left in their natural state.

Similar to the *Grand Cru* level in Burgundy, this vineyard produces a *Niagara Grand Cru* and thus fully expresses the **Jordan Bench** terroir. The *Grand Clos* consists of the three parcels along the west side of the **Clos Jordanne** vineyard, two of which are *Pinot Noir* and one *Chardonnay*.

The vineyard is cultivated in a sustainable way in order to preserve the vines' natural balance and to respect the terroir. Each lot is treated individually according to its terroir, and all the work in the vineyard, from pruning to harvesting, is done by hand.

In terms of soil management, the objective is to maintain and sustain a natural level of microbiological life. One row in two is cultivated and a ground cover is left in the following rows, which creates competition in the root system and allows the topsoil to remain loose and well aerated.

<https://www.leclosjordanne.com/#>

Le Clos Jordanne

Le Grand Clos, Chardonnay Niagara, 2018

The fruit was harvested, as always, entirely from the western portion of **Le Clos Jordanne**. Then the fermentation was carried out using indigenous yeasts. In order to preserve the aromatic profile of each terroir, the percentage of new oak does not exceed 20%, the other barrels being aged from 1 to 4 years. After 16 months of aging, the wines are raked from the barrels and left to rest in the vat for about a month to obtain a better homogenization and an elegant bouquet. The wines are filtered just before bottling, after which they are left to age for about 8 months to allow the aromatic bouquet and mouthfeel to develop further in the bottle.

It is a delicate and elegant wine, with a noble character that cannot be described by simple fruit, although *white flower scent* and *white pit fruit notes* are the best possible description, at this time, for a wine still so young.

Tasting notes

This wine reveals itself with rather intense aromas of very fresh and pure fruits such as peach, apricot, notes of vanilla, butter, brioche as well as a hint of citrus. The palate is bursting with fruitiness and incomparable freshness which combine in harmony with a beautiful perception of minerality.

The smooth and slightly oily texture creates a nice contrast with the fresh acidity. It is rich, opulent, yet silky and flavourful. And what an incredible length!

You will make beautiful pairings with chicken and white meat dishes.

Price: \$45.50

Alcohol: 13%

SAQ Code: 14222851

<https://www.saq.com/en/14222851>



BUON GUSTO

By CLAUDE LALONDE



Le Clos Jordanne Le Grand Clos Pinot Noir Niagara 2018

The wine is fermented with natural indigenous yeasts from the vineyard which results in fuller, more textured and complex wines. After the fermentation, when the wine is dry, it is left on the skins for several days to a week to fully extract all the possible aromas, finesse and complexity of the grape skins.

Then, it is aged in selected French oak barrels (about a third of which are new) for 16 to 20 months (depending on the needs of the cuvée or the vintage). The long period of barrel aging helps integrate the lively acidity of this fresher vintage. Then, it will continue to age in the bottle for 6 to 8 months before its release, during which it will develop its fragrance, its aromatic bouquet, and its mouthfeel.

Tasting Notes

What a mastery **Thomas Bachelder** has of Nordic terroir wines! He succeeds in creating a *Pinot Noir* of great elegance and finesse. As he likes to say, these are *transatlantic* wines that will draw all his experience of Burgundy allied to the **Jordan Bench** terroir.

This very beautiful *Pinot Noir* reveals itself with aromas of sour cherries, cranberries, sweet spices, floral notes as well as a hint of very well-integrated woody notes. The palate has a beautiful freshness and a velvety texture which expresses flavours of morello cherries, cherries, a hint of black fruits as well as sweet spices.

The whole is supported by balanced and melted tannins which express its elegance well. The finish is crisp, juicy, complex and concentrated.

It will pair well with duck breast, calf's liver, coq au vin or salmon with pesto.

Le Clos Jordanne

Le Grand Clos, Niagara Pinot Noir, 2018

Price: \$ 45.50

Alcohol: 12.5%

SAQ Code: 14222886

<https://www.saq.com/en/14222886>

Samples – Agence Arterra

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CLASSICAL MUSIC

By CHRISTOPHE HUSS

FEATURED

CHARLES RICHARD-HAMELIN (piano) FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

Les Préludes. Andante spianato et Grande polonaise brillante.

Analekta, AN, 29148

Interpretation: *****

Technique: *****

Quebec pianist **Charles Richard-Hamelin** has released his fourth **Chopin** CD for **Analekta**, following the 3rd *Sonata the Ballads* and the *Concertos*. The *24 Preludes* have a plethora of discography whose great names are **Alfred Cortot**, among the historical versions, **Martha Argerich**, **Maurizio Pollini** and many others. Without denying the greats, the salt is often found in the *well of others*, sometimes unexpected like the French **Éric Heidsieck** in the 1970s, the young **Beatrice Rana** in her first CD (**ATMA**), an aging **Nikita Magaloff** at **Denon** or, recently, **Eric Lu** (**Warner**), a friend of **Charles Richard-Hamelin** and winner of the Leeds piano competition. The Quebec pianist paints a detailed, thoughtful vision, full of shadows. Rightly, he strongly differentiates the *Preludes* from the *Studies*: they are not exercises in virtuosity, but often painful sound paintings. It is magnificent, poignant.

JAMES EHNES EUGÈNE YSAÏE

Six Sonatas for Solo Violin

Onyx, 4198

Interpretation: *****

Technique *****

In our last issue, we reviewed **Kerson Leong**'s first major recording, the **Ysaïe Sonatas** recorded for **Alpha**. The young **Kerson Leong** methodically sculpted these works, **Carl Talbot**'s recording relaying this meticulous work from a distance, as did the limpid and mellow sound of the violin. And, a few weeks later, **James Ehnes**, Canada's greatest violinist, and one of the five

greatest violinists in the world. And the register changes completely. According to **Ysaïe**, his performer had to experience the full range of emotions in order to express them all in his playing. Apollonian violinistic exercise (**Leong**) or embodied narration between light and shadow (**Ehnes**)? The truth of the scores is on the side of the elder. **James Ehnes** built a studio in his home during the pandemic. There, he recorded **Ysaïe** and **Bach** for webcasts. **Ysaïe** became a record. Along the *Dances of Shadows*, the *Furies*, a fabulous *Ballad* (Third *Sonata*), **James Ehnes**, in a very present, but not matte, atmosphere, settles the case of this discography.

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Winterreise (The Winter Journey).

Joyce Di Donato (mezzo),

Yannick Nézet-Séguin (piano).

Erato, 0190295284145

Interpretation: ***

Technique *****

This record, recorded in December 2019, in concert at **Carnegie Hall**, marks the beginning of **Yannick Nézet-Séguin**'s return to the piano, a new activity developed during the pandemic and one that we will continue to hear about with the release in June of digital album *Introspection* on **DG**. Accompanying singers on the piano is an important activity for a conductor. But from there to recording such a frequented score... The step threshold was crossed. **Yannick Nézet-Séguin** is very much in tune with **Joyce DiDonato**, in a score where the appearance of a female voice is a rarity in itself, even if **Brigitte**

Fassbaender and **Christa Ludwig** have been two notable interpreters. The use of a baritone in this cycle written for tenor is more natural perhaps because the *Traveller*, like the **Titan Atlas**, seems to carry the weight of the World on his shoulders. The concert was a moving performance based on the diary of the *Traveller* read by the woman he loved. The viewer was captured in this (reductive) perspective, but the listener of a CD might not know what to make of it. It was obviously a DVD that had to be released rather than a CD, a backup version to **Fischer-Dieskau**, **Padmore**, **Hotter**, **Anders** and a few others.

LUC BEAUSÉJOUR

Nouveaux Moments Baroques :

Cœuvres pour clavier de A.-L.

et F. Couperin, Bach, Balbastre,

Scarlatti, Fischer, Sweelinck,

Fröberger.

Analekta, AN2, 8919

Interpretation: ***

Technique *****

In 2016, harpsichordist **Luc Beauséjour** was invited by **Analekta** to record Baroque keyboard pieces. He does so again for a second volume. Five years ago, **Beauséjour** told **Le Devoir** that he approached the project with carelessness and candor, simply dismissing from his program some highly ornamented works that he felt called for the plucked string of the harpsichord. Performing this repertoire on the piano in a straight, harpsichord-like style seems to make little sense. The reason for using an instrument that did not exist at the

time is to take advantage of its expressive sound possibilities. Apart from a few resonances on the extinctions of notes, one does not really hear here the use of the palette of nuances of touch from which a musical poetics could be born. The two **Scarlatti** sonatas (*K. 9* and *87*) are very symptomatic of the difference between a full-fledged pianistic approach and this indistinct compromise.

MAURICE RAVEL JEAN-PHILIPPE SYLVESTRE (piano Érard, 1854).

Miroirs, Menuet sur le nom de Haydn,

Pavane pour une infante défunte,

À la manière de Borodine,

Le tombeau de Couperin.

Atma, ACD2, 2773

Interpretation: ***

Technique: *****

This play on words may be unfortunate, as *Miroirs* is part of this **Ravel** program, but here is the mirror of **Luc Beauséjour**'s CD *Nouveau Moments Baroques*, that is to say, the false good idea, but in reverse. Instead of using a modern piano in early music and making little use of it, **Jean-Philippe Sylvestre** uses an *old piano* in modern music which absolutely calls for a more advanced instrument by its brilliance, its harmonics and its resonances. **Ravel**'s works are 50 years later than this **Érard** piano and the construction had changed a lot. This is the heyday of the **Érard** factory, but by 1900-1910, this declining factor had been supplanted on all sides. **Érard** having been a great innovator in the escapement



mechanism, what works is the remembrance of the sound and the repeated notes (*Alborada*, track 4). What doesn't work at all is the color, woody, muffled and the sound response, with a dynamic ceiling. An anecdotal record, despite the pianist's undeniable sense of French style.

DEAL OF THE MONTH

MURRAY PERAHIA

Murray Perahia plays Schubert and Brahms

Works for piano, Lieder and chamber music.

Sony, Masters, 8 CDs, 19439788352.

Interpretation: *** to *****

Technique: ****

The collection of small white boxed sets by Sony and RCA is being expanded with a number of new releases, including the complete *piano sonatas* by **Rudolf Buchbinder**, performed in Dresden in 2011, which have been reduced from over \$100 to \$30 in one fell swoop, and this box of **Murray Perahia's** most valuable piano repertoire. We find the last sonatas of **Schubert** (including twice the *D. 959*), the *Impromptus*, the *Fantasy* with **Radu Lupu** and three **Brahms** discs, including a two-piano with **Georg Solti** and *Opus 25* with the **Amadeus Quartet**, but also the last **Schubert's** *Journey of Yesterday* by **Dietrich Fischer Dieskau**, with a damaged voice, but still a master of theatricality between cries and whispers.

Not everything is referential, but at this price, we used to have two CDs, not eight.

RECORD OF THE MONTH

FRANZ SCHUBERT
ANDRÉ SCHUEN (baritone)
DANIEL HEIDE (piano)

Die schöne Müllerin
(The beautiful miller).

Deutsche Grammophon, 483 9558.

Interpretation: *****

Technique: *****

This record is perfect. In his first recording for **DG**, the Italian baritone **André Schuen** shows his qualities as a

Liedersänger, as an expert in Germanic melody, which are beyond the norm. The tone is sumptuous as well as the control of the voice. Thus, **Schuen** does what he wants: he can ideally balance the sound emission and the elocution of the text. At 36, he also has the youthfulness that gives his character a personality that is both haughty and tender, leading him from the hope of seducing the beautiful miller to the suicidal despair of seeing her prefer the hunter. Everywhere, **André Schuen**, with great warmth, seems to address us, to sing only for us. In doing so, he reveals the fragility of the miller's soul, who will wall himself off more and more in a resigned incomprehension leading to his death. This journey is admirably anticipated by pianist **Daniel Heide**, a lifelong accomplice. If you only have one *Lieder* record in your library, let it be this one. And it won't be the last.

SOUND RECORDING OF THE MONTH

ORSINO ENSEMBLE, PAVEL KOLESNIKOV (piano).

Belle Époque

Works by Roussel, Debussy, Saint-

Saëns, Chaminade, Koechlin, Caplet.

Chandos, SACD, CHSA, 5282.

Interpretation: *****

Technique: *****

Very interesting configuration that we have rarely praised, a wind ensemble (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn) accompanied by a piano. There are several problems, all of which are well solved by **Jonathan Cooper** at **Henry Wood Hall** in London. The first is timbres. When we looked at the combination of flute and piano in a recent **Warner** recording by **Emmanuel Pahud** and **Daniel Barenboim**, for example, we did not have this purity and clarity of outline. The timbres are, here, admirably rendered and some (the oboe!) are enchanting.

The second point is the ideal balance of *space vs. mattness*. Wind music is known as *outdoor music*. But to put

it in too large a space loses precision. On the other hand, the pitfall that too many sound recordists fall into is that of excessive confinement, giving a *box sound*.

The third element is the balance between the winds and the piano. The choice here is musically very correct: the piano is a complement to the winds at the front of the stage. In short, a faultless performance.

A SELECTION OF DVDS

COSÌ FAN TUTTE

A Mozart opera directed by Christof Loy at the Salzburg Festival 2020.

Conductor: Joanna Mallwitz.

Erato, DVD, 0190295050320.

Interpretation: *****

Technique: *****

The **Salzburg Festival** made headlines last summer by braving the pandemic to hold its 100th edition. With a system of bubbles and an adapted staging, but not free of contacts, but also at the price of some cuts in the score (to shorten a performance given in one piece), the festival had been able to mount this *Così fan tutte* of which the first quality is an extremely interesting cast with **Elsa Dreisig** and **Marianne Crebassa** singing the two sisters and **André Schuen** and **Bogdan Volkov** their two lovers, **Lea Dessandre** as **Despina** and **Johannes Martin Kränzler** as matchmaker **Don Alfonso**. If only for this *casting*, we want to see it! **Christof Loy** organizes his staging at the front of the stage, in front of a wall with two openings. Everything is white, including a staircase leading down to the room. In the absence of accessories, the clothes bring a touch of... black, which is adorned with colors when the Albanians arrive. This is the kind of stripped-down work that deserves to be scrutinized by cameras. And it doesn't fail. Incomplete, stripped down, but strong. This does not replace **Haneke's** *Così* in Madrid of course, but it is one of the events of 2020.

JOHN WILLIAMS IN VIENNA

Anne-Sophie Mutter, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra.

DG, Blu-ray, 0745892.

Interpretation: *****

Technique: *****

First released on a CD and *Deluxe* version with a DVD, the hit of the year 2020, which testifies to **John William's** glorious encounter with the **Vienna Philharmonic** in January 2020 comes back to us on *Blu-ray* with the complete video of the concert and the audio program (75 min) on *Blu-ray* audio. The sound formats are **Dolby Atmos 9.1.4** and **DTS-HD 5.1** and **2.0**, so we can definitely use the qualifiers that already inspired the base product: *spectacular, luxurious and grandiose*.

LE NOZZE DI FIGARO

Mozart opera directed

by Felix Breisach at the Theater an der Wien in 2014.

Conductor: Nikolaus Harnoncourt.

Unitel, Blu-ray, 803 804.

Interpretation: ***

Technique: *****

Nikolaus Harnoncourt died in March 2016. At the end of his life, he involved his *Concentus Musicus* period instruments ensemble, in repertoires (**Beethoven** symphonies, **Mozart** operas) that he usually played with modern orchestras. In 2014, he was scheduled to give performances of *Così fan tutte* at **Theater an der Wien**, but the project fell through. **Harnoncourt** then decided to offer *Così*, *Le Nozze* and *Don Giovanni* in a concert version in an elegant generic setting. The event is not at all theatrical: lecterns, scores, minimal interactions. But music is in the spotlight. Surprisingly, the cast includes the first appearance of **André Schuen**, only 30 years old, as **Figaro**, alongside **Mari Eriksmoen** as **Susanna**, while **Bo Skovhus** (vocally aging) and **Christine Schäfer** play their masters. **Harnoncourt's** final **Mozart** recordings are ultra-dramatized, and the varying tempos and heavy silences



A JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF MUSICAL REALISM

By JD DOYLE

In recent years, the headphone market has grown steadily. It has become a parallel world to the traditional high-fidelity world and has expanded worldwide. In many large cities, many people no longer have the space to install a large, high-end audio system. On the other hand, these music lovers often have a considerable budget, which allows them to

afford a high-quality system for headphone listening. **Focal's** top-of-the-range *Utopia* headphones fall into this product category, with no compromises, and aimed at customers looking for the ultimate experience. The *Utopia* model by French manufacturer **Focal** represents an achievement in terms of expertise, research and development. Since I



had the privilege of having it at home for a few weeks, I am pleased to share with you my experience with this exceptional product.

Focal is a company located in La Talaudière, France. It is a leader in the field of sound reproduction and its product range is very wide, including several lines of domestic speakers, car systems, home theatre equipment, *monitoring* speakers for recording studios, and, finally, headphones. **Focal** entered the headphone market in 2012 and its product line has grown considerably since then. The different models that were introduced have been praised by both the specialized media and the *audiophile* public. **Focal** is therefore now part of the major leagues among headphone manufacturers, both in the realm of professional and domestic products. For its high-end speaker projects, **Focal** has relied heavily on beryllium *tweeter* technology. For the *Utopia* headset project, the company's engineers once again turned to beryllium. This time, it is with the ambitious idea of creating an all-beryllium headphone transducer. **Focal** has therefore created a unique product, which uses technology and expertise never before seen in a pair of headphones. As befits a headset, **Focal** has carefully chosen the materials that go into the assembly of these headphones, resulting in a unique product, designed without compromise, for the audiophile who aspires to the very best.

Technical Description

Focal's Utopia headphones are of the open dynamic type. They do not need a specific amplifier, like some electrostatic

headphones. They will work from any headphone jack. However, it would be better if the headphone amplifier was up to the task, both in terms of power and quality. Indeed, even if the 80 Ohm impedance and the 104 dB output at 1 mW seem easy to feed, the *Utopia* headphones will need a good amplifier. It should have an iron hand and control in the low frequencies. Since these are open-face headphones, it is important to remember that they offer virtually no insulation against external noise. You will share your musical journey with your immediate circle.

The **Focal Utopia** headphones feature a carbon fibre headband that offers no unpleasant resonance. This headband is adjustable to provide optimal comfort, regardless of the size or shape of your head. The underside of the headband is padded with a combination of memory foam and perforated lambskin for optimal ventilation and comfort. The headphone cushions are made of exactly the same combination of materials. With a thickness of 20 mm, they allow the *Utopia's* transducers to remain a good distance from the ear, which ensures that the stereophonic effect is broadened and spatializations is increased.

The most important parts of these headphones are, of course, the beryllium transducers. With a dimension of 40 mm *M*-shaped, they make it possible to obtain a 5 to 50,000 Hz ultra-wide frequency response. The use of beryllium has therefore enabled **Focal** to offer a headset that uses a single transducer per side. It is capable of going both very low and very high in frequency. In addition, these beryllium transducers' resonance is at a very high frequency, around 70,000 Hz. In this way, it remains completely inaudible to the human ear. This assures the listener that they will not hear any unpleasant harmonics which might disturb the treble's purity.

The **Focal Utopia** headphones come with two types connecting cables. The first one is 4' long and has a conventional *jack* plug. The second, 10' long, allows a balanced connection from a 4-contact XLR jack. Clearly, at this level of quality, the balanced connection, when available, will be optimal to exploit the full potential of this headset.

Unpacking, Installation, Comfort and Preparation for the Journey Ahead

Unpacking the *Utopia* headset is an experience in itself. Indeed, the packaging,



FOCAL UTOPIA 2020 HEADPHONES

decorated with refined leather, is worthy of a **Cartier** watch. These headphones come with a hard carrying case, moulded to the shape of the headphones and finished in a luxurious grey fabric. This one will allow you to bring your precious headphones on a trip and will protect them adequately.

Focal's Utopia headphones are certainly among the most comfortable available on the market. Although the *Utopia* is a rather heavy and large headset, it can be worn quite comfortably for several hours. The pads generate virtually no heat, and there are no unpleasant pressure points to disrupt the listening experience.

Utopia headphones absolutely need a high-quality headphone amplifier to shine. It will therefore have to be chosen wisely because the *Utopia* headphones will let you hear the slightest distortion or the slightest grainy sound. After much experimentation, I chose to use a **Chord Mojo** on a trip and the superb **SPL Phonitor X** amplifier at home. The **SPL** and the **Focal Utopia**,

connected in balanced mode, proved to be a *match* made in heaven.

Listening Impressions

First destination, Chopin

My first listening began with a concerto for piano and orchestra by **Frédéric Chopin**, featuring soloist **Danill Trifonov**. The incredible level of resolution that these headphones are capable of is immediately apparent. It is a real magnifying glass that immediately highlights the slightest micro-information with disconcerting ease. It's a veritable feast of fine little things that seem to float around my head, a bit like fine snowflakes that stay suspended around me. This abundance of fine detail goes a long way towards creating a unique stereophonic effect for headphones. Although the SPL amplifier I used has a *Crossfeed* function improving the stereophonic effect, I found that with the *Utopia* headphones by **Focal**, this function had become



completely unnecessary. However, the **SPL Crossfeed** settings work wonders with some headphone models. On the other hand, *Utopia* headphones produce such a stable, perfectly layered, three-dimensional stereo effect that they need no manipulation to transport you to the recording location. It is fascinating to be able to assess, with such precision, the distance between the different sections of the orchestra that accompanies **Danill Trifonov** on the piano. And what about this piano? It is strikingly realistic as much for the space it occupies as for that which it does not occupy. Indeed, the piano spreads out across the musical landscape, but remains centred with razor-sharp precision. Quite an experience!

Second destination, Genesis— A Trick of the Tail.

When you experience a headset with as much resolution as the *Utopia*, you wonder how it can handle old recordings that are far from perfect. The **Genesis** album, *A trick of the Tail*, is a very relevant example. Musically superb, melodically very addictive, this masterpiece of progressive rock is not always the most pleasant to listen to on a high-end audio system. And yet, with the *Utopia* headset, I totally rediscovered it. These headphones' timbres are so accurate that they let *Ripples'* melody mesmerize us. Obviously, we can perfectly understand the compression and the limits of the recording techniques of the time, but the musical message's essence passes entirely and touches

us emotionally, shivers included. As a bonus, there is a total rediscovery of certain keyboard lines and subtleties in the bass playing. This new information allows us to better appreciate the difference between the original on vinyl, from 1976, and the 2007 *remastered* version. The album's finale, the track *Los Endos*, played on the *Utopia* headphones, is an epic moment that every progressive rock fan should experience at least once!

Final destination, a stay in the depths of low frequencies.

Listening through **Focal's** *Utopia* headphones redefines, in my opinion, what it is possible to hear at low frequencies. I didn't believe it was possible to go down this low in frequencies, with so much finesse, articulation and agility. This headset draws the line. I very much doubt that a pair of speakers can achieve this level of quality, currently. On **Chris Jones'** album, *Roadhouses & Automobiles*, the track *No Sanctuary Here* lets the *Utopia* headset give us a demonstration of this quality. Even if its power seems infinite, the bass never invades the other registers of the spectrum and does not mask the fine harmonics. The singer's voice has body and the lyrics of the song remain intelligible and clear, despite a surge of bass worthy of an earthquake. For the first time in my life, I was able to listen to my music, with headphones, without feeling this kind of vacuum at the low frequencies. **Focal's** *Utopia* headphones make us feel the bass practically physically, a feat that is quite unique.





« Listening through **Focal's** *Utopia* headphones redefines, in my opinion, what it is possible to hear at low frequencies. I didn't believe it was possible to go down this low in frequencies, with so much finesse, articulation and agility. This headset draws the line. I very much doubt that a pair of speakers can achieve this level of quality, currently. On **Chris Jones'** album, *Roadhouses & Automobiles*, the track *No Sanctuary Here* lets the *Utopia* headset give us a demonstration of this quality. »



Concluding This Beautiful Adventure

Focal's Utopia headphones are a total success. For **Focal** engineers who wanted to demonstrate their know-how, mission accomplished! Obviously at this price and quality level, buyers will take the time to try it out for in-depth listening. They will discover headphones with incredible resolution, perfect timbres, ultra-transparent and endowed with an absolutely epic bass rendering. Professionals will find it a fabulous working tool, which will allow them to hear infinitely far in their recordings' *mix*. To all those who can afford it, I say this, you are a *lucky bunch*! For my part, I greatly appreciated the musical exploration journey that the *Utopia* headphones took me on. Bravo!

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Médiagraphie

Danill Trifonov, Chopin Evocations,
Deuch Gramophone, fichier Tidal

Genesis, A Trick of the Tail, Atlantic, R1 187964

Chris Jones, Roadhouses & Automobiles,
Stockfisch Records, SFR, 357.6027.2



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BLUES

By PIERRE JOBIN

NEW MOON JELLY ROLL FREEDOM ROCKERS

Vol 2

Stony Plain Records, SPCD, 1417

Here we are, then, with *Vol 2*, that is to say at the *continuation and end* of these recordings by the **New Moon Jelly Roll Freedom Rockers**, this one-off and intergenerational *band* of musicians rooted in the blues music of the South of the United States. It is composed of **Charlie Musselwhite**, harmonica and vocals, **Alvin Youngblood Hart**, guitar, mandolin and vocals, **Jimbo Mathus**, guitar and vocals, **Jim Dickinson**, piano and vocals, **Luther Dickinson**, guitar, mandolin, bass and vocals, **Cody Dickinson**, drums, washboard and vocals, as well as guest musicians, **Chris Chew**, bass and **Paul Taylor**, *contrabassoon*, or *washtub bass*. To refresh your memory, we'll say that it's a gathering of musician friends, old acquaintances gathered around the pleasure of sharing, in turn, good old blues and roots music, in all simplicity. The two compact discs are the result of recording sessions that took place in a few meetings and late evenings in 2008. This was at **Jim Dickinson's Zebra Ranch** studio in Mississippi. Once again, it is **Charlie Musselwhite**, the veteran *bluesman*, singer and harmonica player from Mississippi, who opens the ball with one of his compositions, *Blues For Yesterday*, a *shuffle* with a fast walking rhythm. The magic of his blues in the simple Mississippi tradition may be due to the fact that, being old school, he has patiently injected precise, nuanced and expressive harmonica playing, as well as his warm, deep and hearty voice with *cool* accents. Then, **Alvin Youngblood Hart** takes over. He was born in Oakland, CA. His family roots, grandmother and uncle, are from North Mississippi. He was immersed in its culture during stays in his youth. This *Grammy Award* winner, friend of **Jimbo**

Mathus and the **Dickinson** family, accentuates the rhythm with a danceable classic by **Doug Sahm**, *She's About A Mover*. The heart of the music pulses, the other musicians accompany, support, and provide the chorus. The party is on! The electric guitar complains in a controlled distortion. Further on, in an obvious style kinship, **Jimbo Mathus** plays one of his tracks, *Searchlight (Soon In The Morning)*, a tasty and catchy *mid tempo shuffle* that blends perfectly into this *potluck*. The table is set for *Oh Lord, Don't Let Them Throw That Atomic Bomb On Me*, a **Charles Mingus** composition that **Jim Dickinson** offers us, vocals and piano, accompanied by his fellow musicians, on guitar, *slide* guitar and rhythm section. **Dickinson** sings with conviction and guts in an expressive voice that touches the heart. It is a slow blues with *speakeasy* piano sounds and a badly articulated vocal that his companions, who seem to be in misfortune, sing in a beautifully harmonized cacophony of a chorus. We are dealing here with an interpretation that defies convention and demonstrates a strong *esprit de corps*! All this music that unfolds for the pleasure of our ears and our souls forms an undeniable organic and cordial whole. The combo, fused and broken to the simple beauties of these rhythms and music of the heart, knows how to season with well dose, pleasant and tasteful herbs and spices well dosed! Music and atmospheres impregnate us as in a slow cooking, simply and skilfully orchestrated. A little further on, **Jim's** son **Luther** covers *Blue Guitar*, an instrumental by legendary

guitarist **Earl Hooker**. **Charlie's** harmonica is fine and remarkable on a base of rhythm section and piano. Solid foundations! The complicity and intimacy of the guitar and the harmonica is very much felt. The sounds are amazingly authentic blues. Overall, **NMJRFR Vol 2** represents for me a unique and incomparable moment, a reunion of friends and exceptional talents at all levels of execution and production that nobody expected. It's as if all the stars aligned at the right time. Those who love traditional blues, whether acoustic or electric, will enjoy it. A big thank you, also, to Mr. **Holger Petersen**, Executive Producer, for having shown the passion, flair and intelligence to finally make public these treasures of authentic and elevated blues sessions in the purest Southern tradition. I would add, in conclusion, that **NMJRFR Vol 2** is an album high in sound and color of the South where we can see, with four well chosen and interpreted titles, **Jim Dickinson**, at home, surrounded by his sons and friends. I leave you with a quote, in my opinion of capital importance, by the late bluesman: *Although diluted, defused and sometimes misdirected, the music survives, symbolizing freedom and illustrating the inner-racial brotherhood of man.* **Jim Dickinson**, from his book, *I'm Just Dead, I'm not Gone*.

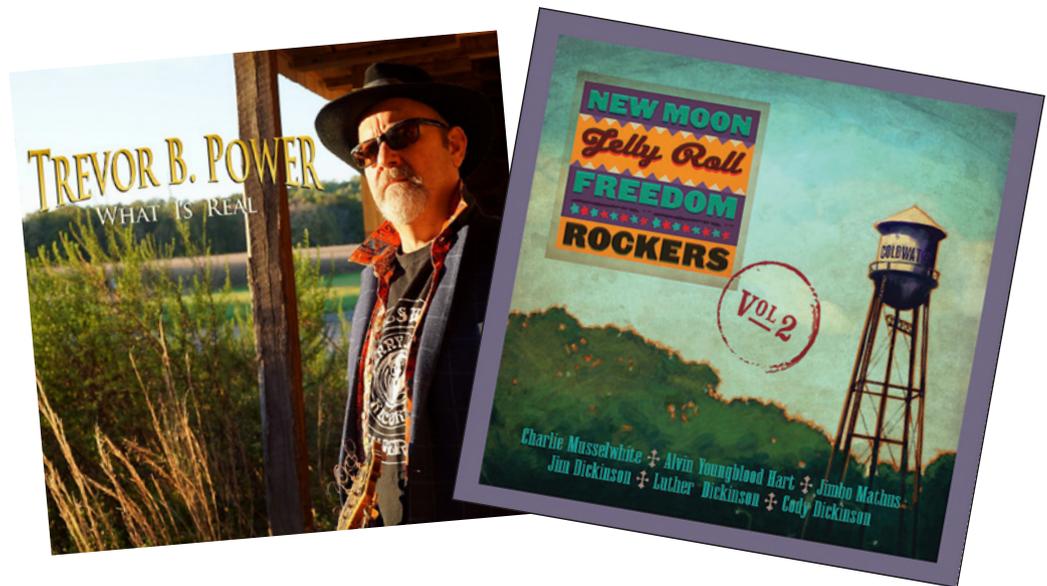
TREVOR B. POWER

What Is Real

Farm 189 Records, 489

What *Is Real* is the second release by **Trevor B. Power**, an experienced and

inspired songwriter, guitarist and singer from New Jersey. To his blues, *soul*, rock n' roll dimensions present on *Everyday Angel* his first record, he adds and accentuates, this time, his *folk* rock side, in the great tradition of pioneer **Woodie Guthrie** and his emulators, commentators of the real and the observable, such as **Bob Dylan**, **Johnny Cash**, **Bruce Springsteen**... The title *World Gone Madd* opens the ball with a muscular drums and electric *slide* guitar rock. It depicts the situation of a distressed individual confronted with a world and current events full of madness. With the help of his friends, he intends not to give up. The next track, *Get Well Johnny*, is a simultaneously danceable and reflective *R&B*. Guest harmonica player **Will Wilde**, in an energetic and complete solo that brings back memories of **James Cotton**, plays as if he were breathing his last! *Pandemic 2020*, the first *single* from the opus is a hard-hitting rock anthem that describes the relentless and insidious reality of the Covid-19 pandemic. This song's contagious energy is matched only by its invigorating and unifying lyrics, in these difficult and atomizing times. **Trevor B.**, in an idealistic and sincere impulse, loudly proclaims his faith in the American people's resilience in the face of this scourge! With this second album repete with well rendered eclectic styles such as blues, ballads, rock, *r&b*, *folk* rock, etc., **Trevor B. Power** confirms that he is a solid, well-rooted artist who has all the qualities needed to shine and last.



RHYTHM & MUSIC

OFF THE BEATEN PATH

By DAN BEHRMAN

KLEZTORY

Momentum

Chandos Records Ltd, 2020, www.chandos.net

Who said you had to be Jewish or of Slavic descent to play klezmer music? Many legendary jazz musicians, black and white, played at weddings and *bar mitzvahs* to put bread on their tables and pay their rent!

United by their passion for the Jewish diaspora's beautiful and intense music that spread throughout most of Eastern Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, the seasoned musicians of **Kleztory**, a Montreal-based ensemble much appreciated by connoisseurs and neophytes alike, are releasing their sixth album, *Momentum*, on **Amérix Artists**, for the Canadian market, and on the prestigious British label, **Chandos Records**, for the international market, with distribution in more than fifty countries.

Few bonds are deeper than those forged between the members of **Kleztory**, whose careers are firmly established here and elsewhere. With *Momentum*, the quintet celebrates its connections by delving into its unique interpretation of the vast universe of klezmer music it has explored, and exploited, since its inception. *This is our best album in 20 years!* exclaims **Airat Ichmouratov**, **Kleztory's** clarinet player and musical director. *This album contains the band's best songs. We have chosen 10 excerpts from our repertoire, the public's favourites!* explains **Ichmouratov**. *As a special and important event in the life of an ensemble, we wanted to present them with a different touch and a jazz color to enrich our repertoire. We slightly re-orchestrated the chosen tracks and recorded them live in the studio, accompanied by a string quartet and two excellent jazz musicians: pianist-improviser **David Ryshpan**, and percussionist **Bertil Schulrabe**.*

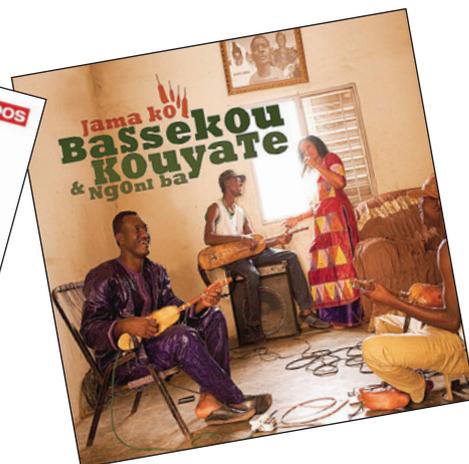
Launched on October 30th on the European market, *Momentum* is already receiving a very good response, especially from the two **BBC** radio stations in England. *Like our Klezmer album, also released on **Chandos Records** in 2004 with the **I Musici de Montréal** string orchestra, I believe this album will forge new connections on the national and international scene, adds **Airat Ichmouratov**, winner of the 2020 **Charles-Biddle Award**.*

Like the music of the Eastern European *shtetls*, which they perform with infectious passion, the members of **Kleztory** form a rich mosaic of cultures (Russian, Quebecois, Canadian), training (conservatory and self-taught) and musical sensibilities (classical, contemporary, jazz, blues, traditional, *country* and *folk*). Combining their talents instinctively, the musicians play with an emotion and virtuosity that embodies the true spirit of klezmer music. Through innovative yet respectful arrangements and original compositions, **Kleztory** has forged a unique and authentic musical path over the years and is acclaimed for its absolutely electrifying performances.

Founded in 2000, **Kleztory** began its joyous and incredible journey by traveling throughout Quebec, performing in numerous festivals and theaters, in cafés as well as in small venues of all kinds.

Since then, the ensemble has given more than a thousand concerts in Canada, the United States, China and throughout Europe.

In 2001, **Kleztory** released its first self-produced album, **Kleztory - Klezmer Music** - with the bare minimum resources at hand. Proud of this first recording, they presented it to **Yuli Turovsky**, director of the **I Musici de Montréal** chamber ensemble. A few days later, he suggested that they make a recording with his ensemble. *Klezmer*, featuring **Kleztory** and the **I Musici de Montréal** chamber orchestra, conducted by **Yuli Turovsky**, was released in 2004 on **Chandos Records**. Thanks to this project, the group has received invitations from the classical music community to perform with numerous orchestras, including the **Montreal Symphony Orchestra**, the **Quebec Symphony Orchestra**, the **Laval Symphony Orchestra**, the **Orchestre Métropolitain**, the **Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra**,



the **Orchestre Nouvelle Génération**, the **Violons du Roy**, the **McGill Chamber Orchestra** and the **Orchestre de Bruxelles**.

A third album, *Nomade*, was released in 2007 and received the *Opus Award* for *Best Jazz / World Music Album* in Quebec. In 2012, the group was selected to participate in the prestigious *International Jewish Music Festival* in Amsterdam where they won the *Furth Award* in the *Klezmer Music* category.

In 2013, **Kleztory** released their fourth album *Arrival*, nominated by **ADISQ** in the *Best Album of the Year / Traditional Music* category. It is followed, in April 2017, by a fifth album entitled *Nigun*, a Hebrew word meaning melody, and wins a second *Opus* award in the category of *Best Show in Quebec*.

The members of **Kleztory** are **Airat Ichmouratov**, musical director, clarinet, bass clarinet and duclar, **Elvira Misbakhova**, violin and viola, **Dany Nicolas**, guitar, **Mélanie Bergeron**, accordion and **Mark Peetsma**, double bass. The guest musicians for this exceptional album are **David Ryshpan**, piano, **Bertil Schulrabe**, percussion, **Veronika Chermiak**, violin, **Anastasia Virlian**, violin, **Cynthia Blanchon**, viola and **Jean-Christophe LizoWe**, cello. Various melodies and rhythms, intensity, nostalgia, joy and so much more, as everything is really there, interpreted with an uncommon virtuosity and accuracy. We can absolutely say that **Kleztory** is a jewel in the Montreal music scene and also, worldwide... *Zagezundt!*

BASSEKOU KOUYATE & NGONI BA

Jama Ko

Out There Records, OH021, 2013, www.outhere.de/jamako

Jama Ko means a *great gathering of people* in the Bambara language, and that's pretty much what comes across on this album by **Bassekou Kouyate**, a specialist in this small but wonderfully expressive Malian stringed instrument associated with the banjo and played by griots since the 14th century. An important figure in the Malian *roots* scene, **Bassekou Kouyate** has performed alongside **Sir Paul McCartney**, **John Paul Jones** and **Damon Albarn** at the **Africa Express** presentations, and his *Grammy* nominated album, *I Speak Fula*.

The recording of this *CD* took place in 2012 at **Studio Bogolan**, one of the trendiest studios in Bamako, but during the first day of work, the rumor of the coup d'état against President **Amadou Toumani Touré**, a close friend of the musician, spread like wildfire with the political, military and social consequences that we know. Shocked by the events occurring at that very moment, **Bassekou Kouyate** reared back and, instead of immortalizing the planned selection of traditional songs, he reacted instinctively by plugging his ngoni into a wah-wah pedal and turning up the volume of his amp to the max, thus giving birth to a collection of musical pieces of an intensity and energy straight from the mystical roots of *Wassoulou*.

The preface written, with emotion, by **Bassekou** really deserves to be mentioned here, because it faithfully reflects the atmosphere of the moment as well as the color of the album, *Jama Ko, it's for everyone! There are more than 90 % Muslims in Mali, but our reading of Islam has absolutely nothing to do with a radical interpretation of sharia law. This is not our culture. If the Islamists prevent people from making music, they will rip the heart out of Mali. Whoever we are, let's get together, enjoy life and celebrate the true spirit of Mali!*

To note, **Amy Sacko's** extraordinary voice, **Bassekou's** two sons', **Madou** and **Moustafa Kouyate**, ngonis, as well as the vocal participation of **Taj Mahal**, old friend and admirer of **Bassekou Kouyate** and of Malian music in general.

Jama Ko was mixed at **Hotel2Tango Studio** in Montreal by **Jay Rutledge** and **Howard Bilerman** (**Arcade Fire**, **Godspeed you! black emperor**) and I highly recommend this album.

AN INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER WITH A RETRO LOOK

By MICHEL DALLAIRE



Swedish manufacturer **Moonriver Audio**, whose chief designer is **George Polychronidis**, is a relative newcomer to the high-fidelity amplifier market. The company is based in Malmö, Sweden, and consists of a handful of employees who are dedicated to making all of the brand's products by hand. At the moment **Moonriver** has a limited catalogue of two integrated amplifiers, the *404* which is the standard model and the *404 Reference* which is essentially the same amplifier but with a boosted version of its power supply. In this test bench, I will focus on the standard *404 model*, which has an attractive retro look.

Retro yes, but not necessarily retrograde

George Polychronidis, the *404's* designer, has already worked on various types of audio electronic devices, and his integrated amplifier project started about 4 years ago. The **Moonriver 404** integrated amplifier is, in my opinion, the archetypal device designed in the 1970s, but without the features of the time such as meters, tone controls and the notorious *Loudness* button. However, the **Moonriver 404** retains the balance control between the two channels, the mono/stereo switch and the venerable *Tape In / Tape Out* monitoring loop. The latter allows a processor to be inserted into the signal path for acoustic correction according to the listening room or any other device that can improve the sound of the sources connected to this amplifier. For an old hand at high-fidelity like me, the *404* is intuitive to operate without a manual. All its functions are clearly identified and within easy reach. With it, one forgets the maze of adjustments to be chosen on a touch screen.

The **Moonriver 404** is a purely analogue 50W per channel amplifier operating in class A / B. It is built in a modular way with proven circuitry and a good motorized **Blue ALPS** potentiometer. Its printed circuit boards have a very rigorous topology and layout. There are no surface mounted parts and all electronic components are soldered one by one by experienced technicians. The cover and underside of the unit can be easily removed to facilitate future repairs when required, protecting the customer from premature obsolescence. This type of assembly also makes it possible to offer optional boards such as a *MM* or *MC* phono input as well as a digital-to-analogue conversion board with *USB* input. The modularity allows the basic price of the *404* model to be kept as low as possible and to develop it according to our needs. At the time of writing, the *DAC/USB* board was in development, but with no expected date of availability. I was also unable to find out whether the conversion to a *Reference* model was possible retroactively, although spaces are provided for this on the main circuit board.

My Impressions Upon Unpacking

The packaging box is lined and contains only recyclable or biodegradable cardboard protectors rather than Styrofoam blocks. This is a further sign of the manufacturer's sensitivity to environmental issues. The *404* integrated amplifier exudes solidity and a love of fine craftsmanship. Its black front panel is a bit austere visually, especially when used in dim light. However, its generic **Apple**-like remote control allows me to select sources and control the volume, which are indispensable functions when sitting remotely in a good armchair. On this front panel, there are four buttons of the same size, machined from a solid aluminium rod. From left to right, the first knob is for source selection; the second knob is for activating the *Tape Loop* monitoring loop; the third is for balance and the last, on the far right, is for volume control. There is also a toggle switch to dim the *LED* lights or simply turn them off. Another toggle switch is used to

set the amplifier to stereo or mono mode. The user interface could not be simpler. On the back plate, which is fortunately white, there are 4 line inputs on *RCA* connectors, one of which can be converted into an input for the optional phono board. The screw for grounding the turntable is, of course, included. A hole in the wall is reserved for the *USB* input and its optional digital-to-analogue conversion board. Then there is the *Tape In / Tape Out* recorder loop and two *preamp* outputs. There is no input on *XLR* connectors, which for me is not a problem. The speaker terminals are of a nice quality, but are not doubled for bi-wiring which, again, is not a problem for me.

Installation and Condition of Use

The cover of the **Moonriver 404** does not have any vents, which are located on the bottom of the unit. As it gives off virtually no heat, I was able to easily fit it on a shelf in my audio cabinet, while still leaving some free space on top. Despite its modest power of 50 W per channel, the amplifier's weight is over 12 kg, which tells me that its power supply circuit and, especially, its toroidal transformer are of good dimensions. As the *404* I was lent did not have its optional digital card, I was provided with an excellent little **Chord** *Qutest* converter. In this way, I was able to use the *404* with my **CeolBOX** music server, with my *CD* player connected by a coaxial cable and with my *PS3* console connected by an optical cable. I really liked the fact that the volume control stroke was slow and very gradual. This feature, which I consider essential, allowed me to finely and precisely adjust the sound level of each album I listened to, especially because they all have their own ideal listening level.

Sweden in Music

Since I'm testing a Swedish product, why not start my listening with music from that country, in this case from the band **E.S.T.**? So I take the **E.S.T.** *Symphony*, album which is a tribute to the music of the pianist and leader of this group, **Esbjörn Svensson**. This talented composer died accidentally in 2008

and in this album, some of his hits have been arranged by **Hans Ek** for the **Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra**. The *404* that I was lent was already broken in, and from the first seconds of listening, I knew that I was dealing with a special, not to say exceptional, product. Even though this amplifier's number is *404*, it does not mean that it is an error code like those you see on Internet pages that cannot be found. Don't let its modest power influence your perception of its sound. Thanks to its well-designed preamplifier section, the **Moonriver 404** has gain and dynamics to spare. What makes the difference in an amplifier is not so much the strength of its continuous power announced on a fixed load, but rather its ability to react instantly on musical peaks and in an impedance that varies according to frequencies. The *404*'s level of transparency and its openness contribute to a stereophonic image that is large enough for me to visualize, virtually, the entire space occupied by this large symphony orchestra.

I continue my listening with the album *Histoires sans Paroles-Harmonium Symphonique* downloaded in 24 bits / 96 kHz *WAV*. This recording has incredible dynamic gaps. **Moonriver**'s *404* served them up royally, from passages that almost border on silence to soaring flights of the orchestral mass. The music flows freely and without any feeling of compression or saturation of the circuits. As much on the voices as on the instruments, the timbres are scrupulously respected and beautiful. On the great orchestral flights just as on the soloists' voices, I have shivers that increase to goose bumps. This recording of the **OSM** at the **Maison Symphonique** was done with respect for sanitary measures and distancing. However, the *404* integrated makes me very aware of the unusually large space between the various musicians and the choristers. I follow with jazz band **GoGo Penguin** and their album *A Humdrum Star*. The compositions of this trio from Manchester, England, are influenced by the minimalist movement in classical, electronic and jazz music from the Nordic countries of Europe. On this

MOONRIVER MODEL 404 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



recording, the 404 made me rediscover my speakers, which had lost some of their low-frequency foundation since I moved into a new, larger, open-plan living room. In this sense, **Nick Blacka**'s double bass has gained in strength as the plucking of his strings seems even sharper and more defined to me. The 404 makes me perfectly perceive **Chris Illingworth**'s piano's electronically modified sound. **Rob Turner**'s drums have impact with cymbals that maintain their metallic character without becoming shrill. The drummer's playing rhythmically supports the double bass, which in turn gives depth to this ensemble's infectious melodies. The 404 integrated amplifier is both smooth and detailed, a difficult characteristic to achieve and one that is more often than not found in amplifiers two to three times more expensive. I was so impressed by the sound of this only 50 W per channel amplifier that I hardly dare to imagine what the results would have been if I had been sent the *Reference* version which doubles its capacitors' capacitance in the preamplifier and amplifier section.

« On this recording, the 404 made me rediscover my speakers, which had lost some of their low-frequency foundation since I moved into a new, larger, open-plan living room. In this sense, **Nick Blacka**'s double bass has gained in strength as the plucking of his strings seems even sharper and more defined to me. The 404 makes me perfectly perceive **Chris Illingworth**'s piano's electronically modified sound. **Rob Turner**'s drums have impact with cymbals that maintain their metallic character without becoming shrill. »

Conclusion

When an amplifier sounds fundamentally good, it doesn't take hours of listening to realize it. The **Moonriver 404** is one of those few exceptions where you can sit down and immediately



MOONRIVER MODEL 404 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



stop wondering as a music lover and audiophile. It's not often in my work as an audio reviewer that a device forces me to put aside my *analysis* mode and simply let the music wash over me. **Moonriver's** 404 integrated amplifier is one of those exceptions, and even though it seems to go against the grain in its design, it is based on sound and timeless values that only do the music justice. The 404 is beautifully made, easily repairable and its user interface is one of the easiest to use. Despite its modest power, it has a lot of heart and its sound is simply sublime for its price category. While the **Moonriver 404** is not affordable for everyone, I feel that at \$4,500 and up, it can be considered one of the best buys out there. This is yet another device I have to pack up with a twinge of regret! But as my mother used to tell me, you can't have everything in life.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Moonriver Model 404

Price: \$4,499; with MM phono card: \$4,999; with MM/MC phono card: \$5,199

Moonriver Model 404 Reference

Price: \$6,499; with MM phono card: \$6,999; with MM/MC phono card: \$7,199

Warranty: 3 years, parts and labor

Exclusively at: Art et Son, Tel: 514.222.2342, www.artetson.ca

Mediagraphy

E.S.T. Symphony-Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, ACT 9034-2

Histoires sans Paroles-Harmonium symphonique, OSM, WAV 24 bits / 96 kHz

GoGo Penguin, A Humdrum Star, Blue Note 6716431

Frank Woeste, Pocket Rhapsody II, ACT 9917-2, FLAC 24 bits

Catherine Major, "Carte Mère", FLAC 24 bits / 96 kHz

Thanks

The editors would like to thank the **Art et Son** store for the loan of the device.

TECHNICS OTTAVA F SC-C70MK2 ALL-IN-ONE DEVICE

THE MUSIC BOX OF MODERN TIMES

By JD DOYLE

If there is one category of high-fidelity product that I find exciting, it's *all-in-one* devices. Here I am referring to the real *all-in-one* devices. Those that contain everything you need to listen to your music, from the source to the speakers, all in one housing. They are the modern descendants of our grandparents' *table radio*. When designed with great care, these devices allow more people to

enjoy their music, in different locations, with amazing audio quality. In addition, they are often offered at fairly reasonable prices. The *Ottava F SC-C70MK2* from **Technics** is a very interesting example of this category of devices. It's a complete magic box that will fill your space with music. Ideal for any room in the house, this device is worth discovering for its functionality and musicality. Will it be able





to fit in your life? In many ways, it could be exactly what you are looking for.

Technics is a Japanese manufacturer that was a major player in high-fidelity in the 1970s to the 1990s. Back on the market for a few years, this prestigious **Panasonic** division never ceases to impress us with its state-of-the-art products. The design of the new devices is crazy chic and this *Ottava F SC-C70MK2* is no exception. This superb music box is of an irreproachable quality of assembly. No matter how you look at it, it's almost impossible to find a flaw. The manufacturing exudes quality and zero defects from one end to the other. This *Ottava F SC-C70MK2* by **Technics** should work well for years.

In my memory as an audio reviewer, I don't remember having a more complete device than this one. To start with, the *Ottava F SC-C70MK2* is equipped with an analogue radio that picks up the *AM* and *FM* band, just like the one in your car. This feature can be very useful when you want to save data on

your Internet package, or when the service is cut. The **Technics** is also equipped with a *CD* player, an option that many users will appreciate, especially when it comes to titles that are not available for *streaming*. Obviously, since we are in 2021, this device is, above all, a network player that will be able to play music files from the vast majority of online music services. Like any good network player, you will be able to control it from your tablet or smartphone. A full-featured remote control is included with the unit. The **Technics** also features **Google Chromecast** and will be able to receive commands from the **Google** voice assistant. In addition, it has a *Bluetooth* and **Apple Airplay 2** receiver. This little wonder also has its own amplifiers and speakers, and even its own *subwoofer*! A headphone jack is available on the front. Finally, the **Technics Ottawa F SC-C70MK2** is equipped with a *USB* and an optical input. It will be possible to connect your computer or your TV sound to it and use it as a high-performance sound bar. Phew! I think I've covered everything this pretty little music box has to offer. Let's

see now by which technical tour de force it manages to do all this.

Technical Description

The **Technics Ottawa F SC-C70MK2** is an ultra-sophisticated *all-in-one* device. It is equipped with a dual power supply that will allow it to better manage the demand of the different sections. The **Technics** incorporates three intelligent *Class D* amplifiers called *Jeno Engine*. Their respective power is 40 W for the *subwoofer* and 30 W for the left and right channels. Thanks to an intelligent circuit named *LAPC*, these amplifiers automatically adapt to the impedance of the speakers they feed. The *Ottava F SC-C70MK2* incorporates 5 speakers. First, there is a 12 cm *subwoofer*, underneath the unit, of which the cabinet opens onto two vents at the back of the unit. On the front of the unit, hidden behind an elegant dispersion grille, are two small 8 cm *woofers* and 2 2 cm *tweeters*. The device is equipped with a circuit called *Remaster* by **Technics**. It is essentially a digital circuit that oversamples data to increase the quality of low-resolution

TECHNICS OTTAVA F SC-C70MK2 ALL-IN-ONE DEVICE

signals, such as MP3, AAC and signals transmitted via Bluetooth. Finally, this all-in-one device is equipped with a well-designed and informative multi-function display.

Installation, Start-up and Configuration

Before even unpacking the device, you will need to install the **Google Home** app in your tablet or smartphone. Then, we unpack the **Technics** and we preferably connect it to the network in a wired way thanks to the RJ45 connector. From **Google Home**, you will need to configure the *Ottava F SC-70MK2* on your network. Once this is done, you need to install the **Technics Audio Center** control application. Thanks to the *Space Tune* function of this application, you can adjust the frequency response of your device according to its location in the room. Once started, this process takes a few minutes and greatly improves the performance of the **Technics** device. There you go, you're ready! The **Technics Audio Center** application is very user-friendly and has well thought-out tone controls. This ensures adjustments that will allow you to give your *Ottava F* the tonal colour you like, which comes with a real full-size remote control that takes over the vast majority of the device's functions, which responds quickly and is a real pleasure to use.

Listening Impressions Beautifying rainy days.

I started listening to the **Technics Ottava F SC-C70MK2** with its built-in CD player. It is of really excellent quality. On **Alfa**

Rococo's album, *Lever l'ancre, Les jours de pluie* can be listened to with a good sense of rhythm that makes the song very catchy and makes you want to turn up the volume. The stereophonic image that the device delivers is not the vastest when you sit in front of it to *seriously* listen. On the other hand, when you move away from the device, it gives the impression that it is diffused throughout the room. The interesting thing is that the tone remains beautiful and balanced no matter where you are. So this is not a device for analytical listening, but rather a charming music box that will provide a nice musical atmosphere in your living room. The *Ottava F SC-C70MK2* has all the power needed to play at high volume without distortion. It will have no problem partying when you invite it to do so. That said, you will need to make sure it is installed on a solid surface that doesn't vibrate. Indeed, the *subwoofer* underneath is capable of delivering a good amount of energy.

The Joys of Wireless Transmission

The *Ottava F SC-C70MK2* is truly a champion of wireless communication. Thanks to its **Google Chromecast** feature, I was able to play my favourite files on **TIDAL** directly from the **TIDAL** app using the **TIDAL Connect** feature. I didn't even have to open the **Technics** app to do it. I also had fun playing the sound of **YouTube** videos on it, thanks to the *Bluetooth* function. I got amazing results in terms of sound quality. Especially with this extraordinary acoustic cover of **Pat Metheny's** song *And I Love Her* by the **Beatles**. The artist's baritone guitar is delivered by



TECHNICS OTTAVA F SC-C70MK2 ALL-IN-ONE DEVICE



« I got amazing results in terms of sound quality. Especially with this extraordinary acoustic cover of **Pat Metheny's** song *And I Love Her* by the **Beatles**. The artist's baritone guitar is delivered by the **Technics** device with a splendid body and a superb tone. The device's *Remaster* feature seems to work small miracles, despite **YouTube's** compression and the limitations of *Bluetooth* transmission. »

the **Technics** device with a splendid body and a superb tone. The device's *Remaster* feature seems to work small miracles, despite **YouTube's** compression and the limitations of *Bluetooth* transmission. This is a very interesting feature that this device offers. It will allow you to enjoy your music to the fullest, regardless of the quality of the original files.

Bringing It to the Movies

The **Technics Ottava F SC-C70MK2** becomes a formidable sound bar when given this task. Placed on a piece of furniture, just below my TV set, connected with a fibre-optic cable from my TV, it gives a powerful and clear sound of movie soundtracks. As a soundbar, it builds a sound image that has similar dimensions to my TV screen. I love it! Personally, I have always found that home theatre systems offer a sound image that is far too large, scattered and often blurred and has nothing to do with the size of the screen. With the *Ottava F SC-C70MK2*, the dialogue is perfectly understandable and seems to come straight from the actors' mouths. The stereo image is razor-sharp with excellent focus. Thanks to its tone controls, it is possible to give it a little *boost* in the bass, which gives a nice impact to the different sound effects. Small details in the soundtrack come through with excellent clarity, making the home theatre experience more enjoyable thanks to this **Technics** device.

Conclusion

The *Ottava F SC-C70MK2* by **Technics** is a splendid *all-in-one* device. It is a real modern-day music box. It is ultra-complete and takes up little space. It is a technologically advanced object, maximally connected and full of interesting features. It is manufactured with great care and if **Technics'** legendary reputation for reliability is anything to go by, it should perform flawlessly for many years. Its sound is clean, solid and well timbred. It will fill your space with music with ease and can be placed in any room of the house. A splendid machine to enjoy your music every day.

RENSEIGNEMENTS GÉNÉRAUX

Prix : 1 299,99 \$

Garantie : 3 ans, pièces et main-d'œuvre

Distribution : Technics Canada, Tél. : 905.238.2211, ca.panasonic.com

Médiagraphie

Alfa Rococco, Lever l'ancre, Tacca Musique, TACD, 4547

Pat Metheney, And I love her, The Beatles, vidéo YouTube

CLASSE DELTA PRE PREAMPLIFIER AND **CLASSE DELTA AMP** STEREO AMPLIFIER

A REWORKED DUO FOR *POSTERITY*

By MICHEL DALLAIRE



In 2012, I had the opportunity to bench test a pair of devices from **Classe Audio**. It was then the *CP-800* preamplifier and the *CA2300* amplifier. At that time, the *CP-800* was one of the first preamplifiers to be able to process digital signals and to integrate some adjustment functions supported by a *DSP (Digital*

Signal Processor). The use of a touch screen to navigate through the adjustment menu was also a first. The new products I will be testing are the *Delta Pre* preamplifier and the *Delta Stereo* amplifier which are still designed by **Classe Audio**.



A Little History

Classe Audio, based in St. Laurent on the island of Montreal, began its activities around 1980 thanks to its two founders, engineer **Dave Reich** and businessman **Mike Viglas**. The name **Classe** comes from **Dave Reich's** firm belief in the sonic qualities of Class A amplification circuits. Production has evolved over the years to include class A/B amplifier models and other devices such as preamplifiers, CD players, or even home theatre processors. Around 2001, **Mike Viglas**, then the sole owner of **Classe Audio**, negotiated a distribution agreement with British speaker manufacturer **B&W**, who would become the owner of **Classe Audio** in 2010. In 2018, the American group **Sound United** decided to buy **Classe Audio** with its research and development office in Montreal. Another piece of good news is that **Classé** products are now manufactured in the large Japanese factory at **Shirakawa Audio Works**, where all **Sound United** products such as **Denon** and **Marantz** are made. In 2020, **Sound United** completed the purchase of speaker manufacturing company **Bowers & Wilkins**, adding another brand to their portfolio of quality audiophile products.

The Third Generation of Classé Products

The *Delta Pre* preamplifier and the *Delta Stereo* amplifier are, in a way, a rebirth of the *Delta* series from 2011. **Classe Audio** has retained the same enclosures, with the front and sides moulded in one piece and the front corners heavily rounded. The glass bead blasted finish is now anodized in a charcoal gray shade. Physically the *Delta Pre* looks just like the old *CP-800* with its touch-screen display and large volume knob. The functions have remained more or less the same, but the topology of the interior circuits has been completely revised. The *Delta Stereo* amplifier also resembles its ancestor, the *CA-2300*, to which were added two vu meters and a generous louvred grille serving as an air intake for the active cooling system. This grid is also removable for easy maintenance of the *ICT (Intelligent Cooling Tunnel)*. This cooling principle is still used in *Delta* amplifiers because of its efficiency, but in an improved version. For the time being, the new *Delta* series consists of only three devices, which are a preamplifier, a stereo amplifier and a monophonic amplifier. However, the Montreal design team is reportedly working on other models such as a five-channel amplifier, a home theatre processor and an integrated amplifier.



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CLASSE DELTA PRE PREAMPLIFIER AND CLASSE DELTA AMP STEREO AMPLIFIER

The Delta Stereo Amplifier

The *Delta Stereo* is a behemoth weighing over 100 lbs. When you look at a photo of its interior, the space is fully occupied despite its generous dimensions. Its 250 W per channel power on an 8-ohm impedance may seem a bit low for such a big amplifier, but the idea was to switch from a high-voltage power to a high current model in order to better feed the speakers in the low impedances. Thus, in an impedance of 4 ohms its power increases to 500 W, and at 2 ohms it can still provide 350 W. In other words, there is practically no speaker that can resist it, even the most power-hungry. For this purpose, the capacitance was substantially increased with a total of 22 superb 4-pole **Mundorf** capacitors. In the output stage, instead of the traditional bipolar transistors, we now use lateral **MOSFET** transistors, of which there are 16 per channel. These are still mounted on the famous **ICT** cooling tunnel which includes an ultra-quiet thermostatic fan located on the front of the amplifier. The latter forces air to circulate in the tunnel, whose thick walls are made

of cooling fins. The excess heat of the transistors is thus evacuated to the rear. This cooling technique allows amplifiers to be stacked on top of each other when used in recording studios. In the case of the *Delta Stereo*, this ventilation is crucial, since its first 12.5 W operates in pure class A. In other words, in normal listening conditions at home, the *Delta Stereo* will work, most of the time, in pure class A. The circuitry has been completely redesigned with the use of 6-layer circuit boards to reduce the signal path and lower the noise floor. Inside the amplifier, you can see on the right a huge 2,400 VA double-wound toroidal transformer weighing a whopping 16.2 kg. On the left is the massive cooling tunnel with its 32 transistors mounted on the top and bottom. At the rear, the speaker terminals are doubled to allow for dual wiring. These terminals as well as the **RCA/XLR** input jacks are all **Furutech** brand and rhodium plated. **Classe Audio's** own Ethernet connectors are provided to allow networked control of Classé Audio devices or to update the device's microcontroller. *Trigger in/out jacks* are also provided



to facilitate powering up all connected **Classe Audio** devices at the same time. The *Delta Stereo* is compatible with external home automation systems such as **AMX** or **Crestron**.

The Delta Pre Preamplifier

The *Delta Pre* has the same dimensions as the old *CP-800*, that is to say 44.5 cm height with a 12 cm height. The front panel is relatively uncluttered with, on the left, the touch screen that gives access to the preamplifier's various adjustment menus, the most commonly used of which are found on the sumptuous backlit remote control. The large characters on the touch

« All instruments are played by **Robert Len** and the recordings' quality is impeccable. I downloaded this album in **FLAC** format with 24 bits / 96 kHz resolution and the **Classe** duo presents it with a very lively and subtle sound. The highs are bright and well-defined without becoming exaggerated. The timbre of the different instruments is perfectly respected while the bass is deep and without any unwanted overflow. »

screen make it easy to read from a distance. This screen is surrounded by buttons for sleep, menu access and *mute*. To the right is a front **USB Type-A** socket that is compatible with all **Apple** devices such as the *iPod*, *iPad*, and *iPhone*. A 6.35 mm headphone *jack* is powered by its own amplifier circuit. A large knob for volume control completes the description of the front panel. The latter is an analogue attenuator based on a network of calibrated resistors controlled by an intelligent circuit. These adjustment steps are of the order of 0.25 dB from -93 dB to +14 dB which allows for fine adjustment of the sound level for better comfort of use.

The *Delta Pre* is therefore essentially an analogue preamplifier with the addition of a digital-to-analogue converter and a digital signal processor (*DSP*) that offers the possibility of modifying the response curve in two ways, either through an adjustable slope tone control or through a five-band parametric equalizer. This processor allows the *Pre Delta* to select and control the crossover frequency on the subwoofer output. To listen to the *Delta Pre* in a purely analogue fashion, connect only analogue sources and do not activate the tone or EQ controls. All inputs, both analogue and digital, can be renamed and gain adjusted using the touch screen menus. It is also possible to disengage all the unused inputs that will no longer appear on the screen in order to simplify its use.

The Delta Pre's Connectivity

The *Delta Pre's* connectivity is ultra-complete and can meet almost any audiophile's imaginable needs. Its D-A conversion circuits use one **AKM 4497** stereo chip per channel. These are implemented in dual differential mode to obtain a perfectly balanced stereo signal at the D/A converter output. The asynchronous **USB-B** input is galvanically protected against noise from computers or music servers. High-resolution 16-, 24-, and 32-bit **PCM** files are supported up to a sampling rate of 384 kHz. For **DSD** files we are talking about 64, 128 and 256. There are three coaxial and optical **S/PDIF** inputs each, plus an **AES/EBU** input on an **XLR** connector. These inputs go up to a sampling rate of 192 kHz for **PCM** and **DSD64**. An **RJ45** connection terminal is available on the back of the device. When the *Delta Pre* is connected to an **Ethernet** network, it is possible to take advantage of the **Airplay** communication protocol for **Apple** devices. There are three stereo analogue inputs on unbalanced **RCA** connectors, one of which is intended for the turntable. Two other line inputs are available on balanced **XLR** connectors. On the analogue line output side, the *Delta Pre* features a main output and an auxiliary output on **RCA** and **XLR** connectors. A subwoofer output is also provided on **RCA** and **XLR** connectors.





Installation Conditions

Despite its large size and weight, I was able to insert the *Delta Stereo* amplifier in my audio cabinet with the help of my son. As for the *Delta Pre*, it remained on top of my cabinet to facilitate access to the connections. The two devices were connected together by balanced XLR cables. I used my CD player as a digital transport connected to the *Delta Pre* with a coaxial cable as a source. My **CeolBOX** music server was connected directly to the *Delta Pre* via USB for most of my listening to some high resolution PCM and DSD files. The speakers used were my own speakers, of which the relatively compact stature had absolutely nothing to frighten the colossal *Delta Stereo*! The latter quickly demonstrated who was the master in this high-fidelity system.

Listening to a Tried and Tested Duo

The first time I listened to this **Classe Audio** duo, the sound that emerged gave me a sensation of precision, great dynamics, and a lightning-fast response. As mentioned earlier, my music was mostly listened to in class A. I don't know how much of this sense of freedom is due to the following and some 237.5 W that remain waiting under the hood of the *Delta Stereo*. It is a well-known fact that meters are never fast and accurate enough to tell us, in real time, the instantaneous power that is delivered to the speakers during musical peaks. Nevertheless, the *Delta Stereo's* vu meters indicate that I never exceeded 2.5 W of continuous power, and this, for relatively high listening levels. The control over my speakers' diaphragms' movement is quite astounding, which suggests a very high damping factor. My little **Proac D20Rs** obeyed the **Classe Stereo**, responding instantly to the slightest change in musical regime.

One of my latest acquisitions is **Robert Len's** album *Help*, a Canadian multi-instrumentalist of whom it is the third album

of this sort. He interprets pieces by different authors/composers in his own way, which exposes us to relaxing ambient jazz with a little bit of a *New Age* feel. All instruments are played by **Robert Len** and the recordings' quality is impeccable. I downloaded this album in *FLAC* format with 24 bits/96 kHz resolution and the **Classe** duo presents it with a very lively and subtle sound. The highs are bright and well-defined without becoming exaggerated. The timbre of the different instruments is perfectly respected while the bass is deep and without any unwanted overflow. In this respect, my only regret is that I did not have a pair of larger speakers with two *woofers* of at least 20 cm in diameter during this test bench. This would probably have allowed me to really test the *Delta Stereo's* bass depth and control. However, I found that despite its muscularity and weight, the *Delta Stereo* is an agile pugilist who can dance like a ballerina on her toes when the music demands it.

I continue my listening with **Anna Maria Jopek's** bewitching voice and her album *Barefoot*, which is a fusion between European jazz and the traditional music of her native Poland. The singer or the musicians' slightest inflections are clearly relayed to me by the **Classe** duo with a level of transparency that is far above average. The stereo image is largely proportioned with a well-felt sense of depth. Ms. **Jopek's** voice is so well reproduced in all its sweetness that I decided to follow up with another album in which she is featured. It is *Upojenie* which is a collaboration between her and jazz guitarist **Pat Metheny**. The first track begins with a solo by the guitarist on his very special 42 string *Pikasso* guitar. This instrument was made to order by Canadian violin maker **Linda Manzer**. The sound of this instrument is amazing and the **Classe** duo succeeded in drawing me into this atmosphere of airy notes that intertwine in a magical way. When Ms. **Jopek's** beautiful voice comes into play,

the magic manifests even more and gives me chills and goose bumps. Isn't that the whole reason for the existence of excellent high-fidelity equipment, to transmit all the emotions that music and its performers can arouse?

I end this rather short description of my musical listening with the superb piece *My Funny Valentine* performed by **Sting** accompanied on the piano by the no less famous **Herbie Hancock**. The **Classe** duo presents me with this recording downloaded as a 24-bit *FLAC* file with a transparency that does not exclude sumptuousness. **Sting's** husky voice is delivered to me with a nice presence and it is well centred on the front of the stereo image. **Herbie Hancock's** piano playing in this case shows a beautiful fluidity, while his instrument is superbly reproduced in all its tonality and harmonics. The double bass is deep and very natural. It displays a nice roundness while keeping the woody side of its sound box.

Conclusion

As you may have guessed, I had a great time with the *Delta Pre* preamplifier and the *Delta Stereo* amplifier from **Classe Audio**. This ensemble's colossal power is not a hindrance on subtlety and musicality. In reality, you're *listening* to a small 12.5 W per channel amplifier that operates in class A and is supported by some 235 W of reserve power waiting to be called upon when the music or speakers demand it. As best I can recall, these two devices are certainly a vast improvement over the previous

version of the *CP-800* and *CA-2300* which were themselves, in their day, milestones in digital music. In their price category, the *Delta Pre* and *Delta Stereo* will indeed face serious competition from the United States, Canada, and Europe. But these devices have for them the advantage of having a modern and most complete connectivity. Moreover, they have the good grace of not being the most expensive in the world market of prestige brands. If you have high-calibre, power-hungry speakers with an impedance curve that flirts with 2 ohms, this **Classe Delta Pre/Delta Stereo** set is definitely worth considering.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Delta Pre preamplifier

Price: \$14,999

Delta Stereo Amplifier

Price: \$18,999

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Distribution: Classé Audio, www.classeaudio.com

Mediagraphy

Robert Len, Help, 2xHD, FLAC, 24 bits / 96 kHz.

Anna Maria Jopek, Barefoot, Emarcy, 016 299-2

Pat Metheny & Anna Maria Jopek, Upojenie Nonesuch, 511496-2

Eddie Higgins Trio, Haunted Heart, SSC, 1080D

Oregon, Beyond Words, Chesky Records, JD 130



ROTEL TRIBUTE 11 CD PLAYER AND **ROTEL TRIBUTE A11** INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

IN TRIBUTE TO MR. KEN ISHIWATA AND TO MUSIC

By ADRIEN ROUAH



With a career of more than 20 years in test benches behind me, I still wonder what is more exciting: writing about very sophisticated high-end products or writing about very affordable devices, but built with a real concern to place them in the high-end category? And being the loyal **TED Magazine** readers that you are, you'll notice that today's review follows the previous issue's review of a high-end *MICHI X3* integrated amplifier, also from **Rotel**. Is it possible to have high-end products at a price that justifies truly affordable high-end products today?



Here is a particular entry that deals with a delicate subject, high fidelity is expensive, and when it is not expensive, can we talk about... loyalty? This must be how **Rotel** could imagine a scenario where it would be a question of proposing a range of affordable devices, which could satisfy certain requirements of audiophiles, and especially ensure a remarkable listening experience. And this time, to accentuate the challenge, **Rotel** has allowed itself an exceptional presence in the person of Mr. **Ken Ishiwata** – now deceased – who added a sophisticated technical touch to the brand's devices and especially to those in the series in this article. This legendary man had already brought his personal (and brilliant!) touch to the **Marantz** brand for some forty years, modifying certain crucial parts of the electronics in order to propel some products into the highest *audiophile* spheres. Mr. **Ishiwata's** contribution is elegantly highlighted by a small engraved plaque on the front of each unit. This contribution mainly relates to the choice of certain components, selected with great rigour, and to the addition of shock absorbers for the mechanical parts. We see here that it is a question of a double contribution, electronic and mechanical, in order to be able to draw all the musical quintessence from the modified products.

The CD11 Tribute Compact Disc Player and the A11 Tribute Integrated Amplifier

The version received is silver for both devices, with a timeless configuration and a very classic and elegant presentation, the kind of which one does not tire of quickly. Apart from the player's drawer, the two devices are virtually identical and each has a display showing the usual information and that during our programming. These screens can be adjusted in brightness. They are clear and quite readable. Note that the brightness of the pause and start indicators is also adjustable - what a great idea! The *CD11 Tribute's* converter uses a **Texas Instrument** 24 bit / 192 KHz chip. And the device benefits from a revisited approach, both from a digital/analogue conversion point of view and from a mechanical point of view with some judiciously placed damping. **Rotel**, thanks to Mr. **Ishiwata**, proves

to us that these improvements, regardless of the class to which a product belongs, are not only electronic but are aimed at mechanical improvements that will remove micro-vibrations that also deteriorate the signal – and thus our music! On the integrated side, 2 x 50 W of power at 8 ohms, class A/B operation and bass, treble and balance controls are provided. A phono input for moving magnet (*MM*) cartridges is offered as well as a *Bluetooth* Apt-X function. **Rotel** provides a dual *speaker* output that can be used for dual wiring or to provide a sound system in another room of the house. The unit also has a preamp output. Both devices have their own remote control, classic and quite user-friendly. Internally, the work is very well done, even almost exemplary considering the category in which this range of devices is placed. Even an electronics novice will marvel at this crystal-clear construction. Professionals will welcome the return of the **Sanken** bipolar transistors (A1695 and A4468), transistors with a renowned musical reputation!

Pre-listening Clarifications

For the **Rotel CD11** and *A11 Tribute*, I imagined a couple with a budget that fits the niche of these units, a couple who may be acquiring their first piece of audio equipment, or replacing an existing system, or wanting to introduce sound to another room in their flat. It is indeed possible to fulfill these three wishes with the *CD11* and the *A11 Tribute*. The installation was done with both devices side by side (and not on top of each other – and if you can't do otherwise, you'll choose to place the integrated on top of the player to ensure good internal cooling), decent quality cables, and with a price range relative to that of the set. All bass and treble settings have been removed, in order to benefit from direct listening. The speakers connected for pre-listening were monitors with an 8" bass transducer and a ribbon tweeter in the first case, and in the other, a model created from a 6.5" and a classic fabric dome *tweeter*. This precision about the speakers used allows for a better analysis of the behaviour of electronics in relation to different technologies rather than referring to known brands. It is the pair of monitors equipped with a 6.5" and a dome *tweeter*

ROTEL TRIBUTE 11 CD PLAYER AND ROTEL TRIBUTE A11 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



that I have chosen for the final review. This is the type of speaker that will be offered with the **Rotel** system in 80% of cases.

Listening Impressions

I guess readers will do as I did and connect all their entertainment sources to the *A11 Tribute*. I'm familiarizing myself with a few films that make me think that the integrated amplifier

« I have often written about it, but I repeat, 2 x 50 W is sufficient if the chosen speakers are lively, and the *A11 Tribute's* dynamics will be widely felt and will satisfy all music lovers... The *CD11 Tribute* player gives a surprisingly light and precise impression. I remember the asking price for this reader and I think that something serious is going on here. We are dealing with a player that should cost much more! »

is suitable for home cinema, with enough power reserve for sound effects. It is also very good for understanding dialogue and you don't feel the need to turn up the sound, as is often the case. A few concerts, then, to check out the worst and the best, which is easy to differentiate. Let's keep them remarkable, because the integrated amplifier is capable of surprising you with *live* shows! What if buyers interested in the *A11 Tribute* were equipped with a turntable? I plug mine in and choose some records. The music flows, smooth and precise, I immediately feel that the *A11 Tribute's* phono circuit is quite respectable, not just to be able to say that a phono option is available. A lot of details are highlighted, in addition to a pleasant sound presence. I now move on to the *CD11 Tribute* which constitutes 70% of the listening I focused on. I choose some compact discs,

of different styles as usual, because the readers might be more inclined towards *jazz* or more towards *classical music* or *world music*, who knows? I have often written about it, but I repeat, 2 x 50 W is sufficient if the chosen speakers are lively, and the *A11 Tribute's* dynamics will be widely felt and will satisfy all music lovers... The *CD11 Tribute* player gives a surprisingly light and precise impression. I remember the asking price for this reader and I think that something serious is going on here. We are dealing with a player that should cost much more! I cannot, of course, know Mr. **Ishiwata's** exact contribution to this project, but I think that he certainly had an important part in this reading quality increase. Musically, it is successful, the compact disc remains, with good reason, my favourite source of music, and the **Rotel CD11 Tribute** confirms this. I don't feel any musical priority with this *A11* and *CD11 Tribute* set and fans of all kinds of music will be pleased. You have to listen to a string quartet or a small jazz ensemble to realise that all the required precision is present, all the nuances respected and that the pleasure felt easily makes you forget the modest prices for this duo.

Conclusion

Combined with a good, generous and lively pair of speakers, this formidable duo will delight many music lovers on a tight budget. We are talking about the beginning of the top of the range with a renowned brand name. To say that it is so good that you forget the price is no small compliment, especially in these times! But that's the crux of **Rotel**, which superbly displays this electronic duet that pays homage to music at the same time as it pays homage to a man who was dedicated to the beauty of the music. This is a realistic achievement that combines product quality, ease of use, excellent workmanship and above all, total sonic success.





GENERAL INFORMATION

CD11 Tribute compact disc player

Price: \$699

Warranty: 2 years, parts and labor

A11 Tribute Integrated amplifier

Price: \$1,099

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labor

Distributor: Kevro International Inc, Tel: 905.428.2800,
www.kevro.com; www.rotel.com/en-ca

Mediagraphy

Analogue

Johann Sebastian Bach, Violin Concertos, Harmonia Mundi, HM113

Jacques Bertin, Domaine De Joie, Le Chant Du Monde, LDX, 74701

Digital

Jordi Savall, Esprit Des Balkans, Alia Vox, AVSA, 9898, SACD

Christine And The Queen, Chris, Because Music, LC33186

ZAZ, Effet Mirroir, Warner Music, 2-580865

AN OPEN WINDOW ON A JAZZ CLUB

By JD DOYLE

That's how it is, I've always preferred bookshelf type speakers, those that must be installed on a stand, to freestanding type speakers. My friends always tell me, you're a bookshelf guy. Small, medium, large or huge, they always end up making me fall in love with them. Indeed, in the products of a speaker manufacturer, it often happens that the small bookshelf speaker is the one that catches my attention the most. This was exactly the case with the **Bowers & Wilkins 705 Signature**. This *Signature* model, which is a completely redesigned version of the 705 S2, is so agile and refined that it will leave you breathless. So here's the **Bowers & Wilkins 705 Signature** review. A speaker for those who understand that sometimes the best things come in small packages.

Bowers & Wilkins is one of the world's leading speaker manufacturers. Founded in 1966 by **John Bowers**, the company manufactures several lines of speakers and headphones for every budget. Based in **Worthing**, England, **Bowers & Wilkins** is like a university dedicated to the study of all disciplines related to speakers. At **Bowers & Wilkins**, science is at the epicentre of every decision made in a speaker's design. Moreover, the scientific rigour shown by this company is remarkable, especially in its longevity. When **Bowers & Wilkins** makes a technical choice, it's not to change its mind when thinking about fads and trends of the coming year. It is a considered decision validated by a rigorous research protocol. In the 1970s, **Bowers & Wilkins** engineers decided that the front *baffle* of high-end models should be reduced to the bare minimum. **Bowers &**

Wilkins never reversed that decision. So choosing a new technology or material is a crucial decision for the engineering team. The consumer wins, assured of getting a product that is the result of a serious approach. However, there is another area where **Bowers & Wilkins** has virtually no competition, and that's in manufacturing quality, where they aim for and achieve a radical zero defect. For proof, just watch this amazing video titled **Bowers & Wilkins** —*The New 800 D3 Series* on **YouTube**. The 705 *Signature*, the subject of this test bench, is the result of two years of work by **Bowers & Wilkins** engineers. Based on the 705 S2, the *Signature* version is the result of extensive work on the crossover and drivers to provide a racing version of this small *bookshelf* speaker. Let's explore it in more detail.

Technical Description

The **Bowers & Wilkins 705 Signature** speakers are two-way *bookshelf* speakers. The cabinet is vented to the rear of the speaker. It is adjustable, thanks to the inclusion of a set of foam plugs that allow to adjust the low frequencies' output level according to the environment. The *Signature* version is finished with precious lacquered wood and is simply superb. Here, the term *beautiful work* takes on its full meaning and the **Bowers & Wilkins** craftsmen have truly outdone themselves. The 705 *Signature's* *tweeter* is completely separate from the speaker, having been placed on top of it. This is a technique that **Bowers & Wilkins** has been using for many years. It avoids the many diffraction problems caused by the front of a speaker, except that this time **Bowers & Wilkins** has gone much further. The tubular part that encloses the *tweeter* is now cast from a single piece of aluminum and is decoupled from the enclosure. The *tweeter* itself is quite unique. It is an aluminum dome with a thickness of only 30 microns. This is reinforced by a custom-shaped carbon washer installed at the back of the dome. In addition, the dome's surface is finished with a thin layer of carbon powder that has been sprayed on. When you listen to it,



BOWERS & WILKINS 705 SIGNATURE LOUDSPEAKERS



all this great technology will translate into top-notch definition and transparency.

The *705 Signature's* woofer is a cone made from a material developed by **Bowers & Wilkins**, which they named *continuum*. This material is similar to the aramid fibre it has long used. According to **Bowers & Wilkins engineers**, this material has better acoustic properties than aramid fibre and is state of the art. Surprisingly, in spite of its remarkable rigidity, the *continuum* has a certain degree of flexibility which, therefore, makes it possible to obtain a cone of which the behavioural change will be much less abrupt when it approaches its resonance frequency.

When listening, this should result in smoother midrange frequencies and a higher level of clarity. Because **Bowers & Wilkins** engineers design the speakers themselves, the

« The level of fine detail that these *tweeters* are able to bring out is world class. I challenge you to find a speaker with a more refined *tweeter* in this price range. **Bowers & Wilkins** didn't skimp on the quality of the capacitors that filter the *705 Signature's tweeters*, and it shows. Jazz lovers of all kinds will love these little speakers. »

crossover could be built around a minimum of high-quality components. This filter is equipped with **Mundorf capacitors**, nothing less. This speaker's development took almost two years of work, listening tests and refinement. As the listening impressions will confirm, the effort was well worth it, as the results are there.

Unpacking and Installation

The **Bower & Wilkins 705 Signature** came to me in some of the most professional packaging I've ever seen. They were accompanied by the elegant 26" tall *Fs-700 S2* stands, which add enormously to the *look* and stability of the speaker. You will have to assemble them and fill them with pre-dried sand for an optimal result. The *705 Signature* is equipped with a double terminal block for bi-wiring. You may need to replace the supplied metal jumpers with quality wire ends. I don't understand why speaker manufacturers continue to install this type of double terminal block even today. A simple pair of very high quality terminals would have been much better on a small speaker of this quality. In my music room, the *705 Signature* ended up about 16" from the back wall and 24" from the side walls. I used them positioned straight, without any orientation towards the *Sweet-Spot*. If you decide to place them closer to the wall, or even on a shelf, you'll need to use the included adjustment foams. These will allow you to obtain an optimal result and to control the low frequencies well.

Listening Impressions

A Cymbals Story

From the moment you plug in these beautiful little speakers, you know that they are tailor-made for jazz. My God... what beautiful cymbals! On the **Steve Kuhn Trio's** album *Wisteria*, **Joel Baron's** drums are airy, light, and take up all the space around the speakers. The **Bowers & Wilkins 705 Signature tweeters** deliver a memorable performance that is all about refinement. The level of fine detail that these *tweeters* are able to bring out is world class. I challenge you to find a speaker with a more refined *tweeter* in this price range. **Bowers & Wilkins** didn't skimp on the quality of the capacitors that filter the *705 Signature's tweeters*, and it shows. Jazz lovers of all kinds will love these little speakers. They create a jazz club atmosphere without having to turn the volume up too high. The *705 Signature* loves piano and knows how to reproduce it with delicacy and abundant nuances. Sometimes one wishes that the instrument's lower mid range could be a little fuller, but to achieve this the cabinet would have to be considerably larger and bulkier. As a result, they would lose the agility that allows them to bend the sound of a double bass so realistically. As is, when properly placed in a room, these small speakers still manage to reproduce a realistic portrait of the instruments. The timbres are always right and never fall into the trap of excessive resonance.

Strong Dynamic Capabilities

Bowers & Wilkins 705 Signature speakers will fill a room of respectable size with music. They are capable of handling a good amount of power, playing at high volume and will be able to party when the opportunity arises. On **Dominic Miller's** *Second Nature* album, the electric bass gets really low. In no case did I feel the need to add a subwoofer. The bass is strong and solid and never masks **Dominic Miller's** subtle guitar. They will therefore be able to easily accommodate the different tasks they will have to accomplish. Whether it's listening to a movie at high volume, nostalgic listening to old 1970s rock or even techno, they'll be up to the task.

A Delight for World Music

These wonderful little speakers simply make you want to venture into unknown musical territory. It's hard to explain, but that's how it is... With the *705 Signature*, I spent a lot of time exploring the world music repertoire, among others the **Radio Paradise World Music mix**. This Internet radio station, which now broadcasts in CD quality resolution, offers a fairly strong selection of *World Music*. On **Ali Farka Touré** and **Ry Cooder's** album, *Talking Timbuktu*, the *705 Signature* deliver a riveting performance. The guitars are *punchy*, the voices are beautiful and the rhythm is well marked. It is easy to get carried away by the tempo of *Gomni*. It's easy to tap your foot and get completely

BOWERS & WILKINS 705 SIGNATURE LOUDSPEAKERS



BOWERS & WILKINS 705 SIGNATURE LOUDSPEAKERS

into the music. This hard-to-define ability, which makes you want to try new music, is, in my opinion, the most beautiful quality a speaker can have. After all, that's kind of the point of high fidelity.

Conclusion

The **Bowers & Wilkins 705 Signature** are a complete success. These speakers are delicate and subtle and have a stunningly high quality. They are capable of delivering a performance that would make many more expensive speakers pale in comparison. They are for people with taste, those who appreciate refinement and true musicality. Beware of the opinions of pseudo-experts on **Facebook** who will tell you that **Bowers & Wilkins** speakers are too expensive and have an overrated reputation. That would be a shame, because you'd be missing out on the opportunity to listen to your music from one of the best speakers on the market. In these difficult and endless pandemic times, when it is impossible to get to your favourite jazz club, **Bowers & Wilkins' 705 Signature** will bring the musicians to your home, to your living room.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$2,249.99 ea or \$4,499.98/pair

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Manufacturer: www.bowerswilkins.com

Mediagraphy

Steve Kuhn Trio, Wisteria, ECM,
2257 – 279 4578

Dominic Miller, Second Nature, BMG, DOM3CD

Ali Farka Toure with Ry Cooder, Talking
Timbuktu, Polygram, HNCD, 1381



A REAL FAVORITE!

By RICHARD SCHNEIDER

Photos by: CYNTHIA VAN ELK

DeVille speakers are radically different in both their cabinet design and use of innovative technologies. For those who are not familiar with their manufacturer, this introduction will surely arouse your curiosity, because **Fleetwood Sound Company (FSC)** does nothing like the others. As an added bonus, these speakers look great with the optional, albeit essential, non-traditional stand. Will they be your next object of desire? You would think so! **Fleetwood Sound Company** is a subsidiary of high-end manufacturer **Oswalds Mill Audio (OMA)**. It is an audio company that flirts as much in the excessiveness of its concepts as in the unaffordability of its prices for most of us. For its part, **FSC** designs high-end devices, off the beaten track, and accessible to budgets deemed reasonable, while adhering to the philosophy of the parent company. The management wants to extend its reach to a more traditional *audiophile* market without compromising the quality of the components in its product line. To this end, the owner, Jonathan Weiss, said *We created **FSC** to produce a new line of smaller, more affordable audio components while maintaining the high standards of construction and design of our **OMA** line.* The **OMA** aura always hovers over the **FSC** projects, as the *DeVille* is still a niche product.

The *DeVille* speaker is the flagship product of the **Fleetwood** division. It is a two-way horn speaker. Its small size, 24" high, or 48" high on arranged stands, makes it an ideal product for those who have to manage a small environment where space is at a premium. However, this is not the only aspect to consider, as it is not afraid of open spaces, on the contrary.

Do you have a low-powered tube amplifier (8 W or more) or a heavy transistor amplifier? Fear not, because the *DeVille* can really take it in the power department. Note that

their efficiency rate is 94 db. If this aspect tells you little or nothing, we agree that the higher the efficiency of a speaker, the less it will require a large power amplifier. You will have understood that these are very versatile speakers adapting to the majority of power devices. When I listened to this test bench, they were paired with a 30 W tube power amplifier. They can be appreciated in a *nearfield* as well as in a very large room, because they are able to perform at very high volume.

Why offer horn speakers? It is no small task to describe this concept. The answer is

that it is a sound that combines dynamism and naturalness in a very balanced, if not incomparable way. The musical rendering is imbued with a realism that few speakers can achieve. The listening is very simple, comforting and without any effort of analysis. At nearly \$15,000, that's a lot of *money*, we agree - except that it's an investment you'll enjoy for the rest of your life. You will even be able to leave them to your descendants who will appreciate them as much as you do. They come with a lifetime warranty, a rare feature in the audio industry.

Let's take a closer look at these enclosures

Let's start the tour with the case. The back panel is a phenolic resin plate, better known as *Bakelite*. The older among us will remember the black rotary phones. This material was chosen for its anti-resonance properties. At the bottom, you will notice the presence of a single pair of terminal blocks for coupling to a power device. Bi-wiring, or bi-amplification, was not an option.

A large portion of the cabinet is made up of ash from torrefied Pennsylvania ash wood. Roasting is a concept used by many guitar makers. The goal is to accelerate the aging process of the wood to improve the tone and strength of the cabinet. Torrefied wood is an ecological, all-natural product that remains stable in the face of weather variations. This process represents a marked difference from industry standards that favor *MDF*. After machining, it acquires a smooth finish that enhances its appearance.

The top and bottom panels as well as the solid wood horn arched at the front like a carved flower are hand treated with

beeswax and boiled linseed oil. According to **Jonathan Weiss**, finishing wood is a process that requires time and patience. It requires three hand-rubbed coats, with long drying periods between each. The main advantage is that the wood grain comes out in all its glory and will age like fine furniture. At the base, the front and sides of the *DeVille* are black. However, there is an almost endless array of finish options, including **Farrow & Ball** paints from England. How about a denim pattern?

The *DeVille* is a two-way speaker mounted on a solid wood horn (a first as far as I know) 6" long with a one-inch compression tweeter. It covers the frequency range down to 2 kHz. A neodymium magnet woofer with a high efficiency 8" treated paper cone handles the lower frequencies. These are manufactured in Italy according to **OMA's** specifications. All wiring is silver.

The speakers' integration is unusual. For the woofer, high frequencies are attenuated with a third-order low-pass filter (18 dB/octave) at about 1.5 kHz. According to the designers, the *tweeter's* high-pass filter is actually a first-order electrical filter, 6 dB/octave at nearly 8 kHz. This mitigates the phase interactions between the two speakers, and allows them to be connected in positive acoustic polarity. This is a manufacturing principle that **OMA's** technical director, **Vytas Viesulas**, insists on. Note that the *DeVille* speakers are scaled-down versions of **OMA's** no-compromise speakers. The horn was designed by **Bill Woods**, who has designed this type of speakers for over 35 years. He is recognized as a leading authority in the field.

My Listening Impressions

I had countless notes, some emotional, some rational, from listening to the *DeVille* speakers. However, I had to rationalize all my impressions in order to offer you a comprehensible account of this listening experience, which represents one of my most beautiful auditory experiences to date. I might as well say it right away, I have nothing but praise to share with you.

The sound of horn speakers takes us into a completely different world than that of what we might call traditional speakers.



It is an enveloping sound that, from the first notes, is both confusing and enjoyable. There is a purity, a spatial precision of instrumentation, vocals, special effects and percussion that makes one dive into the heart of a record. I don't think it's an

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FLEETWOOD SOUND COMPANY DEVILLE LOUDSPEAKERS

exaggeration to say that the *DeVilles* help us understand the journey of a director. When a particular aspect of a recording, the piano for example, is brought to the forefront, it is obvious from the very first notes. He fills the entire front stage with energy. On many recordings, you can feel the *feeling* of the booth where the artists perform their songs.

The *DeVilles* have a sound that I would describe as triangular or three dimensional if you prefer. The award-winning vocals and instruments are clearly defined in the center front, just as I mentioned above, and I repeat this because it is one of the aspects that impressed me the most. It's a cut above the rest. The musicians and the harmonies that accompany the performance are at the back and on the sides. You could say that they are floating in space, except that the whole thing is of a great precision and clarity that I have rarely heard. A speaker does not have to impose itself during a listening session. Let me clarify. It is quite unpleasant when listening to the sound that one feels that the sound comes directly from the speakers. It becomes a mechanical performance that is not very melodious. It's almost unpleasant. This is precisely what the *DeVilles* performance will not offer you. I cannot stress this enough.

The high notes are of great delicacy, silky without ever being brittle. However, they are a little bit behind, which I don't mind, on the contrary. In this respect, it is a matter of taste.

The *DeVilles*' have the flaw of their quality, as they are so revealing that they have no mercy for bad recordings except (this is not a contradiction) that it is already better than what some

speakers produce. The great quality of a horn speaker is its ability to reproduce a very energetic, wide, even invasive midrange. A good part of the sound spectrum being precisely at this level, the restitution is grandiose.

If you're the type of person who prioritizes speakers with abysmal bass, unfortunately you'll probably be left wanting more. For my part, I clearly like the fidelity of this tone reproduced by the *DeVilles*. They are right on the money, because having been to countless performances, it is obvious to me that the bass is an accompanying instrument that serves to tie a piece of music together. Its reproduction should never be too invasive, nor too far back. The *DeVilles* respect this balance.

DSD recordings often get bad press. Many would say that this is just one of many fads. I disagree, because I find that these speakers reproduce *DSD* files with impressive accuracy. The recordings take on a new dimension.

I have a guilty pleasure of listening, from time to time, to the success of bands such as the duo **The Carpenters**. I challenge anyone not to get goosebumps when hearing **Karen Carpenter** perform *We've only just begun*. You'd swear she's right in front of you. The instruments and harmonies float in the space in the background. It is magnificent.

Chantal Chamberland was also on hand during this listening session to present her record, also in *DSD*, **Chantal Chamberland - Autobiography**. The same phenomenon occurred again. The Canadian jazz guitarist and singer, whose sultry, raspy voice is worthy of a smoky jazz bar, is accompanied





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by her trusty guitar. She envelops us in a spellbinding musical world. Sometimes we even forget the instrumentation and follow the path of the voice.

I am a fan of **Patrick Bruel**. So it seemed obvious to me to take a look at his catalogue. I have always considered that his song, *Pas eu le temps* from his *Ce soir on sort* album, was not recorded with a good quality. What a surprise to see the high quality of this production. The instruments, the percussion, the layers of instrumentation are amazing, fine-tuned and always with a well-centered voice. The fluidity and precision are remarkable. This recording is very complex, but there is no confusion. There is space between the sounds of each speaker.

Conclusions

I waited at least two days before reviewing my notes and attempting to recount my encounter with the *DeVille* speakers. In the heat of the moment, we are sometimes too enthusiastic and the tone of some comments could be toned down. This time, we have to admit that this listening session was a real crush. On many occasions, for a rare occasion, I was able to capture the emotion that real artists try to convey to us through

their recordings, and I must admit that several performances particularly touched me.

If the conditions allowed it, I would not hesitate to buy them immediately. How many times have we made purchases that were intended to be a good compromise or if you prefer a term I hate, a good value for money? Isn't it better to wait and save money to buy uncompromising products that will satisfy us for life? I believe that to ask the question is to answer it.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Fleetwood DeVille speakers

Price: \$16,000 / pair

Warranty: Lifetime, parts and labor

Fleetwood DeVille speakers stands

Price: \$1,995 / pair

Exclusively at: Codell Audio, Tel.: 514.737.4531

Mediagraphy

The Carpenters, The Carpenters Collection

Chantal Chamberland, Chantal Chamberland - Autobiography

Patrick Bruel, Ce soir on sort

VERITY AUDIO LAKMÉ LOUDSPEAKERS

A BOLD LOUDSPEAKER

BY MICHEL DALLAIRE

Verity Audio, located in Quebec City, has been in the speaker business since the mid-1990s. Its international reputation is well established and when I heard that **Verity Audio** had announced a new speaker in 2019, I was hoping to try it out. It is now done, as I have been sent the superb *Lakmé*. The name of this speaker is the title of an opera in three acts by **Léo Delibes** on a libretto in French by **Edmond Gondinet**. At **Verity Audio**, it is a consistent practice to name all their speakers by opera titles.



Verity Audio's design

As a retired industrial designer myself, I have always found **Verity Audio** speakers to be among the most successful in terms of aesthetics. The *Lakmé* speaker does not escape this observation thanks to its harmonious and relatively compact dimensions and an outstanding manufacturing quality. It comes to take its place between the *Finn* which is the entry level at **Verity Audio** and the *Otello*. Like its larger siblings, the *Lakmé*'s design features a two-box construction to isolate the high and midrange transducers from the rear-mounted low frequencies. However, these two boxes are fixed rather than being removable and reversible as on

« I discovered that the **Verity Audio** *Lakmé* speaker has a level of transparency such as it allows me to understand in all its details the *Steven Wilson's* intentions in his album's realization. The soft dome ring tweeter does its job wonderfully well without any harshness or exaggeration in the high frequencies. The transition to the midrange transducer is seamless, with the midrange transducer demonstrating outstanding openness and dynamics. Its natural pulp cone has a very good weight / stiffness ratio, which ensures speed of execution while, in my opinion, avoiding the colorations often encountered in certain synthetic materials. »

some higher-end models. All **Verity Audio** speakers adopt the non-parallel wall concept. With the *Lakmé* model, they made an exception to this rule but its rounded edges

soften its *look*. In this way, it is nicely differentiated from other more angular models. The front plate of the cabinet, which contains the *tweeter* and midrange transducer, is slightly tilted backwards by a few degrees. I assume it is to acoustically phase these two speakers. The latter are mounted without visible screws, because they are attached to the back of the plate, with a rounded edge and a horn leader for the *tweeter*. The front plate that covers the subwoofer is interchangeable and available in different finishes. It is even possible to customize it for a small extra charge. The rest of the enclosure is covered with a beautiful satin lacquer available in two finishes, black or white. However, there does not seem to be a protective grille for the speakers, which for me is not a problem in itself.

The Lakmé's Mechanical Elements

As mentioned above, the low frequency transducer is mounted at the back of the speaker, but in the case of the *Lakmé*, the difference is the use of the topology of a 15 cm active bass transducer associated with a dual-passive radiators. This configuration would facilitate the speaker's positioning in a small to medium sized listening room. The *tweeter* is a 25 mm ring dome model with a soft fabric membrane. The 127 mm midrange transducer has a cone made of compressed and treated natural paper pulp. The rear woofer is 152 mm in diameter and its cone seems to be made of the same material as the midrange transducer. The rear connectors are by **Furutech**, of impeccable quality, and are silver plated. The enclosure's base is provided by a solid aluminum tripod base with large height-adjustable washers





as support points. The latter are felted, which makes it easy to move the speaker on a wooden surface without damaging it.

The Lakmé Speaker in a Few Figures.

For this speaker, the manufacturer advertises a 91 dB to 2.83 Vrms effectiveness and to a distance of one meter in the axis. Its nominal impedance is stipulated at 8 ohms with a minimum at 4 ohms. The minimum recommended power to drive it is 18 W at 8 ohms, but we are not talking about maximum power. We can therefore assume that the *Lakmé* is relatively easy to feed for all types of amplifiers, provided that they are of good quality. Its dimensions are 38.7 cm wide by 39.2 cm deep for a height of 105.4 cm. Their weight is about 60 pounds each.

Installation and Usage Tips

I placed the two *Lakmé* speakers in about the same location as my usual speakers, more than a meter from the side walls and about 45 cm from the rear wall. I didn't have to play with the placement too much to get a satisfactory tonal balance. I tilted them a little toward my listening position. At first, I listened to them with a small entry-level integrated amplifier that I had for a test bench. Its 45 W per channel were more than enough to power the *Lakmé* speakers, but let's just say that their revealing side quickly made me realize that they were more at home with my own integrated, which is worth seven times more. Here it is not necessarily a question of having a lot of power but let us say that the amplifier's wattage must be of an irreproachable quality. The sources used are my CD player, my Ceo/BOX server and a DAC/Streamer costing about \$7,000 that I had for another test bench.

Verity, the whole Verity and nothing but Verity!

I started my listening with *Steven Wilson's* (mainly known as the leader of British progressive rock band *Porcupine Tree*) last solo album. On this album titled *The Future Bites*, an electro-pop style is skillfully used to create catchy melodies. We find ourselves with some good English progressive music, but modernized and mature. The *Lakmé* speaker gives me a very good window on this realization of which the sound spectrum range allows me to test almost all of a speaker's characteristics.

In the first listening, I discovered that the **Verity Audio** *Lakmé* speaker has a level of transparency such as it allows me to understand in all its details the *Steven Wilson's* intentions in his album's realization. The soft dome ring tweeter does its job wonderfully well without any harshness or exaggeration in the high frequencies. The transition to the midrange transducer is seamless, with the midrange transducer demonstrating outstanding openness and dynamics. Its natural pulp cone has a very good weight/stiffness ratio, which ensures speed of execution while, in my opinion, avoiding the colorations often encountered in certain synthetic materials. The subwoofer with its rear-facing transducer also pays off. By playing around a bit with the speaker's placement, I was able to get deep, accurate

low frequencies without the usual airy tonality being expelled through a vent.

I continued my listening with the *Pocket Rhapsody II* album by the German jazz pianist **Frank Woeste**. This album's first version was released in 2016 under an American production. *Pocket Rhapsody II* was recorded in 2020 in Paris with French musicians. **Frank Woeste** himself has been living in Paris since 1999. For this opus, he asked the **Maîtrise des Hauts-de-Seine** children's choir, in which his son **Oscar** sings, to participate in some of his compositions. This collaboration adds a layer of emotion to this **Fender Rhodes** piano specialist's music. In **Frank Woeste's** arrangements, one can feel the influence of French jazz on top of his basic training in classical music. His electronic keyboards and especially his **Fender Rhodes** offer an incredible presence when reproduced by the *Lakmé* speaker.

On the second piece entitled *Parlance*, **Julien Herné's** electric bass and **Stéphane Galland's** drums are perfectly fused with a frank and dry impact of the drumsticks. The **Eric Vloeimans'** trumpet and **Robinson Khoury's** trombone, as well as the children's choir, are wonderfully highlighted. The *Lakmé's* tonal balance is among the most satisfying I have heard. It has a certain roundness that adds warmth to the music without becoming overweight, which would make it opaque. The low frequencies are just right while the midrange and high frequencies blend seamlessly with extraordinary coherence. In short, the **Verity Audio** *Lakmé* is not blustering, but rather respectful of music and its emotions. I believe that musicality is its motto.

Conclusion

In an increasingly protectionist international market, why don't we also adopt a more protectionist attitude towards our manufacturers? As an audiophile, it would be nice to collectively buy more products made in Quebec whenever possible.

Verity Audio is one of our flagships in the field of high-fidelity music reproduction and its products are very competitive with the best European and American achievements. At a price of \$17,500, the *Lakmé* speaker will certainly face stiff competition, but its build quality and timeless design make it a unique and highly desirable item. It is often said that the devil is in the details, in the case of *Lakmé* I can tell you that it is devilishly attractive while having a heavenly voice.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$17,495 / pair

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labor

Manufacture: Verity Audio, Tel.: 418.682.9940, verityaudio.com

Mediagraphy

Steven Wilson, *The Future Bites*, FLAC, 24 bits / 96 kHz

Frank Woeste, *Pocket Rhapsody II*, ACT 9917-2, FLAC, 24 bits

Harmonium symphonique, *Histoires sans Paroles*, OSM, WAV, 24 bits

William Jackson & Mackenzie, *Notes from a Hebridean Island*, FLAC, 16 bits

Dominique Fils-Aimée, *Nameless*, Ensoul Records

PROGRESSIVE ROCK

By RICHARD GUAY

TRANSATLANTIC

The Absolute Universe

www.transatlanticweb.com

Seven years after the release of *Kaleidoscope* (2014), here is the fifth album by *Transatlantic*, an international collective made up of four big figures of current progressive rock that are Americans **Neal Morse** (ex **Spock's Beard**) and **Mike Portnoy** (ex **Dream Theater**), Brit **Peter Dinklage** (**Marillion**) and Swede **Roine Stolt** (**The Flower Kings**). These characters, heavily involved in cult bands, solo albums or various reunion projects, all published at the speed of light, need no introduction and have nothing left to prove. This explains the popularity of *Transatlantic's* releases, which offer a guarantee of quality. We know in advance that it will be good, so there is no risk! This fifth album is true to its trademark, a superior level neoprogressive music, deep melodic lines, catchy melodies, complex instrumental passages, intoxicating symphonic atmosphere, in short, a formula that we know well and that offers the ideal platform to the virtuosos who take part and express themselves without constraint. And what about this fifth test? The whole will obviously not cause any surprise and bathes in a joyful conformism, alternating between **Flower Kings**-like variations and others, inspired by **Spock's Beard's** good old days. Moreover, this time the music lover is allowed to choose the environment where this desirable music will evolve. Two versions of *The Absolute Universe* are indeed available, a single album of 14 tracks and 60 min (*The Breath of Life*) as well as a double album of 18 extracts and lasting 90 min (*Forevermore*). The two products share their essential content, but have, nevertheless, several differences. The double album, which was conceived first, was almost the only one to be released. This long saga, a bit dark and dealing with the upsetting nature of life we all know, especially during the last

year, offers more stretched tracks, more daring passages, some bordering on the experimental, as well as some quite disconcerting surprises such as a nod to a **Beatles** song or a vocal arrangement straight out of an old *Gentle Giant*. On the other hand, the short version is neither a *remix* nor a re-release of the long version, but a new record completely produced and recorded from scratch. This time, we'll have the same tracks, but shorter and less vaporous, a better put together set and only the essential music, without too many surprises. For my part, I find the short version more fun and more natural to listen to. On the other hand, *Forevermore* also offers some interesting features. I believe that, at that point, it is a matter of taste. The important thing is not to miss this fifth **Transatlantic**.

CAST

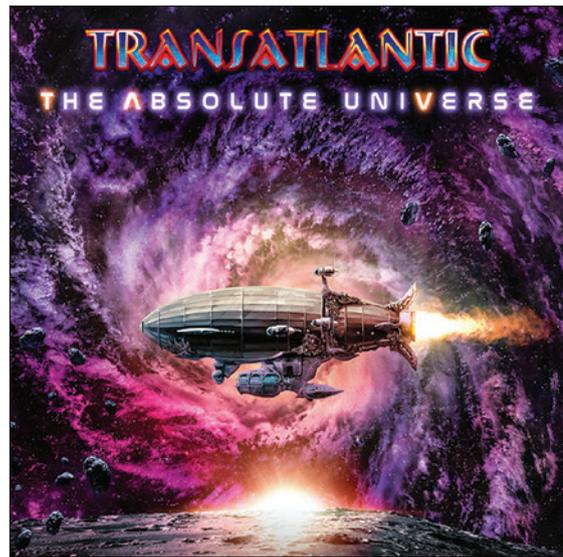
Vigesimus

www.castofficial.com

Cast is a Mexican band founded in 1994 and revolves around its founder **Luis Alfonso Vidales** (keyboards), always flanked by his faithful companion, **Jose Antonio Bringas** (drums and percussion). They are assisted by half a dozen collaborators on vocals, guitars and string and wind instruments. These *official guest members* always participate in a few albums before being replaced or even leaving and coming back later. This time, we must mention the presence of two soloists, **Bobby Vidales** and **Lupita Acuña** as well as a guitarist, a bassist and a violinist. First of all, let's mention that **Cast** is a band that has been under the radar for too long. Their curriculum vitae indicates a production of 20 albums in 27 years of

career including double albums, and several released in the same year. In addition, the recent albums are as well done as all the previous ones. Such a machine could not remain unmentioned any longer! **Cast** have been a British-inspired neo-progressive from the start and have no desire to change their style, much to the delight of their followers. In spite of some small Latin touches, their music is international and very well respects the prerogatives of the genre. The keyboards are incisive and omnipresent, the guitars are stretched, the symphonic base is solid, and there are many Middle Eastern variations, penetrating melodic lines, neutral voices placed in the foreground, etc. All the ingredients that have ensured a successful career for bands like **IQ** or **Pendragon** are well and truly present, with, of course, a little personal and all-Mexican touch, including the Latin guitar and **Bobby Vidales** and

Lupa Acuña's slightly theatrical voices (English lyrics on this album, but Spanish on several previous opuses) in order to establish, in a stable way, the **Cast brand**. The result is breathtaking and we are left with a hyper-playful and captivating set from start to finish. Even though I have not assimilated the entirety of this monumental discography, based on the opuses already listened to, including the exceptional *Power and Outcome* (2017), *Originallis* (2008) or the double album *Mosaic* (2006), I can say that *Vigesimus* (twentieth), with its 10 medium-sized and masterfully structured tracks, not only figures very well in this collection, but offers a degree of maturity still unmatched. **Luis Alfonso Vidales** is at the top of his art and offers us an opus musically close to perfection. Don't miss this invitation to join the party!



JAZZ

By CHRISTOPHE RODRIGUEZ

CARL MAYOTTE

Pop de Ville

Volume 1

Première Édition / Radio-Canada

In the pure lineage of jazz fusion, **Carl Mayotte**, whose model was undoubtedly **UZEB**, and to a lesser extent, the legendary group **Weather Report**, offers us electric jazz with a lot of *groove*. After *Fantosme* (released in 2019), we can say that this happy bassist has studied his peers a lot, but without copying too much. **Radio-Canada Revelation** for the year 2020-2021, recipient of the *Grand Prix de la relève* at the **Festi Jazz de Rimouski**, his career is well on its way. With *Pop de ville*, adorned with a decidedly *retro* cover, which is a tribute to a Japanese musical genre known as *City Pop*, he combines this style with a bracing jazz fusion with a host of guests, which gives the five tracks even more bite. While waiting for the reopening of the concert halls, let's be optimistic, this new release will give you wings, especially during the summer. To open the festivities, the first track, nicely named *Cocotte*, sets the tone. The bass is shimmering, the keyboards evoke a 70s sound, while trumpeter **Rémi Cormier** makes a nice nod to veteran **Benoit Glazer**. Much more rock in its essence, *Jaine* is a showcase

for guitarist **Gabriel Cyr** who opens the show, all wrapped up in keyboards with oh surprise! our friend, harmonica player **Lévy Bourbonnais**, whose mentor, the late **Toots Thielemans**, must be proud. After these punchy musical arabesques, **Carl Mayotte** becomes resolutely poetic with superb ballad *Tandy*, which precisely highlights his sense of melody. For *Chasse à l'homme*, we sail in the middle of a police procedural, to then conclude with *Mike Mercury*. This composition thunders with just the right amount of brass. Bright, progressive, yet with a nod to the past, this novelty is more than worth the trip.

LEE KONITZ

Leewise

1992

Jazzpar Winner

Storyville/ Naxos

Taken from us by Covid-19, alto saxophonist **Lee Konitz** (1927-2020) was perhaps the greatest exponent of cool jazz. In 1992, he received the prestigious *Jazzpar* award and thanks to the archives of the **Storyville** record company, we find him surrounded by nine musicians and under the direction of **Jean Sondergaard**. Having escaped the Parkinson influence, **Lee Konitz**

developed a diaphanous, almost ethereal sound, not unlike another renowned violinist, **Paul Desmond**. In twelve solid tracks, you are free to rediscover this unique sound around Stardust, *Body and Soul*, *Subconscious Lee*, a famous composition of **Konitz** that has become a standard, and the less known **Jenslee**, **Peggy Lee** or **Skygger**. A jewel in your disc library.

EDDIE BARCLAY

Arranger, performer & producer

1946-1962

Frémeaux & Associés/Naxos 3 CDs

Great figure of *show-business* and of the French Riviera, **Eddie Barclay's** (1921-2005) aura was inseparable from the French chanson, popular and jazz music. Friend of **Henri Salvador**, **Django Reinhardt**, **Boris Vian**, **Quincy Jones**, as well as the **Frank Ténort / Daniel Filipachi** tandem (for *those who love jazz on Europe 1*), **Eddie Barclay** was the man for the job. With these three discs from the Frémeaux & Associés vaults, what a journey we make in music and song! Around his

record companies (**Riviera**, **Blue Star**, **Belair**), we find the guitarist **Django Reinhardt** (*Blues For Barclay*), **Les chaussettes noires**, **Leo Ferré**, **Dalida**, and very high quality good-natured *swing* when **Eddie** summons his big band. You'll be tapping your feet or dancing to *Chesterfield Boogie*, *Czardas Tango* and *April in Paris*. Quite delicious and also nostalgic.

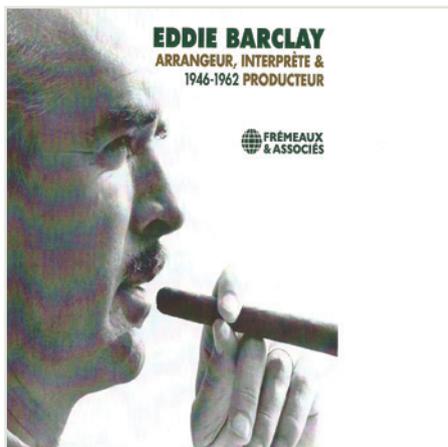
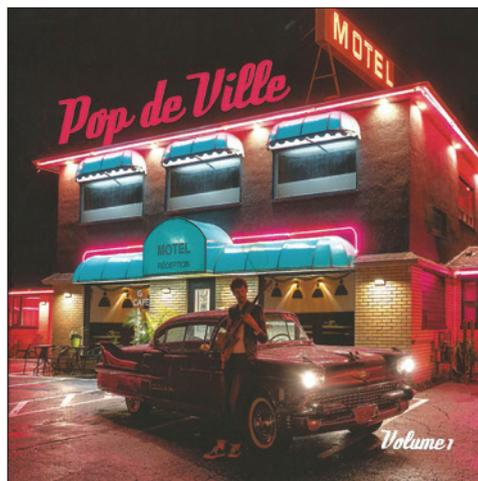
ENRICO PIERANUNZI

Bert Joris

Afterglow

Challenge Records / Naxos

A little bit of sweetness to complete this festival column. Fine stylist and poet of the 88 keys, Italian pianist **Enrico Pieranunzi** invited trumpet player **Bert Joris** to a dialogue. Disregarding the rhythm section, evoking what the late trumpeter / bugler **Don Goldie** did in another era, our two privateers of the blue note offer personal, often touching compositions, such as *Siren's Lounge*, *Millie*, *What's What* or *The Real You*. One day, when festivals come back, it would be a great pleasure to hear them.





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