

TED

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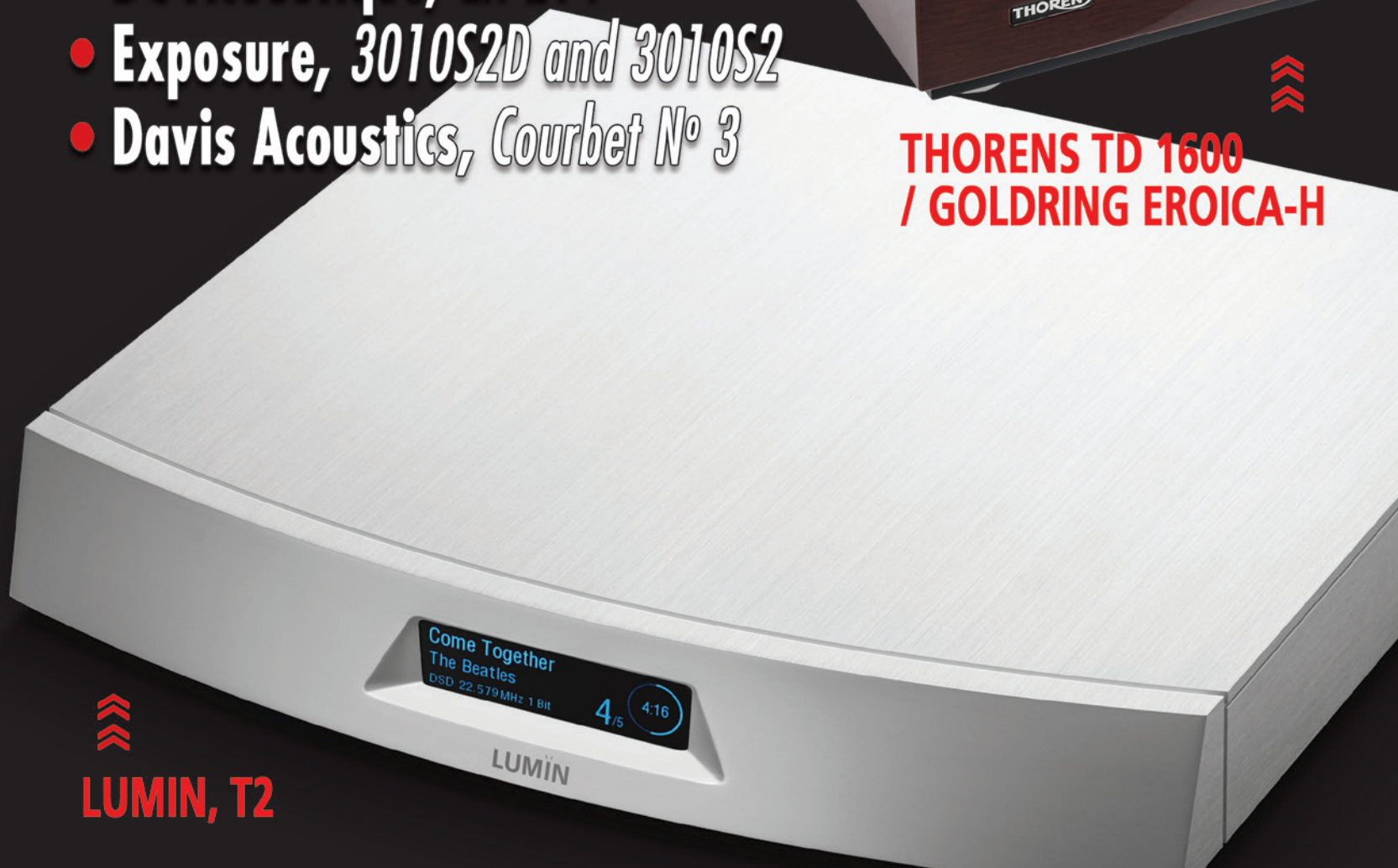
MAY - JUNE 2021
VOLUME 2 EDITION 03

»»» DIGITAL EDITION

- **Grado, Hemp**
- **Sennheiser, HD 450BT**
- **Rotel, Michi X3**
- **BC Acoustique, EX-214**
- **Exposure, 3010S2D and 3010S2**
- **Davis Acoustics, Courbet N° 3**



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EDITORIAL

A little bit of love...

In *elementary school*, we were told, as part of our religious education – I'm not hiding my age – that **God is Love**. Far be it from me to doubt this teaching, and right now I realize that it is obvious that with everything the whole planet is going through, we all really need a *little* love. I suggest you check out the lyrics of a sentimental song by **Julio Iglesias** called *J'ai besoin d'un peu d'amour**. This song was not written recently, of course, but its lyrics reflect the need of everyone to be in the presence of their loved ones, which has been impossible for almost a year now ... impossible to touch, to embrace, whether to console or for the simple pleasure of seeing each other. Just as impossible to get together, to see each other, to talk to each other in person, and not through some smart device, has become almost essential ... at least for our mental health. But as we seem to be getting closer to this goal thanks to vaccines, to be together and not just in a bubble, family or otherwise, let's all remain patient and not abandon health measures. The future, more or less close, will prove to be all the more beautiful and pleasant.

In the meantime, I suggest you relax by reading **TED Magazine**, as our contributors have unearthed some very interesting products. The electronic devices are in the spotlight (2 integrated amplifiers and a combined preamplifier and mono block amp are presented for test benches). As for the listening part, this one is normally done rather from acoustic speakers and there is a test bench for a French brand whose model is nevertheless rather affordable. For those who prefer or need to listen with headphones, two different brands and models were also the subject of a short article by one of our contributors.

Sources have not been forgotten either, as a network player as well as a vinyl turntable have been the subject of a very interesting article.

To spoil yourself a little, there's nothing like tasting a good colourful and flavourful dish accompanied by an excellent wine. The *Buon Gusto* section will allow you to discover an easy and comforting recipe as well as two French wines from **Château Loudenne**.

The music of your choice can accompany your meal or follow it, depending on your preference. Our staff in the *Rhythm & Music* section always manages to find new and/or talented artists.

Good reading, good listening and let us remain vigilant and patient. We will arrive at a new *reality* where everyone can pick up where they left off last year. It will really get better!

Lucie Beauchamp

Co-publisher & Public Relations Director

CLASSICAL MUSIC

By CHRISTOPHE HUSS

FEATURED

SERGEÏ RACHMANINOV

Symphony No. 1. Symphonic dances.
The Philadelphia Orchestra, Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

DG 483 9839.

Interpretation: ***

Technique: ****

Have musical ideals changed that much? Or is it the culture and values of the commentators? Aesthetically very close to **Charles Dutoit's** **Decca** recordings with the same orchestra, **Yannick Nézet-Séguin's** **Rachmaninov** has received a lot of praise, whereas his predecessor's recording, a little more than 20 years ago, was only politely received for being clean and smooth, very well constructed and luxurious on the orchestral level, but inoffensive compared to the already very tormented personality of the young **Rachmaninov** (*1st Symphony*), then tortured by the idea of death in the last orchestral work (*Symphonic Dances*).

Obviously, in this first volume of a future complete works, everything is superb and even more detailed than in Dutoit's, but beyond the beautiful orchestral playing, the dull anguish, the abysses are to be found in Ashkenazy's (**Decca**), Svetlanov's (Melodiya and Exton) and, more recently, Jurowski's (LPO) and Petrenko's (Warner). If you follow everything **Yannick Nézet-Séguin** does, you can buy this very nice CD. But he has already done much better.

EUGÈNE YSAÏE KERSON LEONG

Six Sonatas For Solo Violin

Alpha 455

Interpretation: ****

Technique: ****

Superb consecration for **Kerson Leong** whom we know since the age of 13, when he won the **Yehudi Menuhin Competition** for participants under

16 years old. This was in 2010. Everything seemed easy then. The most difficult part was to come, the passage from the status of child prodigy who amazes to that of an artist who interests. After a short period of hesitation, at the age of 17, a decision was made to move from Ottawa to Brussels. At the **Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel**, **Kerson Leong** became **Augustin Dumay's** protégé and we saw the prodigy become a great violinist and a true artist. Several concert performances in Montreal have attested to this. For his first major recording, he tackles a monument, the *6 Sonatas for solo violin* by **Eugène YsaÏe**. He methodically sculpts them, exploring the dynamic gaps. **Carl Talbot's** recording, done at **Domaine Forget**, relays this meticulous work from a distance, as does the clear sound obtained by **Kerson Leong** from the **Guarnerius** loaned by the **Canimex Foundation**. We have known interpretations that were more aggressive (**Zimmermann**, **Zehetmair**, **Tianwa Yang**), but hardly more spidery.

CAMERON CROZMAN (cello), PHILIP CHIU (piano).

"Tapeo"

Works for cello and piano
by **Cassado**, **de Falla**, **Ravel**, **Turina**, **Granados**, **Albeniz**, **Ginastera**, **Ponce** and **Guerrero**.

Atma ACD2 2820.

Interpretation: *****

Technique: *****

Fantastic! By dint of seeing the Quebec labels chaining together very decent *business card* records, but without any

transcendent artistic scope, we were desperate to hear such a CD. This program is (or should be) the propulsion of a very remarkable Canadian talent into the great world of international artists. **Cameron Crozman** is far from being unknown. The **Canada Council for the Arts** instrument bank has been lending this **OSM Standard Life Competition** winner high quality instruments for many years. **Crozman** had the excellent idea of completing his cello studies in a sanctuary, the **Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris**, where he also studied chamber music. *Tapeo*, which takes its name from a bar in Barcelona, is a program perfectly built around Spanish music. Beyond the accuracy and the instrumental beauty, we hear with **Cameron Crozman** a remarkable intelligence of the musical lines. There is also a real temperament that distinguishes the business card CD from a real artistic legacy. This is sure to be one of the great Canadian records of 2021.

RECORD OF THE MONTH

PIOTR ILITCH TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphony No. 5 Francesca da Rimini.

Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich,

Paavo Järvi.

Alpha 659.

Interpretation: *****

Technique: *****

This CD is in some ways the counter-example to **Yannick Nézet-Séguin's** *1st Rachmaninov Symphony*. **Paavo Järvi's** obsession seems to be to make the music speak beyond the notes

of the score and the sounds of the orchestra. **Tchaikovsky's** *5th Symphony* is therefore a great emotional experience where everything is weighed, experienced and embodied. The *Fifth* becomes, psychologically, a logical continuation of the *Fourth*. The latter is a symphony of loneliness and the prohibition to taste happiness. The next step, the *5th*, ratifies a renunciation which, in spite of jolts and impulses, locks **Tchaikovsky** in darkness. This whirlwind, which would lead to his death in the *Pathétique Symphony* (*No. 6*), was relentlessly described by **Ferenc Fricsay** in his 1949 **DG** recording. Less radical and terse, **Paavo Järvi** follows a parallel path and emphasizes relentless percussion, blistering brass and sharp bowing, culminating in a sublime *2nd* movement. From beginning to end this *5th* is organized as a relentless process of repression of the last **Chaikovskian** outbursts. In this perspective, the final *Allegro vivace* is, above all, fierce and threatening, **Francesca da Rimini** completing this rare experience.

SOUND RECORDING OF THE MONTH

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Chamber Symphonies op. 73a & 83a.

Orchestre de chambre de Lausanne,

Joshua Weilerstein.

Fuga Libera, FUG, 769.

Interpretation: *****

Technique: *****

The recording space of the month can be a place to discuss the options



available to a sound recordist when faced with an aesthetic problem. We opened this debate in November 2020 with **MDG's** CD of **Liszt** paraphrases, which favoured a very open piano sound with clean high notes. In the case of **Shostakovich's** chamber symphonies, we are dealing with quartets transcribed for string orchestra. There are two ways of dealing with this enlargement of sound: analyzing the orchestra and privileging an immediate impact or inscribing it in a room. In other words, to conceive a purely discographic sound product or to convey a realistic experience close to the concert.

In his recording made at the beginning of July 2019 at the **Métropole** venue in Lausanne, **Renaud Millet-Lacombe** chooses the second philosophy without sacrificing the readability of the works, the transcriptions of **Shostakovich's Quartets Nos. 3 and 4**, remarkably conducted here by the **Rafael Payare's** brother-in-law, the **OSM's** new music director. Anyone who wants the pizzicato to jump out at them will not buy this record. On the other hand, those who want to know what it sounds like in real life will find here a little gem of realism.

THE DEAL OF THE MONTH

RICHARD STRAUSS

Orchestral Works.

Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich,

David Zinman.

Sony, 19075945482.

Interpretation: ****

Technique: ****

The reference in **Richard Strauss's** orchestral work remains and will remain **Rudolf Kempe (Warner)**. That said, it is now possible to find, for little more than \$20, a 7-CD boxed set of important recordings made between 2000 and 2003 by **David Zinman** in Zurich for **Arte Nova**. This label was then part of the **BMG** group and became part of **Sony Classical**, hence this reissue. The **Zinman-Zurich** duo enjoyed a

strong reputation for their complete **Beethoven Symphonies**, the first to be based on the new **Bärenreiter** scores. **Zinman** has recorded the complete **Beethoven** concertos.

In Strauss, we find **Zinman** the pragmatist, a conductor who advances more than he savours. **Zinman** is thus the opposite of **Karajan's** warm lyricism and will please those who seek to get straight to the point (indeed, the *Battle of A Hero's Life* is memorable). If you're looking for slovenly complacency, you won't find it here. If you want great value in logical and purposeful interpretations, go for it.

BOX SETS OF THE MONTH

RICHARD BONYNGE

"Complete Ballet Recordings"

Decca, 45 CD, 4850781.

Interpretation: *****

Technique: **** and *****

For the Australian conductor **Richard Bonynges** 90th birthday, **Decca** has assembled his complete ballet music recordings: 45 CDs devoted to the Romantic ballet, with many firsts on the disc, especially for the benefit of the French ballet with works such as *Adam's Le diable à quatre*, **Offenbach's** *Le papillon*, **Messager's** *Les deux pigeons*, **Auber's** *Marco Spada*, and **Massenet's** *Carillon* and *Cigale*. We are obviously not going to binge listen to 10 CDs in a row, because the dance steps are standardized and, therefore, the type of music ends up being repetitive, but it is everywhere a very pleasant music to listen to that we had to preserve and record. It should also be noted that this is much more than a box set of the month, but rather a box set for eternity, because no equivalent product has existed in the history of phonographic publishing. On the other hand, since **Bonynges** benefited from the (bygone) important financial resources of the record companies from the 1960s to the 1990s, and given the quality of the orchestras at his disposal and the famous **Decca**

recordings, we are not about to see the equivalent. In addition to some rarities, the set contains the 3 great ballets by **Tchaikovsky**, the two great ones by **Delibes**, *Adam* and *Minkus*.

"NEW YEAR'S CONCERT: THE COMPLETE WORKS"

Vienna Philharmonic.

Sony, 26 CD, 19439764562.

Interpretation: **** and *****

Technique: *** to *****

This unexpected boxed set is intended for fans of Viennese waltzes who do not collect *New Year's Concerts* year after year because they find them redundant. In practice, the organizers of this concert, broadcast in nearly 80 countries, have made it a point of honour for many years to introduce unpublished works that swell the catalogue of works and allow this unexpected transversal box set of all the scores played on this occasion. **Sony** called on **Clemens Hellsberg**, first violin, as a consultant in the choice of interpretations and collaborated with the labels (**DG**, **Decca**, **Warner**) holding the rights to the concerts of the vintages that do not belong to them. Each work, even the most famous, appears only once, *Emperor Waltz* and *Radetzky Marsch* by **Harnoncourt**, *The Blue Danube* by **Mehta**, for example. The box set is enriched by a nice CD realized in a small committee by musicians of the **Philharmonic**. Obviously, if you collect concerts over the years, you have it all, but not so selected, ordered and indexed.

OTHER NEW RELEASES

GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 4.

Anna Lucia Richter,

Bamberg Symphony, Jakub Hrusa.

Accentus, ACCC, 30532.

Interpretation: *****

Technique: ****

The **Bamberg Symphony** is made up of the musicians of the **German Philharmonic Orchestra of Prague**, an orchestra with a long tradition of

mixing Czech and German cultures, who fled in extremis, just before being lynched by the local population, during the Prague uprising in 1945. The **Bamberg Orchestra** is connected to **Mahler** through its historical conductor **Joseph Keilberth** and has recorded the complete symphonies under the direction of **Jonathan Nott** for **Tudor**. Its current musical director is **Jakub Hrusa**. This 4th *Symphony*, prepared for a tour in the summer of 2020, arouses interest through its refinement. **Mahler's** interpretation has been very strong for the last two or three decades, with conductors emphasizing counter-chords and accents in large strokes. **Hrusa** adopts a much more fluid and flowing approach, which suits this symphony of happiness and wonder very well. The choice of **Anna Lucia Richter** corresponds to the desire to find a woman who, in the spirit of **Mahler**, sings without vibrato, a bit like a child.

HEITOR VILLA-LOBOS

"Choral Transcriptions."

São Paulo Symphony Choir,

Valentina Peleggi.

Naxos, 8.574 286.

Interpretation: ***

Technique: ****

We are in the presence of an *a cappella* choral disc, i.e. without instrumental or orchestral accompaniment. What we are hearing was completely unknown, for no one knew that **Heitor Villa Lobos** had transformed into choral works *Preludes* and *Fugues* from **Bach's** *Well-Tempered Clavier*, **Schumann's** *Reverie*, **Chopin's** *Waltz* in C-sharp minor, a *Prelude* by **Rachmaninoff**, or the 2nd movement of **Beethoven's** *Pathétique Sonata*. These adaptations are made for the pleasure of choral sounds, not to push the voices to their limits, as they were intended for teachers' choirs in Brazil. The **São Paulo Choir** is not the most refined in the world, but that does not prevent us from enjoying this strange curiosity.



Trends Electronics & Design – An Encore

AN INSTALLATION BT STEREO PLUS

A sumptuous residence located on one of the shores of the St.-Lawrence River...

By LUCIE BEAUCHAMP

Spring was a long time coming, but the sun was shining during our last visit of a home automation installation made by one of the **Stereo Plus** stores. This very large residence is located in the Centre-du-Québec region. It overlooks the majestic St. Lawrence River and took about seven months to build. It meets the needs and desires of a young semi-retired couple. They oversaw the project from start to finish and had the wisdom to consult with the home automation department to try to plan everything electronically from the initial plans. This way, the owners were in good hands and knew that the installation plan would go smoothly. As for the selection of materials, the couple was involved from start to finish. Of course, he received help from a designer, but in the end, he had the final say. As it should be. Let's take a look at the different areas that have been automated in order to simplify the daily life of the occupants of this sumptuous home.







The exterior appearance of the residence is breathtaking. All the faces are covered with silica stones. This stone's main characteristic is its colour, which seems to change depending on whether the weather is sunny or cloudy. Under a certain light, its colour seems rather grayish while under another, it seems rather white beige, even pinkish beige. This enhances the exterior beauty of the house, which is quite large. The land on which it was built is large enough, but not out of proportion, and it is lined with a few more or less mature trees and firs. Once unlocked, from a distance, a solid wrought iron fence allows access to the house. At the main entrance door, there is also a tiny camera allowing the occupants to see who they are opening to.

Let's go inside

As shown in the beautiful photos, the materials chosen for the interior of the house are wood (mainly cherry), stone (terrazzo, mosaic, etc.), metal (steel, wrought iron) and glass. Particular care was given to the







lighting, combining recessed lights and standard light fixtures.

Main living spaces

The kitchen is vast, allowing for the preparation of everyday meals as well as those for special occasions. The work area, with its own sink, is highly functional and allows you to proceed with the various stages of food preparation without having the impression of suffocating. A superb kitchen for those who like to entertain and be efficient at family functions or any other occasion. It should be noted that, because of the very high ceiling in the dining room section, the installation of two lights above the very large **Dion** cherry wood table required a lot of agility and skill. Responding to a passion for wine and various other beverages, a large glassed-in wine cellar reveals the choices available to guests already seated. To the left of the cellar, we note the contrasting colours that decorate the whole. As for the living room, the fireplace surround, made of dark grey ceramic stones, offers a breathtaking view thanks to the



contrast of colours and textures. The walls are of a sandy colour varying from beige to gray depending on the brightness provided by the huge windows. A long white leather sofa, two charcoal gray leather armchairs, a pearl gray accent rug, a coffee table and a side table, made of wood and glass, complete the ensemble. Since the living room is a place that encourages conversation, the homeowners chose to install a television with in-wall speakers on a side wall rather than above the fireplace because they wanted to keep that wall unadorned, since it is the main focal point.

The master bedroom is very large and the lighting is always appropriate. As in the rest of the house, the choice of pale taupe-beige complements the steel gray of the decorative accessories, such as the bedspread, softening the whole and inviting relaxation and rest. The locations of the bathroom and *walk-in* closet offer an interesting look. Both rooms have sliding doors for maximum use of space. When you enter the *walk-in* closet, the motion detector activates the lighting.





The bathroom, adjacent to the bedroom, is very large and has a modern freestanding bathtub above which a fireplace provides an ideal and comforting temperature. A large walk-in shower completes the room. The two sink-mirror areas allow the couple to get ready at the same time, but without interfering with each other.

Relaxation and home cinema spaces

On the upper floor, we have access to a huge room that serves as a relaxation area. One can read while enjoying a drink of one's choice, or watch television or play a game of pool with family and/or friends. It should be noted that the walls are decorated with various and very interesting paintings. The home theatre room is beautifully decorated. The choice of colours was made specifically for its use. The carpet, composed of different appliquéés of various colours and textures, recalling the rectangular shape of the acoustic panels used on the side walls, shows a clever attention to detail that is very pleasant. The positioning of the 4K projector is almost totally eclipsed as it blends in well with the decor of the room, and the choice of black for the ceiling contributes to this integration. It is easy to combine darker and lighter colours without detracting from the

enjoyment of watching a movie. *LED* lighting adorns the interior of the cup holder and the underside of the chairs. This light can be turned on or off according to the person's choice.

Storage of electronic devices

In this installation, the owners concluded that the best place to install the major devices required to meet the various home automation needs—controllers, decoders, amplifiers, preamplifiers and processors of all kinds—had to be out of sight. These are therefore located in the basement, inside a room reserved for the other mechanical devices of the house. The electronic devices are adequately installed in a double storage cabinet that can be easily moved by wheels, allowing the technician to access them without problems.

Conclusion

It is always preferable for anyone wishing to install a home automation system in their future home to consult a specialized store, as soon as the new home is planned. In this installation, the **Control4** system was chosen to manage all the various lighting, audiovisual distribution, surveillance and security systems, etc. Of course, most

installers can also provide the various electronic devices according to the customer's needs and choices (amplifiers, televisions, in-wall/in-ceiling speakers, projectors, etc.). What is important is the versatility of the selected system (**Control4**) and the fact that it can be upgraded, which adds a certain security, knowing that the system will always meet the current and future needs of customers. By dealing with specialized stores and installers, the customer is assured of receiving outstanding service. The team of technicians in charge of the installation can often advise or even concoct custom solutions for certain unforeseen aspects of an installation, as was the case for the large windows that the couple decided, after the fact, to dress with mechanized covers when the installation was completed.

Congratulations to this charming couple, as their home is very welcoming and warm. We can only salute the impeccable work of the team of installers from the **Stéréo Plus** store in Trois-Rivières who received the home automation mandate leading to this magnificent achievement. Kudos to all involved – a true masterpiece!

List of the main equipments

Management and control system

- Control4 Processor model HC800 (1)
- Control4 Processor model HC300 (1)
- Control4 Processor model HC200 (2)
- Control4 connection processor (1)
- Control4 7" touchscreens (5)
- Control4 Smart Remote Controls (2)
- Control4 Camera with outdoor intercom system (1)
- Control4 Opening management modules for garage doors (2)

Lighting system

- Control4 lighting dimmers (22)
- Control4 light switches (12)
- Control4 multifunctional keyboards (8)
- Control4 motion detectors (5)

Audio distribution system

- Control4 16 inputs audio matrix (1)
- Control4 8 zones amplifiers (2)
- Control4 Airplay audio distribution processor (1)
- Monitor Audio 8" In-Ceiling Speakers (16)
- Monitor Audio 8" In-Wall Speakers (2)
- Monitor Audio external speakers (4)
- Monitor Audio 6.5" stereo in-wall speakers (2)
- Paradigm Millenia in-wall speakers (2)

Video distribution system

- Atlona HDMI 8X8 distribution matrix (1)
- Control4 Media Player (1)
- Videotron HD decoders (3)
- Videotron PVR decoder / recorder (1)
- Sony 1080p Blu-ray player (1)
- Samsung 55" TVs (2)
- Sony 46" TVs (2)
- Toshiba 40" TV (1)
- Omnimount motorized TV stand (1)

Home Theatre

- Pioneer Elite SC model 9.2 channel receiver (1)
- Pioneer Elite Blu-ray 3D/1080p player (1)
- Panasonic 2:35:1 full HD projector (1)
- Cirrus 2:35:1 fixed projection screen (1)
- Panamax surge protection and filtration (1)
- Monitor Audio Gold Series centre speaker (1)
- Monitor Audio Gold Series front speakers (2)
- Monitor Audio 12" 500 W subwoofer (1)
- AudioQuest high fidelity cabling

Motorized sunshades

- Somfy Motorized sunshades (14).



GRADO HEMP HEADPHONES

A WARM TONE FOR YOUR EARS

» BY JEAN-DENIS DOYLE

The **Grado Hemp** headphones are certainly one of the most pleasant surprises of 2020. Available in limited edition, they are made of hemp wood and are unlike any other headphones on the market. Their sound is quite unique. The look and presentation of the Grado Hemp will surely become a topic of conversation and admiration. So let's take a look at this pair of headphones that could well become a **Grado** classic.



Grado is above all the story of a family of audio enthusiasts. Founded by **Joseph Grado**, the company made its debut in 1953 on a kitchen table in the New York suburb of Brooklyn. The small company began by making cartridges and tone arms for vinyl turntables, then diversified into headphones in the 1990s. The **Grado** family still assembles its products by hand in Brooklyn. It is now run by **John Grado** and his son, **Jonathan Grado**, who is responsible for marketing. A complete line of cartridges and headphones is exported worldwide. Although **Grado** has an extensive line of headphones to suit every budget, the company has always enjoyed producing limited editions of its products. We will particularly remember the **Joseph Grado Signature** model that some recording studios now sell at a high price. And what about the *White Headphone*, this beautiful model also offered in limited edition to commemorate the **Beatles' White Album**?

For the *Hemp* model, **Grado** had wanted, for a little while, to try and make a model of which the resonance box would use hemp wood. This plant, which is similar to the cannabis plant but contains no *THC*, has recognized acoustic properties. Indeed, the idea behind the *Hemp* was to create a pair of headphones whose warm tone would be, in good part, provided by the hemp wood resonance box. In addition, hemp is a fast-growing ecological plant whose fiber is used in many applications. Thus were born the *Hemp* headphones, a limited edition model that may well be a permanent fixture in the **Grado** catalogue.

Technical Description

Grado's Hemp headphones are dynamic type headphones. With a 98 db output and a low 38 ohms impedance, the *Hemp* will be really easy to power, even with the headphone jack of any mobile device. Of course, a quality amplifier will allow you to get the most out of it. They are equipped with already broken-in transducers (according to **Grado**, they are *de-stressed*...) and these are



matched with a half-decibel tolerance.

Hemp headphones are open-backed, which means people near you won't have trouble hearing the music you're listening to, so much so that they can easily distinguish the track that's playing. You should therefore take this into account before choosing this model.

The *Hemp* are headphones that are placed on the ear, which is an interesting advantage, since it allows the earpiece to be smaller. Like all **Grado** models, the earpiece can rotate 360 degrees, allowing them to be stored flat, ideal for the traveller. The *Hemp's* cable is quite substantial in length and contains no less than eight conductors in order to obtain a signal transfer without any loss. An adapter that allows to switch from 3.5 mm stereo to 6.3 mm stereo is provided. However, the *Hemp's* most distinctive feature is its hemp wood outer casings. Note that the interior is made of maple. This combination of wood species was patiently developed in the same way as a musical instrument, in order for the rigidity of maple to allow securely holding the transducer and the magical timbre of hemp wood for the resonance box. Relatively thin foam pads simply fit over the headphone housing. These pads can be replaced very easily. As the foam is rather rigid, the comfort remains rather average. On the other hand, they have the good fortune of not being too hot, which avoids sweating when wearing the *Hemp* for long periods.

Listening Impressions

I've had the opportunity to listen using *Hemp* with a good variety of music sources,

ranging from the headphone jack on my **Samsung** phone to a professional **SPL** headphone amplifier. The results of each session have been excellent. These headphones are true chameleons with the ability to easily adapt to the device they are connected to. I started my listening with the album *Utopies* by **Hadouk Trio**. The bass is simply phenomenal without, however, becoming too intrusive. These headphones have the knack of always finding the right tone to reproduce the music. On this **Hadouk Trio** album, there is a small instrument called the doudouk, which can sometimes become quite incisive. With the *Hemp*, it goes by smoothly with a creamy and soft side. If I had to make an analogy with a classic speaker model, I would say that the *Hemp* are the **Harbeth Compact 7** of headphones. With a superb timbre, the mid-range frequencies are perfectly fluid. The treble is perfectly balanced and the overall tone is always warm. The *Hemp* have a rather unique quality that can only be found on these headphones. It is a sensation, that of being directly in contact with the artist's performance. On this **Hanne Boel** excerpt, *After Midnight* is delivered without any setback or delay, which provides a rather addictive *live feeling*. Some audiophiles may find this a little uncomfortable at times, but I love it! No false stereophonic effect floating in the void, everything happens as if my neurons were directly connected to the outputs of my *DAC*. The most impressive thing is that the *Hemp* renders a fabulous amount of

GRADO HEMP HEADPHONES



detail. They manage to do all this, while releasing timbres with a beautiful warmth. A feat that only the experience, know-how and careful work of **Grado's** craftsmen can achieve.

Conclusion

The *Hemp* are probably the most sensational headphones **Grado** has released in a long time. For now, they are only available in limited edition. In my opinion, **Grado** would be well advised to include them in their regular catalogue. These headphones offer an interesting mix of qualities. They're small enough to be portable, they're easy to amplify and they'll connect you to your music no matter what the source. And I know that their warm and well-measured tone will make many people fall in love with them. So run to your **Grado** dealer to try them out, before they run out, and let yourself be charmed by the warmth of hemp wood.

« The bass is simply phenomenal without, however, becoming too intrusive. These headphones have the knack of always finding the right tone to reproduce the music. On this **Hadouk Trio** album, there is a small instrument called the dou-douk, which can sometimes become quite incisive. With the *Hemp*, it goes by smoothly with a creamy and soft side. »

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: 599 \$

Distributor: Grado Canada, Tel. : 514.276.6231,

<https://gradocanada.ca>

Mediagraphy

Hadouk Trio, Utopies, Naïve, NV 809411

Hanne Boel, Boel Best, Fichier Tidal

MICHI

BY ROTEL



Monitor Audio PL300 II



"We are in the presence of a remarkable achievement, of a masterpiece."

- Adrien Rouah, TED Magazine, March / April 2020

Michi features 5 models engineered on the strength, history, and heritage of Rotel with a revolutionary design architecture, delivering extraordinary sonic performance.

"With Rotel and Monitor Audio, we salute the music perfectly transcribed in our listening rooms, salute the rigor of design and manufacturing and salute the value for money - highly justified."

- Adrien Rouah, TED Magazine, March / April 2020



New X3 and X5 Available Now!



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ROTEL

A WIRELESS, INTELLIGENT, VERSATILE AND MUSICAL HEADSET

By JEAN-DENIS DOYLE

Life works in mysterious ways. I was in the middle of looking for a wireless and connected product, for a test bench. That's when my wife arrived with the **Sennheiser HD-450BT**. Look what I got as a corporate gift for Christmas! she said. As she asks me what I think about it, I say: it's hard to say just like that, but it seems really interesting! Indeed, the **Sennheiser HD-450BT** headset is a product whose features and various functions are likely to appeal to a wide audience. As we'll see, audiophiles looking for a wireless headset with great musicality will fall in love with its state-of-the-art features. The release of this headset comes at a time when the new reality of remote work requires that we equip ourselves properly. So let's take a look at what it offers.

Sennheiser is a German manufacturer that needs no introduction. Founded in 1945 by **Fritz Sennheiser**, the company has developed an unparalleled expertise in the field of headphones and microphones. **Sennheiser** manufactures every conceivable type of headset for every possible application, both in the home and in the office. **Sennheiser** is not new to wireless technology, as it has been using it for a long time for its microphones. As for the **HD-450BT** headset, **Sennheiser** uses the *Bluetooth 5.0* communication standard. This standard, widely used on the majority of mobile devices, provides reliable data transfer quality and a data rate of 1.4 Mb/s per second. Then, this headset uses smart technologies, a powerful noise reduction system, and some other handy tricks.





Technical Description

The *HD-450BT* is a closed type wireless headset. The ear cushions go around the ear and ensure optimal isolation from the outside world. Available in black and white, the *HD-450BT* is foldable, reducing the space it takes up in your bag. This headset has a *USB-C* format connector to charge the lithium battery in fast mode. It takes about two hours to fully recharge. Once recharged, the battery has a life of thirty hours, which is quite impressive. For situations where a wireless connection, in *Bluetooth* mode, is not available, a second stereo 3.5 mm jack allows the headset to be connected with the supplied cable. The **Sennheiser** *HD-450BT* has a wide frequency response that ranges from 18 Hz to 22,000 Hz, which should result in a deep bass and a crystal clear treble. This headset is also equipped with a microphone perfectly calibrated for the human voice. The *HD-450BT* supports the main *codecs* used for wireless transmissions: *SBC*, *AAC*, *APTX* and *APTX low latency*.

SENNHEISER HD 450BT WIRELESS HEADPHONES

Start-up and operation

You will first need to install the **Sennheiser Smart Control** app, in your smartphone or tablet. This application, available on *Android* and **Apple**, is essential. It only manages the headset's firmware updates as well as tone controls. Yes, you read correctly, you will be able to adjust the *HD-450BT's* tone as you wish. All the *HD-450BT's* controls are on the right earpiece. It will take some time and a little learning to master all the functions instinctively. Let's start with the multi-function button that controls song selection and incoming calls. Indeed, it is possible to advance to the next piece of music or to return to it only by toggling this button! Pretty cool feature. This even applies to **YouTube videos**. Another small button activates the ambient noise reduction function. I must admit that when it comes to noise reduction, the *HD-450BT* headset is remarkably effective. It also has a volume control that is mainly used to set the maximum volume allowed. Once on the head, the *HD450-BT* headset is comfortable enough to be worn for long periods.

Listening Impressions

I did most of my listening using *Bluetooth*. The tone, when the headset is adjusted at the factory, is rather warm with a very present bass. By adjusting it with the tone controls, I arrived at a tonal balance that suited me perfectly. For a *Bluetooth* headset, the diffusion's finesse is surprising and the overall sound is not aggressive. It is capable of beautiful transparency and excellent detail. The ambience is well restored and the stereophonic effect is credible. Of course, that the **Sennheiser** will not replace my reference earphones for an *audiophile* listening. However, I could easily imagine spending a day working, listening to music, watching videos and receiving calls with the *HD-450BT*, without any problems.



Conclusion

The **Sennheiser HD-450BT** headset is a really interesting product for anyone looking for quality wireless headphones. It sounds great and is equipped with many essential features for remote work. The price is reasonable and the quality is there, what more could you want?

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$199.95

Distributor: Sennheiser Canada,
Tel: 1 952.392.0981;

<https://en-ca.sennheiser.com/hd-450-bt>

PROGRESSIVE ROCK

By RICHARD GUAY

SONUS UMBRA

A Sky Full of Ghosts

<https://shadowsmadeofsound.com/>;
<https://gotsonus.bandcamp.com/>
Sonus Umbra, a band founded in Mexico in the 1990s by bassist **Luis Nasser**, was quite active between 2000 and 2010 having released no less than three outstanding albums, four including the first one, released under another name. One remembers *Spiritual Vertigo* (2003) with nostalgia, a real treasure, that I had frantically praised in this magazine. **Nasser** took advantage of the new craze for progressive rock to create a band that would skillfully blend this musical style's British origins with Latin rhythms. Unfortunately, after *Digging for Zeroes* (2005), the band's first breakup occurred. Radio silence ensued for eight long years, which did not bode well for the future. Fortunately, in 2013, after a move to the United States, our bassist revived the **Sonus Umbra** machine and gave us three wonderful albums, including the latest, *A Sky Full of Ghosts*. Although *Winter Soulstice* (2013) and *Beyond the Panopticon* (2016) broke significantly with their very Latino earlier style, these records were, nevertheless, a valid evolution for a project that everyone

wanted to see reborn. This change in tone was largely due to all the original musicians' replacement, including those of Mexican nationality, by an American team composed of half a dozen artists with a different musical culture who added their touch of jazz, blues, funk and soul to **Nasser's** already rich material. *A Sky Full of Ghosts*, on the other hand, picks up where they left off in 2005 and plunges us back into the swirling atmosphere of the South with a frankly frenzied content where dry, Brazilian-style guitars mix with catchy melodies, lively choruses and complex instrumental passages. **Poston's**, **McCaskey's** and **Tillotson's** innovative guitars, **Steve Royce's** bewitching flutes and multi-flavoured keyboards, as well as **Nasser's** thundering bass guitar form a spicy and delicate dish at the same time. The vocal arrangements, delivered by five of the seven musicians, are elaborate and ring true in this universe touching on esotericism, fantasy and the macabre, themes dear to **Nasser**. *A Sky Full of Ghosts* is an extremely rich album, resting on a very stable progressive base and whose surprises and colours literally overflow. **Luis Nasser** is still in control of **Sonus Umbra**, a ship that he leads as only a master can!

ELLESMERE

Wyrđ

<https://ellesmere-ams.bandcamp.com/album/wyrđ>;
<http://www.ellesmere-project.com/>
Ellesmere is a large Arctic island located in northeastern Canada, on Inuit territory. This emblematic place also gave its name to **Roberto Vitelli's** project, known as the bassist of Italian band **Taproban**. *Wyrđ* is his third release, the first two being *Les Châteaux de la Loire* (2015) and *From Sea and Beyond* (2018). Surrounded by a dozen experienced musicians who have a lot



of freedom, **Vitelli** offers a mismatched music on a timeless progressive base. He is surrounded by an army of about ten musicians enjoying a lot of freedom and which varies, in part, from one album to another. It thus evolves within a flexible structure allowing to shape a different personality with each opus, according to the team's musical profile. This last born is particularly interesting, because of its heterogeneity, its dynamism, and its somewhat strange universe. We can even say that it is a particularly successful style exercise where we can find sophisticated and catchy melodies, British and Italian inspiration, exacerbated lyrical content as well as complex arrangements. To get such a dense and interesting album is, however, nothing exceptional if we look at the list of participants: **Mattias Olsson** (drums), **Tony Pagliuca** (keyboards), **David Jackson** (saxophone), **David Cross** (violin), **John Hackett** (flute) and **Tomas Bodin** (keyboards) to name but a few, in short, very big names who belonged to progressive rock's leading bands. Comprising five tracks, this too short record, barely 44 min long, gives us pleasure from one end to the other. It has everything, ethereal and instrumental passages, vibrant texts, wild rock, crazy variations, in short, we are not bored for a second and the weak moments are non-existent. Some vaporous saxophone scores bring us a **Jackson** from the glorious **Van Der Graaf Generator** era back. **Vitelli's**, and several of his accomplices', Italian origins are not insignificant. An *IPR* soul is present in spite of **Luciano Regoli's** and **Giorgio Pizzala's** English singing, whom have nevertheless kept *IPR* intonations. *Wyrđ* is a record that should appeal to everyone, regardless of their taste or background in progressive rock, because of its diversity, its incredible richness, and its accessibility!

MAJESTIC

Monument

<https://majesticsongs.bandcamp.com/album/monument>;
<https://majesticsongs.com/>
After a six-year break, Minneapolis multi-instrumentalist **Jeff Hamel** returns with his prolific **Majestic** project which, from 2008 to 2014, offered us no less than eight albums. **Majestic's** music is easily recognizable with its long space prog suites, its sometimes very hard, often psychedelic variations, its soaring sound, its strange atmosphere and its compositions' complexity. This time around, **Hamel** only surrounds himself with vocalists including **Jessica Rasche**, already present on several opuses, **Sarah Hamel**, his sister who participates in the adventure for the first time and **Mike Kosacek**, his regular drummer since 2012. He will do without guest musicians and will take care of the guitars and keyboards himself, which will be the only instruments, except for the drums. This light organizational structure results in an album quite different from the others, where stratospheric guitars and enveloping keyboards take up all the space. More talkative than the others too, the team of seven soloists gratifies us with numerous vocal passages of different styles which are embedded everywhere and enhance an already colourful music. Very lengthy, *Monument* reaches 100 min and offers five tracks. The 24-minute title track takes us back to the days of endless progressive rock pieces that are hard to kick. *Monument* is the **Majestic** we no longer expected. Different from the others, less rock, more symphonic, but just as intoxicating, it resumes, gladly, things where we had left them...



Works of art and masterpieces... *Part two*

By ADRIEN ROUAH

About a year ago, I described a **Rotel** – P5 and M5 set, that is to say a preamplifier and a power amplifier, which had strongly impressed me by its construction quality and, of course, by its really extraordinary musical level. I had thus elevated this set to the rank of exceptional products and greeted the pleasure of a listening experience using real audio material. It is from these two devices that I told myself that high fidelity could come from important companies and propose, still today, products that have a beautiful artisanal signature,

in the noblest sense of the term. Here I am again to describe you, this time, an integrated amplifier from the same MICHI series by **Rotel**, named X3.

It is a truly imposing integrated amplifier by its stature, despite an aesthetic of which the discretion has dominated its general design. We notice immediately the total absence of screws, as much on the front face as on the whole casing except on its back part from where the eventual dismantling will be done. If the will to hide the transducers' fastening screws, on certain





speakers, always seemed curious to me – and even more curious if what hides the screws is in fact a plastic crown holding through simple pressure. Here, I have to salute **Rotel's** performance who managed to achieve an exceptional mechanical bearing of its chassis while hiding its method from us.



Despite its generous size, the X3 integrated amplifier seriously plays on discretion, thanks to its shape with rounded corners, its anthracite colour (neither black nor gray) and also to its lateral heat sinks which are uncommon, as they are well incorporated into the cabinet and form heat evacuation chimneys. The front part is flanked by two large rotary knobs (volume control and input selector), a headphone jack and a power switch. A large window (*display*) will appear only when the power is turned on, indicating many choices.

The rear part has multiple connection possibilities which are well identified. In the upper section are placed the *line* inputs, one of which is in balanced XLR mode, the *Phono* input and its ground terminal, and the *Bluetooth* antenna. Below, a second row offers the digital coaxial, optical, *network*, *USB* inputs, and the main switch, and finally the third row responsible for the outputs to the loudspeakers. Note that these are doubled, in order to allow an easy bi-wiring, and that they are of a remarkable quality. At the end of this third row is the *power* socket for the power cable. The *Michi X3* integrated amplifier is a class A/B amplifier that offers 200 W per channel at 8 Ω loudspeaker impedance and 350 W per channel at 4 Ω. So this is not a puny integrated amplifier, but rather a powerful product with sought-after features and a really comprehensive connectivity option. And if the connectivity is exhaustive, so are adjustment possibilities – bass, treble, input names, power visualization and control, balance, various programs, etc. The

beautiful, solid aluminum remote control that accompanies the X3 is noteworthy, sleek, ergonomic and modern at the same time, with a cachet that suits the *Michi* series well.

Prior to Listening

I did not refrain from using the X3's integrated converter, not to compare it with the one my own record player is equipped with, but rather to benefit from an updated listening experience in terms of digital performance thanks to the 32 bits / 768 kHz **AKM 4490 Premium** installed in this integrated amplifier. The interconnections were made with the unbalanced mode and the loudspeaker connections in mono-cabling. Although the power available is considerable with the *Michi X3* integrated amplifier, I used non-energy consuming loudspeakers including a pair with a sensitivity of 95 dB/W. However, for the description of the listening part, I will use a pair of loudspeakers that is more in line with the current market, i.e. 90 dB. I invite all readers to reread the article dedicated to the *Michi P5* preamp and *Michi M5* amp set published in **Ted Magazine** (Vol 27, n° 03/March - April 2020). You can easily find the hyperlink to this issue on the magazine's website (www.tedpublications.comp/en). This is an important point for comparison purposes, because most of the technologies used in these devices are, of course, found in the integrated one described here. This is proof that **Rotel** does not diminish the design or chosen components quality for its integrated devices. The *Michi X3* and its



big brother the X5 are really devices derived from the separate elements described in the P5 and M5 test bench.

Listening Impressions

After configuring the *Michi X3* with a TV link for movies and music content on the Internet, the great adventure began, and the listening impressions description follows as well. It is easy after a few visual sessions, to know the dynamic character and the realism of a film soundtrack, but one must allow oneself to listen to selected pieces, without being disturbed by images. And the images create themselves, as with my first approach, the meeting of the **Chemirani Trio** – *Michi X3* integrated amplifier. This album, called *Invite*, allows you to change the instrument according to the invited musician, without changing the compact disc. **Omer Sosa's** piano, **Renaud Garcia Fons's** double bass or **Titi Robin's** oud are sometimes mixed in. There is nothing like a selection of world music for immediate pleasure, or not.

The *Michi X3* has the natural signature of its brethren in separate elements, which is a very serious dynamic and a detailed and precise side. It is immediate and unequivocal, the X3 integrated amplifier is not an atrophied version. There is also a certain delicacy of the sounds which allows me to say that the auditory fatigue will not be present, even after several hours of listening. And if the recording touches perfection in this first album, the retransmission is of a very high level, as testifies *Azadeh* where one guesses at a marvellous positioning of the protagonists.

Then I move on to **Kari Bremnes** and her album *Ka dromte du om Anna* (*Did you dream about Anna?*). A beautiful voice and a refined accompaniment for this choice with, of course, a high level of sound recording. And it's great to spoil the X3 musically, because it spoils us in return. A lot of warmth, a lot of richness, clear and rare as a transmitter of emotions, here is what comes to my mind and that I share with you.

Beautiful moments are too short says **Francis Cabrel** in the first text of his last album *À l'aube revenant*. Male voices and choirs in the background, enough to confuse a device that would not have the ability to transcribe the distances between the musicians on the soundstage, this primordial area, which will make you feel like you are present at the time of the recording, and which is well highlighted here. In *Les bougies fondues*, we perfectly recognize the author's artistic touch and the rendering is extremely pleasant. The **Rotel Michi X3** integrated amplifier adapts to all music, all genres, a very important versatility for me.

But in classical music, you may ask? Well, there, I did not go the easy route, since neither the compositions nor the interpretations are common! The album's title is *Deux* (**Patricia Kopatchinskaja**, violinist and **Polina Leschenko**, pianist are the *Two*). Two virtuose who will transport you with **Ravel**, **Poulenc** or **Bartók**, thanks to the integrated *Michi X3* of course. It is a question of prowess realized, also on behalf of an audio device, to be able, with so much of accuracy, to hook you and to keep you listening to unusual music. The performances are



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ROTEL MICHIX3 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

truly breathtaking and so is the staging of the X3 integrated amplifier.

Conclusion

The conclusion may seem long, because there is so much to say! The aim is to speak, to begin with, about this available power that some will find exaggerated. In fact, for a car or an amp, we are talking about power that will allow, in the case of the motor vehicle, to make very fast overruns and, in the case of the audio device, to also ensure fast changes in sound levels—that is, sound overruns. Future buyers can also choose loudspeaker models with a generous temperament (over 90 dB) to ensure a substantial reserve of watts. Since the *Michi X3* operates in Class A/B, the first few watts will be in Class A, resulting in exceptional definition at low volumes and breathtaking transitions at higher volumes.

Now let's talk about the case of sound staging, which is what so many audio devices lack. The music can be heard, but its position in space is often quite a problem. And this is perhaps one of the reasons why we are weary of certain products despite them being described as effective. Our brain makes such an effort of musical reconstruction, such an effort of position recognition that we get tired of listening. With the X3, you don't have to make any effort, everything is *limpid* and, above all, in its *proper* place. As the serious dynamics increase the music's intensity, we follow, captivated, as we would a thriller. The *Michi X3*, all lights off, (meaning, the *display* gone), makes us live very intense moments. And its musical versatility comforts me,

because the only thing left for future buyers to consider is the choice of loudspeakers. Around 90 dB, the choice is rather large, and it is the type of sound which will prevail amongst the available models. You will tell me, with good reason, that the choice of integrated devices, in the price range of the *Michi X3*, is quite important. That is true. But if we add the manufacturing quality, **Rotel's** legendary reliability, the outstanding finish, the device's possibilities complete proposal, and we mix it all with the extraordinary musical performances, we can easily declare the X3 as a noble winner in the forest of integrated devices. Coupled with high-level sources and connected to dynamic, true-to-life loudspeakers, **Rotel's Michi X3** is on its way to making history.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$ 6,299

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Kevro International Inc.,
Phone. : 905.428.2800, www.kevro.com

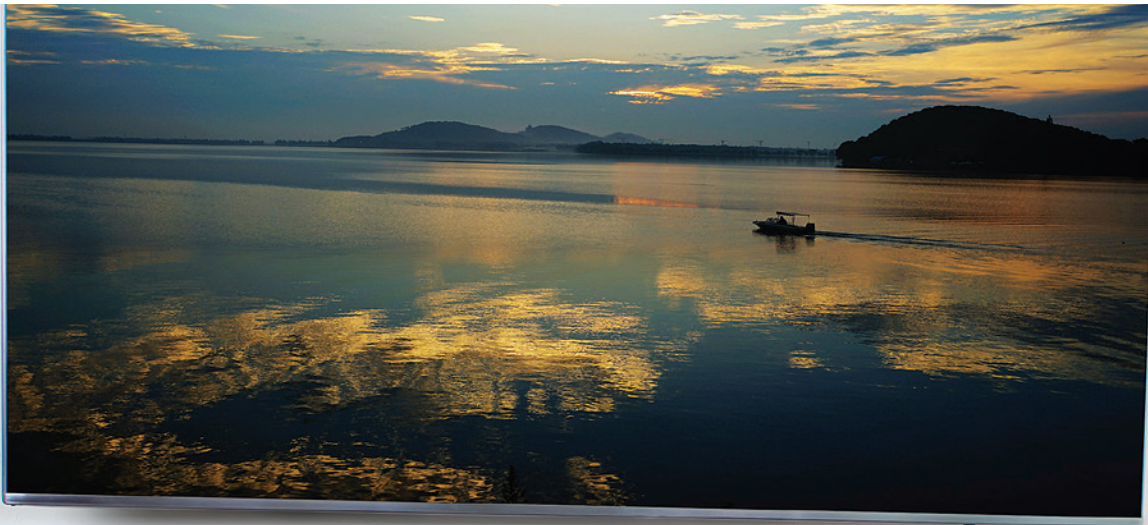
Mediagraphy

Trio Chemirani, Invite, Accords Croisés, AC143

Kari Bremnes, Svarta Bjorn, Les ours noirs, FXCD, 200

Francis Cabrel, À l'aube revenant, Sony Music,
19439809282

P. Kopatchinskaja/P. Leschenko, Deux, Alpha Classic,
AC387



BLUES

BY PIERRE JOBIN

DENNIS JONES

Soft Hard & Loud
Blue Rock Records

Dennis Jones is an assertive guitarist as well as an expressive and consistent singer. With **Raymond Johnson** on drums and **Cornelius Mim** on bass, keyboards, percussion and vocals, they form a powerful, inventive and flexible trio. This musician and songwriter, from Baltimore County, Maryland, and based in Los Angeles, has been influenced by the **Jimmy Page**, **Jimi Hendrix** and **Billy Gibbons** of this world. Shortly before his twenties, he lived and played in Europe, which helped to refine and diversify his musical style, which is rooted in a feeling blues, dipping into rock, reggae and other genres that he instrumentalizes to his liking. The title of the album, *Soft Hard & Loud* represents the musical approach and the creative freedom of this artist who wrote and arranged the ten pieces of the album with his personal, original and groovy touch! On three of these, a B3 or choirs are added, enriching and completing these pieces. **Dennis Jones** and his band plays dynamic and sensitive music that invites itself to a variety of styles that cannot be confined. This music and this energy, they carry it and present it in the United States as well as in the four corners of the world for the greatest pleasure of the fans of music that moves, shakes and impacts.

JO HELL

Retour aux Racines
Self-produced

Jo Hell sings in Quebecois, plays the guitar like the devil, in a rock n' blues that swirls like a merry-go-round of catchy riffs and fiery solos. His *Retour aux racines* is entirely an heir to Quebec rock n' blues à la **Offenbach**... The sound and vocal textures can only

remind us of them. I believe that it's not a copy, but because we like it, or not, and that's how it's played and sung, the Quebec rock n' blues. **Joël Cyr** a.k.a. **Jo Hell** is an energetic guitarist reminiscent of the rock n'roll of **Chuck Berry**, **Keith Richards**, etc. He does wonderfully well with his axis. His riffs are incisive, his solos precise, intense, elaborate... Without compromise! His band is rock solid, as sensitive as a light shuffle. **Sam Harrison** on drums, a king in the rock n' blues genre, **Bruce Cameron** on keyboards and mixing (and co-producing with **Jo Hell**), and **Stéphane Lapierre** on bass (a founder), all in fusion with **Jo Hell**, guitar and vocals. The latter is also the composer of the album's lyrics and music, completing an energetic, competent, and, as we say in the language of **Shakespeare**... tight as can be! The *Retour aux Racines* (*Back to the Roots*) album can be listened to like a rolling fire of experiences and energies with a few moments of respite allowing to breathe a little in order to blow more on the flames! There are beautiful lines in the lyrics, beautiful lines of experience and reflection. In this style of music, the lyrics resonate as if set on fire by the musical inferno. After 25 years of career and 15 years spent in Austin, Texas, will Jo Hell continue to dig, to deepen his furrows in Quebec or, like a *nomad*, is he only a *Survivant*, Great god of the roads? **Jo Hell** is unique, it's Quebec rock n' blues fused with a guitar on fire!

SKYLAR ROGERS

Firebreather
Self-produced

Skylar Rogers is a Chicago-born blues singer who, with *Firebreather*, is on her first full-length album after her EP released two years ago. She writes and sings her story with the

authority of experience, one foot in the footsteps of her inspirers, from **Ma Rainey** to **Tina Turner** via **Etta James** and **Koko Taylor**, and one foot in a more rocking blues with a more contemporary sound, and even **Motown** accents. Her band, **The Blue Diamonds**, consists of **Steven J. Hill** and **Marty Gibson** on guitars, **Jerry Ewing** on bass, **Disco Fuzz Bradley Arl** on drums and **Pete Zimmer** on keyboards. The fusion music they concoct together in a particular and confident approach, they call it *Soul Rockin' Blues*. This self-proclaimed *hard-headed* woman, from the very first track, has what it takes to make her mark, a powerful and expressive voice, especially in the ballads, an intense and sensitive energy, with know-how and audacity. On this momentum, she is surrounded by musicians, excellent and experienced companions, and a close and loyal team allowing her to deal with the vagaries of the career and the road. **Skylar Rogers & Band**, synergy, fire, intensity!

VERONICA LEWIS

You Ain't Unlucky

Blue Heart Records, BHR 0008

To talented souls, maturity comes early! **Veronica Lewis** is a good example.

Dynamism, freshness, talent, and a synergistic piano-vocal blend make her an attractive artistic personality, and that at an age as young as seventeen! In early 2021, she released her first album, *You Ain't Unlucky*, featuring eight tracks, including six original compositions full of aplomb and originality. Recipient of the **2020 Boston Music Award** in the *Blues Artist Of The Year* category, this is not her first award, having won the **2020 Boston Blues Challenge** and the **2020 Best Young Artist** by the **New England Music Hall of Fame**. In a trio with saxophone and drums, she puts her personal touch, as much in her well-chiselled and compact writing, as in her playing of catchy *boogie-woogie* on the piano, or shuffle or ballad. Her young and fresh voice, which she willingly places at the front, when the situation lends itself to it, is exciting, surprising, with a slight vibrato here and there! She is an interesting artist in every dimension of performance, from conception to execution. She is already making her mark and taking her place among the accomplished artists at the beginning of a promising career. **Veronica Lewis** convinces with her piano playing, her energy, and she touches with her voice! To be continued!



BUON GUSTO

By CLAUDE LALONDE

LOUDENNE, LE CHÂTEAU, A BEAUTIFUL EXPRESSION OF THE MÉDOC!



I had the pleasure of tasting, virtually, the **Loudenne Le Château**, red wine, *Cru Bourgeois 2015* with **Philippe de Poyferré**, director since January 2018. **Philippe** is an agricultural engineer by training, and I greatly appreciated his winegrowing philosophy which aims at simplicity, straightforwardness, and an absence of recipes and artifices.

As he says, *Cabernet Sauvignon is not vinified in the same way as Merlot. You can't use recipes that work for everything.* Vintages are consecutive but dissimilar, and we cannot apply a recipe or standardization to the winemaking process as many do.

It should be noted that **Loudenne** passed, in 2013, under the ownership of the **Kweichow Moutai** group, the leading spirits group in China, and **Camus**, which became

co-owner in 2016. **Camus** is the largest independent family house in Cognac.

The investments of this group will allow **Philippe** and his group to make several qualitative changes starting with the process of parcel farming. The avowed aim is to develop an even stronger identity for the wines of the house. As part of these changes, **Loudenne** is already in organic conversion since 2019 and the 2022 vintage will be its first organic wine. Already, the house is certified *HVE* level 3, the highest such level. Listening to **Philippe de Poyferré**, one senses a real desire to take the necessary steps to restore **Loudenne** to its former glory. With his experience at **Ducru-Beaucaillou**, a *Saint-Julien Grand cru* classé appellation, he has ambitious goals for **Loudenne**.



Loudenne, the Château

Loudenne has a beautiful history of 350 years. A prestigious past that owes much to two British merchants, **Alfred** and **Walter Gilbey**. In 1875, these two lovers of life and *beautiful things* decided to make the property their home base in France. The port of **Loudenne** allows the wines to be shipped by sea to London and to their distribution counters around the world. It is in fact the closest château to the estuary, in the Médoc. The two men built an ultramodern winery, for the time, and modelled the park in the English style. For 125 years, the **Gilbey** family, and then the company they created, built the reputation of the vineyard and made **Loudenne** an unmissable place to live and entertain.

The castle, locally called *chartreuse*, was built in 1670 by a noble family from Bordeaux. Because of the colour of its walls, it is known in the Médoc as *Le Château Rose*. **Loudenne** has always been a place of splendour known for its social events, especially during the Roaring Twenties and the post-war years. Many personalities have been received there such as **Robert Kennedy**, **Princess Margaret**, **Winston Churchill** and **Jeanne Moreau**, among others.

Loudenne, the land

– *There is no great terroir that does not look out over the river, according to a cellar master of the Médoc.*

Loudenne is an exceptional terroir of 132 hectares of which 62 are planted with vines, the rest being salt meadows dedicated to extensive breeding and classified *Natura 2000*. The grapes come from vines of which the average age is 42 years. They are located on two gravelly ridges directly on the edge of the Gironde estuary, 6 km north of Saint-Estèphe. The proximity of the estuary greatly reduces the risk of frost and favours the maturation of the grapes. In fact, this vineyard almost never freezes. The constant presence of the wind allows the drying of the vine and reduces the possibility of mildew attacks. The rich soils are composed of Garonne gravel mixed with clay with a subsoil formed by a limestone plateau. **Loudenne** is the last château to the north to benefit from this unique terroir.

The **Loudenne, Château red** comes from 32 hectares planted at a density of 6,700 ft/ha, of which 48% is *Cabernet Sauvignon* and 52% is *Merlot*.

As for the *Château Bordeaux blanc*, 11.5 ha are dedicated to it, of which 76.5% are *Sauvignon Blanc* and 23.5% *Semillon*.

Loudenne is the oldest château on the Medoc peninsula to produce white wine, and has done so since 1880, and this is an important differentiating factor.

And when travel resumes, know that **Loudenne** is a remarkable reception location, offering 14 adjoining rooms, with the only private port of the Gironde.

BUON GUSTO

By CLAUDE LALONDE



Château Loudenne, France Médoc, Cru Bourgeois, 2015

Grape varieties: Merlot 52%, Cabernet Sauvignon 48%

Sugar: 2.0 g/l

Alcohol: 13.5%

Price: \$ 33.00

SAQ Code: 102210.

<https://www.saq.com/en/102210>

This wine's harvests come from plot selections and are done manually. The bunches and grapes go through a manual sorting, and the vatting is done by gravity. The alcoholic fermentation is carried out in thermo-regulated stainless steel or concrete vats, while the malolactic fermentation is done in barrels. The wine is aged for 12 to 16 months in French oak barrels from Bordeaux, 33% of which are new.

Tasting Notes

This wine is a beautiful expression of what the Médoc can give and of what the very special situation of the terroir can bring. It is little marked by the wood, and its present fruit aromas are in balance with some evolutive notes. This wine is already 7 years old! But be aware that it can last 20 to 25 years!

Like the Médoc wines, it is distinguished by a certain austerity and a very interesting *drinkability*, since it only draws 13.5 degrees.

The nose reveals ripe fruit aromas such as blackcurrants, cherry and blackberry with a hint of well-integrated woody notes and a touch of vanilla. The palate has a silky texture with fresh acidity and well rounded, tightly woven tannins. The dominant flavours of black fruits (blackberries) are expressed with a certain restraint, and combined with discreet woody notes create a very classic, rich and typical Médoc aromatic profile. Beautiful persistent finish on freshness and fruits, and amazing *drinkability*! It is a good wine for meals which will be an exceptional pairing with grilled red meats.

BUON GUSTO

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Loudenne, Les Jardins

Another wine is available at the **SAQ**. It is the **Loudenne, Les Jardins**, organic white wine. **Les Jardins** is a range of certified organic wines, created in partnership with winemakers in the Bordeaux region. Following the specifications of organic wines, **Loudenne** has created wines without artifice in the winemaking process, which express the typicity of the grape varieties and terroir of Bordeaux.

Loudenne, Les Jardins, France, Bordeaux, 2019 – Organic white wine

Grape varieties: *Sauvignon blanc* 60%, *Muscadelle* 20%,
Sémillon 20%

Sugar: less than 1.2 g/l

Alcohol: 12%

Price: \$ 23.15

SAQ Code: 14408189

<https://www.saq.com/en/14408189>

I did not have the chance to taste this wine, so the following description comes from the technical sheet that was developed by the producer.

Nose: with aromas of boxwood and citrus fruits, typical of Sauvignon.

Palate: balanced by the blend of Sauvignon, Semillon and Muscadelle, it combines suppleness and freshness with a fruity finish.

A wine to be served as an aperitif or with mixed salads during outdoor meals. Ideal with oysters.

Loudenne is represented in Quebec by the **Sélections Cœno** agency, recognized as the agency of the year 2019.

Claude Lalonde - biography

Sommelier by training, for me, wine is a matter of passion and pleasure. Visit my page *Vinformateur* on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/vinformateur/> for your dose of humor daily wine suggestions.

On my blog *Vinformateur* (www.vinformateur.com), you will find the complete tasting notes including food/wine pairings for more than 1,000 wines as well as several meetings with winegrowers from all over the planet.



BUON GUSTO

Easy recipes by the mischievous cook

SALMON RESTING ON CRUSHED POTATOES, PARSNIPS AND CARROTS. PARSLEY TOMATO SALSA.

This salmon dish, calculated for two people, is a nice treat to offer yourself.
Easy to make, this beautiful salmon meal is delicious, light and healthy.

For the salsa

Cut 1 tomato into small cubes without seeds and liquid.

Chop 2 tbsp parsley finely

Chop 1 shallot finely

Cut 1/8 green bell pepper into small cubes

Measure:

1 tbsp brown sugar

2 tbsp balsamic vinegar

3 tbsp olive oil

Mix all ingredients, add salt and pepper to taste, and set aside in the refrigerator.

For the crushed root vegetables

Cut the following ingredients:

1 cup peeled and cubed potatoes

½ cup peeled carrots, sliced into rounds

½ cup parsnips sliced into rounds

Cook in boiling salted water for 30 minutes.

Drain, grind lightly with a hand blender, adding 1 tbsp butter.

Reserve.

For the salmon

Choose 2 pieces of about 170 g fresh salmon, from the centre of the filet. Preferably no tail pieces.

Season both portions of salmon with Cajun spices.

Cook in a non-stick pan with a knob of butter and a spoonful of olive oil for 3 minutes on each side.

Finish cooking in the oven at 400° F for 3 more minutes.

Arrange as shown in the photo and serve.

Have a nice meal!

Even though the recipe is very detailed, I recommend you visit the Facebook page, *Recettes faciles du cuisinier tannant*. You will find the fully detailed recipe with many photos where each step is clearly explained. Enjoy your meal!



<https://www.facebook.com/Recettes-faciles-du-cuisinier-tannant-105071697846276>

What's new?

Luxman L-595A Special Edition



By MICHEL DALLAIRE

Legendary Japanese manufacturer **Luxman** marks its 95th anniversary with the launch of a new integrated amplifier. The **Luxman L-595A Special Edition** takes much of the look of the venerable *L-570* integrated amplifier that was introduced in 1989. The new *L-595ASE* therefore commemorates **Luxman's** relentless work to achieve the best possible build quality and a timeless design. The new *L-595ASE* will be produced in only 300 numbered copies worldwide, of which around 100 are reserved for all of North America.

On its front panel, the **Luxman L-595ASE** does not integrate recent production meters, but it uses the square keys of the *L-570* which serve as a function switch and selector for the sources. Its power is specified at 30 W per channel in an impedance of 8 ohms, at 60 W in 4 ohms and at 2 ohms, it is said to be still stable. It operates in pure class A with a feedback loop that **Luxman** commercial calls *ODNF-u* for **Only Distorsion Negative Feedback (ultimate)**. This circuit is believed to improve error correction in amplifying the analog signal.



Volume control is performed through the *LECUA 1000* circuit. The new *L-595ASE* amplifier therefore includes this **Luxman Electronically Control Ultimate Attenuator** which was designed and used for the first time in the *C-900u* preamplifier which sits at the top of the **Luxman** range. The *L-595ASE's* case is solidly manufactured and its weight of 29 kg tells us that protection against resonances has surely been taken into consideration. Its inputs and

connections are essentially analog while including an MM/MC preamplifier stage for a vinyl turntable. A *Preamp* output and a *Main Amp* input are provided for bi-amping or integrating the *L-595ASE* into a home theater system.

At the time of this writing, availability of the *L-595ASE* is slated for June 2021 and at a suggested price of \$11,995 USD.

luxmanamerica.com

A redesigned entry-level product

By MICHEL DALLAIRE

Manufacturer **BC Acoustique** was first known for its very particular speakers like the Tibre and the Niger which marked their era in the high-fidelity field in France. In the past, I had the opportunity to test some of **BC Acoustique's** products, but for various reasons this brand has stopped being represented in Canada. The company has been bought and **BC Acoustique** products are once again imported here. As an introduction, I was offered to test a new integrated amplifier which is the entry level of the range. Let's see what the EX-214 model offers us.

It is compact and relatively light, but...

In a reorganization perspective, **BC Acoustique's** new owner has moved production to a manufacturing plant in Asia. So he intends to revise his entire catalogue, and the EX-214 integrated amplifier is the first of this new generation of products. According to my sources, **BC Acoustique** has in its plans to release other amplifiers or CD players to expand its catalogue soon. That said, the new EX-214 looks a bit like the previous entry-level model that was the EX-212. It only comes in black, and it comes with a fairly conventional plastic remote. The displayed power remained the same, 45 W per channel, and increases to 75 W in 4 ohms. The manufacturer specifies that its

power supply and power stage can match all types of speakers in impedances of 8, 4 and 2 ohms.

BC Acoustique EX-214 Connectivity

The EX-214 amplifier includes a *Bluetooth* connection with a built-in antenna for listening to music from tablets and smartphones. It also includes, on the front panel, an analogue input in mini-jack format (3.5 mm) to directly connect an MP3 player. A 6.3 mm headphone output is also included. On the back there are two line inputs on RCA connectors and a *Phono MM* input. Two analogue outputs are also provided, one labelled *Pre-Out* and the other *Rec*.

On the digital side, there are two *S/PDIF* inputs, one coaxial and one optical. There is no asynchronous *USB-B* input to connect directly to a computer. The interface of the *S/PDIF* inputs is possible thanks to an *AK4112* chip and the digital-analogue conversion is carried out by a **Texas Instrument PCM1606**. Inside, the layout is logical and orderly with a good-sized toroidal transformer and substantial cooling fins.

The EX-214 Dashboard

For a few decades, I have been used to using integrated amplifiers for a rather purist approach. The EX-214 took me back,



with a bit of nostalgia, to the days of the *Bass, Treble, Balance* tone controls and the notorious *Loudness* button. However, a button labelled *Direct* allows you to use the amplifier in a purist way without going through the tone control stage. In *Direct* mode, the *Loudness* function can still be engaged and it has a very addictive effect on the *EX-214's* sound. It intervenes on the low-mid-range and the bass to subtly reinforce this portion of the audio signal which is badly perceived at low volume by the human ear. In a nutshell, using *Loudness* on this amplifier is like adding a little cream to a good espresso. This addition detracts a bit from the original taste, but, in my opinion, it makes the drink sweeter and more satisfying. The digital and analogue inputs can be selected alternately with three buttons on the far right of the unit or on the remote control. The lighted circles around the buttons tell us which input is on, and some turn red to indicate an alternative input or function. The volume control is motorized, but its action delay and its overly fast travel prevent me from adjusting the level precisely. This is this amplifier's only flaw.

The EX-214's Use Conditions

First, I gave the *EX-214* a warm-up period by installing it right next to my computer in my basement office. Since it does not offer an asynchronous *USB Type B* input, I used its *Bluetooth* function to listen to music with my headphones. I was pleasantly surprised by this wireless transfer protocol's sound, which is very satisfactory despite the fact that the audio signal is compressed. Then I installed the *EX-214* in my hi-fi system in the living room using my *CD* player connected to the amplifier's coaxial input as a source. I was also able to listen to the music placed on my *CeolBOX* music server thanks to a network player that I had for another test bench.

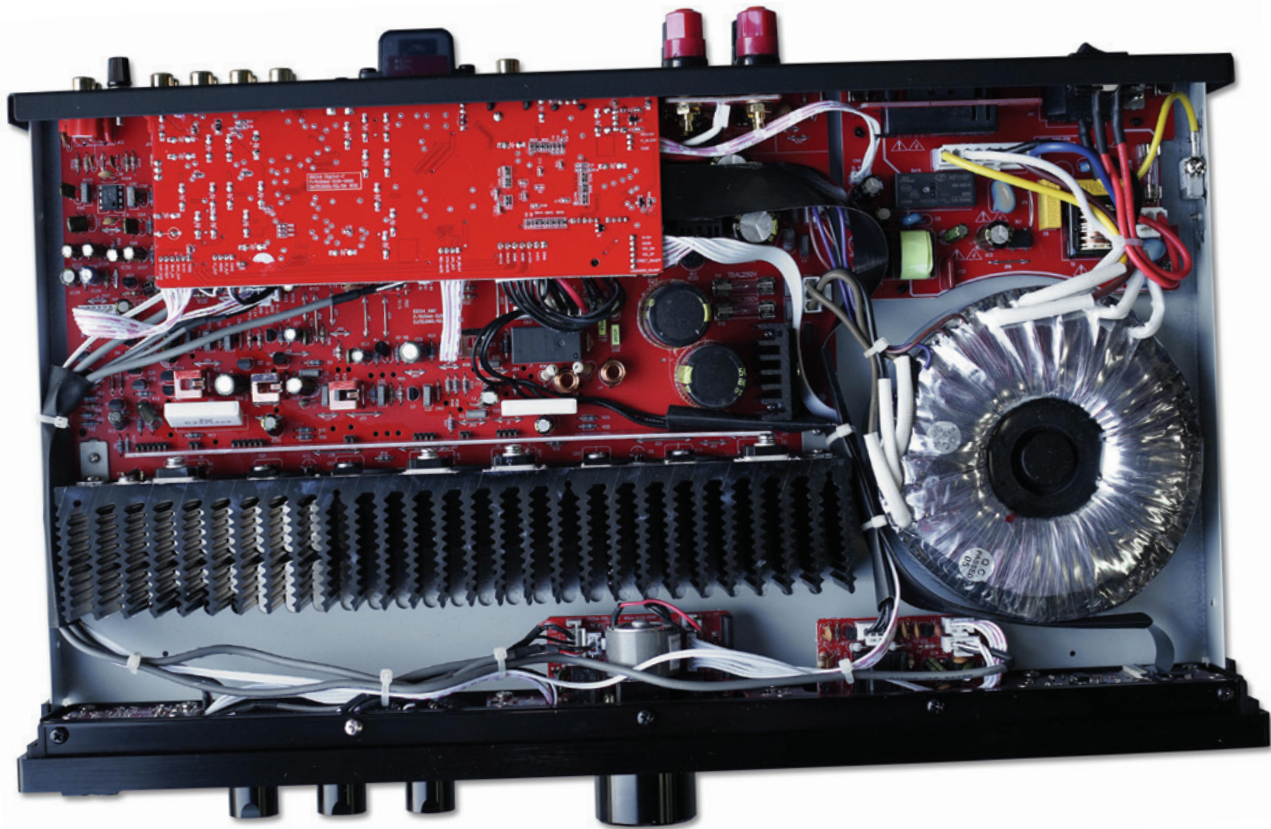


A Democratic Voice

My listening started with **Catherine Major's** fifth album entitled *Carte Mère*. This title refers to the main circuit board of a computer, but also to the more electronic style she adopts for this opus. On some tracks, the orchestrations by *Antoine Gratton* and *Catherine*, played by the *Bratislava Symphony Orchestra*, give a more magisterial air to her compositions. *Jeff Moran's* lyrics bring together the human warmth and drama that inhabit a complete and well-crafted work. The *EX-214* integrated amplifier refuses to hide from me these recordings' rich details and shows an incredible aplomb for a power of only 45 W per channel. Its tonal balance is more on the light side of neutrality, which makes it sound a bit thin on the initial listening. But by activating the *Loudness* function, everything came back in order according to my high-fidelity installation. This comment should take into account the fact that the *EX-214* amplifier is intended to play in an open plan living room of good dimensions. In addition, I paired it with a source and speakers at least seven times the retail price of the *EX-214*. In spite of these unusual conditions for such an amplifier, it managed to *bluff* me completely on its power of only 45 W per channel.

I continue my listening with the recent double album entitled *Histoires sans Paroles-Harmonium Symphonique* downloaded in its 24 bits / 96 kHz *WAV* version. The symphonic adaptation and arrangements by conductor *Simon Leclerc* are an exceptional tribute to *Harmonium's* music. This high-resolution recording's dynamic range is very wide, so that we have to deal with passages at very low volume, then with grandiose, not to say explosive, musical flights. This music gives me chills especially when *Luce Dufault* and *Kim Richardson* enter the stage to perform vocals. The small *EX-214* integrated amplifier manages to give me goosebumps in front of this majestic interpretation, and its sound respects in good part all the characteristics sought by hardcore audiophiles. In other words, criteria such as transparency, breadth of response, respect for the instruments' timbre and breadth of the stereo image are addressed by the *EX-214* in a very brilliant way for its price category.

I end this description with an instrumental jazz album. It is *Homescape* by Vietnamese guitarist *Nguyen Lê*. This album was recorded in 2005, entirely at the guitarist's home in the Parisian district of Barbès. For this opus, he called on his neighbour, Tunisian singer and oud player *Dhafer Youssef*. Italian trumpeter *Paolo Fresu* joins this album, released on the **ACT** label, which features compositions by each musician. Needless to say, that for this label, the recording quality is, as always, impeccable. Obviously, the *EX-214* amplifier does not have the precision nor the finesse of my integrated amplifier which is worth seven times more, but let's just say that this little device by **BC Acoustique** does not have to be ashamed compared to the competition in its price category. On this album, it gives me a good impression of these three excellent musicians'



performance. *Dhafer Youssef's* oud and voice are vibrant and well-timed, while *Paolo Fresu's* trumpet remains soft, even carnal. *Nguyễn Lê's* electric guitar is synthesized in such a way as to obtain the sliding sound of a Vietnamese guitar, which makes it very exotic. This guitarist's virtuosity is beautifully demonstrated to me by the EX-214 amplifier, while the percussion and electric bass retain their full weight and impact. For a home recording, this album has no shortcomings.

Conclusion

I have been collaborating with **TED magazine** since at least 2006. So I had the opportunity to test several integrated amplifiers, from the most expensive to the most affordable. Fortunately I was able to avoid the trap of becoming jaded over time. To me, it is always a pleasure to discover smaller devices that deserve our respect. Isn't the job of a high-fidelity designer more rewarding when the task is to design a device that sounds good, or even great, on a limited budget? The integrated amplifier **BC Acoustique EX-214** embraces this mission perfectly with, in addition, connectivity that meets current requirements in

music, whether digital or analogue. Even though I sandwiched this entry-level amplifier between a source and speakers that cost at least seven times as much, the EX-214 did a great job of keeping its head up. At a price of \$799 I can very well imagine it with a source and speakers of the same price in a most respectable high-fidelity system, around \$3,000 including cables and taxes. Proof that true high fidelity is still affordable today.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$799

Warranty: 2 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Asona Ltd, Phone: 905.947.9229, richard.k@asonaltd.com, www.bc-acoustique.com

Mediagraphy

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

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

Nguyễn Lê Duos, Homescape, ACT 9444-2

Copland, Third symphony etc. Eiji Oue, Reference Recordings, RR-93CD

Sienna Dhaleen, Verglas, Just In Time, JTR 8576-2



OFF THE BEATEN PATH

By DAN BEHRMAN



DIANA HAMILTON

Babylon Café

Self-produced, 2020,
msdianahamilton@gmail.com

A Bahamian woman in Paris? It's anything BUT mundane, especially when it comes to the lovely, inspiring and very talented **Diana Hamilton** who, after nine years of work, and interruptions due to that weird but exciting thing called Life, has just released her second album entitled *Babylon Café* wisely produced by **DJ Dang**.

Gifted with a very distinctive voice with tones pleasantly reminiscent of **Billie Holiday**, **Nina Simone**, **Amy Winehouse** and **Josephine Baker** when singing in French, **Diana** had no idea that she would ever be destined to sing professionally.

Born in Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas, where she had an idyllic childhood, she went to New York to study in university and ended up, by chance, but mostly for love, in Paris where she lived for three decades.

Back in her native island for a few years, she participates in the *Rake 'n Scrape Festival* dedicated to the preservation of this rural style, of the same name, of which the sound and African origins are close to Cajun music. It was **Diana's** initiative that helped revive the interest and relevance of this endangered style. In conjunction with the festival, she established the **Cat Island Accordion & French Camp Project**, which consists of a series of workshops dedicated to the preservation of the *Rake 'n Scrape* and learning French language and culture. All this to tell you that there is not only *Calypso* and **Harry Belafonte's** music in the Bahamas, there is also that of the legendary **Joseph Spence (Sloop John B.)** as well as *Rake 'n Scrape*, but let's get back to the little cafés if you will! Accustomed, like any self-respecting Parisian, to frequently savour delicious espresso and other coffee-based concoctions in these inescapable

establishments, which are absolutely convivial and representative of French culture, of which the future is also unfortunately compromised by the hazards of modern life, **Diana** came across a nice song composed by **Florian Lacour**, an accomplice of her first album, which had as its theme little cafés.

Well accompanied by **Diego Yayin Parada Suárez** (guitar), **Taca Shimizu** (accordion) and **David Jacob** (bass), **Diana** takes on writing and music with ease, takes off in a remarkable and relaxed way, and transforms this already great song into a real earworm that is pleasantly difficult to get rid of. Her slight anglophone accent adds a little *je ne sais quoi* that is really charming, a nod to the days when **Petula Clarke** and some of the other singers named above sang in French to everyone's delight.

The other six tracks of the album are very different in the sense that they are, first of all, interpreted in English, although with some small injections of French placed here and there. *Babylon Café* illustrates a virtual bridge between two generations, that of **Dang**, a young director-DJ clearly influenced by hip hop and beats, and that of **Diana**, a more old-school singer with a voice evoking a past that is both exciting and a bit nostalgic. The interest and success of the album can be summed up in the fact that these two generations merge perfectly and create a vibrant, interesting and harmonious hybrid music.

Of particular note is the very personal and moving version of *Motherless Child*, a traditional song from the days of slavery in the United States that has been performed by many artists for over a century and brought up to date by **Diana**, who adds an infectious *groove* to this already beautiful song. The fairly funky **Seeline** dedicated to **Nina Simone** is full of energy and it's hard not to dance to it, as is *Tell Me Why*, a track amicably and respectfully dedicated to **Bob Marley**.

Simple Thing, rapped with a very pleasant touch of trip hop. Not to be forgotten is the weary and intense eloquence of *Interlude to Mr. Blues*, straight out of the Harlem underbelly. *Rake 'n Scrape Please* is a warm tribute to the 100% Bahamian style revitalized by **Diana** thanks, among others, to the very inspired **Robert Santiago** on accordion!

Diana Hamilton sings with kindness, humour and a touch of mischief that is very pleasant to hear and, if I have a good tip to give you, it is to take the time to discover her, because she is almost unknown on our side of the ocean, except for the Bahamas, of course! You won't regret it! To watch and hear the very nice *Dans Les Petits Cafés* music video, you have to go on **YouTube**.

KOWAN DUO (RÉGIS COISNE, DIDIER GRIBOVAL)

Musical World Trip

Self-produced, 2020, www.regiscoisne.com

Originally from Lille, in the north of France, but living in Paris for a long time, **Régis Coisne** has been piqued since his youth by practically every style that can be played on the guitar, folk, rock, blues, jazz rock, jazz, ethnic. He has assimilated all of them to finally focus on the guitar in its simplest and perhaps most beautiful form, the nylon-stringed guitar. An ardent aficionado of such guitarists as **Joe Pass**, **Baden Powell**, **John McLaughlin**, **Wes Montgomery** and **Barney Kessel**, to name but a few, **Régis** is fundamentally open to discovery and loves to listen to the different idioms that weave the exquisite cultural and sonic fabric constituted by the innumerable musical forms of all kinds that exist throughout the world. This auditory experience allows him to compose cheerfully, to find his place and to find his trademark in the form of an original concept called **Kowan Duo** with **Didier**

Griboval on drums and multiple percussions.

As its title indicates, *Musical World Trip* is a colourful instrumental trek, with ten compositions by **Régis Coisne**, and generously inspired by the exotic and varied musical styles found in places as diverse as India, Ireland, the Maghreb, Argentina, Brazil, Italy, Africa, China and the United States.

Recorded in an impeccable way at **Studio Kowan** and mixed at **Studio Travel in Sound**, the different tracks of the album flow naturally and leave **Régis'** guitar all the space necessary for its expression, grandiose while remaining intimate, warm and very human. **Didier Griboval's** work is remarkable in the sense that he knows how to be present exactly where needed while remaining classy and discreet. His interventions do not only serve to mark the rhythm, but also to underline and colour very specific passages coming from his accomplice's guitar, which is not necessarily obvious.

I was pleasantly surprised by the sound presence of the guitar masterfully played by **Régis Coisne** who ensures, in the same gesture, the melodic part, the chords and the bass.

We're not talking about sparkling displays of guitar virtuosity to impress the listener, but rather an intense conceptual continuum based on the simplicity of the melodies that are not only very solid but also, and more importantly, very enjoyable to listen to. It is an intelligent, sincere music appealing to fragile emotions, deeply hidden inside us, and it is all to the credit of **Régis Coisne** who could easily have released an album full of fireworks, but as he felt, it was all but necessary, especially since there are already a multitude of albums like that on the market. So what could be better than a musical journey around the world, comfortably seated in an armchair?

A talented musical trio at home

By JEAN-DENIS DOYLE

Here is a trio of devices, from England, which are very interesting. Composed of **Exposure's** 3010S2D preamplifier and 3010S2 monophonic amplifiers, this set offers performance and flexibility for a price that remains reasonable. Since **Exposure** is making a comeback in Quebec, we took the opportunity to do a test bench

of this 3010 series kit, in separate elements. As we will see, these amazing devices offer many options and have more than one trick up their sleeve. So let's take a look, and a listen, at this trio of classic British electronics. Will they find their place in the Quebec *audiophile* landscape?





Exposure is a manufacturer of high-end audio electronics based in **Lancing**, Southern England. Founded in 1974 by **John Farlowe**, this company found the professional amplifiers they sold at the time very boring. Convinced that more could be done, they founded **Exposure Electronics** and began designing amplifiers and preamplifiers. The first **Exposure** devices were a *great* success. Mrs. **Yolande Roberge**, from **Audiorama**, was the first to introduce them to the Quebec public. Since the early 2000s, engineering leadership has been provided by **Tony Brady**, the man behind the legendary **Onix OA-21** amplifier. Today, **Exposure** manufactures six series of devices. These are still made and assembled by hand in England. The 3010 series, which we are interested in, includes several models and has been in **Exposure's** catalogue for a long time. Following a listening session in a store that had impressed me, I decided to commandeer the preamplifier and the mono blocks for a test bench.

In the *audiophile* world, integrated amplifiers have become the norm. Often, they incorporate a section for *streaming* and a *DAC* within the device. Have we gone too far in terms of integration? The use of this **Exposure** set, in separate elements, for one listening session, had shocked me with its ease and quiet power. So here we are, like a trip back in time, listening to a preamplifier and a pair of mono blocks for our greatest pleasure. It is not by chance that these

devices are so efficient. As we will discover, the different sections' physical separation, and offering them their own power supply, has *obvious* advantages. It's just that we had forgotten the qualities of such a configuration. Or is it rather that we are used to listening only with amplifiers that are a little too integrated?

The Exposure 3010S2D Preamplifier

It is a fully analogue preamplifier. It has six inputs and two outputs in *RCA* format. The circuits' topology operates in pure class *A* and includes only discrete transistors. True to **Exposure's** design philosophy, the circuits are simple, cleanly assembled and optimized in every detail, with the sole purpose of achieving flawless listening quality. The power supply is based on a substantial toroidal transformer and large high capacity capacitors. This power supply would probably be enough for an integrated amplifier! This may seem like a complete *overkill*, but believe me, the gain in listening quality is really obvious.

Three option boards are available to equip the **Exposure 3010SD2** preamplifier. The first two are phono stages intended for use with a vinyl turntable. One was designed for *Moving Magnet* cartridges and the other for *Moving Coil* cartridge users. These phono cards are very powerful and their reputation is most enviable. They use quality components, such as discrete transistors and high-speed regulators. They will make the most

of the majority of cartridges available on the market.

The third card, available as an option, is a digital to-analogue converter. Based on **Wolfson** WM8714 chips, this card is of good quality and is an interesting option for those whose main source will not be digital. In my opinion, phono cards are a more interesting option than the *DAC* card. A separate, high-level digital-to-analogue converter will allow the immense potential of these devices to be better exploited. In any case, nothing is definitive, since these cards will be easily interchangeable by the reseller.

The 3010S2 Monophonic Amplifiers

These devices are high power amplifiers. They are in monophonic configuration, which means that you will need two to power each of your speakers (left and right). The main advantage of this configuration is that each amplification channel has its own power supply, which has the consequence of doubling the power supply of the amplifiers. In addition, it increases the configuration's quality and the stereophonic image's stability.

The transformer, which equips each of the amplifiers, is huge and suggests good things for the listening. The **3010S2** amplifiers operate in class *AB* in a very classical way, using quality bipolar transistors. The circuit is extremely simple and straightforward, which should result in interesting transparency and a good level of detail.

EXPOSURE 3010S2D PREAMPLIFIER AND EXPOSURE 3010S2 MONO AMPLIFIER



They deliver a power of 100 W each. Please note, however, that this is a 100 W monophonic block. As we will see when listening, the impression of power offered by these devices has nothing to do with the one offered by a 100 W integrated amplifier.

Implementation and Installation

This trio of devices installs like a charm. Avoid making the mistake of stacking all three devices on top of each other. The magnetic fields generated by the huge amplifiers' transformers could harm the preamplifier. These amplifiers generate little heat, so it will be easy to install them in the bottom of your cabinet with minimal clearance. Ideally, they should always be installed on the floor on an isolation plate, as close to the speakers as possible, which allows shorter speaker cables to be used and maximum quality to be extracted. These devices require only a few minutes to reach their full potential, so it will not be necessary to leave them on constantly. Be careful with the terminal blocks for connecting speakers, they are only compatible with banana connectors. This will have to be anticipated. As is often the case with this kind of *boutique* manufacturer, the cheap plastic remote control is just terrible.

Listening Impressions

Rock solid

From the very first notes of the **Peter Bernstein and Guido Di Leone Quartet** album, *A Tribute to Jim Hall*, one gets the impression of a solid stereo image. The music doesn't flinch a bit. Each musician keeps their place in the space, as if they were bolted to the floor. No matter how much you turn up the volume, everything stays in place with

warm and natural timbres. The base, in the low frequencies, is also quite spectacular. The double bass is in control and the speakers never go crazy. Here, the expression "*an iron fist in a velvet glove*" applies perfectly and describes the effect of this trio of **Exposure** devices on reproduction very well. The power is present, but unlike other amplifiers, it does not invade the midrange when the volume is increased. No shrill effect, the timbres remain magnificent and keep a very pleasant relaxing side.

These beautiful qualities are the direct consequence of the fact that these devices use three separate and independent power supplies. We can say what we want about the virtues of integrated amplifiers, but when we listen to a trio of amplifiers like this one, the superiority is obvious.

Rendering the Details With Discretion

These devices have a rare ability to bring out details in the recordings without it ever being aggressive. In fact, with these **Exposure** devices, we enter the world of *dark transparency*. And once you've had a taste, it's hard to go back. **Melanie de Blasio's** album, *No Deal* offers us an excellent demonstration. With this **Exposure** trio, you can hear, in the *mix*, the slightest reverberation of her voice, which becomes intelligible while remaining far behind the speakers. His pronunciation does not suffer from any sibilance and is of a bewitching realism. Achieving this level of balance between transparency and resolution requires expertise, hundreds of hours of listening, judgment and *good taste*. When you buy a set like this **Exposure** trio, it's not only machines that you buy, but you also add musical culture, experience in the right mix of ingredients and a lot of magic.





A Dynamic That Turns Into Emotion

These **Exposure** amplifiers will surprise many with their dynamic capability. Not so much by their ability to *play* loud, but rather by the speed of the attacks. On *The Roy Haynes Trio* album, there is a track called *Green Chimneys* that starts with a crazy drum solo. Listening to it with the **Exposure** trio is a surprising experience. The transients' speed is simply hallucinating and we approach, as never before, a *live* performance. These devices can reproduce the strike of a *snare* with a tremendous impact and will make you jump with joy.

Conclusion

It's hard to fathom how the **Exposure 3010S2D** preamplifier and **3010S2** mono amplifiers deliver reproduction that is sovereign. When you unplug them from your system and return to your integrated amplifier, you realize the impact they have. Frankly, the return to normalcy was painful. These devices have everything, musically speaking. The dynamics they provide are breathtaking, and the timbres are incredibly well-balanced. At the price these devices are offered at, they will be really hard to beat. If you are lucky enough to have the space to acquire them, then you will have many years of great music ahead of you. Well done **Exposure!**

« No matter how much you turn up the volume, everything stays in place with warm and natural timbres. The base, in the low frequencies, is also quite spectacular. The double bass is in control and the speakers never go crazy. Here, the expression "*an iron fist in a velvet glove*" applies perfectly and describes the effect of this trio of **Exposure** devices on reproduction very well. The power is present, but unlike other amplifiers, it does not invade the midrange when the volume is increased. »

GENERAL INFORMATION

3010S2D Preamplifier

Price: 2 199 \$.
The phono MM, MC or DAC options are not included in the price.

3010S2 Amplifier

Price: 3 999 \$
Warranty for both units is : 3 years, part and labor
Distributor: Nation Imports, Phone : 514.604.1698, www.nationimports.com

Mediagraphy

Peter Bernstein & Guido Di Leone, Tribute to Jim Hall, fichier Tidal
Melanie De Blasio, No Deal, Pias Recording, PIASB335LP, 941.B335.010
Roy Haynes, The Roy Haynes Trio, Verve Records, 314 543 534-2

THE QUIET LITTLE *FRENCH* LOUDSPEAKERS

By GUILLAUME BRUNET

The current trend, in terms of decoration and design, is for uncluttered spaces where each object is carefully chosen for its function as much as for its appearance. Speakers, as furniture, do not escape this trend. The **Davis Acoustics Courbet N°3**, with its Kevlar cones and sloped cabinets, fits this bill perfectly. Technological advances and breakthroughs in materials physics have allowed, over the years, the production of smaller and smaller speakers without sacrificing performance. Discreet, modern and neat in appearance, they will suit any decor. These *Courbet N°3* intrigue me, let's see in more detail what they have to offer in terms of performance.

Davis Acoustics is a French family business. It was founded by **Michel Visan**, an engineer who started out at **Audax** and **Siare Acoustics**. In 1986, he decided to launch his own company after the acquisition of **Siare** by the **Harman group**. **Davis Acoustics** began by marketing speakers and speaker concepts sold in kits. It is among the first companies to manufacture carbon, Kevlar and fibreglass cones. Their first complete speaker was released in 1993. The following year, the company moved

to Troyes, France. Since then, all its production is made on site, by a highly specialized team.

In 2005, **Davis Acoustics** changed designers. Design and production are now entrusted to the founder's son, **Olivier Visan**, who also took over the company's management when his father passed away in 2014. The change operates within a continuity, and **Davis Acoustics** continues to sell kits, single speakers and speaker enclosures. It also manufactures loudspeakers from specifications for other companies including **Avantgarde**, **Golmund** and **Jadis**.

The *Courbet* series is just below the *Dream* series, the most high-end of the brand. It includes four models, three freestanding speakers and one speaker requiring a stand. The *Courbet N°3* is the direct descendant of the *Olympia One Master* model, the great recipient of the renowned *Diapason d'or in 2016*. It is mainly aimed at audiophiles with limited space or those who prefer a monitor-type speaker in their décor. Because of its high efficiency, 90 dB/W/meter, it will simplify the choice of the amplifier as long as it supports a load of 4 Ohms of impedance. It will require high quality electronics and media to reveal its full potential. The *Courbet N°3* compares easily to speakers costing between \$2,000 and \$3,000 such as the **Triangle Trio**, the **B&W 706 S2**, the **Focal 906** or the **Totem Sky**.



«**Stef's** voice is really beautiful and its richness is well reproduced by the **Davis Acoustics** *kevlar* cones. The acoustic bass and the bass drum go down very low at times and the *Courbet N°3* do well despite their size. Sure, they don't have the articulation and control that larger radiators would provide, but the gist is there and most importantly, it's slick and spill-free. The high end of the spectrum is reproduced smoothly and without compromising on image extension or accuracy.»



Technical Description

The *Courbet N°3* is a two-way shelf speaker with a tuned port. Two finishes are available: piano black lacquer or satin white, as well as two limited edition finishes, red mahogany and dark walnut. The finish is very nice and the construction is impeccable in this price range. The casing is very solid and inspires confidence, while the walls have been reinforced to prevent body noise. The cabinet is slightly tilted backwards, which prevents standing waves from forming inside the box. The protective grid is held in place by magnets, which is perfect for viewing when removed.

The transducers used in the *Courbet N°3* are the same as in the entire *Courbet series*. The 28 mm soft dome *tweeter* supports frequencies above 3,500 Hz and up to 25,000 Hz. The 13 cm *Kevlar* midrange speaker handles frequencies below 3,500 Hz and down to 55 Hz. Which is quite low considering the enclosure.

This means that the cone takes in almost the entire range of the human voice, which is ideal for the integrity of the reproduction. The *tweeter* only serves as a support for the voice. The circular vent, made of rigid plastic, is located at the back of the cabinet.

The tube is very deep, it goes down to a few centimetres from the *tweeter* magnet. On the back of the magnet, an ogive has been fixed and penetrates slightly into the vent. No information in the documentation is given about this ogive, but I imagine that the designers placed it there to channel the outgoing airflow and thus break the port's resonances.

The frequency separating filter uses high-end components that are soldered point to point, without mounting plates. This process is often used in *very high-end* products. The components are also glued to a wooden board that is attached to the bottom of the case, which prevents them from vibrating and altering the reproduction. The terminal blocks are good quality and allow a tight connection both with large gauge bare wires and with banana or fork type connectors.

Unpacking and Start-up

When I unpacked them, I realized that the *Courbet N°3* I received were store demos. Perfect for me, as less time will be necessary before they reach their full potential. I then sat them on 24" high stands, and took the opportunity to install an anti-vibration base

underneath. In addition to decoupling them from the stand, the base has the effect of raise them by another 2", which is perfect because once I sat in my listening position, the *tweeters* were at my ear level.

I tried different geometries before finding the ideal one. My first attempt was to put them, as recommended, about 30 cm from the rear wall to benefit from the low frequency gain. It was good, but a little congested. From this position, I brought them closer together and oriented them a little more towards the centre, which was already better. Then I moved them closer to me until the bass emphasis faded a bit and was more natural. Bingo! They ended up 40 cm from the back wall and 190 cm between them, which gave a distance of 216 cm from the *tweeter* to my ears, a nice isosceles triangle. This is how I found the best balance.

Listening Impressions

These speakers surprised me from the first notes. It's hard not to apprehend the sound type of a new product. Prejudice may or may not be favourable, but it is always present. Whether it's the reputation of the brand, its country of origin, its appearance or its construction, even the colour of the product will have an effect. The satin white finish and yellow cone remind me of **KRK** studio monitors. So I was expecting a rather clear and thin sound, considering the source and the size of the speakers. I had it all wrong! The *Courbet N°3* are soft and well-balanced. They offer a nice opening with plenty of detail in the mid-range and a surprising extension in the bass. Its high frequencies are muffled with an interesting definition.

I started my listening with a choir's album, **Bach's Mass in B minor** performed by the **Bach Collegium Japan** ensemble with **Masaaki Suzuki** at the stand. I especially appreciate the version of the *Agnus Dei* sung by alto soloist **Robin Blaze**. The little *Courbets* manage to fill my listening room. You can feel the whole reverberating space where the recording was made. The rendered image is large and precise. The orchestra's strings remain at the bottom of the sound image while the voice rises. It goes up to the high ceiling and leans against the walls of the church which seems rather

long and narrow. I feel like I'm sitting in the twelfth row and I'm the only spectator. My mind is free to be bewitched and lulled by this angelic voice.

I continued my listening with Montreal duo **Bet. e and Stef** and their second album, *Day by Day*. I really appreciate this album with bossa nova jazz colours. I've gotten into the habit of listening to it on all new equipment that comes into my home. The production is good enough to allow me to evaluate the restitution of these devices. I particularly like the track entitled *Il n'aurait fallu*, a poem by **Louis d'Aragon** set to music by **Léo Ferré** in 1961. **Stef's** voice is really beautiful and its richness is well reproduced by the **Davis Acoustics** kevlar cones. The acoustic bass and the bass drum go down very low at times and the *Courbet N°3* do well despite their size. Sure, they don't have the articulation and control that larger radiators would provide, but the gist is there and most importantly, it's slick and spill-free.



The high end of the spectrum is reproduced smoothly and without compromising on image extension or accuracy.

I finished my listening with a **Frédéric Alarie Trio** album, *Live à Vienne*. This album was originally recorded in 1998 for European and Canadian radio broadcast. The CD was released in 2008 on the **Fidelio label**. The album includes jazz standards and two original compositions. I particularly like *Walking on the Moon*, composed by **Sting**, who is, like **Frédéric Alarie**, a bass player. The melody is superbly interpreted on the saxophone by **Kelly Jefferson** while the *drum* is masterfully played by **Michel Lambert**. The sound recording is *live* and the instruments are acoustic, which is representative of what the audience heard on the night of the recording. There was little post-production on this recording. Here again, the *Courbet N°3* plunge us into the space that becomes easily imaginable. You feel like you're sitting in the middle of a medium-sized venue, I would say about 200 seats. The reverberations tell us that the room is very lively and probably has a high ceiling. The band plays at a certain distance and each instrumentalist has their own sound space. The applause is also well rendered, very realistic. The *Courbet N°3* like to *play* loud, which is surprising, despite their size.

Conclusion

With their yellow *Kevlar* cones and slanted cabinets, the *Courbet N°3* will never go unnoticed, no matter what the setting. However, when they start to *play*, they will be quickly forgotten and disappear. With their textured, open midrange frequencies and muted treble, they will never be aggressive. The bottom of the spectrum is not left behind and surprises given the size of the cones. So if you're looking for modern, *contemporary-looking* speakers that can be easily powered, costing \$2-3,000, the **Davis Acoustics Courbet No 3** should be among your choices.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$2,699

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Atoll Electronics Canada, Tel: 438.380.8906, <https://www.atoll-electronique.ca>; [davis-acoustics.com](https://www.davis-acoustics.com)

Mediagraphy

Bach Collegium Japan, Masaaki Suzuki - Mass in B Minor, BIS, SACD, 1701/02

Bet. e and Stef, *Day By Day*, Universal, CD, 7697422302

Frédéric Alarie Trio, *Live À Vienne*, Fidelio Audio, CD, FACD002

ITS QUALITIES: CLARITY, DYNAMISM AND TRANSPARENCY

By MICHEL DALLAIRE

LUMIN is a **Pixel Magic Systems Ltd** registered trademark. This Hong Kong-based manufacturer is now one of the largest manufacturers of networked music players. After having positively reviewed their small *M1* integrated amplifier in these pages, what I was offered to try, this time, is this manufacturer's most recent player, the **LUMIN T2**. The latter is not a novelty in itself, since it appeared on the market in 2019. But since its technology is directly inspired by its big brother, the *X1*, I was eager to have the *T2* in hand to test it.

It Looks Great

At almost half the price of the *X1*, the **LUMIN T2** combines much the same networked music playback and digital-to-analogue converter platform for high-resolution files. The *T2* adopts, in part, its big brother's aesthetics, with a curved front panel that is precisely machined from a solid sheet of aluminum. Its design, with no visible screws, and its brushed finish are available in two versions, metallic grey or anodized black. The *CNC* panel assembly gives it exceptional rigidity. Its sleek front panel includes only a small *OLED* display screen. The latter is not tactile, but it displays the track's title, the artist or group's name, the file type and the elapsed time during playback. Its dimensions, quite compact, allow it to be easily installed in an audio cabinet as it gives off almost no heat. However, its elegance and visual sobriety also encourage leaving it in view, on a piece of furniture, as a decorative object. The *T2* does not come with

a remote control, but a free **LUMIN** app is available for *Android* or *iOS* tablets and phones. It allows you to control the *T2*'s configuration and all its adjustments as well as the volume of the analogue outputs located at the back of the device.

The LUMIN T2's Connectivity

Once connected to your *Ethernet* network in wired mode, the *T2* can play all your *PCM* music files up to a resolution of 32 bits/384 kHz as well as *DSD 512* (22.6 MHz). It can also play high-resolution files, such as *MQA*, on sites like **Tidal**. *T2* is also a *client* of sites like **Qobuz**, **Spotify** and **Tuneln**. It does not have a coaxial or optical *S/PDIF* digital input that would allow you to connect, for example, a *CD* player or a game console. It also does not have an asynchronous *USB* input to connect a computer. However, a *USB* type *A* port is available at the back where you can plug in a *USB* stick or an external hard drive with music content. So, to give it access to the content of your music server or your *NAS* (**N**etwork **A**ttached **S**torage), you basically need to connect the *T2* to your router using the wired *Ethernet* connection. Otherwise, it is also possible to use a *Wi-Fi* access point. To this end, it is also worth mentioning that the *T2* is compatible with **Apple AirPlay** devices. However, coaxial and optical *S/PDIF* outputs are available on the back of the unit in case the user wishes to route the signal to another external converter.

The T2's On-Board Technology

For digital-to-analogue conversion, the **LUMIN T2** uses one **ESS Sabre ES9028PRO** chip per channel. Each of them has eight channels configured in parallel to offer balanced analogue outputs on *XLR* connectors or unbalanced on *RCA* plugs. The 32-bit



volume control, which is built into its **ESS Sabre** chips, offers the option of fixed or variable gain output. The T2 can therefore be connected directly to a power amplifier or a pair of active speakers. A discrete clock system is used for precise timing during data transfer and to eliminate *jitter*. The power supply is provided by a low-noise switching circuit and a two-stage regulation.

The LUMIN T2's Configuration

My home is equipped with a wired *Ethernet* network inside its walls, in almost every room. So connecting the T2 to my router, which is in the basement, is a breeze. Since my **CeolBOX** music

server is *DLNA* compliant, the **LUMIN** application automatically detected all the files contained in my server using its **Logitech Media Server** player software. I also successfully used an external hard drive plugged into the *USB Type A* connection on the back of the unit. The T2 is also compatible with the **ROON** playback software. As this software is installed on my *iMac* computer in the basement, I was also able to read all of my music server's content, which, in this configuration, is perceived as a *NAS*. The **ROON** application, which is downloaded to my tablet, allowed me to control everything remotely. Finally, the T2's output was connected to my integrated amplifier using the *XLR* connectors and using the fixed gain option.

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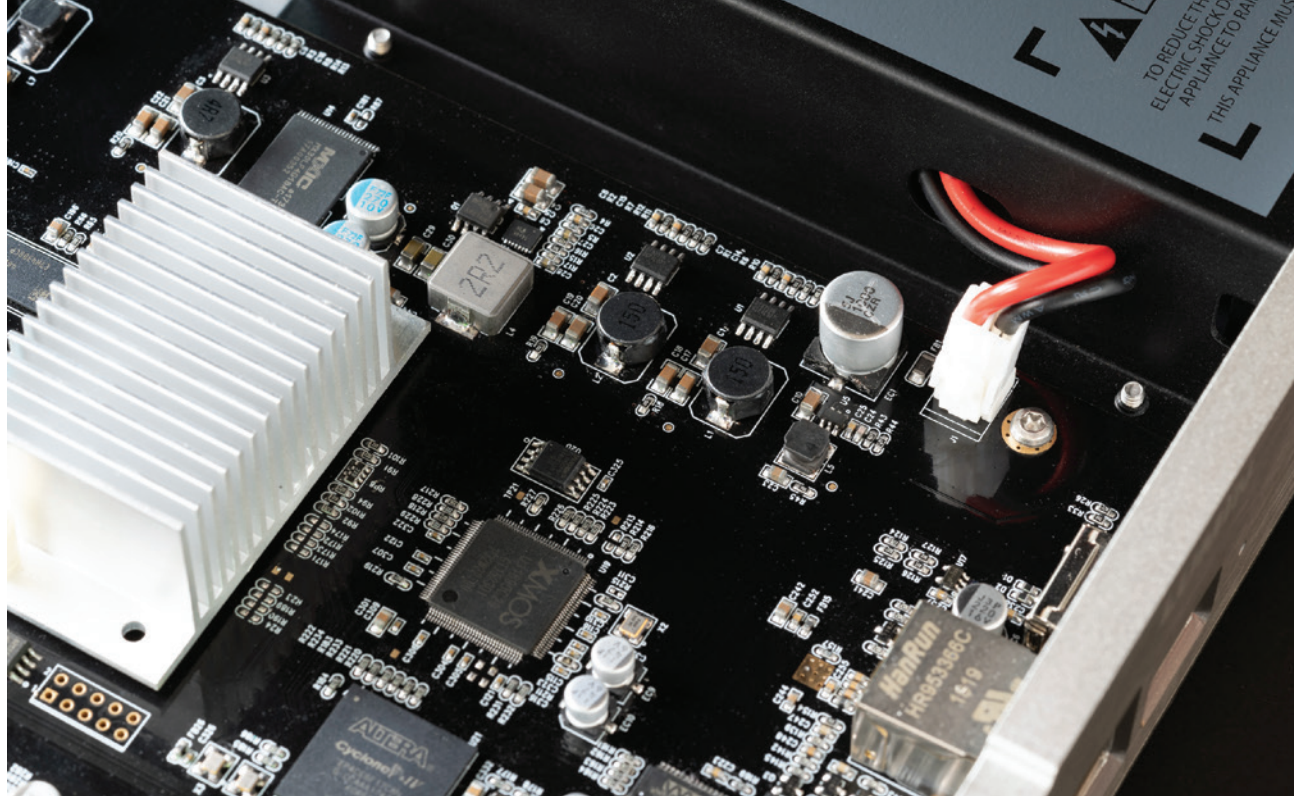
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Light on the LUMIN

I started my listening with a jazz album on the **ACT** label, downloaded in 24 bits *Flac* files. It is *Pocket Rhapsody II*, the latest album by German jazz pianist **Frank Woeste**. This composer, who has performed at the **Montreal International Jazz Festival**, is surrounded for this occasion by four good musicians: **Eric Vloeimans** (trumpet), **Robinson Khoury** (trombone), **Julien Herné** (bass) and **Stéphane Galland** (drums). To this team is added the voice of **Oscar Woeste** and the **Maitrise des Hauts-de-Seine** children's choir. **Frank Woeste's** compositions are melodious and catchy. They are situated between German classical music, American jazz and a touch of French music. Without wanting to make a bad pun, the **LUMIN T2** offers a nice luminosity on this album's content. The musicians' play is perfectly deciphered with an interesting presence of the keyboards, gleaming horns, a well supported electric bass and a drum set whose dynamics has some *punch*. In my opinion, no part of the response curve seems to be emphasized or overly

highlighted. This suggests a good neutrality on the **T2's** part with an assumed respect of the timbres. Its level of transparency gives me abundant details on the children's choir and **Oscar Woeste's** voice, which are well distributed in the stereo image. The latter is limited only by the other high-fidelity components associated with it. I continue with another album on the **ACT** label, downloaded as a 24-bit *Flac* file. In this case, it is jazz trio **E.S.T.** whose founder is the late Swedish jazz pianist **Esbjörn Svensson**. He died accidentally in Cuba, in 2008, while scuba diving. The album, entitled *E.S.T. Symphony*, is a tribute to this musician in which some of his best compositions have been adapted by **Hans Ek** for the **Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra**. As usual, the sound recording, on the **ACT** label, is excellent and very *luminous*. The other two musicians behind the trio are **Dan Berglund** on double bass and **Magnus Orström** on drums. Pianist **Svensson** is replaced, in this case, by **Liro Rantala**. The clarity and speed of execution offered by the **LUMIN T2** allowed me to follow each

soloists' play perfectly through the orchestral mass that was served to me in a grandiose and expansive way. In the middle of this symphonic concert, drummer **Magnus Orström's** play seems a bit more distant than usual, but I can hear the cymbals range very well. **Dan Berglund's** double bass keeps all its resonating chamber's power and roundness. The colour and timbre of the wind and brass instruments are perfectly respected. They reinforce the serious and dark character of certain tracks, while the piano's fluidity brings me back to more soaring and comforting emotions.

Conclusion

You will have understood, I spent very good moments using the **LUMIN T2** for this listening session. This network music player is equipped with a most advanced digital-to-analogue conversion section. So much so that the idea of combining it with an external converter becomes almost obsolete. The fact that it doesn't have an asynchronous *USB* or *S/PDIF* input is a lesser evil, since the **T2** has the ability and ease to





play music content from just about anything connected to a local Internet network. Its transparency and straightness of sound enhanced the qualities of my integrated amplifier and speakers. At that time, I had another integrated amplifier at home for a test bench. The latter is an entry-level model that is ten times cheaper than the **LUMIN T2**. Even if this combination is most unbalanced, I can assure you that *T2* was able to make this little integrated sing beyond my expectations. I did not have the opportunity to listen to the **LUMIN X1**, which is the ultimate *streamer/DAC* from this manufacturer. However, I have good reason to believe that the *T2* comes very close for almost half the price. In this regard, should it be considered a real bargain compared to the *X1*? It's hard to say, especially since the *T2* faces fierce competition in its price range. However, there are good arguments in its favour, such as exemplary sound, superb aesthetics and a very user-friendly application.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$6,999

Warranty: 1 year, parts and labour

Distributor: Motet Distribution, Tel: 905.474.4331; www.motetdistribution.com

Mediagraphy

Frank Woeste, Pocket Rhapsody II, ACT, 9917-2, Flac 24 bits/44.1 kHz

Esbjörn, Svensson Trio, E.S.T. Symphony, ACT, 9034-2, Flac 24 bits/96 kHz

Ulf Wakenius, Love is Real, ACT, 9459-2

Jan Lundgren, Magnum Mysterium, ACT, 9457-2

Harmonium Symphonique, Histoires sans Paroles, WAV, 24 bits/96 kHz

Thanks

The editorial staff thanks the **Audiophile Expert** store for the loan of the device.

THORENS TD 1600 TURNTABLE AND **GOLDRING EROICA-H** CARTRIDGE

BETWEEN TRADITION AND NOVELTY



By ADRIEN ROUAH

What a surprise! I learn today that I will have the responsibility to tell you about a turntable, from legendary company **Thorens**, which was founded over a century ago. But where is the surprise in this test bench, you may ask? Well, I'm going to tell you about a TD 1600 model and a **Goldring** Eroica-H cartridge, while I've owned a **Thorens** TD 166MKII for 35 years, equipped with a cartridge identical to the one I've been asked to test! Quite a surprise, isn't it? This test bench will therefore be addressed to those who know **Thorens** well and also to those who will discover this mythical Swiss brand. But be careful, the comparison between vintage and recent objects will not be subjective. The point here is not to compare the old with the new, but rather to compare the technologies used, those of yesterday with those of today.

It's a turntable hidden in a triple cardboard box that I receive – you can never be too careful when it comes to transportation – and it protects the **Thorens** TD 1600 perfectly. I unpack, install and have to balance and adjust the weight of the cartridge as it is already mounted on the arm. Some important accessories are provided by **Thorens**, i.e. a positioning disc with, on the front, a strobe printout for speed adjustment, and on the back, a cartridge positioning jig. A wrench is added to perfect the height of the arm, a scale which I did not use as I preferred mine, which is more precise. The device comes with a multilingual instruction manual, nice, but poorly translated into French, which gives strange sentences. The worst thing for an instruction manual! I found the same simplicity of adjustment as on my old turntable, except the *anti-skate* compensation is magnetized on the TD 1600, instead of a weight at the end of a wire, as on mine.



THORENS TD 1600 TURNTABLE AND GOLDRING EROICA-H CARTRIDGE

Presentation and Technique

The elegant arm is made of extruded, tubular aluminum with shock absorption. In terms of axes, the technical appearance has been replaced by a set of invisible pivots, which is a good way to update an arm and make it more discreet. The end is removable and will facilitate any change of cartridge, which will be installed first on a small aluminum support and will be positioned on the arm with a single screw. Long live simplicity! At the other end of the arm, the counterweight is placed in the cartridge's axis, i.e. lower than the main tube, resulting in a better ratio of masses and centers of gravity. In the middle of the arm's tubular part is a neoprene ring covered with an aluminum

« A woman's voice, terribly beautiful, and supporting the vocals, some percussions. Simple, you may say, and yet oh, how difficult! Because, of course, only the best turntables will pass this exam! And this is what I realize with the **Thorens TD 1600** and its moving coil cartridge, which demonstrate, beyond any doubt, that vinyl playback will still be relevant for many years to come. Refinement, magic positioning of the sound stage, fidelity, which will maltreat the most recalcitrant and will push the nihilists of the materialized to review their premature judgments. »

ring which acts as a damping of the arm and cancels certain resonances. The arm lift is a classic piston manually operated by a lever for the *TD 1600*. In the *TD 1601* version, the arm lift is automatic as well as the stop at the end of the disc. The main chassis is lacquered black, beautiful, with an exemplary overall finish. The chosen connectors are of very high quality, both *RCA* and *XLR*, as the *TD 1600* is equipped with balanced outputs. The ground wire's connection is made by means of a screw that cannot be tightened by hand (as on 95% of the current or old vinyl turntables) and it is not very convenient. The power supply, placed in a separate box, is stabilized to allow a perfect tension to the electronic speed control module, and the speeds being electronically selected, there is no need for the belt to move on a pulley! For this power supply, **Thorens** used a toroidal transformer and adjustable regulators (*LM317* and *LM337*) for greater voltage accuracy. The **Thorens TD 1600's** chassis has a particularity that will improve or remove the main drawback of turntables with suspended bearings. To compensate for the displacement of the suspended part due to the eccentricity of some discs—which affects the regularity of rotation—**Thorens** has installed a tension cable that permanently adjusts the sub-platter so that it returns to its initial position. This is an ingenious new control system that deserves to be highlighted. If **Thorens** has always been in favour of a belt drive, we find here again the same partisanship with the counter-platter suspended by 3 springs which isolate both the platter and the tone arm from the main plinth, parts which





become independent from what happens during playback. Unlike my old model, of which the 3 springs were attached to the main frame's upper part, a simple aluminum plate in my case, the new *TD 1600's* 3 springs are supported on its base, much stiffer, much more inert.

I notice the tray and sub-tray's extremely precise adjustment and their exceptional polished aluminum finish. Proven suspension and insulation principles and a timeless design with a flawless finish are the **Thorens's** hallmarks which have combined together here to brand this achievement. The main base will be levelled using the 3 adjustable feet, which is almost essential before any cartridge positioning and arm balancing adjustment.

Cartridges

As I set out to address **Thorens** connoisseurs as well as newcomers when writing this review, I thought that if the latter follow the advice given by the audio specialist in their store, like the **Thorens** regulars, they will have already chosen and used some cartridges, from various companies, on their own turntable. It is thus with the aim of pleasing everyone that I successively installed 3 different cartridges on the *TD 1600* table, in different price ranges, that is to say a \$100 **Audio Technica**, a

\$500 **Ortofon** and the **Goldring** offered by **Thorens's** distributor for \$1000.

I notice that the *TD 1600* turntable and its arm make it possible to differentiate immediately the cartridges, without the sound being distorted or unpleasant. We are indeed in the presence of differentiation in the sound scene's depth, in the musicians' positioning's precision and in the notion of sound space, and it is on these points that my remarks are founded. Of course, and this is unavoidable, a moving coil cartridge (in the case of the **Goldring Eroica-H**), will prove to be superior in definition and dynamics, but it should be noted that all my tests are qualified as good, very good and excellent or, in other words, when the quality level of the cartridge increases, the overall definition also increases. I am not demonstrating here that 3 cartridges of increasing price increase the listening qualities – everyone hopes for that, I am proving that the *TD 1600* turntable easily makes differences between the cartridges and that is very good.

Precisions Before Listening

I'm reassured about the different cartridge sources, but we'll look at the one offered by distributor **Erikson Consumer** for this review, the **Goldring Eroica-H**. And to say that I know it well is an understatement, since we've *known each other* for almost 10 years! The *H* indicates a high output level, so it is a moving coil cartridge, which has ... a high-output level. Maybe it's a daring compromise, a mix of the advantages of moving coil cartridges and the ease of use due to this high output voltage compared to standard *MC* cartridges, therefore with low output voltage, but the goal is reached, in my opinion, that of making these *MC* cartridges with exceptional properties accessible to as many music lovers as possible. It is the *RCA* connection which was privileged in this test and I used my phono preamplifier of which the input and output benefited from cables by the same manufacturer.

The Comparison

For this comparison, I chose only one album, repeatedly the first 5 minutes of *Baby Night* by **Sweet Smoke**, for the flute, the voice and the rhythm changes. As there are about 20 minutes between each cartridge change, we can't really be sensitive to what seems to be the best defined, but on the other hand, and this is the goal, the image and the sound scene remain in our memory and will go from adequate to ultra-precise. The notion of space does not go beyond the speakers, but remains in a restricted plane with the **Audio Technica**, whereas with the **Ortofon**, the distance on the stage can be easily guessed between the speakers as well as in front and behind. With the **Goldring**, it is immediately better in width and especially in depth. The voice is also much truer. As such, it is the space which is redefined according to the cartridges, thanks, of course, to the **Thorens TD 1600** turntable which does not hold back in showcasing its playback differentiation capacities.

THORENS TD 1600 TURNTABLE AND **GOLDRING EROICA-H** CARTRIDGE

Goldring's Eroica-H Turntable and Cartridge

As proposed, this package is perfectly balanced. And while **Sweet Smoke's** album is ultra-pleasing, it is necessary to hear **Jacques Bertin's** voice to realize this set's delicacy. Nothing protrudes, everything is integrated into my space, as the sound engineer certainly wanted by working on the intimate and singular character that the minimalist orchestration gives. A remarkable vocal presence here that invites me to switch styles and performances, so let's shake up this new arrival.

World music or a world of music! With **Toto Bissainthe**, we are disoriented. A woman's voice, terribly beautiful, and supporting the vocals, some percussions. Simple, you may say, and yet oh, how difficult! Because, of course, only the best turntables will pass this exam! And this is what I realize with the **Thorens TD 1600** and its moving coil cartridge, which demonstrate, beyond any doubt, that vinyl playback will still be relevant for many years to come. Refinement, magic positioning of the sound stage, fidelity, which will maltreat the most recalcitrant and will push the nihilists of the materialized to review their premature judgments. It is with a definition like this that one understands what seduces, again and again, analogue enthusiasts. And the applause bursts and surprises us at the end of the track, sign that we had forgotten that we were in front of a show, which the **Thorens TD 1600** and **Goldring Eroica-H** set reminds us with much seriousness.

To end this listening session, I thought that a record as fabulous as it is mesmerizing would be in order and that the classical choice of the *Symphonie Fantastique* would be appropriate. It is also this incredibly well-recorded album which made me understand, many years ago, that one could obtain, in analogue, a stunning rendition. And you'll be as overwhelmed as I am by this conducting that features brass instruments like you've never heard them before. The sound recording accentuates this presence of the brass instruments as well, and the **Thorens TD 1600** turntable equipped with its **Goldring** moving coil cartridge makes us understand all the processes' pleasant exaggeration. The brass's precision is breathtakingly realistic, and the dynamics are stunning in the work itself. It is easy to understand the studied audio equipment's purpose, to blow our minds, if I may say so!

Conclusion

Thorens turntables follow in continuous succession, not aesthetically, of course, even if mine still looks great, but musically. They still honour all the music lovers who have remained faithful to this legendary brand for its offer of musical emotions in analogue reproduction. And let's also talk about the newcomers, those who are lost in the forest of new releases, although there are more reworked old productions than real novelty...

Thorens, with the various in-house products that it improves, and even surpasses, as much as on the technological level, keeps the trust of the audio world. Hence the title of my article which perpetuates the ancient turned tradition. Without hesitation, we recommend experiencing listening with this **Thorens**

turntable equipped with the cartridge described here, but which can also be equipped with your preferred cartridge. For all those who are faithful to vinyl, or for those who are newly interested, I would, however, recommend considering buying the automatic version, the *TD1601*, if it doesn't change your final vision of this set, i.e. if the price increase doesn't harm the cartridge you will choose. The old ones know, and newcomers have to get used to this disposition that makes vinyl always less user-friendly than what CDs got us used to. Keep in mind that stopping, *placing* and *removing* the arm, automatically, should not be at the expense of the price of the cartridge you choose. For my part, if I had to make a choice, **Thorens** for the turntable, even if it is easy for me with my experience of good and loyal service, and a cartridge, like the one described, mainly with movable coils, then finally ask myself the question of automatism. As a **Thorens** fan tells you, you will never regret your choice. Word of a die-hard enthusiast!



GENERAL INFORMATION

Thorens TD1600 vinyl turntable

Price: \$4,399.99

Warranty: 2 years, parts and labour

Thorens TD1601 vinyl turntable

Price: \$4,999.99

Warranty: 2 years, parts and labour

Goldring Eroica-H cartridge

Price: \$999.99

Warranty: 1 year parts and labour when installed by an authorized Goldring agent

Distributor: Erikson Consumer, Tel: 514.457.6674, www.eriksonconsumer.com; thorens.com

Mediagraphy

Sweet Smoke, Just a Poke, EMI Columbia, 2C, 062 28 886

Jacques Bertin, Domaine de joie, Le Chant du Monde, LDX, 74701

Toto Bissainthe, Haïti Chanté, Harmonia Mundi, LDX, 74799

Hector Berlioz, Symphonie Fantastique, Dir. Carlos Païta, Decca, 7659

JAZZ

BY CHRISTOPHE RODRIGUEZ

BARNEY AND TETE

Barney Wilen Quartet
Grenoble, 88

Also available in vinyl

Elemental Records 2 DC, 5990538

That evening's music speaks for itself, a stellar mix of familiar tunes, French standards and a few originals to spice things up, everything that musicians of the **Wilen** and **Tete** generation know and appreciate. It was in 1993, during his only appearance at the **Montreal Jazz Festival**, that I heard the French-American saxophonist **Barney Wilen** live for the first time. I knew his work as a performer and composer, including *Un témoin dans la ville*, *Grand Prix*, as well as his work with **Art Blakey**, not to mention *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*, as well as the album *La Note bleue* which gave birth to a comic strip, so the pleasure was tenfold. Since last year, his son **Patrick** has undertaken, with the help of a Spanish record company, to exhume unreleased material, since **Barney Wilen** always recorded his concerts separately. After the **MIJF 1993** concert, here was another surprise in December 2020. An unprecedented double concert featuring the brilliant Catalan pianist **Tete Montoliu**, the unforgettable bassist **Riccardo Del Fra**, the drummer **Aaron Scott** and, of course, the saxophonist

Barney Wilen, all in Grenoble in 1988.

Just **Tete's** presence, this double *live* album is worth the detour and has not aged. By this welded areopagus with **Barney** as leader, you will find a multitude of compositions which oscillate between certain classics of the French chanson and jazz standards revised with an infinite precision, where everyone shared the chorus. A delight this year that will make you forget a little bit, the bad news.

OSCAR PETTIFORD

Baden-Baden 1959

Karlsruhe 1958, SWR/Jazz Heroes / Naxos
Whether it was with **Duke Ellington's** big band (1945–1948) or during the advances of *bebop* within trumpeter **Dizzy Gillespie's** band, without forgetting his collaborations with tenor saxophonist **Sonny Rollins**, or pianist **Thelonious Monk**, bassist **Oscar Pettiford** was a role model, after the departure of bassist **Jimmy Blanton**. Inescapable technician, with a sound recognizable between thousands, this giant who disappeared too early, alas! is still a reference object. To convince us of that, we find him in a studio, and in front of an audience, in 1959 and 1958, with very high calibre musicians. Drummer **Kenny Clarke**, trumpeter **Dusko**



Goykovitch, tenor saxophonist **Lucky Thompson** or pianist **Rolf Kühn** joined the party around jazz standards. Without having aged one iota, this joyful music marked by professionalism and a deep love of swing will make you rediscover *All The Things You Are*, *Smooth One*, *My Little Cello* as well as the inevitable *Blues In The Closet*.

ADONIS ROSE

Piece of Mind

Live at The Blue Alma

Storyville / Naxos

An important American drummer, seen too infrequently here, **Adonis Rose** has also been director of the Ascona Jazz Festival since 2017. After the world of New Orleans where he made his debut, his work allowed him to explore other movements, as you will see with *Piece of Mind*. Surrounded by a solid team, including pianist **Miki Hayama** and trumpeter **Maurice Brown**, he delivers a more than acceptable performance. For open minds.

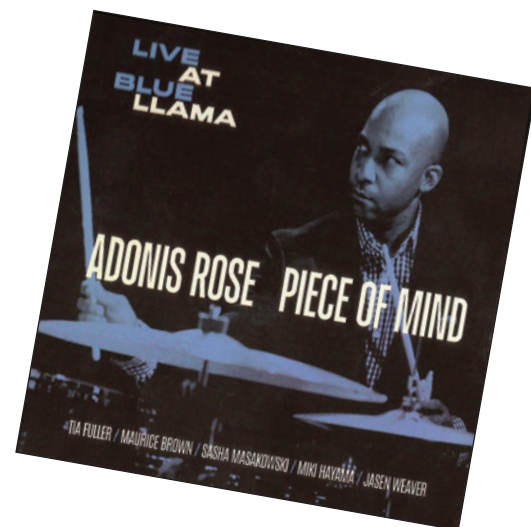
TOMMY FLANAGAN

Flanagans Shenanigans

1993

Storyville Naxos

With pianist **Tommy Flanagan** (1930–2001), we enter the world of great performers. From **Ella Fitzgerald** to **Tony Bennett**, whose musical director he was, and from **Miles Davis** to **Coleman Hawkins**, without forgetting the tandem with **Hank Jones**, pianist brother by blood, our friend **Tommy's** career was rich. In 1993, the year he was awarded the prestigious *JazzPrize*, awarded to a musician for his longevity and even more for his talent, he recorded in trio, quartet and sextet, also with wind ensembles. We are in awe of this superb album, which demonstrates the extent to which this artist could work in all genres, from swing to bop to neobop. From delicate touch to imaginative technique, the nine tracks can easily serve as models for anyone wishing to learn the blue note. Listen to *Tin Tin Deo* and *Minor Mishap* and you will understand my point.



What's new ?

A new luxury headset for the home

By the newsroom

Focal, a French brand known worldwide for its audio expertise, unveils a new *Clear Mg* reference. In addition to an elegant finish, these open-air headphones offer an even more refined sound reproduction than its predecessor *Clear*, at a price below 1500 euros. At **Focal**, the luxury of its products is hidden in the performance and experience they offer, as well as in every detail that enhances the object to make it *more* than a headphone.

An Innovative Headset Made in France

After four years of research and development, **Focal** engineers have designed a magnesium dome for the *Clear Mg* speakers. This new alloy, combined with the *M* geometry of the dome, adds even more lightness, rigidity and damping, the three qualities of a speaker. The sound restitution is fine, precise and dynamic, giving a sensational realism

when listening. Associated with an amplifier / DAC, *Clear Mg* offers all its performances. Thanks to an impedance of 55 Ohms, it can also be used without compromise with an *audiophile* player. Since 2016, the Saint-Etienne-based brand has positioned itself on the global hi-fi headphones market. This unique know-how, combined with masterful French manufacturing in its workshops, has earned **Focal** the status of *French Entreprises du Patrimoine Vivant* (Living Heritage Company).

Refined Design and Materials – A Remarkable Object

In its products' conception, **Focal** places design and materials at the forefront, always at the service of sound and ultimate listening comfort. The solid aluminum *yoke* was developed to fit the face perfectly, the genuine leather and microfibre covered headband offers a consistent curvature regardless of head size, and the perforated microfibre pads complete the comfort and openness. The exterior of the ear cups features a sophisticated honeycomb pattern, an elegance derived from the *chestnut* and *mixed-metals* finish that blends classicism with modernity. To complete the set, the carrying case matches the colours of the helmet.

www.focalnaimamerica.com/





Bluesound – New Generation

By Michel Dallaire

The original and award-winning hi-res multi-room streaming favorites get new DAC designs, next generation quad-core processors and intuitive touch panel controls with presets

Bluesound is a Canadian manufacturer based in Ontario who just introduced a 3rd generation of its popular *Node* and *Powernode* devices. These 2 devices specialize in network music playback (*streaming*) and wireless distribution of this music to different rooms in your home. These devices have been modified bringing them up to date.

Their streaming section has been improved thanks to a new 1.8 GHz **ARM Cortex A53** quad-core processor that is 8 times faster than that of the previous generation. The latter brings to the *BluOS* platform compatibility with the **ROON**, **Spotify Connect** and **Airplay 2** platforms. Thus, we could add to the functions the playback of **MQA** files in *streaming*. The display panel on the top of the devices becomes touch sensitive to allow adjustments directly on the device. The audiophile grade digital-to-analog converter section of the *Node* and *Powernode* now features a 32-bit / 384 kHz resolution chip. Both units support **eARC HDMI** connections for greater flexibility with other AV products such as video game consoles.

The *Node* and *Powernode* are equipped with a variety of digital and analog inputs and outputs for the most flexible connectivity possible. As for wireless connectivity, they integrate **Wi-Fi**, **Airplay 2**, and an **aptX HD Bluetooth** transceiver. It is therefore possible to listen to your music on both wired headphones and wireless **Bluetooth** headphones. For wired

connections, you can count on an **Ethernet** socket, a **Toslink** optical input, an **RCA** coaxial input and a **USB type A** socket.

The *Node* is essentially a network music player with a **DAC**. Its *BluOS* application for **iOS** and **Android** tablets and phones can also be installed on a **PC** or **Mac** computer. This application associated with the *Node* software offers the possibility of adjusting its sound thanks to tone controls. You can also select the cut-off frequency for **Bluesound** wireless subwoofers.

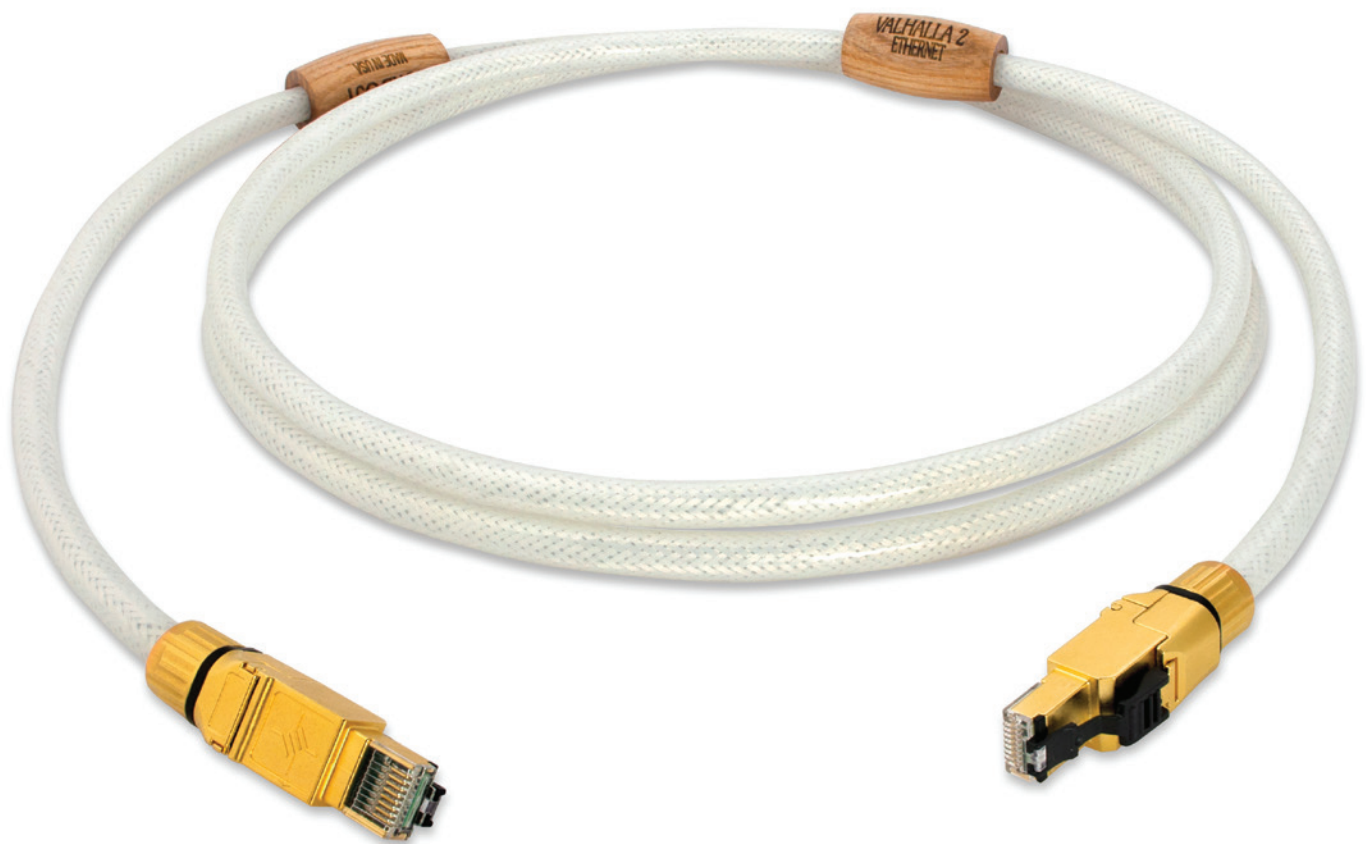
The *Powernode* is essentially the same music player as the *NODE*, but to which an amplifier section of 80 W per channel has been added. This is an increase of 20 W from the previous version that was 60 W per channel. The *Powernode* can be fully controlled by the *BluOS* app once installed on your phone or tablet. Just add your favourite speakers to get a complete stereo system. The *BluOS* platform allows you to add rear speakers to this high-fidelity system, such as a pair of **Pulse Flex 2i** and a **Pulse Sub +** wireless subwoofer. This transforms the stereo into a **2.1-channel Dolby** home theater system. It also allows you to add sound to every room in the house with different models of wireless speakers, included in the **Bluesound** catalog. Everything can obviously be controlled by your tablet or smartphone.

The *Node* and *Powernode* come in in a satin black or white finish. As of this writing, both devices can be pre-ordered for expected availability in June 2021. The prices are \$649 for the *Node* and \$1,099 for the *Powernode*.

bluesound.com

What's new ?

The New Nordost Valhalla 2 Ethernet Cable



By MICHEL DALLAIRE

American cable manufacturer **Nordost** announces the release of the *Valhalla 2 Ethernet* cable. In a world where the demand for fast data transfer and ever-increasing bandwidth is growing, the *Valhalla 2 Ethernet* cable is designed to ensure a perfect digital signal transfer.

The *Valhalla 2* consists of eight 23 AWG single stranded conductors surrounded by a high density polymer outer jacket. These eight conductors are divided into four twisted pairs and are covered with a triple layer of shielding against electromagnetic interference. This configuration minimizes the so-called skin effect and intermodulation interference.

The *Valhalla 2 Ethernet* cable uses **Nordost's** unique technology that evenly cuts each conductor to a precisely

calculated length taking into account the twist. This process is used to mechanically eliminate the cable's internal microphony as well as the resonances due to high frequencies. This precise cutting of the conductor length in relation to the geometry guarantees a uniform arrival of the data. This eliminates timing errors in the signal transfer.

The *Valhalla 2* is terminated with gold-plated 8P8C/RJ45 connectors that are ESD resistant and provide long-term mechanical reliability. The transmission speed and bandwidth of this cable can easily comply with Category 8 standards. As with all **Nordost** products, the *Valhalla 2* is designed and manufactured entirely in the USA.

www.nordost.com



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\$2,990



Mu-so Qb 2nd Generation

\$1,290



Mu-so 2nd Generation

\$2,190



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