

TED

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Life is beautiful!

Yes, this is the French title of the film *La vita è bella*, an Italian dramatic comedy written and directed by Robert Benigni and released in December 1997 in Italy and in October 1998 in France. The story tells how a Jewish bookseller, although deported to a concentration camp, tries to make his very young son, who is interned with him, believe that it is only a game. The following question was put to Robert Benigni Why did he deliberately choose this context to make people laugh? And he replied *But because it's a de-dramatized story, a de-dramatized film. Because life is beautiful, and the germ of hope is nested even in horror; there is something that resists everything, any destruction...* And one can, after all, make people laugh without hurting anyone... This is a point of view that one may or may not share, but it is very true that the germ of hope is nested everywhere, even in horror. Haven't we all recently seen, heard and sometimes even experienced quite exceptional situations of generosity and compassion during this horrible period of confinement due to the health crisis caused by COVID-19?

Now, in the middle of autumn, once again, we have to deal with it, under different conditions, of course, but still with a certain degree of uncertainty hanging over our heads. It is up to everyone to keep their level of vigilance high while we must also continue to support each other in the warrior's efforts that we must make during this new phase of deconfinement and reopening. The weather is beautiful and it is good to recharge from all kinds of activities reserved for early fall while protecting individual and collective security. We must remember that our individual freedom to do x, y or z will never take precedence over the safety of the community of which each of us is a part. We concentrate hard on what we have left and not on what we have lost, even if only temporarily.*

How can we achieve this goal? You have fun with your family members, friends or colleagues, even if it is in a virtual way, but always respecting the recommended rules of distancing. We read, we watch a good movie or TV, we listen to the music of our choice, the one that makes us live a very pleasant emotional experience. Let's not forget that positive emotions dominate musical experiences. The pleasure of listening to music could even alter the mood and sometimes even help to regulate our moods while reducing our stress and fatigue levels. That's the *magic of music* and that's what can help us keep hope and believe that, after all, *la vita è bella!*

For this September—October 2020 edition, we offer you an excellent choice of benchmarks including a DAC/headphone amplifier, three different brands and models of speakers and two streamers at different prices. Our *Buon Gusto* column is back and we even add a recipe for an iced dessert (the summer season is not yet completely over) concocted by the **Cuisinier tannant**. You will surely lick your lips. Let's not forget the *Rhythm & Music* column, because without the various musical works, all audio devices would, unfortunately, be silent. The team of columnists and the management of **TED Magazine** wish you a smooth and musical summer!

* Yann Arthus Bertrand, French photographer, reporter, director and ecologist



Lucie Beauchamp
Coéditrice et responsable des relations publiques

A Peaceful Home on the water's edge

By LUCIE BEAUCHAMP



In the early fall of 2016, **TED mag@zine** had the pleasure of visiting an imposing *Georgian*-style residence located on the shores of a lake. As you can see from the magnificent photos, this residence inspires calm and serenity thanks to its impeccable interior and magnificent exterior view. This house is the work of architects **Philip Hazan** and **Michel Dumoulin**. The architecture refers to the style favoured in Anglo-Saxon countries between 1720 and 1840, which consists of a simple cube-shaped house with one or two floors and rooms of almost symmetrical size. The front door is well encamped in the centre of the house and is surmounted by a rather imposing rectangular window. The construction of the house was carried out by **Lakeshore Constructions** under the tireless supervision of **Guy Deslauriers**, project manager. The owners also retained the services of designer **Blandine Ridel** who proposed a very decoration that is very appropriate in its elegance and simplicity. Some side tables were custom made by **Michel Bernier**, a steel craftsman whose workshop is located in Montreal. Some of the wooden furniture (the upstairs living room rosewood cabinet, the everyday dining room table and the living room console table) was made by **Alan MacDonald**, cabinetmaker. For its part, **Exact Audio Vidéo** designed and carried out a plan for the integration of home automation (i.e. the installation of infrastructure for lighting management, enhancement of cellular signals, audiovisual distribution, control of various electronic equipment, etc.). The **Control4** home automation system takes care managing the home's electronic devices. All those involved in this project share two common objectives: concern for a job well done and customer satisfaction.



As soon as you enter this magnificent residence, through the main entrance, you will notice an alcove where you can take off your outer clothes and store them. We continue our way in the entrance and we will then notice a magnificent staircase of sinuous shape, the crystal light fixture having the shape of a round cake on several floors as well as the very large panelled window illuminating the second floor. The choice of colours and the geometric arrangement of the shapes used are very pleasing to the eye.

Once past the main entrance, a large central space opens up to us, integrating two living rooms and a dining room. The first living room, on the left, is equipped with a fireplace, a four-seater sofa, two individual chairs and side tables. The second living room, occupying the centre, is furnished with four individual armchairs and side tables. Between the two lounges, a console table acts as a psychological separator from the space reserved for these very inviting lounges. In terms of brightness, one is pampered, as each of these three spaces has beautiful patio doors leading to a rear terrace and the breathtaking view of the large lake. The third space, also separated by a table decorated with a sculpture and two magnificent turquoise urns, serves as an everyday dining room. As you can see, nature offered us quite a spectacle during our visit, as the mist slowly lifted letting us enjoy the autumn sunshine.

We continue our visit of the first floor where, by the right, we reach the kitchen. As you can see, the walls of this room are a restful and impeccable creamy white. This kitchen is well lit by the two windows as well as by the recessed ceiling and accent lighting. Everything is tidy and each item that is used more often finds its place on the counter.

Also on the first floor is the main dining room where *Louis XV* style furniture has been carefully selected. The fireplace ensures that, regardless of the time of year,

all family members and their guests are well protected from the cold and/or humidity. This room, like all the others by the way, is both elegant and inviting at the same time. The mirror, the paintings, the sculptures have been chosen with care and everything fits perfectly: colours, shapes, materials. **Sonance** speakers have been recessed into boxes inside the walls and are not visible because they have been covered with a thin layer of plasterboard. They are therefore completely invisible. The same type of loudspeakers were also used in the living room on the second floor. A completely ingenious system requiring special attention and a certain amount of skill on the part of the installer. You have probably noticed that a place has been assigned to each object of decoration or other, and that the use of space is well symmetrical. Rectangular shapes



are favoured although occasionally more curved shapes, such as the rounded staircase, are judiciously used, ensuring that the whole does not become austere.

Let's go now to the second floor

Right at the top of the stairs is a cozy living room where you can enjoy watching a movie or TV show on the 75-inches LED TV. A **Golden Ear** sound bar was installed underneath the TV and, as mentioned above, **Sonance** in-wall speakers were installed in





the wall. A white **Totem Acoustic** subwoofer completes the 5.1 configuration. In this room, from an architectural point of view, the ceiling is slightly rounded like a half-dome. *LED* lighting was also used, which has a very charming effect.

To the left of the living room, there is a room used as an office where the two owners

can go about their professional activities. This room is followed by a bathroom and, of course, a first bedroom is occupied by the son when he is at home. The decoration is in shades of very pale blue and different greys. As you can see, a large outdoor balcony is accessible from this room, where the very large lake is within view. We continue our visit, and we find to the right of the living

room, a first room that serves as a guest room, which also has an outside balcony offering the same view of the lake.

A little further on, still to the right of the living room, one discovers the space reserved for the masters of the residence. A corridor with a thick glass table decorated with an orchid leads us there. On the left, there is a large walk-in room used to store Mr. / Mrs.'s clothes. In this room, a motion detector has been installed for lighting, while small *LED* lights are inside the cabinets, allowing people to find each other without having to turn on the lights themselves. On the right, we reach the main bathroom where from the entrance, a make-up corner has been reserved for the lady. In the majority of the rooms, we naturally enjoy audio and / or visual distribution.

Back in the corridor, where we go down a step, here we are in the master bedroom. This bright room offers a lounge-boudoir area in front of the fireplace where you can relax either by watching TV, chatting with



your spouse or simply reading a good book. Once again, the combination of the various styles of furnishings is successful and the color scheme (pale blue, cream white, taupe brown and grey-blue) and the various materials reflect calmness and invite relaxation.

The charming owners, all young retirees who have kept a professional activity, but on a part-time basis, kindly welcomed us in their home in order to make us understand that there are many advantages to including a home automation consultant such as **Exact Audio Video** in a home construction or renovation plan. Given the size of their home, the couple confirms that they have been won over by home automation, which helps them better manage the whole system, including audiovisual access in several areas of the house from a simple remote control, electronic tablet or laptop. The key to such success lies in good planning and in the choice of service providers (architects, designers, craftsmen and installers). Many thanks to our hosts and congratulations to everyone involved for such a great project!





LIST OF EQUIPEMENT

Lighting control set

Control4 KC120 and KD120 programmable dimmer keyboards;

Control4 SW120 switches;

Control4 APD120 dimmers.

Home automation system management

Control4 HC-800-B central controller;

Control4 HC-250-B Home Theatre Controller;

Control4 IOX-E-B expansion module;

Control4 SR260 RSK remote control.

Networking

D-Link 48-Port switches;

Luxul XBR-4400 gateway, XWC-1000 wireless controller, XAP-1210 access points.

Monitoring

Speco HINT7246 varifocal dome cameras;

Wirepath WPS-300-DVR digital recorder.

Audio and home theatre distribution

Control4 AMP108 8 zone amplifier;

Golden Ear 3D Array X and 3D array XL soundbars;

Totem Acoustic KIN Sub subwoofer;

Audio and home theatre distribution

Current Audio CS 651FL speakers;

Sonance VP-62 speakers;

Stealth Acoustics invisible 2-way speakers;

Sonance IS4 3-way 16-inches X 24-inches invisible speakers;

Audio Authority ADX1616 16 X 16 audio matrix;

Control4 Airplay gateway;

Yamaha RX-A850 audiovisual network receiver;

Yamaha RX-S600 AV Receiver.

Televisions and video distribution

Key Digital KDHD8X8 8-zone HDMI Matrix;

Samsung UN75H7150TV;

Samsung UN50H6350TV;

Other equipment

Wilson cellular signal antenna and amplifier;

APC J25BK surge protector with booster battery;

Omnimount RE42 storage rack and TV stands;

Logenex Teledoorbell intercom system.



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MUSIC IN SILENCE, THANKS TO ULTRASOUNDS

By Jean-Denis Doyle

What music lover, vinyl format, hasn't dreamed of owning a record collection that is in absolutely impeccable condition? Thanks to ultrasonic technology, this dream becomes reality. **iSonic** now offers us a device to wash discs, the *P4875II* model. This device allows to obtain amazing results with a relatively fast execution speed. As you'll see from this bench test, when it comes to cleaning your vinyl records, things are never as simple as you'd like them to be. So I invite you to follow me through my experiments as I had the time to clean dozens of disks.

iSonic is an American company based in Chicago that specializes in the manufacturing of various ultrasonic cleaning devices. **iSonic** manufactures them in all sizes and colours to thoroughly clean any object, such as jewelry and any other object that can benefit from ultrasonic cleaning technology. **iSonic** does not specialize in the cleaning of vinyl records, but rather in the design of devices that allow cleaning by means of ultrasound. The *P4875II* model, together with the *MVR5* rotating module, is a product that is designed for music lovers, on rigid media (such as vinyl), who have a fairly substantial collection of records and wish to clean them relatively quickly.

The difference between the iSonic device and the Kirmuss Audio device

In order not to mislead the reader, it would be a good idea to clarify the difference between the two cleaning systems. The **Kirmuss Audio** system is very different from the **iSonic** system, even though the two devices have a similar appearance. In fact, **Dr. Kirmuss'** patented process, which many of you had the opportunity to see demonstrated at the **Montreal and Toronto Audio Show**, is much longer and more sophisticated. In addition, the **Kirmuss Audio** machine operates at a slightly different frequency and its mechanism allows only two twelve-inch discs

to be cleaned at a time. On the other hand, **Dr. Kirmuss'** technique, with its numerous steps, where he applies several layers of surfacers, provides a cleaning quality worthy of an archival laboratory. The system proposed by **iSonic** is much simpler and faster while offering a high quality result.

Technical Description

The **iSonic P4875II** device The **iSonic P4875II** device cleans using ultrasonic technology. But how does ultrasonic cleaning work? In fact, an object is immersed in a water-based liquid that may contain soap or any other cleaning agent. Vibrators operating at very high frequencies, in this case 36,000 Hz, will cause the vessel to vibrate and thus cause tiny bubbles to appear and move in the water. These will hit the surface of the object and thus dislodge in depth the dirt that has accumulated there. In the case of a vinyl record, it will be necessary to ensure that the record spins in the water basin at a speed of about five revolutions per minute, hence the need for the *MVR5* module.

The bubbles will therefore strike the surface of the disc to the bottom of the grooves, dislodging all forms of contaminants, including residues that may remain after pressing the disc. As we will see later, the secret lies in a clever combination of the type of water used, the cleaning agent, the time spent by the disc in the machine and the drying method. The **iSonic** is equipped with a tank with a capacity of approximately two gallons, more or less eight litres. The controls on the side of the unit control the water heating, the timing, the start and stop of the ultrasound, as well as the switching on. The unit is equipped with a display that shows the elapsed time and water temperature. A handy translucent cover is provided.

The MVR5 Module

The *MVR5* module is a motorized mechanism to rotate the discs above the tank while protecting the central labels of the discs.



The *MVR5* is equipped with a small motor that rotates a shaft to which plastic washers with gaskets are attached. Once in place, and tightened securely, these washers prevent water from damaging the disc labels. The assembly swivels to facilitate draining and drying. The motor is equipped with its own switch and a small power transformer. The *MVR5* module is absolutely essential and must be ordered with the *P4875II* to be able to clean its disks.

Unpacking and installation

Unpacking is easy and the instruction manual provides all the necessary basic information. For the *iSonic* appliance, it is absolutely IMPERATIVE to read the instruction manual from beginning to end to ensure your safety first.

You should always keep in mind that this is an electrically powered appliance that still contains eight litres of water.

Take care to set up on a large table with space for a drying rack. A dish drainer will do the trick perfectly. Next, allow space for about ten record sleeves and make sure there is sufficient lighting.

Be sure to plug the *iSonic P4875II* and the *MVR5* into a power strip equipped with a

circuit breaker and a grounded outlet. It will preferably be fixed to the wall and placed at least six inches higher than your table. This way, if you spill water, you won't risk electrocution. You will also need a substantial amount of distilled water. A bottle of 18 l will be sufficient to start. To give you an idea, a full machine uses about eight litres and you will need to change the water about every 30 discs. **Le Marchand D'Eau**, located in Longueuil, offers laboratory grade reverse osmosis water with a PH level of 6.5. It's hard to find better! Beware, however, not all waters obtained by reverse osmosis are equal, and some are too corrosive for this use. You will also need 70% isopropyl alcohol and microfibre wipes. And it would be a good idea to get new inner sleeves so that you don't re-contaminate your records once they have been cleaned. You will find some excellent ones on the **MOFI** website or at any other retailer offering this type of vinyl record supplies.

Let's go, let's clean up!

In order to fully understand the product that *iSonic* offers to the public, I started my first cleaning session by scrupulously using the method, the soap as well as the **Kimtech** paper wipes that are provided. First, of

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ISONIC P4875II VINYL RECORDS CLEANER SYSTEM

course, the unit must be filled with at least eight litres of distilled water. Forget tap water, don't even think about it, it contains too many minerals that would leave deposits on your discs. Contrary to what the manual suggests, do not turn on the element that heats the water. It is neither necessary nor desirable to clean a vinyl.

Five discs must then be mounted on the *MVR5*, taking care not to overtighten the mechanism. A piece of advice, for your first time, choose five discs that are not too precious to you, while you refine your technique.

The difference is so easy to hear that you will have only one desire, to clean the rest of your record collection. The dynamics suddenly take a leap and fine details, previously drowned in noise, appear disarmingly.

iSonic recommends adding two capfuls of the soap provided for the *P4875II* bin. Before starting the cleaning process, it is always recommended, when adding fresh water, to use the degas function for one and a half minutes. In fact, this procedure conditions the water by removing air bubbles to make ultrasonic cleaning more effective.

Then the *MVR5* and the five discs are hung on the right side of the machine. We start the small motor of the *MVR5* and activate the ultrasound for five minutes. When the cycle is completed, **iSonic** recommends letting the discs drain at 45° for a few minutes. Then simply remove the discs from the *MVR5* and wipe them with **Kimtech** wipes. I will be quite frank with you, the cleaning method proposed by **iSonic** is far from satisfactory. First, it uses far too much soap, which leaves a visible and audible deposit on the discs. You don't want that ... unless your records have been used as a plate in a restaurant or have been lying in your children's sandbox, this method, and especially this soap, is of no interest to an audiophile's record collection.

Let's go, let's start all over again!

It therefore became obvious that I had to develop my own method that would adapt to this device in order to obtain a satisfactory result. So I consulted **Guillaume Brunet**, a specialist in archiving and digitization at the **Bibliothèque et archives nationales du Québec**. After discussion, it became obvious that I needed to add a rinse cycle. So I diluted 4 ml of the soap provided in 750 ml of distilled water. I then applied this soapy



water, rubbing with a small brush with very fine bristles, on each of the discs before mounting them on the *MVR5*.

I then put the discs to be cleaned in the machine using only distilled water for a ten-minute cycle. In other words, I wash by hand and use the **iSonic** for the deep rinse cycle. I also replaced the **Kimtech** wipes with microfibre wipes that I rinse occasionally. Bingo! Now we're talking! Clean, soap-free and quiet discs. Simply wipe them with a microfibre cloth without putting pressure, and let them dry on a support designed to drain the plates, for a good thirty minutes. This method may not be perfect in the absolute, but it has, at least, the merit of making a good cleaning quickly, and not to damage the disks.

Listening impressions

Rediscovering your record collection.

Between before and after ultrasonic cleaning is day and night. The difference is so easy to hear that you will have only one desire, to clean the rest of your record collection. The dynamics suddenly take a leap and fine details, previously drowned in noise, appear disarmingly. As a child, my mother used to say, when she was washing the windows, ah, look, we can see outside! It is exactly the same phenomenon that occurs. We can now hear to the depths of the trillions.

ISONIC P4875II VINYL RECORDS CLEANER SYSTEM

However, this can have a pernicious effect. If your turntable is not in perfect condition, absolutely flawless records will let you know. For example, when there are piano notes that go out softly, if your belt needs to be changed, you will now hear the speed change. This will also apply to excessively worn needles, or other incorrect adjustments. On the other hand, when all the right conditions are in place, listening to a cleaned vinyl record with the **iSonic P4875II** is a great improvement. If you ask me what would be better between getting a better turntable or investing in a device like the **iSonic P4875II**, I would tend to lean towards the Isonic.

Conclusion

If, for a long time, the manufacturer **Linn** preached that the most important thing was the source, we must not lose sight of the fact that in analogue music, the real source is the record itself. By purchasing an **iSonic P4875II** disk cleaner, the music lover, on a rigid support, is making an investment above all for his or her disk collection and thus ensuring its longevity. The gain in quality obtained by a freshly cleaned disc from the **iSonic** device is considerable. With its ability to clean five discs

at a time, you'll be able to quickly go through your collection and appreciate the most important thing in your music, silence

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$1,099 for the 5-disc cleaning model and \$1,299 for the model that can clean 10 disks.

Warranty: 1 year, parts and labour

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

Thanks

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Guillaume Brunet, Bibliothèque et archives nationales du Québec

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AMAZING, DETAILED, CONSISTENT, ENERGETIC, CONTROLLED AND PRECISE PERFORMANCE

By Richard Schneider

iFi Audio is a subsidiary of the English audio company, **AMR**. The latter manufactures high-level audio components. **iFi Audio** was created in 2010 to meet a growing demand for compact and portable devices at reasonable prices. These have been designed without compromising the audiophile aspect of sound reproduction.

The *Zen Dac* is a fairly small device, trapezoidal in shape, measuring 117 mm in length, 100 mm in width and 30 mm in height. Despite the robustness of its all-metal casing, we have to admit that we are light years away from large traditional hi-fi equipment. This little box may have some nice surprises in store for us.

Initially, the *ZEN DAC* can act as a headphone amplifier, otherwise it can be used as a digital audio converter in a stereo system. It connects to both *PC* and *Mac* computers via a *USB* port. If you are a *Mac* or *Linux* user, visit the manufacturer's website to get the firmware exclusive to **iFi**, *Limoncello 5.2A*. *Zen Dac's*

firmware is upgradeable and updates will be available to optimize it.

Physical Appearance

A backlit volume control is located at the front centre of the case. The colour of the *LED* display varies according to the sampling rate during reading. There are also push buttons that are very useful when using the unit as a headphone amplifier. One of these buttons, the *Power Match*, is used to adjust the gain, and the second, the *True Bass*, is used primarily when the unit is used as a low-frequency amplifier by users of headphones. Still in this respect, on the far right, there are two exits. It's all about using the one that best suits your headphones. One is a standard 6.35 mm output and the other is a balanced 4.4 mm output. For headset owners, let's review two important aspects. *The Power Match* amplifier stage will be used, or not, depending on the type of headphones or earphones used. High-sensitivity earphones such as in-ear monitors do not require the use of a power gain under any circumstances. Thus, *Power Match* is left



IFI AUDIO ZEN DAC HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER AND D-A USB DAC CONVERTER

at its lowest setting. However, if your headphones need a power boost, like most on-ear or over-the-ear headphones, you'll get a higher gain boost. *True Bass*, on the other hand, amplifies the low frequencies without encroaching on the midrange frequencies. These circuits are at the analogue level and do not affect the digital signal in any way. At the rear, the 4.4 mm balanced output allows the unit to be used as a preamplifier directing the signal to a power amplifier or active speakers with balanced inputs using 4.4 mm to *XLR* cables. For this reason, a switch allows you to choose between fixed or variable use. In variable mode, the *Zen Dac* runs as a preamplifier. For example, the volume control on the front will be used, while in fixed mode, the preamplification is bypassed so that the unit can be connected to an external preamplifier or an integrated one using the *RCA* outputs.

The asynchronous *USB type B* socket connects the converter to your computer. The *USB* input of the computer is also used to power the device. You will not find a power switch. The converter remains powered on as long as it is connected to the computer, regardless of whether the computer is turned on or off. As an option, you can purchase an external power outlet that plugs into the *DC 5 V* input on the far right. According to **iFi Audio**, this addition improves the musical rendering significantly. I have not been able to test this power supply.

Technical design

Digital audio conversion is provided by a **Burr-Brown** chip, a favourite at **iFi Audio**. The manufacturer appreciates its fluidity and great musicality. Upon entry, the data is processed by an *XMOS* processor. The sampling rate for *PCM* and *DXD* files ranges up to a rate of 24 bits / 384 kHz while for *DSD* files the sampling rate increases from 2.8 Mhz to 12.4 Mhz (*DSD256*).

Thanks to the *True Native* design, the *PCM* and *DSD* files use different circuits of the **Burr-Brown** chip architecture. The *DSD* signal remains intact (*bit-perfect*) until the analogue conversion, unlike many devices that convert the signal to *PCM* before sending it to the analogue converter. Another detail deserves a special mention about this converter. As a general rule, manufacturers retain the firmware that comes with the *XMOS* chip. Not at **iFi Audio**, because according to the manufacturer, it does not optimize the quality of music reproduction. The chip is reprogrammed to its own specifications.

The analogue conversion stage is balanced, which is rather rare for a device with such a selling price. In addition, the *Zen Dac* incorporates an interesting range of high quality circuit components selected to offer a perfect integration in an audio context. Examples include **TDK's COG** capacitors and a high-end analogue volume control.

Despite a very small price, the *ZEN DAC* handles *PCM* files up to 384 kHz and up to 256 in *DSD*. It also decodes *MQA* files, which is quite impressive at this price. See for yourself:

- 44.1 / 48 / 88.2 / 96 / 176.4 / 192 / 384 kHz *PCM*
- 2.8 / 3.1 / 5.6 / 6.2 / 11.2 / 12.4 MHz *DSD*
- 353 / 384 KHz *DXD*

As you can see, *DAC ZEN* can be used in various ways. Since I'm running out of space, here is a summary of my use in d-a conversion mode. Having in hand a converter of good workmanship, and taking advantage of the fact that I was in full evaluation of a converter for a possible test bench, I was well armed to make a comparison. I had no particular expectations, but sometimes indifference is a bad counsellor.

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IFI AUDIO ZEN DAC HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER AND D-A USB DAC CONVERTER

Installation and use

I have connected the D-A converter to my laptop under *Windows 10*. In no time at all, the *USB* connection was made. I needed a file reader on my computer, especially software that could read *DSD* files, because I was very curious about that. After some research, I stopped on *HYSOLID*, mainly because the software is free. It reads *DSD* files and seemed pretty user-friendly to me. Rest assured that I have no pecuniary interest in this software. I downloaded it to my computer. I was asked where my music files were and the software took care of the rest of the configuration.

Next, *HYSOLID* asked me to install the interface of the software on my *iPhone* from the **Apple Store**, which is quite normal. By the way, the process works just as well on a tablet. So far, not too complicated, right? By virtue of my installation, I used the *RCA* outputs of the *ZEN DAC* to bring it to my preamplifier. That's all. This is the easiest installation I've done in years.

Listening to music

Of course, the first record I wanted to hear was a *DSD*. I chose *Café Blue* by **Patricia Barber**. *HYSOLID* tells me that the file of *The Thrill is Gone* is indeed a *DSF 2.8 MHz/1 bit to DoP 176.4 kHz/32 bits—Bit perfect*. So far so good, the manufacturer's promises are being kept. I was very surprised by the performance of this small aircraft, a true champion in terms of value for money. Of course, we are not in the leagues of **Meitner**, **Linn** or **Naim**, but for the price, I have absolutely

nothing to reproach him with. The result is surprisingly clear and detailed. Consistency is very good, because the aircraft knows how to stay on course during passages where there is a lot of traffic. In addition, the width of the sound stage is quite adequate. The device diffuses a lot of dynamism, the bass is deep and precise. It reproduces all musical genres with energy. I plugged *ZEN DAC* into my reference channel, and the latter drew all the potential out of it. I own 3 different brands of headsets and I was able to appreciate what I heard. The gain and bass controls provide a valuable, if not essential, contribution.

In the end

If you want to explore the reading of digital files and, for the moment, you don't want to invest a large amount of money; then, in my opinion, the question doesn't even arise. *ZEN DAC* is a must. The only risk you run is spending a lot of time listening to your favourite records. We can easily affirm that this device is a no brainer. It says it all.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$199

Warranty: 1 year, parts and labour

Distributor: Motet Distribution,

Tel: 905.474.4331,

www.motetdistribution.com;

ifi-audio.com

Mediagraphy

Patricia Barber, *Café Blue*





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Technics

BUONGUSTO

By Daniel Ménard

The Best in the state of Washington, a young wine, powerful and full of promise

J. Bookwalter, Notebook NV13 Columbia Valley, Washington

This wine is made from grape varieties considered among the most tannic, *Cabernet Sauvignon*, *Syrah* and *Malbec*. You will be surprised by its balance, roundness, smoothness and complexity. It lets itself be discovered by its charming scents of ripe strawberries, raspberries and black cherries, notes of tobacco, cedar and sweet spices. The vineyard is located in the heart of the Columbia Valley in the state of Washington about 345 km from the city of Seattle. During my visit in this region, I took the road through the Cascade Mountains from Seattle to Columbia Valley. The trip is very pleasant and so I made a stop at the majestic Mont Rainier. The latter is an active Stratovolcano of the Cascade Range and it dominates the area with almost 4,500 m of altitude.

If you want to taste **John Bookwalter's** wines, no need to drive 5 hours, you can go to Wondinville, this small town

is 30 min away from Seattle and there are several stores of Washington producers.

It was **Jerry Bookwalter**, father of the current president of the company **John Bookwalter**, who one day decided to go into winemaking. A graduate of **UC-Davis**, he spent 13 years farming in California's San Joaquin Valley before moving his family to Washington State's *Tri-Cities* in 1976. From 1976 to 1982, he helped manage the plantations of three famous Washington vineyards — **Sagemoor**, **Bacchus** and **Dionysus**. In 1982, he founded **J. Bookwalter Winery**. The winery is now run by his son **John**, who was marketing director at **E&J Gallo and Coors** before returning to the family project in 1997. Since 2014, **Caleb Foster** is the head winemaker. Today a recognized producer, the vineyard has award-winning wines including its *Cabernet Sauvignon* ranked among the *100 best wines of the year 2018*. The region is very beautiful and pleasant, it is a must. However, if you are unable to travel, you will be



able to taste the **Notebook**, which is available at the **SAQ**, to get an idea of its quality. An opulent and generous wine with aromas of ripe fruit, cherries, black olives and well-integrated woody notes. The palate is distinguished by a velvety, smooth texture supported by almost full-bodied, round tannins that melt like a caress on the palate. At this price, I would say it offers very good value for money. Enjoy the tasting!

**J. Bookwalter, Notebook NV13
Columbia Valley, Washington**

Red wine 750 ml

SAQ code: 14,294,046

Alcohol: 14.1%, sugar 3.4 g/l

Price: \$21.85

Grape varieties: 65% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Syrah, 12% Malbec, 3% other grape varieties.



John Bookwalter of J. Bookwalter Winery



THE NEW ASPIRANT TO THE DANISH THRONE

By Guillaume Brunet

Recently distributed in Canada, **Audiovector** is a Danish company with more than forty years of experience in manufacturing high-end speakers. Founded in 1979, **Ole Klifoth** sought nothing less than to create the perfect high-end speaker. Since that time, **Audiovector** has remained true to its original idea of producing high quality, natural sounding speakers for music lovers and audiophiles around the world. **Audiovector** differs from its competitors because it offers scalable speakers. On some models, it is thus possible to move up in range while keeping the same housing. The model being evaluated today is the smallest model in the R Series, the R1 Signature loudspeakers. On this model, **Audiovector** offers the possibility to convert it to an active version with analog and digital inputs. Quite unique as a concept. With the basic passive version, and in this price range, the choice is great and the competition is fierce and well established. Let's see if this newcomer will be able to carve out a place for herself among her rivals.

At **Audiovector**, innovation and tradition go hand in hand to deliver exceptional products and unique listening experiences. According to its founder, who is now in charge of research and development for the brand, live music is the reference. So by measuring, listening and comparing, he fine-tunes his speakers until the sound is exactly what he hears during a live performance. All **Audiovector** products are manufactured and assembled by hand, with great care, using the best materials, from its factory in Copenhagen, Denmark. The product range obviously includes speakers, also speaker cables and brackets for shelf type models.

The *R Series* is not **Audiovector's** entry-level model, but rather the second in the progression of the brand's series, which offers up to very high-end models such as the *R8* and *R11*, which retail for \$75,000 and \$285,000. The *R Series* is for audiophiles and home theatre enthusiasts alike. It consists of a freestanding speaker, the *R3*, a pair of bookshelf or shelf speakers, the *R1*, a centre channel speaker, the *RC*, and a subwoofer, the *R Sub*

Arreté. All *R Series* models are available in three versions: the entry-level *Signature*, followed by the *Avantgarde* and the most advanced model, the *Arreté*. Four basic finishes are offered, silky white, Italian walnut, African rosewood and black ash. It is also possible, for an extra charge, to choose the color of your choice with a piano gloss finish.

Technical description

Audiovector speakers are packed with cutting-edge technology and innovative design. The first thing you notice is the drop-shaped case, with its rounded sides. This shape is not only aesthetically pleasing, it prevents the formation of standing waves and eliminates the distortions associated with them. It also allows a considerable reduction in internal damping materials, which results in better dynamics. The cabinet-work of the cases is very meticulous, carried out with millimetre precision resulting in an irreproachable device.

The rear panel of the speakers has two tuned vents, one for each transducer. The dedicated *tweeter* vent works with the tweeter which has no rear absorption chamber. The vent delays the rear wave of the *tweeter* so that it integrates with the natural reflections of the room, thus increasing the depth of the perceived sound scene. A bit like some manufacturers who place a tweeter at the back or on top of the speaker to increase the soundstage. This concept called *SEC (Sound Enhancement Concept)* has been used since 1996 by **Audiovector** and is patent pending. All *tweeters*, from soft domes to *Air Motion Tweeter (AMT)* ribbons, are designed, engineered and produced in-house to exacting standards.

As for the *woofer / midrange* speakers, they are designed and developed by **Audiovector**, but their manufacture has been entrusted to **Scan-Speak**, another large Danish company. The 165 mm woven carbon fibre *woofer / midrange* speaker is the foundation of the *R Series'* dynamic character. At **Audiovector**, all transducers are attached to the cabinet with only three points of contact. This concept, called *NES (No Energy Storage)*,

isolates the transducers from the weight of the cabinet, reduces energy transmission and loss, and increases transparency.

Unpacking and Start-up

The *R1 Signature* is a shelf speaker with a narrow, sleek profile and a classic, modern, pure Scandinavian design. The finish of the delivered model is Italian walnut and it fits perfectly with my vintage Scandinavian decor. I installed the speakers on heavy, ultra-rigid stands lent by an audiophile friend. Since they are a little short, 51 cm, I didn't hesitate to decouple the speakers with a **Primacoustic Recoil 5** isolator / stabilizer — this allowed me to gain a precious 4.5 cm in height. At this height, the tweeters are perfectly aligned with my ears when my chair is in a reclined position.

The **Audiovector R1 Signature** does not offer bi-wiring or bi-amplification. The connection is made through a high quality connector which, inside the housing, holds the plate where the filter separator is mounted. Everything is designed to minimize unnecessary welding and wire ends. After various positioning tests, the speakers landed 183 cm away from each other and 244 cm from my ear, which gives an angle of 15° to the horizontal. When I tried to distance them more, the sound image couldn't close in the centre and I would lose in medium-low frequencies. By bringing them closer together, I had to reduce the angle and regain image width, but I was losing depth and focus. But it's all about preference and the room you have to deal with, it's all about compromise management...

Listening Impressions

I started my critical listening after about a week of running-in, which is only about 30 hours — the components set up really quickly. **Amber Rubarth** and her album *Session From The 17th Ward* seems the perfect choice for these speakers. **Chesky Records'** *Binaural +* series albums are live stereophonic recordings, with no post-production processing or mixing, so what you hear really happened. With the *R1 Signature*, the stage is really well



reproduced, the instruments take their place perfectly and literally overflow from the position of the speakers. On *Strive and Down*, the dynamics are incredible and the room where the recording was made is really well restored. A pure delight.

I continued listening with the bewitching oud of **Anwar Brahim**. Her album on the ECM label, *The Astounding Eyes of Rita* is a masterpiece of the genre, both in terms of music and production. I particularly like the title track of the album. The intensity is constantly rising, and bewitched, I also turned the

sound up to an indecent volume compared to what is expected from such a small speaker. At this volume, the bass clarinet's low notes combined with the double bass became physical and with the darbouka playing totally percussive, the music was never restricted or compressed in any way. Great art. I have also listened to many other styles such as pop, electro, jazz and classical, and none of them have been at a disadvantage.

Conclusion

From the very first listen, the *R1 Signature* speakers impressed me with their speed, rhythm and dynamism. The projected sound image extends far beyond the edges of the speakers in both width and height. The presentation is usually placed horizontally in front of the speakers rather than behind them. The bass is fast and hollow, it's surprising to see so much authority emanating from such small cabinets and, above all, how coherent these speakers remain even in the face of dense instrumentation. The level of detail is as high as the price requires, but the way the *R1 Signature* presents them really impresses. The tone is fair, transparent and unrestricted.

The **Audiovector R1 Signature** has the shortcomings of its qualities. Let me explain, if a recording is, for example, thin, sibilant or simply of poor quality, the *R1 Signature* will tell you right away, without any detour. They have the agility to deconstruct the less fine, lower quality mixes, delivering the music to us as an outdoor live presentation, unlike others who will rather let us hear the tracks individually, unmixed, just juxtaposed. This is the type of speaker that allows you to analyze the production. The **Audiovector R1 Signature** has the shortcomings of its qualities. Let me explain, if a recording is, for example, thin, sibilant or simply of poor quality, the *R1 Signature* will tell you right away, without any detour. They have the agility to deconstruct the less fine, lower quality mixes, delivering the music to us as an outdoor live presentation, unlike others who will rather let us hear the tracks individually, unmixed, just juxtaposed. This is the type of speaker that allows you to analyze the production quality of a recording, but prefers you to live in the moment and enjoy the music rather than analyze it. If you're on a budget and looking for small speakers with great music quality, they should definitely be part of your listening experience. A new one among the great Danes.



GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$3,960 (available finishes: silk white, black-stained ash, Italian walnut and African rosewood)

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Tri-Cell Enterprises, Tel: 905.265.7870 or in Quebec, 450.415.0730, www.tricellenterprises.com; www.audiovector.com

Mediagraphy

Amber Rubarth, *Sessions From The 17th Ward*, Chesky Records, AIFF files 24 / 96

Aouar Brahem, *The Astounding Eyes Of Rita*, ECM Records, CD, ECM, 2075



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Easy recipes by
the mischievous cook

Ice Cream Cake Recipe

He cooks... He makes us cook. A mischievous cook and it is, quite simply, a question of replacing a few letters to get to an **ingenious** cook.

When it comes to dessert, as we all know, there are the ingredients and there is the hand. The mischievous cook is ingenious and has the **hand**, and **TED Magazine** is certain that he will know how to help you cook a perfect dessert.





P.-S. Now it's time to share the magazine with the person who will be able to succeed in such a project at home.

By Easy Recipes from the mischievous cook.

Strawberry ice cream cake and its rhubarb compote recipe

For the compote

Cook 2 cups of frozen rhubarb with 1 cup of sugar and 1/2 cup of water. Cook for 20 minutes. Grind with a hand blender. Keep refrigerated.

For the crust

Melt 1/4 cup butter and mix with 1 1/4 cup **Graham** cracker crumbs with a fork.

Line the bottom of a 9-inch baking pan, working up the edges.

For the cake mix

Whip 3 eggs with 1/2 cup of sugar.
Whip 1 cup of 35% cream. Add to the egg mixture.
Pour the mixture over the crust, filling the pan well.
Put in the freezer overnight.

For the topping

Mix the 3 cups of strawberries with 1/2 cup of maple syrup.

The next day

Cut the necessary portions. Garnish the bottom of the plate with the rhubarb compote. Place the pieces of cake on the plates. Let stand at room temperature for 10 min. Garnish with strawberries marinated in maple syrup.

Discover many more recipes on the mischievous cook's Facebook page. Enjoy!
https://www.facebook.com/Recettes-faciles-du-cuisinier-tannant-105071697846276/?view_public_for=105071697846276



Speakers that sing in unison

By Michel Dallaire

Davis Acoustics has been in the speaker business for over 30 years. It is part of a small circle of French manufacturers who design and manufacture everything from A to Z, including their own transducers. Olivier Visan is now at the head of this company founded around 1985 by his father, the late Michel Visan. For the past 15 years

or so, Olivier has designed all the speaker models at Davis Acoustics, including the *MV One Master*, of which the 20DE8 wideband transducer was originally developed by his father. The development of the 20DE8 required a full year of research and development before it could finally be used in the MV One enclosure launched

in 2012. At the time of writing, the new *MV One Master*, which is being imported by **Atoll Electronique Canada**, is a first in North America. It was scheduled to be presented in March 2020 at the **Montreal Audio Fest**, which was cancelled due to the *COVID-19* pandemic. So let's see together what this novelty is going to offer us to brighten up our period of confinement and post-confinement.

What is a broadband speaker?

It is a transducer designed to reproduce the entire range of frequencies audible to the human being, ideally from 20 Hz. 20 kHz. The design of such a speaker is very difficult, not to say almost impossible. The principle of the broadband speaker is not new in itself, but it has come a long way since the beginning of the last century. One of the flagship models of this approach is **JBL's** famous *LE8T*, which had its heyday in the 1960s. **Michel Visan** knew this broadband transducer very well and was inspired by it for the design of his superb *20DE8*. The advantage of a one-way speaker is its coherence, as it doesn't require a crossover for frequency cuts as with two or three-way speakers. This filtering requires electronic parts that can induce phase rotations and create dips or bumps in the frequency response curve of a speaker. The broadband transducer also has the advantage of high sensitivity and dynamic range. It is therefore easy to power any amplifier, including tube and low-power amplifiers.

The 20DE8 by Davis Acoustics

Michel Visan was an engineer with more than 45 years of experience. He worked for other speaker manufacturers such as **Vega** and **Siare** before founding **Davis Acoustics**. The centrepiece of the *MV One Master* speaker is its famous *20DE8* with a diameter of 21 cm, the design of which began in 2011. Its very light cone, made of graphite-treated paper, is provided with eight radial grooves that reinforce its rigidity. The central core cover, 50 mm, is made of aluminum and its task is to reproduce high frequencies. The moving coil of the *20DE8* is made of *Nomex* covered with a winding of flat aluminum wire. Everything is bathed in a magnetic field generated by a powerful truncated cone magnet made of *TiCoNAL* (**Titanium, Cobalt, Nickel and Aluminum**). The core and pole pieces taper towards the air gap to concentrate the magnetic field lines of force. This core also has a copper ring which is used to regulate the impedance, between 8 and 10 ohms.

The motor of the *20DE8* is covered with a very dense and heavy protective pot. The whole unit is mounted on a thin-branch alloy salad bowl with ventilation at the moving coil. All metal parts of the speaker are connected to a ground wire, which is connected to a terminal block outside the speaker. According to **Davis Acoustics**, this additional option is supposed to provide listening stability, and is highly recommended.

The MV One Master

Unlike the original *MV One*, which was simply a freestanding speaker at right angles, the new *MV One Master* is relatively large and trapezoidal in shape. The angles of its woodwork make it tilt backwards, with a front face wider than the back face, in order to fight against the formation of internal standing waves. The speaker is covered with natural wood veneer and the two available finishes are golden bamboo and black ebony with a strong white vein. The rear terminals are superb **WBT**, of German origin, four in number. The red terminal block represents the positive side while the other three represent the negative side of the signal which includes three different modes of frequency curve corrections. The direct connection to the amplifier and without any filtering is *Mode 1*. *Mode 2*, on the other hand, adds an *RLC* circuit that slightly attenuates part of the frequency curve between 500 and 7,000 Hz. This mode softens the midrange portion of the speaker so that we can listen to it from a closer distance in smaller rooms. *Mode 3* is used to slightly increase the bass and treble levels of the speaker while maintaining the realistic and dynamic feel of the full-range driver. These corrective filters are discrete, and they offer the possibility of adjusting the sound of the *MV One Master* according to the acoustics of the listening room and/or the type of amplifier used. These filters are, of course, made with quality parts such as **Mundorf** capacitors and internal wiring from the French manufacturer **Esprit** whose conductors are made of grade 5n pure copper.

A Unique Voice for Music

Given the space allotted to me, I will not elaborate on the description of the music used to make my listening. Let's get to the heart of the matter, specifying first that I have tested the three connection modes with my built-in. Since my open-plan living room allows me to listen relatively close, at 2.5 m, it is with mode 2 that I obtained the best results. What strikes me from the very first listen is the fact that my volume control needs to





be adjusted much lower to get a comfortable level. The high sensitivity and dynamic range of the *MV One Master* provides incredible midrange presence. This portion of the spectrum is detailed with very accurate stamps. The phase coherence of the *20DE8* loudspeaker allows me to feel no dissection between treble, midrange and bass. Thus the instruments and performers are better positioned in the stereophonic space and on the subjective depth of the recordings. The bass reflex load and speaker volume allow the bass to drop surprisingly low for a full-range speaker. Even though its vent opens to the front, I don't hear a tonic, which is often characteristic of this type of charge. The treble rises remarkably well in high frequencies and remains soft in all circumstances. Even if the extreme high is somewhat truncated, this characteristic does not create any imbalance or any glaring lack of tonal balance which, subjectively, remains very satisfactory. The ultra-light membrane of the *20DE8* combined with a very powerful magnetic assembly ensures

impressive dynamic deviations without being too much affected by a settling or saturation phenomenon at high volumes as on other realizations of this type. The attack of the notes shows good transitions that reproduce the original sound of the instruments while respecting their timbres. The level of transparency of the *MV One Master* has meant that on the majority of my reference albums, I have been able to perceive details in the mid-range and high-midrange that, until now, have not been highlighted as well by other two-way or even three-way speakers. But where the magic works the most is on voices accompanied by small ensembles of acoustic instruments in which the *MV One Master* excels with confounding naturalness. In this sense, I believe that the sound of the *20DE8* can be compared to an electrostatic membrane transducer in terms of coherence. I have often seen, at audio shows, speakers with a wide-range driver used without a crossover on the mid-range to which a super tweeter and a big woofer are added to compensate for its limitations. In

these cases, we return to the problem of frequency overlap between the different transducers. With the *MV One Master* speaker and its superb *20DE8* transducer, none of this is necessary, as it comes close to the ideal of a single point source. Frequency Response Curve Correction *Modes 2* and *3* work wonders to adapt the sound of the speaker to the listening room or to the taste of the user. These options make it easy to install and set up the speaker. In this way, a most satisfactory tonal balance can be achieved for this type of single-channel speaker.

Conclusion

Despite their undeniable quality of coherence in the mid-range, wideband speakers are generally limited in the extremities of the audible spectrum. The *Davis MV One Master* speaker and its superb *20DE8* elegantly overcomes these shortcomings with its outstanding design. Its three listening modes subtly modify its sound without distorting the coherence of the broadband speaker. They also improve the speaker's power handling despite high sensitivity. The *MV One Master* speaker is the best realization of a broadband speaker I've heard so far. To manufacture a transducer that alone manages to provide a bandwidth from 40 Hz to 20 kHz without too many accidents, in an impedance curve between 8 and 10 ohms is a feat. And this is, in my opinion, what the late *Michel Visan* achieved in designing his now mythical *20DE8*.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$13,599

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Atoll Électronique Canada,
T. : 438.380.8906, www.atoll-electronique.ca;
www.davis-acoustics.com

Mediagraphy

Adrianna Savall / Hirundo Maris,
Chants du Sud et du Nord, ECM, 2 784 395

Hadouk Trio, Now, Celluloid, 67039-2

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

Kevin Seddiki and Bijan Chemirani,
Imaginarium, World Village, WV479083

Quercus, June Trabor, Iain Ballamy
and Huw Warren, ECM, 2276 372 4555

Thanks

The management of **TED Magazine** sincerely thanks Atoll Canada for the loan of the speakers.

RHYTHM & MUSIC

BLUES

By Pierre Jobin

AVEY GROUWS BAND

The Devil May Care

Autoproduction

Avey Groows Band deploys a contagious energy and dynamism that never lets up. The band, based in the *Quad Cities* of Illinois and Iowa, on either side of the Mississippi River, was a semi-finalist at the *International Blues Challenge* in Memphis in 2018 and 2020. *The Devil May Care* is their first album. It includes ten original tracks composed by the solid and expressive singer **Jeni Groows** and the brilliant and versatile guitarist and singer **Chris Avey**. They are the two founders of this group created in 2017. **Bryan West** on drums and **Randy Leasman** on bass complete this well-fused quartet with relevance and brilliance. **Nick Vasquez's** keyboards add, here and there, enriching and welcome touches and atmospheres. **Nolan Schroeder's** sax and **Dan Meier's** trumpet complete the instrumentation on the swing track *Two Days Off (And A Little Bit Of Liquor)* that completes this record. This opus proposes a modern mix of different declinations and expressions of the blues. This band, coming, like many others, from a blues jam, has personality, freshness and know-how. The attractive power of their music is obvious.

GERALD MCCLENDON

Can't Nobody Stop Me Now

Delta Roots Records, DR-1003

Gerald McClendon is a Chicago soul and R&B artist in the tradition of **Otis Redding**, **Ben E. King**, **Marvin Gaye**, **ZZ Hill** and **Wilson Pickett**.

He earned the title *The Soul Keeper*, a well-deserved name for this talented and groovy singer. For this project, he teamed up with the local drummer, director and producer, **Twist Turner**, who provided him with the material for the twelve original tracks, based on the classic themes of love, sensuality, fatal attractions and concrete attachments. Everything is played, interpreted and rendered with distinction by excellent musicians, with high quality standards. The album opens with a catchy and

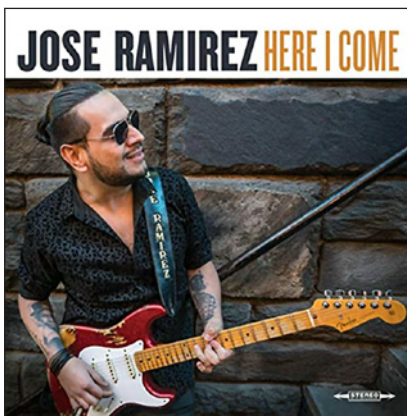
energetic R&B title track, *Can't Nobody Stop Me Now*, which causes one to want to move their feet and their hips. The introduction is followed by an intense soul ballad, punctuated by organ and **Skinny Williams'** fiery and passionate tenor saxophone. What a groove, what a craft and what a sensitive interpretation of **McClendon**, this astute singer and natural storyteller who knows how to touch and move! If you like soul music, you'll be served at will with this record exuding freshness, variety and elegance.

JOSE RAMIREZ

Here I Come

Self-production

Jose Ramirez has blues and soul, you can feel it, you can hear it! Soul, feeling, expressive and tasteful guitar playing, inspired singing, all these qualities are at the service of his deep and true expression of the blues. He has a lot of assets, maturity and know-how at a relatively young age... With well-born souls, the player doesn't wait for the number of years! In any case, he has very good dispositions and knows how to surround himself. This winner of the second prize at the *International Blues Challenge* of Memphis 2020, with more than two hundred and thirty participants from around the world, is already attracting the appreciation of some of the most experienced and renowned musicians and producers in the field of blues, **Bruce Iglauer (Alligator Records)**, **Bob Margolin**, **Charlie Musselwhite**... For this first album, **Jose Ramirez** has retained the services of Texan **Anson Funderburgh**, renowned guitarist and producer. He was surrounded by a great team: **Stuart Sullivan**, sound engineer at **Wire Studios** in Austin, Texas, **Jim Pugh**, piano and organ, **Wes Starr**, drums, **Nate Row**, bass, and the fabulous **Texas Horns**. **Funderburgh** also makes his contribution to the guitar on two tracks. What more could you ask of an artist who is inspired and on the move! **Jose Ramirez** has developed a very fused and synergetic mix of voice and music.



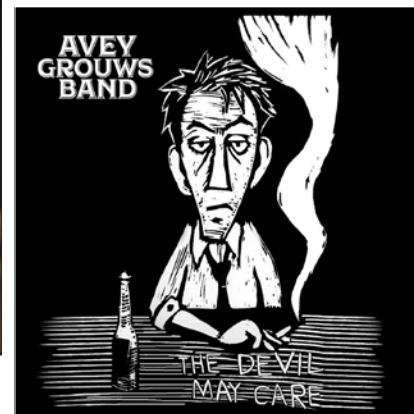
With him, everything is soul, everything merges naturally! He breathes the blues, he inhales it, he exhales it, and, as for me, he inspires! He is a native of Costa Rica. This is another living proof that the blues has no borders, no color, no race. **Ramirez** shows talent and a deep blues attitude. He is the kind of artist, songwriter and performer that we wish to see develop, for a long time to come... He arrives, quite simply, blues in heart, soul in song, and... guitar in hand. **Jose Ramirez**, a name that could be written in gold letters on the wall!

THE REVEREND SHAWN AMOS & THE BROTHERHOOD

Blue Sky

Put Together Music, PTM 00008

The *Blue Sky* album by **Reverend Shawn Amos & The Brotherhood** exudes originality and energy. Attractive sounds and catchy rhythms lead us, nourished by eclecticism, in the footsteps of **Reverend** and his musical brothers and sisters, colorful and inspiring artists. A lot of soul in the voices and atmosphere on the tracks, while sound textures emerge from this opus where one perceives a unity of performance and interpretation. We can speak, here, of magic, the result of varied talents, long maturations and openings of heart and mind. All lyrics are by **Shawn Amos**, who also contributes vocals,



harmonica and music, notably with **Chris Doctor Roberts**, his long-time guitarist. The other members of the core group are drummer **Brady Blade (Buddy & Julie Miller, Indigo Girls)** and bassist **Christopher Thomas (Norah Jones, Macy Gray)**. The abundant alchemy of instruments, bass, drums, guitar and harmonica, joined by friends on trumpet, saxophone, trombone, various keyboards, lap steel, pedal steel, dobro, etc. results in a skillful mix of blues roots and its offspring of creativity and expressive amplitudes. *Blue Sky*, in the end, offers to taste an attractive gumbo, with mysterious and complex scents. Refreshing, captivating!

WORKS OF ART THAT WRAP YOU IN MUSIC



By Jean-Denis Doyle

The magnificent **Deziart** speakers are the fruit of the craftsman **Marc Deziel** and his team. As you can see, there's absolutely nothing conventional about these speakers, both visually and technically. They showcase the creative genius of our local people and offer a locally made alternative. So I had the privilege of being the first to turn it into a bench test. I will thus make you discover a different product, which certainly hasn't finished being talked about.

Deziart Holiday speakers and subwoofers are omnidirectional speakers. Unlike conventional speakers, which project sound forward, they radiate sound in a circular pattern over 360 degrees. The idea is far from being entirely new. Several speaker manufacturers, since the 1960s, have tried it with more or less interesting results. From my point of view, the only omnidirectional speakers that proved the validity of the concept were those of the German manufacturer **MBL**. These are very high-end models costing tens of thousands of dollars. What makes

this concept so interesting? The answer is quite simple. Imagine a piano in the middle of your living room, or even placed on its side, the sound it will emit will not spread in one direction, but, of course, over 360 degrees, all over the room. What you will hear will be the sum of the direct wave and those reflected on the walls. The phenomenon is the same for the voice as for other musical instruments.

Deziart speakers were therefore designed to reproduce music naturally, in exactly the same way that a musical instrument would behave in a listening room. Thanks to new technologies and an unparalleled craftsmanship, **Marc Deziel's** team has arrived at a result that gives a successful foretaste of the performance of **MBLs**, with an elegant loudspeaker, and this, at a most competitive price.

Technical description

Deziart's *Holidz* speakers and *Subwoofers* are two distinct and complementary products designed to work specifically together. *Subwoofers* are optional, and *Holidz* speakers can work perfectly well without them.

Holidz speakers (pronounced *Holidays*)

The *Holidz* are truly modern and elegant sculptures. Essentially, they consist of two small closed cubic boxes. These are made of *MDF* covered with a veneer of the most beautiful effect. The boxes are connected by a curved solid wood hoop that also serves as a base. *Holidz* speakers have no electronic filter circuitry. The two small three-inch diameter speakers will therefore be connected directly to your amplifier for maximum purity. Two high quality connectors, assembled on a custom-made board, provide the connections. *Holidz* loudspeakers are equipped with speakers using a very special technology that of the *BMR* transducer. This type of speaker is still unknown among audiophiles and deserves attention. The diaphragm of a *BMR* speaker is flat and emits sound waves in a concentric way, a bit like a stone falling into the water, producing circles that get bigger and bigger. This type of loudspeaker therefore has an exceptional dispersion. In fact, whether you listen to it directly in front or completely to the side, the sound will be virtually identical. And that's the secret of the *Holidz* speakers. By choosing to use a *BMR*-type speaker, **Marc Deziel's** team achieved a stroke of genius. By placing two *BMR*-type speakers horizontally, one of which was coupled with a wooden conical diffuser, the team produced a high-performance omnidirectional speaker at a reasonable cost. One wonders why no one thought of it before. That's the creative genius of our local artisans!

Subwoofer Speakers

Deziart *Subwoofers* are responsible for reproducing low frequencies. They are sold in pairs, which is the only way they can work. These are passive subwoofers, so they are not equipped with an amplifier. They will be powered by your audio system.



They contain a filtration circuit set at 132 Hz. This crossover sends the lower bass frequencies to a conventional 6.5" **Visaton** speaker, and the higher frequencies to *Holidz* speakers. The caissons rest on beautiful granite slabs custom-machined by a local company. The *Subwoofers* are equipped with two pairs of terminal blocks, one pair at the bottom of the subwoofer for the signal input and another pair at the top so that the *Holidz* can be connected to it using a pair of very good quality jumpers.

Listening impressions

Invite Diana in your living room

The inescapable **Diana Krall** was the first to invade my music room for my first listening, and I chose to use the *Holidz* without the addition of subwoofers. So I placed the speakers about two feet from the rear walls on an appropriate stand. These small speakers are incredibly thin. What strikes immediately is the presence and texture of the singer's voice. On the cover of *California Dreaming*, from her album *Wallflower*, the *Holidz* disappear completely, leaving only the song to spread all over the room. The piano has plenty of texture, the voice stands out well from the orchestra and the choristers have their place behind the stage. How does this little speaker get to this level of refinement? The absence of an electronic filter between the loudspeakers and the amplifier certainly has something to do with it. Since both *BMRs* are connected directly to the amplifier, this small speaker is able to offer a level of refinement and detail rarely seen in this price category. Given their small size, it will still be necessary to be reasonable with the volume control so as not to damage them.

Occupy all the space you want

Although the bass delivered by the *Holidz* is sufficient in a small room, the addition of subwoofers is necessary to sound



a large room. These allow the speakers to be placed a little closer to the center of the room. This is when the concept of 360-degree dispersion takes on its full meaning. Placed about three feet from the rear walls, the *Holidz-Subwoofer* set offers an ethereal holographic performance.

Paul Bley's trio seems to interpret the album *When Will the Blues Leave* with striking ease and realism. With this piece, we can see the very successful manufacture of the *Subwoofers*. The bass they render is never intrusive and integrates beautifully with the *Holidz*. The best part of the deal is that no matter where you decide to sit, the orchestra's show doesn't move. This kind of listening has the advantage of its flaws. What you lose in immediacy or attack, you gain in listening flexibility. Farewell to the sacrosanct *Sweet Spot*, it is not really necessary anymore! I ended my listening with a movie classic, *Forest Gump*. The use of these speakers is extraordinary for a home theatre. They will easily replace a complex multi-channel installation while offering more refinement and better tone.

Conclusion

The Deziart *Holidz* speakers and *Subwoofers* are true works of art. Made and assembled with care and love by local artisans, they are a local alternative that future owners can be proud of. They present music in a unique way that will appeal to all those who want to surround themselves with music in their environment. For a new product, their astonishing maturity will surprise you. The tonality is perfectly right and they demonstrate a rare balance in this price range. So take the time to go and listen, they will wrap you in their musical universe.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Holidz Model

Price: \$2,300 / pair

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Subwoofer Model

Price: \$1,100 / pair

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Manufacturer: Deziart by Création Marc Deziel, Tel : 1.855.896.6272, www.deziart.com

Mediagraphy

Diana Krall, Wallflower, Verve Records, B0020989-02

Paul Bley, *When Will The Blues Leave*, ECM, ECM 2642

Forest Gump, Paramount Epic

JAZZ

By Christophe Rodriguez

BARNEY WILEN, ALAIN JEAN-MARIE

Montreal Duets

Elemental Music (Importation) 2 CD
More than a gift, this novelty is a blessing. In 1993, the **Montreal International Jazz Festival** invited Franco-American saxophonist **Barney Wilen**. He, who died too soon (age 59), was one of the pillars of *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (**Louis Malle**), *Un Témoin dans la ville* (**Édouard Molinaro**), *Les liaisons dangereuses* (**Roger Vadim**), not to mention his collaborations with the jazz gotha. Never locked down in a style, or almost, cultivating a unique sonority, even more soprano, left in the memory of your chronicler, imperishable memories. While in Montreal, we were there for the 10 p.m. concert at the **Gésu**, but there was also another concert at 8 p.m. that the saxophonist had previously recorded, according to his son **Patrick Wilen** with whom we had a long and exciting conversation. So we are in the presence of a piece of history. In the company of his faithful accomplice, the pianist **Alain Jean-Marie**, the great **Barney Wilen** revisited a series of standards that we keep in mind. Between the infinite softness, the swing and the poetry, this return in time is worth its weight in emotions. There is no shortage of choices between the rereading of *Round Midnight*, the inevitable *No Problem*, linked to the **Art Blakey** period, or *My Funny Valentine*, an obvious homage to the late trumpeter **Chet Baker**. With this double album, we have our summer in hand, for lack of festivals.

ERROLL GARNER

Gemini

Octave Music / Mack Avenue

I won't hide the fact that the pianist **Erroll Garner** (1912-1977) is one of those rare musicians who make me happy when I'm depressed. We have to admit that with all these events, past and present, we really need them. A pillar of record company **Sony**, then **Mercury**, you will have the chance to rediscover this immense pianist, thanks to small record company **Octave**. As the months go by, it exhume pretty little treasures, as *Gemini* proves it. Surrounded by a solid team and his indispensable conga player **José Mangual**, who is no stranger to the interpreter's musical ideas, we find in this year 1971 an **Erroll** in great shape. In eight tracks, which are as many standards inscribed in the *Great American Songbook*, our friend **Garner** twirls. His *How High The Moon* is a jewel of inventiveness just like *Tea For Two* which is, without a doubt, a beautiful tribute to its master, **Art Tatum**. If you like ballads, jump immediately to beach 9 and listen to *Misty* again. This composition became the cornerstone of the fascinating film *Play Misty For Me*, from and with **Clint Eastwood**. In the absence of festivals, the magic of **Erroll Garner** puts a bit of balm on a more than quiet summer in sight.



TEDDY WILSON

Revisits The Goodman Years

Storyville / Naxos 33 T

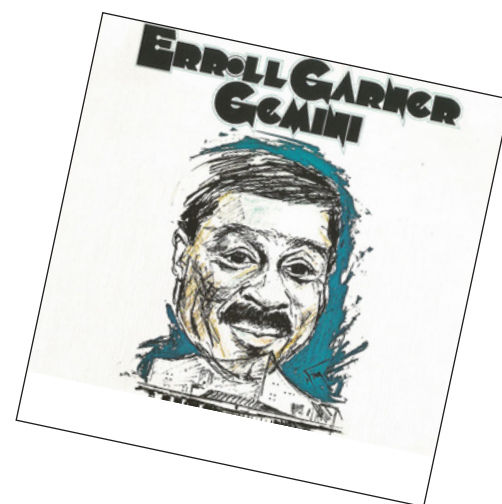
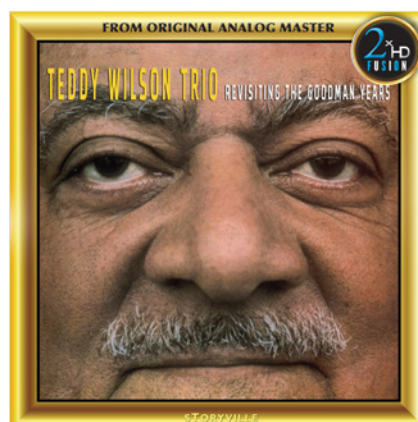
Good old vinyl is making a comeback and we think this trend will be far from being a passing fad. The **Blue Note** company exhumes everything that made the strength of its catalog, and now **Storyville** does the same. Under a good 180 grams, we open this series with the pianist **Teddy Wilson** who was the accomplice, for years, of the clarinetist **Benny Goodman**. Recorded in 1980, six years before his death, **Teddy Wilson Trio / Revisits The Goodman Years** is a tribute to swing. The pianist, surrounded by double bassist **Hesper Lundgard** and drummer **Ed Thigpen**, revisits the **Goodman** spirit, but also that of standards. If **Teddy Wilson** had nothing more to prove, he was deploying an ancestral know-how, that of the encounters which, over the decades, made the joy of simple amateurs as well as aficionados.

ARCHIE SHEPP

The New York Contemporary Five Vol 2

Storyville / Naxos 33T LP

It was a time that some described as a great disturbance. After swing, bop and hard bop, free jazz will also come to shake up, in a way, the codes of jazz. Born in 1937 and still alive today, **Archie Shepp** was a pioneer in this field. Together with pocket trumpet player **Don Cherry** and alto saxophonist **John Tchical**, he formed the **New York Contemporary Five** in 1963. From this union will be born an important tour in Scandinavia which will give birth to five records. If you like strong jazz, this vinyl is a joy. Opening on a composition by **Don Cherry**, *Consequences*, which is worth its weight in gold, we continue with saxophonist **John Tchical's** bursting *Wo Wo*, then back to **Monk**, with the luminous *Monk's Mood*. A history of jazz in time that has aged well.



IFI AUDIO ZEN BLUE BLUETOOTH RECEIVER

The perfect lifestyle streamer!

By Guillaume Brunet



In the age of streaming, and with the ever-advancing technology, who would have thought to see a Bluetooth receiver in a high-fidelity channel one day? It is now possible and even more and more frequent! With the ZEN BLUE, incorporating **Qualcomm's** latest chip, **iFi Audio** positions itself as the first manufacturer to offer a Bluetooth solution without compromise. This receiver offers the latest high-resolution codecs available on the market: those of the aptX family and the latest developed by **Sony**, the LDAC, and **Wawei**, the LHDC. With a maximum resolution ranging from 24 bits to 96 kHz and a maximum data rate of 990 kbps, the ZEN BLUE impresses with its specifications and now rivals WiFi technologies such as **Apple** AirPlay and **DTS** Play-Fi. But will it be enough to conquer the trained ears of audiophiles?

Founded in 2012, **iFi Audio**, a sister company of **AMR Audio**, specializes in the manufacture of portable and lifestyle audio equipment. Recipient of several awards and acclaimed by the trade press, **iFi Audio** is now recognized as one of the companies that offer the best value for money products in their respective categories. Its product range includes all-in-one systems, *DACs*, a phono preamplifier, a *Tube Buffer*, amplifiers and digital-to-analogue converter for headphones, power bars and current purifiers, interference filters for digital signals as well as all the cables necessary for the proper functioning of these devices. Although **iFi Audio** already uses *Bluetooth* protocols in some of its products, the *ZEN BLUE* is the brand's first dedicated *Bluetooth* receiving device. It has been created for listening alone or in combination with a *DAC*, while for ambient listening, the analogue output is more than sufficient.



Technical Description

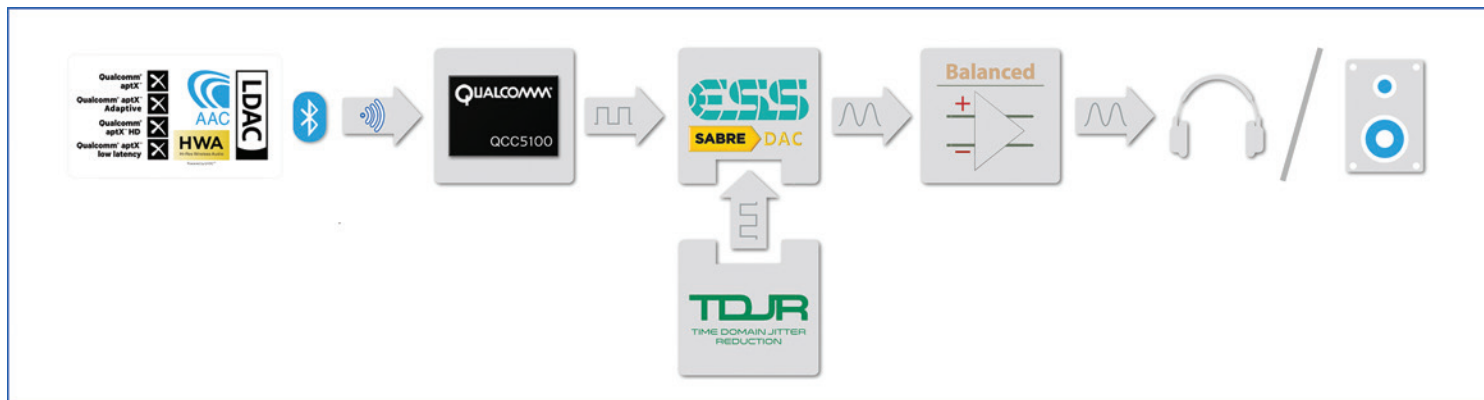
The *ZEN BLUE* is an all-aluminum *Bluetooth* receiver that houses fully balanced output circuitry, quite exceptional in this price range. It has four outputs — two digital, one coaxial *S/PDIF* on *RCA* connector and one *Toslink* on fiber optic, as well as two analogue outputs — one *RCA* and one balanced on 4.4 mm **Pentaconn** connector, and a five-connector jack. The analogue and digital outputs cannot be used simultaneously, they are switchable by means of a switch at the rear. The *Bluetooth* signal is decoded by a latest-generation chip developed by **Qualcomm**, the *QCC5100* series. This chip incorporates the latest *Bluetooth 5.0* transmission protocols and could easily do all the work on its own, including digital-to-analogue conversion, but that's not what the engineers at **iFi Audio** decided. Instead, they chose to separate the digital and analogue stages. The **Qualcomm** chip passes a digital signal that is routed to a *DAC* in **ESS Technology's Sabre** family of *DACs*. The latter takes care of the digital-to-analogue conversion. The *Sabre ESS DAC* was chosen for its *Hyperstream* architecture, a technology that eliminates jitter in the time domain, resulting in low distortion and 109 dB of dynamic range. The *ZEN BLUE* processes all *Bluetooth* codecs to date, including *SBC*, *AAC* and the *aptX* family, all in 16 bit at 44.1 or 48 kHz, *aptX HD* in 24 bit at 48 kHz, *HWA/LHDC* and *LDAC* in 24 bit at 96 kHz. It is important to understand that it is the phone or tablet that will dictate the codec that *ZEN Blue* will use and therefore greatly influence the results obtained. **Apple** products, for example, use their *AAC*

(*Apple Audio Codec*) for music at up to 250 kbps. So, regardless of the source file type or streaming service, the device will transcode it into its preferred codec before sending it to the **iFi ZEN BLUE** receiver over *Bluetooth*. In most cases, a double transcoding will take place before broadcasting. But don't forget that *Bluetooth* technology was created, first of all, for simple and practical use, not for high-fidelity.

Unpacking and start-up

When I opened the box, I was pleasantly surprised by the design of this small transmitter. All-aluminum finish and with a weight that surprises, you immediately feel that you have quality in your hands. The only assembly to be done, before the connections, is to screw in the receiving antenna. Once connected, pairing is done by pressing the button on the front panel and selecting **iFi Hi-Res Audio** from the list of devices appearing under the *Bluetooth* settings of the cell phone or tablet. The *ZEN BLUE* stores up to seven paired devices, which is more than enough for the whole family and a few friends. Once paired, the **iFi ZEN BLUE** will confirm this through the speakers using a robotic female voice.

It will then tell you by which codec it will receive the music. In my case, with my *iPhone*, the tests were done in *AAC*. The acronym of the mark confirms it by the colour it takes, it was yellow in my case. I have tested the *ZEN BLUE* in two different listening contexts. I first incorporated it into my sound system using my





DAC, and in minimal configuration, Lifestyle, directly on my amplified **Audioengine A5+** monitors. On my sound system, I used both types of outputs, digital and analogue on a *RCA* connector, and on the *A5+*, only the analogue output. Even if the volume of the device acts on the level of the transmitted signal, I left it at maximum during all my listening on my main system. Because to have a listening as faithful as possible, the volume is done on the analogue side, at the preamplifier. However, on my amplified monitors, I took advantage of this possibility and was able to control the volume directly from my cell phone.

Listening impressions

The idea of a *Bluetooth* transmitter integrated into a high-fidelity chain must repel many. However, it is only a feature, one more possibility to have access to music. Performances captured live and broadcasted on **YouTube** become easily accessible with this device. That's how I approached the product. I first listened from the analogue outputs of the *ZEN BLUE*. From the very first notes, I was pleasantly surprised by what I heard. The music is fluid, full and, above all, without aggressiveness. On *Jah Work* by **Ben Harper & The Innocent Criminals** (*A Lewis Marnell Tribute*), the band plays in a large practice room transformed into a studio for the occasion. The bass is full and resonates perfectly. We feel the grandeur of the place itself through the whole process of transcoding that the music must undergo before reaching our ears. By switching to digital outputs, even more details appear. For example, on the first snare drum rolls, you can really feel the resonances of the room, untreated, in which the musicians are playing, especially those coming from the cathedral-like ceiling. With **Ulrich Drechsler & Tord Gustavsen Duo**, we are truly at the height of sensuality. Two virtuosos, at the peak of their art, offer us an intimate performance full of nuances. Captured live, in a multi-purpose space entirely made of wood and where the acoustics reinforce the message of the musical composition, this performance is not on disc and is only available on **YouTube**. A good reason, therefore, to have at hand the possibility to listen to it and enjoy it with a good sound system. I noticed that the coaxial output produced a slightly sharper, more precise sound. Not

always desirable, on the other hand, the limitations of the *Bluetooth* codec are also more easily understood. By using my amplified monitors, **Audioengine A5+**, the limitations obviously become less apparent. Normally, these speakers are connected to my computer with an external sound card. By plugging in the *iFi ZEN BLUE* and repositioning it, it has become a completely independent sound system that delivers truly amazing performance.

I continued my listening with the **Hooverphonic** *With Orchestra Live* album on **Tidal**.

The interpretation of the play *Mad About You* gains a lot compared to the original version, in my opinion. The singer offers us a particularly touching performance where the orchestra takes all its meaning. My daughters enjoyed the *ZEN BLUE* by streaming their favourite artists, a lot of **Kids United**, sometimes at an indecent volume. We are no longer in high-fidelity, but the music remains completely communicative and catchy. Even at high volume and on small speakers, **iFi** remained pleasing to the ear with all types of music.

Conclusion

The *iFi ZEN BLUE* is a perfectly targeted and executed product. With its more than affordable price, it is as much for the audiophile as it is for those who want to add sound to a room in the house without making compromises. The possibilities of *Bluetooth* streaming give access to a large amount of music otherwise unthinkable. With *ZEN BLUE*, it's never been easier for a guest to share their latest musical discovery with you. Please note that before being able to access the possibilities of the new high-resolution codecs of the *Bluetooth* protocol, it is important to check the possibilities of the device you will be using to access the music, as it will determine the accessible bandwidth. Please note that only *Android* family devices incorporate the *Bluetooth aptX* and *aptX HD* protocols. As for the *LDAC* and *LHDC* codecs, they are only available on some latest-generation models from the manufacturers **Sony** and **Wawei**. For users of **Apple** products, the *AAC* codec does a lot of the work.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$199

Warranty: 1 year, parts and labour

Distributor: Motet Distribution, T.: 905.474.4331, www.motetdistribution.com; ifi-audio.com

Mediagraphy

Ben Harper & The Innocent Criminals, *Jah Work* (*A Lewis Marnell Tribute*),

YouTube: youtube.com/watch=lc2n58vzhz8&list=RDlc2n58vzhz8&start_radio=1

Ulrich Drechsler & Tord Gustavsen Duo, *You Always Know*,

YouTube: youtube.com/watch?v=DxZR_ybUoRI

Hooverphonic, *Mad About You* (Live at Koningin Elisabethzaal 2012), **Tidal**

WHAT'S NEW?

THE NEW THE PEARL AKOYA CONNECTED SPEAKER

By Michel Dallaire

Cabasse is a French manufacturer that has been working in the field of speakers for more than 50 years. This company holds several patents in the field of transducer design. It was the first company to put forward the concept of the sphere as an acoustic speaker using coaxial transducers whose membrane profile respects the curve of a sphere.

The new **Cabasse The Pearl Akoya** is the little sister of the *The Pearl* speaker. These two active connected models are designed specifically for listening in high definition streaming, wireless, *Bluetooth* or from a wired *Ethernet* network. Both models have essentially the same functions and connectivity. The diameter of *The Pearl* speaker is about 325 mm, while *The Pearl Akoya* is more compact with a diameter of 222 mm.

To get an idea of the physical appearance of the **The Pearl Akoya** speaker, imagine a sphere about the diameter of a large bowling ball. The latter is equipped with a grille at the front and another recession grille at the rear. This speaker even comes with a carry bag with a handle, which further confirms my analogy with the bowling ball.

Like its big sister, *The Pearl*, the *Pearl Akoya* is a 3-way speaker equipped with a 13 cm coaxial *BCI* front driver with a concentrically mounted carbon tweeter and midrange. At the rear, a 17 cm *HELD (High Execution Low Distortion)* woofer is provided for low frequencies. It also has a carbon diaphragm of which the rigidity allows a linear travel of 20 mm both forward and backward. The three transducers are powered by three independent amplifiers that total 1,050 W



of power in mono use or 2,100 W with a second speaker in stereo use.

The Pearl Akoya is an intelligent and versatile speaker. It can be connected via *WiFi* to other speakers for multi-zone use. Its *CRCS* calibration system, equipped with a microphone, makes it possible to adjust its response curve according to the acoustics of each listening room, regardless of location. Its directivity is homogeneous over almost 360 degrees, resulting in a wide and deep stereophonic image. Naturally, the *Pearl*

Akoya loudspeaker supports almost any streaming service such as **Qobuz**, **Deezer**, **Spotify**, **Napster**, **Tidal**, and more.

At the time of writing, the price of the *The Pearl Akoya* speaker is \$2,300 each and the price of the *The Pearl* is \$4,300. They are available in pearl white or metallic black. These prices include a *Bluetooth* remote control and the **Cabasse Stream Control** application (*Android-iOS*). Optional wall mount and floor support available.

cabasse.com

Detailed, revealing and cheat-free reproduction

By Richard Schneider

The ND5 XS 2 is the entry-level network player / converter from UK manufacturer **Naim Audio**. They thought of all generations and different lifestyles when designing this device, which offers functionalities that will appeal as much to those who do more conventional music listening as to those who prefer more nomadic and easily transferable music listening (from smartphones, tablets, NAS, etc.). **Naim** takes taste into account. Mission accomplished.

Description

Here is a list of its main characteristics:

- *Ethernet, WiFi* and *Bluetooth* with external antennas
- Most streaming services including **Spotify, Tunes Radio, Qobuz, Google Play Music, Deezer, and Pandora** to name a few.
- *Roon Ready*
- *vTuner premium*
- Possibility of multi-room use
- Up to 6 **Naim** devices can be synchronized and managed using the **Naim** application, available from either the **Apple Store** or *Android*.

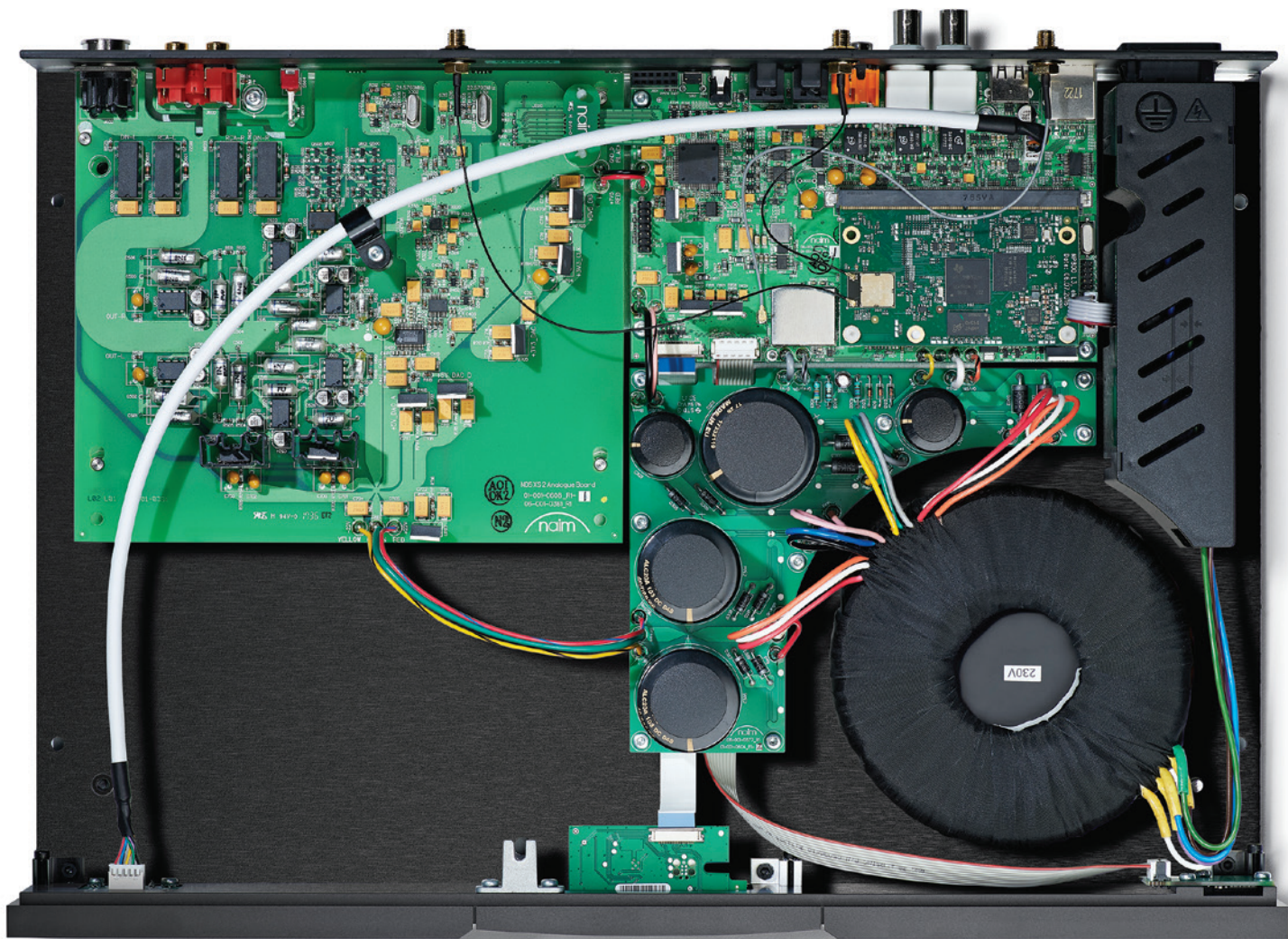
- **Tidal** — offered with a free 90-day subscription. Please note that it does not decode *MQA* files.
- Network drive from *USB* sticks and/or external digital music server.

You will be able to maximize the functionality of the *ND5 XS 2* using either an audio channel, to connect the device (on a pre-amplifier or built-in amplifier), or a *WiFi* Internet connection and with a network cable for wired connection, or, finally, using a tablet and/or smartphone (*iOS* or *Android*).

The owner's tour

The *ND5 XS 2* recalls the simplicity of **Naim** aesthetics. A little conservative, but still very chic. The front is adorned in the centre with the company's emblematic logo, subtly backlit in green. On the left is a *USB Type A* input for playing songs stored on *USB* media. To the right, a push button is used to turn the unit on and off. To the left of the push button, an *LED* light indicates the status of the network communication. Yellow indicates that the player is not connected to the network, while green, on the contrary, indicates that the communication is successful. The player is not equipped with a display and you will not find a controller in the package.





The back of the device, devoid of any unnecessary artifice, offers the most in-demand criteria:

- 1 *USB type A* jack for connecting *USB* storage drive.
- 2 *TOS Link* optical jacks (up to 24 bits / 96 kHz)
- 1 coaxial *RCA* jack (up to 24 bit / 192 kHz, *DoP* 64Fs)

- 2 coaxial *BNC* jacks (up to 24 bit / 192 kHz, *DoP* 64Fs)
- 1 digital output to connect various equipment.
- 1 output reserved for the use of an infrared wired connection.
- 1 *Reset* pushbutton for resetting the device
- 1 *DIN* analog output
- 1 grounding switch
- 2 *WiFi* antenna ports and 1 *Bluetooth* antenna port
- 1 pair of analog outputs.

Finally, I would have preferred to find a *USB A* male to *B* male input, a standard that is quite popular. However, **Naim**, and a few others, have a clear preference for *BNC*, which they believe to be superior. The elements of our chains, of different brands, are not always compatible with this standard, which is why they offer a *BNC* to *RCA* (coaxial) adapter in the package.

A Little Technique

Since this device is, first and foremost, a *DAC*, let's take a brief look at this aspect. The final conversion is performed by a **Burr-Brown**

chip, namely the *PCM1792A*, produced by **Texas Instruments**. It is frequently found inside high-end devices thanks to its great musicality and impeccable signal-to-noise ratio. It offers a very detailed reproduction. Initially, the digital signals are processed by an in-house network card equipped with *LVDS* (**L**ow-**V**oltage **D**ifferential **S**ignalling) technology. This technology minimizes synchronization errors and significantly reduces jitter. **Naim** says that the speed of the *LVDS* protocol gives the *ND5XS2* the ability to handle all *HD* formats up to 32 bit / 384 kHz or *DSD 128*. Subsequently, the signals reach a *DSP* that will take care of the oversampling before handing over to the *DAC*, i.e. the **Burr-Brown** *PCM1792A*. Fans of *DSD* files will be interested to know that by the time they arrive at the final conversion, they will have been previously converted to *PCM* format.

Supported Formats

- *WAV* up to 32 bits / 384 kHz
- *FLAC* and *AIFF* up to 24 bits / 384 kHz
- *ALAC* up to 24 bits / 384 kHz
- *MP3* up to 48 kHz, 320 kbps (16 bits)



- AAC up to 48 kHz, 320 kbps (16 bits)
- OGG and WMA up to 48 kHz (16 bits)
- DSD — 64 and 128
- M4A up to 48 kHz, 320 kbps (16 bits)

Features

Digital connectors allow the digital-to-analog conversion of CD and Blu-ray players, TVs, NAS, etc. This network player provides you with an inexhaustible source of streaming services including built-in Spotify π, native support for the TIDAL streaming service, Internet radio from anywhere. The ND5 XS 2 supports high-end audio servers including Roon. The Naim application is available free of charge on iOS and Android. It works very well and is stable. Integrated Chromecast allows streaming from hundreds of supported applications for smartphones or tablets (192 kHz). The player offers access to full-service vTuner 5* Internet Radio. It is compatible with Party and multi-room modes. Bluetooth connectivity uses the aptX HD codec to provide superior playback quality. Finally, the RC5 system allows control of compatible amplifiers connected to the network directly from the Naim application.

Start-up

Start-up is disconcertingly easy. I used all available connections: Ethernet, WiFi and Bluetooth. I have a clear preference for the wired solution, i.e. Ethernet. If you believe that the wired solution is not viable for you, I have described many times the method that turns your electrical system into a wired network. There are other methods except that the one I use is very simple and inexpensive. If your daily use does not make much use of WiFi waves, a properly configured router will ensure a proper connection. If your network is heavily used (games, movies, downloading of increasingly large high-definition music files, multiple devices...), there is a risk of signal instability that could lead to poor performance of the player. Like fellow columnists, I've had trouble with Bluetooth. It is a game of trial and error. To be honest, I gave up. Anyway, I don't see a good reason to use Bluetooth with a device of this calibre. It is very personal and only concerns me. The WiFi connection, on the contrary, did not cause any problems.

The Naim application

Now that everything is connected and the network recognizes the ND5 XS 2 without any manipulation on your part, the application will prompt you to confirm the device(s) you have in hand. The small LED on the front left will be green (as already mentioned) confirming the connection to the network.

From that moment on, you literally forget about the device. Everything is taken care of by the application including voltage controls. This will become your control centre, because the device does not come with a joystick, which would be useless anyway without a screen on the front panel. Thanks to the application, therefore, you will have access to all functionalities. This is particularly useful if you are in a multi-room environment as it manages all Naim component settings as well as controlling your entire installation remotely. In no time at all, you'll be able to create and play playlists and adjust the order in which they are played, while having access to detailed artist information. In terms of user-friendliness, I will note in passing that the application immediately recognized my hard drives, although my server has its own operating system. It took control of my files perfectly. Using the multi-room feature of a Naim channel your favourite music will be played throughout the home from a different playlist in each room. However, don't worry if you only own a Naim device, the ND5 XS 2 works very well solo. The application is not useless, on the contrary, it will be the control centre.

Findings

For many years people, affectionately referred to as *naimists*, have been talking about the uniqueness of Naim devices. According to the rumour, and following the acquisition of a device of the brand, one becomes addicted for life. I was finally going to enter the Naim universe.

The ND5 XS 2 integrated perfectly with my audio system. Although the recommended running-in period is quite long, already after a few days, the sound has become more transparent and fluid. The details, particularly in the medium and treble, proved to be more articulate. The table was set. From the very first listening, a particularity intrigued me. There was a change that I couldn't pinpoint precisely. Finally, I understood what is meant by the Naim sound. Having Linn equipment and a Meitner DAC on hand, I am used to a sound that can be described as colourful if not warm and enveloping. This is not the case with the Naim. The presentation is closer to the real tonality of the instruments by its neutrality. It is easy to understand why the philosophy of these two manufacturers has been at odds with each other for ages.

My first findings were written after long passages in digital listening with a USB key or NAS. I have great affection for the latest version of the Beatles' *Abbey Road* album remastered by the son of the great George Martin. The dynamics are breathtaking and I know this record like the back of my hand. McCartney's bass is deep, powerful, and vigorous. I dare to repeat the term





« I have great affection for the latest version of the **Beatles'** *Abbey Road* album remastered by the son of the great **George Martin**. The dynamics are breathtaking and I know this record like the back of my hand. **McCartney's** bass is deep, powerful, and vigorous. I dare to repeat the term dynamic. The guitars, especially **Harrison's**, reveal all the richness of the medium. The attack is solid and well felt. »

dynamic. The guitars, especially **Harrison's**, reveal all the richness of the medium. The attack is solid and well felt. Trebles are rather shy when it comes to **Beatles** album recordings, but the *ND5 XS 2* works without cheating and without trying to add a layer. At the opposite end of the musical spectrum, I had a great time with **Patricia Barber** and *Café Blue*. A true classic. **Barber** and her musicians excel in their respective fields. In addition, the recording is impeccable. All this is reflected in the performance and **Naim** knows how to take advantage of it. The result is a superb reproduction. I find with happiness the subtleties and textures of the highs not very present in *Abbey Road*. What about the friendly duel between the bassist and the drummer in the track *Too Rich For My Blood?* Beware, neighbours may complain.

I have a finding to share with you and, in my opinion, this is the most important one. Listening with a **Naim** device (or set of **Naim** devices) takes on a whole new dimension. We listen to **Naim** without stress and without always trying to analyze the performance. Several audio components force us to work mentally while listening. We

anticipate, we analyze, we dissect. It's tiring in the long run. I enjoyed a lot of music in a different way. This famed neutrality, which is often talked about but rarely found, does not mean that the sound result is dull. On the contrary, the reproduction is detailed, it raises a layer that reveals the potential of the tonalities and textures of the instruments without adding artifice. That's why listening is so pleasant.

The quality of the stream depends, of course, on the chosen source. **Tidal** proved to be a very good choice with the *High* function. Of course you can't compare an *MP3* file to *FLAC* or *WAV*, but on some tracks the difference wasn't abysmal. The quality of Internet radio varies from country to country and station to station. Some have a sound so compressed that no device can reproduce it, while others, such as **Chante France** at 128 kbps, run very pleasantly for several hours a week in my home.

Conclusion

I also understood why the *ND5 XS 2* is aimed at such a wide audience. Its diversity makes it a very complete device. Its *USB* jacks will delight your guests as you share their

latest discoveries. You'll be able to reach the planet using Internet radio, discover gems on **Tidal** or **Spotify** or, alternatively, simply relax by listening to your favourite albums or playlists. Not to mention that you will be able to connect all your devices in one place.

If you read this article from beginning to end, chances are you are in the process of acquiring such a device. Do not make a decision without first trying out the **Naim ND5 XS 2** for listening. Add a good amp, good speakers, decent cables and you'll have a system that will give you many years of musical joy.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$5,490

Warranty: 5 years for the electronic portion and 2 years for the mechanical portion

Manufacturer / distributor: Focal-Naim Canada, Tel.: 1.866.271.5689, www.naimaudio.com

Mediagraphy

The Beatles, *Abbey Road*

Patricia Barber, *Café Blue*

WHAT'S NEW?

A COBRA ROAMS AT AUDIO NOTE

By the newsroom



Legendary manufacturer **Audio Note** has just released a new amplifier called *Cobra*. This is an entry-level model, designed to be more universal and accessible than the other products in the prestigious manufacturer's line. Featuring a fairly unique digital-to-analog conversion section, it is practically an *all-in-one* device seasoned with **Audio Note** sauce.

Equipped with four *EL34* tubes, capable of a power of 28 W, it will therefore be able to power the vast majority of loudspeakers with plume and plumb. The *Cobra* is equipped with a remote control that supports volume and input selection. The *Cobra* has three analog and three digital inputs.



Since **Audio Note** did not skimp on quality, the *Cobra* is attracting a lot of interest from audiophiles because of its reasonable price and performance. To have an idea of it, you will just have to book your listening session with **Audio Note America** distributor and reseller. We'll talk about this soon.

BRYSTON 4B / BRYSTON4B³ PROGRAM EXCHANGE



By Adrien Rouah

Just because your 4B amplifier is guaranteed for 20 years doesn't mean you should keep it for 20 years! It is with this slogan that Bryston invites owners of 4B amplifiers to participate in the new exchange program, which consists of replacing an old 4B (from the classic 4B to the newer 4B-SST²) with a model from the Cubique Series, the 4B³.

This cubic series is the culmination of **Bryston** amplifiers offering even more remarkable performance. Although audiophiles have surely already been enchanted by their 4B models for many years, thanks to this exchange program, audiophiles will be able to reach new heights in terms of sound performance and appreciate the technologies applied to the new cube series. This series offers not only an aesthetic change, but also a dramatic improvement in performance, with virtually no background noise, even lower distortion, and increased output power. This idea of exchange proposal is particularly interesting, because it allows you to free yourself from a very powerful (and highly esteemed!) device and to acquire, in exchange, an exceptional and updated model. We can talk about the

extreme loyalty of a customer who is already delighted with his 4B model.

If **Bryston** is talking about *Music for a Generation*, their well-known slogan, she is now talking about *Music for Many Generations*, because with this exchange program, the 4Bs of the *Cubique Series* will become accessible not only to new customers, but also to former owners of 4Bs and even to those who have owned one since it went into production in 1978. It is undoubtedly the company's legendary reliability that has allowed it to move towards this idea of exchange and loyalty, a sort of reward for its most loyal customers.

Check the **Bryston** website and your local dealer for full details of this exchange offer and to find out what your loyal and beloved 4B is worth. And as **Bryston** says, turn your incredible 4B into a masterpiece of the cubic series. This seems to me to be an easy reality to believe and much more than an advertising slogan on the part of **Bryston**.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

By Christophe Huss

THE RECORD OF THE MONTH FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

EVGUENI KOROLIOV (piano).
Feuilles nocturnes. Nocturnes, Valses, Études and Mazurkas.

Tacet, 257.

Interprétation :

★★★★★

Technique :

★★★★★

This is the third **Chopin** disc of the Russian pianist **Evgueni Koroliou**, 70 years old, for the German label **Tacet**. Recorded in February 2019, published one year later in the midst of a pandemic, which it seems to anticipate. How can we imagine that another release could surpass this one as record of the year? **Frédéric Chopin**, as we know, was in poor health. Tuberculosis slowly destroyed his lung cavities.

TEN PERFECT CHORDS BETWEEN MUSIC AND SOUND

During the pandemic a small game of challenges has flourished on social networks. Some would ask the others for 10 books, 10 records or 10 movies that had marked their lives. There is something to be gained from exercise. It is not a question here of putting my personal life forward, but of using this time of synthesis to recall some markers that unite artistic and sound ideals in various fields of classical music. You may find it useful for testing your system or discovering great recordings you don't know about. No rating here, everything is 5 stars at all levels.

ANCIENT MUSIC

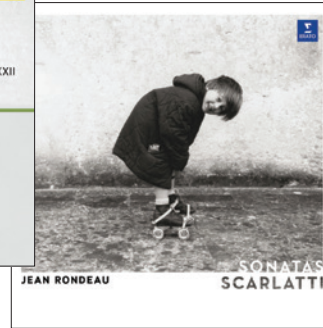
LA CAPELLA REIAL DE CATALUNYA, HESPÈRION XXI, JORDI SAVALL.

Carlos V - Mille Regretz : La Cancion del Emperador.

Alia Vox, SACD stereo AVSA, 9814.

The number one record I take in my bag when someone wants to show me the qualities of his high-fidelity equipment. In three tracks, almost everything is said! This miraculous disc, recorded by **Nicolas Bartholomé** in 2000 at the **Collegiate Church of Cardona Castle** in Catalonia, is dedicated by **Jordi Savall** to the music of the time of **Charles V**. The works make up a historical journey from 1459 to 1558 with solo and ensemble instruments, percussion and rubbed strings, solo singers and choirs. From the beginning of track 1, the music emerges imperceptibly from the shadows. Permanent

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Koroliou conceives his program as the imaginary journey in music of a composer whose breath is scarce. Curiously, he evokes, in the booklet, memories of childhood and of a young pianist. But this wordless winter journey does not deceive. Nostalgia, solitude, pause, reflection, everything, through works written almost two centuries ago and so well arranged, evokes what we have just experienced. The sound taken by **Andreas Spreer** from an instrument tuned by **Gerd Finkenstein** and captured at the **Jesus Christus Kirche** in Berlin, where **Karajan** made all his recordings, is a miracle. **Tacet** is a small label, but it is worth being patient and looking for this *CD* with abnegation.

ceremony in a state of weightlessness. In all the moments when one feels like isolating oneself from the dissonances of the world, the work of **Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger** is a haven of peace that never disappoints. **Giuseppe Famularo**, the sound recorder, captured the right measure and distance of everything to capture **Stefano Maiorana** alone, with his chitarrone, the Italian name for theorbo. This hypnotizing record is of a rare freedom and beauty of sound.

INSTRUMENTAL BAROQUE MUSIC JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

The Well-Tempered Consort Phantasm

Linn, CKD 618

After the plucked strings of the theorbo, here are the rubbed strings. This sublime record by the **Phantasm** viol consort alone justifies **Linn's** involvement in record publishing. Hardware manufacturers who are becoming disc publishers to showcase their products are not necessarily successful. But rarely has the match between an artistic product and an audiophile been so brilliantly combined and expressed as here. A viol consort is a group of viols (ancestor of the cello), which allows us to explore the sound spectrum and spatialization, but also the detail in sound production. **Phantasm** uses the group of instruments to highlight the polyphony of a music originally conceived by **Bach** for

the keyboard. This *Well-Tempered Consort* is the counterpart of the **Fretwork Ensemble's Bach Alio modo CD** released by **Harmonia Mundi**, but it surpasses it in everything. Experience the music like a spider's web being woven.

HARPSICHORD JEAN RONDEAU

Scarlatti : Quinze Sonates

Erato, 0190295633684

There are two ways to record **Scarlatti's Sonatas**, on the harpsichord, their natural instrument, and on the piano, and four ways to capture the harpsichord, an instrument that sounds with little amplitude. It can be enlarged, which is the case with most recordings, too close together. One can also play smaller as in many **Alpha** recordings of the excellent **Céline Frisch**. It's a lesser evil. The right proportions, as here, can fit either in a vast setting, like a small chapel (superb **Frescobaldi** record by **Christophe Rousset** at **Aparté** for those who like this aesthetic) or in an atmosphere more reminiscent of the grand salon of a castle. Complicating matters further is the intrinsic beauty of the instrument, as the reputation of harpsichord records was destroyed by the misuse of real thumbtack boxes in the 1960s. **Jean Rondeau's Scarlatti** combines all the assets thanks to the loan of Quebec harpsichordist **Olivier Fortin**, who has taken out of his collection this **Jonte**

musical enchantment, this record is an ideal indicator of spatialization (percussion relief, track 2), but also of a possible aggressiveness and colouring of the timbres (rubbed strings, track 4).

LUTE AND THEORBO GIOVANNI GIROLAMO KAPSBERGER STEFANO MAIORANA

Intavolatura.

Fra Bernardino, FB 1603777 (distr. Naxos).

In fact, lute and theorbo miking is not so easy. It's easy to get too close to the player's nostrils or to have your nose in the instrument. Lute and theorbo, from the discipline of plucked strings, is nonetheless a rewarding field that has seen a number of sonic successes, such as **Hopkinson Smith's** records with **Naïve**. There is an extra dimension to it: a feeling of participating in a spiritual



Knif and **Arno Pelto** instrument, made in 2006, a copy of an old German harpsichord. It sounds divine, captured by **Aline Blondiau** in a supreme record.

PIANO

MITSUKO UCHIDA SCHUBERT

Piano sonatas D. 958 and 959

Philips, 475 6282

There are, of course, many piano recordings that have been praised in these columns over the years. Our record of the month is a solid reference. But when I want to acquire sound equipment of any kind, especially entry-level equipment (*Bluetooth* speakers or headphones for example) I haven't given up for 20 years, this **Schubert** record may not be the most perfect, but it has an incredible and almost magical asset. It thwarts products unsuitable for the classic and enhances those that are suitable. **Mitsuko Uchida** is a maniac. In his **London** apartment, which contains his Bordeaux and his pianos, one instrument is reserved only for **Schubert**. It is in this sound idea of roundness and intimacy that it is captured. When it sounds bad, it's swollen in mediums and soft. When the material is adequate, it gives the balance and richness of great wines, never flashy, but lastingly intense. The reference indicated corresponds to the boxed set of sonatas, the easiest way to access this disc.

CHAMBER MUSIC

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART FLORENT HÉAU (Clarinet) QUATUOR MANFRED

Quintet with clarinet K. 581.

Quatuors K. 378 et 380.

Alpha, 498

This seems to be easy and is not at all! This choice will allow you to taste not only the most beautiful clarinet quintet in history, but a success more subtle than it seems. Three pitfalls here. The overall sound setting is neither too reverberant nor too dry. The dosage of the clarinet should not be too prominent in order to preserve the character of chamber music. But the most delicate dimension, which distinguishes this recording from others, is to form a string quartet (or a trio in the case of K. 378/317B and 380/374F, two skillful arrangements of sonatas for violin and piano) with superb timbre quality and a clear individualization of the sound sources. On these aspects, the capture of **Franck Jaffrès** at the Saint-Marcel church in Paris in March 2007, originally published by **Zig-Zag Territoires** (republished in 2019 on the **Alpha** label), is a standard meter.

SYMPHONIC MUSIC

RICHARD STRAUSS PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA MANFRED HONECK

Elektra And Der Rosenkavalier Suites. Reference Recordings, SACD multicanal, FR 722 SACD

Impossible to make such a synthesis without an orchestral disc from either **BIS** or **Reference Recordings**. We changed our minds many times,

hesitating in the end between **Dvorak's New World Symphony** by **Claus Peter Flor** at **BIS** and these two **Richard Strauss** opera suites by **Manfred Honeck** in Pittsburgh. Both are the work of conductors with real temperament, with real ideas in records that have the interest of photographing an orchestra on its stage with very accurate reports in depth and width. But how can we get past **Richard Strauss' Elektra** delirium when it comes to testing the ability of a chain to take in orchestral music while not transforming it into magma? The quality of **Reference Recordings** has always been the opulence of the bass. This one is worthy of this reputation.

CHORAL SINGING AND ORGAN

MAURICE DURUFLÉ THE GENTS, PETER DIJKSTRA. ERWIN WIERSINGA (Orgue)

Lux Aeterna. Requiem.

Messe cum jubilo. Our father (and works by Poulenc and Messiaen).

Channel, 2 SACD, multichannel, CCS SA 22405

Two birds with one stone! Every *hi-fi* equipment demonstrator has an organ disc in reserve to dazzle at a good price. The organ discipline is very delicate. Is the instrument or location being recorded? For a good synthesis and the pinch at the heart of the memory, the **Bach** disc recorded at **Notre-Dame de Paris**, three months before the fire, by **Olivier Latry** and *La Dolce Volta* is a good choice. But here is a disc that offers the quintessential recording of choral and organ music: the recording by **Jared Sacks**, the founder of **Channel Classics**, of the organ version of **Duruflé's Requiem**. The result is sumptuous in stereo as well as in multichannel, both in the recording of the choir in the church of Rhede in Germany and in the dosing of an organ with sumptuous, clean bass and sublime tapered treble. The *Lux Aeterna* track of the *Requiem* will easily discriminate the good from the noisy chaff.

OPÉRA

GIUSEPPE VERDI ORCHESTRA OF THE OPERA OF ROME, GEORG SOLTÍ.

Aida

Leontyne Price (*Aida*), Jon Vickers (*Radames*), Rita Gorr (*Amneris*), Robert Merrill (*Amonasro*), etc.

Decca, 483 1600

This 1961 recording brings together the ideal cast in one of the most spectacular and popular operas. The beginning of the 1960s was **Decca's** time of glory in the recording of operas, notably in collaboration with **Georg Solti**, **Wagner's** tetralogy in Vienna, *Salome*, *Elektra*... This *Aida* has not been dethroned since 1960 and is by no means six decades old. The proportioning of the voices is perfect as well as the relief of the instruments. In addition, a remastering carried out in 2017 clarifies the spatialization.

REMASTERING 24/192

ORCHESTRE SYMPHONIQUE DE BOSTON, WILLIAM STEINBERG.

GUSTAV HOLST : The Planets

RICHARD STRAUSS : Thus spoke Zarathustra.

DG, CD et Blu-ray audio 479 8669

The quality of the re-release of these 1970 and 1971 recordings made in Boston under the direction of **Günter Hermanns**, the *Tonmeister* of **Deutsche Grammophon** combined with the diffuse sound of **Herbert von Karajan's** recordings, was, in 2018, a stunning surprise. If **Günter Hermanns** witnessed and masterminded the **Karajan** sound, confronted with a radically opposite aesthetic, where one hears everything, with sharp timbres, biting brass instruments and rutting clarinets, he does not soften anything and documents it in its juices. With this release, **DG** engineers have created the iconic title of their *CD/Blu-ray Audio Combo* album collection, which combines remastered recordings on *CD* (16 bits / 44.1 kHz) and *Blu-ray* (24 bits / 192 kHz) media in the form of small books. Compared to the 2001 *The Originals* transfer, the gain is spectacular in terms of the breadth of the sound image, the depth of the bass and the relaxation of the treble. It can be heard on *CD* and in full splendour on *Blu-ray*. This sonic luxury serves the most vibrant and fiery versions of these two spectacular works of art of all.



PROGRESSIVE ROCK

By Richard Guay

ETERNAL WANDERERS

Homeless Soul

<https://eternalwanderers.bandcamp.com/album/homeless-soul>

Eternal Wanderers is a Russian band led by the sisters **Elena** (vocals, keyboards) and **Tatyana Kanevskaya** (guitars, choirs) assisted by **Dmitry Shtatnov** (bass, keyboards, synthesizers, vocals, sitar) and **Sergey Rogulya** (drums, percussion). *Homeless Soul* is their fourth album, the first three being *The Door to a Parallel World* (2008), *So Far and So Near* (2011) and *The Mystery of the Cosmic Sorrow* (2016). Russian bands share a rich heritage that includes classical as well as symphonic and contemporary music. This musical culture starts from an early education in school and, consequently, resonates in the modern music of this country, which obviously includes progressive rock. This is why bands such as **Vespero**, **Gourishankar** or **Lost World Band** all share this concern for creativity, refinement and perfection recovered from their ancestors. **Eternal Wanderers** is no exception to this culture and offers a rather hard, sometimes jazzy and psychedelic music under the sign of the neo-progressive. The melodies are catchy and **Elena Kanevskaya's** voice flows smoothly. Vocal arrangements involving choirs and guest singers are sophisticated. The instrumental passages are complex and betray a high level of artistic creativity as well as an outstanding mastery of the instruments. Russian bands don't do anything like the others and this one is no exception, to our great pleasure.



BERNARD & PÖRSTI (THE SAMURAI OF PROG)

Gulliver

<https://www.facebook.com/thesamuraiofprog/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsWG11wYeM>

The Samurai of Prog is an international trio, which came into being in the middle of the 2000s, in which we find the American guitarist **Steve Unruh**, the Finnish drummer **Kimmo Pörsti** and the Italian-Finnish bassist **Marco Bernard**. The latter is the founder of this group. Active in the Finnish Association for Progressive Music since 1995, he is known for the major role he played in the *Colossus* series of themed albums, created in cooperation with the French label **Musea Records**. Classical cinematographic works were often used as a backdrop for these titanic opuses, which often spanned three or four discs and involved the collaboration of a multitude of groups. In the end, practically all the training courses active in the 1990s and 2000s collaborated on these projects. Music lovers who had the financial means to afford these treasure chests of progressive music were at the height of their happiness! Moreover, the people who have been reading me for a long time know the special place I reserved for them in this forum some ten years ago. **The Samurai of Prog** was thus born from this desire to offer a completely original and very refined product, throughout his discography of seven magnificent albums. Often impenetrable, and more or less accessible, the



music of this trio, usually accompanied by a plethora of artists, flirts with classical music and constantly challenges us. Undefined, **The Samurai of Prog** is a disarray, given the influences of all origins that appear in his works. This time, we are dealing with a light version of the samurai team's version of progressive with only **Marco Bernard** and **Kimmo Pörsti**, although **Unruh** participates discreetly for the duration of a violin piece or a vocal score. We are thus entitled to a completely balanced album, more accessible than the others and very aesthetic with its passages sometimes muffled, sometimes hard, but always well dosed. It must be said that the concept is based on **Gulliver's** moving travels, which makes it conducive to experimentation and emotions of all kinds. The texts are abundant and interpreted in two languages, English and Italian. Several epic instrumental moments, as well as an army of guest musicians dabbling in virtually every instrument of the progressive and orchestral scene, provide a solid foundation for a musical context that is out of the ordinary. The music on **The Samurai of Prog** is not for everyone, of course, but this album, in particular, is a great way to broaden one's horizons.

UBI MAIOR

Bestie, Uomini e Dei

<https://ubimaior.bandcamp.com/album/bestie-uomini-e-d-i>

Ubi Maior is an Italian band founded at the beginning of the millennium and composed of **Mario Moi** (vocals, violin, trumpet), **Gabriele Manzini** (keyboards, flute) and **Alessandro di Caprio** (drums), who are also founding members. **Marcella Arganese**

(guitares) and **Gianmaria Giardino** (basse) complete the quintet. *Bestie, Uomini e Dei (Beasts, Men and Gods)* is their fourth opus, the first three being *Nostos* (2005), *Senza Tempo* (2009) and *Incanti Bio Meccanici* (2015). **Ubi Maior**, which I unfortunately ignored for too long, is signed to the **RPI (Rock Progressivo Italiano)** label, which should please the fans of Italian bands. There is no need to go back over the **RPI** concept, as it has been sufficiently explained in previous columns. On the other hand, having heard the previous discs in the series, including *Incanti Bio Meccanici*, which I've heard a lot more of, I must admit that this little one is particularly successful and is the centerpiece of **Ubi Maior**. After an introduction (*Nero Notte*), exciting and inspiring, which gives us an irresistible desire to know more, follow five pieces of medium length (between 7 and 9 min) which are very effective. The Italian emotional song of *Moi* perfectly supports existentialist lyrics and integrates just as perfectly with the amalgam of styles and instruments used that structure this work by **RPI**, rather accessible and playful, contrary to the dark and serious atmospheres that are usually the domain of this kind of music. **Ubi Maior** is an Italian band that, while respecting the classic style of the **RPI** genre, doesn't take itself too seriously and will bring a breath of fresh air and optimism to all Italian music lovers, of which, it must be remembered, I am an active member.

rega



P8

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