

TED

TRENDS, ELECTRONICS & DESIGN

HI-FI • HOME THEATRE • SMART HOME | NOV. - DEC. 2020
EVENTS • WHAT'S NEW? • & MORE | VOLUME 1, EDITION 03

»»» DIGITAL EDITION

- **Ollo Audio, S4, S4R and S4X**
- **Audio Note, Cobra**
- **Rega, 10**
- **Cabasse Audio, The Pearl Akoya**
- **Focal, Shape 65**
- **VPI, Prime Scout**



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Trends Electronics & Design Magazine
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Les Editions Mizka inc.
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 Les Editions Mizka Inc.

Subscription & change of address
 Trends, Electroniques & Design Magazine
 450.436.1777
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www.tedpublications.com/fr

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 ISSN 1498-4318

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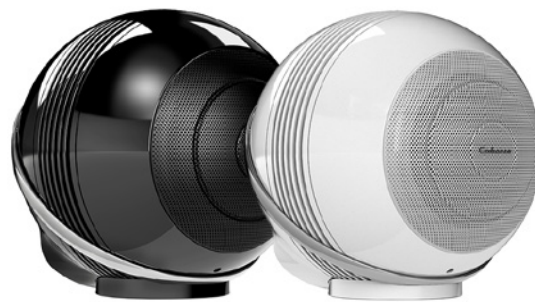
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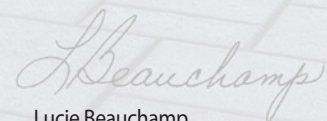
Yes, we are all tired of the health crisis that is currently affecting the entire planet. But then again, what can we do about it other than follow the public health guidelines, and dare to hope that it will result in effective care, and that we can get through it thanks to the break time that the situation forces us to take. It will take as long as it takes. We all need to be resilient, courageous and show a lot of solidarity. Do we all suffer from some kind of anxiety? Yes of course, at different levels no doubt. Look, if Mrs. **Michelle Obama** can tell people in public that she believes she is suffering from a mild form of depression (that's reassuring, coming from someone who is well known to the public and even to the world) and that what we experience on a daily basis affects her as much as it does us (the health crisis, racial tensions, inequalities of all kinds), then that recognition is still the basis from which we can begin to find solutions.

In a community, of course, some problems can not only be solved by one person. And that's exactly where, as members of the same community, if each of us gets involved, if each of us does our small part, the community will achieve the best results. We will all derive a certain well-being from it. At least, that's what I wish for us!

In the meantime, let's recharge our batteries in our favourite activities and hobbies, whether it's listening to music, watching a good movie or reading a good book. Speaking of these activities, you will find articles on three different models of **Ollo Audio** headphones, two models of integrated amplifiers, one from **Audio Note** and the other from **Rega**, an all-in-one spherical

speaker from **Cabasse Audio**, a pair of professional speakers from **Focal Audio** and a vinyl turntable from **VPI**. I also suggest that you read our *Buon Gusto* column carefully. The mischievous cook suggests a quiche recipe in case you're a little hungry. If, instead, you would like to enjoy a glass of wine, our columnist, **Claude Lalonde**, has thought about it and offers good suggestions. Covid-19 being what it is, we reprint the chronicle *TED Installation – Encore*. It's as a reminder to admire beauty and think about the beautiful possibilities of integrating our electronic equipment while ensuring that we do not spoil the chosen design to decorate our living environment. Our reviewers in the *Rhythm and Music* section have also worked hard to unearth some equally interesting recordings.

On that note, you can still see that the articles of our columnists invite you to be entertained. We need to read and learn about more than just statistics and data related to the health crisis. Let us keep in mind not what we have lost (the freedom to do what we want, when we feel like it, etc.), but rather let us realize that a certain semblance of normality is allowed to us. Let us redouble our efforts so that a new confinement does not become necessary once again. Take care. I wish us courage and resilience, because one day we will get through this. Let's keep our spirits up and see you next time, in fact in the 2021 New Year! Our Best Wishes for the Holiday Season coming up shortly!



Lucie Beauchamp
Co-publisher and Public Relations Manager

TRENDS, ELECTRONICS & DESIGN – AN ENCORE

A PEACEFUL HOME ON THE WATER'S EDGE

By **LUCIE BEAUCHAMP**

Photos taken by Robert Guevremont



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 favored 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 center 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 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**, a cabinetmaker. For its part, **Exact Audio Video** designed and carried out a plan for the integration of home automation (i.e. the installation of infrastructures for lighting management, enhancement of cellular signals, audiovisual distribution, control of various electronic equipment, etc.). The **Control4** home automation system takes care of 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 sinuously shaped staircase, a crystal light fixture in the shape of a round cake with several tiers as well as a very large paneled window illuminating the second floor. The choice of colors 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 center, is furnished with four individual armchairs and side tables. Between the two living room, 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 at any time of the 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: colors, shapes, materials. **Sonance** speakers have been encased in 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 speakers 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 decorative object and that the use of space is very symmetrical. Rectangular shapes are favored 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

Just at the top of the stairs is a charming living room where you can enjoy watching

a movie or TV show on the 75" LED TV. A **Golden Ear** sound bar was installed underneath the TV and, as mentioned above, **Sonance** in-wall speakers were installed. 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 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. and 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 of the house. In the majority of 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, 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 EQUIPMENT

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 Theater 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 theater distribution

Control4 *AMP108* 8 zone amplifier;
Golden Ear *3D Array X* and *3D Array XL* soundbars;
Totem Acoustic *KIN Sub* subwoofer.

Audio and home theater distribution

Current Audio *CS 651FL* speakers;
Sonance *VP-62* speakers;
Stealth Acoustics invisible 2-way speakers
Sonance *IS4* 3-way 16" X 24" invisible speakers;
Audio Authority *ADX1616* 16 X 16 audio matrix;
Control4 *Airplay* gateway;
Yamaha *RX-A850* audio visual network receiver;
Yamaha *RX-S600* AV Receiver.

Televisions and video distribution

Key Digital *KDHD8X8* 8-zone HDMI Matrix;
Samsung *UN75H7150 TV*;
Samsung *UN50H6350 TV*;

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.

MICHI

BY ROTEL



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- Adrien Rouah, TED Magazine, March / April 2020

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- Adrien Rouah, TED Magazine, March / April 2020



New X3 & X5 Available Now!



ROTEL

BUONGUSTO

By Claude Lalonde

THE AUTHENTICITY OF ITALY WITH...

Poderi Colla and Poli Distillery



I suggest you discover two producers from Northern Italy who have something very important in common: authenticity and a constant search for quality. Meet **Poderi Colla**, located in the Langhe, and the **Poli Distillery** in Veneto, and discover two

excellent red wines and an amazing *Vermouth*.

Poderi Colla has been, probably for 300 years, the quintessence of the family estate in Piedmont, firmly rooted in tradition, in work well done, in respect for nature and in the constant search to let the vine express itself in what is known as the naturalness of the wines.

As **Tino Colla** says so well, *we know all about the latest technological advances in winemaking in order to use it as little as possible in the elaboration of our wines. We elaborate a natural product that only helps the vine to express itself. Our family has tried everything, in the various appellations of Piedmont, often being the first to vinify, and we have been fortunate over the years to select the best terroirs for Nebbiolo, which represents 60% of our planted grape varieties.*

Poderi Colla, Barbera d'Alba DOC, Costa Bruna, 2017

Beautiful, fresh Barbera from vines of 70 years and older with a lot of structure and substance. A wine that lets itself be discovered on notes of sweet spices, red fruits (cherries), with a hint of fresh black fruits, not very woody and very complex. The kind of wine that is said to recognize the *character of the grapes*. On the palate, a lot of freshness, finesse and elegance on supple, well-structured and tightly woven tannins. It is juicy, crunchy with a very present acidity that supports flavors of cherries, cherry stones, blackberries and some discreet woody notes.

Finish with a beautiful persistence on fruity notes. I'd drink it every day! And what potential for aging! The 1995, which I also tasted, presented evolutionary notes on the plum with tannins that are still well-structured. The finale had a lot of volume and amplitude.

Poderi Colla, Barbera d'Alba DOC, Costa Bruna, 2017

Price: 24,85 \$

Grape Variety: Barbera 100 %, sugar: 3 g/l, alc. :13,5 %

SAQ Code: 14508981

This house, which I visited last year, is truly in constant search of authenticity, originality, integrity and purity. From its four vineyards covering 28 hectares of the highest quality, it produces serious, classic wines that bear witness to the grape varieties from which they come. His wines are conceptually simple and benefit from the long experience the family has acquired over the years. Each wine has its own character which is the expression of the grape variety, the vineyard and the parcel it comes from. In fact each grape variety of each parcel is vinified separately.

Poderi Colla

<https://www.podericolla.it/fr/>



Poderi Colla, Barbaresco DOC Tenuta Roncaglie, Roncaglie, 2015

A wine of great finesse with great complexity that comes from one of the most qualitative plots (Roncaglie). It presents notes of spices, red fruits, a little tobacco, blackberries, violets, spices and undergrowth. On the palate, the texture is most velvety on full-bodied tannins. The whole is very rich, very generous and of great amplitude. A real favorite! Great ageing potential.

The 1998, which I also tasted, was still very fresh with notes of tobacco, very ripe fruit with supple and almost full-bodied tannins. Surprisingly, this wine was still quite juicy and had a superb length.

Poderi Colla, Barbaresco DOC

Tenuta Roncaglie, Roncaglie, 2015

Price: 48,25 \$

Grape Variety: Nebbiolo, sugar: 2,7 g/l, alc.:14 %

SAQ Code: 14358345



Poli Gran Bassano Bianco, Vermouth

Poli is an artisanal family distillery, more than 100 years old, whose reputation is well established. Founded by **GioBatta Poli** (a family whose origins date back to the 1400s), it is specialized in the elaboration of *Grappa*, liqueurs and other spirits. It is located right next to Bassano del Grappa. *Vermouth* is an aperitif made from wine fortified with an eau-de-vie which is then flavoured with aromatic plants. This *Gran Bassano Bianco*, developed by **Jacopo Poli**, is a *Vermouth* based on *Vespaiole*, a white wine made from grapes indigenous to the *DOC*, to which the town of Bassano belongs.

The aromatic profile of this *Vermouth* is the result of an infusion of more than twenty plants, among which hawthorn and elderberry (*sambucus*) dominate, plants characteristic of the Bassano region, as well as grapefruit, galanga (ginger), sweet and bitter orange.

What a beautiful *Vermouth* with an incredible aromatic intensity and a more than appreciable persistence! The nose is on a dominant of aromatic herbs, sweet spices, citrus and floral notes. The mouth, slightly fat, presents a beautiful balance with herbaceous flavors, citrus notes with, in addition, a hint of bitterness on the orange zest. Although the sugar level is quite high, you can hardly feel it because the aromatic balance has been achieved. You will enjoy this *Vermouth* well chilled without it being too cold.



Poli Distillery

<https://www.poligrappa.com/eng/>

Gran Bassano Bianco, Vermouth, Italy,

Poli Distillery

Price: 26,00 \$

Detailed Info: 750 ml, sugar: 190 g/l, alc.: 18 %

SAQ Code: 14462281

<https://www.saq.com/fr/14462281>

Enjoy the tasting!

Claude Lalonde - bio

Trained as a sommelier, for me wine is a matter of passion and pleasure. Visit my *Vinformateur* page on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/vinformateur/> for your dose of humor and daily wine suggestions. On my blog *Vinformateur* (www.vinformateur.com), you will find the complete tasting notes including food/wine pairings for more than 1,000 wines as well as several meetings with winemakers from all over the planet

BUONGUSTO

Easy recipes from the mischievous cook

SMOKED SALMON AND SPINACH QUICHE

Quiche is one of life's simple pleasures. This dish belongs to those popular standards that have been distorted, some adding ham or other things, but you don't cheat with cream.

For its garnish, you have a lot of choices and here is one that will undoubtedly please you. Quiche is made quite quickly, and can be served hot for a delicious dinner, or cold, as here, for lunch, accompanied by a simple salad.





For the dough

1/3 cup butter
1 egg
2 cups flour

Mix together the egg and the softened butter with a whisk, add the flour, knead, and leave to rest in the fridge for 2 hours

For the filling

1 cup of 35% cream
3 eggs
1 teaspoon Tuscan bouquet
½ tsp curry powder

Mix with a hand blender.

For the garnish

1 package of 130 g smoked salmon, coarsely chopped
1 package of baby spinach sautéed in olive oil and well drained
1 cup grated mild cheddar cheese

Spread the dough on the bottom of a 9-inch baking pan. Add smoked salmon, cooked and drained spinach and grated cheddar cheese. Pour the cream and egg mixture. Bake at 400° F for 25 min. Chill and serve the quiche the next day, accompanied by a salad.

Discover many more recipes on the mischievous cook's Facebook page. Bon appétit!

https://www.facebook.com/Recettes-faciles-du-cuisinier-tannant-105071697846276/?view_public_for=105071697846276

The ready-to-wear studio atmosphere

By Guillaume Brunet

A new company in the world of sound reproduction, **Ollo Audio** manufactures high-end headphones intended primarily for audio professionals. Three models are currently in their catalog and they are planning to diversify their offer. The products are already getting good press and gaining popularity in Europe, they are just arriving on this side of the Atlantic. We would like to take this opportunity to tell you all about them. So I will be the lucky one who will be able to use these new headphones before anyone else. Will they be able to carve out a place for themselves in a market already dominated by well-established companies that have long been appreciated by the locals? According to comments, it's only a matter of time.

In 2019, after an unsuccessful all-nighter spent trying to finish a headphone mix session, an idea sprouted in **Rok Gulič**'s head. That night, his problem was that he couldn't physically feel the

low frequencies with his headphones, which is essential for mixing the bass lines and the bass drum. To overcome this problem, he made a module that he affixed to his chair to feel the vibrations without sound. But the idea of full band headphones was already there. Together with his good friend **Mitja Sajovic**, they founded **Ollo Audio**.

Also in 2019, the company won the *Startup of the Year* award in Slovenia. Its first product on the market, the *S4* earphones, was specially designed for sound mixing. The second model released shortly afterwards, the *S4R*, was designed specifically for recording. The *S4R* is, in fact, a closed-back version of the *S4*. The last born, the *S4X*, is the brand's reference model. Priced at \$550 for the *S4* and *S4R* and \$650 for the *S4X*, they will become natural competitors for the **AKG 702**, **Grado RS2e**, **Sennheiser HD 600** and **650** and **Audio-Technica ATH-M70X**. Although designed for audio professionals, they are ideal for audiophiles looking for a neutral sound.



S4 Model

S4R Model



Technical description

Ollo Audio headphones have a very sober appearance thanks to a timeless and classic design. All the materials used are noble. The frame is made of American walnut wood with a matte finish. The arch is made of stainless steel, the headband is made of nautical quality leather, the pads are made of acoustic foam, and everything is matte black. The name of the company, painted in white, is very discreet and does not disturb the eye. The *S4* and *S4X* models are open at the rear while the *S4R* is closed.

Open type headphones generally reproduce a more airy sound, and people around them lightly hear what is being listened to. Those of the *closed* type do not interfere with the environment and plunge us into a bubble while giving us a real proximity to the source. The *S4X* is slightly larger and unobstructed on the inside than the other two models. Offering more space for the ears, they will be more comfortable for some people. The pads fully cover the ears and for the *S4* and *S4R*, the cover is made of vegan leather. As for the *S4X*, it's more like faux leather on the outside and a velvet finish on the part that is in contact with the skin. The headphones do not have a specific right or left side. Rather, it is determined by the power cord. It is 2 m long and fits into the earphone housing through the 2.5 mm *TRS*-type connectors. At the other end, the connector is 3.5 mm and a 6.3 mm adapter is provided. A faux leather carrying pouch is also provided for storage.

All models of **Ollo Audio** headphones have 50 mm diameter diaphragms in their cores made of *PET 25u* (Polyethylene terephthalate), a saturated polyester type polymer, commonly known as plastic. The

neodymium magnet feeds a double-layer moving coil. Since all parts are available on the manufacturer's site, it is easy to replace a worn or defective part yourself. It is also possible to upgrade from an *S4* to an *S4R* or vice-versa, and even better, increase the quality by purchasing the kit to upgrade to the *S4X*. The *S4* and *S4R* models offer a full 1-year warranty, and the *S4X* models offer a 5-year warranty.

At **Ollo Audio**, they don't skimp on quality control, all headphones are individually

measured and inspected before being packaged. Its measuring system is very sophisticated. It uses a **GRAS 45CC** holder to standardize the position of the earphones in relation to **IEC 60318-1** ear simulators.

The data is then translated by a **Dewesoft Sirius** system and a sheet attesting to the results is printed, signed by the technician and inserted into each box of **Ollo Audio** headphones.

Unpacking and start-up

When I asked the **Ollo Audio** representative if the headsets supplied were new, he replied that they had barely 50 hours of use each. So I plugged them in and used them when I got home. My system allows me to connect all three pairs at the same time,





S4X Model

which I did. That way, it will be easier to compare, I told myself. Immediately, I was delighted by the natural rendering of what I heard, no matter the pair. After a few comparisons, I quickly realized that the headphone outputs of my DAC would be preferable for evaluation versus the headphone output of my integrated. Although the latter is very good, the former offers a more palpable proximity and definition.

Listening impressions

To start my listening, what better than a good test album? So I chose Dr. Chesky's classic, *The Ultimate Headphone Demonstration Disc*. This Chesky Records compilation features a selection of recordings made with the binaural technique. For these recordings, the engineers used the B&K 4100 D head on which the microphones are integrated precisely at the ears. What you hear really happened, pure capitation without any mix, and no equalization, reverberation or compression is added. I started my listening with the S4R, probably because my references are mainly about closed type headsets. On *The Bucky Pizzarelli Trio's Three For All*, each musician occupies their own perfectly defined space in the stereophonic image. The capture seems to have been made quite close, given the amount of details restored, especially those produced by the strings on the frets of the sleeves. I even perceived a *click*, something I had never heard before on this piece. Established proof that the takes are not edited after capture on this album. Afterwards, I moved on to the different spatialization and distancing tests. Alternating between the S4 and S4R models, what immediately appears is space, movement and contrasts. With the S4, the reverberation information is much more present and the localization becomes even sharper and more precise than on the S4R where the raw signal is prioritized. On the other hand, impact, bass and air displacement are much more felt with the S4R than with the S4. This is probably due to their closed design rather than their frequency response, which is almost identical to the S4.

I end my listening with a record that I really appreciate, *What Was Said* by pianist Tord Gustavsen in a trio with singer Simmin Tander and drummer Jarle Vespetad. I chose this album because the atmosphere is particular, very hushed, almost foggy. I appreciate the atmospheres created by the synthesizers and the electronic bass which are just in support of the trio. I started my listening with the S4 and continued with the S4X.

With these, we are elsewhere, we don't have the impression of headphones, but of music. Music that inhabits a certain space, of course, but that space is larger and clearer to the ears. We are getting closer to the spatialization of electrostatics. The tonality is also different from the other models, more neutral, especially in the low frequencies where no parasitic resonance or coloration appeared to me.

Conclusion

Ollo Audio offers three excellent products, each with its own particularity. The S4 promises to be a great for sound mixing, but it's also perfect for any audiophile looking for pure, uncolored sound. For those who travel by public transit, the S4R would be more suitable. With their back panels, they isolate much better from ambient noise and offer a presence closer to the artist. For the meditative listener, the S4X will undoubtedly be the best choice. With the most neutral curve, the S4X reveals the music and the conditions under which it was produced. There is no doubt that Ollo Audio products will gain the market share to which they are entitled.

GENERAL INFORMATION

S4 Headset

Price: \$549.99 (on promotion at \$449.99 until Dec. 31, 2020 on lestudioduson.com website)

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labor and 1 year, for the cable

S4R Headset

Price: \$549.99 (on promotion at \$449.99 until Dec. 31, 2020 on lestudioduson.com website)

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labor and 1 year, for the cable

S4X Headset

Price: \$649.99 (on promotion at \$549.99 until Dec. 31, 2020 on lestudioduson.com website)

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labor and 1 year, for the cable

Distributor: Le studio du son, Tel: 514.249.6169, lestudioduson.com

Mediagraphy

Dr. Chesky, *The Ultimate Headphone Demonstration Disc*, Chesky Records, AIFF 24 / 96

The Bucky Pizzarelli Trio, Chesky Records, AIFF 24 / 96

Tord Gustavsen, *What Was Said*, ECM Records, ECM 2465



DS-10
Streaming DAC
PSU-10 EVO
External power supply



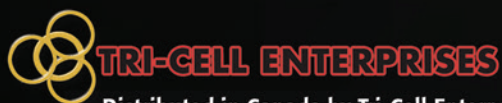
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AUDIO NOTE COBRA INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Seven Days under the Spell of the Cobra



By Jean-Denis Doyle

Audio Note is an English manufacturer that feeds the dreams of many audiophiles. This manufacturer is best known for its absolutely uncompromising achievements, endowed with exceptional musicality. **Audio Note** products rank among the best products available on the market and are often the end of the road for the most experienced audiophiles. Unfortunately, their prices

remain out of reach for most of us. With the arrival of the Cobra, **Audio Note** now offers music lovers a well-equipped integrated amplifier at a price that will make this dream a little more accessible. I had the opportunity to spend a wonderful week in the company of the Cobra, a spellbinding and exciting device that is likely to disturb many established references.

Monday, the lucky day.

The good news is, you are going to have the **Audio Note Cobra** for a test bench. Too happy to hear that, it's time for me to refresh my knowledge about this unique company that has never done anything like the others. **Audio Note** is, first and foremost, the vision of **Peter Qvorkrup**. He only thinks in terms of the quality of music reproduction. **Peter Qvorkrup** and his team have virtually no sense of compromise, and absolutely everything in an **Audio Note** device is designed, engineered and evaluated with music in mind, nothing else. **Audio Note's** engineers don't care about technical specifications, fashions, trends and even less about marketing. **Audio Note** is probably one of the companies that manufactures the largest number of components themselves, in order to keep a total control of the final product. It is impressive to see the number of pieces bearing the **Audio Note** mark inside its devices. At **Audio Note**, the product lines have been divided into levels ranging from one to five. For each level of quality, there are specific criteria that the products must comply with. Some **Audio Note** products are available in several quality levels. For each one, the quality of the components increases progressively. The *Cobra*, which is an entry-level device, is only available in a basic version.

Tuesday, it arrived! Let's explore the beast.

The *Cobra* arrived in a professional and appropriate packaging. The manual is well done and clearly explains how to install the unit and its tubes. It is, as always from **Audio Note**, an amplifier using tube technology to amplify the signal and power the speakers. The *Cobra* uses four *EL34* tubes operating in *push-pull* mode and polarized in class *A* for this purpose. These four power tubes are equipped with an automatic polarization setting that will save future users a lot of headaches. This quartet of *EL34* tubes allows the *Cobra* to generate 28 W for each of the speakers. For those who are used to the specifications of transistor devices, 28 W may not seem like much. As we will see while listening, this device is capable of surprising power off the top of its small 28 W. The *Cobra* is equipped with double C-shaped output transformers manufactured by **Audio Note**. These allow the *Cobra* to give an impression of power that has nothing to do with the announced figures. Two *5670* and two *6AU6* tubes complete the *Cobra* configuration. All the tubes used on the *Cobra* are not expensive or exotic, and that's a good thing. This will make the owner's life much easier when the time comes to replace them. The *Cobra* has three analog and three digital inputs. To connect a vinyl turntable, a separate phono stage must

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AMPLIFICATEUR INTÉGRÉ **AUDIO NOTE COBRA**

« Coupled to large speakers with good efficiency, the *Cobra* is capable of a punch and a descent into the bass that will leave many speechless. The song *Make Us Stronger*, by the band **Ghost Rider**, is really impressive to listen to with the *Cobra*. Don't think too much of the announced 28 W, you just have to listen to it to believe it. This device is obviously capable of partying. »

be used, since the *Cobra* is not equipped with one. The rear of the unit houses the *RCA* connectors and terminal blocks for connecting a pair of speakers. All these connectors are of exceptional quality and are coated with pure silver plating. The *Cobra* has a remote control that controls input selection and volume. It is made of plastic, which makes it feel a little bit *cheap*. Since this is a device that will last for many, many years, **Audio Note** could have made an effort to offer something more solid and substantial.

Wednesday, understanding the zeros and ones.

The **Audio Note Cobra** is equipped with a digital-to-analog conversion section. This one is quite special, using a *vintage*

Phillips TDA-1543 chip. It is an *R2R* type converter working in ladder from the very beginning of digital audio. **Peter Qvorkrup** loves the ultra-musical, organic sound of the old chip and has even purchased nearly 20,000 units to ensure its longevity. This choice is the complete opposite of all current trends in digital audio. I must confess, after making several comparisons, that it completely defends itself from the point of view of musical reproduction. The most maniacs of specifications and digital jargon will probably get worked up when they learn that everything that goes into the *Cobra* is reduced to 16-bit format...

All you have to do, then, is make them listen to some music with the *Cobra* to calm them down. Personally, I loved the texture, color and warmth that the *Cobra's* *DAC* delivers. So I used it for the entire duration of my listening session.

Thursday, Friday, concert days.

Lively! This is the first term that came to mind when listening with the **Audio Note Cobra** Amplifier. Finally, a tube amplifier that has grip, rhythm and momentum. With **Charlie Haden's** live album, *The Montreal tapes*, the bass player's playing overflows with energy and literally transports us to **Place des Arts** in 1989. The tone remains superbly straight without falling into the trap of becoming too warm. Unlike many tube amplifiers,





tonality capable of powerful, dynamic and controlled reproduction.

Sunday, it is now time to pack it back up (sadly...)

This *Cobra* gave me a memorable week. It is the point of entry into the wonderful world of **Audio Note** products. Its high-class sound and dynamic capabilities may shake up many perceptions about tube amplifiers. Equipped with a charming digital-to-analog conversion section, it will allow you to listen to your files with a totally new ear. This is a powerful and refined device of exceptional quality that will appeal to many music lovers. Take care to partner it well and let yourself be charmed by the magic of this *Cobra*.

the *Cobra* has poise and control over the speakers. **Geri Allen's** piano, which accompanies **Charlie Haden**, is plenty powerful, and the string of notes is rapid and well defined. This is an amplifier that provides neutral reproduction in the best sense of the word. Therefore, like any high performance equipment, it will deserve to be associated with partners of its level to give its best. So don't rely too much on the *Cobra* to fix a faulty source or to make speakers with a lot of coloration sing.

Saturday, why not techno?

It is well known that **Audio Note** products are often associated with the reproduction

of classical music. No one would really think they could listen to techno at a crazy volume with an **Audio Note** amplifier. Yet that's exactly what I did. Coupled to large speakers with good efficiency, the *Cobra* is capable of a punch and a descent into the bass that will leave many speechless. The song *Make Us Stronger*, by the band **Ghost Rider**, is really impressive to listen to with the *Cobra*. Don't think too much of the announced 28 W, you just have to listen to it to believe it. This device is obviously capable of partying. Lovers of rock music and film soundtracks will also be delighted. They will finally have found a device with refined

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: 6 260 \$

Warranty: 2 years, parts & labor

Distributor: Audio Note Amérique,
Tel: 514.404.6486, 438.876.5018,
audionote.amerique@gmail.com;
www.audionote.co.uk

Mediagraphy

Charlie Haden, The Montreal Tapes, Verve,
537 483-2

Ghost Rider, Make Us Stronger, Part of a
dream compilation, Vini Vici, Tidal file

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WHAT'S NEW?

BENTLEY-STYLE LUXURY FOR YOUR LISTENING PLEASURE

By the news room

Over twelve years ago, two prestigious UK companies, **Naim Audio** and **Bentley Motors** joined forces to create the best possible listening experience inside an automobile. Surrounded by unparalleled luxury and an uncompromising sounding audio system, owners of **Bentley** cars equipped with a **Naim** system have enjoyed unique pleasure since 2008. To this partnership is now added the French manufacturer **Focal**, which is now associated with **Naim**. This partnership of reputable manufacturers

has just launched two new products that are sure to turn heads.

These are the **Naim Mu-so for Bentley Special Edition**, and the **Focal for Bentley Radiance** headphones. The **Naim Mu-so for Bentley** features a luxurious finish taken from an African precious wood named *Ayous*. This exceptional wood is protected by a thick layer of lacquer which gives it a very attractive dark appearance. The copper sconces and smoked glass backing



plate are directly inspired by the trimmings of the stunning **Bentley Mulinar Bacalar**. The **Naim Mu-so for Bentley** will deliver luxurious listening quality and complement the most refined decors.

The **Focal for Bentley Radiance** headphones are also an exceptional object of timeless luxury. It is a pair of closed type headphones that can be used for mobile applications as well as at home. These sumptuous headphones are trimmed with leather sourced from the **Pittards' Tannery** in Somerset. Thanks to this natural leather that breathes perfectly, the **Focal for Bentley Radiance** headphones have been optimized for unparalleled comfort. The *Radiance* headphones will come in a sleek carrying case with a copper finish, identical to the grille on the **Naim Mu-so for Bentley**. The sound signature of the **Focal for Bentley Radiance** headphones has been deliberately refined so that it is as similar as possible to that of the **Naim Mu-so for Bentley**, in order to maintain a certain consistency among the various products of the **Naim-Focal-Bentley** partnership.

These magnificent products have been available at select **Naim** retailers as of October 2020, and lovers of luxury products will undoubtedly be in their eyes and ears.



A satellite on the audiophile planet

By Adrien Rouah

IO is the name of one of the satellites of the largest planet in our universe, Jupiter. Jupiter has 79 satellites and four of them are large satellites. IO, which reaches the size of our moon, is one of them. If one looks at the Rega website and compiles the number of products on offer and their diversity, the metaphor is easy and one can say that, with the IO, one of the satellites of the audiophile planet that Rega has to offer, is in our hands. Other manufacturers also have very comprehensive ranges, but I have to admit that Rega has a particularly open resonance for me, and has always done so. Even if we know that some of their products are aimed at the very high end of the market, I have in mind the accessibility of the devices and especially their always reasonable prices. A constant desire at Rega, to make things simple and affordable.

This IO is so small, I was going to write tiny, it could almost be confused with a phono preamp or a headphone amp. But no,

it is indeed an integrated amplifier, very cute, discreet and delicate, which, in use, proves to be complete and nicely nervous. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. I see Rega's challenge as being quite simple: *can we make a little brother for the Rega Brio and lower the cost of production and, above all, reach a less wealthy clientele?* Of course it's possible (*since we've done it, say the Rega designers!*), but what changes do we need to make? Here I describe what I see and what seems obvious to me. Aesthetically, first of all, a few points have been simplified without changing the general appearance, which is already a feat. The rotary volume knob is simplified and the front panel has no rounding. Compared to the Brio, the future owner will not be prejudiced, since the IO is attractive, even refined. All in all, if Rega installs a generous toroidal transformer and high-quality electronic components, it soon becomes clear that the choice was made on the overall appearance of the product and not on the performance and the components with which it is obtained. The power is aimed at 2 x 30 W under 8 Ohms, and to live with this power myself for many, many years, in class A, whereas





with 30 W per channel all the same, I can say that if the integrated is well designed (both mine and **Rega's IO**), the power won't be lacking. A generous power supply, well-designed circuits, Class A/B technology with **Sanken** transistors in the power stage and, last but not least, an **ALP** volume potentiometer with an established reputation for quality and reliability, show that **Rega** has risen to the challenge with flying colours. In terms of practicality, **Rega** offers a phono input for moving magnet (*MM*) cells. This is to the manufacturer's credit for satisfying vinyl lovers, since, as we know, **Rega** is one of the benchmarks in analogue playback. Two other inputs are available for those who want to connect a *CD* player or any other music receiver and their TV. An ear-phone jack on the front panel will allow a solitary listening which, sometimes, can be welcome. This headphone connection does not use a stand-alone circuit, but uses the main amplifier, of which the power **Rega** drops before sending the music to our ears. A remote control completes the ease of use, a remote control of which the large buttons I appreciated.

Rega IO before use

As we have seen, this **Rega** integrated amplifier goes to the heart of the matter, ensuring a sound performance that will not be sacrificed. All that remains now is to add speakers who will not be anemic, i.e. who will have a sensitivity of at least 89 dB. More is even better. For this test, I connected my two usual pairs (not at the same time!), one with a sensitivity of 89 dB and the other of 94 dB. My aim here is not to demonstrate that the difference in sensitivity will help me to describe how **Rega's IO** works, but rather to show that it is capable of differentiating between two different technologies. The first pair (rated at 89 dB) is equipped with a 5.25" bass driver and a soft dome tweeter (a *silk dome*, as often said in the language of connoisseurs), but in tergal impregnated with reality. As for the other model, an 8" diameter bass speaker with a tweeter section equipped with a pure metal ribbon tweeter. Personally, and to give you a more accurate account of the feeling, I prefer this path in the versatile choice of speakers. The reader will thus be able to free itself from the constraint of choosing speakers and move towards a model that they really

like. They will also be able to choose from a wider range of prices, as **Rega's IO** can very well be paired with more sophisticated speakers than those that would match its price. I should also point out, before the listening report, that **Rega** certainly wanted to offer this **IO** integrated amplifier equipped with a vinyl turntable and a pair of speakers of its own design, under the name *Rega System One*. Although the idea is attractive and commendable on **Rega's** part, I am sure that your regular dealer will take the same happy step and create a *System One* type system with different brands for you.

Rega IO in use

Let's be fair and give back to **Rega** what is **Rega's**. We have to start with vinyls! Immediately you know whom you're dealing with, such a long history of research and development in analog playback is bearing fruit. Beautiful richness of timbres, it's simple and efficient, without sound unbalancing or other inconveniences, and that's the success of the vinyl turntable and its magnificent return, a guarantee of immediate music. I find that the phono circuit at work in the **IO** is more than satisfactory. There is no lack



of dynamics and the 30 W, which can be thought of as a *limit*, are not defeated. As I've often told you, a well thought out and well-designed circuit is always a must. The separation of the channels is beautiful too, the warm presence effect. Then come digital readings and beautifully recorded compact discs. From *Birds on a Wire* (i.e. **Rosemary Standley** and **Dom la Lena**) to **Heilung** for the simple to strange music sector, I am delighted by what I hear. Here we successfully test the intimate, especially the song *All the World is Green* and **Heilung's** strange *Season of Mist*, and we realize that the pleasure does not necessarily grow only with ultra-powerful amplifiers. The result is fabulous, in both musical choices, and surprisingly precise. In classical music and jazz, happiness is guaranteed in the same way. We are in the presence of a manufacturer who loves music and lets us know it.

Conclusion

Rega's IO is not just another satellite on our *audiophile* planet. Equipped with a vinyl turntable and a pair of speakers worthy of the name, i.e. with a sensitivity of more than 90 dB, i.e. not anaemic, audiophiles who have chosen **Rega's IO** will never be

disappointed by the performance of this little device that hides its playfulness and seductive power well. It can be considered as the gateway to a musical and reliable system. Ease of use, simplicity of association, musical performance and discreet design all contribute to making the music emanating from this device a priority and a joy to listen to. Admit, like me, that this is indeed what we want, and **Rega** is successfully offering us simple and very affordable loyalty.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$849

Warranty: 2 years, parts and labor

Distributor: Focal-Naim Canada, Tel: 1.866.271.5689

Mediagraphies

Analog media

Geminiani, *The Enchanted Forest*, CBC Enterprises, SM5017

Elek Bacsik, *The electric guitar of Fontana*, 885.541 MY

Digital media

Rosemary Standley & Dom la Lena, *Birds on a Wire*, 1618033993

Heilung, *Futha*, SOM 511D

M.Figueras - J.Savall, *El Cant de la Sibila*, Aliavox, SACD, AVSA9879



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CABASSE THE PEARL AKOYA CONNECTED SPEAKER

A little gem for your
everyday music



By Jean-Denis Doyle

This intriguing little sphere from France, made by **Cabasse**, is called The Pearl Akoya. This is a connected all-in-one speaker. It is a complete solution for broadcasting music at home. The Pearl Akoya is the younger sister of The Pearl speaker, a similar, larger and much more ambitious speaker. There was a rumor that the little sister, more affordable, would be very interesting to use. That's all it took to make us want to turn it into a test bench. Here it is, The Pearl Akoya, a surprising speaker, as much by its musical qualities as by its characteristics. Let's take the time to discover it together.

CABASSE THE PEARL AKOYA CONNECTED SPEAKER

Cabasse is a French company that has been manufacturing speakers for 70 years. Yes, you've been reading right, as early as 1950. Located near Brest in Brittany, France, **Cabasse** designs, explores and manufactures a complete range of speakers and holds numerous patents. One wonders if **Captain Haddock's** famous "*tonnerre de Brest*" came from **Cabasse's**. This speaker manufacturer has always known how to innovate in order to stand out from the rest of the industry. **Cabasse** was one of the first manufacturers to adopt the spherical shape for a speaker. This shape maximizes sound dispersion and limits the edge effects present on a conventional speaker. Although **Cabasse's** *The Pearl* series may resemble **Devialet's** *Phantom* series, it must be said that **Cabasse** was the pioneer of the spherical enclosure many years ago.

Cabasse's expertise has therefore made it possible to take **Devialet's** concept of an autonomous and connected spherical speaker a step further in terms of refinement. The history of great inventions only repeats itself, the good ideas of some are often transformed by others and refined afterwards. In the end, it is the consumer who benefits. *The Pearl Akoya* is a luxurious, high-performance product for a demanding clientele looking for a connected speaker that delivers beautiful musicality. *The Pearl Akoya* thus comes to interfere with **Naim's** *Muso* and **Devialet's** *Phantom*. In this category, it must therefore compete with well-established references.

Its operation is controlled using an application that installs on any *iOS* or *Android* product. A charming little remote control is also provided. Each *The Pearl Akoya* speaker is completely self-contained with a network player, amplifiers and drivers. The *Akoya* is therefore able to play your favorite music, whether it's on an online download site, on your computer or on your mobile device. *The Pearl Akoya* speaker will, of course, need to be connected to a network or via *Bluetooth*.

Technical description

The Pearl Akoya is first and foremost an active three-way speaker. It is equipped with a 17 cm long throw carbon fiber woofer. A midrange speaker and a tweeter, in a coaxial configuration, complete *The Pearl Akoya*. The three transducers are powered by specific amplifiers and controlled by an internal processor that ensures perfect calibration with the listening room. It adjusts phase, latency and several other parameters. It is a very powerful speaker with substantial amplifiers. The *Akoya* will be able to reach, incredibly, 115 dB peak, without any risk of damaging its own drivers. Your neighbors will love it. The *Akoya* is also equipped with a microphone. This will allow the internal processor to perform an intelligent calibration of the speaker, since it will perceive how the sound waves travel through the room. This microphone will also allow the speaker to receive voice commands, since it is compatible with **Google Assistant**.



Cabasse's *The Pearl Akoya* will connect to your music in many ways. First you will be able to connect it to your network using an *Ethernet* cable or simply through *WiFi*. A *Bluetooth* connection is also available, which will allow all family members to use the speaker even when there is no network. The *Akoya* can also be wired, since it has a *USB* input and an analog input in 3.5 mm format. The *Akoya* also has an optical format input to route the sound from the TV set. The **Cabasse *The Pearl Akoya*** is equipped with a network player, and all major online music services are already programmed into it. It is therefore possible to access **Tidal, Qobuz, Deezer, Spotify** as well as a multitude of Internet radio stations. The **AKM** digital-to-analog converter is capable of accepting high-resolution files up to 24 bits / 192 kHz. The *Akoya's* hull is made of composite fiber and gives a good impression of strength. It is covered with several coats of lacquer to simulate the *look* of a piano finish. A small round remote control allows access to basic functions.

Unpacking and installation

The beautiful packaging has a nice surprise in store for us. Indeed, the *Akoya* comes with a beautifully crafted carrying bag. An idea with a typically French touch of refinement. This elegant bag will allow, for example, to carry the *Akoya* to a cabin or to a friend's house for an impromptu party.

When installing the loudspeaker, it is imperative to install the **Cabasse *StreamControl*** application. It will automatically guide you to the next steps, i.e. calibration and all settings. Since it is possible to use *The Pearl Akoya* speaker in pairs for stereo listening, the application allows you to assign the left and right channels to each loudspeaker. The whole installation goes like a charm. The application is very functional and perfectly fluid. It offers a choice of five tone settings, allowing you to adjust the *Akoya* to suit your personal preferences and the environment in which you find yourself. In the case of a multi-zone installation, the application will be able to control the volume separately for each of the *Akoya* speakers visible on the network. Finally, a floor support is offered as an option as well as a wall support.

Listening impressions

***The Pearl Akoya* speaker, solo**

The Pearl series speakers were first and foremost designed as high-fidelity speakers that deliver music in mono, while having a wide dispersion. Since you don't have to sit in the middle of two speakers as within stereophony listening, it doesn't matter where you are. Standing on the side, sitting in front or several meters away, listening will always be pleasant and interesting.

So it was with just one *Akoya* that I attacked the *Great Cello Concerto* album featuring soloist **YoYo Ma**. Immediately, *The Pearl Akoya* speaker manages to convey a credible ambience of the recording, even though it is currently being played through a single speaker. **YoYo Ma's** cello retains all its roughness and a very natural texture. The notes go down deep in the low register with a lot of body and the

fortissimos pass with the ease of a real audiophile's chain. At low volume, the music keeps its warmth and the entire album can be listened to without any auditory fatigue. Connected speakers often are slightly overdriven in the low frequencies so that listening to low-resolution files such as *MP3* or *AAC* is less painful. The *Akoya* is no exception. So I had fun listening to the **Harry Manx** album *Bread and Budda*. From the **Google Music** service and played on my phone, the song *What*

« So I had fun listening to the **Harry Manx** album *Bread and Budda*. From the **Google Music** service and played on my phone, the song *What Your Eyes Have Seen* plays beautifully, and it would be hard to tell it's low resolution. The *Akoya* seems to have a knack for getting away with things, without ever falling into an aggressiveness that would make you want to turn down the volume. *The Pearl Akoya* speaker focuses on tracking the melody thanks to its *timing* qualities. »



CABASSE THE PEARL AKOYA CONNECTED SPEAKER

Your Eyes Have Seen plays beautifully, and it would be hard to tell it's low resolution. The *Akoya* seems to have a knack for getting away with things, without ever falling into an aggressiveness that would make you want to turn down the volume. *The Pearl Akoya* speaker focuses on tracking the melody thanks to its *timing* qualities. The song thus keeps all its interest and charm. As you turn up the volume, you can see that the *Akoya* will be truly capable of partying. *Stromae's* song *Papaoutai* invades the room and gives a visceral desire to dance. The bass lines are incredibly solid and deep. The dynamic capabilities of this small speaker are truly convincing and will liven up your evenings. The only limit will probably be the peace officer who will come ringing your doorbell.

The Pearl Akoya duo speakers

In stereophony, with two *The Pearl Akoya* speakers, the reproduction quality goes up a notch, presenting a wide and extended sound stage. Although the pleasure is there with only one speaker, the different excerpts of music used for listening in mono now take on another dimension. The stereophonic image is flawlessly coherent and even offers a rather impressive depth effect. Still with *YoYo Ma*, the sound stage transports us to the concert site in a remarkable way. However, with two

speakers, you'll have to make sure that the bass doesn't become too intrusive by moving the speakers away from the walls and adjusting the settings.

Conclusion

So here's a small, quality connected speaker that stands out from similar products thanks to its refinement. Alone, she will delight those who desire a beautiful tonal quality and a fluid musicality. Its versatility and portability will also be appreciated. In addition, you can add a second one to double your pleasure in stereophony. A real little gem that will enrich your daily life with beautiful music.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$2,300 (includes Bluetooth remote control, carrying bag, USB cable to a USB micro and 3.5 mm stereo right/left RCA cable). Pearl white or metallic black finish

Warranty: 2 years, parts and labor

Distributor: Asona Ltd, Tel: 514.655.6882, richard.k@asonaltd.com

Mediagraphy

Yoyo Ma, Great Cello Concertos, Qobuz file

Harry Manx, Bread and Budda, Dog My Cat Records Inc., DMCR00513

Stromae, Racine Carrée, Mosaert, 3747987

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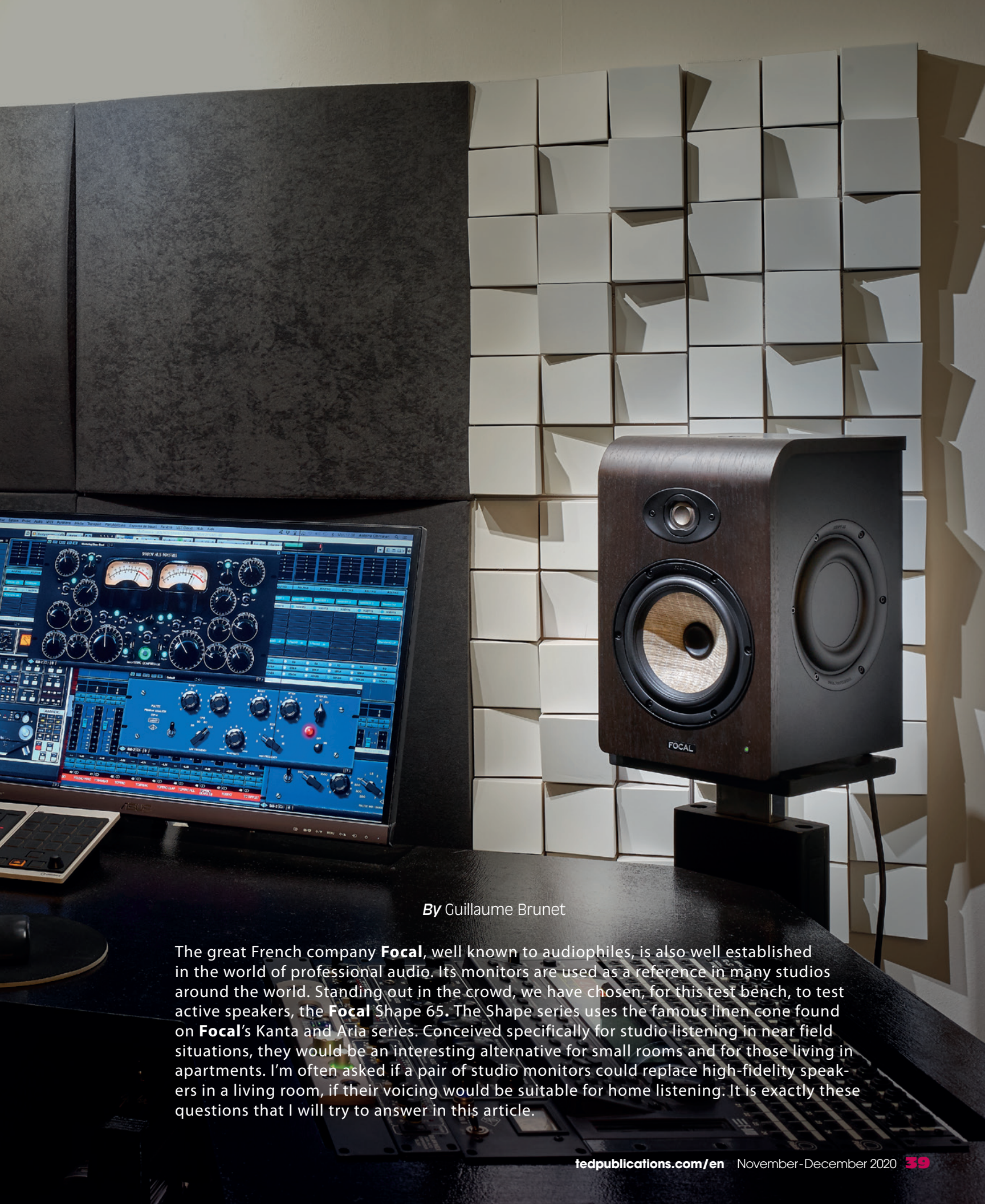
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FOCAL SHAPE 65 SPEAKERS

**They rally the pros
as well as the music lovers!**





By Guillaume Brunet

The great French company **Focal**, well known to audiophiles, is also well established in the world of professional audio. Its monitors are used as a reference in many studios around the world. Standing out in the crowd, we have chosen, for this test bench, to test active speakers, the **Focal Shape 65**. The Shape series uses the famous linen cone found on **Focal's** Kanta and Aria series. Conceived specifically for studio listening in near field situations, they would be an interesting alternative for small rooms and for those living in apartments. I'm often asked if a pair of studio monitors could replace high-fidelity speakers in a living room, if their voicing would be suitable for home listening. It is exactly these questions that I will try to answer in this article.

« The **Focal Shape 65** combines these qualities sought after by all lovers of good sound, professionals or not. They let the music speak for itself and offer a very wide and deep sound stage. On **Jean Leloup's** album *À Paradis City*, which I've listened to dozens of times, I perceived subtleties and even guitar and synthesizer lines that I'd never heard or paid attention to before. Of course, the melodies are very catchy and you stamp your feet, but in front of the *Shape 65*, you can perceive all the richness and subtleties of the *mix*. All the details are present and appear without being forced. We literally find ourselves in front of a wall of sound. »



Like all **Focal** products, all development, design and assembly are carried out in France. **Focal's** proaudio division consists of three major families of monitors, each with a different price range, with the *Shape* series at the center. The products are sold individually and retail for between \$800 and \$1,500 each. In this market share, **Focal** stands out because it is about the only one, along with **Dynaudio**, to be in both professional and residential audio. It is the only one, however, to use passive radiator technology, a technology that radically increases the impact of low frequencies. Unlike its lines for in-home use, **Focal** does not offer any passive monitors in its professional lines. There are several advantages to choosing to incorporate the amplifier in the cabinet. In this type of speaker, the crossover and tone controls are often placed upstream of the amplifiers, which allows amplifiers to work only in the frequency range of the motor they power. Second, reducing the distance between the amplifier and the speaker greatly increases system efficiency while reducing costs and losses as well as interference that may be induced in the speaker cables. Originally designed and intended for near-field audio professionals, the *Shape* incorporates all the necessary adjustments to accommodate small spaces and would be ideal for an audiophile looking for a minimalist system.

Technical description

The **Focal Shape 65** is a *closed* type active loudspeaker with two 165 mm passive radiators on each side of the cabinet. The box is made of 15 mm thick *MDF* and covered, from top to front, by a single piece of rounded walnut wood. This particular shape is the design signature of the *Shape* range. Underneath the speaker, four adjustable feet with rubber tips allow it to be decoupled from the surface on which it is placed.

Turning on the power puts the speaker in *standby* mode. To activate it, just send a signal. Input is either via an *RCA* or *XLR* connector, without any control of sensitivity or input level. Everything has been set in the factory. Dual Class *A/B* amplification ensures that the speakers hold their own. The aluminum-magnesium inverted dome *tweeter* is backed by 25 W of amplification while the *Flax* woofer is backed by 80 W.

The *Shape* series has taken advantage of several innovations introduced on other models. The *M*-shape of the *tweeter*, inspired by the *SM6* and *SM9* models, provides more rigidity to the dome while reducing its directivity. Its *Poron*® suspension has the effect of linearizing the response curve below 6 kHz, which greatly facilitates its integration with the *woofer*. The 165 mm *Flax* medium and low frequency cone is also used in **Focal's** *Aria* and *Kanta* series. It is made of a natural fiber



sandwiched between two layers of fiberglass. Linen was chosen for its mechanical properties. It increases the rigidity and resonance control of the cone while being very light. The *Flax* cone also uses *TMD (Tuned Mass Damper)* technology to counter the distortion caused by the deformation of the suspension and the cone. All *Flax* speakers are also equipped with the *NIC (Neutral Inductance Circuit)* motor, which stabilizes the magnetic field for perfectly defined sound and better controlled bass.

On the rear panel, a fixed-frequency high-pass filter makes it easy to adjust and integrate with a subwoofer. Three potentiometers control the frequency response of the speaker. Those in the high and medium frequencies have a play of plus or minus 3 dB, while those in the low frequencies have a play of plus or minus 6. The engineers chose infinitely variable potentiometers rather than fixed values such as a 1 dB jump, for example. This makes it a little more difficult to perfectly match the two speakers.

Unpacking and start-up

I assure you, the **Focal Shape 65** are much more beautiful in reality than in photo! That's what I found when I put them on the tripods. Their rounded shapes add a modern

and above all very design touch to boxes intended mainly for studios. The positioning was very fast and was done instinctively. In close listening situations, the shape of an equilateral triangle is normally preferred. The crossing of the *tweeter* lines is at head height or slightly behind, depending on taste. That's what I did. The speakers landed 195 cm from each other and 200 cm from my position. The bass controls helped to make the speaker fit my room. After a few tests, I opted for an attenuation of 1.5 dB. Passive radiators are really efficient and give a lot of effect to this small cabinet. They must, of course, be given time to adjust before they are well articulated and give their full potential.

Listening impressions

I have noticed, over time, that many audiophiles are prejudiced against professional equipment. According to them, they all project an image forward, a clear, cold, even incisive sound, and yet ... For audio professionals, several criteria are essential when choosing a pair of monitors. Of course, their sound has to be pleasing while being as neutral as possible. They must also allow you to listen for many hours without feeling hearing fatigue. But the most important

consideration is the ability to point out overflows while helping to make decisions that will be valid for the majority of speakers. For audiophiles, what is taken into account is sometimes different. In addition to making the listener's musical styles enjoyable, they must often appeal to the eye as well as the ears. The **Focal Shape 65** combines these qualities sought after by all lovers of good sound, professionals or not. They let the music speak for itself and offer a very wide and deep sound stage. On **Jean Leloup's** album *À Paradis City*, which I've listened to dozens of times, I perceived subtleties and even guitar and synthesizer lines that I'd never heard or paid attention to before. Of course, the melodies are very catchy and you stamp your feet, but in front of the *Shape 65*, you can perceive all the richness and subtleties of the *mix*. All the details are present and appear without being forced. We literally find ourselves in front of a wall of sound. With **Nenad Vassilic** on *Bass Room*, we can see all the work on articulation and the care taken by **Focal's** engineers to the reproduction of low frequencies. On this album, the artist explores a wide variety of ways to play his instrument. One passes from *slaps* of fingers, as percussion on the body, to harmonics plucked with his

left hand, and to the slipped bow, sometimes struck on the strings. All this produces a great quantity of resonances and harmonics of the different materials, the woods, neck and body, the metal of the strings, the horsehair of the bow, everything combines and produces, together with the musician's playing, a unique and very rich music. The presentation is very dynamic, sometimes projected forward, but always right. The bass is fast and has a lot of effect. You can physically feel the music, even at low volume. With **Patricia Barber** on *Nightclub*, we are in a pure *audiophile* recording. **Patricia's** suave voice remains firmly anchored in the center with the double bass supporting her behind, while the piano and drums are about 8' wide. It is in this kind of production, where exaggeration is intended, that we appreciate all the spatiality and precision of the *Shape 65's* sound image. It's the kind of speaker that lets you see your entire music collection in a new light.

Conclusion

The **Focal Shape 65** are truly easy to love speakers. They project a huge sound stage, full, fair and perfectly coherent. Passive radiators are really efficient and give us the impression, with the bass quality produced, of being in front of a floorstanding speaker. Tone controls allow them to adapt to any room and deliver a frequency response to the listener's taste. Combined with a *DAC-Streamer* preamplifier such as a **NAD C 658** or a **MOON 390**, they would form a package capable of competing with much more expensive conventional systems. This is an option that is obviously not for everyone, but is worth exploring.



GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$1,299

Warranty: 5 years for the speaker and 3 years for the electronic portion

Manufacturer-Distributor: Focal Naim Canada, Tel: 866 271.5689, www.focalnaimamerica.com

Mediagraphy

Jean Leloup, À Paradis City, CD, Grosse Boîte, DTCCD-4445

Nenad Vassilic, Bass Room, Galileo Music Communication, GMV091

Patricia Barber, *Nightclub*, SACD, UDSACD2004, Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab

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WHAT'S NEW?

COLLABORATION BETWEEN MASERATI X AND SONUS FABER

THE MERGER OF TWO AUTHENTIC BRANDS...

By the News Room



Bound by their commitment to excellent craftsmanship, technological advances and centuries-old traditions, the **Maserati x** and **Sonus faber** collaboration fuses powerful performances with symphonic sounds to blend the unique voices of these authentic Italian brands. With both brands individually known for their distinct aesthetics, a clash was potentially imminent, however, this unique pairing shows how these different industries complement each other and become a seamless experience with the recent September 2020 unveiling of the **Maserati MC20** super sports car - powered by **Sonus faber**.

Sonus faber, founded in Vicenza in 1983, embodies translation of its name, *handmade sound* to create luxury audio systems that exemplify the brand's mission to use innovative technologies and craftsmanship to achieve its refined design. **Maserati**, indissolubly linked to an audacious personality and a defined aesthetic, has never ceased to gather its faithful followers since the creation of the brand in 1914. **Maserati** has set the standard in the luxury car industry and with the **MC20** model equipped with **Sonus faber's** deep sound quality, both brands

will certainly expand their reach and adopt a new set of brand loyalties with this collaboration.

The **Maserati MC20** is the only model in the world currently in production with the **Sonus faber** audio system. It features a 12-channel high-power amplifier with 695 W of power and 12 speakers with specific characteristics to remain true to the **Sonus faber** philosophy, which is the ultimate pursuit of *natural sound*, creating sound reproduction that involves the use of materials such as the silk used for the dome of the *tweeters*. Thanks to the special **Sonus faber** fine-tuning, the sound is always natural, clear and detailed, giving the listener the opportunity to distinguish the different instruments on stage, with the emotion of experiencing a live musical performance.

The **Maserati x Sonus faber MC20** super sports car was launched last September 9th and has been on pre-order since September 10th 2020.

www.sonusfaber.com

A RACING CAR TO PLAY YOUR VINYL RECORDS

By Jean-Denis Doyle

American manufacturer **VPI** has just refreshed the popular and now classic *Scout* turntable. It will henceforth be known as *Prime Scout*. For the people at **VPI**, the operation was tricky, since the *Scout* model has always been very successful. It has greatly contributed to **VPI**'s reputation as a manufacturer of high-performance, reasonably priced turntables. **VPI**'s objective for the *Prime Scout* was to offer several improvements and refinements, while trying to maintain its gains. Will the new *Prime Scout* live up to its prestigious lineage? This is what we will discover in this test bench.



VPI is a family business in New Jersey, founded more than thirty years ago by the charismatic **Harry Weisfeld**. It is now his son **Mat**, who runs the company. It brings dynamism and modernity in its ways of doing things. At **VPI**, they've known how to make turntables and tonearms since... forever. In fact, **VPI** manufactures nothing but products designed to extract the maximum amount of music from our vinyl records. In this quest for performance, **VPI** has ventured into all kinds of technologies. This manufacturer will have tried virtually everything from belt drives to direct drives, from ball-bearing tone arms to unipivot arms. **VPI** will also have covered most of the available materials used in the composition of a vinyl turntable. Its expertise in the effects of these materials on sound is unparalleled. When **Mat Weisfeld** and his team decided to revamp the *Scout*, the challenge was daunting, as this model was already very successful. Since its inception, *VPI's Scout* model has always embodied what an entry-level high-performance turntable should be. The **VPI Scout** has often been referred to as the **Ford Mustang** of turntables. A high performance device offered at a fairly reasonable price. In order to improve it, the **VPI** team therefore chose to incorporate several features that were already present on the *Prime* model by adapting them to the *Scout*, while maintaining an excellent quality/price ratio. The *Prime Scout* was born.

Technical description

The **VPI Prime Scout** is a belt-driven turntable, equipped with a huge motor supporting a heavy platter. The *Prime Scout* has no

suspensions. In general, this type of turntable offers solid, stable and very dynamic sound reproduction. The entire turntable rests on a four-centimeter thick *MDF* frame, which is reinforced at the bottom by a steel plate. The latter provides a significant gain in rigidity and resonance control, which will result in better sound clarity, especially at low frequencies. The frame rests on four plastic feet. These are surprisingly efficient and are adjustable for height. They provide a good level of insulation against external vibrations.

The heavy engine, which is completely separate from the chassis, is directly inherited from the *Prime* model. It rotates at a speed of 300 revolutions per minute. Its rotation stability ensures a reading without variation, worthy of a direct drive turntable. It has two pulleys, one for the 33 rpm and the other for the 45 rpm, so the gear change will be done manually by means of the pulley belt. The steel platter is heavy and rests on a huge axle that ends with a large ball bearing.

The **VPI Prime Scout** is equipped with **VPI's JMW-9** tone arm. This arm is legendary in the small world of vinyl and is perfectly tuned. This is a unipivot model. The peculiarity of this type of tone arm lies in the fact that no ball bearings ensure its movement, both horizontally and vertically. Indeed, the *JMW-9* rests only on a needle-like tip. Horizontal balance is ensured by two counterweights that are unscrewed on the sides of the arm. This technical choice was made because the arm offers no resistance in either axis. In other words, when the needle is in the groove, the tone arm will only follow the fluctuations imposed by the disc while keeping the needle in the right position. Unlike a



ball-bearing arm, it will not try to make the needle work in the groove. In short, with a unipivot arm, the disc takes the controls and the tone arm just follows. This type of arm often gives a beautiful sound free of any form of distortion and has exemplary *tracking* capabilities. Unipivot arms often give better results when mounted on a heavy turntable without a suspension, just like the **VPI Prime Scout**. A felt mat and a pressure puck with screws complete the **VPI Scout**.

Unpacking, installation and use

Unpacking the **VPI Prime Scout** is easy and the instructions are complete and particularly well described. However, mounting the cartridge and the different arm settings require experience. Indeed, a unipivot arm can be difficult to adjust. So, if you have no experience in adjusting a vinyl turntable at this level, I strongly suggest you let a qualified technician do it for you. If you are planning to purchase this model online, you will need to ensure that you get the services of someone qualified. Like a sports car, the use of the *Prime Scout* is not very user-friendly either. The start switch located on the side of the motor is not very practical, nor is the pressure puck that has to be screwed

« **Anne Bisson's** voice immediately takes on a soft texture, while remaining clear and unencumbered by any form of distortion. With the track *September in Montreal*, one immediately understands, with the finesse of the piano's timbres, that we are dealing with a high level turntable, capable of diffusing timbres of great finesse. [...] The *Prime Scout* offers a smooth, detailed reproduction of the contradictory qualities that are usually difficult to reconcile, demonstrating the quality of its engineering. Thrills at every turn.»

and unscrewed each time you change discs. As the spindle of the disc tray is threaded, care should be taken when removing the disc. If the disk gets caught in the threaded spindle, an unfortunate incident could occur due to a false movement and damage the cartridge. In addition, with the unipivot arm, it is sometimes difficult to place the needle in a specific place on the record, such as between songs. The turntable is not equipped with a cover, which would have been welcome to keep away little curious little fingers. Like sports car enthusiasts, audiophiles will tell you that all these practical considerations don't really matter and that what really counts is performance. Agreed! However, it is important to be aware that this is not a turntable for family use.

Listening impressions

A gentle stroll.

It was with **Anne Bisson's** Blue Mind album that the needle of the **Audio Technica** AT-OC9XLM cartridge, supplied with the turntable, began to explore the bottom of the grooves. Anne Bisson's voice immediately takes on a soft texture, while remaining clear and unencumbered by any form of distortion. With the track *September in Montreal*, one immediately understands, with the finesse of the piano's timbres, that we are dealing with a high level turntable, capable of diffusing timbres of great finesse. The bass has plenty of support and the drums have a nice impact. **VPI's** JMW-9 unipivot arm allows small subtleties, often ignored by other pick-up arms, to be extracted from the disc. The *Prime Scout* offers a smooth, detailed reproduction of the contradictory qualities that are usually difficult to reconcile, demonstrating the quality of its engineering. Thrills at every turn.

The *Prime Scout* is capable of bringing emotions to life like few turntables are. Careless Whisper by **Wham!** is an obvious choice. Do you think you know this ultra-classic song that has

been played millions of times on the radio? Wait until you hear it on a **VPI Prime Scout**. Wow! **George Michael's** voice is rendered with an infinite palette of tonalities. This makes it possible to distinguish the lyrics perfectly in its micro-details. And what about the saxophone solo which is an integral part of the chorus in this song! Wow! Beautiful! This **VPI** turntable allows you to experience thrills with commercial recordings that are not meant for *audiophiles*. A fundamental quality that allows you to rediscover your nightclub from top to bottom.

Power to keep control.

The heavy platter and the imposing engine of the *Prime Scout* provide the reproduction with an uncommon rhythmic follow-up. On **Steely Dan's** Hey Nineteen, the drums display a tempo that immediately makes you tap your foot. Impossible to remain impassive and indifferent. The voices follow the rhythm section perfectly and it becomes obvious that this turntable imposes a *timing* of its own to the music. A real metronome through its stability, which gives the songs a solid aplomb. The *Prime Scout* will therefore be a *must-have*, to showcase your collection of popular and rock music, which will shine in all its glory.

Conclusion

The **VPI Prime Scout** truly achieves a flawless sound reproduction. Its sound is clear and free of distortion. His sense of rhythm is unparalleled and gives the impression that songs always end a little too soon. Of course, you will have to take into account its particular ergonomics and make sure that it is adjusted by a professional. Like a sports car, it will make you experience thrills that will quickly become addictive. At the price where it is offered, the **VPI Prime Scout** is an excellent purchase for those who wish to listen to their records at 200 km/h.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price : please contact your local retailer

Warranty: please contact your local retailer

Manufacturer : VPI Industries, Tel: 732.583.6895,
www.vpiindustries.com

Mediagraphy

Anne Bisson, Blue Mind, Fidelio Music Inc, FALP025

Wham!, Careless Whisper, Colombia, 12XP-05170

Steely Dan, Gold, MCA Records, MCA-5324



CLASSICAL MUSIC

By Christophe Huss



THE DISC OF THE MONTH

MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

Liszt-Thalberg: Opera transcriptions & fantasies

Hyperion, CDA, 68320

Interpretation: *****

Technique: ****

In the 1830s and 1840s, piano building developed considerably. It was the era of the great keyboard virtuosos who travelled all over Europe to amaze the salons of the capitals and the public of the emerging concert halls. In the upper echelons, pianistic jousts are organized, like today's boxing matches. **Franz Liszt** (1811-1886) and **Sigismund Thalberg** (1812-1871) were then world leaders. Many testimonies attest to **Thalberg's** superiority. **Marie d'Agoult**, **Liszt's** mistress, will find a memorable formula: **Thalberg is the first pianist in the world. Liszt is the only one.**

These piano competitions were based on paraphrases and fantasies (or musical and digital elucubrations) on famous arias and themes from popular operas. We have left the original English title of the CD even though it is poorly chosen. Nothing here is a *transcription*, because it goes far beyond that. These virtuoso composers embroider on **Bellini's Norma**, **Rossini's Moses**, **Verdi's Ernani** or **Donizetti's Don Pasquale**. It's intoxicating and **Marc-André Hamelin** is fabulous.

SOUND RECORDING OF THE MONTH

STÉPHANIE D'OUSTRAC, ENSEMBLE AMARILLIS, HÉLOÏSE GAILLARD.

Portraits de la folie

Harmonia Mundi, HMM 902 646

Interpretation: ****

Technique: *****

This disc recorded in Entraigues-sur-la-Sorgues in France, entrusted to sound engineer **Alban Moreau**, asks pertinent questions about the sound aesthetics and balances of a recording

of baroque music. For this secular program, **Alban Moreau** wisely chose a sound setting that in no way evokes a chapel or a religious place. The sound is therefore rather dry and well defined. The pitfall then becomes that of distancing and balance. It is very successful, because we aren't overly close to the instruments and the relationships between them are very adequate and we will listen, for example, to the very credible volume of the harpsichord. The accuracy of the timbres and the balance of **Stéphanie d'Oustrac's** superb mezzo voice make these *Portraits de la Folie*, through French (**Campra**, **Destouches**, **Marais**, **Rebel**), English (**Purcell**, **Eccles**) and German-Italian (**Keiser**, **Heinichen**, **Handel**) works a nectar. Track 9, **Purcell's From Silent Shades**, with its clean cut and crisp bass, synthesizes its success. One will also note the perfect articulation of the program, alternating instrumental and vocal works.

THREE LOOKS AT BACH

FRANCESCO CORTI

Harpsichord Concertos BWV 1052, 1053, 1055 and 1058.

Francesco Corti, Il pomo d'oro.

Pentatone, CD, PTC 5186 837

Interpretation: ****

Technique: ****

MASATO SUZUKI, BACH COLLEGIUM JAPAN.

Harpsichord Concertos BWV 1052, 1053, 1056 and 1059R.

BIS, SACD, 2401.

Interpretation: ****

Technique: ****

LARS ULRIK MORTENSEN, CONCERTO COPENHAGEN.

Complete Harpsichord & Violin Concertos.

CPO, 5 CD, 555 299-2.

Interpretation: *****

Technique: ****

Please note: although **PentaTone** is a SACD specialist, this release is a stereophonic CD, whereas the **BIS** disc

is a multi-channel SACD. The exciting juxtaposition of these two new versions shows what the art of interpretation is all about. **Corti** grabs **Bach's Harpsichord Concertos** in the same way that **Il Giardino Armonico** grabbed **Vivaldi's Four Seasons**: the lines fuse, the countermelody stand out. Everything is a pretext for jousting, emulation and playing, at the price of some hard and abrasive sounds. What is sharp with **Corti** and *Il pomo d'oro* is rounded in an ocean of pleasure and elegance by **Masato Suzuki**. The tones are more docile, melted and coated, which does not prevent dynamism, but erodes tonicity. **Corti's** more sonorous harpsichord is contrasted with **Suzuki's** harpsichord, which is made of lace.

For a drier and more chamber-like elegance, **CPO** has just reissued the complete concertos for harpsichord and violin by **Lars Ulrik Mortensen** realized between 2002 and 2013. As always with the modest **Mortensen**, the balance and taste are perfect. It's **Corti** without the hyper-articulation and the excesses. But some will certainly seek the great thrills of the Italian.

REDISCOVER CÉSAR FRANCK

There are important composers who suddenly seem to go out of fashion and that nobody records anymore. When was the last time you heard **César Franck's Symphony**? Two new versions rekindle its flame along with an important novelty and rare reissue of so-called *minor* works.

FRANCK LE CHASSEUR MAUDIT, PSYCHÉ, LES ÉOLIDES. JEAN-LUC TINGAUD, ROYAL SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA.

Naxos, 8573 955.

Interpretation: *****

Technique: ****

Here is the important new work dedicated to **César Franck** (1822-1890), a

naturalized French Belgian composer who marked the history of music in France in the 2nd half of the 19th century. This **Naxos** disc shows the gap between the great reputation of **César Franck** and the low diffusion of these exciting works. There have been a few versions of the *Éolides*, but for this work and for the extraordinary *Cursed Hunter*, the real discographic references go back more than 50 years. As for *Psyché*, it is a score of which we essentially know one movement, *Psyché et Eros*, recorded by **Carlo Maria Giulini** at **DG**. **Jean-Luc Tingaud's** disc gives us the complete 45-minute version with chorus, of which there was only a studio recording made in Wales by **Chandos**. Congratulations to **Tingaud** for this essential **Franck CD**, an ardent modern reference.

FRANCK RÉDEMPTION GÉ NEUTEL (Soprano), RADIO FILHARMONISCH ORKEST, JEAN FOURNET.

Brilliant Classics, 96002

Interpretation: ****

Technique: ****

If lovers of **Franck's** music knew the complete score of *Psyché* before **Jean-Luc Tingaud's** disc, it was mainly through a concert of the **Radio Filharmonisch Orkest** conducted by **Jean Fournet** (1913-2008). It is the same for *Rédemption* (1871, revised in 1874) whose competing version is that of **Michel Plasson** recorded in 1994. **Franck** did not refer to it as an *oratorio*, but saw *Rédemption*, despite the presence of a soprano, a choir and its mysticism, as a *poem symphony*. Compared to **Plasson**, **Fournet**, in this 1976 recording, does not use a narrator. The music is less essential, because it is more refined and less varied than that of *Psyché*. There is a certain grandiloquent compunction that would make it in **Franck's** work what *L'enfance du Christ* is to **Berlioz**. The women's choir represents angels, the soloist is an archangel. So you need a voice that's

not too heavy, but here it's too dry. This record, which is worth for its rarity, is perfectible.

FRANCK
SYMPHONIE EN RÉ MINEUR.
CE QU'ON ENTEND SUR
LA MONTAGNE.
ORCHESTRE PHILHARMONIQUE
DE RADIO-FRANCE,
MIKKO FRANCK.

Frank by Franck
Alpha, 561.
Interpretation: ***
Technique: ***

FRANCK
SYMPHONIE EN RÉ MINEUR.
VARIATIONS SYMPHONIQUES.
GUSTAVO GIMENO,
DENIS KOZHUKHIN (Piano),
Luxembourg Philharmonic
Orchestra.

Pantone, SACD, PTC 5186 771.
Interpretation: ***
Technique: ****

Why was **César Franck** important?
As a composer, in many genres, as a pedagogue, as a synthesis between the French and Germanic musical worlds. Above all, he invented the cyclic form. The *Symphony in D* is both a simple and sublime example of this method of composition, since it is easy to spot in the *Finale* the *summaried* aspect of this affair, with the return of themes from the 1st and 2nd movements. Stylistically, we can oppose the very French versions (**Charles Munch**) and Germanic looks (**Carlo Maria Giulini**, **Claus Peter Flor**). The greatest successes are personal syntheses: **Pierre Monteux** (RCA) and **Leonard Bernstein** (DG). Here, **Gimeno** prevails for a sharper and more present sound capture, but the phrasing remains rather *flat* as if in permanent tension, whereas **Bernstein**, in comparison, looks like a visionary who comes out of a yoga session and transmits his serenity to the orchestra, whose breathing is deeper, freer and more intense. **Mikko Franck**, whose surname allows the publisher to dare the title *Franck by Franck*, has a more subtle approach,

but the recording keeps us a little at a distance giving a bland image of the orchestra (3rd movement). Nothing has changed, but revisit this symphony with **Bernstein** or **Monteux**!

NEW RELEASES
LANG LANG
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Goldberg Variations
DG, 2 CD, 481 8971.
Interpretation: **
Technique: ****

It was recorded from 15 to 18 March 2020 in Berlin. So it wasn't just COVID that struck at that time. The **Lang Lang** *Goldbergs* exist in two versions: as a 2 CD album (this studio recording) and as a 4 CD, *Deluxe* version, in which is added a concert given in Leipzig ten days earlier. We stayed with the studio version, the luxury in life being sometimes to be able to avoid certain things. So the **Lang Lang's Goldbergs**? It starts where **Glenn Gould's** begins and ends: an ecstatic *Aria* from the outset. If he played the *Aria* like that, the brave **Goldberg**, who had been prescribed the score to find sleep, had just invented *Valium*. **Lang Lang's Goldbergs**, are very simple, very slow, *slowed down* variations, which sound like film music on cumulonimbus for abusive consumers of hemp, and lively variations where the whole counterpoint is hammered like a road sign supposed to direct us in a Montreal asphyxiated by roadwork. The spirit of all this is of a vulgarity that almost insults the intelligence. Two stars? Yes. In the trade, we have **Khatia Buniatishvili**. She can do worse.

STEPHEN HOUGH,
FINNISH RADIO
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA,
HANNU LINTU.

Ludwig Van Beethoven
Piano Concertos.
Hyperion, 3 CD, CDA 68291/3.
Interpretation: ****
Technique: ****

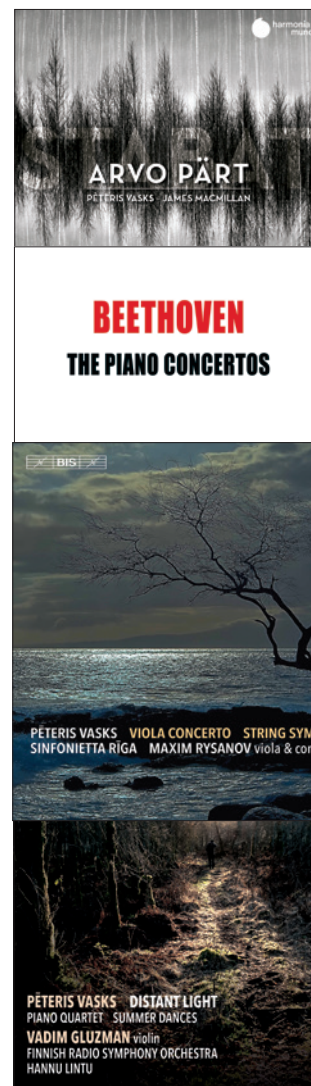
The *Piano Concertos* are the most ploughed ground of the **Beethoven** year, with several integrals completed, or in progress. The first are on

fortepiano, a formula that has never really brought satisfactory results, but to which **Kristian Bezuidenhout** and **Pablo Heras-Casado** (HM) try to give more emphasis. On modern piano, the cohort of new interpretations started with **Jan Lisiecki** (DG). The most interesting contribution so far is that of **Martin Helmchen** and **Andrew Manze** (Alpha), but the complete works are being released on separate CDs and we are waiting for the 3rd volume. **Hough** and **Lintu** have many assets, including a very fine, fluid and modest playing of the pianist. The accompaniment is more square than that of **Manze**, but on the whole we are close to the references **Kovacevich-Davis** (Philips-Decca) and **Bronfman-Zinman** (Arte Nova-Sony). A very beautiful novelty, homogeneous and honest.

CHOIR OF CLARE COLLEGE,
CAMBRIDGE,
THE DMITRI ENSEMBLE /
GRAHAM ROSS.

Arvo Pärt
Vasks et McMillan.
Stabat Mater Da pacem Domine,
The Woman with the Alabaster Box,
Magnificat, Nunc Dimittis.
Harmonia Mundi, HMM 905 323.

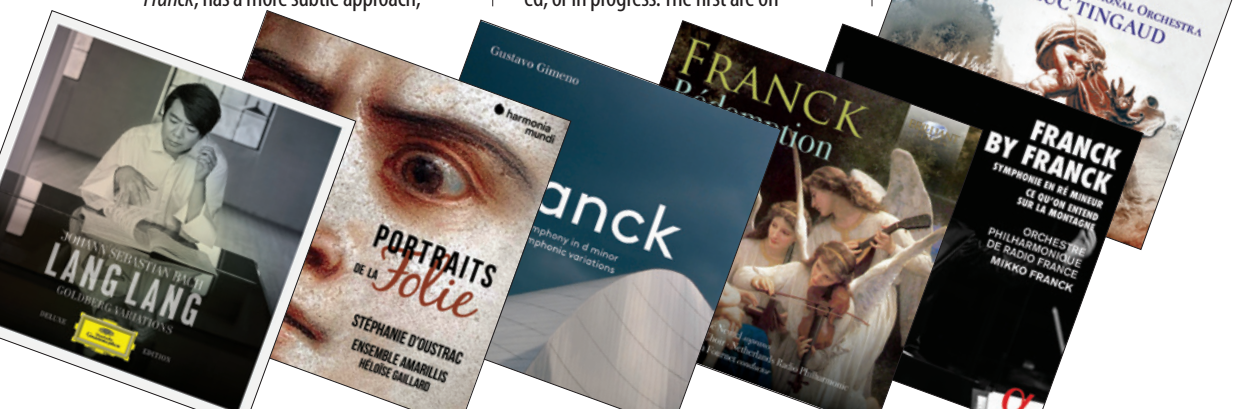
Interpretation: ****
Technique *
This CD was meant for glory! A copious program of almost 80 minutes, a very beautiful selection, a choir with very accurate colors in the high register, a work by **Peteris Vasks** (*Plainscapes*) showing his fascination for the guardian figure of **Pärt**. In short, everything to please and even fascinate. But there is a curious sensation of sound saturation at times, for example in the last minute of **James McMillan's Miserere**. We check and indeed the signal exceeds 0 dB. It is not massive, but clearly audible. Digital saturation in a studio recording of a major label? Unfortunately.



PETERIS VASKS
Viola Concerto & 'Voices' Symphony
for Strings 'Voices'.
Maxim Rysanov, Sinfonietta Riga.
Bis, SACD, 2443.

PETERIS VASKS
Concerto for violin and string orchestra
'Distant Light' Summer Dances.
Quatuor with piano.
Vadim Gluzman, Solists, Finnish Radio
Symphony Orchestra, Hannu Lintu.
Bis, SACD 2352.

Interpretations: *****
Technique: *****
If **Arvo Pärt** is the most played composer of our time, the Latvian **Peteris Vasks** is, in our opinion, the most outstanding. He too deploys an immediately identifiable language, very poetic, but also tortured, which alternates conversation between the solo instrument and the orchestra and tormented soliloquies. These two discs document two very large contemporary concertos in reference versions with eloquent couplings. The **Gluzman** disc in particular is the greatest **Vasks** CD currently available.



BLUES

By Pierre Jobin

JORDAN OFFICER

Jazz vol .1, Country, vol. 1, Blues, vol. 1

Spectra Musique

Jordan Officer is a guitarist with jazz, blues and *country* roots who can play at breakneck speed with imperturbable *coolness* and incorporating well-placed subtleties. His musical breeding ground is found fundamentally in American popular root music, which he renders with naturalness and simplicity, and with disarming dexterity. On this project of three studio albums recorded *live off the floor*, in one day, each with his friends and accomplice musicians, he is *armed with his Gibson ES-150, without any effects, and his Gibson GA 50T 1949 amp*. He follows the thread of his *feeling* and his approach to guitar gambades from one style to the other as in communicating vases. The particular accents and angles of each of these three musics stand out here, there and elsewhere to mark the styles and, often, the line is very thin from one to the other. **Officer's** characteristic use of the Southern-style violin enhances the *country* tracks in which his simple, uncluttered singing hits the spot and convinces. Having first of all, *once* appreciated *live* his qualities as a gifted, inventive and dazzling jazz guitarist, the kick of these albums is to find him surrounded by such good musicians and with this transparent and immediate complicity. For the blues part, **Stephen Barry** and **Michael Jerome Browne** (**Browne** with an e), among his models and friends in the genre, are naturally part of the party, **Barry**, of course on the bass and **Browne** on the harmonica on two tracks. A little anecdote, by the way... One day, at a time when I was intensely collecting comments from the great creators of the blues from **Jimmy Rogers** to **BB King**, and from our local greats, **Stephen Barry**, **Bob Walsh**, **Jay Sewall**, **Gilles Sioui**, etc., I had the pleasure of hearing them. I had asked **Michael Jerome Browne** what he thought were the emerging talents on

the Montreal blues scene. He replied something like, watch out for **Jordan Officer**, mentioning in passing that he was a gifted young guitarist participating, at the time, in **Stephen Barry's jams**. I remembered the name which, at the time, seemed rather unusual to me... On the whole, these three albums, jazz, *country* and blues reveal for me the **moods n'feels**, the peculiarities of these musics and standards dear to the artist and a part of the **substantial musical marrow** which animates his soul and his music. **Jordan Officer, Jazz, Country and Blues, Vol. 1**, for a personalized journey into the founding musics, full of flavors and updated **thrills**.

WILY BO WALKER & DANNY FLAM

Ain't No Man A Good Man

Mescal Canyon Records, MCREX061

Wily Bo Walker is a striking character, a singer inhabited by black, swampy imaginations and endowed with guts! He tells his surreal stories with verve and passion, in fusion with very expressive and competent musicians. This Scottish artist with a raspy, solid and picturesque voice has to his credit more than two dozen publications in forty years. He is said to be a *provocative blues and rock*. After recording collaborations with **Danny Flam** in 2013 and 2015, he once again paired his talents as a songwriter and *performer* with him, trumpet player, trombonist, arranger and *leader* of **New York Brass**, already a *Grammy* winner with **Kanye West**. They are joined by some thirty of the best musicians and backing singers in the UK and the US for this inspired and creative record that pushes the boundaries of genres. **Wily Bo Walker** is an original and experienced artist with abundant, theatrical and dynamic artistic inspiration. He wasn't born yesterday! He has a rich and varied musical background, and owns his inclination for literature, cinema, film noir, as well as the gothic, littered with



broken characters. Whatever styles he borrows, blues, *gospel*, *soul*, *classic R&B*, rock, jazz, *AAA* and *Americana*, his talents and his thirst to leave his mark, he expresses them in visions that enhance and personalize his love of them. The album includes ten tracks, mainly from **Walker's** pen. In this dreamlike journey from London to New Orleans, our adventurer deconstructs the conventional paradigm of the blues, and as he moves away from it, he regains the original, uncomplicated freedom of this music, which also blows in a rolling, burning, *tight* and captivating fire. **Wily Bo Walker**, if you feel the call of this music of the soul, dramatized and intense.

CD WOODBURY

World's Gone Crazy

Autoproduction

World's Gone Crazy is guitarist **CD Woodbury's** second album as *band-leader*. He and his *band*, based in Washington State and representatives of the **South Sound Blues Assoc.** and the **Washington Blues Society** (Seattle) at the *International Blues Challenge* in Memphis in 2014 and 2020, have twice been semi-finalists in this competition in addition to being finalists in the *Best Self-Produced CD* category. On this momentum and as a quartet, **CD Woodbury**, guitar, vocals and backing vocals, **Don Montana**, drums, vocals and backing vocals, **Patrick McDanel**, bass



and backing vocals and **Mike Marinig**, keyboards, saxophone and backing vocals, offer us here a record of thirteen pieces, the first eight of which are compositions by members and close friends of the band, while the following ones are hand-picked covers. I like the creative and experienced side of the *band*, its impeccable four-part *cappella* intro on the opening piece, the solidity of the *band* well fused in its interpretation of *Hendrix's Hey Joe*. They are old hands who, during their first participation at the *IBC*, were nicknamed *Kings of Beale Street* at the **Jerry Lee Lewis Café** and **Honky Tonk** in Memphis. A nice recognition for these resilient of the blue note, whose creative and original side I really appreciate.

WHAT'S NEW?

SMALL, HIGH-CLASS SPEAKERS AT YAMAHA

By the News Room



After dazzling us with its fabulous *NS-5000* speakers, **Yamaha** introduces a new, much more compact model that uses the same technologies as the *NS-5000*. So here are the *NS-3000*, small two-way speakers using a 16 cm woofer and a 3 cm tweeter. These 2 transducers (the woofer and the tweeter) are made of a synthetic polymer called *Zylon*.

Zylon, which **Yamaha** had already introduced on the *NS-5000*, has an absolute rigidity that is even higher than that of *Kevlar*. The *Zylon* tweeter is quite peculiar, since it uses a tube that acts as a chamber to suppress parasitic resonances. Located behind the tweeter, this tube has the appearance of a maze and is directly descended from the *NS-5000*. On the separator filter side, Yamaha did not skimp on quality by equipping the *NS-3000* with **Mundorf EVO** series capacitors. The inductor for the woofer is quite impressive too, since it revolves around a substantial C-shaped ferrite. The *NS-3000* enclosure was designed and built using laser measurement technology. This very sophisticated technique makes it possible to analyze the behaviour of the panels in the face of vibrations.

Inside the box, **Yamaha** has chosen to use a new type of absorber that significantly reduces standing waves while allowing air to circulate as freely as possible. At the rear of the speaker is a pair of high-quality brass terminal blocks made by **Yamaha**. A decompression vent completes the back of the speaker. This vent is adjustable thanks to two foam tubes, supplied, which are inserted inside the vent, and allow to adjust the low frequencies according to the positioning of the speaker in the room.

It's clear that these speakers have been designed without compromise, as evidenced by the piano black finish, made in the same workshop where **Yamaha** pianos are assembled, and by the same craftsmen. An optional stand is available and is a perfect complement to the **Yamaha NS-3000**. So here's a pair of very ambitious, carefully crafted small speakers that are brimming with technology. We can't wait to have them for a listen!

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

By Dan Behrman

MIKE GLICK WITH GENERATIONS

Alternative Facts & Other White Lies
Generations Music, 2020 auto-production,
www.generations-music.com

Don't be surprised if you don't know **Mike Glick**, as his long career has taken him all over the world, but never to Quebec!

Extremely active during the 1970's and 1980's in Greenwich Village (NYC), where he toured virtually every folk club and many festivals with his excellent band, **The New Song Project**, **Mike** almost disappeared from the music scene for about 20 years in order to pursue other activities.

Returning to the hard core of the committed songwriting movement some time ago, he returned to the fold with an impressive catalog of new songs and released two albums, *In These Times* and *Generations: Two For The Blues*. The title of the most recent issue, **Alternative Facts & Other White Lies**, published in June, clearly announces the color of the content inspired by the sad events experienced in the United States since the arrival of its 45th president four years ago.

Inspired by the great pioneers of the *Protest Song*, **Woody Guthrie**, **Leadbelly**, **Paul Robeson** and the unforgettable **Pete Seeger** with whom he worked, **Mike Glick** tackles historical themes that unfortunately continue to pollute American society in a dramatic, if not dangerous way: racism, anticommunism, social smearing (blacklisting), isolationism and other principles harmful to the development of a society in harmony, peace and productivity.

The fifteen songs of the album deal with all these subjects in depth and with a certain humor while proposing tracks likely to improve the current problematic such as justice, dignity, equality and peace. Although most of the songs were composed by Mike Glick, some classics such as *Pastures of Plenty* (**Woody Guthrie**), *Let's Get Together* (composed by **Dino Valenti**,

but popularized by **Jesse Colin Young**, **The Youngbloods** and **Jefferson Airplane**) as well as *The Preacher And The Slave*, composed in 1911 by the famous American trade unionist **Joe Hill** who was unjustly executed in 1915).

Faithful to the dynamic but relatively sober tradition of American folk music where the emphasis is placed on the lyrics, the musicians surrounding **Mike Glick** (his son, **Aleksi Glick** on guitar and vocals, **Lindsey Wilson** on vocals and many others, including the unavoidable **David Amram** on flutes and the venerable **Si Kahn** on vocals) ensure that the performance is as enjoyable as it is effective, and note the brilliant participation of **Matheus Verardino** on harmonica.

This brand new album by **Mike Glick** is a real breath of fresh air in the increasingly unbreathable atmosphere of today's American reality. One can hope that the lyrics and ideas so well expressed throughout these fifteen songs will help to inspire the voters of this great country to make the right choice on November 3rd!

P.-S. Bravo for the very complete 48-page booklet with illustrations and biographical and circumstantial explanations in addition to the lyrics of each song.

SPOOKY RIDE

Spooked

2019 auto-production,
www.spookyride.com

Although the popular music usually made in Quebec is influenced by different styles coming from the United States, *bluegrass* from Kentucky is not often present in our musical panorama on an exclusively instrumental level. So ladies and gentlemen lovers of *good music*, welcome to the dynamic, joyful and wonderful world of **Spooky Ride** which is, to my knowledge, the only instrumental *bluegrass* band in Quebec! Integrating musicians, all great specialists of their instruments: **Pascal Richard** (dobro), **Pierre Côté** (guitar), **Guy Donis** (banjo), **Robin Boulianne**

(violin) and **Samuel Cournoyer** (bass), **Spooky Ride** has fun, exults and tears by the originality and the contagious energy of its compositions sometimes surprising and audacious, but always executed with enthusiasm, know-how and brio.

Not always easy to innovate in a musical style existing since the 1929 crisis and based essentially on three chords, that's for sure! Nevertheless, *bluegrass* and the instrumental techniques associated with it have evolved enormously over the years to give birth to *newgrass* whose pioneers were **The Seldom Scene**, **Country Gazette** and **The Tony Rice Unit**. Subsequently, an inspired little banjoist, **Bela Fleck**, an illustrious disciple of the legendary **Bill Keith**, injected with his band, **The Flecktones**, a massive dose of testosterone sprinkled with electronics to this once rudimentary idiom, even naive despite its technique not always easy to master by neophytes.

Pascal Richard, a true Quebec dobro ace if ever there was one, founded **Spooky Ride** less than two years ago with the extraordinary Belgian-born banjoist **Guy Donis**, whose albums I have had the pleasure of describing advantageously in a review on several occasions in the past. The intention was to explore the possibility of building a bridge linking traditional *bluegrass* with elements of jazz and improvisation, an approach already successfully accomplished in the past by the American mandolin player **David Grisman** with various musicians. So, why not start from there, right? Another important aspect of their vision was to give each of the musicians the opportunity to express themselves freely, and to put their talents as arrangers to work for the benefit of the group, and this has indeed been done, as the individual performances are all brilliant and uplifting and contribute to the cohesive aspect of this decidedly out of the ordinary group.



The ten tracks of this very promising and, above all, extremely enjoyable first album were composed by **Pascal Richard**, **Guy Donis** and **Robin Boulianne**, and we must also note the contribution of the emeritus mandolin player, **Joe K. Walsh**, on *Darcy*, the very first track of the album, which sets the stage in a very masterful way while announcing the vibrant colors of what will follow on the rest of the album, which was also very well recorded and mixed. No subterfuge with **Spooky Ride**, their music that's 100% present, honest, intelligent and pure.

All we can wish to the group is a second album just as good if not better and, above all, that this Covid-19 disappears so that these musicians can play their music on stage and in front of the very many spectators they deserve and who would, without a doubt, be delighted to see and hear them in the flesh. Ah yes, **Spooky Ride** is anything but... *spooky*!

CHESHIRE CARR

Dawn Comes Crashing

2020, auto-production,
www.cheshirecarr.com

Unfortunately, I don't have much room left, just enough to tell you some excellent news: the upcoming release of the second album of the Montreal folk-rock collective **Cheshire Carr**! I received an *artisans copy*, that is to say a paper sleeve with the photo of the album, but nothing else.

Thankfully, this rudimentary cover contained a CD with ten new songs from this Mile-End band that I describe as exceptional and wonderful. And you know what? The same carnal reaction, which I had felt the first time I heard this group two or three years ago, came back and the same little hairs on the forearms stood up just like the previous time. To be continued and I can't wait to receive the official album in order to share it with you on these pages!

JAZZ

By Christophe Rodriguez

JORDAN OFFICER

Jazz, Vol 1

Spectra Musique

Amazing **Jordan Officer!** In these times when the music industry is wondering which path to take, our guitarist doesn't mince his words. In addition to this jazz record that you will hold in your hands or download, you will also taste its influences: *Country*, Vol 1, as well as *Blues*, Vol 1. In eight tracks, including six standards and two tributes (**Lester Young**/tenor saxophonist, **Eddie Lang**/guitarist), **Jordan** and his accomplices revisit immortals who have crossed the time barrier. He sets the tone, a sound between **Django** and **Charlie Christian** sometimes mixed with blues. To tackle the *Great American Songbook*, you need skill, a very good ear and a good sense of *swing*. Happy, we were listening again to *Creole Love Call* (**Duke Ellington**) as well as pianist **Fats Waller's** hit *Honeysuckle Rose*. This moving return to the past, which we hear less and less, is worth its weight in gold. A fine guitarist, **Jordan Officer** knits, becomes a tightrope walker, while telling us the most beautiful story of all, that of jazz. On a much faster tempo, he exhumes an excellent *Cherokee*, spearhead of the fearsome saxophonist **Charlie Parker**. **Jordan**, our friend, is a great soloist who will give you a great moment.

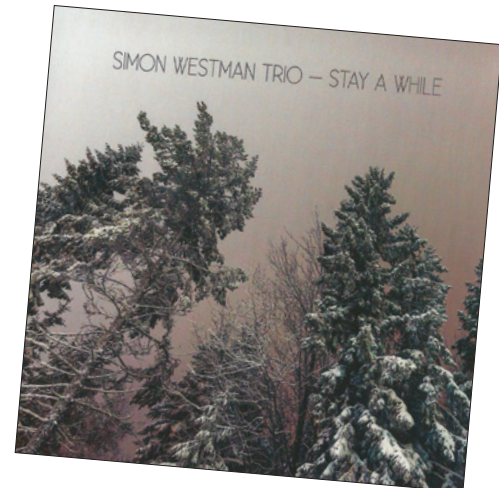
QUINCY JONES

Live in Paris

14 mars 1961

Frémeaux & Associés/Naxos

Before being **Michael Jackson's** producer, not to mention countless film scores, **Quincy Jones**, Q for friends, was a trumpet player and conductor. From the vibraphonist **Lionel Hampton** to **Dizzy Gillespie** (1956), he learned the trade *on the job*. In the spring of 1958, **Quincy Jones**, while in Europe, received a phone call from the singer **Frank Sinatra**. The latter is to present a gala at the **Sporting Club** de Monaco for Princess **Grace**. This first collaboration, which was to be fruitful, carries in its genes the 1961 tour in Paris. Thanks to the **Frank Ténot/Daniel Fillipachi** tandem, hosts of *Pour ceux qui aiment le jazz* on Europe 1, recordings at the **Olympia** are multiplying. On this March 14, 1961 at 6 p.m., which is also the birthday of our friend **Quincy**, a place becomes available. With a few studio sharks, including trumpet player **Freddie Hubbard** who just participated in the soundtrack of *In the Heat of the Night* (**Norman Jewinson**), the large orchestra sounds the charge. Contrary to the proverb that says that the beautiful is the enemy of the good, in this case everything was beautiful and ... good. Opening with an *up tempo Summertime*



featuring **Freddie Hubbard** and tenor saxophonist **Eric Dixon**, we continue with a *G'Wan Train* blues digest that leaves the audience breathless. Hats off to **Oliver Nelson's** *Stolen Moments*, which again features the **Hubbard/Dixon** tandem. *The Midnight Sun Will Never Set*, starring alto saxophonist **Phil Woods**, is more *Parkerian* than ever. **Quincy** and his team will make you happy without being nostalgic.

master's repertoire. More than an ode to the man who remains one of the leading artists of American music, this *Ellington 100* will give you all the measure of a world. In twelve tracks, with a few winks, this little record will certainly make you rediscover in all simplicity *Jam Blues*, *I Got It Bad*, *Solitude* and the immense *Come Sunday*.

MULGREW MILLER

Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen
Ellington 100

Storyville/Naxos

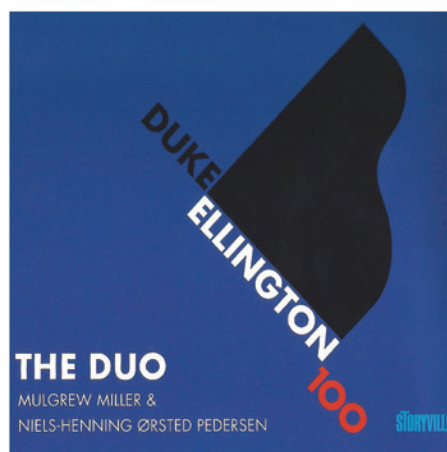
A little jewel and a piece of history. In 1999 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of composer/pianist/conductor **Duke Ellington**, the late pianist **Mulgrew Miller** and his late accomplice, double bassist **NHOP** intelligently revisited the

SIMON WESTMAN TRIO

Stay a While

Prophone/ Naxos

Jazz, of course, but also a bit of classical and neo-classical music from Sweden. In ten personal compositions that evoke moments from the past and present, pianist **Simon Westman** offers a special look at the blue note. Along the beaches, we draw your attention to the singer **Maria Rylander** (*Stay a While*). A particularity that has charm.



PROGRESSIVE ROCK

By Richard Guay

THE TANGENT

Auto Reconnaissance

<https://www.thetangent.org/>

Andy Tillison (vocals, keyboards) continues **The Tangent** adventure by offering us the eleventh opus of this band that quickly became a reference in the progressive rock of the 2000s. Still accompanied by **Jonas Reingold** (bass), the *surviving* element from the Swedish era of the first albums, **Theo Travis** (saxophone, flute) and **Luke Machin** (guitar), his faithful accomplices for 10 years, this creative genius seems to still have a lot to say. **The Tangent's** constant evolution led to albums of rare perfection such as *Le Sacre du Travail* (2013), *The Slow Rust of Forgotten Machinery* (2017) or *Proxy* (2018) to name but a few. It was therefore natural to expect a mismatched product with the new effort. Unsurprisingly, **Tillison** continues to perfect his art, because at this level, that's what it's all about. However, *Auto Reconnaissance* brings us resolutely elsewhere. We're moving away from traditional progressive rock to explore more variations borrowed from a multitude of styles. The bill, quite similar to that of *Down And Out In Paris And London*, explores much more deeply the *jazzy* and *lounge* atmospheres noticed on previous albums. In fact, it is these styles which predominate, the *hard* and even *neoprog* passages serving rather to consolidate the songs, which is the case, in particular, of *Jinxed In Jersey* which one would believe to have come out of an album of **Joe Jackson** so much the context of *New York Style* is impregnated there. **Tillison's** lyrics, sometimes sung, sometimes spoken, are whimsical and much more positive than usual. In addition, the very long suite *Lie Back & Think of England* (28 min) with its passages reminiscent of the 1970s, not to mention several verses in French, is breathtaking. *Proxima*, a 12-minute instrumental piece, closes this fun part with its experimental and psychedel-

ic menu. *Auto Reconnaissance*, less dark and also less progressive than *The Slow Rust of Forgotten Machinery* or the first albums to which **Roine Stolt** collaborated, is very playful and the musicians do not hesitate to let themselves go freely in this playground. This album is also delightfully complex. A little inaccessible to the first approaches, it will however be easily tamed.

APOGEE

Endurance of the Obsolete

<http://apogee.versus-x.de/apogee-discography/endurance-of-the-obsolete/>

<http://apogee.versus-x.de/apogee-discography/endurance-of-the-obsolete/>

Here is another regular contributor to this column. **Apogee**, as we all know, is the **Arne Schäfer's** solo project (vocals, guitars, keyboards, bass, orchestral arrangements), the founder and soul of **Versus X**, a rather discreet German band. Indeed, the last one, *Primordial Ocean*, dates from 2008. **Schäfer**, always accompanied by his faithful drummer, **Eberhard Graef**, will now devote all his time to **Apogee**, which has occupied him for 25 years already. These opuses arrive fairly regularly, generally at intervals of 3 to 4 years. This tenth disc on the other hand, *Endurance of the Obsolete*, is little distanced from the previous one, *Conspiracy Of Fools* (2018), which demonstrates **Schäfer's** eagerness to make **Apogee** his sole



concern. Fans of **Versus X**, however, will not have to repent and will continue to be dazzled by the creative genius of our one-man band. It is now redundant to say of a new **Apogee** that it is excellent, since that goes without saying. Each album, on the other hand, is made differently. This is the case of this new effort where we obviously move away from **Versus X** to a more traditional, more symphonic and more accessible style. This heavy tendency, begun with **Conspiracy Of Fools**, is completely assumed with *Endurance of the Obsolete* which proposes a lot of fast, rhythmic variations, as well as complex, but very symphonic harmonies. **Versus X's** syncopated *piano-style* synthesizer passages are completely abandoned in favour of music that flows from the source, which in itself is good news. Although **Schäfer's** lyrics are, as usual, cynical and politically committed, his voice is less aggressive, though still very talkative. Most of the tracks are quite long (8 to 16 min), which leaves enough space to refine them and turn them into real little musical treasures. *Endurance of the Obsolete* is to be obtained without hesitation as long as one understands that, this time, we are moving further away from **Versus X**.



LOGOS

Sadako e le mille gru di carta

<https://logosprog.bandcamp.com/album/sadako-e-le-mille-gru-di-carta>

Logos is an Italian *RPI* (*Rock Progressivo Italiano*) band founded in Verona in 1996 by **Luca Zerman** (keyboards, vocals), **Alessandro Perbellini** (drums) and **Fabio Gaspari** (guitars, bass). The band usually has four musicians, so it will be **Claudio Antolini** (keyboards), present on the previous album, who will complete the team. **Zerman** and **Gaspari** are the only two musicians present on all the opuses, although practically all the others

return from time to time as main or guest musicians. A formula somewhat like that of **Yes**. Let us also note the presence of **Elisa Montaldo** (singer), **Federica Zocattelli** (saxophone) and **Massimo Maoli**, the guitarist of the previous albums, who intervene sporadically. *Sadako e le mille gru di carta* (*Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*) is the fourth edition of the course, the previous ones being **Logos** (1999), *Asrava* (2001) and *L'Enigma della Vita* (2014). **Logos'** music draws on the reassuring, comforting and passionate fragrance of *RPI*. It is easy to recognize all these variations so characteristic of enveloping keyboards, penetrating guitars and emotional Italian lyrics. The whole rests on a symphonic, quasi-orchestral basis. The instrumental passages are of a rare aestheticism. The concept is however quite sad and is based on the story of a Japanese girl with a passion for origami who lived through the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945. It is therefore a hymn to peace commemorating the 75th anniversary of this sad event. Moreover, the album will be exhibited at the memorial museum of this city which knows only too well what an atomic bomb can do in terms of human and material damage. The title piece (*Sadako e le mille gru di carta*), a long 21-minute suite of impeccable musical quality, pays homage to this serious theme, and **Zerman's** voice fits well with this atmosphere of sadness. However, the output of this group is quite uneven. The 2014 album, *L'Enigma della Vita*, for example, is very different and is based more on the more experimental and disjointed *Italian progressive rock* of recent years. *Sadako e le mille gru di carta*, however, is of a very classic design. Such a treasure of authenticity should imperatively appear in the discotheque of any *RPI* lover of which, need I remind you, I am one.

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