

# TED

TRENDS ELECTRONICS & DESIGN

HI-FI • HOME THEATRE • SMART HOME | JAN. - FEB. 2021  
EVENTS • WHAT'S NEW ? • & MORE | VOLUME 2 - EDITION 01

»»» DIGITAL EDITION

- **SPL, Phonitor X**
- **Hegel, H95**
- **Musical Fidelity, M8xi**
- **Linn, Majik DSM**
- **Audio-Technica, AT-LP7**
- **Musical Fidelity, Roundtable S**

**NEAT EKSTRA »»»**

**YAMAHA A-S1200 »»»**



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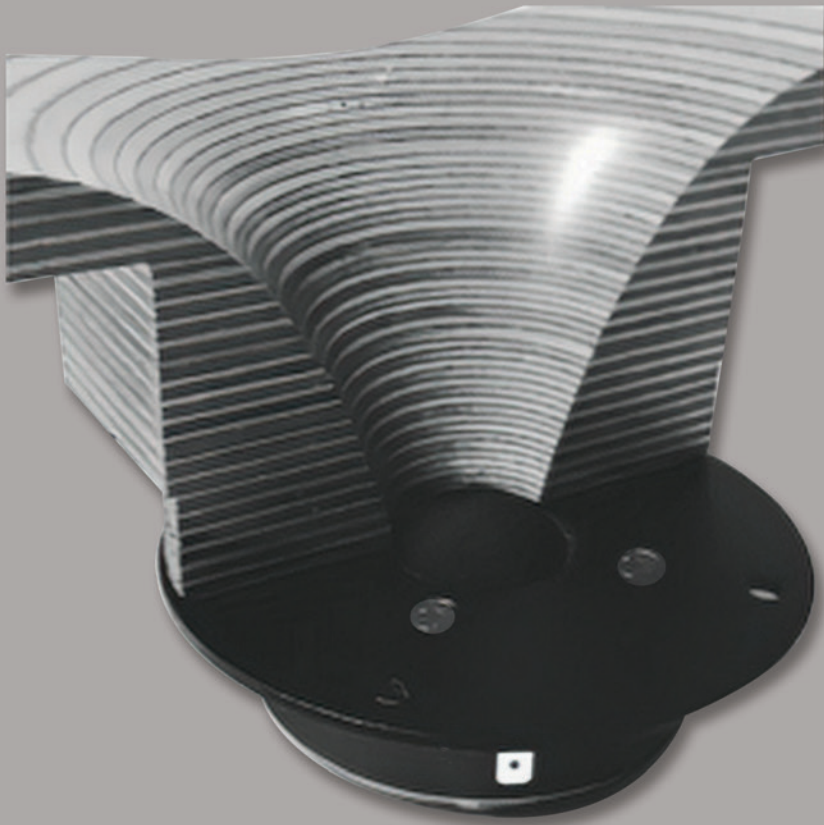


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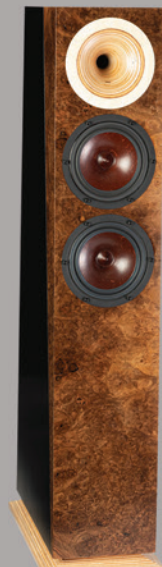
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## EDITORIAL

# Let's be better! Let's rise up to the occasion!

There are so many events that we've all been through lately that I'm not sure where to start. There is the Covid-19 crisis, a difficult time for all. I'm really looking forward to hearing that the entire country has had no cases for at least 2 days in a row. It's going to happen.

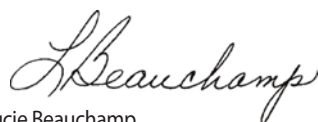
On the other hand, the fall has been rather mild in some parts of Canada while elsewhere, both here and around the world, already, fairly heavy snowstorms, hurricanes, super-typhoons have multiplied. In short, the environment is in turmoil. We must see to it as soon as possible, evidently. Thankfully, our youth often call us to order and invite us to do so now. Unfortunately, it is they who will have to manage the aftermath, disastrous or straightened out.

I remain *hopeful*, because these same young people are mobilizing and starting the work to correct not only the environment but politics as well as the fight against racism, for example. They are not the only ones, of course, but it is so encouraging to see these movements for change emerging. We are becoming more and more aware of the respect that must be accorded to every human being, regardless of ethnicity, gender, skin color, or religion. It is certainly not by killing more human beings that the misunderstanding will be resolved. One must not kill, period, that's all. Of course, soldiers and law enforcement officers do not always have an alternative. We must invest in better training for the people who are supposed to protect us, because it is their job and their choice. They

have the difficult task of resolving an explosive situation in just a few seconds...

Let's think, and take the time to analyze all the facets of a problem before taking a stand. Words can hurt or, on the contrary, heal a wound.

Let's not hesitate to entertain ourselves, to take a break in order to recharge our batteries and calm down either by watching a good movie, reading a book or a magazine, or simply by listening to a piece of music. Of course, the equipment that allows us to do this is important and our team offers you a nice range of devices, including a headphone amp/preamp from **SPL**, a new **AS** series stereo amp from **Yamaha**, a new integrated amplifier from **Hegel**, a new integrated amplifier from **Musical Fidelity**, speakers from **Neat**, a network/integrated player from **Linn**, a vinyl turntable from **Audio-Technica** and another one from **Musical Fidelity**. You have the choice, because each device has great features and many innovative functions. I'll leave you the pleasure of discovering them by reading each test bench. Also take a look at what's new in our *Buon Gusto* section, between a small snack, or the taste of a liqueur. Don't forget our *Rhythm & Music* section which will allow you to discover new releases. The **TED Magazine** team wishes you a very *Happy 2021 New Year!* Let's be better, let's rise to the occasion and let's stay the course so that the next *Holiday Season* can bring together all those we love regardless of whether they are from our family or not. Yeah, I'm sure we can do it!



Lucie Beauchamp  
Co-publisher and Public Relations Manager

# TRENDS ELECTRONICS & DESIGN – AN ENCORE

INTEGRATION ACHIEVED BY EXACT AUDIO VIDEO

*In symbiosis  
with nature!*

Pictures : Guevremont Photographie

» By **LUCIE BEAUCHAMP**

The domain visited for this edition of **TED Magazine** is located in the beautiful region of Estrie. The owners are a couple with three young children. The father is a savvy businessman who occasionally travels around the world. Back home, he allows himself to spend quality time with his family and friends, in the great outdoors, without too much electronic equipment. The

family wants to enjoy nature and all its benefits. Quality time with the family also means looking for comfort. In this huge house, home automation plays an important role because it minimizes coordination efforts and lots of moving around. The mandate, for the realization of the home automation aspect, was granted to the company **Exact Audio Video**.



The owners had certain objectives regarding the installation of home automation for this large country estate: ease of use, flawless efficiency and, of course, respect for the budget. The customers decided on the level of sound and image quality for the various home theater installations and multi-room audio distribution, aiming at centralized control of all this equipment. The architect selected for this construction project also had certain non-negotiable objectives, especially with respect to the appearance, location and size of the equipment. One must admire the hyper straight lines of the construction of the

house and the impeccable final result. The occupants of this magnificent house and their visitors are in symbiosis with nature thanks to the way the residence has been designed. An incredible result! As you can see from the photo report, the facade of the residence is 250 ft, with a view of the lake. The following materials were used in the construction of the house: wood, glass, stone, slate, metal and iron. It has very large windows (12' x 12'), which gives the impression of being right out in nature, even indoors. Its U-shape has two wings, connected, inside, by a staircase giving access to the basement and to the kitchen/dining room.

# TRENDS ELECTRONICS & DESIGN – AN ENCORE



The main wing is reserved for the family members' bedrooms (including a very large entrance, a laundry room, a shower room and a *mud room* where you can store your outdoor clothes).

The other wing is reserved for guests (two bedrooms, a bathroom, a living room, as well as an additional kitchenette and storage space for outdoor clothing). At the end of this wing, there is a huge *man cave*-type garage where, among other things, several bicycles for hiking in the forest are stored. There is even a lounge area with a home theater... Every man's dream!

The two wings are connected by a staircase leading to the basement which houses a children's playroom, a pantry and mechanical rooms. Very practical, this interior passage, given our harsh winters. In the summer, if you feel like it, you can simply go through the outdoor living room/kitchen area to go from one wing to the other.

## Home automation

Home automation means that the majority of electronic equipment (wires, receivers, decoders, amplifiers, processor-controllers,

etc.) is out of sight and/or blends into the decor of the house. It must be remembered, however, that in order to achieve an efficient result in the use of any technology and its components, the basic rule is, of course, planning. Listening to owners and understanding their goals and priorities.

## Control

What is sometimes confusing when publishing a photo report on an installation integrating home automation is the fact that the vast majority of the required electronic devices, including the infrastructure, are out of sight, hidden somehow. It is also the beauty of home automation, complete control through the use of a remote control or a wall keyboard. The control of the house is taken care of by **Control4** devices. This makes it possible to properly manage the broadcasting, in several rooms, of music (in the main living room, the kitchen and around the pool, as well as in other areas that have been planned according to the evolving needs of the owners), certain **Lutron** lighting elements, as well as to control window coverings, to verify the functions and

notifications of the alarm system (installed by a national provider), to ensure surveillance by a camera system (wherever there is access to the Internet, either by cellular network or *WiFi*).

As far as telephony is concerned, the wiring is in place for the installation of devices that will take place a little later, at the choice of the owners. A highly sophisticated *WiFi* network includes five wireless access points, network management, a 48-port network switch and a small business gateway. The heating/cooling system is controlled by multiple sensors and thermostats that support the various elements of the geothermal system in order to maintain balanced comfort at all times.

## Home entertainment in the spotlight

Five home theater systems were installed in the guest lounge, the children's playroom on the second floor, the garage/workshop, the master bedroom and the outdoor terrace. The video sources, **Bell Satellite**, a video server and an **Apple TV** device, are installed in a cabinet in the basement and the signals are distributed through **Key Digital's HDMI** matrix.







## TRENDS ELECTRONICS & DESIGN – AN ENCORE

In the guest lounge, the 7.2 home theatre system consists of a **Yamaha** receiver (installed in the basement cabinet), a **Blu-ray** player and an **Apple TV** stored in the cabinet underneath the 70" **Sharp** TV (which the customer already owned). Amplifiers are paired with the **Yamaha** receiver. The audio aspect of the system is supported by a passive **Golden Ear LCR 3D Array XL passive Sound Bar** speaker mounted on the wall between the TV and the storage cabinet. As for the surround speakers, two pairs of **Definitive Technology DI 4.5R** were installed in the ceiling panelling. The choice of these speakers was dictated by the width of the panelling, as the speaker grille is recessed into it with only 1 mm of play on each side. Two **Triad Flex Sub Mini** subwoofers were also recessed into the ceiling with vents hidden in the panelling boards. This installation is managed by the **HC-250** controller and a **Control4 SR-250** remote control.

In the garage/workshop, a home theatre system includes a 55" television and a stereo audio distribution system of four **Episode** outdoor speakers and a **Golden Ear Forcefield4** subwoofer.



In the children's playroom, located on the second floor of the family wing, a 5.1 home theater system was installed, including a 65" **Sharp** TV (which the customer already owned), a **Golden Ear LCR 3D Array XL passive Sound Bar** speaker with two **Focal SIB XL**

speakers for surround sound, and a **Yamaha** subwoofer. The management of this installation is handled by the **HC-250** controller and an **Control4 SR-250** remote control.

As for the master bedroom, given the exceptional view of the lake, it was decided to



# TRENDS ELECTRONICS & DESIGN – AN ENCORE



conceal a projector on a shelf above the bed and to use the sun blind as a projection screen, as it was not possible to install a mechanism to lift a camouflaged television in the floor, as the clearance under the slab did not allow it. Stereophonic audio distribution is reproduced by two invisible **Stealth Acoustic** in-ceiling speakers and

two invisible **Stealth Acoustic** subwoofers mounted in the top of the wall on either side of the bed.

The last home theatre system is installed on the outdoor patio with a 135" hidden screen that extends from and retracts from the ceiling. As for the audio distribution, it is produced by two pairs of **Definitive Technology**

*DI 4.5R* installed in the ceiling panelling. The two **Triad Flex Sub Mini** subwoofers are hidden from the ceiling on either side of the fireplace.

## Challenges and results

**Exact Audio Video's** primary objective is to always meet the customer's expectations.



# TRENDS ELECTRONICS & DESIGN – AN ENCORE





Managing a project of this scale is a challenge in itself, and even more so when you are working remotely. Here are some of the challenges. Finding an Internet provider, as none of the usual providers were able to connect the residence to the network due to the distance between the residence and the street. The **Exact Audio Video** team therefore proceeded to install a satellite antenna that was not to be on the roof of the house, nor visible from the house. The maximum cable length limit to get an *HD* signal is 200 ft. The length of this installation is 192 ft. Considering the *U*-shaped layout of the house, the distances to be covered with the cables are very long, so they had to alternate between going through the crawl space and then through the attic. A real *Snakes and ladders* game!

The decor of the house is very understated. No bling-bling, everything is tidy and the straight line predominates. In fact,

each piece of wood from start to finish, from one wing to the other, is perfectly straight and aligned with the others. That's why the speakers and subwoofers absolutely had to be recessed into the panelling. Wall keyboards, for lighting and other home automation elements, also had to be reduced to a minimum and be, in a certain sense, practically hidden.

Of course, there can always be a last minute request from a customer wanting to add this or that to an unplanned location despite the best planning. Thanks to its experience, **Exact Audio Video's** team of installers adds cables on a fairly regular basis, *just in case or while they're at it.*

Congratulations to all those who worked on this project and contributed to making this magnificent residence an oasis of peace where one can recharge one's batteries.

# THE ULTIMATE PREAMPLIFIER / HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER

BY GUILLAUME BRUNET

Better known in the world of professional audio, **Sound Performance Lab** designs and develops high-end audio equipment that equips many studios around the world. For more than 35 years, the German firm has been innovating with products that have become a consensus among users. The range of products now offered is very wide and falls into four main categories: *Mastering, Studio, Plugins* and *Professional Fidelity*. It is the latter category that we will discuss today. According to **SPL**, it offers a rendering that allows you to *experience* the music just like the sound engineer in a *mastering* session. **SPL** offers five different headphone amplifiers, each designed for a different application or need. The *Phonitor X* is the only one that combines most of the features of the different models without any real compromise, making it a wise choice for those who are looking for both preamplifier and headphone amplifier functions. It is intended for both the owner of amplified speakers and the

consumer who wants a device for a conventional system requiring few inputs. The two analog inputs could accommodate a phono preamplifier and a *steamer* or *DAC*, for example. Its two outputs can simultaneously power a power amplifier and an amplified subwoofer. With the option of the *DAC768xs* module installed, it offers even more versatility and adjustability at a lower cost than a *Sennheiser HDVA 800* or *MOON 430HA*, for example.

## Technical description

Compared to some high-end audio equipment, **SPL** products focus on function and ergonomics rather than flashy design. That said, I find them pretty and rather sober, a happy mix of *vintage* and modern. Three finishes are available, red, black or silver. The front panel is covered with 4mm thick aluminum plate. In the center, a volume control with a red *LED* indicates its





position, a very practical function for night listening. On the left, two source selection switches, the output selection switch, the cross-feed matrix controls, the mono/stereo/lateral switch and its adjustment potentiometer. On the right side of the device is a pair of VU meters and the two headphone connections, either symmetrical or asymmetrical. The VU meters are reminiscent of Nagra's, with that typical yellow lighting, switching to red in *silent* mode. It indicates the entry level, which is not adjustable in any way. Only the sensitivity of the display is configurable by means of a DIP switch on the underside of the device. The rear panel of the *Phonitor X* includes a pair of balanced and unbalanced analog inputs and a pair of outputs of the same types. If you take the DAC768xs option on your *Phonitor X*, it will additionally have three digital inputs, one coaxial SPDIF, one TosLink and one USB. Under the housing of the device, there are DIP switches allowing various adjustments and functions to be customized. The main feature of the products in SPL's Professional Fidelity range is the VOLTAIR technology. This is far superior to anything else on the market when it comes to operational amplifiers. The principle is simple, maximize performance by raising the voltage of the output module rails. For

household appliances, the standard voltage is 30 V (+/- 15 V DC), and some go up to 36 V. With professional equipment, it is normally 48 V (+/- 24 V DC). At SPL, it's 120 V, i.e. +/- 60 V DC! The advantages of such a high voltage are numerous. It increases the theoretical *Dynamic Range* to 141.6 dB. It reduces the rate of total harmonic distortion and theoretical residual noise (*THD + Noise*) to -14.2 dB. It also increases the *headroom* available after 0 VU (*Volume Unit*) to 33.2 dB, or 9.2 dB after the 0 dB FS saturation level. For the listener, this translates into pure and limpid listening, without any auditory fatigue.

The other exclusive technology present on the *Phonitor X* is called *Matrix*. Since the vast majority of music has been *mixed* for listening with speakers, reproduction through headphones does not accurately represent the recording and alters the playback. Let me explain. With headphones, the right ear hears only the right channel, and the left ear hears only the left channel, which is not the case with speakers. The result is a stereophonic effect and exaggerated reverberation, a more confused center and a very localized bass. The *Matrix*, or cross-feeding matrix, solves this problem by sending a skillful mix of the right channel to the left, and vice versa, and thus mimic listening with speakers, through the headphones. The level of the signal sent as well as the angle of the speakers (delay applied to frequencies above 500 Hz and below 10 kHz) is adjustable using the matrix controls. Ultimately, when the right dosage is reached, these adjustments allow you to reproduce the ambience of your own listening room and have the same reproduction with your headphones as with your speakers. It is important to know that this circuit is entirely analog and fully preserves the entire signal.

### Unpacking and start-up

I was very happy to open my package when I received it. A packaging completely different from anything I've seen so far is in front of me. Some sort of German origami where the cardboard, by its folding, provides rigidity and tightens a thick plastic that holds the device in place. Do not cut

this plastic or you will not be able to safely repackage the unit in its original box. Just look at the pictograms to assimilate the unpacking technique.

The DAC768xs module was not already installed on the received model. So I focused on the analog inputs. No remote control is supplied with the unit, but it can *learn* the code from any of them. To do this, simply press the *PGM Volume* control on the back of the unit and follow the instructions in the manual. So I used my old Apple TV controller to control the *Phonitor X*.

I first tested the device as a headphone amplifier, then later in preamplifier mode. The sources used were my DAC using the XLR inputs and my phono preamplifier with the RCAs. After a few tests and different settings on the cross-feed matrix, I managed to *match* the sound image produced by my loudspeakers with my headphones. Thereafter, the feeding matrix remained engaged so much it increased the pleasure tenfold.

### Listening impressions

To illustrate the power of the *Matrix* function, I chose the title track from Grant Green's album, *Idle Moments* on vinyl. Recorded in 1963, and released on the Blue Note label in 1965, the track is almost 15 minutes long and was done in *one take*. In the early days of stereophony, or more precisely of directed mono, the effect was accentuated by positioning the instruments at the extremities of the sound plane. Listening to these recordings today makes you smile because we have progressed so far. It's such a rich period, both musically and in terms of recording quality, that it would be crazy to do without it. With listening from speakers, you get a representation of what the engineer wanted to do, but with headphones, it's terrible, you really feel like you're listening to two separate mono tracks that crush the ears on either side of your head. When the cross feed matrix switch is turned on, the whole *mix* expands, the instruments literally move backwards and a center stage appears. The sound image suddenly renders a new perspective. Depth appears. The base of the newly formed triangle will be larger or smaller depending on the settings you make.

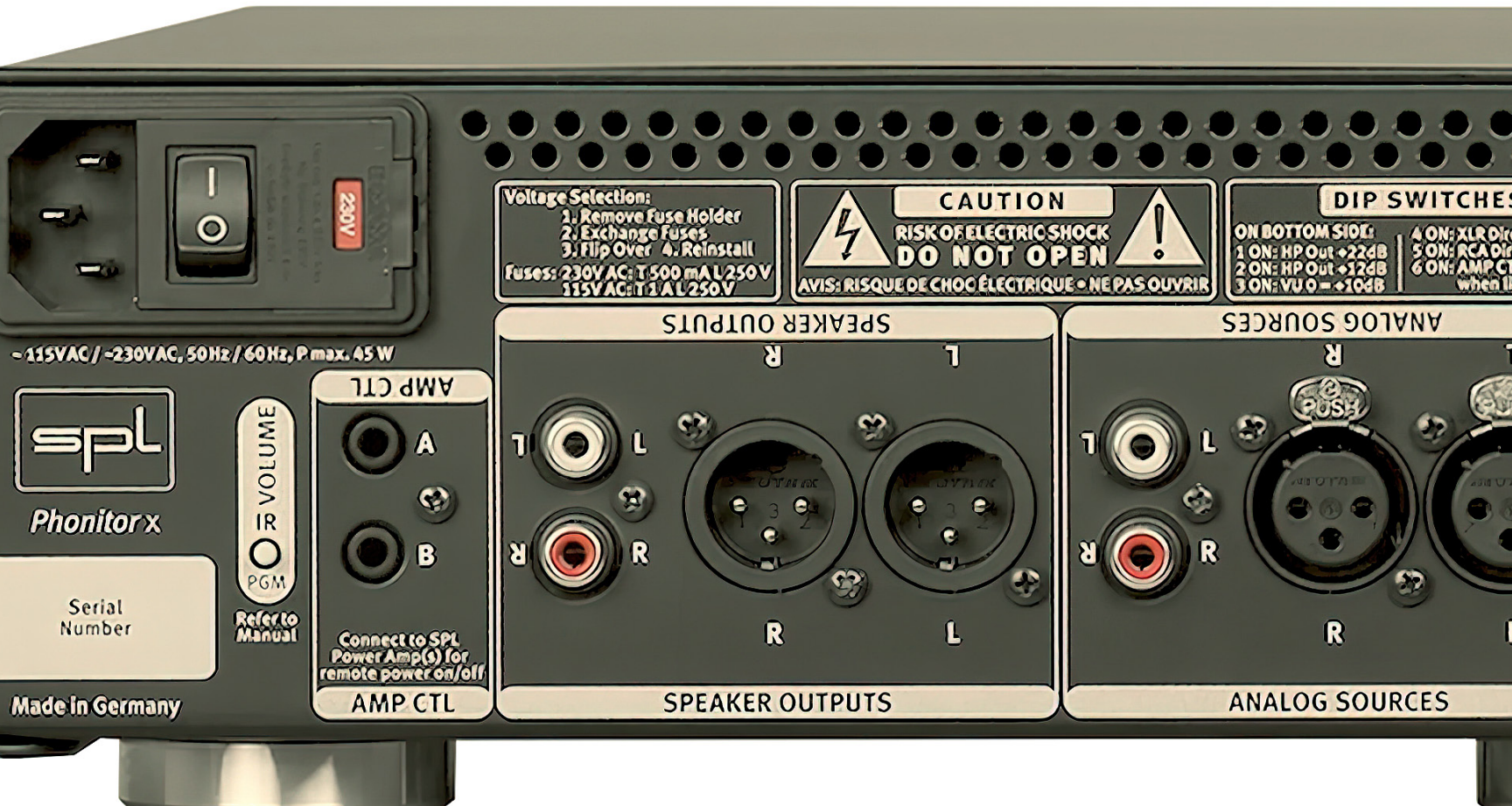


THE **SPL PHONITOR X** PREAMPLIFIER/HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER



I continued listening without the headphones. **Nik Bärtsch's Ronin**, an artist I especially appreciate for his hypnotic melodies, plays just as skillfully with dynamics. On the album *Awase*, several pieces present a real progression on several levels. The

music starts calmly and simply and you tend to turn up the volume. Beware, the tempo accelerates, the music becomes more complex and the explosion surprises, and even knowing it, I often get caught. The *Phonitor X* renders it superbly, from *inky*





black silence to unrestricted apotheosis. The volume control is very precise and pleasant to use, doing exactly what is asked of it. With

the remote control, it's much less precise, but very practical. I followed up with **Bettye LaVette** and her latest album, *Blackbirds*. At 74 years old, the lady has lost none of her *soul*. She still sings with her heart and the emotion passes in her voice. The **SPL Phonitor X** really honors her by reproducing all her voice inflections with incredible accuracy. The richness of her contralto tones resonates even in our guts. The sound image is accurate and perfectly stable. The depth varies and follows the recordings from song to song. It is a device that is easily forgotten because it is so transparent. It lets the music flow, while being able to analyze it, if that is the goal. I didn't perceive any added coloration at any listening level. It had no trouble feeding the used headsets and had no lack of gain. It offers superb bass reproduction without any drag. It is important to remember that the **SPL Phonitor X** is a professional device, and that its inputs and outputs follow the standard specifications, i.e. - 10 dBV (2 v) for *RCA* and + 4 dBu (4 v) for *XLR*. A balanced 2V source will not provide the necessary gain at the output of the preamplifier to properly drive the amplifier. The amplifier will appear much less powerful than it actually is. In this case, it would be preferable to connect it directly in *RCA* and take full advantage of the 32.5 dB of gain available on the *Phonitor X*.

### Conclusion

**SPL's Phonitor X** has fulfilled its promises and even surpassed them. It perfectly fulfilled its missions, as much in its function of headphone amplifier as in that of preamplifier. The *VOLTAiR* technology is truly unique and contributes directly to the transparent and colorless character of the product. The *Matrix* function is really a plus. I would even qualify it as indispensable for all headphone listening enthusiasts. Try it, and you will love it! If you are shopping for a preamplifier and / or headphone amplifier, the *Phonitor X* should be on your list. I would have liked to have been able to test the *DAC*

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$ 3,249 (without the *DAC*)  
 Warranty: 2 years, parts and labor  
 Distributor: Focal Naim Canada, Tel.: 1 866.271.5689, focal-naim.com ; spl.audio/en

### Mediagraphy

Grant Green, *Idle Moments*, Blue Note, LP, ST-84154, 2014  
 Nik Bärtsch's *Ronin*, *Awase*, ECM Records, CD, ECM 2603B0028299-02, 2018  
 Bettye LaVette, *Blackbirds*, Verve Records, CD, 00602508725845



## YAMAHA A-S1200 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



# THE AMPLIFIER WITH A MUSICIAN'S HEART

By JEAN-DENIS DOYLE

We will have heard it so often *a device built this way and that complete, doesn't exist anymore*. Apparently, manufacturers can no longer afford to make such products. So here's the **Yamaha A-S1200**, an amplifier that will make this tenacious belief lie and should bury it for good. In fact, the **Yamaha A-S1200** is the result of the evolution of the previous **A-S1100** models. It is an integrated amplifier archi-classic, with *vintage* look and crazy charm. Assembled with the utmost care, it is packed with ultra-modern technology. This device is special, especially for music lovers whose only concern is to have fun while listening to music. Let's take the time to discover together what makes it so special. It could be exactly what you are looking for.

**Yamaha** is a multinational company well known for its motorcycles, musical instruments, professional audio equipment and entertainment devices. Founded in 1887 by **Torakasu Yamaha**, the company began as a piano and harmonium manufacturer. **Yamaha** has a long history of making musical instruments. It is, in fact, the only manufacturer of musical instruments that is

also a manufacturer of high-fidelity devices. In reality, **Yamaha** is able to produce almost all of the products involved in the making of music, right down to its reproduction in your living room. **Yamaha** makes acoustic instruments of all kinds, from mixing consoles to performance sound equipment. This company has been an integral part of the musical landscape you've been listening to for over a century. So the next time a pseudo-expert tells you that **Yamaha** isn't really capable of making a good audio device, make him or her visit **Yamaha's** endless website, especially the musical instruments section. That should help shut them up. **Yamaha** manufactures the majority of its entertainment products in a factory located in Malaysia. Workers in this country have long been known for their meticulousness and attention to detail. **Yamaha** chose to locate there and offer decent working conditions including a range of medical, dental and pharmaceutical services as well as a physical workout space. The working conditions at this plant are in stark contrast to other Asian factories, making employees proud to work here. The quality of assembly and the legendary reliability of **Yamaha** products are therefore no stranger to the care with which Yamaha treats its staff.



Yamaha also has different ways of doing things when it comes to product development. Product development is done on a *project-by-project* basis with dedicated teams. The company does not hesitate to consult some of its retired engineers who have designed glorious products for them. In addition, some musical instrument specialists often participate in listener panels when evaluating prototypes. In the case of the **Yamaha A-S1200**, the team focused on what could be improved on the previous version. The result is an extremely mature integrated amplifier in line with what Japanese manufacturers are currently producing.

#### Technical description

The **Yamaha A-S1200** is an integrated amplifier. It is equipped with a preamplification section, a phono stage and a power amplification section. The **Yamaha A-S1200** does not include a digital-to-analog conversion section, a decision I fully endorse. Often, the digital-to-analog converter, included in this type of device, is just a convenience that quickly becomes obsolete. In any case, it



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## YAMAHA A-S1200 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



is always better to get a quality converter and keep it separate from the amplifier.

The preamplifier stage is quite sophisticated with high quality relays and an ultra-modern volume control circuit. The latter includes scale controllers that guarantee constant quality at all levels and an absolutely perfect balance of the two channels. This type of volume control is a great luxury for such a system at this price, as it is found in much more ambitious Japanese designs at **Luxman** and **Accuphase**. This preamplification section

features tone controls of a transparency and quality that I have rarely seen. Using relays to ensure the shortest possible signal path, the relays allow perfect adjustments of treble and bass without any loss of quality.

The configuration of the power amplifier section is of the *floating balanced* type, a circuit unique to Yamaha that was already used on previous models. With a power of 90 W per side, it is now powered by a toroidal transformer. This brings a gain in terms of dynamics and control of low frequencies. The power

reserve is provided by four huge 18,000 microfarad capacitors, which ensures that the device will not run out of power when you need it. We left the **Yamaha A-S1200** with the same excellent phono section as its predecessors, and so much the better. It accepts *MM* and *MC* cartridges and it is as quiet as a grave. **Yamaha** engineers have also upgraded the quality of many of the components inside the unit. As we will see when we listen, all these small improvements will have paid off in terms of musicality.

### Unpacking and installation

Taking the **Yamaha A-S1200** out of its packaging immediately brought back fond memories of the high-fidelity gear of my teenage years. Its presentation is simply impeccable and its real piano wood sides contribute to the luxurious look of the amplifier. Since it weighs 22 kg, take care to install it on a solid shelf and make sure it is well ventilated. Connections are easy to make thanks to perfectly identified terminal blocks of an astonishing quality. Once turned on, you literally fall under the spell of classic *VU*-meters with a retro look that gives it a crazy charm. The smooth operation of the controls and the remote control adds a layer of pleasure to the use of the *A-S1200*.

### Listening impressions

#### An appreciable improvement in terms of timbre

As a former owner of a **Yamaha A-S1200** and an *A-S1100*, I was the right person for this test bench. From the outset, we *hear* that this model has progressed considerably. The timbre has changed markedly for the better. The **Yamaha A-S1200** has gained in warmth and timbre in fullness. This is obvious from the beginning of the song *Hey You* from **Pink Floyd's** classic album *The Wall*. The bass lines now have more weight, and the amplifier retains full control over the speakers. This is a direct consequence of the change to a toroidal transformer. Listening surprises by the quality of its support and authority. So I let the record run to the song *Comfortably Numb* to discover beautiful voices and a guitar solo rendered with a very nice tonal quality. The stereophonic image has also improved, with better separation and greater depth effect.

#### A premium phono stage

This amplifier is really tailor-made for listening to vinyl records. Whether it is with a moving magnet cartridge or a moving coil cartridge, it will get the most out of it with total operating silence. What's more, the **Yamaha A-S1200** is equipped with





superbly efficient and perfectly transparent tone controls. These do not introduce any phase aberrations that could harm the stereophonic effect. With some discs that have a rather average recording, it becomes very easy to apply a bass or treble correction that will make the recording much more pleasant to listen to. This was exactly the case with **Genesis' Home by the Sea**. I love this song of which the mid-1980s production didn't age so well. With its miraculous tone controls, the **Yamaha A-S1200** makes me rediscover this great song in a new light. If you're a record collector rather than a purist audiophile, you'll love this amplifier and its tone controls. The set will allow you to appreciate many vinyls above all for their melodic and musical qualities.

### A sound of its time

Despite its *vintage* look, the **Yamaha A-S1200** has its feet firmly planted into 2020. Transparent and fast, it will find its place in an *audiophile* system, even if it is surrounded by much more

expensive partners. Featuring the **Stefano Bollani Trio's Black and Tan Fantasy**, the **A-S1200** builds a remarkably stable stereo image with a surprising level of detail for a device in this category. Capable of a good level of refinement, the tone is perfect. This time there is no need to use the tone controls to correct anything. The cymbals have a beautiful extension and have nothing to envy to more ambitious amplifiers. The atmosphere of the studio is well rendered, thanks to an impressive three-dimensional holographic effect. **Yamaha** offers us so much with this device! As proposed, this amplifier will be perfectly in its place with a network player like the **Cambridge Audio 851N** and floor-standing speakers like the **Focal Chora** series. To get better than the **A-S1200**, you're going to have to invest a lot more.

### Conclusion

With the **A-S1200**, **Yamaha** offers a classic amplifier that is primarily intended for music lovers and vinyl collectors who own a wide variety of vinyl discs. Although it is perfectly capable of performing well in the context of an audiophile system, its real strength lies in its flexibility, which will allow the user to get the most out of listening to music from all origins and all eras. Built to last, with an absolutely superb phono stage and ultra-transparent tone controls, it will awaken the heart of the musician in everyone.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$3,229

Warranty: 4 years, parts and labor

Manufacturer / Distributor: Yamaha Canada, Music Ltd,  
Tel: 416.298.1311, [www.ca.yamaha.com](http://www.ca.yamaha.com)

### Mediagraphy

Pink Floyd, The Wall

Genesis, Genesis, Home by the Sea

Stefano Bollani Trio, Black and Tan Fantasy, Venus Records,  
4 571292 513890





# BUON GUSTO

Recipes from the *mischievous* cook

## Pecan and Maple Bars

*These delicious treats are, apparently, born with all the flaws in the world! Full of butter and calories, they abound with maple syrup and pecans. In addition, they are quite expensive to make. You know what? Who cares!*

*With the year that has just passed, it's time to treat ourselves. Go ahead, try it, the recipe is easy to make.*

*For a detailed step-by-step pictorial description, visit the Easy Recipes from the Mischievous Cook **Facebook** page. Full of delicacies and happy New Year 2021!*

### **JD's Pecan & Maple Bars**

Preheat oven to 375 °

#### **For the crust**

In a microwave oven, melt  $\frac{3}{4}$  **cup of butter** in cubes for 20 seconds.

Incorporate  $\frac{1}{2}$  **cup of brown sugar** with a spatula.

Add  $1 \frac{1}{2}$  **cup of flour** and mix well.

Spread the mixture on the bottom of a well-buttered 13 x 9-inch Pyrex pan.

#### **For the filling**

Boil  $1 \frac{1}{4}$  **cup of maple syrup** with **1 cup of brown sugar**.

Off the heat, whisk in  $\frac{1}{3}$  **cup of butter** in cubes.

Add  $\frac{1}{2}$  **cup of flour** with a spatula.

Add **3 eggs**, mixing with a whisk.

Pour over the crust, into the mold.

Add pecans evenly.

Put in the oven for **35 minutes**.

Cool down, cut into bars, eat, gain weight, say it's the mischievous cook's fault...



Discover plenty of other recipes on the **Facebook** page of the mischievous cook. Bon appétit!

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THE **HEGEL H95** INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

# FROM THE H90 TO THE H95

By MICHEL DALLAIRE

After having tested, over the years, some integrated amplifiers from Norwegian manufacturer **Hegel**, here is another replacement that appeared in September 2020. After testing the *H300*, the *H360* and its replacement the *H390*, it is with the same excitement that I tackle a much more affordable model, the *H95*. It will replace the *H90* integrated amplifier, which has served its entry-level category well at **Hegel's**. Let's see what the manufacturer's reasons are for moving us from *H90* to *H95* without a substantial price increase.

## Twins? No, not really?

Physically, the new *H95* and its predecessor the *H90* look like two peas in a pod. The *H95* is still offered in the same disconcertingly sober black case. Since its inception, **Hegel** has accustomed us to this philosophy which is to invest more on the internal circuitry rather than on the bodywork. Nevertheless, the integrated **Hegel H95** is a solid device with great ergonomics, and of which the timeless *look* will age well. Its power is still 60 W per channel for an impedance of 8 ohms, and about 170 W at 4 ohms. The *H95* can even withstand impedance spikes of up



to 2 ohms from the speakers. The patented *SoundEngine 2* technology is also included as in all the brand's devices.

### SoundEngine 2

Before going any further in this test bench, let me take a look back at this home-grown technology developed and patented by Hegel founder **Bent Holter**. The *SoundEngine 2* is an intelligent circuit described by the manufacturer as *Adaptive Feed Forward*. It locally corrects the distortion and errors produced in each of the amplification stages. These are due to coloration and drifts of the electronic parts. It has been proven, in the past, that the global feedback technique can alter the original quality of the audio signal. By acting locally and flexibly on different parts of the amplification circuit, the *Sound Engine 2* makes it possible to preserve the details and dynamics of each recording. It can even correct the crossover distortion often produced by class A/B amplifiers.

### Improvements made on the H95

It is especially around its digital circuits that the major differences of the *H95*, compared to the *H90*, are located. The network *streaming* circuitry is new and the same as on the *H590* which is the pinnacle of **Hegel** integrated amplifiers. The digital-to-analog conversion card (*DAC*) is completely new with a recent **AKM** chip. The *USB* input supports all *PCM* file types up to a resolution of 24 bits/96 kHz, but does not process *DSD* files. On the other hand, the *S/PDIF* inputs (coaxial and optical) go up to a definition of 24 bits/192 kHz. As the *H95*'s functions are controlled by in-house *software*, updates will be available free of charge via a wired *Ethernet* connection. (*Android*) *Bubble UPnP* or (*iOS*) *Mconnect* applications can be used with a smartphone or tablet to control *streaming* functions over an Internet network. The *H95* does not have a *Bluetooth* receiver, but it is a function that can be added. On the other hand, its *Airplay* feature will delight **Apple** device users. The integrated *H95* is compatible with the **Spotify Connect** application. From the

*Ethernet* connection, you can also access the contents of your music server or *NAS*.

Improvements have also been made in the analog stages and in the headphone output. The amplification circuit remains essentially the same with two good bipolar transistors per channel and a large toroidal transformer. A second small transformer has been added to eliminate noise from the power on/standby circuit and possibly from the display. As for the analog connections, there is a *PREAMP* output on *RCA* connectors and two line inputs also on *RCA* connectors.

### Installation and listening conditions

As a first step, I installed the **Hegel H95** amplifier in my office located in the basement in order to grant it a break-in period. I connected it to my *iMac* computer using the *USB* connection. I used my *ROON* software and headphones to listen to it. Afterwards, it was installed in my audio system located on the upper floor. In this case, the sources used are my *CD* player, my music server and my speakers. For my initial listening, I tested the *H95* amplifier connected directly to my server thanks to the *USB* connection. I also tested the *Ethernet* connection through my wired network. In this configuration, the *UPnP/DLNA* feature of the *H95* allowed me to easily access the content of my music server. In my *SqueezePlay* application on my tablet, the *H95* appears under two different names, one for the *USB* connection and the other for the *Ethernet* connection. I haven't noticed any noticeable difference in signal quality between these two types of connections, which are equally efficient. An *iPad* and *iPod* were also used to check for *Airplay* compatibility.

### The H90 is dead, long live the H95!

As mentioned above, my first listenings were done using my *iMac* computer in my basement office. The *UPnP/DLNA* function of the *ROON* playback software gives me access to the content of my music server, which is on the top floor. I don't know if this *H95* had already undergone a few hours of burning-in before delivery. I can assure you that even when it came out of its

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## THE **HEGEL H95** INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



packaging, the results were already exceptional from the headphone output. The **HIFIMAN Sundara** headset is notoriously difficult to power and despite this, I was really able to exploit its qualities to the maximum. Once connected to the *jack* on the front of the amplifier, a relay automatically mutes the speakers to allow direct access to the *H95's* 60W per channel. So, in principle, no high-performance headset will be able to resist it. During all my listening sessions, I was able to find more or less the same sound on the *H95* as on all the other models of **Hegel** integrated amplifiers. Obviously, the most powerful will show more *punch* on the attack of the notes, but the *H95* shares the same DNA as its big brothers. So I'm talking about a sound with finesse and transparency. The recordings' details are well present and spread over a very vast sound stage. The result of the *H95* is soothingly soft and has a small organic side that makes music reproduction more human, if not less technical. So that even amateurs of tube circuits could be confused with its use. I continued my listening sessions with **L'Arpeggiata**, a group specialized in baroque music. This ensemble led by multi-instrumentalist **Christina Pluhar** produced in 2006 an album entitled *Los Impossibles*. For this occasion, The **King's Singers** were invited to perform the vocal segments. This superb recording, on the **Naïve** label, is an exploration of the ancient and traditional music of Spain, Portugal and Latin America. The **Hegel**

*H95* succeeds perfectly in making me feel all the subtleties of ancient instruments such as the theorbo, harp, guitar, baroque violin, lute, psaltery, cornet, harpsichord and some percussions. The **Hegel H95** gives me a very good idea of the space and the natural reverberation of the place in which the sound was captured, **La Chapelle de l'Hôpital Notre-Dame de Bon Secours** in Paris. The **King's Singers** unfold perfectly in front of me, while the musicians are spread widely behind the scenes. Each instrument is easily identifiable by its harmonics thanks to a very low distortion rate and an obvious respect of timbres. On more popular recordings or electronic music, the **Hegel H95** has nothing to be ashamed of against the competition, even with amplifiers two to three times more expensive. Whether with the *USB* connection or with the *Ethernet* connection, listening without an audio signal shows me that the background noise is almost zero, even with the volume control set to maximum. This probably explains the *H95's* ability to reproduce the sound panorama with musicians and performers precisely positioned in space.

### Conclusion

As an entry-level amplifier, I consider the **Hegel H95** to be a definite success story. Its digital circuits have been the subject of a redesign that projects it into a future where updating will be





possible. Its digital-to-analog conversion and *streaming* circuits perform their functions perfectly. The **Hegel H95** is easy to use and does not require you to be a networking expert to connect it to your Internet network. It offers a very good level of transparency without sacrificing anything in terms of musicality. Its power is modest, but its constitution will allow it to control most speakers in its price range. Its connectivity is complete enough to meet the needs of any user, whether an audiophile or simply a music lover. If only for listening with headphones, its retail price of around \$2,300 is entirely justified in my opinion. But if you're planning to purchase a complete high-fidelity system for less than \$5,000, the **Hegel H95** amplifier is a purchase to be made with your eyes closed, and your ears wide open.

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$2,300

Warranty: 3 years, parts and labor

Distributor: Hegel Canada, Tel.: 905.947.9229, richard@hegel.com

#### Mediagraphy

L'Arpeggiata et Christina Pluhar, Los Impossibles, Naïve, V5055

Nils Frahm, All Melody, Erased Tapes

Mercan Dede, Breath, White Swan Records, WS0078

Ensemble Correspondances, Litanies de la Vierge, HMC902169

Kate Bush, 50 Words For Snow, Fish People, FPCD007

# THE RETURN OF THE FLAGSHIP

By MICHEL DALLAIRE

The **Musical Fidelity** brand is now part of the **Austrian Audio Tuning Vertrieb GmbH** group. Since this acquisition, **Musical Fidelity** products have been largely revised. The design is still made in England, but the manufacturing is entrusted to a Taiwanese factory in order to make the retail prices more accessible. Distribution in the country is now handled by **Focal Naim Canada** located in Repentigny. After having tested, last year, the **Musical Fidelity M6si** integrated amplifier, it was here proposed to me to test the **M8xi**, which is the summum of the integrated amplifier by this manufacturer. How can you refuse such an offer when it comes to having fun with a mastodon weighing 46 kg and a power of 550 W per channel?

## Ding dong, a delivery for you Mr. Dallaire!

The deliveryman came alone to my door and climbed the few steps leading up to my landing to deliver the package. As I open the door, I discover a breathless and sweaty man. He agrees to give me a hand to bring the **M8xi** amplifier into my home. However, I needed my kid's help to unpack it and install it on my audio-visual cabinet. Its dimensions of 48.5 cm wide by 50 cm deep for a height of 18.5 cm prevent me from integrating it into the furniture. Its 2 cm thick beveled front and huge

cooling fins at the angled ends give it a Spartan *look* that commands respect.

The **M8xi** is, first and foremost, a performance-oriented integrator in the analog field of music reproduction. Its interface is unparalleled ease of use. On the front panel, there are only two huge rotary buttons, a small display window and a tiny power button. The large button on the left is used to select inputs and the large button on the right is only used to control the volume. The display is reduced to its simplest form and shows only the selected input and volume level. On the other hand, the numbers are large enough for comfortable reading even from a listening distance. The integrated **M8xi** does have a digital card (**DAC**) based on a **Texas Instruments Burr Brown PCM5242** chip, and this is limited to 24-bit/192 kHz **PCM** files at the **USB** input and the two coaxial **S/PDIF** inputs. So no processing possible for **DSD** files. The two optical inputs are limited to a resolution of 24-bits/96 kHz. There are also two **S/PDIF** outputs, one coaxial and one optical. In this case, the digital signal can be diverted to an external **DAC**.

The **M8xi** does not have *streaming* capability over an **Ethernet** or **Bluetooth** wireless network or **Airplay**. This will require the use of an external device. Ditto for a phono input necessary for a vinyl turntable. Anyway, the **Musical Fidelity** catalog is already well equipped with stand-alone devices to perform these functions.



# MICHI

BY ROTEL



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

- Adrien Rouah, TED Magazine, March / April 2020

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- Adrien Rouah, TED Magazine, March / April 2020



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# ROTEL

## MUSICAL FIDELITY M8XI INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

The *M8xi* manufacturer is probably banking on the fact that the *audiophile* clientele targeted by this amplifier is the type to use different devices for each music source. As for the analog inputs, here, we are well served with four auxiliary inputs on *RCA* connectors, one of which is *HT/AUX* switchable, allowing the *M8xi* to be associated with a home theater system. Two other balanced line inputs are available on *XLR* connectors. A *LINE* output and a *PRE OUT* are provided on *RCA* connectors as well as a balanced *XLR* output. The *M8xi* integrated amplifier is available with a charcoal black or light metallic gray front panel. It comes with a generic plastic remote control that can also control and program the manufacturer's *CD* player.

### The entrails of the beast

The *M8xi* is manufactured as two monophonic blocks of 550 W each in an impedance of 8 ohms. This power increases to 870 W in 4 ohms, and at 2 ohms, we can still count on a peak power of 1,600 W. Each channel is completely independent with its own toroidal transformer and with at least six large capacitors per channel. It is mounted on two circuit boards attached almost directly to the cooling fins. This integrated amplifier should, in principle, be able to control just about any speaker on earth with connection terminals that allow bi-wiring. The preamplifier, digital and analog input management boards are mounted directly on the rear panel to provide the shortest possible signal path.

### Use conditions

The **Musical Fidelity *M8xi*** integrated amplifier that was delivered to me seemed to have been unpacked earlier, perhaps as a demonstrator. I still gave it a few hours of break-in before making a more serious use of it. As a source, I connected my *CD* player to it using the *XLR* balanced connection. The other source is my music server connected to the *M8xi*'s *USB* input. The speakers used are those of my usual system.

### Let's go for a boost to my speakers!

I begin my listening with an eponymous album by **Alice Jemima**, a young British singer-songwriter. She masters the electropop style well with deep and frank low frequencies. His album, which I downloaded in a 24-bit *Flac* version from *prostudiomasters.com*, is, in my opinion, a good recording to test the power of an amplifier. In this respect, you have to hear the track *Liquorice* to understand that the *M8xi* has physically imposed himself in my living room and that my speakers just have to behave themselves. What immediately strike you when you listen to this integrated amplifier are the clarity of the message and its speed of execution despite its enormous power. The 550 W per channel is not just there to wow the gallery, but rather to reinforce and support the natural dynamics of the recordings. The *M8xi*'s dual-mono configuration allows the singer's soft, warm voice to be well encamped in the center of a very wide and deep stereophonic image. And this, even if the realization of this album is the result of a studio mix. The low frequencies are obviously deep and controlled, as expressed by *an iron hand in a velvet glove*. The velvet glove is reserved for high and medium frequencies. Listening to this electropop album, I don't notice any harshness even if the impact of the notes is striking, not to say dazzling. In

this regard, I believe that the *M8xi*'s digital-to-analog converter surely has a role to play. Its asynchronous *USB* input performs very well on all my high-resolution *PCM* files. I follow up with an album by singer **Barb Jung** entitled *Love Me Tender* in which she appropriates and interprets well-known songs. This artist has recorded extensively on the *audiophile* label **Linn Records**, and her multi-channel *SACD* album has an *HDCCD* layer that can be played in stereo mode on my *CD* player. Mrs. **Jung** is accompanied, very soberly, by a few instruments such as the piano, the harp, the cello, an organ and percussions subtly scattered here and there. This recording is incredibly clear and crisp. Incidentally, the *M8xi* is not hiding anything from me and all these instruments are operating in the most credible airspace. Its ability to respect the natural dynamics of the instruments and their timbres allows an incredible presence in my listening room. The percussions are frank, clean, well peeled and the impact is always striking. I continue with another *SACD* album that can be played in *CD* mode. It is *Les Éléments: Tempêtes, Orages et Fêtes Marines* by **Le Concert des Nations**, conducted by **Jordi Savall**. This recording, on the **Alia Vox** label, includes pieces by composers such as **Locke, Marais, Rameau, Rebel, Telemann** and **Vivaldi**. The recording was captured in





2015 in the **Abbaye de Frontfroide** in Narbonne, France. The *M8xi* integrated amplifier invites me without any problem to a place where the musicians are spread out in a rather vast space that presents a natural reverberation. Once again, the dynamics and the level of transparency of the **Musical Fidelity** integrated system make it clear to me that this is not a recording made with compression methods, often used in the studio. The slightest pinch on old stringed instruments or the slightest slip on the bows are highlighted with subtlety and benevolent gentleness. This makes me say that even if the *M8xi* is a powerful heavyweight, it can still move with the lightness of a ballerina on tiptoe.

I end my listening with the truculent **Billie Eilish** and her electropop music based on ultra-low frequencies. With the *M8xi*, this music explodes, in the good sense of the word, and floats in space as if there were no more speakers to play it. The diaphragms of my loudspeakers are under such control that I regret a little to have only a small two-way tower with only a 15 cm *woofer* to submit to this mastodon. On *Bad Guy*, the low frequencies are a bit exaggerated and distortion is even added on purpose. The first time I heard this track, I thought my speakers were damaged. But the *M8xi* is totally playing with this effect by keeping a sovereign control over reproduction.

### Conclusion

The **Musical Fidelity** *M8xi* integrated amplifier is what you might call a soft-hearted ogre. It can swallow anything you give him, no matter what musical diet you give him. Submit recalcitrant speakers to it and it will bring them to heel. Its power seems infinite and its ease in dynamics leads us to increase the volume in an almost unreasonable way. When the music

is delicate, it may whisper in your ear. If, to the contrary it is energetic and thunderous, it knows how to be muscular while keeping control of the situation. Although its converter and *USB* input are limited to *PCM* files, these are processed efficiently thanks to good oversampling and accurate timing. As far as the analog inputs are concerned, the connection is, in my opinion, very complete even if a phono input and a headphone jack are missing. To get an integrated amplifier of this size, well under \$10,000, you necessarily have to make compromises by cutting back on features. In the case of the **Musical Fidelity** *M8xi*, compromises have certainly not been made with regard to its sound quality or the quality of its construction. If your speakers are greedy and demanding in terms of power and sound quality, the *M8xi* integrated amplifier is definitely an option to consider if your space permits it.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$8,440

Warranty: 2 years for the mechanical portion, 5 years for the electronic portion and 1 year for the remote control, parts and labor.

Distributor: Focal-Naim Canada, Tel.: 1 866.271.5689, focal-naim.com; musicalfidelity.com

### Mediagraphy

Alice Jemima, Alice Jemima, Flac 24/44, ProStudioMasters.com

Barb Jung, Love Me Tender, Linn Records, AKD 255

Le Concert des Nations, Les Éléments, Alis Vox, AVSA9914

Fink, Sort of Revolution, ZENCD146

Manu Katché, Third Round, ECM, 2156 B0014334-02



**NEAT EKSTRA** ACOUSTIC SPEAKERS

# *Musical Ekstra that one will want to adopt*

By JEAN-DENIS DOYLE

Neat Acoustics recently presented its brand new *Ekstra* tower speaker. For several years now, the British manufacturer has been renewing its product ranges. This *Ekstra* speaker has particularly piqued our curiosity. With its sleek design, sophisticated sound and near wall placement, this speaker really stands out from the crowd. *Ekstra's* are full of innovative technologies and

deserve to be watched and listened to. So here is the test bench of an atypical speaker that has pleasant surprises in store for us.

**Neat Acoustics** is a British company that has been manufacturing speakers for over twenty years. Located in the Teesdale Valley in the north of England, **Neat Acoustics** was founded





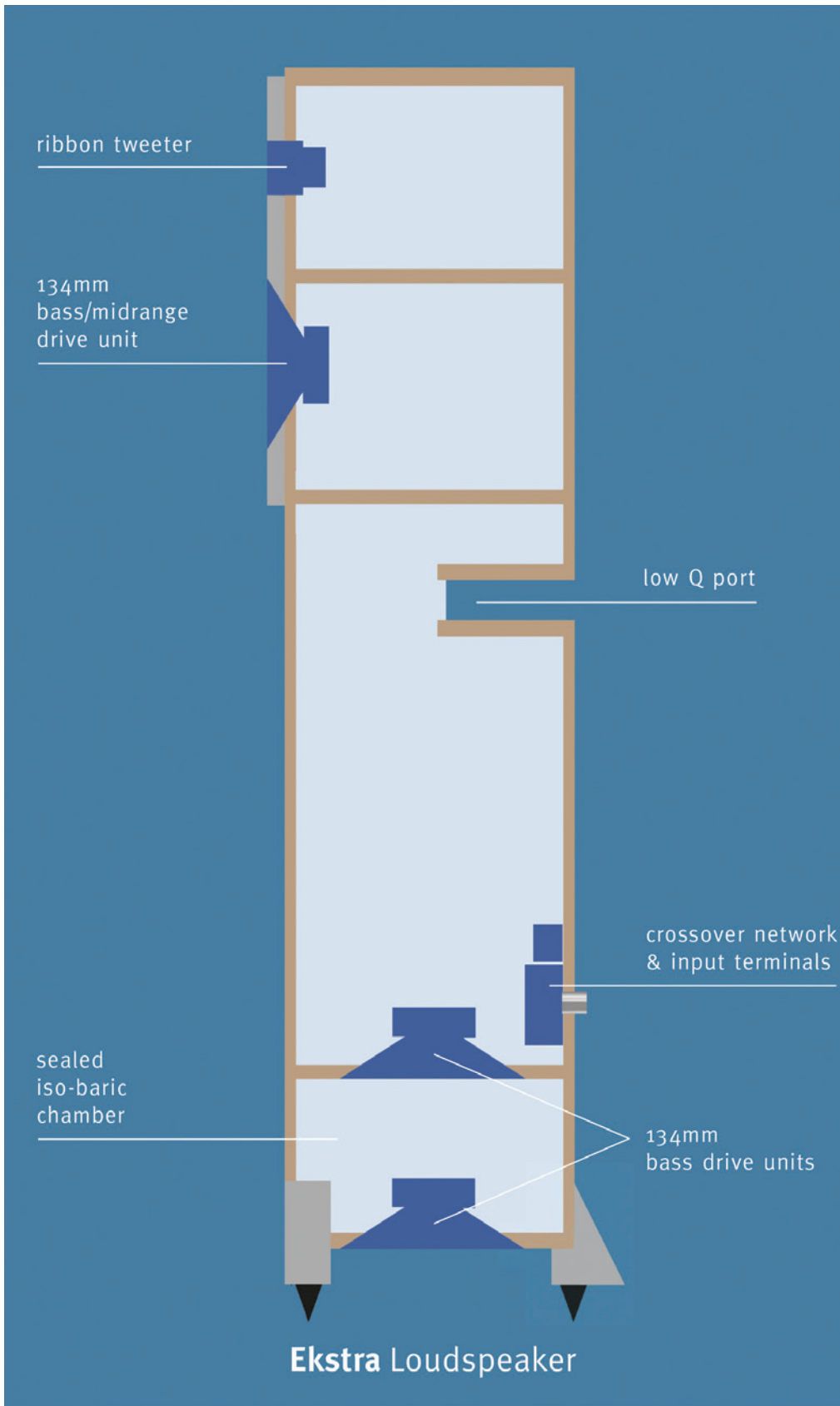
by musician **Bob Surgeoner** in 1989. **Neat Acoustics** is one of those small British manufacturers who have always been associated with **Naim** products. Although **Neat Acoustics** has no business association with **Naim**, the two brands are very often brought together, both by their users and by **Neat** itself. Neat speakers also blend perfectly with other quality electronics. The design of **Neat** speakers is the result of countless hours of listening, spent not only in the company's listening room, but also in many domestic environments. This approach has allowed **Neat** to arrive at a product whose behavior in your listening room will be predictable and satisfying. **Neat** also has a small recording studio and several musical instruments. This allows the design team to make ultra-precise comparisons between recorded and reproduced music. It is one of the most rigorous development tools used to identify the weak points of a speaker prototype with remarkable precision. All these development protocols allow **Neat Acoustics** to achieve a consistent and easily recognizable listening result. In addition, unlike many speaker manufacturers, **Neat** is able to provide fairly accurate instructions on how to place its speakers in an environment.

#### **Technical description**

The **Neat Ekstra** are floor-standing speakers, of the two-and-a-half-way type. It is therefore a two-way speaker, using a five-centimeter ribbon *tweeter* that broadcasts high frequencies. A small 13.4 cm speaker, located below, broadcasts the mid-frequencies and bass. Two more bass speakers are located in the bottom of the speaker and act as a built-in *subwoofer*. The ribbon *tweeter* is a brand new model at Neat. It is manufactured according to specifications specific to this series. It is a nice development, compared to those Neat used before, and they are particularly proud of the result.

The bass midrange speaker is made from a die-cast alloy basket assembly and has a polypropylene cone. Equipped with a rubber suspension, it should last for the entire life of the speaker and will not require maintenance. This small low-midrange speaker operates on a closed load. It therefore has its own box inside the enclosure. This provides

## NEAT EKSTRA ACOUSTIC SPEAKERS



fast bass and midrange response with minimal distortion.

Two additional woofers, which are identical to the one on the front, are located at the bottom of the speaker. They are in charge of diffusing the lowest frequencies. They are placed facing the ground, one below the other, under isobaric load. One of these *woofers* is visible below the speaker and the other is invisible, since located inside. This is supported by a tuned port that opens to the rear of the speaker. This type of configuration makes it possible to obtain a bass response that is comparable to a cabinet that would be double in size. So when you look at the **Neat Ekstra**, tell yourself that in fact, acoustically, it is a speaker twice as large! As usual with **Neat**, the crossover has been carefully designed and uses excellent quality film capacitors. The **Neat Ekstra** are equipped with three feet, with adjustable spikes, which will allow the small *woofer*, which is located under the speaker, to have enough space to function well.

### Unpacking and installation

The **Neat Ekstra** can be easily and quickly installed in a listening room. Simply mount the supplied feet underneath the speakers and insert the decoupling spikes. As specified in the instruction manual, the **Neat Ekstra** ended about eight inches from the rear wall and about two feet from the side walls. Boom! Right in the bull's eye. However, it's quite rare to come across a pair of speakers of which the manufacturer's suggested positioning proves to be just as accurate. What a joy!

### Listening impressions

#### Chameleons that will blend into your environment

It was with the superb *Buika* album by singer **Nina de Fuego** that I started my listening sessions. These speakers strike immediately with their ability to isolate with scalpel-like precision both the instruments and the singer, while maintaining an attention worthy of a high-resolution photograph. **Nina de**

Fuego's splendid, raspy voice takes on a delicate, nuanced texture and seems suspended between the speakers in a superbly three-dimensional stereophonic image. Each instrument of the accompaniment group keeps its place solidly. Even if we change the listening position, the musicians and the singer also keep their place. What is surprising is that despite being positioned close to the rear wall, the stereo image retains a surprising depth, exactly as if the rear wall had disappeared. You can hear these hallucinating echo effects from the studio that seem to come from several feet behind the wall. In the evening, you can turn down the lighting and you will have the impression that your room has suddenly been enlarged. Here, at last, are speakers that will be able to disappear both acoustically and physically from your environment for your greatest pleasure.

**Plenty of finesse and resolution!**

These Neat Ekstra speakers have the ability to dig deep into recordings, which is no match for much more expensive models. Part of the secret comes from the fabulous ribbon tweeter Neat uses. It shines on *Where There Is Smoke* by Dominique Fils-Aimé. This album has now become a must-have in the

audiophile landscape thanks to its exceptional recording quality. The fine resolution of the Ekstra's ribbon speaker enhances the quality of this production and seems to have no limit to the amount of detail it is capable of bringing out. I, who thought I had heard everything in this song, was surprised to discover amazing subtleties in the vocals that I hadn't perceived before. It's a real pleasure when a speaker is able to make us discover unknown details in recordings that we pretend to know well. On the other hand, I would have liked the Ekstra's to have a little more bite in the midrange frequencies, which would give them a little less docile of a character. A very personal preference. The Neat Ekstra speakers offered here will allow you to spend hours rediscovering your music collection.

**Solid foundations for perfectly accurate timbres**

Many music lovers will tell you, without the bass they are lost. With its two passive subwoofers, the Neat Ekstra deliver an abundance of them, but not just in any way. These speakers dig incredibly deep into the bass for this speaker size, and provide a solid foundation for the rest of the spectrum. Supported by perfectly controlled bass lines, the mid and high registers can

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## NEAT EKSTRA ACOUSTIC SPEAKERS... (SUITE)

afford to assert their presence without ever becoming aggressive. With **Wolfgang Haffner's** extraordinary album *Heart of the Matter*, music floods the entire space. This grandiose image is not only due to the *tweeter's* resolution, but also, and above all, thanks to this solid support in the bass. These infra-bass frequencies, when present, allow the sound image to develop dramatically. Unlike active, separate *subwoofers*, which are too often difficult to integrate, the two small *woofers* work in isobaric mode and are integrated into the speaker. They thus disappear in a masterful way. These reproduce the lowest octaves, giving the music a chance to take on its true dimensions.

These **Neat Ekstra** speakers have the ability to dig deep into recordings, which is no match for much more expensive models. Part of the secret comes from the fabulous ribbon *tweeter* **Neat** uses.

It shines on *Where There Is Smoke* by **Dominique Fils-Aimé**. This album has now become a must-have in the *audiophile* landscape thanks to its exceptional recording quality. The fine resolution of the *Ekstra's* ribbon speaker enhances the quality of this production and seems to have no limit to the amount of detail it is capable of bringing out.

### Conclusion

The **Neat Ekstra** are a real success in many ways. The **Neat** team can be proud of the product they have developed. These speakers will fit perfectly where space is at a premium, and will allow you to enjoy your high-end audio system, even if you live in a small apartment. Paired with an *all-in-one* device like the **Naim Uniti**, the **MOON Ace** or the **Micromega M-One**, you will have a minimalist system with flawless musicality. Thanks to their elegant *look*, they will blend into your decor in all discretion. Here are some well studied and perfectly tuned speakers that I warmly recommend.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$ 5,999

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labor

Distributor: Nation Imports, info@nationimports.com; nationimports.com; www.neatacoustics.com

### Mediagraphy

Nina de Fuego, Buika, DRO Atlantic, 2564695477

Dominique Fils-Aimé, Stay Tuned!, Ensouls Record, fichier Tidal

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



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# BUON GUSTO

By CLAUDE LALONDE

## A trio of crème de menthe to discover

*So many memories are evoked by the famous crème de menthe! Forgotten over time, it regains its prestige with even more freshness, with a more refined, contemporary look. Indeed, the **Les Subversifs** microdistillery is launching a brand new crème de menthe, pink this time, which completes its trio of crèmes de menthe, the other two, one white and one green, being already on the market.*

The two associate distillers, **Fernando Balthazard** and **Pascal Gervais** are bringing this spirit up to date with a more refreshing and refined version. With three different crème de menthe, they can be described as masters in the art of producing this type of spirit. As Mr. **Balthazard** told me... *They tried to link the development of a product to the history, heritage and imagination of Quebec. And crème de menthe is part of this heritage and imagination. At Christmas parties everyone saw someone drinking it or drank it themselves. But no one dared to say that they liked to drink it. As if they don't want to come out of the closet.*

They went to see more in depth the how and why of crème de menthe, and they soon realized that the choice was limited. One brand dominated almost the entire market. They set themselves the goal of trying to improve this product and make it in a natural way without adding colouring or flavourings. Several tests were done with real fresh mint, dried mint and many others, and they found that the best taste came from the essential oil extracted from the mint. This was what gave them the taste they were looking for. Then, they added bog Labrador tea for the green crème de menthe and American wintergreen for the pink crème de menthe to give them a more complex aromatic profile as well as an authentic taste of Quebec. Whereas in the past the product was only enjoyed with ice, now, thanks to the development of mixology, new ways are being discovered to enjoy it. For each of the crème de menthe, various ways of consuming it are suggested and people adopt the one that suits them. By this very fact, it becomes a product that is consumed all year round, which helps in its popularity. It's very refreshing, a crème de menthe on ice or layered with sparkling water in the summer. And the product is now a growing phenomenon. It's up to you to try it or rediscover the pleasure!

### The crèmes de menthe

What is a *subversive* character? According to the **Larousse** dictionary, it is what is likely to disturb or overthrow the social or political order. This character trait fits this micro-distillery. It was the first to distill gin in Quebec, which was launched a few years ago as **Piger Henricus Gin**. And in this lineage, each product is associated with *subversive* characters who have made history. You can consult, in detail, the profile of each character by clicking on the following link: <https://subversifs.ca/>.

### The Isabelle crème de menthe (white, peppery)

Les Subversifs, 750 ml

**Price:** \$33.50

**Alcohol content:** 24%

**SAQ Code:** 13547208

The name of this first crème de menthe refers to **Isabelle Montour**, a rebellious, independent and libertine young *métis* born at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1667-1752). The **Isabelle** Crème de menthe is the result of a blend of neutral alcohol and organic peppermint leaves grown in Quebec and of which the aromatic strength is particularly bewitching. Upon tasting, it is of a certain lightness and the taste is not too accentuated. Nothing alike the traditional crème de menthe which is rather too sweet. Enjoyed as an aperitif, it gives a new aspect to the traditional **Stinger** cocktail. It can also be sipped as a digestive with a few ice cubes or sparkling water

### The EVA crème de menthe (green, bog Labrador tea)

Les Subversifs, 750 ml

**Price:** 33,50 \$

**Alcohol content:** 24%

**SAQ Code:** 14350280.

This crème de menthe is identified with **Eva Circé-Côté** (1871-1949), journalist, poet, playwright, columnist and co-founder of the literary magazine **Lécincelle**. For this crème de menthe was concocted a spirit that displays a beautiful natural color and brings to the forefront the refreshing taste of mint and the boreal flavors of bog Labrador tea. A little less aromatic than the **Isabelle**, it offers delicate aromas and flavors with a certain restraint when it comes to both aroma and taste. The addition of Labrador tea adds a little spiciness in the mouth, which combines well with a smooth texture. This **Eva** crème de menthe is





Claude Lalonde - Sommelier by training : for me, wine and alcohols are a matter of passion and pleasure.

Visit my Facebook page, *Vinformateur* at : <https://www.facebook.com/vinformateur/> for your dose of humor and daily wine suggestions.

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

best enjoyed as a digestive, layered with sparkling water or simply on ice cubes. Delicious for dessert when generously poured over vanilla ice cream.

**The Arthur crème de menthe (rose, American wintergreen)**

Les Subversifs, 750 ml

**Price:** 33,50\$

**Alcohol content:** 24%

**SAQ Code:** 14646881

The third crème de menthe from **Les Subversifs** distillery pays homage to *Arthur Petrie* (1890-1957), forerunner of the Montreal

burlesque scene in the years 1910 to 1940. Made from a blend of grain brandy and organic mint leaves grown in Quebec, with the addition of wild tea, **Arthur's** crème de menthe has a fresh aroma reminiscent of the famed peppermint candies. On the palate, the texture is satiny and envelops the whole mouth. The attack is on mint and wintergreen, and the sugar level remains pleasant. To be enjoyed preferably as a digestive, with ice cubes. This new crème de menthe has now available since the beginning of November, 2020.

LINN MAJIK DSM ALL-IN-ONE DEVICE

# THE MAGICIAN WHO WILL MAKE MUSIC APPEAR IN YOUR HOME



BY RICHARD SCHNEIDER

Linn recently introduced a new version of its integrated network player / amplifier, the *Majik DSM*. The *Majik* series is at the front door of this Scottish manufacturer's catalog. The new look of the aluminum case and its glossy front give it a sober and uncluttered appearance. The improvements justifying the arrival of this new edition are based on its revised connection section, a significant improvement in integrated technologies, as well as its new amplification, borrowed from its big brother, the *Selekt DSM*. So here's an *all-in-one* device that shows great promise and all you have to do is plug in a pair of speakers. Let's take the time to discover it.

Linn is a company that needs no introduction. It specializes in the manufacturing and development of high-end audio products. Its reputation is legendary. Linn's research and development team has been responsible for some of the most significant advances in the history of digital and analog reproduction, particularly in the field of dematerialized music playback. The company has secured the services of high-calibre engineers and technicians. A privileged sector occupied by in-house computer specialists who manage all the techniques and software

integrated into the components, thus ensuring perfect synergy between the products and absolute control of the manufacturing quality. The new *Majik DSM* benefits from this legacy. The *Majik DSM* is, first and foremost, an integrated amplifier with a network player. Its connectivity via *Ethernet*, *WiFi* or *Bluetooth* allows access to the world's leading online music services. In addition, the device will have access to your music files stored on your network. It is compatible with the **Roon** software. Interesting features are available, such as the possibility of connecting your smart TV, your **Apple TV**, your games console and even an analog turntable equipped with an **MM (Moving Magnet)** cartridge. The *Majik* aims to become a device that will be at the center of all your audio-visual entertainment. It can be teamed with other components, optional and offered by Linn, providing you with an expanded system that delivers quality sound throughout your home. With such a complete package, all you'll need is a good pair of speakers.

#### Technical description

The new Linn *Majik DSM* is a device equipped with the latest technology both in terms of the choices made by the manufacturer and the latest generation of components. On this version



of the *Majik DSM*, Linn has incorporated its *Katalyst* architecture into the digital-to-analog conversion section. With its high-precision clock circuitry, its ultra-regulated power supply, and its state-of-the-art converters, the *Katalyst* architecture ensures a digital data stream with a purity and stability rarely achieved. This section of the conversion accepts and transmits 24-bit/192kHz signals as well as some *DSD* files. The *Majik DSM* now uses *Class D* for its power amplification section, which offers 100 *W* of power. Thanks to high-speed switches, Linn says they have taken this class of amplification a giant leap

forward. As we will see as we listen, the results speak for themselves.

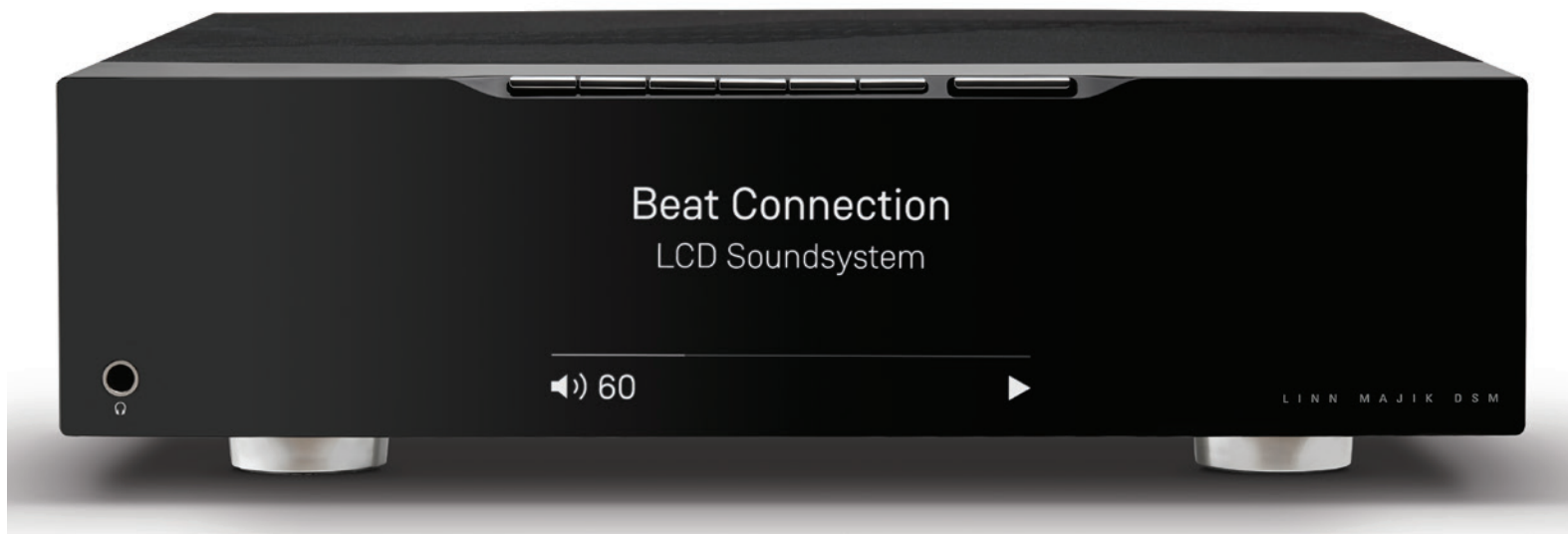
The *Linn Majik DSM* has a hybrid analog/digital phono input that can be configured as a line input. Directly inspired by the *Urika II* phono stage, the phono stage, placed inside the *Majik DSM*, uses a hybrid technology that allows an *RIAA* correction with excellent precision and an almost total absence of background noise.

In terms of connectivity, the *Linn Majik DSM* now has a *USB* input, an *Ethernet* socket, several *HDMI* inputs, an analog input and a variable output to a preamplifier. There are also

two digital outputs. A ¼ inch headphone jack is used to connect headphones.

#### Unpacking and installation

Since the *Linn Majik DSM* is first and foremost a network player, it must first be connected to the home network, preferably in wired mode via the *Ethernet* socket. Of course, it is necessary to install the applications and software required for its configuration. Linn offers several configuration software packages that will satisfy even the most tech-savvy among you. Don't worry, the device works without any problems





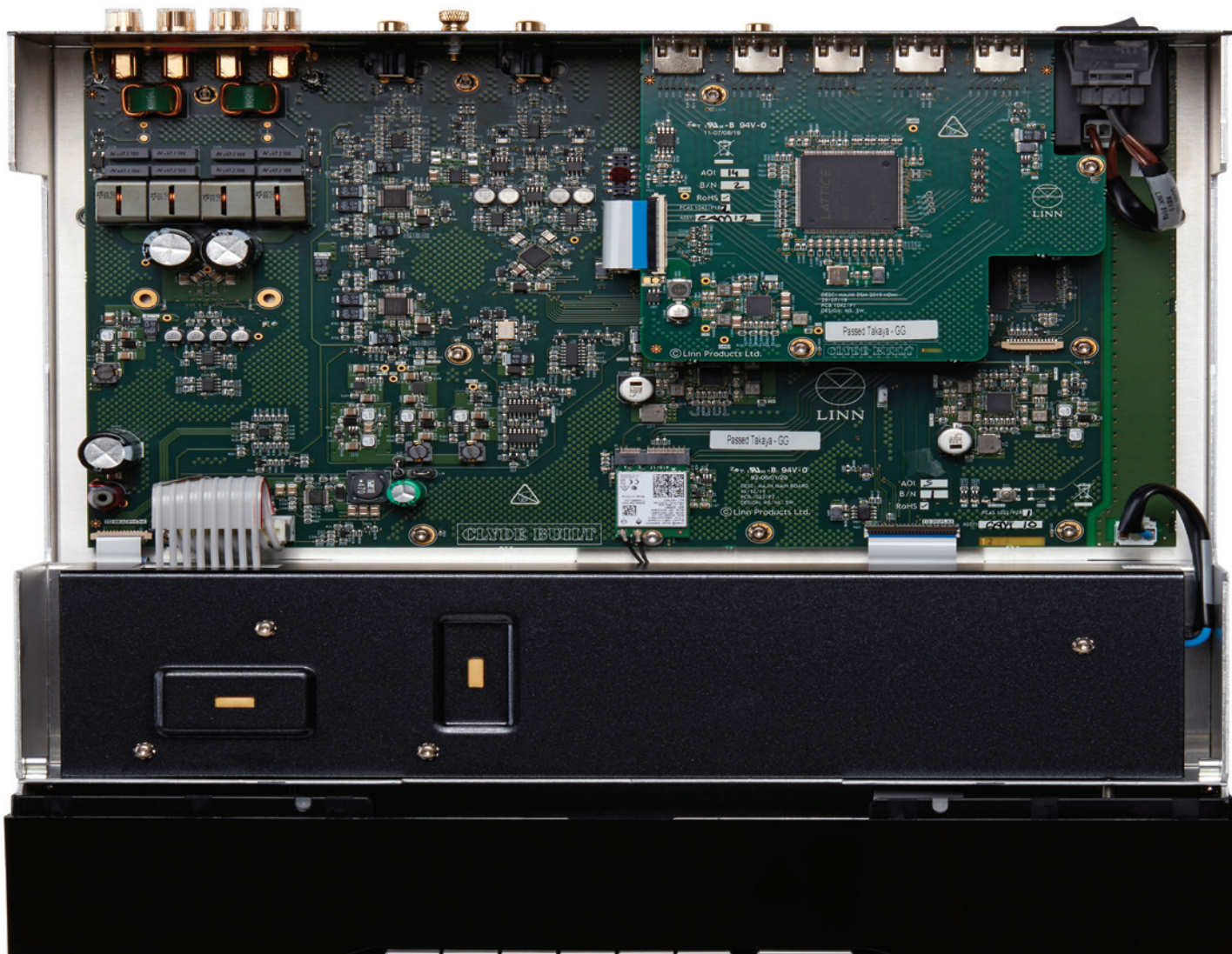
with the **Linn Konfig** application. The *Majik DSM* is compatible with the *Space Optimization* software. This state-of-the-art software allows the optimization of speaker performance in the acoustic environment. Thanks to digital technologies, the software virtually optimizes the positioning and frequency response of the speakers and will avoid many headaches regarding their position. As a small warning, some electrostatic speakers may require modification to work properly with **Linn Class D** amplification. You should therefore make sure that the speakers are compatible before connecting them to the *Majik DSM*.

### Listening impressions

Listening to several musical sources, three qualities stood out: musicality, transparency and coherence, especially when reading the files stored on my hard drive. Three essential qualities in my opinion. For a long time, it was hoped that **Linn** would

adopt the *DSD* format. The company hesitated for a long time before introducing it in its devices, but it is now done. Not all *DSD* formats are accessible, but it's a start. In this respect, it is impossible not to refer to **Patricia Barber's** *Café Blue* disk in *DSD/DSF 2.8 MHz - 1 bit 5.6 Mbps* format. *Too Rich for my Blood* is a remarkable track, recorded according to the rules of the art, but very demanding in terms of amplification. The *Majik DSM* did admirably well. Towards the middle of the song, the drums get heavier and heavier and **Patricia Barber's** voice reaches heights that put an audio system to the test. The sound rendering maintained its coherence and musicality throughout the performance. At a certain point, I was shivering because it was so intense. The amplification has a lot of reserve and at a high level you don't perceive any distortion. The sound scene is wide, deep and very coherent. We capture the multiple details. It's an effortless and enjoyable listening experience. Congratulations!





By the way, my *audiophile* side can't help but notice how deep the bass digs in, which my speakers didn't mind. *Zaz's Paris* is in a completely different register. It's cheerful, playful and *Zaz's* performance is a real source of joy. *Quincy Jones'* polished touch, without reproach, only adds to the pleasure. My version is a *Flac* file. When a recording is of high quality, *Flac* files are very efficient. The disc can be listened to in one go without any analysis effort. The tracks do not suffer from compression, so the *Majik DSM* pulls all the available information consistently. *Zaz's* playful performance is communicative and there is a tendency to increase the volume. I replayed some tracks on several occasions during those few days because it was too good to do without.

Finally, *Mer(s)* by *Marie-Nicole Lemieux*. Classical music, especially opera, remains a major challenge for most audio channels. The terms, the sibilance, the cacophony and even sometimes the sensation of hearing nails sliding along a slate board came to my mind during some of the listening. The *Majik* performed very well. The sound stage, wide and deep, went beyond the physical space of the speakers. When your speakers seemed to disappear, it's a sign that the mechanics are doing their job very well. Here, Ms. *Lemieux* is very much at the front and center as the orchestra fills the room. The singer loves her art and it's evident with this player. Once again, Bravo!

## Conclusion

The new *Linn Majik DSM* is far ahead of its predecessor. The device is highly competitive in this price range, to the benefit of consumers. Its excellent musical restitution will make it an option to consider, even if you had planned to invest much more. In fact, it offers a combination of a high-quality networked music player, a world-class phono stage and an amplifier of exceptional purity. In short, when I sit in front of a sound system, I expect it to carry me away, to make me dream and to rock me with beautiful music, effortlessly. The *Majik DSM*, will have really transported me in a universe of music all in beauty.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: 5 120\$

Warranty: coming soon

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

## Mediagraphy

Café Blue by Patricia Barber

Paris by Zaz

*Mer(s)* by Marie-Nicole Lemieux

# What's New?

## The Bryston BR-20, a modern and ambitious preamplifier

By THE NEWSROOM



Canadian manufacturer **Bryston** announces the arrival of the *BR-20*, by far the most ambitious and comprehensive preamplifier in its history. The *BR-20* is a combination of a very advanced analog section, a high-level digital-to-analog converter and a network player. This preamplifier therefore provides access to the main online music services, in high resolution, such as **Qobuz** and **Tidal**. The internal converter supports all file types, from *PCM* up to 384 kHz as well as the majority of *DSD* formats. The *BR-20* has four analog and eleven digital inputs, resulting in a wide variety of connectivity. The *BR-20* has new features such as a software-controlled volume knob surrounded by small *LEDs* that give it a super sleek look. As an option, an *HDMI* card with 4 inputs and one output and a phono stage can be added to the *BR-20*. The *BR-20* also includes an excellent headphone amplifier.



The *BR-4*, which is the remote control for the *BR-20*, can be configured to control different sources. It is also possible to use a phone or tablet to control the volume and switch sources. **Bryston's** engineers are particularly proud of the *BR-20's* technical performance. With its circuitry consisting entirely of discrete components, it is the lowest noise and distortion level **Bryston** has ever measured. The new *BR-20* preamplifier offers an unparalleled

degree of flexibility to process any type of audio signal, analog or digital. The brand's legendary reliability and a price that remains realistic make the *BR-20* even more attractive. Users will certainly find the connectivity options they need for any system configuration to create an audiophile hub with optimal performance. The *BR-20* has been available since the 2020 *Holiday Season*.

## JBL's new HDI Series, speakers that think outside the box



Here's a very interesting new product. It comes from the now famous American manufacturer **JBL**. This is a new series of speakers named *HDI* for **High Definition Imaging**. These speakers have the particularity of using a compression transducer joined to a horn which required a lot of studies. Inspired by some of the horns used by **JBL** in its studio monitors, the *HDI* Series horn provides absolutely flawless horizontal and vertical dispersion. In the purest **JBL** tradition, the bass drivers have also been carefully designed, including aluminum cones and substantial molded bowls. The speaker cabinets are particularly massive and reinforced on the inside. The cabinets are available in three colors: glossy black, grey oak and walnut.

The series includes the two floorstanding speaker models (*HDI-3800* and *HDI-3600*), the *HDI-1600* bookshelf speaker, the *HDI-4500* center channel speaker and the *HDI-1200P* subwoofer. Here's a lineup of speakers that promises to perform especially well in home theater installations, and **JBL** says the performance of the *HDI-1200P* subwoofer will be devastating.

With specifications that show efficiencies well above 90 db for 1 W at 1 m, and a very linear frequency response, tube amplifier enthusiasts are likely to be attracted to this series. Fans of energetic rock music will also be very well served, with speakers that will project music with zest and won't be afraid to shake things up, at last!

The new *HDI* series will be available soon from your **JBL** dealer and featured in a test bench in our next edition. Don't miss it!

**AUDIO-TECHNICA AT-LP7** VINYL TURNTABLE

# SIMPLE, ELEGANT AND EASY TO USE!



*By* RICHARD SCHNEIDER

The *AT-LP7* turntable is at the top of the vinyl turntable hierarchy at **Audio-Technica**. It is endowed with features that will appeal to a pragmatic clientele, fond of quality audio products that are uncomplicated and affordable. It displays an aesthetic of great simplicity. All in black, with its rounded corners and wide adjustable legs, it does not go unnoticed. When at rest, its smoky dust cover will protect the entire housing. The *AT-LP7*'s ease of use stems from **Audio-Technica**'s desire to offer an *all-in-one* product that meets high manufacturing standards. You'll find that it's easy to use for the first time because all you have to do is connect the turntable to

your preamplifier or integrated to enjoy your vinyl records. Of course, some manipulations will be required, but nothing insurmountable. In fact, it adds to the pleasure of owning a vinyl turntable. Interesting isn't it?

As for **Audio-Technica**, it is a Japanese company that has been firmly established in the field of electronics for more than 50 years. Since the 1960s, the company has been successfully manufacturing vinyl turntables and phono cartridges of all categories. **Audio-Technica** is recognized worldwide for the quality of its headsets and microphones. And from this expertise shows with the *AT-LP7*.





The rotation of the plate is ensured by a belt drive. The operation is very simple, as all the mechanics are entirely manual. It is therefore a device that requires basic maintenance, and which will serve you well for many years to come. The integrated preamplification avoids additional costs during acquisition, not to mention the many possibilities of incompatibility with other devices that you will not have to take into account. A selector offers the choice between using an *MM (Moving Magnet)* or *MC (Moving Coil)* phono cartridge type. You don't have to worry about the rotation speed of the platter, because the motor is controlled by sensors.

Speaking of phono cartridges, note that the turntable comes with a very good *MM* phono cartridge. It is a double magnet **Audio-Technica VM520EB/H**. It is equipped with two magnets placed in a *V*-shape. This manufacturing technique accentuates the magnetic performance of the cartridge. The channel separation is greatly improved due to the use of an insulation plate between the coils. By this fact, an appreciable reduction of the distortion will be underlined while obtaining a linear sound restitution from 20 Hz to 23 kHz. The elliptical diamond stylus (or cell) can be replaced by one of the six tips of the *VM* range if you feel like it. It is a simple and economical way to replace or upgrade the stylus without having to replace the entire phono cartridge. As such,

it is interesting to note that the cell holder is removable.

The body of the table is made of *MDF* (medium density fibers) whose thickness is 40 mm. This material is appreciated for its anti-absorbent properties. The *J*-shaped tonearm is the heir to the *A-T* models of the 1960s and 1970s. The arm is equipped with an adjustable counterweight, anti-skid control and precision bearing system. The metal gimbal suspension system limits reading errors by faithfully following the furrow line. Finally, the height of the arm can be adjusted from 0 to 6 mm allowing the use of several types of phono cartridges.

Upon a quick overview of the unit, one notices on the front left of the turntable, the rotary control knob to turn the turntable on. This button is also used to change the rotation speed. Two speeds are possible, either 45 or 33 rpm. The pulley on which the drive belt rests is located at the right rear. That's all, but it's more than enough.

#### **Preamplification section**

The rear is easy to approach. On the left is the preamplification selector switch. You do not have to stick to the built-in preamplification of the *AT-LP7*. You can choose the *Line* function for the integrated phono preamplification or the *Phono* function for the external phono preamplification of your choice. If you choose the internal preamplification, you will then connect the turntable to the

*AUX* or *LINE-IN* input of your preamplifier or integrated amplifier. The turntable can also be connected directly to active speakers or even to a *PC*. However, an optional audio adapter may be required if your computer's sound card does not have an audio input. Then, a little further to the right, are the *RCA outputs*. A set of *RCA* link cables is offered by the manufacturer. Towards the middle of the plate is the cartridge selector, which we have already discussed at length. Finally, there is the ground terminal that will connect either to your preamplifier or to your integrated amplifier. You will obtain an optimal tenfold increase thanks to the levelling of the housing by adjusting the tabs under the plate. I allow myself a small caveat. The legs create a suction effect on the surface on which the turntable is installed. Be careful when moving the housing, especially if it has been in place for some time.

#### **Installing the turntable**

The installation is a relatively simple process. The required accessories are very well identified. You will have to install the tray, the drive belt found in the pouch of the user's manual, the *AC* adapter, the *RCA* cables, the cell cartridge, which integrates the cell, and the counterweight. An adapter is provided for 45 rpm discs.

The cell cartridge calibration is done by hand, eye and ear unless you have the required calibration tools. This process

## Simple, elegant and easy to use! ... (suite)



requires a certain amount of patience. I am confident that your retailer will be able to guide you through this process. Otherwise, I invite you to use a disk in good condition, but without any particular value to you, during the process, which will avoid an unfortunate accident to one of your rarer discs. The level of success of a calibration is easily noticeable. If the tonearm is levelled when it is on the disc, if you do not perceive distortion, and if, at the end of the disc, the arm remains stable and does not attempt to return to the outside, and finally the sound is pleasant, you will probably have succeeded in the installation. If, for one reason or another, you choose to use a cartridge other than that included in the package, **Audio-Technica** makes available, on its website, ([www.audio-technica.com/en-ca/atlp7](http://www.audio-technica.com/en-ca/atlp7)), under the *Downloads* article at the bottom of the page, a printable tool for this purpose, which will guide you in the alignment of the cell.

### Let's listen

The real serious listening session began with a remastered version of the *Abbey Road* album. I know every detail of this record. The recording is very well done. McCartney's bass in particular,

on *Come Together*, makes it easy to assess the skills of an audio device.

One can discern a certain roundness of the instrument, but the result is not up to my standards. I feel a lack of precision, as much in terms of the drums as the bass or the low midrange. There is a lack of authority. The cymbals are a little set back, but still noticeable. The sound stage does not exceed the limits of the speakers. Everything is well centered. As a result, I came up with the idea of replacing the connecting cables, supplied with the device, with a pair of Linn *Silver*. There you go! Problem solved. The sound has taken on a new dimension. The bass was now deep and authoritative. The very present midrange (a normal phenomenon in analog) lets the highs express themselves freely and smoothly. I do not note any aggressive effects. Interestingly, the micro-details of the midrange and mid-high, including percussions, are much more noticeable. On this record, the voices are well in the center and slightly set back, as George Martin wished. The instrumentation has become much more palpable, enveloping.

The *Famous Blue Raincoat* box set by **Jennifer Warnes** that I have in hand offers a different perspective. This is a 45 rpm

edition. It is an ideal medium for checking the accuracy of the grooves' reading, some will prefer the term *tracking*. Faster rotation allows for better extraction of details, but it can also add its share of errors. The first notes are encouraging. There is no undue pressure from the stylus on the groove walls. The sound is clear, limpid, without distortion. It will be understood that I left the Linn interconnect cables in place. The session took place according to the rules of the art. The J-tonearm, with a metal gimbal suspension system and precision bearings, performed well because the disc was played without a hitch right to the end, i.e.: the arm did not jump or try to return to the outside of the disc. The result is very musical and coherent, indicating that the internal preamplification is doing a good job.

I finish in the best way with **Miles Davis'** *Kind Of Blue*. No doubt, **Miles Davis** reigns as King and master precisely at the center of the soundstage. Everything happens around him as usual. However, one can easily feel the complicity of the musicians. Unlike the jazz recordings of the time, outrageously dominated by **Rudy Van Gelder**, which had a strong tendency to stifle pianos and percussion in favor of wind instruments, **Irving Townsend** left much more room for the rest of musicians. The piano dictates the tempo that can be followed effortlessly. The *AT-LP7* ensures the consistency required so that I can effortlessly enjoy the beautiful *All Blues*. It's so good to settle down and listen to a good vinyl record by pausing our analytical sense and relishing the musicians' performances. One last detail that I can't overlook is the total

absence of background noise when playing a vinyl, whether it's a 33 or 45 rpm record. If only for this aspect, this turntable deserves several marks of excellence.

#### Conclusion

So, is the performance of the *AT-LP7*, in its original state, perfectible? The answer is yes. The fact remains that this is a very sensible purchase that, first, will offer you excellent service for several years at a more than reasonable price considering the quality of the mechanics and its ageless *look*. You will be able to considerably improve the sound at your own pace and according to your budget. Simply put, **Audio-Technica's AT-LP7** will allow you to enter the world of high-end devices and will be a solid foundation from which you will be able to achieve above-average quality playback.

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$1,199. 99

Warranty: 1 year, parts and labor

Manufacturer/distributor: Audio-Technica, Tel.: 450.506.0245, [www.audio-technica.com](http://www.audio-technica.com)

#### Mediagraphy

The Beatles, Abbey Road

Jennifer Warnes, Famous Blue Raincoat

Miles Davis, Kind of Blue

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# *Long live analog and long live music!*

By ADRIEN ROUAH

It arrived in a beautiful white box, this all black vinyl turntable in the version that was delivered to me. And as soon as it was received, it was unpacked and installed. Easy, it's ready-to-use or almost! This turntable, called *Roundtable S* by **Musical Fidelity**, is equipped with an already installed **Ortofon** brand cartridge, and it is the *2M Red* model that was selected. All that's left to do is to mount the arm counterweight, as it's safer to have an arm travel without its counterweight during transport, to make the usual connections and balance adjustments, before you can say *Let the music begin!* This preparation is not very long.

**Musical Fidelity** named its turntable *Roundtable S*, and once installed, it was well named. Indeed, the right and left sides of the main base are rounded, which gives an unusual and pleasantly wider than usual look to this turntable. The overall appearance is beautiful, elegant even in its all-black livery with glossy parts and other matt parts. The arm is straight and made of solid aluminum. It is harmoniously proportioned. Like the top, the main base is made of high-density *MDF* and has

3 rubberized insulation points that ensure satisfactory seating for the turntable.

The *Roundtable S* is driven by an external toric belt and the speed change (33 or 45 rpm) is done by moving the belt over the drive pulley. The installation is quite easy, no worries on that side, and neither on the speed change side. Let's mention that apart from a few moments of nostalgia (or curiosity to listen to some 45 rpm of our youth), it will be rare to change speeds on this turntable. If the manufacturer obviously wanted to create a simple and performing vinyl turntable, with the main attribute of being *ready to use*, this is corroborated by the fact that the *Roundtable S* is proposed with its own detachable connection cable, which makes it possible to use this one, or one's own if one does not want to change one's listening habits. Power is supplied by means of a small wall-mounted transformer, which is connected to the back of the turntable. The starting rotation is given by a switch located under the main base, in front of the left side. But why say on the left side, what does it matter? Well that's important and it underlines the concern that the manufacturer has towards the user who radically separates the start-up of the rotation from the manipulation related to the



listening device. The *Roundtable S* is offered without cover, and it will have to be provided as an option if you wish to protect your turntable when it is not in use. Even if the manufacturer tells us, quite rightly, that the covers induce some microphonic resonance during listening, it seems to me that it is nevertheless indispensable when the turntable is not in use. We are in the presence of a well thought-out vinyl turntable, very well built and very pleasant to look at.

#### Installation details

True to **TED Magazine's** recommendations for many years, I install this **Musical Fidelity** *Roundtable S* on a perfectly horizontal stand and I will listen using the supplied cables and the factory installed **Ortofon 2M Red** cartridge, exactly as a future buyer would receive the device. The balancing of the tonearm and the adjusted weight for the cartridge concerned did not cause any inconvenience. The *Roundtable S* is designed to be *ready to use*, and a few *Allen* wrenches and a scale are included in the package, making our lives easier and allowing us to start listening quickly. The presence of a pair of white gloves adds a delicate and respectful side to the installation for future owners, of course, but also during the installation done by a **TED Magazine** contributing editor who has to observe a device from every angle.

#### Listening

This return of vinyl records that I've been observing for a few years now will have allowed me at least one thing, a rediscovery of all my *LPs* (and of my *45s*, to live the nostalgic moment I told you about earlier). I believe that for some readers, it is the same, while for others, the return of vinyl is a real discovery, and so much the better! The musical choice made, let's move on to the description of what this *Roundtable S* vinyl turntable offers by **Musical Fidelity**.

I simply start with classical music with **Johann Sebastian Bach**, then follows **Iggy Pop** for musical dehusking, and finally, I compare a beautiful female voice and a beautiful male voice, which will test the *Roundtable S's* versatility.

As I use an **Ortofon** cartridge (*2M Bronze*) on my personal turntable, I immediately recognize the characteristic signature of the brand. It is already a first good point to be able to say that the choice of the proposed cartridge fits perfectly with this turntable. I remove immediately a doubt by saying this, because one could think that if one opts for *ready-to-listen*, with an imposed cartridge, it is necessary that the proposal holds the road (or the groove)! On this music by **Johann Sebastian Bach**, the attacks are frank and the virtuosity perfectly evident for this first musical confrontation. On this album without visuals (the record was sold without a picture on the cover) with

## MUSICAL FIDELITY ROUNDTABLE S TURNTABLE AND ORTOFON 2M RED CARTRIDGE



simply an accompanying text to lower the price, while keeping the artistic value and the recording proper to the **Harmonia Mundi** brand, that is to say prestigious, we understand that the bet is won. The recording is almost perfect and has enough to overturn the most skeptical towards analog.

With the **Stooges**, you shake up the speakers a bit and, at the same time, the whole set up. With this choice, a working reference for me, I know that the vinyl record is superior to the compact disc, without really being able to explain it. Maybe the vinyl is just better at dissecting the gently difficult message? Careful listening to *Dirt* confirms that the *Roundtable S* is not afraid of difficulties.

This is followed by voice comparisons, so that I can realize the emotional potential of the playback. The lady first, a great lady who charmed us for life. Beautiful melodies that can be hummed and that remain in our memory. **Sade's** recordings have always been of high quality and it is a brilliant performance offered by the **Musical Fidelity** set. Exact voice timbre and adequate positioning, the whole **Sade** universe transports us so much the restitution is vibrant.

As far as the male voice is concerned, **Jacques Bertin's** voice is bewitching and perfectly appropriate for trying out a new turntable. Without being a pure demonstration, I quickly realize that the *Roundtable S* can show a lot of finesse. The song *Carnet* is aptly unveiled without artifice or superfluity, and one falls under the spell while concentrating on the various musics.

### Conclusion

If you want to change your turntable and orient yourself on this one, or if you are a newcomer to the world of materialized audio, the *Musical Fidelity Roundtable S* is the right turntable to consider. Of course, the unit as proposed will give complete satisfaction, and no musical choice will displease it. The manufacturer, by providing replacement tools, scales, positioning jigs for the cartridge and *Allen* wrenches, invites us to try the adventure with other cartridges, if we are so inclined. But know that as I received it and analyzed it, no one will be bored by choosing the *Roundtable S* turntable to satisfy a new passion or simply to rediscover vinyl records.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

**Price:** \$910

**Warranty:** 2 years for mechanical portion, 5 years for electronic portion, parts and labour

**Distributor:** Focal-Naim Canada, Tel.: 1 866.271.5689, focal-naim.com; www.musicalfidelity.com

### Mediagraphy

Johann Sebastian Bach, Violin Concertos, Harmonia Mundi, HM113

Stooges, Funhouse, Elektra, EKS 74071

Sade, Promise, Epic, EPC 86318

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

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# CLASSICAL MUSIC

By CHRISTOPHE HUSS



## THE DISC OF THE MONTH

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN  
FRANK PETER ZIMMERMANN  
(violin),  
MARTIN HELMCHEN (piano).**

**Sonatas for violin and piano 1-4.**

Bis, SACD, 2517.

Interpretation : \*\*\*\*\*

Technique : \*\*\*\*\*

The discography of *Beethoven's Violin and Piano Sonatas* is very extensive, but the association of big stars is not always a guarantee of success. These sonatas are not athletic competitions (**Perlman/Ashkenazy**) and the interpretive style has evolved to be more fluid than in the days of **Grumiaux/Haskil**, the dream team of a few decades ago. The other recurring problem in the discography is a chain of sound disasters across the whole range of possible errors, from soapbox sound to train station hall sound. Star tandems such as **Szeryng/Rubinstein, Oistrakh/Oborine** or **Francescatti/Casadesus** are thus evacuated. **Hans Kipfer** at the **Siemens Villa** in Berlin has found the right balance and the combination of **Frank Peter Zimmermann** and **Martin Helmchen** is as creative, humble, imaginative and fruitful as one could hope for. **Helmchen's** feline touch and **Zimmermann's** very fine playing bring us a myriad of musical twists and turns on a palette of unprecedented nuances

## THE VINYL FEEL

**BEDRICH SMETANA**

**Ma Vlast (My Homeland).**

**Bamberg Symphony, Jakub Hrusa.**

Accentus, 3 LP, ACC, 40482.

<https://vimeo.com/434471476>

Interpretation : \*\*\*\*\*

Technique : \*\*\*\*\*

The phenomenon of vinyl in the consumption of musical recordings has only very rarely given rise, in classical music, to specific out of the ordinary projects.

But here we are suddenly plunged back into the 1970s and the **Sheffield Lab'** direct engraving vinyl epic. The project came from **Rainer Maillard**, the director of the **Emil Berliner Studios** in Berlin, who revived the *direct-to-disc* process (the matrix is directly engraved on the lacquer matrix during the recording), who wanted to enable the **Berlin Philharmonic** to sell limited editions of some of its concerts. For its first trip outside Berlin, the engraving machine went to Bamberg for a recording of **Smetana's My Homeland**. The six symphonic poems, including the famous **Moldau**, are recorded on six separate sides, each spinning at the speed of 45 revolutions. It's a real pleasure: we are in a real aesthetic project linked to the vinyl support and to the maximum possible quality. No handling, no editing, a fully analog production line, a very natural capture. This kind of object, a limited series of 1,111 copies, is destined to become a cult object, especially since vinyl is its exclusive medium (no CD version). Musically, what's happening is electric: it's a real concert for the microphones described by the producer in a short video by a succulent Germanism: *When it's on, everyone knows it's sausage time!*

## SOUND RECORDING OF THE MONTH

**FRANZ LISZT  
JULIA HERMANNSKI (piano).**

**Tannhäuser Overture, Consolations, Ballad n° 2, Ständchen.**

MDG, SACD, 904 2180-6.

Interpretation : \*\*\*\*\*

Technique : \*\*\*\*\*

This disc completes our *Disc of the Month* of the previous issue, the release by **Marc-André Hamelin** dedicated to the paraphrases of operas by **Liszt** and **Thalberg**. It evokes the excellent work of the German **MDG** label and

pays tribute to the recently deceased **Reimund Grimm** (the **G** in **MDG** is him). In its *SACDs*, **MDG** favors the 2+2+2 approach rather than the 5.1 approach, which consists of the two main front speakers, the two front risers and the two rear sides. The disc can also be listened to in 5.1 of course. There is a daring sound bet here, because we literally have the impression of sitting behind the pianist and having an image of the keyboard from left (low) to right (high), but with a coherence due to the choice of the concert hall of an abbey. The audacity lies in the very clear and frank resonance of the trebles, a rather rare choice in piano recordings. But it's a superb spatialization, and you never hear the hammers or windows of the place (the kind of feeling you had with **Gerhard Oppitz's Haenssler** recordings). If you like muffled pianos, run away, but if you find that trebles too rarely sound honest, here's a recording of a real and dazzling honesty.

## A WORTHWHILE BOX SET

**ZUBIN MEHTA**

**Los Angeles Philharmonic Complete Decca Recordings.**

Decca, 38 CD, 485 037 4.

Interpretations : \*\*\*\*\*

Technique : \*\*\*\*\*

If you're looking to spoil yourself with a luxurious gift, here it is. **Zubin Mehta** conducted the **Los Angeles Philharmonic** between 1962 and 1978, a term that began when he was *Music Director* of the **OSM**. He considerably improved the quality and the image of this orchestra where he was succeeded by the great gentleman of conducting, **Carlo Maria Giulini**. The **Zubin Mehta** discographic saga, recorded by **Decca's** technical teams of the great era, began in 1967-68 and includes a number of legendary recordings including *The Planets*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,

*The Rite of Spring*, etc.. But the box set, which contains a whole history of sound with the original covers, makes us rediscover many things, including a very large complete set of **Tchaikovsky's Symphonies**, a major *5th Symphony* by **Mahler** and great symphonic poems by **Liszt**, including an unsurpassed *Battle of the Huns*.

This box is full of nostalgia. It documents a conductor who was then raising a legitimate enthusiasm for his blend of energy and generosity.

## NEW RELEASES

**JOHN SEBASTIEN BACH  
PAVEL KOLESNIKOV**

**Goldberg Variations**

Hyperion, CDA, 68338

Interpretation : \*\*\*\*\*

Technique : \*\*\*\*\*

We told you in our last issue about the aesthetic shipwreck of **Lang Lang's Goldberg Variations**, a sort of self-dazzling journey attempting to reconcile a romantic approach with a dissection of phrases and lines.

And here is **Pavel Kolesnikov**, one of the pianists of the young generation that we pay attention to the most, along with **Benjamin Grosvenor**, **Beatrice Rana** or **Lukas Geniušas**. And what a contrast! What a musician! **Kolesnikov** shines light through the musical text. Ornaments (small notes added) never interfere with the speech. And speech there is, because the narrative is permanent. **Kolesnikov** is the absolute antidote to **Lang Lang**: inventiveness is at its peak, the taste is perfect, the dazzle is permanent. The analysis is, basically, very simple. From the very first note, **Lang Lang** thinks he is the **Glenn Gould** of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while **Kolesnikov** is one of those who, after **Evgeni Koroliov**, **Murray Perahia**, **Alexandre Tharaud** and **Beatrice Rana**, allow us to move on.



**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN  
ANDREW WAN (violon),  
CHARLES RICHARD-HAMELIN  
(piano).**

**Sonatas for violin and piano  
# 1, 2, 3 and 5.**

Analekta, AN2, 8795.

Interpretation: \*\*\*\*

Technique: \*\*\*

Why comment on another disc of **Beethoven's Violin and Piano Sonatas** in the same issue? Because it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume of an integral currently in progress of which the 1<sup>st</sup> volume had been very well received. Regardless of the fact that **Zimmermann** and **Helmchen** have just more or less swept the competition away in the same works and at the same time, there is a small zest of charm that has disappeared and which does not seem to be the artists' doing. This is all the more surprising since the location of the recording and the technical team are the same one year apart. But probably by wanting to create a more objective sound, the sound envelope is drier and the musical product sounds more clinical and less likeable. The complicity between the two artists remains obvious, as does their joy of playing and the quality of their work, but **Zimmermann-Helmchen** are on another level.

**FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN  
LOUIS LORTIE (piano)**

**Piano works (vol. 6) : Mazurkas,  
Polonaises, Variations, Fantaisie.**

Chandos, 20117.

Interpretation : \*\*\*\*

Technique : \*\*\*\*

The sound bias is close to that of **MDG's Liszt** disc: the highs flow freely in this recording made at the **Potton Hall** in Dunwich, Suffolk. This is all the more important since **Louis Lortie** chose a **Fazioli** piano, a make known for the radiance of his instruments in the upper register. Everything is now very well established in the **Lortie-Chandos**

partnership, the piano and its tuning, the recording location and the recording process.

Volume 6 of the Quebec pianist's **Chopin Complete Works** asks some interesting questions. **Louis Lortie** seems to be a pianist of phrases and structures, therefore more inspired by the *Fantasy in F minor* op. 49, the *Polonaises* N<sup>os</sup>. 3 and 4 and the *Variations on "La ci darem la mano"* than by the *Mazurkas*, short sketches and dances, in which **Pavel Kolesnikov** had so enchanted us. Very nice full-length suite, then, but it is not the *Mazurkas* (there are sixteen of them here) that will be the main asset.

**GEORG FRIEDRICH HÄNDEL  
SOLOISTS, NAMUR CHAMBER  
CHOIR, MILLENIUM ORCHES-  
TRA, LEONARDO GARCÍA  
ALARCÓN.**

**Samson.**

Ricercar, 2 CD, RIC 411.

Interpretation: \*\*\*\*\*

Technique: \*\*\*

It's fabulous. If you want to hear to what degree of incandescence music can bring performers, this oratorio, composed by **Handel** just after *The Messiah*, performed by **Matthew Newlin, Klara Ek, Lawrence Zazzo, Luigi Di Donato**, the **Namur Chamber Choir**, the **Millennium Orchestra**, conducted by **Leonardo García Alarcón** is the most eloquent example. The Argentinian conductor overtakes in passion and ardour **Nikolaus Harnoncourt** who until now signed the reference version (with the same choice of score). But it is worth pointing out, especially to a readership of *hifi* aficionados, that this is a recorded concert and not a scrupulously premeditated production for the record. The church is therefore a little too reverberant and one hears some incidental stage noises. This should not distract you from this release, but it is not a perfect discographic object.

**EMILIE MAYER  
NDR Radiophilharmonie, LEO  
MCFALL.**

**Symphonies n° 1 and 2.**

CPO, 555 293-2

Interpretation: \*\*\*\*

Technique: \*\*\*\*

**Emilie Luise Friderica Mayer**

(1812-1883) is one of those forgotten composers of the *Romantic* period who are now resurfacing (**Louise Farrenc** also comes to mind). **Emilie Mayer**, a student of **Carl Loewe**, composed eight symphonies. The first two date from 1847 (a comparison will be made with the *Trios* by **Clara Schumann** and **Fanny Mendelssohn** - see below) and are in a style inherited from **Carl Maria von Weber** and **Schubert** (*Symphonies* N<sup>os</sup>. 4 or 6), but with a denser atmosphere and texture. It is not an essential repertoire, but it is a well executed romantic music, which in no way deserves to be forgotten. For lovers of new discoveries, this is one of the symphonic finds of the year.

**FANNY MENDELSSOHN  
THE NASH ENSEMBLE.**

**Piano Trio in D minor,  
String Quartet in E flat major. + Clara  
Schumann: Piano Trio in G minor.**

Hyperion, CDA, 68307.

Interpretation: \*\*\*\*

Technique: \*\*\*\*

It is one of the repertoire rediscoveries of last year. Even if **Clara Schumann's** name is highlighted for her 28-minute *Piano Trio*, which opens the disc and convinces us of her talent, notably in a *Finale, Allegretto*, which her husband could envy her, it is **Fanny Mendelssohn** who wins the day with her own *Trio in D minor*, which dates from the same period (1846/47) but evolves to an even higher level of inspiration. This is a great piano trio from the entire classical repertoire, which the **Nash Ensemble** plays with ardor and élan. The *String Quartet* of 1834 is a small



notch below, but among the discs devoted to women composers here is a very nice opus.

**SERGEÏ RACHMANINOV  
SERGEI BABAYAN (piano).**

**Préludes, Études-Tableaux et  
Moments musicaux.**

Deutsche Grammophon, 483 9181.

Interpretation: \*\*\*\*\*

Technique: \*\*\*\*\*

**Sergei Babayan** is a very big recruit for the **Deutsche Grammophon** catalog. He dazzled us in 2018 with his accomplice **Martha Argerich** in his transcriptions of **Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet**. Alone, facing **Rachmaninov**, he is immense and this first solo disc for **DG** is a miracle of tactile subtlety culminating in the *Étude-tableau op. 39 n° 2* (track 7). It should also be noted that this disc is really conceived as a musical and emotional journey through **Rachmaninov's** work where the scores respond to each other. It is certainly one of the great records of the year.



# BLUES

By PIERRE JOBIN

## DWANE DIXON

### Betting On A Gambling Man

Self-production, DDP0719

**Dwane Dixon**, a native Montrealer, wields guitars and vocals with ease and naturalness. *Gambling Man*, his third self-produced album, on which he plays all instruments: guitar, bass, keyboards, drums and harmonica, is rather eclectic, including bluesrock, rockabilly, acoustic blues, and even hard rock. His dynamic energy and catchy boogie riffs set the place on fire for shared and contagious celebrations. The title play *Gambling Man* is inspired by the experiences of his father's gambling life and his mother's wise thoughts in this context. It's well executed in every way. All the pieces on this CD are written, produced and performed 100% by **Dwane Dixon** with brilliance and know-how. When he slows down for mid-tempo or slower pieces, he undoubtedly demonstrates balance and agility, as well as a voice fully in tune with his guitar playing whether electric, slide or acoustic. *The Awakening*, the instrumental track that closes the opus, gives off psychedelic emanations, and that is exemplary of the breadth and variety of styles that his music judiciously renders on this release. *Gambling Man*, a record deserving of attention.

## JACK DE KEYSER

### Tribute

Star Records, CD 2512

**Jack de Keyser** is one of the best guitarists in Canada and elsewhere. This renowned guitarist, singer and songwriter enjoys an enviable reputation, having accompanied the greatest, from **Etta James** to **Blue Rodeo** to the fantastic **Otis Rush** and **Duke Robillard**, and so many others. This winner of two *Junos* and seven *Maple Blues Awards*, who performs in Canada and internationally, comes to us with *Tribute*, his

twelfth album. This opus pays tribute to the different musical styles that punctuate and animate classic blues and classic rock, including funk, soul, reggae rock, latin rock, and more! This experienced guitar player has integrated, along the way, all this music that he renders with relevance and know-how. Here we are dealing with a master at writing, playing and singing who performs with the energy of a beginner. He is accompanied by a quartet of brilliant musicians, **Alan Duffy** on bass, **Richard Thornton** on saxophone, congas and percussion, **Nick Succi** on piano and organ and **Peter Grimmer** on drums. *Tribute* by **Jack de Keyser** is a rolling fire of flamboyant tunes and emotions to be tasted and experienced.

## LAURA TATE

### Live From El Paso

811 Gold Records LLC

In this concert recorded under the stars at the **McKelligon Canyon Amphitheater** in El Paso, Texas, **Laura Tate** appears relaxed, in full control and radiant. You can hear it! This trained actress and singer, after having trodden the stages off-Broadway and in other New York productions, after having performed in theaters throughout the United States, as well as with touring companies, arrives cheerful and warm with a hand-picked band, including a piano and a brass section, to present us with tracks from her four albums, as well as from composers she is particularly fond of. The result is an eclectic performance characterized by an assumed professionalism and a contagious *joie de vivre*. The songs she performs range from blues ballads to catchy rock and jazzy tracks. It is a pleasure to hear her and to imagine her moving in such a friendly atmosphere producing such fluid music! She evolves



with an invigorating naturalness and with the ease of a fish in the water. *Grammy*-nominated Texan singer **Theresa James** is the chosen chorister here. The playfulness of such a brilliantly given performance is refreshing. **Laura Tate**, *Live From El Paso*, pure pleasure!

## NEW MOON JELLY ROLL FREEDOM ROCKERS

### Volume 1

Stony Plain Records, SPCD 1416

### New Moon Jelly Roll Freedom Rockers

is the name of a one-time band created through random encounters. It is intergenerational and consists of **Luther Dickinson** on guitars, mandolin, bass and vocals, his brother **Cody** on drums, washboard and vocals, both from **North Mississippi Allstars**, their friend **Jimbo Mathus**, ex-leader of the **Squirrel Nut Zippers** on guitar and vocals, veteran **Charlie Musselwhite** on harmonica and vocals, **Alvin Youngblood Hart** on guitar, mandolin and vocals and **Jim Dickinson**, the father of the two others, and renowned director on piano and vocals. It is a gathering of musicians reunited around the pleasure of sharing the good old blues in complete simplicity. These recording sessions took place in a couple of late-night sessions at **Jim Dickinson's** ranch



studio. Everyone brings a few songs and assumes the role of leader or accompanist, depending on the rotation. The concept of the album is simple and the result is original and authentic. Recorded in 2008 and finalized by **Jim Dickinson** in his studio before his death in 2009, it will have taken a dozen years before the recording of these convivial sessions was made available to the public. Old blues, talents and friendships form the unique fabric of this impromptu jewel. Volume 2 of these sessions is scheduled for release in spring 2021. **NMJFR** is a beautiful meeting of passionate and rooted people in the service of letting the good times flow and a *Roots* music.

# JAZZ

By CHRISTOPHE RODRIGUEZ

## MICHEL LEGRAND

### Le monde instrumental Jazz et musiques de film 1953-1962

**Conception by Olivier Julien**  
Frémeaux & associés / Naxos,  
One had to dare and the result exceeds our expectations. If the composer / pianist and sometimes singer, **Michel Legrand**, was not the most pleasant man, his compositions were inscribed in the firmament of music. Who hasn't whistled one day the theme of *The Young Girls of Rochefort*, *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, *Donkey Skin* or that of the *Moulines de mon cœur* from the *Thomas Crown affair*? **Michel Legrand** was a machine that worked tirelessly until the last hours of his life, and this box set, oh how magical, retraces, in part, his career before the great hours (a nod to the dialogues of *Les Tontons flingueurs*). Drawing here and there, like a big-hearted archaeologist, **Olivier Julien** exhumes through this **Legrand** box set, which touches on rock and roll (1956), his collaborations to the music of *Lost Continent*, *Riffi*, *Grisbi*, *The Counterfeiters of Paris*, *The Gentleman from Epsom*, *Wasteland*, etc. What's more, we find ourselves in the presence of discs that have not completely disappeared, but which are resold at a high price on

specialized sites. Among the pearls, **Legrand** in *Rio* (1957), *Paris jazz Piano* (1960) and of course, **Legrand Jazz** (1958), with **Miles Davis**, **John Coltrane**, **Bill Evans**, **Ben Webster** and **Donald Byrd**. Other surprises await you with this immense gift that honors both the musician and the music.

## KLAUS KÖENIG

### Jazz Live Trio Music for The Gentle Man

TCB / Montreux Jazz Festival / Naxos  
By chance, it is possible to make very nice discoveries such as that of the German pianist **Klaus Koenig**. If he was unknown in my humble dictionary (shame on me), his record across the Atlantic is particularly impressive. Since his graduation from the conservatory in 1962, his path has crossed that of the jazz gotha. His trio, which produced over 100 recordings and was the subject of a documentary, by the way, including trumpeters **Clark Terry** / **Franco Ambrosetti** / saxophonists **Phil Woods** / **Cliff Jordan** / **Johnny Griffin**, collaborations are on the honor roll. In 1988, **Klaus Koenig**, had to stop his activities because of arthritis. He found a way to fight this insidious evil, and in 2012 / 2013, he re-formed his trio. In 2019, under the lucky star of the



**Montreux Jazz Festival**, he entered the studio with this ode to the good or kind man (*Gentle Man*), and believe your columnist, it was strong. Far from reminiscing about the past, the nine personal tracks are dynamic without being revolutionary, in the tradition of **Bud Powell** / **Charlie Parker** to whom he pays a beautiful tribute in *Line for Bird*. Surrounded by young musicians of which the drummer is strangely reminiscent of **Bill Stewart**'s athletic strike, the whole thing is listened to patiently with that *je ne sais quoi* of happiness. As energetic (*Triology* / *Never for Ever*) as it is poetic (*Echo's Lament* / *Laila's Lullaby*), *Music for the Gentle Man* sums up the subtleties of a jazz that is resolutely modern as well as free, and which also exalts the complicity as well as the art of the trio.

## CHRISTINE TASSAN QUINTETTE

**Voyage intérieur**  
Les productions des imposteurs / Select  
*Manouche* at heart, the very good and inspiring guitarist **Christine Tassan** offers us a very personal record. With

her *Voyage intérieur* that sums up its influences particularly well, she will embellish your winter, then make you forget a little about the miasms of COVID. In ten dynamic tracks, marked by the seal of bop, Brazilian music, swing of course, blues and poetry, this new release turns out to be inspiring and joyful. Surrounded by a luxurious quintet, with a special mention for clarinetist / saxophonist **Aurélien Tomasi**, **Christine Tassan** twirls, honors jazz as well as its satellites. Almost a blessing!

## OLGA KONKOVA TRIO

**Moscow Tears**  
Dreyer Gaido / Naxos  
Unfortunately, we don't hear much about Moscow jazz and yet! In the pile of new releases, pianist **Olga Konkova** should definitely seduce you. Recorded in front of an audience, *Moscow Tears*, which is far from being sad, is in the line of a jazz one cannot be more solid which oscillates between **Bud Powell** and **Bill Evans**. *All The Things You Are* and *Moscow Tears* alone will suffice to win you over.



# ROCK PROGRESSIF

By RICHARD GUAY

## GAZPACHO

### Fireworker

[www.gazpachoworld.com](http://www.gazpachoworld.com) ;  
<https://kscopemusic.bandcamp.com/album/fireworker>

It is redundant to marvel at each new Gazpacho opus. If there is a band whose records can be bought with your eyes closed and without having listened to them beforehand, this is the one. Their eleventh attempt is not only no exception to the rule, but will delight its happy buyers even more. In fact, according to the Progarchives webzine, it is one of only three albums in the series to have received a rating higher than 4, the other two being *Night* (2007) and *Tick Tock* (2009). If Soyouz disappointed some (not me, in any case) because of its overly heavy atmosphere, its dark lyrics, although appropriate, given the very sad story that it evokes, and certain passages deemed too accessible, *Fireworker* will, on the other hand, make the unanimity among the fans of the most Norwegian of Norwegian bands, approaching, in particular, the formation's most creative works such as *Night* (2007) or *Molok* (2015). It is also the most difficult to access and several attentive listening sessions will be necessary to grasp all its subtleties. Intropective passages are obviously in order, but several additions should be noted, such as particularly complex vocal arrangements, even including choruses that explode over and over again in *Space Cowboy*, the epic 20-minute suite, or more experimental passages in *Sapien*, the other suite (15 min). The celestial voice of Jan Henrik Ohme, the nebulous keyboards of Thomas Alexander Andersen and the incisive guitar of Jon-arne Vilbo are, as always, in perfect harmony. The context, still a little pessimistic, as Scandinavian mentality dictates, is however less gloomy than on the previous albums and falls back on more or less penetrating existentialist lyrics. Unsurprisingly, this sextet of

talented Vikings delivers the goods, as it usually does ...

## LA MASCHERA DI CERA

### S.E.I.

<https://lomascheradicera.bandcamp.com/>

After seven years of endless waiting, Alessandro Corvaglia (vocals), Agostino Macor (keyboards), and Fabio Zuffanti (bass) restart *La Maschera Di Cera* and return with a sixth album. The previous one, *Le Porte Del Domani* (2013) had the distinction of offering both an Italian and English version (*The Gates of Tomorrow*). None of that for this new release, which is content to become again a good old *Maschera di Cera* classic, Italian-speaking and faithful to the style of yesteryears. S.E.I., the Separazione – Egoatria - Inganno acronym (Separation – Narcissism - Hoax), in a refined RPI style, offers us nothing more than what is already known about this group since the beginning of the millennium. This in itself is excellent news. Rather short (42 small minutes which pass much too quickly), the opus is divided into three parts of which the first, a 21 min suite (*Il Tempo Millenario*), structured like a symphony of classical music and which quickly announces the colors which will obviously be green, white and red! Corvaglia's dramatic and characteristic voice, ideal for supporting a text that is likely to be disturbing, Zuffanti's soft and creative bass and Macor's

vintage keyboards quickly place us in a familiar and comforting universe! The introduction, boldly inspired by Tarkus of Emerson, Lake and Palmer's *Eruption* (a reminder in case there are young people reading this article), makes you smile with pleasure. A new woodwind master, Martin Grice, adds the saxophone and flute touches necessary to any self-respecting RPI album. S. E. I. is extremely classic and rather accessible for a *Maschera Di Cera*. Each track is perfectly put together, pleasant and has its share of surprises. This is obviously not *Il Grande Labirinto* (2003), but simply a darned good RPI record, as playful as one could wish, masterfully built and ensuring the durability of a band that it is so good to see again..

## RIKARD SJÖBLOM'S GUNGLY

### Alone Together

<http://www.rikardsjoblom.com/>  
Rikard Sjöblom, the tireless composer and multi-instrumentalist who, together with David Zackrisson, founded the sublime band *Beardfish*, which unfortunately ended its activities in 2016, is tirelessly pursuing his musical career with the same zeal he once put into his beloved group. *Alone Together* is thus the fifth release of his side-project *Gungfly* after *Please Be Quiet* (2009),

*Lamentations* (2011), *On her Journey to the Sun* (2017), and, of course, the exceptional *Friendship* (2018). *Gungfly* is however a real formation in which is Sjöblom, of course, and, let us add, occupying the greatest place, but also the Diamant brothers, Rasmus (bass) and Petter (drums) present on all the records. This project is in addition to *Beardfish's* eight albums as well as the ten solo albums of his vintage among which we must mention *Cyklonmännan* (2006) and the *Unbendable Sleep* (2016) which stand out. On the other hand, this unbridled production has no negative impact on the quality of the products, partly because this artist changes his style somewhat as the albums go by, which is the prerogative of great composers who love to get out of their comfort zone. *Alone Together* is thus very different from its predecessors. Very accessible, rather light, the theme of this opus is the difficulties of entering into relationships with others, a subject that Sjöblom is particularly fond of. The playful musical content, which underpins this light, bitter-sweet and almost humorous text, points in all directions at once and is most entertaining. The first single, *The Traveler*, catchy and twirling, is worth the purchase of the record on its own. Unlike *Friendship* (2018), which retained several links with *Beardfish*, the presence of Zackrisson at the time no doubt having something to do with it, this new opus breaks with this heritage and aims to be much more atypical. The progressive content is very rich, certainly, because of the complexity of the music, the chords and the arrangements, but it will not be by maintaining the nostalgia of the late cult group that *Alone Together* will seduce you and will lead you into the sweet madness of an extraordinary artist.





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# OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

By DAN BEHRMAN

## ROBERTO LÓPEZ

### Kaleido Stròpico

Curura Musique, 2019, CUR-05012  
www.robertolopez.ca

Born in Bogota, the capital of Colombia, where the bewitching and omnipresent *Cumbia* comes from, **Roberto López** has been thriving in Quebec since the beginning of the century while playing with his creativity and talent to allow those who love to listen to him, all over the world, to have fun!

Looking rather reserved with his little glasses, one would think he was building hydroelectric dams, but make no mistake, his music generates more kilowatts per hour than La Romaine while, when he is on stage, the sluice gates of the dam open all at once and what follows is part of the unforgettable experience of the spectators who were there to bathe in the transcendent, 100% psychedelic-pan-latino sound of his musical universe.

**Roberto López** is, first and foremost, a more than accomplished guitarist who also excels on bass, tiple, keyboards and multiple percussion instruments, which he uses profusely in this album, which is his fifth. A great connoisseur of Afro-Latino and Caribbean rhythms and melodies, he flirts with jazz, funk and electro, an enticing combination that has earned him numerous national awards and nominations. His tours have taken him and his musicians all over the Americas.

Strongly influenced by **Carlos Santana's** dirty and retro guitar style, *Kaleido Stròpico* joyfully combines the wild rhythms of cumbia, porro, pachanga and descarga with the feverish intensity of funk and even motown thanks to the constant input of a rock solid brass and rythm section. **Zal Cissokho's** aerial kora brings an afro-wonderful touch to *Guayaba y Limòn*, which is perhaps my favorite song, although it is difficult for me to begin to give an order of preference to the ten tracks that make up this album, as they all have something appealing about them.

We also owe the musical and artistic production, recording and mixing of this sparkling album to **Roberto**, who also provides the vocals, as well as all the string instruments, and proves to be an outstanding jack-of-all-trades.

Surrounded by musicians of great talent, with whom he has been collaborating for a long time, namely **Sacha Daoud** (drums), **David Carbonneau** (trumpet), **Bruno Lamarche** (tenor sax), **Mario Allard** (baritone sax), **Matthieu Van Vliet** (trombone), **Zal Cissokho** (kora) without forgetting **Jairo Gómez** and **Kullak Viger-Rojas** as choristers, **Roberto López** has once again managed to produce an original, powerful and absolutely motivating sound with *Kaleido Stròpico* whose career and success are now part of the annals of the Canadian World scene, and that's quite fine.

Those of you who are interested in *Cumbia* will particularly like *Ya No Estoy Aquí (I'm no longer here)*, a hard-hitting film by Mexican director **Fernando Frias de la Parra** that revolves around the socio-musical phenomenon of *Cumbia Kolombiana*, which is all the rage in northern Mexico, especially in the city of Monterrey. This film, dating from 2019, is available on **Netflix** and I highly recommend it.

## CHESHIRE CARR

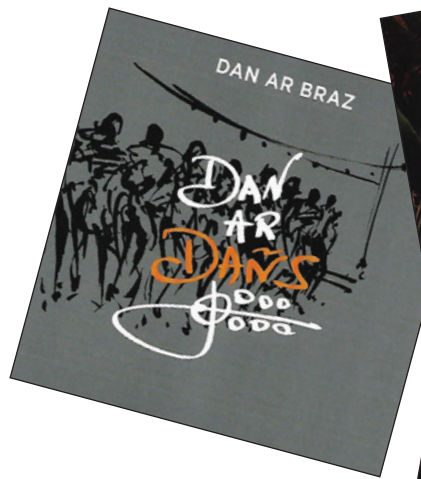
### Dawn Comes Crashing

Self-produced, 2020,  
www.cheshirecarr.com

I gave you a little background on the new, and second, album of the Montreal folk-rock collective **Cheshire Carr** in the last issue of **TED Magazine**. The lack of space, and the fact that I only had a CD-R without any artistic and technical information, did not allow me to expand further on this band and on this album that I describe as exceptional and wonderful.

Having since received the additional information, I am delighted to share with you the wonderful breath of freshness, candor and harmonious and simple beauty emanating from this unique and interesting ensemble evolving in the friendly, trendy and authentically Montreal neighborhood of *La Petite Patrie* overflowing gently on the *Mile-End*.

Composed of two inspired and inspiring women and four men, **Cheshire Carr** has been refining its lyrical and sonic identity for several years by performing in all kinds of official and semi-official venues. Any excuse is good to present their sound,



their intelligent and sensitive lyrics and their music straight out of the Great North American Epic as we could imagine it only a few decades ago.

Although 100% original in their musical approach, there are sympathetic nods to artists whom we love and appreciate a lot and who have undeniably marked their era. **Leonard Cohen**, **Cowboy Junkies**, **Blue Rodeo**, **David Crosby** and **Neil Young** to name but a few.

The melodies are simple and, also, very beautiful. The vocal harmonies and instrumentation are perfect and make the little hairs on the forearms bristling with pleasure. The warm voices of **Geneviève Cooke** and **Ariel Harrod**, who wrote the music and the lyrics, transport the listener to a different place that reminds us of some mythical road trips straight out of a novel by **Kérouac** or **Steinbeck**.

There is no fussing with **Cheshire Carr**. Everything is genuine and very beautiful. It's that simple!

Unlike the first album which included two songs in French, the nine tracks of *Dawn Comes Crashing* are exclusively in English and I was subtly touched by *Fallen*, *Hold Me Down*, *A Way Away* and *Weeping Mary* of which the texts and sounds are particularly moving. The composition of the band is essentially the same as on the previous album with the addition of a piano, a trombone and some electronic effects that are very welcome.

If Montreal has always stood out with an original sound affirming its distinct musical identity, we can certainly say that **Cheshire Carr** is helping to carry the torch of this beautiful and solid tradition.

## DAN AR BRAZ

### Dan Ar Dans

Self-produced, 2020, DAB06 / DB10  
www.danarbraz.com

Originally from Quimper, in Brittany, **Dan Ar Braz**, songwriter, composer and guitarist of legend, is an unavoidable

jewel in the vast world of Celtic music in general and Breton contemporary music in particular!

Having made his debut in the 1960s with the band **Môr**, **Dan** recorded and toured for fifteen years with the equally legendary **Alan Stivell** who was the great pioneer of 20<sup>th</sup> century Breton music. Subsequently, he collaborated with some of the biggest names on the European music scene such as **Fairport Convention**, **June Tabor & Maddy Prior**, **Jacques Higelin**, **Idir** and many others. After embarking on a solo career marked by numerous important albums and equally numerous tours in the United States and Europe, **Dan** fulfills his lifelong dream by creating **l'Héritage des Celtes**, an imposing musical ensemble (70 musicians!) bringing together the biggest names in contemporary Celtic music from the five Celtic nations. And it is the consecration. He won the **Eurovision Grand Prix** in 1996, the **SACEM Grand Prix** in 2000 and sells incredible quantities of albums, video cassettes and DVDs all over the world. Creator of a new sound and a very distinct guitar style, reminiscent of the Breton bagpipe, **Dan Ar Braz's** influence is felt by renowned guitarists such as **Mark Knopfler** among many others...

In the words of the interested party, **Dan Ar Dans** is a celebration of this fabulous instrument that is the guitar that has accompanied me on the roads of my life for almost 60 years and that will have succeeded in bringing me out of my entrenchments, my fears and bring me closer to all of you, me the savage that I can also be...

One hell of a challenge that **Dan Ar Braz** absolutely won for posterity and I am proud to be his friend!



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