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EDITORIAL

Feelings

The last two years have given us all kinds of feelings ranging from anguish to boredom, from grief to hope, from joy to respect and surprise, and so on. But here we are, little by little - we are getting out of it... Sanitary measures are gradually being lifted one after the other and this, from one province to another. At last! Ultimately! And just in time for spring! We take a deep breath and we all enjoy it together while remaining careful, of course.

Life being what it is, our happiness is once again reduced somewhat, because now **Vladimir Putin** decides to invade Ukraine. An inhuman war coming from a person with an insatiable thirst for power... from an unparalleled bully. Ah yes, there was the other, **Adolf Hitler**. Less than 100 years later, human madness is on the rise again. Several nations are supporting Ukraine and hope that all aid efforts and sanctions can make **Putin** feel good. But we all collectively feel so powerless to stop this man's need to redraw the boundaries.

In the meantime, I invite you to contribute with any financial donation to the **Red Cross** or any other charity that will help Ukrainians fleeing this crazy war. The vast majority of these refugees are women and their children, the men having the obligation to defend their country. We can always find some way to help.

Besides this, let's relax a bit by listening to music or watching a movie which, hopefully, can transport us somewhere else, although only temporarily.

Our team has prepared for you, dear readers, a range of equally interesting products. The articles talk about cables, an excellent digital-to-analog converter, a powerful stereophonic amplifier, a duo preamp and mono block amplifiers, a pair of loudspeakers, two systems consisting of a network amplifier/player and a pair of speakers as well as a laser projector offering impeccable image quality. You will see for yourself that there is something for all tastes and all budgets.

Reading these reviews should inform you and surely help you decide if a trip to your favorite audio retailer would be in order. The team of advisors on site will no doubt be able to guide you in your choices. Especially since by the time we publish this edition, the number of customers that can be in a shop should be back to normal. Let's take advantage!

Slowly, but surely, we are heading towards spring. Let's only hope for the positive for each of us. Good reading and good listening!



Lucie Beauchamp
Co-publisher and Public Relations Manager

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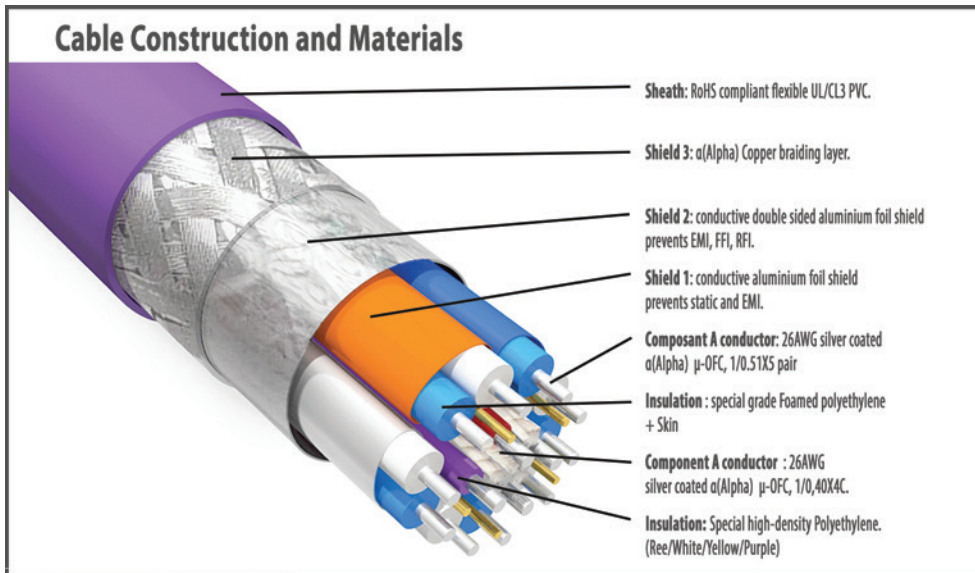
By GEORGE DE SA

These days, I've been around the house more than ever. It's winter in Canada and also the precautions of COVID have demanded it. The good side is that I get more time for my hobbies; music and movies being included in those. With more of my leisure now time in-front of a screen, I've been interested in improving that experience and getting the most I can out of my home entertainment system. I have my **Samsung 85" UHD TV**, a **PlayStation**, a **UHD cable box**, **4K A/V receiver** and full speaker setup. I'm satisfied with where I am with all the components, so now I've turned my attention to the dressings, the loom or cabling that is. Since all the audio and video signals in my home theatre are channelled through **HDMI**, I was interested if upgrading my **HDMI** cable(s) might yield any benefits. Would there be a noticeable difference and more importantly, if any, would it be positive?

Furutech released its **HF-X-NCF** Ultra High-Speed **HDMI v2.1** cable in September 2021. It is the latest and greatest **HDMI** cable produced by the esteemed Japanese audio product manufacturer. A company specializing in high-end audio/video cable and connector manufacture, as well as audio products. As the name indicates, this is an **HDMI** cable designed to meet the most current **HDMI** version specifications, allowing

you to take advantage of all the bandwidth, connectivity, and image capabilities that the format allows. For those of us who have dropped some significant cash on upgrading our components, be it a TV, projector, gaming system or A/V receiver, the **Furutech HF-X-NCF HDMI** aims to deliver that signal unimpeded, in fact, optimally. But aren't all **HDMI** cables the same? This has been the source of some heated debate. Many argue that all **HDMI** cables are the same, I won't take on that argument here... I'm a lover not a fighter.

However, what I can say is that there have been technical changes to the **HDMI** standard over time, with definite different versions implemented over the years; let me summarize them. In 2002, we had **HDMI 1.0** (1920 x 1080 60p / 4.95 Gbps), then in 2013, there was a leap forward with the introduction of **HDMI 2.0** (4K/60p / 18 Gbps). Most recently in 2017, the **HDMI 2.1** format (4K/120p, 8K/60p / 48 Gbps) was introduced, giving us the **8K** capability for truly impressive giant screens here now for some and hopefully soon available to the many. Depending on the video signal you are running, you might get away with **HDMI 1.4** cables today; however, if **4K** content is what you ensure you have optimized then you might want to consider the version of your **HDMI** cables. This can be a rabbit hole, and I'm not here to end the debate but perhaps, if you spent thousands on the new **4K HDTV** and additional money on your A/V receiver and video source, you might want to give some thought as to whether its time to replace, if not to upgrade your **HDMI** cables. Personally, I lean to matching the manufacturer stated version of **HDMI** cables to the highest version that any of my components in my system is capable of, be that TV, source, or A/V receiver. With that in mind, let me now tell you about the **Furutech HF-X-NCF HDMI** cable, a cable designed to deliver without reservation, on the full potential **HDMI 2.1**, **8K/60p** offers.



and carbon powder, given their 'piezoelectric effect' damping properties. This *Nano Crystal² Formula*, **Furutech** believes is the ultimate electrical and mechanical damping material; eradicating vibration and static noise, and thereby improving sound, picture resolution and colour vividness, with blacker backgrounds.

Technical Information about this specific cable

The **Furutech HF-X-NCF HDMI** cable is rigidly built, while preserving flexibility. It is constructed with a 26 AWG silver-plated μ-OFC main conductor. Contacts have a thick gold plating and double layer aluminium foil shielding is used for each twisted conductor, together with a third copper braiding layer, to prevent static, EMI, FFI, RFI, and thereby, eliminate noise and crosstalk. The damping and insulation materials include special grade high-density, foamed polyethylene. An anti-resonance sheath is used to further reducing electrical and mechanical resonance. Finally, all the metal parts undergo

What seems to separate Furutech from other brands

The new *HF-X-NCF Ultra High-Speed HDMI* utilizes **Furutech's** proprietary *Nano Crystal² Formula (NCF)*. The company holds that their *NCF* formula utilizes a crystalline material

with two primary benefits; first, it generates negative ions to eliminate static and second, it converts thermal energy into far infrared (I'd read this as heat dissipation). **Furutech** goes on to explain that their *NCF* is combined with nano-sized ceramic particles

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HF-X-NCF ULTRA HIGH-SPEED HDMI V2.1 CABLE BY FURUTECH

Furutech's trademark two-stage α (Alpha) two-step cryogenic and demagnetization process, to ensure optimal performance and the company's goal of 'pure transmission'. The HF-X-NCF Ultra-High-Speed HDMI version 2.1 and capable of 8K/60p; 4K/120p/48Gbps, the claim to fame on this is its 8K capability, which offers some future proofing. It is UL/CL3 flame resistant and RoHS compliant, with a diameter of $8.5 \pm 0.2\text{mm}$ and comes in finished lengths of: 1.2 M (3.9 ft) / 2.5 M (8.2 ft) / 3.6 M

(12 ft) / 5.0 M (16 ft), with prices on these being US \$228 / C \$268; US \$347 / C \$408; US \$449 / C \$527 and US \$577 / C \$678, respectively, as of Jan. 2022.

Looking at the cable itself, I found the build quality to be very good, with finished ends feeling solid and hardy, and apparently high quality gold plating on terminations. The cable, though relatively thick was admirably flexible and also would hold the shape of a bend. The overall appearance and feel though was nothing more than ordinary,

which I expect is a necessity to ensure its UL/CL3 rating.

Listening conditions

I auditioned the cable in my main home theatre with my **Samsung 82" 4K UHD TV**, **Anthem MRX 740 AVR** and **Bell Fibe 4K** cable box. I also had a friend run it in his home theatre to compare results. I used the **Furutech HF-X-NCF HDMI** between my cable box and TV to evaluate video and then separately, between my **HDTV** and **AVR** to evaluate audio. All video evaluations were done with streamed 4K source material and in comparison, to a generic **HDMI 2.0**, as well as a **Monster 4K HDMI 2.0** cable, serving as references.

Let's get started with the evaluation

To evaluate the video performance of the **Furutech 4K HDMI** cable, I began with some well-watched **Netflix** content that I'm very familiar with. I first put pulled up the fabulously beautiful *Our Planet* nature documentaries, for its 4K video content. My family and I are mesmerized by the visuals and like most, hooked on **David Attenborough's** deliberate and entrancing narration. Something that immediately struck me, was an increase in color intensity when using the **Furutech HF-X-NCF HDMI** cable. Colours had a more vibrant and striking appearance, while not crossing into over-saturation. The grass looked greener... and it wasn't even the neighbour's; however, the HF-X-NCF remained within the boundaries of naturalness, nary a hint of exaggeration. In fact, the colours seemed natural, less monotone, having additional complexity. The overall brightness of the image remained the same as far as I could see, with the result being an image that was more engaging and lifelike. Looking at a mass of pink flamingos, the overall hue seemed unchanged, yet the variations in the pinkish orange tones seemed have more pop.

More than colour, there was apparently some reduction in noise in the images with the **Furutech HF-X-NCF HDMI** in use. Fine details such as the downy fluff of the chicks had just a touch more clarity and definition. Also, referring again to that large flock of flamingos, there separation of the massed



elements was increased. The flamingo flock looking less like a coral-coloured blanket with the individual movements of the birds being more apparent.

Another film I watched was the 2013 sci-fi, *Gravity*. Though this was 1080p rather than 4K content, I wanted to see if the **Furutech** cable might make a difference, when just handling HD rather than UHD content. About twenty minutes into the film, on the scene where the hero, **Matt Kowalski (George Clooney)** first picks up the heroine, **Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock)** in tow, there is a move from the backdrop of the blackness of deep space in the background to that of our friendly planet Earth. Viewing this scene with the *HF-X-NCF* cable, there appeared to be a very slight increase in the visibility of the faintest stars on the black background, providing improved depth. During the close-up on the astronaut's white glove, the fabric appeared slightly more vibrant with the *HF-X-NCF* versus the comparison cables. The differences/improvements here were small and more apparent in the 4K content evaluation. With a friend, we watched some 4K Reference content on **YouTube**. There is some stellar video content there, which is perfect for back-to-back comparisons. In short, similar perceptions, with increased colour vibrancy, some noise reduction lending to a slightly greater perception of detail. Looking for improvements in blacks and shadow details, there was nothing that could be seen at least with the content/setup used.

The audio aspect of this cable

Next up, was the evaluation of the **Furutech HF-X-NCF's** sonic performance. Using music from **YouTube** via the HDTV and into my A/V receiver, I connected my **Grado SR325e** headphones to the headphone output, allowing me to listen for audible differences. Listening to **Halie Loren's** album, *Heart First*, and the track *A Woman's Way*, it was apparent that the brushes across the drum skins were clearer with the **Furutech HF-X-NCF** cable. The **Furutech HDMI**, rendered the recording with more air and openness and a greater sense of the recording space. Instrument separation was also improved with the **Furutech HDMI**, in play. Halie's voice had additional vibrancy; it was more lifelike and less veiled. The bass was denser and more dynamic and there was greater texture revealed with the **Furutech HF-X-NCF** in place. Listening to the accordion and the guitar playing together, along with the upright bass, I could hear a clear improvement in instrument differentiation. Whereas the comparison *HDMI* blurred and commingled the instrument, in particular the guitar and accordion, the **Furutech HDMI** maintained their separation and timbral individuality. It was easy to hear these improvements that **Furutech HF-X-NCF** brought to tone, timbre, texture and clarity. Were these differences small? Individually yes, however in sum, the **Furutech HF-X-NCF HDMI** revealed the music in a more realistic, intricate, and engaging manner.

Moving to the track, *Black Crow*, by **Angus & Julia Stone**, I heard similar results. Improved bass texture, crisper and clears

cymbals, denser kick drum with reduced overhang as well as greater reverb. I also found that with the **Furutech HF-X-NCF**, the raspy texture of **Angus'** vocalizations was more audible.

General conclusion

So, there you have it, my impression of the **Furutech HF-X-NCF** Ultra High-Speed *HDMI v2.1 HDMI* cable. Its an example of a well engineered and constructed *HDMI* cable that has been designed and tested to meet the most current *HDMI* standards, while delivering optimized performance not only in video but also in audio. If you have a 4K or even 8K setup, you would do well to consider the **Furutech HF-X-NCF HDMI**. More so, if *HDMI* audio is something you use for your music listening, the **Furutech HF-X-NCF HDMI** may be a cable you just can't live without.



GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: 1,2 m (3,9 ft): 228 \$ US / 268 \$ CA ;
2,5 m (8,2 ft): 347 \$ US / 408 \$ CA ;
3,6 m (12 ft): 449 \$ US / 527 \$ CA ;
5,0 m (16 ft): 577 \$ US / 678 \$ CA

Warranty: 12 months for any manufacturing defect

Distributor: Furutech Canada, T.: 1.416.704.0105,
<https://www.furutech.com/distributors/america/canada/>

Mediagraphy

Video

Netflix, Our Planet, 4K ;
Gravity, 4K format, Warner Bros. ;
Youtube, 4K format contents

Audio

YouTube films ;
TVHD format contents ;
Halie Loren, *Heart First*, Justin Time, JTR 8573-2 ;
Angus & Julia Stone, *Black Crow*, Netzwerk Productions

THE MAGICIAN OF THE STUDIO, IN YOUR HOME

By JEAN-DENIS DOYLE

It weighs a ton and is particularly elegant with the colours chosen. This is the *Performer S1200* stereo power amplifier from German manufacturer **Sound Performance Lab**. It is a device designed to offer considerable power, while keeping its dimensions quite reasonable. This amplifier, with its roots in the professional world, has a lot to offer. Based on very classic technologies, the **SPL Performer S1200** could be a very tempting choice. It is particularly interesting for audiophiles with a large, aging power amplifier or for those who are looking for a really powerful stereo block. Will the **SPL Performer S1200** make its mark in the audiophile world? Let's take a moment to discover it together.

You probably don't know it, but you've heard **Sound Performance Lab**, aka **SPL**, products on many occasions. You may not have experienced it firsthand, but you've certainly heard the sonic results that **SPL** devices offer. The German company has been manufacturing equipment for mastering studios locally for over 35 years. So **SPL** equipment is at the heart of what gives the tone, texture and colour to the recordings you enjoy every day. Professional **SPL** instruments have an enviable reputation for their excellent reliability, as well as for the accuracy and neutrality of their sound. Since 2014, **Sound Performance Lab** has been on a journey to bring consumers a series called *Professional Fidelity*. This series aims to bridge the gap between the world of professional studio equipment and that of high-fidelity products for audiophiles.

I must admit that this series of **SPL** devices has always attracted me. The *Professional Fidelity* series, with its retro look, is offered in a choice of three colours, including an absolutely beautiful red. These devices are not unlike some vintage studio equipment. The preamplifiers and headphone amplifiers offer new features and high quality reproduction. They have carved out a niche for themselves in the world of high-end headphones. On the other hand, **SPL's** offering in terms of power amplification is less well known. Until recently, the range consisted of the *Performer S800* and the ambitious *Performer M1000* monophonic blocks. **SPL** is now adding the all-new *Performer S1200* stereo amplifier, the subject of this test. The mission of this device is to offer performance similar to that of a pair of *Performer M1000* monophonic amplifiers, in a single enclosure, which will necessarily be more economical

and compact. As we will see in the technical analysis, the **SPL Performer S1200** uses very classical technical solutions that are perfectly mastered and carefully developed.

The Technical Aspect

The **SPL Performer S1200** is an ultra-powerful stereo amplifier. Indeed, it offers a power of 300 W for each of the two channels on a load of 8 Ohms. The power climbs to 520 W per channel, on a 4-Ohm load. Let's face it, this amplifier will be able to power any pair of speakers available on the market. In the unlikely event that a music lover feels the need for even more power, there is always the *Performer M1000* monophonic blocks in the **SPL** catalogue.

The *Performer S1200* amplifier is a very classic pure analog device. All available power comes from a linear power supply based on a good old 1400 VA toroidal transformer. If that doesn't tell you anything, it's an absolutely huge transformer! This last one is entirely shielded by a mu-metal cover. This ensures that the powerful electromagnetic field of the transformer will not interfere with other equipment in your system.

The amplification circuit operates in class AB and benefits from **SPL's Voltair** technology. This technology, present in practically all the **SPL** product lines, ensures a regularized power supply by two 60 V rails, one for the positive and the other for the negative, for a total of 120 V. This type of power supply increases the margin with which the components can operate, pushing back the problems of saturation and distortion to the maximum. The **SPL Performer S1200** has a feedback loop for each of its amplifier stages, which ensures that the feedback current from the loudspeakers will not affect the input stage in any way.

The **SPL S1200** is equipped with a hybrid cooling system. The power transistors are therefore mounted on metal cooling fins that act passively. These ensure the cooling of the amplifier during normal use. When the unit is under heavy loads and needs more cooling, six small fans kick in to remove excess heat as quickly as possible.



Their operation is very quiet, with a residual noise that does not exceed 19 dB.

The *Performer S1200* has two inputs, one in *RCA* format and the other in *XLR* format. The sensitivity level of the inputs is finely adjustable and will allow the obtention of a perfect marriage with the preamplifier which will be used. Finally, the front panel of the amplifier is equipped with three small indicator lights that display the status of the device. The amplifier comes with a choice of three decorative plates, in different colours, that attach magnetically to the middle of the front.

Unpacking and Installation

First of all, a small warning, this amplifier is very heavy. Set it up on a solid piece of furniture, preferably with the help of a strong friend. But before installing it on its throne, take care to turn it over, because you must imperatively remove the two transport screws that immobilize the transformer. Moreover, a notice concerning this precaution should have been in an obvious place inside the package. This would have saved me the inconvenience of having to undo my installation. The instruction manual is only available online, so be sure to print it out before you unpack the unit...

You will then have to select the input you want to use, using a tiny little switch, which you should have located beforehand. To my

surprise, this amplifier remained practically cool during all my listening sessions. Not even lukewarm, but properly cold. On no occasion did I ever set off the fans, I even questioned the relevance of having six of them installed. This feature is a great advantage, as it will make it much easier to integrate the *Performer S1200* into an audio cabinet. For the needs of the test bench, I added a *Phonitor X* preamplifier, also by **SPL**. I was able to achieve excellent results by using only professional *Mogami XLR* cables.

Listening Impressions

A machine that imposes its presence

From the very first notes, the *Performer S1200* is impressive. It lets us know that he is the one who has just taken control of the speakers and it will never let go of them. The first register that strikes is obviously the low frequencies. With the **Wes Montgomery Trio's** album *A Dynamic New Sound*, I suddenly felt like I had added a subwoofer to my small **Audel Sonika** speakers. The different bass lines take on an incredible amplitude and extend throughout the room. You can almost feel the breath of the **Hammond B3** organ and you find yourself turning up the volume more than usual. So much so, that I was a little worried about the integrity of my little speakers. No problem, as much as this amplifier is capable of pushing, it is also capable of holding. This iron grip

SPL PERFORMER S1200 STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER BY SPL

and ease of use ensure that the low frequencies will always be perfectly held, allowing the music to express itself with all its dynamics.

And the **SPL Performer S1200** is capable of delivering dynamics, almost endlessly. It is enough to listen to a film that stirs a little, to be convinced. Not only are the big dynamic gaps explosively rendered, but the tiny ones as well, ensuring that our listening experience is always breathless and lively, never boring.

A Tone of Its Own

The tone was my big surprise when using this amplifier. I expected an amplifier whose sound would be relatively straight, perhaps even very *studio-like*. This is not the case. The tone of the *Performer S1200* is warm, almost burning. This amplifier is transparent in its own way, that is, it lets all the musical information pass through, while keeping a rather warm timbre. The music it renders is enveloping and full. The sound is really dense

and has a lot of substance, so much so that I even wondered if it didn't mask some details of the music. Oh no, it did not! When you unplug it and replace it with another amplifier, that's when you realize that it was missing absolutely nothing. In fact, the **SPL Performer S1200** has a detailed sound in its own way. It does

« The first register that strikes is obviously the low frequencies. With the **Wes Montgomery Trio's** album *A Dynamic New Sound*, I suddenly felt like I had added a subwoofer to my small **Audel Sonika** speakers. The different bass lines take on an incredible amplitude and extend throughout the room. »

this by emphasizing the warmth of the timbres, the dynamics and the density. As with this CD of **Dvorak's** ninth symphony that the *Performer S1200* offers us with a delirious amplitude





and a very solid foundation. This CD, on the **Denon** label, which was burned using *Ultimate High Quality CD* technology, is of incredible quality. With this kind of symphonic music, which features a large orchestra of musicians, the *Performer S1200* amplifier has a lot of fun and shows its power, control and resolution. It transports us then on the places of the concert and we lose the notion of time, for the 42 too short minutes of its duration.

A Leading Bluesman

The **SPL Performer S1200's** bouquet of qualities makes it an ideal amplifier for listening to the blues. If there is a style of music that requires quiet power, it is the blues. The album *Bread and Buddah* of British-Colombian Harry Manx, pushed by the muscles of the *S1200*, can be listened to with a joy that makes you tap your foot. The rhythm is solid, full of aplomb and gives only one desire that to raise the volume. And the more you go with the volume, the more it grooves, the more it hits and the more it's catchy. There must be a limit, but that word doesn't seem to be in the vocabulary of the **SPL Performer S1200**.

Conclusion

Here is an amplifier that comes from the professional world, to which the audiophile public would be well advised to pay attention. Offering seemingly unlimited power, the **SPL Performer S1200** amplifier has a perfectly balanced warm tone and first-rate transparency. It is aimed at customers who need a powerful, high-quality amplifier that is easy to integrate into an audio system. It succeeds in transporting us to the place where music comes into the world, in the heart of the studio.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$9,749

Warranty: 2 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Focal Naim Canada, T.: 1.866.271.5689,
<https://www.focal.com/ca/fr>; <https://spl.audio>

Mediagraphy

Wes Montgomery Trio, A new dynamic sound, Tidal file

Dvorak, Symphony No. 9 from the new world, Vaclac Neumann,
 Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Denon, COCQ 85,321

Harry Manx, Bread and Buddah, Dog my Cat, DMCR00513

A TIMELESS TOOL TO FULLY ENJOY OUR MUSIC

By JEAN-DENIS DOYLE

Digital-to-analog converters have become the heart of our audio systems. They fuel passionate discussions among audiophiles, as they are of crucial importance for the reproduction quality of an audio system. They are available in all levels of quality and price. The device that we present to you today is simply called

Le DAC. This is the entry-level model from prestigious French manufacturer **Métronome**. Although it is simply the small **Métronome**, we are talking about a very high-end device, intended to be integrated into a very successful audio system. **Métronome** being relatively unknown on our local market, its Canadian



distributor, **Wynn Audio**—proposed us *Le DAC* for this test bench. A proposal that we accepted without any hesitation! A great opportunity to discover a manufacturer and an exceptional device.

Métronome Technologie is a manufacturer of audio products that has been recognized worldwide for the extraordinary quality of its products for over thirty years. The French company, located in Montans, near Toulouse, is managed by Mr. **Jean-Marie Clauzel**. This great music lover has as a design philosophy that the sound of the **Métronome** devices should be as natural and analogous as possible. **Métronome** also oversees the prestigious *Kalista* brand. This one became known for its sumptuous *CD* playback mechanisms. *Kalista's DreamPlay* series of *CD* transport devices continues to make the audiophile world dream. **Métronome** products are therefore relatively new to the Quebec audiophile public. They will arouse an obvious curiosity, and the public will probably have the opportunity to listen to them at a future audio show.

The **Métronome** product line is divided into three categories. The *Digital Sharing* and *AQWO* series are very high-end products that target a clientele in search of the absolute. The *Classica* range, to which the *Le DAC* converter belongs, is more accessible while offering performances worthy of the **Métronome** brand. This series also offers a hybrid *CD* player with digital inputs called *Le Player 3+* and a simple *CD* transport called *Le*

« With **Rachmaninoff's Third Symphony**, the tapping of the timpani literally makes you jump with pleasure. When the orchestra is going all out, the *Le DAC* has no trouble keeping up. Its reserve seems infinite and this is certainly not unrelated to the extraordinary power supply it has. With a real little army of capacitors hidden inside, it is not afraid of any music and will let it express itself with all the dynamism and fullness without any restriction. »

Player 3. The latter is, of course, the natural partner of the *Le DAC* converter.

Technical Description

The **Métronome** *Le DAC* device is a pure digital-to-analog converter. It does not contain a section for network playback. To do this, it will be necessary to add a separate high-quality network drive. The converter *The DAC* has two digital inputs in *SPDIF* format on *RCA* plugs, two inputs in *AES EBU* format on *XLR* plugs and two inputs in optical format for *Toslink* type connector and a *USB* input will allow to connect a computer. With a total of seven inputs, the *Le DAC* will be able to process all the digital signals in your audio system. From the sound of your TV, through your network player, to an ultra-sophisticated transport for *CD* playback, you'll enjoy the highest quality conversion. The *Le DAC* has two pairs of audio outputs, one balanced in *XLR* format, and the other more conventional in *RCA* format.

On the front, a blue display, very informative, informs us of the selected input, the sampling frequency and the format of the digital signal. The digital signal that enters the *Le DAC* is converted to an analog by an **AKM 4493EQ** chip. This delta-sigma converter is widely used in the professional world and has proven itself in the most sophisticated recording studio consoles. This **AKM** chip is capable of handling all high-resolution signals in *PCM* format up to 384 kHz as well as *DSD 512* signals. The major technical point that distinguishes the *Le DAC* from other converters remains its incredible power supply. This one uses no less than four transformers, very well made, from manufacturer **Talema**. These transformers supply ten separate current rails to ensure minimum interaction between the different sections. The current reserve is provided by an army of one hundred and sixty capacitors! Yes, you read that right. This type of power supply allows an incredible electrical stability and practically simulates a huge electric battery. When listening, this technical choice should result in an unperturbed stability of the sound result, a formidable dynamic capacity and a total absence of noise.

The output stages of the *Le DAC* are class *A* biased and use high-quality capacitors manufactured specifically for **Métronome** by **SCR**. Here is a digital-analog converter whose interior is quite simply spectacular to contemplate. It's a real shame that the lid is not transparent!





Unpacking and Installation

The *Le DAC* converter is a fairly simple device to unpack, install and connect. That said, you will need to install driver software for the *USB* input if you plan to use a Windows computer. This one is easily downloaded from the **Métronome** website. The *Le DAC* converter is a fairly simple device to unpack, install and connect. You must therefore take care of the sources that will feed it with digital signals as well as all the peripheral accessories that surround them. Forget about cheap network players, super noisy routers and entry-level *CD* players. This converter is very capable and needs to be surrounded by the best to perform at a high level. It will let you know quickly if this is not the case. The unit has no remote control and has three small decoupling cones that attach magnetically under the feet. Personally, I preferred listening without them. It's up to you to experiment. You should also take into account that the *Le DAC* has an output level of 3 V, a level a little higher than

the usual average of 2 V. This characteristic ensures a powerful and dynamic sound, but could be difficult to match with some preamplifiers.

A Powerful Listening Experience

With a power supply worthy of a Hydro power plant and output stages as powerful as those of a reel-to-reel tape recorder, the *Le DAC* is sure to whip up your audio system with a rather impressive burst of energy. This device is very fond of great symphonic works with great dynamic differences. The *Le DAC* can be absolutely blistering and infinitely subtle in the next second. With **Rachmaninoff's** *Third Symphony*, the tapping of the timpani literally makes you jump with pleasure. When the orchestra is going all out, the *Le DAC* has no trouble keeping up. Its reserve seems infinite and this is certainly not unrelated to the extraordinary power supply it has. With a real little army of capacitors hidden inside, it is not afraid of any music and will let





it express itself with all the dynamism and fullness without any restriction.

The soundtrack of the film *Intersellar*, by composer Hans Zimmer, demonstrates the obvious dynamic capabilities of this converter. The sound reaches a totally spectacular scale that goes far beyond the speakers. The depth of the image is superb and the bass is hollow as it can be. Here is a converter, which will perfectly match with large audiophile setups, where high-level electronics and speakers will be able to demonstrate its full potential.

A Beautiful Tone and Subtlety to Spare

This converter is capable of reproducing music with an excellent level of refinement. With the classic album *New Favourite* by Alison Krauss and Union Station, the Le DAC shines with subtlety and delicacy. This is what distinguishes the great cameras, their ability to remain delicate and to go after unsuspected microscopic details. The singer's voice is delivered with a hallucinating three-dimensional presence. The expression "She sings right in front of me" takes all its meaning. With a disarming naturalness, every whisper, every word, every breath and, of course, every power surge can be heard. Once again, the power supply of this device works wonders, ensuring the Le DAC a very low sound that leaves all the room for the small details of the music. From high-resolution files and good quality recordings, this converter is able to make the music shine in a beautiful way.

Dancing on a Volcano to the Sound of the Metronome

Mr. Jean-Marie Clauzel, the designer of the Le DAC, is a big fan of the band Genesis. So I was tempted by the idea of listening to a piece of the band, dating from the 1970s, from the album *A Trick of the Tail*. With the extraordinary song *Ripples*, the

Metronome Le DAC converter takes us back to another era when the quality of musical composition for great songs was at its peak. All the subtlety of the remastering work that was done on this classic album comes out under a new light with this converter. Rather than falling into the trap of an overly analytical restitution, the Le DAC gives back to the song its fullness and space. With unexpected bass lines, great weight and foundation, the converter delivers an inspiring performance of this song. Phil Collins's drumming is super easy to follow, the vocals are beautiful and you get lost listening to the whole album.

Conclusion

The Le DAC converter is a great music-making machine. It is a high-performance tool, designed to transform all digital signals into sweet music. To achieve the performance it is capable of, it will need to be carefully integrated into a great sound system, which will then allow it to shine through. In such a context, it will be able to transport you in a musical universe of any beauty. A device to be discovered!

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$9,800

Warranty: 2 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Wynn Audio, T.: 647.995.2995, <https://wynnaudio.com>

Mediagraphy

Rachmaninov, *Symphony No. 3 in A minor*, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Leonard Slatkin, Tidal file

Hans Zimmer, *Intersellar*, WaterTower Music, Tidal file

Allison Krauss & Union Station, *New favourite*, Rounder Records, CD, 11661-0495-2

Genesis, *A Trick of the Tail*, Acto, CD 82,688

CLASSICAL MUSIC

By CHRISTOPHE HUSS

RECORD OF THE MONTH

MOLIÈRE-LULLY

The Bourgeois Gentleman, musical pieces Soloists, The Harmonic Poem, Vincent Dumestre

Château de Versailles CVS 053.

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

What a great gift for the 400th anniversary of Molière's birth! *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, created in 1670, is in fact a comedy ballet, the result of the joint genius of Jean-Baptiste Lully and Molière. There was then in Versailles, in front of the King, Molière's troop, with the musicians directed by Lully and the Pierre Beauchamp's ballets, with a decor by Carlo Vigarani, the King's engineer. The centre of the work is scene 5 of Act IV, the Turkish ceremony, because, through a colourful pastiche of the Turkish emissaries who were in Paris, Molière mocked the bourgeois who wanted to rise in rank. Much more than interludes between scenes, there are in *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* 75 minutes of music of various uses, all gathered here, including a great *Ballet des Nations* which closes Act V. Vincent Dumestre has summoned the best vocal soloists to give character to these pieces, which obviously do not allow one to follow the theatrical action once recorded by Dumestre with Benjamin Lazar's theatre troupe in its entirety on DVD for Alpha.

SOUND RECORDING OF THE MONTH

JEAN PAUL GASPARIAN (piano) SERGEÏ RACHMANINOV

Sonata for piano n° 2. Musical Moments op. 16. Vocalize op. 34/14.

Prelude in D major op. 23/4 and Prelude in B minor op. 32/10.

Evidence classique, EVC0 085.

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

Finding this disc will certainly require more effort than for a big Deutsche



Grammophon release, but it is worth it. I smiled when I saw the name of the publisher: Evidence. It's been a long time since I've heard such an obvious piano recording in this type of repertoire. Rachmaninoff demands an extreme dynamic range and requires the perception of the finest details, especially when, as here, we have a pianist so sensitive to the question of resonance, dynamics, sonic beauty and impact. Jean-Paul Gasparian, 27 years old, is astonishing by his wisdom and his depth. A Steinway artist, in residence at the Singer-Polignac Foundation in Paris, he has a piano perfectly tuned by Cyril Mordant and captured by Ignace Hauville in the music room of said Foundation. The 2nd Sonata is on a par with the legends of the disc in this major release.

BOXSET OF THE MONTH

ZOLTAN KOCSIS

Complete Philips Recordings

Decca, 26 CD, AVSA 1589.

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

Hungarian Zoltan Kocsis, born in 1952, died prematurely in 2016. This very important pianist began his career in the early 1970s, but as a true musical genius, and notably a great orchestrator of piano works and Debussy's melodies, he also dabbled in conducting. In this capacity, he created, with Ivan Fischer, the Budapest Festival Orchestra and became the conductor of the Hungarian National

Philharmonic. This box set gathers his recordings as a pianist at the top of his art. Few boxes of the same type contain so many treasures, whether in Debussy, Mozart (only one CD of concertos, alas), Liszt, Bartok (the complete reference), Rachmaninoff (my complete concertos of the desert island). And there are these transcriptions of Wagner, a jewel to be played over and over again. This box is not only documentary, it is inexhaustible.

TECHNICAL PUZZLE OF THE MONTH

EDNA STERN (piano)

Schubert on Tape – 4 Impromptus op. 90. 6 Moments musicaux.

Orchid, ORC 100192.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : **

The result of a collaboration between Audio Note Music and Orchid Classics, this release aims, under the impulse of Edna Stern, to return to the analog tape, which, according to the interpreter, supports more faithfully the music and particularly the humanity that is in these masterpieces by Schubert. Exit, also, any digital editing. The pianist prefers full takes without corrections. In the eyes of Edna Stern, to see what can be gained, it is necessary to imagine the gait and movement of a human being compared to the gait of a robot. The result, she says, is a sense of life. The idealism, most commendable, comes up against a very obvious reality:

when you listen, you don't hear the tape recorder, but you hear the sound recording made in a place. It is Marco Pasquariello, the sound engineer and London's Snap Studio that appear clearly more than any equipment. And, in this case, the dry sound framework dries up and casts the music. So, yes, humans dance. But they dance with a gas mask!

NEW RELEASES

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN LE CONCERT DES NATIONS, JORDI SAVALL.

Symphonies n° 6 to 9.

Alia Vox, 3 SACD, AVSA 9946.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : *****

Jordi Savall concludes his complete Beethoven project, which consisted in associating young instrumentalists with his usual musicians during intensive courses. The level of elaboration and preparation is therefore uncommon. We have here, of course, a Beethoven on early instruments that follows the precepts of historically informed interpretation, that is, in general, fast tempos with smaller forces ensuring perfect legibility. The Pastoral Symphony is radiant, the Eighth dizzying with sparkling virtuosity and dynamism. The Seventh is surprising in its almost bellicose aplomb. As for the Ninth, it raises the question of the process itself. Should it be viewed through the prism of history or is it a timeless work that prefigures romanticism? Savall chooses his side. It doesn't have to be ours.

**JOHANNES BRAHMS
MICHAEL COLLINS (clarinet),
STEPHEN HOUGH (piano).**

3 Sonates

Bis, SACD 2557.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : *****

We have already mentioned these *Sonatas Opus 120*, late works by **Brahms**, which can be played on viola as well as on the clarinet. Not content with matching the best, this disc adds an extra spice: **Michael Collins's** apt transcription for clarinet of the 2nd *Sonata for Violin and Piano*. This *Opus 100* belongs to the same musical universe and lends itself particularly

**LEOS JANACEK
CAMERATA ZÜRICH
On an overgrown path.**

ECM, 485 6432.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : *****

Janacek's *On an Overgrown Path* (*Pozarostlém chodníčku*) was originally a collection of 10 intimate piano pieces assembled in the first decade of the 20th century. The **Camerata Zürich**, a chamber orchestra equivalent to **Musici de Montreal**, offers a very skilful orchestral transcription made in 2016 by **Daniel Rumler**, which includes the 5 pieces collected in 2 additional books, and adds poetic texts read in French by author **Maïa Brami** (separate tracks from the music). The disc program is ideally complemented

by **Suk's** *Meditation* and **Dvorak's** *Notturmo*. All this is original and recommendable.

**ENNIO MORRICONE
Cinema Suites for Violon
and Orchestra (2020).**

**Marco Serino, Orchestra Haydn di
Bolzano e Trento, Andrea Morricone.**

Arcana, A 495.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : ****

Morricone is like **Piazzolla**: there are so many CDs! But, also, so many odd jobs which do not do justice to his music... Here is a different proposal, *Suites for violin and orchestra* constituted by either director (*Sergio Leone, Giuseppe Tornatore, Brian de Palma*) or films (*The Mission, Moses and Marco Polo Suite*) and assembled by **Ennio Morricone** just before his death and performed by the violinist who accompanied him in his recordings and concerts for many long years. The arrangements are therefore excellent, the soloist is good, as is the orchestra conducted by the composer's son. When you see how difficult it is to find a correct and properly recorded version of something as simple as *Gabriel's Oboe* from *The Mission*, you realize how useful this record is.

**ASTOR PIAZZOLLA
ESCUALO5**

**Primavera Porteña, Soledad,
Tango Suite, Adios Nonino, etc.**

Bis, SACD 2605

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

The number of discs devoted to the music of **Astor Piazzolla** is increasing, especially on the occasion of the centenary of his birth (2021). But records of this level are very rare. **Escualo5** is a quintet formed by a violinist, an accordionist, a guitarist, a double bassist and a pianist. Served by a perfectly balanced and dosed sound recording (whereas we suffered so much from artificially over-vitaminized recordings), the whole translates well the haunting nostalgia of this music. The fact of swapping a bandoneon for an accordion is not an obstacle, as the astonishing **Ksenija Sidorova** showed in *Piazzolla Reflections* on **Alpha**.

**FRANZ SCHUBERT
QUATUOR HERMÈS**

**Rosamunde and
Der Tod Und das Mädchen**

La Dolce Volta, LDV 85.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : *****

Another record for which the sound quality is immediately obvious: a quartet captured with subtlety and precision, airiness, but without the sound *jumping out at us*. The other supreme

happiness is that the young French **Hermès** quartet does not overdo it in terms of expression. In recent years, we have often seen the tragedy of *Death and the Maiden* overplayed to the point of distortion. **Quatuor Hermès** is first and foremost a flexible, elegant and expressive quartet, which is so wonderful in *Rosamunde*. Among the best quartets of the moment, we will compare what we hear here to the subtlety of Jerusalem. That's how much hedonistic pleasure this recording provides.

**JOHN WILLIAMS
BERLIN PHILHARMONIC**

The Berlin Concert

DG, 486 2003.

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

A year ago, **DG** published **John Williams** in *Vienna*. Here he is in Berlin and, of course, the orchestral luxury is also present. In common to both concerts are some masterpieces (*Indiana Jones, Hedwig's Theme* from *Harry Potter*, the theme *Jurassic Park* and the *Imperial March* from *Star Wars*) of the composer who has just celebrated his 90th birthday. But most of the time we win other music: various excerpts from *Star Wars, Superman, Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. A more classical part is provided by an *Élégie for Cello* with soloist **Bruno Deleplaïre**. It's a bit of a lull in the album. Should the artistic rating be lowered from 5 to 4 stars for this? Everyone will have their own opinion. But once the listening is over, the feeling is so positive that one hardly asks the question anymore.



ELECTROCOMPANIET EC 4.8 MKII REFERENCE PREAMPLIFIER &
AMPLIWIRE AW 180 MONOBLOCK AMPLIFIER

A solid, dynamic and uncompromising duo

By GEORGE DE SA

Norway perhaps might be best known internationally as a country of origin for the legendary **Vikings**. Just the mention of the **Vikings** calls to mind vivid images of their unique dress, longships and epic conquests across Europe. Yet, **Norway** is also

well known for its beautiful landscape, its stunning fjords and lakes, as well as its magnificent northern lights, all truly amazing natural wonders. As glorious as this list is, it wouldn't be complete, at least from an audio enthusiast's standpoint, without the





mention of **Electrocompaniet**. Yes, **Electrocompaniet**, a company whose Norwegian products, have captured the faithful praise from many an audiophile and music lover. Their products, even more so than the **Vikings**, have captured my attention on many occasions and I've so itched for a chance to listen to them within my own abode. Given a recent opportunity to get a couple of their *Classic Line* products in; namely, their *EC 4.8 MkII Reference Preamplifier* and *Ampliwire (AW) 180 Monoblock Power Amplifiers*, I jumped at the chance. Now, like **Vikings**... shall we explore?

Electrocompaniet, the Norwegian manufacturer, prefers to call their audio products, 'fine audio instruments', which I think says a lot about their objectives. With almost 50 years under its belt, the company, having been established in 1973, has had the time to hone their skills and fine tune these instruments. At the heart of any high-end two-channel music system is the amplification. To optimize the performance, many high-end companies such as **Electrocompaniet**, produce what is commonly termed as 'separates' or more specifically, preamplifiers and amplifiers. The *EC 4.8 MkII Reference Preamplifier* and *AW 180 Monoblock Power Amplifiers* are *separates* taken one step further, their architecture aims to fully isolate left from right channels and in doing so, optimize stereo separation. In the case of the *EC 4.8 MkII* it is a true dual-mono design, with separate internal

boards for each channel, while the *AW 180* is a monoblock or single channel amplifier. The *EC 4.8 MkII Reference Preamplifier* is, as its name suggests, in its second iteration, with the *MkII* released in November 2019. It is **Electrocompaniet's** latest, greatest, and only stereo preamplifier. On the other hand, the *AW 180* monoblock power amplifier has had a long and enduring run; introduced in 1994, it remains with its original designation and the company's entry-level monoblock amplifier instrument. What sets these amplifier products apart is that contrary to the prevalent practice of moving production to low-cost-labour countries, **Electrocompaniet**, fully produces their products in their state-of-the-art facilities, right on the west coast of Norway. To get an **Electrocompaniet** *Classic Line* product, like these, is essentially owning a piece of **Norway**...true Norwegian high-end audio.

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ELECTROCOMPANIET EC 4.8 MKII REFERENCE PREAMPLIFIER & AMPLIWIRE AW 180 MONOBLOCK AMPLIFIER

The **Electrocompaniet EC 4.8 MkII Reference** Preamplifier is just that, a preamplifier, which some may refer to as a line-stage, no built-in phono stage here; for that, **Electrocompaniet** has their dedicated *ECP 2 MkII Phono Stage*, alas, for another time. As mentioned, the *EC 4.8 MkII* is the second edition of this preamplifier and incorporates new software with an updated design fitting of the *MkII* status. The *EC 4.8 MkII* is a pure dual-mono design, meaning, separate left and right boards, separate left and right toroid transformers, and yes, separate left and right filter capacitance banks. Along with dual-mono, this is a fully 'true' balanced preamplifier and DC coupled from input to output. Inputs consist of two pairs of balanced (XLR) and three pairs of single-ended (RCA). Outputs, however, are limited to one balanced pair and one single-ended (fixed) record-out.

« The midrange was intoxicating. The sound... warm, silky and impressively lifelike. The midrange warmth and prominence in the presentation was most tasteful and served only to aid the illusion of an in-person performance. Bass strings were full, bold and resonant, yet controlled. Marie's cello was conveyed with a lusciously authentic timbre and tone. »

Note, you will need an XLR/RCA connector if you use with an amplifier that only has single-ended (RCA) inputs. Interesting on the specification side are its noise floor of < -130 dB @ 0 gain, channel separation of > 120 dB and THD $< 0.002\%$. Dimensions are 19 x 16.1 x 4.5 inches, with a weight of 11.3 kg / 24.9 lbs. Moving to the *Ampliwire (AW) 180* Monoblock Power Amplifiers. The design of **Electrocompaniet** amplifiers, according to the company, involves the application of local feedback to individual amplification stages of the circuit, where needed to lower distortion, however, there is no overall/global feedback from input to output applied, as such can be detrimental to the overall sonic performance. In addition, with the use of local and targeted feedback, phase and interphase distortion is also reduced. On **Electrocompaniet's** website, it states that all amplification stages work in Class A with 0.1% efficiency. As

well, the front acrylic plate of the *AW 180* makes the clear statement: 'Class A'. However, I never found that *AW 180* got much more than mildly warm, and given its rated output was curious about this Class A designation. Reaching out to **Red Leaf Audio**, the North American distributor, I was given an explanation, direct from **Electrocompaniet**. Let me paraphrase: *all Electrocompaniet amplifiers are Class A/B for about 40 years... the Class A/B shown on the front panel of the amplifiers is a quality designation only... like high quality and retained for historical reasons, like the acrylic plates and golden knobs... all circuits in our power amplifiers up to the output circuit are Class A/B.* **Red Leaf Audio** also added that the *AW* series of amplifiers are highly biased to Class A in operation, producing up to 15 Watts in Class A.

The *AW 180* uses a single 650 VA toroidal transformer together with a 6 x 10,000 mF capacitors to achieve its rated output of: 250 W (8 Ω) / 380 W (Ω) / 625 W (Ω). It's a full-bandwidth amplifier with an input sensitivity of 1 V for rated output and peak current of 100 A. Distortion is stated as: THD (1 kHz, 1/2 power, 8 Ω) $< 0.001\%$. It's a relatively hefty amplifier, tipping the scale at 22 kg / 48.4 lbs. The *AW 180* only provides a single balanced (XLR) input connection, so if you want to use single-ended (RCA) you'll need an adapter. In addition, the *AW 180* does provide one balanced (XLR) output that is labelled *Link*. This serves to pass the input signal along, unaltered, which allows for daisy chaining amplifiers, or perhaps to connect a subwoofer. Finally, a standard IEC input is provided on the rear for the power cord. I found the *EC 4.8 MkII* and *AW 180* to both have a solid build with excellent fit and finish. The gauge of the metal casework was thick and passed my knuckle wrap test, no concerning rattles whatsoever. Though the satin black finish of the casework was without flaw, it was commonplace; however, the faces of these components were something else. The front dress plates were, just that, dressed and dressed to the nines. Beautiful thick clear acrylic plates (3/8" thick on the preamp and 3/4" on amps) a silk screened on their back with gorgeous gold lettering set on a black background. The fact that **Electrocompaniet** puts the extra effort and cost into painting the backs, rather than just using opaque black acrylic truly pays off, as it provides a looking glass effect, with depth akin to peering through the clearest sheet of Nordic ice. The face plates are adorned with distinctive gold screws, while the *EC 4.8 MkII* preamp also places

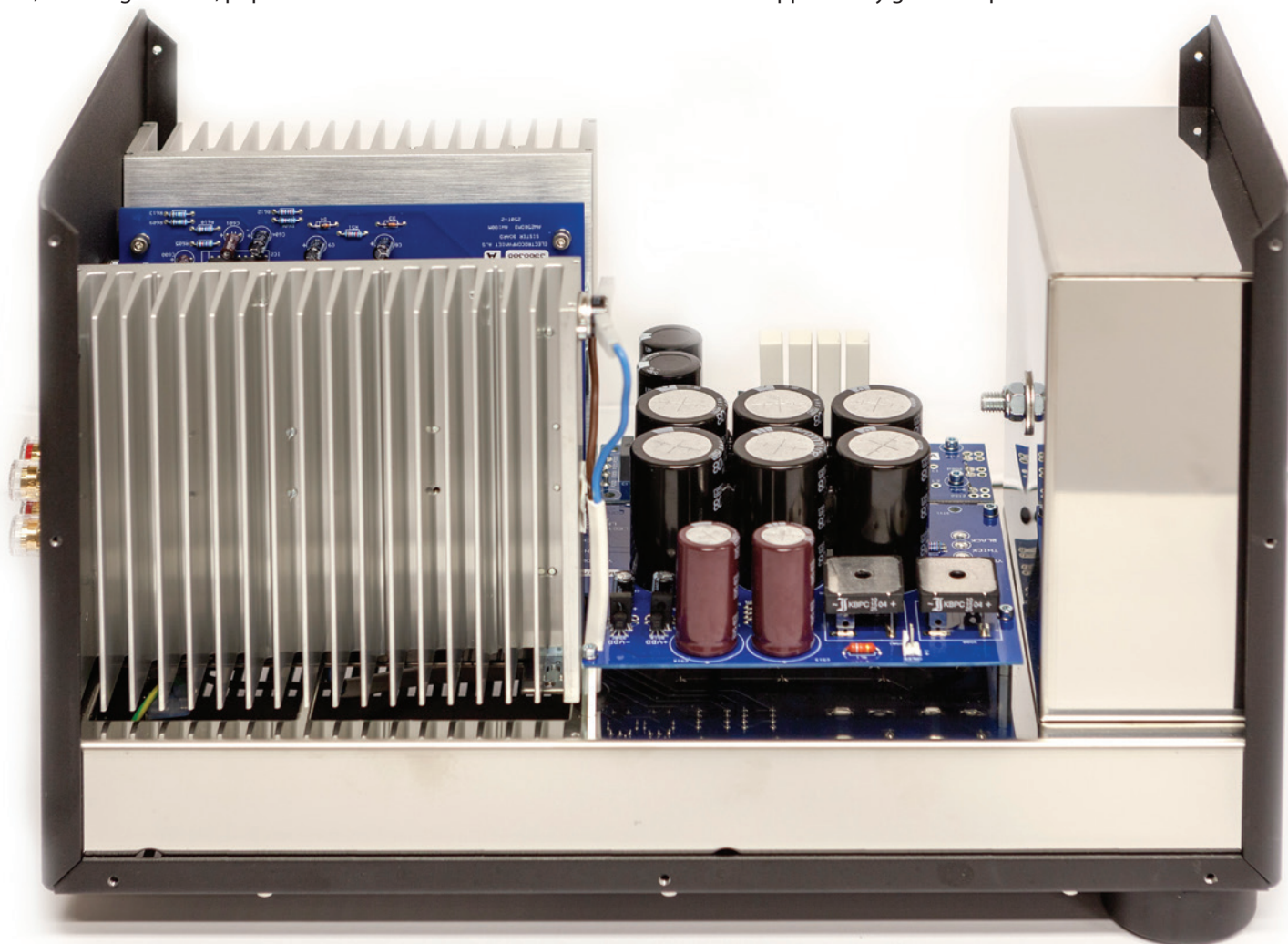


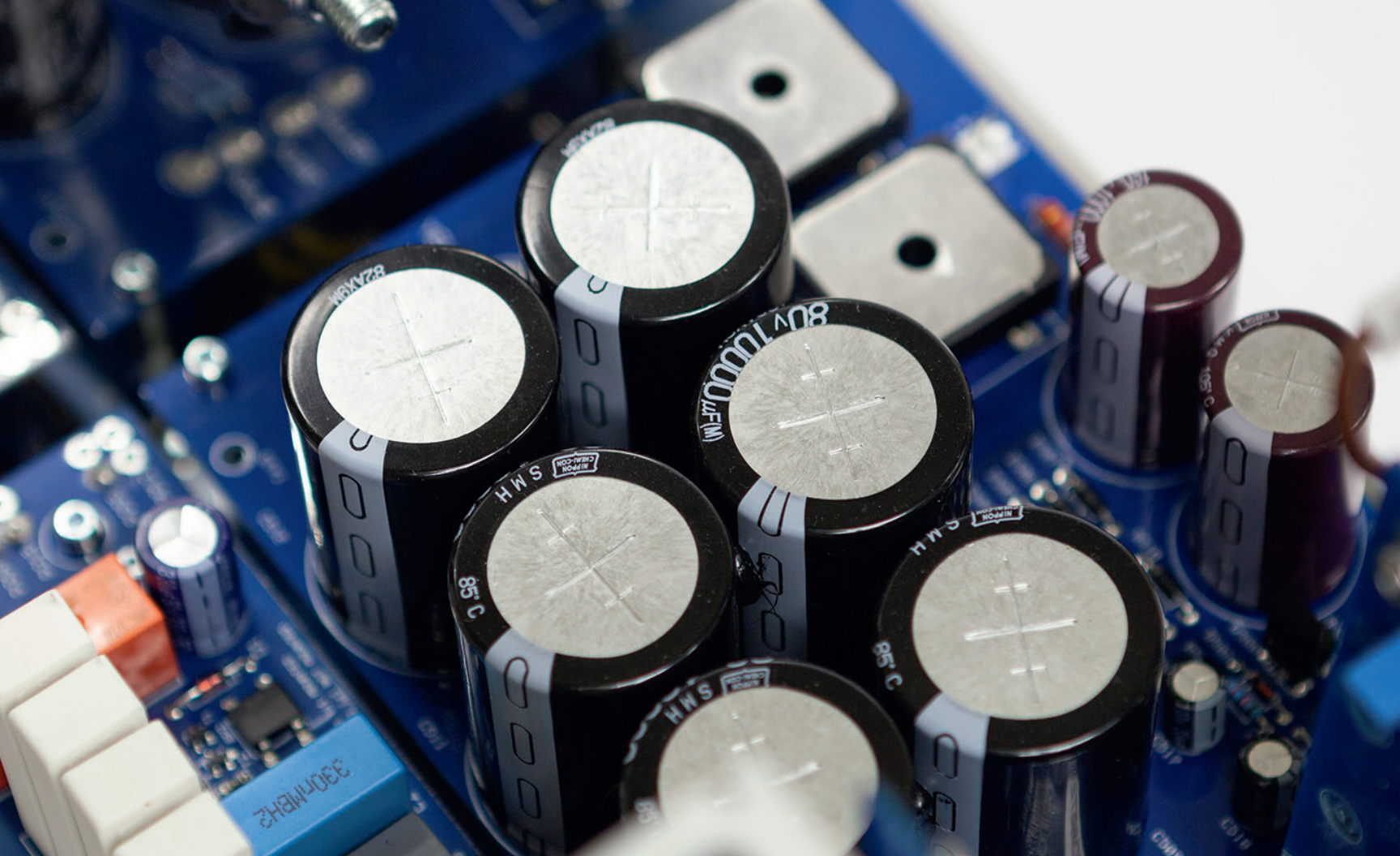
a scarce few gold buttons to maintain a minimalist aesthetic. The result is a combination of classic European boutique style that is exclusively **Electrocompaniet**. Now, not to detract from the beauty of these components with pettiness but I have to mention that the *IR* remote; though fully functional, is nowhere close to the pedigree of the **Electrocompaniet** components. Didn't Dad always did say, *don't judge high-end audio by the quality of its zapper*.

I setup the **Electrocompaniet EC 4.8 MkII Reference** Preamplifier and **AW 180** Monoblock Power Amplifiers in my dedicated listening room, using my **Bluesound Node (v3)** as a digital source and **VPI Scout / Dynavector 10x5 / Gold Note PH10 & PSU10** for the analog. Digital tracks included both *CD* and hi-res sourced from **Tidal HiFi** music streaming. The loudspeakers used for evaluation were my **Dynaudio C2 Signature**.

One of the albums that was recently brought to my attention by a recent acquaintance, was **Marie Spaemann's** album *Gap*. **Marie** is a cellist and singer-songwriter and I've found her music works both novel and stimulating contribution to jazz fusion, blending classical, pop and soul elements. One track that

stood out with the **Electrocompaniet** amplification was the track, *Lovesong*, a unique interpretation of the **Cure's** classic hit. Jumping out at me was how corporeal **Marie's** voice sounded through the **EC 4.8 MkII / AW 180** pairing. The midrange was intoxicating. The sound... warm, silky and impressively lifelike. The midrange warmth and prominence in the presentation was most tasteful and served only to aid the illusion of an in-person performance. Bass strings were full, bold and resonant, yet controlled. **Marie's** cello was conveyed with a lusciously authentic timbre and tone. Moving to the track *Prelude* the opening cello takes centre stage and the **Electrocompaniet** amplification presented it in a succulent and exciting manner. The textures of the strings were immensely musical if only a touch shaded in their resolution. What I was convinced of was that the **EC 4.8 MkII** and **AW 180** were proficient at extracting and communicating the emotion of the performance. Though rich and wet in tone the **EC 4.8 MkII / AW 180** amplification never crossed into the lavish or syrupy waters, staying neutral plus one or two notches. Also, there was an overall relaxed composure, no doubt supported by generous power reserves.





I listened to **Bob James Trio**, and the album *Feel Like Making Live!* Two tracks I spent some time with was *Angela* and *Maputo*. Fans of the late 70's TV drama *Taxi*, will instantly recognize *Angela*. What I got from these with the **Electrocompaniet** amplification was an arrangement full of personality. The Bass was generous, sounding full and rich, with a mid bass energy that drove the dynamic punch. Solid is how I would label the bass character, treading the line of fullness carefully so as to not cross over into any bloat. Listening to the strings of the upright bass, my notes underlined the word *tuneful*. The mids on the track *Angela*, possessed a glow and liquidity with notable vibrance. On *Maputo*, I noted the sonorous glow of the piano notes and the impressive bass string weight. I was taken by the immediacy and energy of the cymbal crashes, which had a very engaging metallic sound. There seemed to be a little emphasis on the front uptake over sustain, and a slight shortness on ultimate air. That said, the rim strikes on this track plainly revealed the woody timbre of the stick on the drum kit. Karen Souza's rendition of R.E.M.'s 'Everybody Hurts', with the EC 4.8 MkII / AW 180 in play, delivered the droning synth bass notes with stunning depth, weight, and variation of tone, albeit with a slight rounding of the deepest notes. It was most apparent that the Electrocompaniet gear was adept at ameliorating the sibilants of Souza's sultry vocalizations. I did find there was some surrender of ultimate resolution and treble air but with the positive consequence of a more organic and melodious exposé.

If it's not yet apparent, let me now be clear, I've very much appreciated my time with these components from Norway. To

summarize the EC 4.8 MkII / AW 180 pairing, I would note that their bass is solid, full, and uncompromised with great macro dynamics that never sounds sluggish nor overripe. The mid-range is uncannily realistic, smooth with natural warmth and beautifully communicative. The Electrocompaniet pair relayed lovely natural timbre and tonal saturation. If you seek a cool and perhaps analytical sound, something that might dissect a recording, you won't find it here; yet, treble presence and musical insight is delivered in spades. The EC 4.8 MkII Reference Preamplifier and AW 180 Amplifier are genuinely high-end audio components and strongly recommended to those seeking long listening sessions where the music takes precedence. Like the Vikings, these Nordic warriors will surely conquer - the hearts of many.

GENERAL INFORMATION

AW-180 Monoblock Amplifiers

Price: 15 000 \$ CAD/a pair

Reference EC 4.8 MkII Preamplifier

Price: 5 500 \$ CAD/ea

Warranty: 2 years, parts & labour

Distributor: Red Leaf Audio, T.: 905.746.9333,
www.redleafaudio.com ; <https://electrocompaniet.com>

Mediagraphy

Marie Spaemann, Gap, Anthropoet – ANP001

Bob James Trio, *Fell Like Making Live!*, Evosound, EVOLP33,
489,712,137,086

What's New?

By MICHEL DALLAIRE

Chord Mojo 2 redefines the portable audio standard



British digital music manufacturer **Chord** has announced a new version of its *Mojo* portable headphone amplifier with an integrated *DAC* in mid-February 2022. The latter is now called *Mojo 2* and according to **Chord**, it has been redesigned to improve its sound with the addition of a new options menu and an additional input.

The new *Mojo 2* now includes a fourth button that gives access to the adjustment menu. This allows you to vary the brightness of the display buttons as well as the adjustment of the tonal balance through a digital equalizer. A crossfeed function has also been added, which virtually simulates stereophonic listening with speakers. To this end, four levels of adjustment are available to adapt the sound to the type of headphones or earphones used.

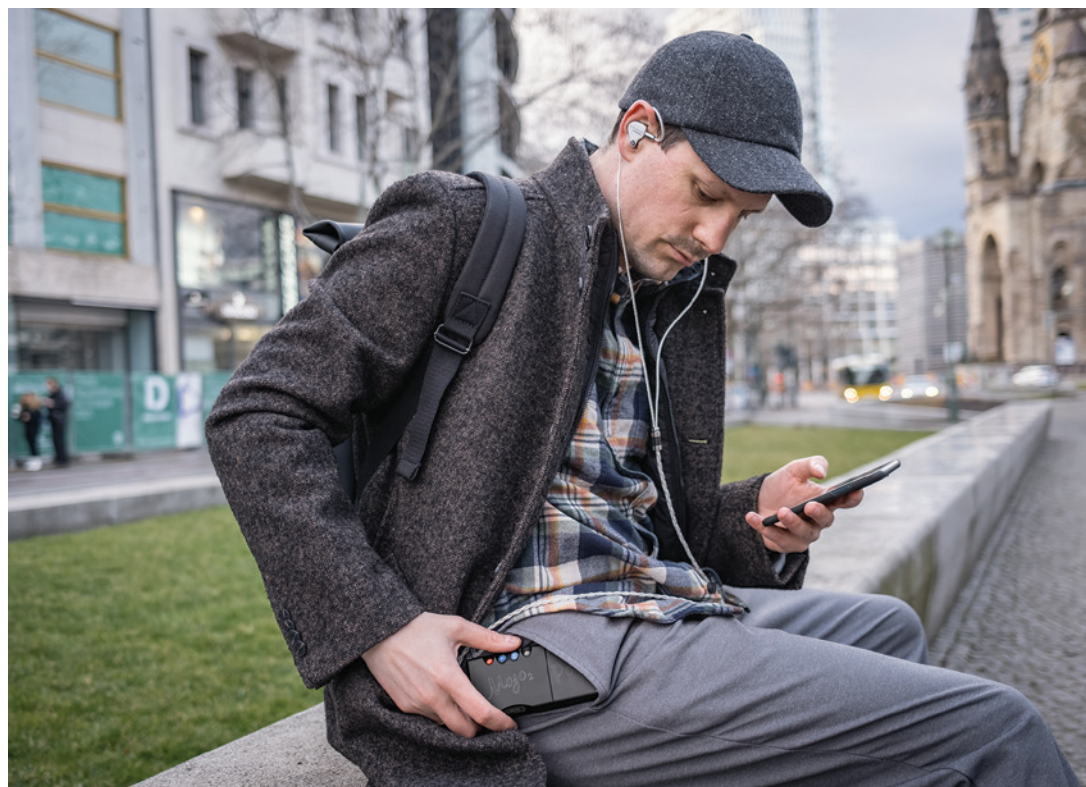
The sound of the *Mojo 2* has been improved by the use of a new 104-bit *FPGA* processor, which has the power to adjust the response curve over 18 points in the low, mid and high frequencies.

Chord also eliminated the link capacitors and took the opportunity to update the fourth generation of its Pulse Array *DAC*. The *WTA* (*Watts Transiant Aligned*) digital filter,

named after its designer **Rob Watts**, has also been enhanced by the new *FPGA*

As on the previous *Mojo*, the *Mojo 2*'s inputs include a micro-*USB* input, an *S/PDIF* coaxial input and a *Toslink* optical input to which a *USB-C* input was added to allow connecting other types of *Android* or *iOS* devices. The two 3.5 mm outputs for headphones or earphones have been retained. In addition, the capacity and duration of the rechargeable battery have also been increased. It is intended that the *Mojo 2* can work in symbiosis with the **Chord Poly** streamer that attaches to the side of the *Mojo 2*. It is therefore a device that can be described as *all-in-one* for listening to dematerialized music on the move. It can also be connected to a high-fidelity system as an external *DAC*.

The **Chord Mojo 2** headphone amplifier/*DAC* is currently available in specialty stores across Canada for \$875. <https://chordelectronics.co.uk>



BLUESOUND POWERNODE NETWORK PLAYER/AMPLIFIER
AND **PSB ALPHA P5** ACOUSTIC SPEAKERS

A VETERAN IN ITS CATEGORY?

By MICHEL DALLAIRE

Canadian manufacturer **Bluesound** is specialized in wireless speakers and network music players (*streamers*). One of its devices, the *Vault 2i* also serves as a music server with its slot that swallows *CDs* to copy them to an internal hard drive. The *BluOS* platform of this manufacturer is already well established in other manufacturers (**NAD**, **Dali**) and it allows the control of the multi-room sound system in our home. What I am proposed to test for this benchmark is the *Powernode* which is essentially a *Node* network player to which

an amplifier section has been added. This *all-in-one* amplifier requires only one pair of speakers to create a complete stereo system ready to play digital music. The *Powernode* is not a newcomer to this market, as it is in its fourth generation. One could even say that it is one of the veterans in the field of wireless streaming, a market already very well occupied by manufacturers. For this occasion I will test the *Powernode* with a pair of **PSB Alpha P5** speakers, a **Bluesound** partner.



What Is the Pownode?

Bluesound is a division of the Canadian **Lenbrook Industries** group which also owns the **NAD Electronics** and **PSB Speakers** brands. The *Pownode*, which is the subject of this review, replaces the *Pownode 2i* launched in 2018. Physically, the two are similar except that on top of the new *Pownode* version 2021, there is a bright touch screen. Its rounded corners are moulded in two shells and it is available in black or white. In white, it is curved by a thin black line which reminds me of the **Mac Mini** computers of a certain era.

Its amplifier section is based on a new *HybridDigital* module developed by **NAD**. This section operates in class *D* and is now 80 W per channel compared to the *Pownode 2i*'s 60 W. Its processor (**ARM Cortex-A53**, Quad Core, 1.8 GHz per core) is more powerful and four times faster than the previous model. The digital-to-analog conversion section has been upgraded with a 32-bit / 384 kHz chip. This new *DAC* can process all *FLAC*, *MQA*, *WAV*, *AIFF*, *MPEG-4 SLS* high-resolution audio file, and its output is configured in differential mode.

The *Pownode* was designed to be both your source and your amplifier. So, if you combine it with a pair of bookshelf speakers, you get a very compact hi-fi system made up of only three products. The *Pownode* measures 22 × 17 × 7 cm, which makes it easily housed or used as a desktop amplifier. Don't rely on its size to get an idea of its potential. The *Pownode*'s functions are very complete, and its power even allows to feed free-standing speakers as long as they are not too greedy nor have an impedance curve that goes too much below 4 ohms.

The Pownode's Connectivity

Visually, the 2021 version of the *Pownode* is very sleek, with just a 3.5 mm headphone output on its front panel and its touch-sensitive screen on top. The latter combines some functions such as the selection of the preset inputs, the volume control, the selection of the previous or next room and the *Play / Pause* button. At the back, there are two 3.5 mm mini jack format hybrid stereo inputs. These are analog and / or digital sockets thanks to an optical adapter provided for each of them.

Then there is an output for the subwoofer on an *RCA* connector, or wirelessly, with **Bluesound's Pulse Sub+**. This is followed by a *USB-A* input to connect a *USB* stick or an external hard drive. There is no asynchronous *USB-B* input to connect a computer directly, but its *Ethernet (LAN)* and *WiFi* connections are, of course, alternative options. An *HDMI ARC/eARC* input is provided to process audio-visual signals from a TV set. It ends with the terminals for the speakers and the *IEC* plug for the power cord. The wireless connection to the network can be done through dual band *WiFi* and through its compatibility with **Apple Airplay 2** devices. The *Pownode* is also equipped with a *Bluetooth aptX HD* wireless transmission module that can receive a signal from *iOS* and *Android* phones or tablets. It can not only receive a signal, but also transmit a signal to these devices or to *Bluetooth* wireless headphones.

The *Pownode's BluOS* streaming platform provides access to high-resolution music from Internet radio stations, online music services such as **Spotify** and **Tidal Connect**, and your own local server. This music can, in turn, be played by multiple *Bluesound* wireless players or speakers throughout your home. The new *Pownode* is also compatible with the *ROON* playback platform and **Amazon's Alexa** voice command application.

PSB Alpha P5

To test the *Pownode*, I was also sent a pair of passive speakers from Canadian manufacturer **PSB Speakers'** entry-level *Alpha* series. The *Alpha P5* is now in its fifth generation as an entry-level two-way bookshelf speaker. Since its introduction in 1992, it has undergone several modifications that have earned it the title of *Best Buy* in its category several times. **PSB's Alpha P5** is roughly in the middle of the *Alpha* range between the small *P3* and the *T20* freestanding speaker with two woofers. This is a conventional looking speaker with a black or walnut imitation vinyl finish. Its dimensions are 29 cm high by 17 cm wide and 24.5 cm deep. It can therefore be placed on a stand, on a shelf, on a desk or even fixed to a wall for home theatre use. On the back of the speaker, there is a threaded hole to accommodate a wall mounting system. The *Alpha P5* is equipped with a 19 mm



BLUESOUND POWERNODE NETWORK PLAYER/AMPLIFIER AND PSB ALPHA P5 ACOUSTIC SPEAKERS

black anodized aluminum dome tweeter surrounded by a shallow horn waveguide. This tweeter is now located below the woofer to improve the phase between the two transducers. This dome is protected by a dispersion plate and is driven by a neodymium magnet. The new 13 cm low/midrange woofer uses a double-layer voice coil. Its cone is made of polypropylene and has a woven fibre finish. The latter is supported by a powerful magnet and its cone is surrounded by a rubber suspension. The acoustic load of the speaker is of the bass reflex type with a tubular vent which opens towards the back. The whole is protected by a magnetic metal grid.

Installation and Context of the Test Bench

As I already own a **Bluesound Pulse 2i** speaker in my downstairs dining room, the *BluOS* app is installed on my tablet. In addition, all the rooms in my house are connected to my router by a wired *Ethernet* network. This type of very stable connection has greatly facilitated the integration of the *Powernode* to my Internet network, but you can also use the *WiFi* wireless connection. With the *BluOS* app on my tablet, I can choose which **Bluesound** device I want to use whether it's independently remote or grouped together for a general broadcast. I can also decide which music source will play in the *Powernode* and/or *Pulse 2i*. The *DLNA* design of the *Powernode* means that all of my applications show both of these players as playback options. In my case, this means that I can control the *Powernode* with *SqueezPad*, *Daphile* and *ROON* which are installed on my computer as well as on my tablet. I could listen to Internet radio stations, online music sites (*streaming*), my TV, thanks to the *HDMI/eARC* connection, or simply with the content of my **CeolBOX** music server.

The Sound of the Powernode in Two Stages

First, I installed the *Powernode-Alpha P5* in my small TV room located in the basement of my house. In these conditions, the ensemble plays in a relatively small room of 2.5 m by 3.5 m. I began my listening with the album *Clearway* by French jazz group **Amaury Faye Trio**. The first track starts with a short drum solo that is impressive to hear from a speaker of this size. The

drumheads are struck cleanly and the cymbals resonate airily in the stereophonic image. The sound of the *Powernode-Alpha P5* is not at all narrow and all instruments keep their natural proportion. The double bass is powerful, round and warm while the piano notes and harmonics are superbly respected. The dimensions of my room certainly favoured the tonal balance of the **PSB Alpha P5** speaker whose low frequencies seemed to me more than satisfactory for a bookshelf type speaker. Even though the *Alpha P5s* were stuck in the shelves of my wall bookcase, the low end of the spectrum didn't suffer too much from exaggerated swelling and the dispersion of the stereo image kept a good amplitude. I continue with the *Laid Black* album by excellent bassist **Marcus Miller**, but this time, by plugging my **Grado RS2** headphones on the front 3.5 mm input of the *Powernode*. The musical satisfaction is just as great, if not greater, because I gain in precision and presence of the message. **Marcus Miller's** electric bass is as playful as ever in his funky style. The details of the recording are revealed to me without secrecy, with a well-balanced tonal balance that is not too accentuated towards the top of the spectrum. In other words, the

« In this new environment, I started my listening with the same album, *Clearway* by French jazz band **Amaury Faye Trio** in order to draw a comparison. It was for me a pleasant surprise not to say a revelation of the true potential of the 2021 version of the *Powernode*. This little devil made my *D20Rs* sing in ways I never imagined. I could repeat word for word what I wrote above about **Amaury Faye Trio**, [...] Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that the *Powernode* beats all its competitors in the all-in-one amplifier market, but to get better and more refined in any meaningful way, you'll have to spend a lot more. »



BLUESOUND POWERNODE NETWORK PLAYER/AMPLIFIER AND **PSB ALPHA P5** ACOUSTIC SPEAKERS

sound is detailed and smooth at the same time. For an entry-level speaker, the **PSB Alpha P5** plays its game well. It will, of course, gain in precision once installed on a good support and slightly offset from the walls, its compact dimensions facilitating its integration in almost any type of decor or environment. In a second step, I installed the *Powernode* in my living room on the first floor with my **Proac Response D20R** speakers. Compared to **PSB's Alpha P5**, which costs about \$600 per pair, we're talking about a price difference of over \$6,000 with my speakers. This association may seem exaggerated with a \$1,200 *Powernode*, but not so much after all.

In this new environment, I started my listening with the same album, *Clearway* by French jazz band **Amaury Faye Trio** in order to draw a comparison. It was for me a pleasant surprise not to say a revelation of the true potential of the 2021 version of the *Powernode*. This little devil made my *D20Rs* sing in ways I never imagined. I could repeat word for word what I wrote above about **Amaury Faye Trio**, but with a clear improvement on all aspects of the so-called high-fidelity sound. The stereo image has expanded, which is normal in a larger room and with larger speakers. As a result, the *Powernode* exhibited nice fullness and comfortable power, at least with my two-way speakers. The low frequencies became deeper and more precise, which enhanced the double bass playing. The piano was even more majestic and literally floated in space. The drums had even more pluck with better defined cymbals. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that the *Powernode* beats all its competitors in the *all-in-one* amplifier market, but to get better and more refined in any meaningful way, you'll have to spend a lot more.

I finish this test bench with the eponymous album by **Alice Jemima**. This young British singer-songwriter has a good command of synthesizers and her electronic music style goes well with her sweet voice. When she performs her songs, I feel as if she is whispering the words into my ears. She also likes to exploit catchy rhythms supported by deep bass frequencies. The *Powernode-Alpha P5* duo is not at all hindered and renders everything with aplomb while taking nothing away from the suavity of **Alice Jemima's** voice. In short, this ensemble is happy to accept any type of music submitted to it, and this, without stifling your musical pleasure.

Conclusion

Let us be realistic and give credit where credit is due. A set consisting of a *Powernode* and a pair of **PSB Alpha P5** speakers is not necessarily aimed at a hardcore audiophile market like me. But for about \$1,800 before taxes, you get a very respectable *hi-fi* system that can handle all types of music, downloadable or otherwise. Although I did not have the opportunity to test the 2018 *Powernode 2i*, so I cannot comment on the sonic improvements made to the 2021 version of the *Powernode*. For my part, its performance as a network music player and the quality of its *DAC* greatly impressed me. With this duo, I was able to find my pleasure as an audiophile, which is no small thing. For the



majority of users looking for a modern and affordable first *hi-fi* system, the *Powernode-Alpha P5* package could possibly be a purchase for many years to come. If your budget is a little more elastic and your room is of average size, then opt for the **PSB Alpha T20** freestanding speaker, which could just as easily make you happy. For my part, the 2021 version of the *Powernode* and the **PSB** speakers are a recommendation without hesitation.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Bluesound Powernode

Price: 1 199 \$

Warranty: 1 year, parts and labour

PSB Alpha P5

Price: 599 \$ la paire

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Distributeur: Lenbrooke Industries, T.: 905.831.6555,
bluesound.com; psbspeakers.com

Mediagraphie

Amaury Faye Trio, *Clearway*, FLAC 24 bits / 96 kHz

Marcus Miller, *Laid Back*, Blue Note Recordings, FLAC
24 bits / 48 kHz

Emie R Roussel Trio, *Rythme De Passage*,

UNI Musiqc 2019, UNICD-4720

Bryn Terfel, *Handel Arias*, Deutsche Grammophon, 453 480-2

Mahler, *Symphonie n° 1*, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, BR Klassik 900143

ROKSAN ATTESSA NETWORK PLAYER/AMPLIFIER AND
MONITOR AUDIO SILVER 500 7G SPEAKERS

SYNERGY, COHERENCE AND VERSATILITY

BY RICHARD SCHNEIDER

One of the biggest challenges when you want to buy an audio system is to acquire devices that are compatible with each other. As part of this test bed, we received a carefully crafted package

from industry experts. We have a pair of speakers from **Monitor Audio**, the *Silver 500 7G* and the **Roksan Attesa** integrated streaming amplifier. These two names have been firmly established



in the world of electronics for many years. You will then have understood that this set is aimed at people with a very busy schedule, and therefore little time available to carry out exhaustive research aimed at arranging an audio system, as well as at people looking for an *all-in-one* set offering compatibility and diversification, and above all, a most pleasant sound.

Roksan, founded in 1985, presented its first product at an audio festival, the *Xeres* analog turntable, which was a real success. Subsequently, **Roksan** has developed a great expertise in the spheres of amplification and digital. In 2016, British speaker manufacturer **Monitor Audio**, founded in 1972 in Teversham, England, acquired **Roksan**. This partnership opened the way to an enviable complementarity by presenting audio ensembles of great coherence thanks to an invaluable sharing of knowledge.

Speakers

The first generation of **Silver** speakers was released in 1998. According to **Monitor Audio**, they were a great success.

According to the manufacturer, throughout the years, this series has been designed with the ultimate goal of offering an excellent balance between superb sound quality, elegant presentation, and a price that is very accessible to all. For the curious, the meaning of the suffix *7G* is not trivial. This three-way speaker model is the seventh generation of the *Silver* series. It has an attractive, modern style and is available in a choice of five finishes, not to mention its many acoustic innovations. **Monitor Audio** makes no secret of the fact that the aesthetics of this speaker are as important as the electronics that compose it.

Let's take a look at the acoustic innovations that characterize the *Silver 500 7G*. Don't worry, I won't give you a headache. They are equipped with a 25 mm golden dome *C-CAM* tweeter with a uniform waveguide. The 8 cm *C-CAM* midrange driver is equipped with the *RST II* technology, while the two 20 cm drivers are also designed with *RST II* membranes. A few definitions are in order. The *C-CAM* acronym stands for Ceramic – Coated Aluminum/Magnesium.

The *Silver 500 7G* speakers not only feature two woofers, but also a large internal volume for more powerful and deeper bass. Whenever possible, they should be installed in medium to large rooms. Being very versatile, they can be used for stereo listening as well as in the creation of a system for your home theatre.

Amplifier / Network Player

Roksan, for its part, is not left behind in the research and development of new products. As such, the company has recently introduced a new generation of audio devices under the *Atessa* name. Designed and developed in the UK, the range consists of an integrated broadcast amplifier, an integrated amplifier, a turntable and a *CD* transport. In this article, we will focus on the amplifier / network player.

The *Atessa* amplifier / network player is similar to the integrated amplifier of the same name. However, the offering is enhanced by the addition of a wireless multi-room platform that can play music in up to 64 zones. Of course, as its name suggests, it is a streaming music player or network player. The device offers a world of possibilities that opens up to you with 20 streaming services including **TuneIn**, **Amazon Music**, **Qobuz**, **Radio Paradise**, **Spotify**, **Tidal**, **SiriusXM** to name a few.

High-resolution broadcasting is available at your fingertips through the integration of *MQA* (Master Quality Authenticated) technology. The *Atessa* is also equipped with a *Bluetooth* controller. Wireless music listening can be controlled either from a smartphone, a tablet, a computer (*PC* or *Mac*) or a discman. Support for the *SBC* and *AAC* codecs ensures optimal compatibility with any *Bluetooth* source, while the *aptX* codec enables high-speed streaming with sources that offer enhanced listening quality. Finally, users of an **Apple** device (*iPhone*, *iPad*, *iPod* or *Mac*) will enjoy streaming using *AirPlay 2* while users of the *Android* platform will be able to do the same via *AirPlay Android* to listen to the music content stored on their devices. The *Bluetooth* range is well within the standards, i.e., 15 m.



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MONITOR AUDIO SILVER 500 7G SPEAKERS



Description of the Attesa

The *Attesa* range keeps pace with the current aesthetic trends in electronics. The slim case is discreet, but still very pleasing to the eye. We are no longer dealing with the previous quasi-military designs such as the **Roksan Caspian**. On the left front side, there is the luminous power button. In the center, a wheel is available if you prefer to control your device by touch. It is designed to be used for sound level adjustment and source selection. The display of the amplification volume level and source selection is done by an orange *LED* graphic interface. Finally, the whole thing is completed by a headphone jack on the right. The output stage of the headphones is excellent. Its power is 7.5 V.

Connectivity and Technical Considerations

In the back, it's a different story and that's where my favourite playground is. This tour begins on the left where we find the terminals used to connect speakers. They are perfectly adapted to the standards of the audio industry and meet all the usual connection types. They are solid and well made. Don't worry if your cables are very rigid. The heavy weight of the device will ensure that it will not be destabilized on a shelf. Immediately to the left, we find the analog inputs which consist of a phono input for a vinyl turntable equipped with a magnetic cartridge (*MM*) as well as two inputs which will be used for any other analog type device. As a bonus, there is access to a preamp output to feed a subwoofer.

For digital inputs, the unit has two optical inputs (up to 24-bit/96 kHz) and two coaxial inputs (up to 24-bit/192 kHz). An input has been provided for the connection of a *CD* transport. Finally, if you want to use a wired connection to connect the device to the home network, an *RJ45* network input is available.

If you opt for the *WiFi* option, which, by the way, works perfectly, you will find a *USB* key as an accessory that you plug into the back to establish the link with your modem. Immediately below this, a second *USB* input is also available. The latter is used to play music saved on a *USB* stick. Further on, you will notice an input and a trigger output

that allow you to turn on or off the different sources of the *Attesa* range connected to your installation.

The power supply is the responsibility of a powerful 400 VA toroidal transformer. Its skills allow a breathless rendering during vigorous passages, while ensuring a great stability, since it produces a very linear current. In another order of ideas, let us note in passing that the power of the amplification is 80 W under 8 ohms and 130 W under 4 ohms.

The digital-to-analog converter is a **Burr Brown** compatible with PCM streams of up to 24-bit/96 kHz using the optical inputs, and 24-bit/192 kHz using the coaxial inputs. Most audio formats are supported by the converter. DSD files will only be played through DoP via *BluOS*. DoP (DSD over PCM) is a method of transmitting DSD audio on devices that do not have DSD drivers as such. This function, which actually converts your DSD files to 24 bits FLAC, is only available through *BluOS* using your Windows PC or MacOs when using **Roksan's Attesa**. This is an option that I did not favour, because anyway the vast majority of DSD files are available in FLAC or WAV format in high definition.

Installation

The installation of the components is very simple. As for the speakers, the bases are easily installed. However, you will notice that they will be easier to fix if the bases of the boxes point upwards. This is the preferred method of opening the boxes. You can choose between spikes for carpet or rubber pads for hard floors. Both systems are adjustable. I loved the rubber pads because you can put the speakers on the floor very easily without having to go to the chiropractor. Afterwards, you will be able to move them at your leisure without effort. All types of connections are available, either a simple connection, in bicabling or in bisamplification. The wiring can be equipped with banana plugs, forks or simply stripped.

The **Attesa** is also relatively easy to install. Upon unpacking, we notice that the device is really strong. This is serious business. Be sure to handle it properly. Also, make sure you have quick and easy access to where you want to drop it off. There are few accessories in the package. We find a remote control at its simplest, a USB key for WiFi and a small extension cord. Broadcasting via *BluOS* requires the WiFi key to be inserted on the back of the device. The extension cord is not essential unless the unit is located in a cabinet where reception is poor.

For the rest, it is a question of connecting your devices and the loudspeakers, and the turn is played.

The *Attesa* amplifier /network player is a complex device, I must admit, especially when you consider all the technology on board. But don't worry, because everything has been designed to make your life easier. Essentially, this will be done through two pieces of software available for free on **Apple Store** or **Google Play**. Both are essential.

The first is *MaestroUnite*. This is the main tool for configuring the device. With the help of the latter, you will be able to unify all the elements of your WiFi network. You will also be able to harmonize your *Attesa* CD transport (if applicable) and your amplifier / network player to make them work as one unit. *MaestroUnite* even allows you to control features such as input sources, as well as configure the device's advanced settings such as headphone sensitivity, analog input gain, balance and low standby power, update installation and more. All from a single application. By following the steps described in the *Attesa* user manual, you should be able to do this without difficulty. The second application is *BluOS*, which is basically an operating system for music management software. In addition to installing the application on your smart devices, I strongly suggest that you install it on your desktop or laptop if, of course, you have those tools. The Windows or Mac versions are more complete and become essential if you want to convert DSD files to FLAC. *BluOS* is really the neuralgic center for controlling the use of the *Attesa*. It is one of the best applications of its kind on the market.

BluOS is also a multi-room audio technology tool that creates a link to access and stream all of our music using a phone, tablet or computer. *BluOS* becomes a wireless tool that uses our home network. The application allows you to play different music pieces simultaneously anywhere in your home. And, not least, *BluOS* can wirelessly transmit lossless music at up to 24-bit / 192 kHz, with no lag and no loss of sound quality. *BluOS* also works with *Alexa*, **Google Assistant** and *Siri*. It is possible to use these assistants to control an audio track, to pause or skip a song, and even to say in which room you want to listen to music.

You will have understood that the charm of the *Attesa* amplifier /network player lies very much in the fact that it allows you to take advantage of broadcasting or streaming services. A host of popular streaming music services and Internet radio



ROKSAN ATTESSA NETWORK PLAYER/AMPLIFIER AND
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applications are integrated directly into *BluOS*, providing unlimited access to millions of songs. Some of these services are available for a subscription fee.

The Sound Quality Aspect

Beyond all these considerations, the big question remains the same. So what about the sound of this set? The short answer is: very good. I set up the set in my reading room, wanting to share my two passions of music and reading except I got caught up in the game. The music took all the space. The authority of the first notes is surprising, to say the least. Although the specifications of the amplification, without being modest, are in the average, it is necessary to admit that *Attessa* is strong hearted and enough reserve to make the *Silver 500 7G* cheerfully.

So, since this was not the first time the devices had been used, I took the liberty of pushing them. **Led Zeppelin's** *Stairway to Heaven* in *MQA* format certainly still resonates at my neighbour's place (I live in a condo). When the *Silver 500s* are relatively close to a wall, not to say too close, the low frequencies are really predominant. However, I found that their design is of a high standard, as the cabinets do not vibrate, and I never felt that I was overstepping the limits. If the bass is too predominant, I discovered a little trick. Not everyone has a large listening room, and sometimes you may still want to own speakers the size of the *Silver 500s* for their sonic advantages. The rear vents can be blocked with foam washers available in the package. It solves the issue at once without altering the quality of the rendering. The association between **Monitor Audio** and **Roksan** has laid the foundation for the creation of a team with great expertise and working in the same direction. The set we present here is the proof. After having placed, ideally according to my criteria, speakers, I appreciated the neutrality of the rendering. I have a particular affection for jazz, classical, French chanson and pop music like **Norah Jones**. The synergy between the speakers and the integrated is perfect. I may have gotten too old, but it seemed to me that the high frequencies were a bit off, although I remembered that this is often a characteristic of British manufacturers. The midrange and the high midrange are very coherent. The bass is smooth and very realistic. I can promise you long hours of listening without hearing fatigue.

I tested one of the digital inputs by connecting my server. It has its own operating system and it is temperamental, so I was not able to control it via *BluOS*. However, my goal was to run my favourite pieces that I know inside and out to make a comparison. The *Attessa's* converter and **Monitor Audio** speakers did a flawless job of playing *FLAC* files, regardless of the sample rate. For example, *Slow Down* by **Keb' Mo'**. I was very pleasantly surprised by the vigour and strength of the resulting sound. It was powerful, clear and with great impact.

The ensemble is also able to offer a smooth rendering and this was the case with the **Mendelssohn Ravel** *Sollima* album by **Quatuor Saguenay**. One can only savour all the details, the softness and the veracity of the sound restitution that this quartet offers. The beautiful musicality of this duo will transport you to a world of discovery of new musical horizons, as broadcast services offering *MQA* or *HD* (24 bits) offer great possibilities that you will savour.

In the End

If you were looking for a turnkey duo, you've come to the right place, because the complementarity of this set is hard to beat. Designed by two British audio experts, the companies have worked hand in hand to build an audio system that offers perfect synergy, consistency and versatility. Now it's your turn to you to discover it.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Roksan Attessa Network Player / Amplifier

Price: 3 499 \$

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Monitor Audio Silver 500 7G Speakers

Price: 3 799 \$

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Kevro Int'l Inc., T.: 905.428.2800, <https://www.kevro.ca/>

Mediagraphy

Keb' Mo', *Slow Down*

Quatuor Saguenay, Mendelssohn Ravel *Sollima*

SURPRISING WINES FROM ALTO ADIGE/SÜDTIROL!

Courtesy of: Alto Adige Wine Florian Andergassen

The **Alto Adige –Südtirol** wine region has become the leading wine region in Italy for its white wines, which are recognized as being of the highest quality. Its alpine-Mediterranean climate, the quality of its soils, the exceptional locations of its vineyards in the hands of a generation of new winemakers and creative cooperatives are among the main reasons for the success of these wines.

But why call it that? It is important to know that Italian and German are spoken there. In fact, 75 % of the inhabitants speak German. In 1918, Italy annexed the region from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and kept the right to speak in both languages. In addition, the name of origin is Südtirol which will be found on the vast majority of labels.

Alto Adige –Südtirol is the northernmost region of Italy, located immediately south of Austria and west of Switzerland. It is located in the Alps mountain range, which strongly affects the topography, the climate and, consequently, the grapes that can grow there

This small region extends over a distance of 42 km and includes 16 municipalities. There are 274 wineries (cooperatives: 70 % of the production, independent

Alto Adige –Südtirol is one of the smallest wine regions in Italy, representing less than 1 % of the country's production. It is also one of the most versatile with its authentic wines of a very original character.

<https://www.altoadigewines.com/en/home/1-0.html>

winegrowers: 5 % and private wineries: 25 %) including 5,000 winegrowers who work on 5,600 ha of vineyards (1 ha per winegrower).

The soils are composed of more than 150 rocks including volcanic porphyry, primary rocky soils of quartz and mica, limestone, dolomite and sandy marl.

In general, the vineyards are at an altitude of 200 m to 1,000 m and there are about 20 varieties of grapes that produce 64 % white wines and 36 % red wines, of which approximately 8 % are organic.

Wines and Grape Varieties

The most important white wines are *Pinot Grigio* (11.9 %), *Gewurztraminer* (10.9 %), *Pinot blanc* (10.9 %), *Chardonnay*



(10.3 %), *Sauvignon blanc* (8 %). We also find *Muller-Thurgau*, *Kerner*, yellow *Muscat*, *Riesling*, *Sylvaner* and *Veltliner*. It was in 2013 that the development of white wines was accelerated at the expense of red wines. As for red wines, we find *Vernatsch / Schiava* (11.4 %), *Pinot Noir* (8.9 %), *Lagrein* (8.8 %) as well as *Merlot*, *Cabernet-Sauvignon*, *Cabernet Franc* and *Rosenmuskateller*. In addition, historical varieties such as *Blatterle*, *Fraueler*, *Furner Hottler*,

Versoaln, and *Weißterlaner* are also grown here.

What characterizes this region is the very high proportion of wines that have a *DOC* designation, 98 % of the production, which indicates a high level of quality.

Appellations

The two *DOC* appellations, **Alto Adige** and **Alto Adige Lago di Caldaro** establish the wines of **Alto Adige** according to their origin. The **Alto Adige** *DOC* is divided into six sub-areas including Valle Isarco,

Santa Maddalena, Terlano, Meranese, Val Venosta and Colli di Bolzano.

There are also *Single Vineyards* designations. Some of the most qualitative historical areas (such as localities) have been identified and can be added to the label in addition to the *DOC*. The production regulations for such wines mean that, quantitatively, the harvest must be reduced by 25 %. Only 89 wineries are entitled to this designation.

The wines of **Alto Adige** can be recognized by the identification on the top of their **Südtirol** capsules.



Buon Gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Andrian Somereto Alto Adige 2020

This *Chardonnay* is fermented at controlled temperatures in stainless steel tanks and aged for 6 months on fine lees.

Tasting Notes

A really beautiful *Chardonnay* that reveals itself on the nose with notes of exotic fruits, pure and ripe white fruits, a hint of yellow fruits and cotton candy.

On the palate, it is the purity of the white fruit and almond flavours that amazes in harmony with a slightly fatty texture and a fresh acidity. Nice amplitude and quite a bit of energy in this wine. Superb concentration of flavours and amplitude that lasts in a surprising way.

To be bought

**Andrian Somereto Alto Adige
Italy, White wine, DOC/Südtirol**

Grape variety: Chardonnay

Sugar: 2.1 g/l

Alcohol: 13%,

Price: \$22.80

SAQ Code: 14,038,771

<https://www.saq.com/en/14038771>

Agency: L'Enoteca di Moreno de Marchi



Kellerei Cantina Terlan

Kellerei Cantina Terlan

The exceptional soil conditions influence the Terlano terroir where the vines have developed a very specific reaction to micro-stresses that allow them to produce polyphenols specific to the terroir, which gives the house wines their distinct personality.

The result is felt in the marked salinity, with a beautiful tension and great depth. The special blend of crystals and minerals in Terlano's soils produces wines whose exceptional longevity consistently impresses the world's greatest wine sages.

Manual harvest with grape sorting, delicate pressing and clarification of the must by natural sedimentation, slow fermentation in stainless steel tanks at controlled temperature, and aging of six to seven months on lees, also in stainless steel tanks.

Tasting Notes

This *Pinot Bianco* is well aromatic with notes of pears, apples, flowers and a hint of exotic fruits.

In the mouth, its texture is slightly fatty and its acidity a little more marked. The flavours of pears and quinces are of a beautiful concentration and last in an appreciable way. Really beautiful!

You'll make a great pairing with appetizers like tuna or salmon carpaccio, spinach pasta, scallop au gratin or grilled shrimp.

Kellerei Cantina Terlan

Pinot Bianco, Italy

Alto Adige DOC/Südtirol, 2020

Sugar: 1.6 g/l

Alcohol: 13%

Price: \$23.55

SAQ Code: 13199012

<https://www.saq.com/en/13199012>

Agency: L'Enoteca di Moreno de Marchi — sample



Buon Gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Cantina Giran Pinot Bianco

Pinot Bianco is grown on the hillside vineyards of Cornaiano at an altitude ranging from 450 m to 500 m in well aerated vineyards. *Pinot Bianco* is the whitest variety grown in Cornaiano. The area in which it is grown is rich in minerals, the result of sedimentation from the ice age. The grapes are picked by hand and placed in small boxes to avoid excessive pressure. Soft pressing and clarification of the must by natural sedimentation. Fermentation in temperature-controlled stainless steel vats and maturation on lees in stainless steel vats.

Tasting Notes

This medium aromatic *Pinot Bianco* reveals floral, pear, citrus and apple aromas with a stony minerality on the nose.

On the palate, its slightly oily texture, balanced acidity and flavours of peaches, citrus, apples, pears with a hint of almonds create a complex and delicious wine. Nice length that lasts pleasantly.

You will make beautiful agreements with white meats, fish with white flesh and seafood. Also ideal as an aperitif.

Cantina Giran Pinot Bianco
Alto Adige DOC/Südtirol, 2020

Sugar: 3.1 g/l

Alcohol: 13%

Price: \$23.70

SAQ Code: 14039475

<https://www.saq.com/en/14039475>

Agency: LBV International



Alois Lageder Gewurztraminer Italy, Alto Adige DOC/Südtirol

This variety produces one of the most popular white wines of **Alto Adige**. This *Gewurztraminer* owes its character to the blending of grapes from two distinct wine-growing areas. The warmer sites near Termeno give the wine substance, mouthfeel and roundness, while the cooler, the higher elevations of the Isarco Valley give it freshness, finesse and a refined aromatic structure.

The vineyards are located in Magrè, Cortaccia, Termeno and in the Isarco Valley, between 250 m and 750 m of altitude. Sandy, gravelly soils, with some areas a little more clayey. The age of the vines ranges from 11 to 55 years. Fermentation is carried out at controlled temperatures in stainless steel tanks. Aged on lees in stainless steel tanks (about four months). The vinification is done with a part of an entire bunch.

Tasting Notes

Very aromatic this *Gewurztraminer* is discovered on dominant notes of flowers (old roses), very ripe peaches, exotic fruits and star anise.

In the mouth, the wine is very tasty with its intense floral flavours and notes of peaches and star anise. Very beautiful aromatic amplitude which is combined with a slightly fatty texture and a fresh acidity. And what a length...

You will make beautiful agreements with Asian cuisine, poultry grilled with curry or with a blue or blue-veined cheese.

Alois Lageder Gewurztraminer

Italy, Alto Adige DOC/Südtirol

Organic white wine, 2020

Sugar: less than 1.2 g/l

Alcohol: 13.5%

Price: \$27.65

SAQ Code: 12,345,671

<https://www.saq.com/en/12345671>

Agency: Mark Anthony – sample



Buon Gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Red Wines

The two red wines are pinot noirs. I cannot tell you how much I love them! I was overwhelmed by the texture, concentration and depth of aroma and flavor of these wines. In fact, they are a surprise to me. Being northern Pinot Noirs, I did not expect such an aromatic profile.

Elena Walch Selezione Pinot Nero Alto Adige DOC/Südtirol

Elena Walch is one of the best vineyards in **Alto Adige** and Italy. Over time, it has become a point of reference. Its vineyards are located on a hilly limestone (and porphyry) terrain between 400 m and 600 m altitude, with a south-east and south-west exposure.

Traditional fermentation is done at a controlled temperature for about 10 days in stainless steel tanks. Then, the malolactic conversion and maturation take place partly in large oak barrels of 22 hl and partly in stainless steel tanks.

Tasting Notes

This one was a bit more classic than the previous one. It is discovered on aromas of cherries, morello cherries, ripe red fruits, undergrowth, spice and a hint of animal notes.

In the mouth, the most velvety texture has a suave aspect that creates a nice contrast with the fresh acidity and the balanced and very supple tannins. The flavours of cherries, morello cherries, strawberries, spices are of a beautiful concentration and exquisite depth.

The whole is of an amplitude and an elegance that I really appreciated. Very nice length on a finish of cherries and spices. Definitely one of my favorite northern style *Pinot Noir*.

Elena Walch Selezione Pinot Nero Alto Adige 2019
Italy, DOC/Südtirol

Price: \$28.25

Sugar: 3.3 g/l

Alcohol: 13%

SAQ Code: 14057067

<https://www.saq.com/en/14057067>

Agency: Univins et Spiritueux – sample



Peter Zemmer Rohut Alto Adige 2019

Pinot Noir flourishes in the vineyards close to the winery, at an altitude of 450 meters. These hills, with their particular profile of silt and chalky soils, offer a particularly suitable climate for producing pinot noir of the highest quality.

The grapes are immediately destemmed and fermented at a constant temperature of 26 to 28° C for about 7 days. The must remains in contact with the skins thanks to pumping over and a slight pressure from below. This allows the obtention of ideal results, to extract the color of the skins and to highlight the fruitiness of the wine.

After two gentle transfers, half of this *Pinot* is aged for a few months in large French oak barrels, while the rest is aged in small French barrels of two or three years. After blending, the wine is bottled and stored for a few more months before being released.

Tasting Notes

This superb *Pinot Noir* reveals delicious notes of very ripe cherries, strawberries and morello cherries.

On the palate, the suave and velvety texture harmonizes with the fresh acidity and the balanced tannins of a delightful suppleness. Flavours of morello cherries, spices, cherries and cranberries create a beautiful aromatic profile that is almost meditative to savour. Beautiful concentration of flavours that linger in a jubilant way.

You will make beautiful pairings with a risotto, grilled meats or served with a sauce.

Peter Zemmer Rohut 2019

Pinot Noir, Alto Adige DOC/Südtirol

Price: \$26.65

Sugar: 5.4 g/l

Alcohol: 13%

SAQ Code: 14057657

<https://www.saq.com/en/14057657>

Agency: Divine Selection – sample



Sophisticated discretion

By MICHEL DALLAIRE

French speaker manufacturer **Focal** has launched a new series named *ARIA K2* in spring 2021. This last one is a limited edition which pushes the performances of the *ARIA 900* series, still in the **Focal** catalogue, even further. Like the latter, the *ARIA K2* series is designed for both stereo music listening and home theatre use. It includes, for the moment, only three models: the freestanding *ARIA K2 936*, the *ARIA K2 906* bookshelf speaker and a centre speaker for home theatre dialogue called *ARIA K2 Centre*. What is proposed for this test bench is the *ARIA K2 906* model with its *ARIA S 900* stand. The new *ARIA K2 906* was recently introduced, so let's see how it differs from the *ARIA 906* which has received very good reviews in both North America and Europe.

The ARIA K2 906 Versus the ARIA 906

The two speakers are physically similar in size and configuration, but aesthetically they are easily differentiated. The *K2* suffix for this new limited edition *ARIA K2 906* refers to the composite material of the 16.5 cm woofer cone that replaces the flax-based *FLAX* of the original series. Indeed, the iconic *K2* membrane was introduced in the 1980s by **JMLab** and later upgraded to *K2 Power*, which has a foam core sandwiched between a layer of aramid fibres and a layer of fibreglass. This *K2 Power* membrane is easily distinguished by its yellow colour. According to **Focal**, the latter consists of an ultra-rigid and very light cone which considerably improves the precision, the dynamics and the power handling of the loudspeaker.

The *TNF* tweeter of 25 mm is, as for him, an inverted dome and formed of an alloy of aluminum and magnesium. It is surrounded by a **Poron** suspension that significantly lowers its distortion from 2,000 to 3,000 Hz, an area where the human ear is very sensitive to mid-range frequencies. This *TNF* tweeter is based on an oval urethane plate with a waveguide that improves its horizontal dispersion.

As for the Aesthetics.

The cabinet construction of the *ARIA K2 906* is made of ultra-rigid *MDF* with non-parallel sidewalls that taper to the rear. The exterior finish is a beautiful glossy lacquer in *Premium Ash Grey* and is the only finish offered for this new limited series which is inspired by the *Utopia* series. Incidentally, it also has a front/back side covered with a material that imitates leather. The top of the speaker is covered with a black glass plate bearing the **Focal** name. This aesthetic touch adds class to the speaker's design while enhancing the perception of its value. The technical characteristics and dimensions have not changed compared to the regular *ARIA 936*, while in the case of the *ARIA K2 906*, the protective fabric grille is now magnetically attached. Its *ARIA S 900* stand is perfectly adapted to the design of the *ARIA K2 906*, since its base is made of a thick black glass plate that displays the graphic logo of the manufacturer. This base is topped by an oval shaped extruded aluminum post. The latter has a beautiful anodized finish and a hollow centre to hide the speaker cables that exit at the base of the stand. The four adjustable legs of the glass base can accommodate decoupling spikes or rubber caps to protect hardwood floors. The plate at the top of the *ARIA S 900* bracket has four holes so that the speaker can be securely attached to it. All the hardware needed to assemble this beautiful stand is included in its packaging. I can only congratulate **Focal**'s designers for their attention to detail and for having matched the design of the stand so well with that of the *ARIA K2 906* speaker.



« What is striking from the first few seconds of listening is the brightness, clarity and transparency of this small speaker that sounds like a big one. Its presentation of the sound stage is amazing and surprisingly clear. The coherence of this speaker is certainly due to the perfect transition between the *TNF* tweeter and the woofer with its *K2* membrane. It is often said that small speakers in their dispersion have the gift of recreating a good stereophonic image. It is indeed the case of the *ARIA K2 906* whose performance largely overflows the framework of the speakers as much in width as in depth. »



Listening to These Great Little Speakers

At the time of writing, we are on the verge of 2022 and in the middle of the holiday season. So I decided to start my listening with the excellent **Claire Pelletier** album entitled *Noël Nau*. In her second *Christmas* album, she introduces us to hymns from different cultures that she interprets in their original language or in a colorful French. The production and arrangements of this album are by **Pierre Duchesne** who did a remarkable job. These pieces are true pieces of history that go far beyond the songs traditionally sung during the holiday season. Once reproduced by the *ARIA K2 906*, these musical jewels are delivered to me in all their quintessence. What is striking from the first few seconds of listening is the brightness, clarity and transparency of this small speaker that sounds like a big one. Its presentation of the sound stage is amazing and surprisingly clear. The coherence of this speaker is certainly due to the perfect transition between the *TNF* tweeter and the woofer with its *K2* membrane. It is often said that small speakers in their dispersion have the gift of recreating a good stereophonic image. It is indeed the case of the *ARIA K2 906* whose performance largely overflows the framework of the speakers as much in width as in depth.

Claire Pelletier has one of the most beautiful voices in Quebec and without making a bad pun, this little **Focal** knows very well how to position this excellent singer in the centre of the stereo image which is vast and well ventilated.

As the **Focal ARIA K2 906** is powered by my French **Atoll IN300** integrated amplifier, why not continue with an album by French jazz trio **Amaury Faye Trio**. Pianist **Amaury Faye** is one of the most prominent young musicians on the French and European jazz scene. His album entitled *Clearway* was awarded the revelation label by the **Jazz Magazine/Jazzman magazine**. In this opus, **Amaury Faye** is accompanied by bassist **Louis Navaro** and the drummer **Theo Lanau**. The first piece begins with a short drum solo followed immediately by the double bass before the piano makes its entrance. The *ARIA K2 906* opens a large transparent window on this lively and well-paced musical performance. The drums are incredibly true to life. The impact of the strikes on the drumheads is frank with a resonance of the drums rarely heard in this kind of recording. The playing of the cymbals is clean, airy and the precision of which perfectly reveals the metallic character. Despite its relatively compact size, the *ARIA K2 906* is very successful in preserving the power, depth and roundness of the double bass. The plucking and sliding along the strings is clearly differentiated, allowing the bassist's playing to be fully appreciated. There is space and airiness around the musicians as if for them, pandemic social distancing was already in order in 2017. The piano is superbly well timed and I don't lose a single note of his frenzied playing.

I followed up with the latest studio album from excellent bassist **Marcus Miller** entitled *Laid Back*. Its release on the **Blue Note Recordings** jazz label came in 2018 and **Marcus** is accompanied by various guest musicians. This bassist is in the vein of **Brian Bromberg**, **Nathan East**, **Stanley Clark** and **Victor Wooten**. His style is a fusion between jazz, funk and hip-hop.





Laid Back was nominated for *Best Contemporary Instrumental Album* at the 61st Grammy Awards. The second track is a cover of the song *Que Sera Sera* performed by singer **Selah Sue**, in which **Marcus Miller** introduces the electric bass with a play as fast and agile as a flamenco guitarist. **Selah Sue**'s warm and slightly husky voice is enhanced by the *ARIA K2 906*. Her voice reminds me of **Janis Joplin** and the speaker gives me the illusion that she is still alive and well in my listening room. The horns are gleaming and majestic while the keyboards create an enveloping atmosphere. The different types of guitars are transmitted to me precisely and with a scrupulous respect of their respective timbres. The dynamics of the *ARIA K2 906* reproduce a drum kit with a clear impact and cymbals that vibrate in the air in a very credible way.

Let's see how the *ARIA K2 906* performs on classical tunes like **Handel's Arias** performed by **Bryn Terfel**. In a 1997 album on the **Deutsche Grammophon** label, this excellent bass baritone is accompanied by the **Scottish Chamber Orchestra**

conducted by **Charles Mackerras**. His superb bass voice has a lot of power and gives me the shivers when he interprets opera arias and those of **Handel's Messiah**. The small *ARIA K2 906* puts **Bryn Terfel** in the centre of the sound stage and at a good distance. The speaker even gives me the impression that a microphone is placed well above the singer for his capture. The precision of the *TNF* tweeter, which rises in frequency, never becomes acidic. The latter, combined with the speed of the woofer, gives me perfect information about the natural reverberation of the recording room and the location of the musicians. For both classical and choral music, the *ARIA K2 906* performs wonderfully, giving me a wide window into the performance of the musicians or performers.

FOCAL ARIA K2 906 SPEAKERS



Conclusion

Focal's *ARIA K2 906* bookshelf speaker does not circumvent the laws of physics. Its relatively compact volume limits it somewhat in the extension of the low frequencies. But what happens in the high frequencies, the midrange as well as the lower midrange is so coherent and captivating that I did not feel any lack in its tonal balance. This beautiful limited edition *ARIA K2 906* demonstrates that a small speaker does not mean a small or narrow sound. On the contrary, this speaker showed me a beautiful opening for a widened potential of listening in stereophony. The yellow colour of its woofer and its only available finish in *Premium Ash Grey* may not be unanimous, but in my opinion, its build quality and sound outweigh any aesthetic aspect. For my part, when the *ARIA K2 906* is well fixed on its *ARIA S900* support, the whole constitutes one of the most beautiful concepts of design harmonized in the smallest details. I liked the sound so much that I can't imagine what its big sister, the *ARIA K2 936* with three woofers, would sound like in my large open-plan living room. Who knows, in the near future, I might have the opportunity to test it unless, of course, the *ARIA K2* limited series sells out quickly. If this is the case, let's hope that this series will be reissued to ensure its continuity.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Focal ARIA K2 906

Price: 1 399 \$/ea or 2 798 \$/pair

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

ARIA S900 Stand

Price: 799 \$

Manufacturer / Distributor: Focal Naim Canada,
T.: 1.866.271.5689, <https://www.focal.com/ca/fr>

Mediagraphy

Claire Pelletier, Noël Nau, Disques ouïe-dire, ODCD 2310

Amaury Faye Trio, Clearway, FLAC 24 bits/96 kHz

Marcus Miller, Laid Back, Blue Note Recordings, FLAC
24 bits/48 kHz

Bryn Terfel, Handel Arias, Deutsche Grammophon, 453 480-2

Oscar Peterson, R. Brown, M. Jackson, The Very Tall Band,
LIM UHD 050

MISSION



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BLUES

By PIERRE JOBIN

ANGELA EASLY

Rise

Class A Records

Originally from Mississippi, **Angela Easley** is an energetic and spirited singer who also has a lot of feeling! From the age of eight, she sang in church on Sundays. Then, at age thirteen, she won a local singing contest that gave her the opportunity to perform on the *Grand Ole Opry* stage and get a recording session in Nashville. She recorded two songs, and thus began her career as a professional singer-songwriter. *Rise* includes six original tracks, of which she wrote one and participated in the other five. It opens with an intense emotional ballad, *I Can't Let Go*, where she receives strong vocal support from the **McCrary Sisters**, the legendary Nashville gospel quartet. Further on, *Running Out of Time* is an energetic, crazy funk where she gives it her all vocally, accompanied by very hot horns, on wild rhythms and a breathtaking sax solo! On the title track, *Rise*, a soulful anthem, she sings with great flights and crescendos with **Shelly Fairfield**, a Mississippi native and **Columbia Records** artist. This performance is intense, as is the rest of the album rooted in and rendering Southern music, blues, soul, funk in various hues with aplomb and skill. The musicians are top level, just like **Easley's** voice, who accompanies herself at the piano. *Rise* is soul, song and music fused at a high emotional temperature!

JOE LEWIS BAND

Up Next

Selfproduction

Gospel Blues, Gospel Blues Rock, Blues, Texas Blues, psychedelic guitar touches, funk, rock'n soul, all these trends and influences merge hot in the original music of the **Joe Lewis Band**. **Joe Lewis** knows how to touch deeply, and accompany serenely, with his music evoking gratitude well anchored in the facts of life gospel and blues. Born and

raised in Picayune, Mississippi, an hour north of New Orleans, this inspired and talented guitarist is from this rich musical soil. He navigates, among other things, in the furrow traced with the dynamic electric guitar and applauded by Sister **Rosetta Tharpe**, in the 1950s. His powerful trio is completed by **Tom Cole**, bass and vocals, and **Derrick Enyard**, drums and vocals. *Up Next*, the band's fourth album, features ten original tracks, including one instrumental, all composed by the band's leader. The tracks that touched me the most are *Do Your Work In Me* and *Broken Angel of the Delta*, a heartfelt, emotional ballad for a deceased loved one. . . **SRV** and **Jimi Hendrix** are not far from my memory either when I listen to this magnificent record of this accomplished guitarist with touching and deep musical peregrinations and flamboyant and intense flights of fancy. **Joe Lewis**, this fiery, high-flying guitarist has done his homework and earned his credentials. **Joe Lewis**, an inspired explorer of the territories of the soul.

MATT ANDERSEN

House to House

Selfproduction, 2 01657

House to House is **Matt Andersen's** ninth album, a solo performance with an acoustic guitar and voice. This is the first time the artist has recorded in this stripped-down format that invites intimacy, closeness and sincerity. What can be heard here are the words of the heart and the music of the soul in their

folk and soul expressions with country accents and gospel inflections. It is as if it were a living room show and he would play for invited guests in a small circle! Female choirs and a male choir are inserted, additional soul, on five of the twelve titles, among which are eleven compositions. **Curtis Mayfield's** inspiring classic *People Get Ready* has the honour of closing this album with this nondiscriminatory humanitarian appeal. How good it is, this music that heals the soul! Listening to this album recorded at the artist's home, I am happy, happy of this appointment, of this meeting in the essential, the triple string of the voice, the soul and the guitar of **Matt Andersen**. *House to House*, a thorough sharing of warmth, texts, talent and commitment! Worth discovering!

PETER VETESKA & BLUE TRAIN
So Far So Good

Blue Heart Records, BHR 021

In seven years, *So Far So Good* is the sixth album by guitarist-singer **Peter Veteska** and his **Blue Train** bandmates. It opens with *Done With Bad Luck*, a compact and danceable R&B. The tone is set and the groove set up by this power trio whose energy and complicity can be felt. **Alex D'Agness** on drums and **Coo Moe Jghe** on bass complete the band and ensure commitment and connivance. For this opus, **Veteska & Blue Train** have added the services of guest musicians who express themselves judiciously throughout the songs to culminate in a rich, consistent

and diversified whole. **Jenny Barnes**, this dynamic and engaging singer from New Jersey is back on two tracks, giving **Veteska** a strong and heartfelt reparation, as in the classics of the genre. Special guest **Jeff Levine's** B3, piano, and **Fender Rhodes** contribute to more appreciable textures and colours in the sound. The singers, the chorus, the harmonicists, the electric and slide guitarists, as well as the brass impregnate and punctuate with their warm imprints the different titles creating an optimal sound density for each of the styles visited such as R&B, funk, slow blues, shuffles, jump blues, rock, rumba, soul, etc. Eight tracks out of twelve are **Veteska's** compositions, six of which were co-written with **Patti Martz**. Inspired by tradition and surrounded by a competent and contributing team, **Peter Veteska & Blue Train** delivers another solid album in all aspects, from creation to execution. The album ends on a hit song, *Can We All Get Along*. . . Ultra-catchy melody, rallying lyrics, we are entitled to a stroke of genius and simplicity by **Veteska-Martz's** creative impulse, much in the vein of **Marvin Gaye**. **Peter Veteska & Blue Train** is a band with a personality!



JAZZ

BY CHRISTOPHE RODRIGUEZ



EVAN CHRISTOPHER

Blues in The Air

The Music of Sidney Bechet

Camille productions, import
With his inimitable sound and his enthusiasm, soprano saxophonist **Sydney Bechet** has entered jazz legend territory. From those American years, before his arrival in France where he found refuge, fame and notoriety, he reached a vast public without quibbling about his talent. Never forgotten, and often considered as one of the fathers of New Orleans jazz, **Bechet** remains, in my humble opinion, more than that. An American clarinetist, **Evan Christopher** perpetuates the New Orleans tradition with a touch of modernism. With this hot new release, he does not hide his admiration for **Bechet** without, however, copying him. Lovers of the clarinet's woody sound will be delighted with the few classics which are full of swing. If *Blues dans le blues* is a masterpiece, with Hispanic accents, we will find the southern heat by listening to *Dans les rues d'Antibes* and *Girl's Dance*. Supported by trumpet player **Malo Mazurié**, guitarist **Féliux Hunot**, double bass player **Sébastien Girardot** and drummer **Guillaume Nouaux**, **Evan Christopher** asserts

himself as a true descendant of **Bechet's** universe!

JACQUES SCHWARZ-BART

Soné Ka-La

Odyssey, Enja

Born in Guadeloupe and son of famous writers, tenor saxophonist **Jacques Schwarz-Bart** has always fused jazz with world music. While accompanying solid names of the blue note, **Danilo Perez**, **Giovanni Hidalgo**, **Roy Hargrove** and, in a different register, **Erika Badu** he cultivated his secret garden. After a first album dedicated to Guadeloupe, then a tribute to his father, he depicted the Haitian musical universe. With *Soné-Ka-La Odyssey*, we relive a dark period in our history, that of slavery. Very percussive in its essence, which is magnified by singer **Malika Tirolien's** voice, without forgetting the fusional contribution of the bass and the saxophone, *Soné-Ka-La* is a bewitching disc, charged with emotions which will transport us in other countries while making us think. *Une merveille des âmes en liberté* as the misery (misery?) of the saxophonist writes so well in the booklet's notes.

BENNY GOODMAN ORCHESTRA

Featuring Anita O'Day

SWR Jazz / Naxos

Clarinetist **Benny Goodman** knew whom to surround himself with. Since his unforgettable concert at Carnegie Hall in 1938, which brought together musicians from **Count Basie** to **Duke Ellington**, not to mention **Harry James** and spectacular drummer **Gene Krupa**, this combination gave his concerts an indefinable aura of swing. In 1959, during a European tour, he called on the incandescent singer **Anita O'Day** who found her accomplice, trumpeter / comedian **Jack Sheldon** and the no less powerful tenor saxophonist **Flip Phillips**. To use a sports term, the MVP was **Anita**. She was as naughty as she could be, energizing the choruses of her accomplices, and few singers had as much charisma and ardour. If trumpeter **Jack Sheldon** didn't have the bite of his alter ego **Roy Eldridge**, he did very well in the *Boogie Blues/Let Me Off Uptown* medley. In the series, sometimes you have to be tender, we strongly recommend *Body and Soul* as well as *Come Rain or Come Shine*. Just for the sensuality that emerges from the interpretation of this great lady of jazz.

GERRY MULLIGAN + CONCERT JAZZ BAND 1960-1962

Live un Paris

Frémeaux & Associés, 3 DC

Sometimes your columnist feels like he was not born at the right time. In those years, 1960 - 1962, the **Olympia de Paris** welcomed the top of the jazz world, and not in a small formation. Under the leadership of radio hosts **Daniel Fillipachi** and **Frank Ténot** with a boost from powerful producer **Norman Granz**, cool baritone saxophonist **Gerry Mulligan** entered the scene. Recorded in front of a visibly conquered audience, these three discs admirably restore the atmosphere as much as the music. From *My Funny Valentine* to *Five Brothers*, then *Blue Port*, *Spring Is Sprung*, the happiness index is perfectly measurable. And let's not forget that his accomplices were immense tenor saxophonist **Zoot Sims**, trumpeters **Don Ferrara**, **Conte Condoli** and **Nick Travs**, trombonist **Bob Brookmeyer** and drummer **Mel Lewis**. A triplet that is worthy of his discotheque.

REALISTIC IMAGES FULL OF CONTRASTS !

By DAVID SUSILO

I wrote my first review of a laser projector about 5 years ago. I loved that projector but the amount of heat, fan noise, physical size of the projector and most importantly, price, stopped me in my tracks from buying that projector. It was around \$45,000 CND back then, which after the devaluing of Canadian Dollars during

that time period made it closer to a value of \$60,000 CND today. That's more than the cost of my entire home theatre.

Jump 5 years ahead, back in September of 2021, **JVC** introduced a line of *NZ* series laser projector at a much more affordable pricing at (for the *RS3100* equivalent of *NZ8*) about \$21,000 CND. On



paper, the *RS3100* should trounce any laser projector in terms of picture quality and noise level. Of course, it is much smaller in size (albeit still big) and emanates a lot less heat than its predecessors regardless of brand.

Admittedly being a fan of high-performance and (relatively) affordably priced items, I anticipated **JVC** *NZ8/RS3100* very highly. I cautioned myself however, as other than the laser diode performance, I can't really imagine what **JVC** can bring to the table after my current *NX7* projector. So when the opportunity knocked, I welcome the **JVC** *RS3100* (*NZ8* equivalent) to my home to be reviewed. So let's start right away with the list of improvements over the already mind-bogglingly high performing **JVC** *NX7/RS2000*.

The HDMI 2.1 signal

HDMI 2.1 is the wave of the future, however, most (if not all) *A/V* receivers and processors

currently is only using 40 Gbps *HDMI 2.1*. Some of them use an even lower bandwidth *HDMI 2.1* which makes the *HDMI 2.1*-ness of them moot.

On the other hand, the *NZ8/RS3100* has two full 48 Gbps *HDMI 2.1* inputs with the obligatory *HDCP 2.3* compliance. That means compatibility with 8K resolution video at up to 60 frames per second and 4K up to 120 frames per second, a format now supported by the new *PlayStation 5* and *Xbox Series X*. By using *HDMI 2.1* 48 Gbps, buyers of the new **JVC** laser projectors are guaranteed to have future compatibility for years to come.

New eShift Algorithm

The *RS3100/NZ8* feature a newfangled 8K *e-ShiftX*, an improvement of **JVC**'s older 8K *e-Shift* system and one that uses a four-direction shift which addresses individual pixels in 8K input signals with no scaling. Pixels with 8K *e-ShiftX* are still slightly overlapped due to the use of wobulation technique but given the massive pixel density of an 8K image, I find it hard to believe there

would be any visible difference between this system and a native 8K imaging chip, something that doesn't exist yet anyway. Regardless, I commend **JVC** for being forthcoming by clearly stating this projector as 8K *e-ShiftX*.

New Video Processor

JVC use a new video processing board on the *RS3100* to support all these new features. Sync times with signal format changes are unbelievably fast, with most clocking in at less than 3 seconds, or about four times faster than the sync time of previous **JVC** projectors of approximately 20 seconds. Alas, however, lens memory changes still take eons. Somewhat understandable as the change includes changes in *Theater Optimizer*, anamorphic modes, etc; but it is slow nevertheless. I was hoping that the load time will be much faster than the previous **JVC** projectors and approaching **Sony**'s blazing fast lens shift; but alas that's not the case. Still, it's a tad faster due to the new



JVC RS3100 BLU-ESCENT LASER PROJECTOR



video processing board on the *NZ* lineup to support all the new features (including the 8K upscaling).

For ease of use, I program three different lens memories for my 21:9 screen. A 16:9 preset for most TV presentations, 17:9 for the many **Netflix** movies, specials, and some *IMAX Enhanced* presentations, and 21:9 for scope movies. As the remote that comes with the **JVC** projector doesn't have direct buttons to access the presets I created, I bought an older **JVC** remote control *RM-MH22G*. This way, I can access the presets I created directly from the remote control without going to menu and sub menus.

Blu-Escence Laser Diode

The *NZ8/RS3100* new *BLU-Escence* laser diode light source assembly is a more compact design compared with the one used for **JVC's** flagship *RS4500* (about \$35,000 CND) but still delivers a very similar lumens peak of uncalibrated output, with a half-life rating of 20,000 hours in the *High Laser Diode* mode. This is good news for me as I usually change my bulb at around 1,000 hours to maintain the brightness level I prefer. Furthermore considering I never use a projector for longer than 3 years, I don't think I will ever have to deal with any perceivable dip in the laser diode brightness output from this projector. Who knows, I may even hang on to this projector for 5 years! Compared to my previous *NX7*, the laser diode is more powerful, putting out a consistent 2,500 lumens, which is enough to maintain a vibrant picture with some lights on in my viewing space. You'll still need light control measures in brighter spaces though, and that includes black-out curtains on any windows in the space. Bear in mind that this is not a negative. This is simply

logical for use of any projector installation. The darker the viewing area, the better the image quality is going to be.

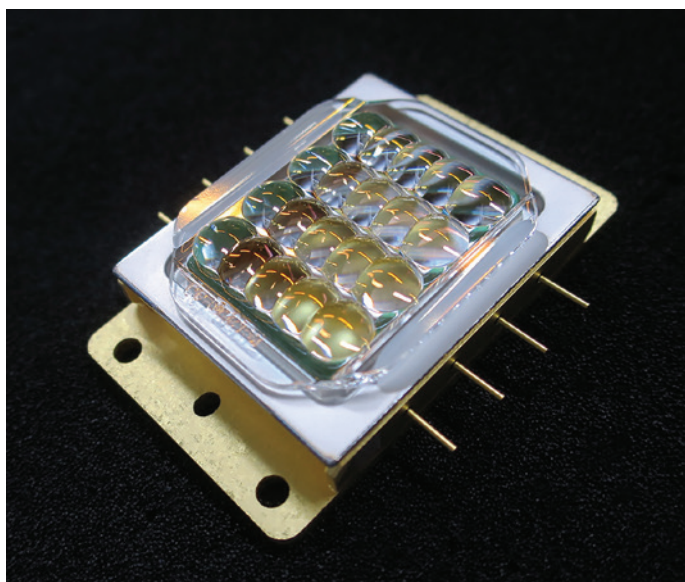
JVC's new laser light engine offers three output modes (*Low, Medium, High*) and two dynamic modes (*Mode 1* and *2*) similar to the flagship *RS4500*. The main drawback of the *RS4500* is the noise level. The noise level in *High* output mode (needed for *HDR* presentation) was loud enough that it was nearly unusable in my 10' x 16' viewing room.

The *RS3100* solved that issue. Using a calibrated *SPL* meter to measure noise, the fan noise in any modes were identical, if not measured lower, than my *NX7* projector which was excellent more than acceptable to me. I also find that the *e-ShiftX* function had practically no effect on operating noise level unlike **JVC's** previous *e-Shift* models of yesteryears.

Set up

Before I start, just like any *e-Shift* (or other pixel-shift type) projectors, I turned *OFF* the *e-Shift* functionality in order to get the most accurate focus on screen. This is done as any type of pixel shifting creates a very slightly softer image due to the movements of the imager. After the focusing is done, I turned the *e-ShiftX* function back *ON* as I don't mind a teensy softer focus in exchange for a more solid image as I'm sitting relatively close to the screen.

Setup beyond the regular focus, zoom and lens shift of the *NZ8/RS3100* was straightforward for me as the menus are practically identical to those found in **JVC's** previous *NX* series of projectors. The most accurate out-of-box presentation for standard dynamic range viewing was by using *Natural* picture



« Par rapport à mon précédent NX7, la diode laser est plus puissante et émet une quantité constante de 2 500 lumens, ce qui est suffisant pour maintenir une image vivante avec quelques lumières allumées dans mon espace de visionnement. Vous devrez néanmoins prendre des mesures de contrôle de la lumière dans les espaces plus lumineux, ce qui inclut des rideaux occultants sur toutes les fenêtres. Gardez à l'esprit que ce n'est pas un point négatif. C'est tout simplement logique pour l'utilisation de toute installation d'un projecteur. Plus la zone de visualisation est sombre, meilleure sera la qualité de l'image »

mode with *Low Laser Diode* selected. For high dynamic range presentation, it was in *Frame Adapt* mode with *Mid Laser Diode* setting and the BT.2020 (*Normal*) colour profile selected. Keep in mind, these outcomes will vary in installations depending on screen, zoom, and other settings. The settings I've arrived from is because what I'm using is a small-ish 96" 2.4:1 *StudioTek 130 G4* with the projector mounted about 14 feet away (lens to screen) with a viewing distance of 9 feet. For larger screen, I would think it might require *Mid Laser* for *SDR* and *High Laser* for *HDR* presentations.

According to my source at **JVC Europe**, he stated that **JVC** hasn't really changed any of the *HDR* tone mapping algorithms for the new line up, but regardless, there are a few changes in the *Frame Adapt HDR* mode. The *Theater Optimizer* setup is now more refined, with new settings for screen aspect ratio (16:9, 17:9, or *Cinema Scope*) and diagonal size, making the more complicated mathematics needed to be done on the *NX* series projectors a thing in the past. The previous *Low*, *Medium*, and *High HDR* brightness options have also been replaced with *Auto* and manually variable (-2 through +2) settings. This, combined with the *NZ8/RS3100's* higher light output, yielded perceivably improved overall *HDR* performance. Something to note, I set the projector's *HDR* brightness to 0 which is visually the same as the previous models' *Medium HDR* brightness. Furthermore, the *Theater Optimizer* loads extremely fast. Much, MUCH faster than the previous *NX* series. This is yet another aspect that I absolutely love from this projector.

Picture modes

With all these optimization done for every single type of inputs, you'd think you'll need to remember to press this button for *SDR*, another button for *HDR*, another button for *HD*, and another for *4K*. Nope! Unlike other projectors, the *NZ8/RS3100* offers the same automatic picture modes **JVC** introduced in



JVC RS3100 BLU-ESCENT LASER PROJECTOR

its last projector firmware update on their previous *NX* series projectors. These include the ability to assign specific custom picture modes for *2D*, *3D*, *HDR*, and *SDR* input formats. I'd still like to see **JVC** add a custom setting for *SDR /2020* input signals that use the BT.2020 color space but are without *HDR*; however as this projector can amazingly deal with *HDR* contents (due to the aforementioned *Frame Adapt HDR* algorithm) this is not important for practically all viewers.

Quite a few interesting characteristics

One of the new functions/selling features, **JVC** revealed an enhanced high contrast light engine and lens assembly for both *NZ8/RS3100* and the *NZ8/RS4100* that is aimed to alleviate uniformity difficulties caused by internal reflections within the light path or optics (read: *streaks*). During my observations, the new engine successfully solved this: almost all visual streaking was minimised, with only a very little bit visible when a bright object occurred on a completely black background such as white letters on black background in end credits sequences. In comparison to the previous **JVC** *NX7* which I also own, the *NZ8/RS3100* significantly improved mixed contrast measures to the point of near non existence.

I spent a lot of time with the *NZ8/RS3100*, watching *HD* and *Ultra HD* content from various sources such as my **Panasonic UB9000 THX Certified 4K Blu-ray** player, **Apple TV 4K** and **NVIDIA Shield Pro 2019** streamers. Overall performance was noticeably better than on my *NX7* (now residing in my bedroom), though the difference was not necessarily dramatic to some people. The laser light engine provided significantly more *HDR* headroom than the previous *NX7*, and subtle changes (but very noticeable) to the *Theater Optimizer* setup further improved *HDR* performance a little bit (but noticeable).

When compared to the previous line, **JVC's** new *Auto Frame Adapt HDR* mode in frame-by-frame setting did an excellent job of balancing the settings to use for overall brightness across different *HDR* sources. From watching more than a dozen movies, I never had to change the auto *HDR* tone mapping at all. Not even once. Something that cannot be said when using any projector that doesn't have an effective dynamic tone mapping (or in some cases, no dynamic tone mapping at all).

Challenges

As far as I'm concerned, there are no challenges faced with this projector other than the seemingly high price of nearly \$21,000CND (although it is still thousands cheaper than the Sony of its class and about \$15,000CND cheaper than the *RS4500*). So while the price is high, it is still comparatively a bargain.

Another possible challenge is mounting the projector. It's a hefty machine, weighing more than 50 pounds. That can make it tricky to choose a suitable mount, since many top out at a weight limit of around 30 pounds. However, owner of previous

Sony and **JVC** projectors should have no problem as the weight-class needed even for those brands' previous native *4K* projectors are the same as this. I highly recommend **Crimson JR3XL** ceiling mount for this projector. As for my self, I put my projector on top of a stack of *SKB* racks (read: glorified shelf) so weight is not an issue.

Last but not least, there is no speaker built into this projector. Not surprising, however, since I can't think of any instance where a user of projector of this calibre will be using the internal speakers if they're available. Who is in their right mind will be buying a projector at this level and not have a proper sound system to pair it with?

Verdict

It's been 3 years since **JVC** released a new set of their fantastical and phenomenal line up of a series of true native *4K* projectors. This year (well, officially October 2021) they released a new *NS7/8/9* and *RS2100/3100/4100* series of laser projectors. As usual, from the specifications sheets, I can tell that the middle offering brings the most value of their line up. Something they have done in the last decade, if I remember correctly. This year, however, the *RS3100*, the middle child costs at around \$21,000CND. Not really a chump change by any means but spec-wise, even the lower end *RS2100* at around \$15,000CND still beat the heck out of **Sony's** *885 series* at \$25,000CND *MSRP* especially due to highly effective *Frame Adapt HDR* dynamic tone mapping equipped in all **JVC's** current offerings. All of the reasons above made me purchased the *RS3100* and I strongly suggest for anybody else to do the same revolutionary step. I can't give high enough praise to this projector. And now I will be catching up to my dozen or so *4K UHD* discs movie viewing.

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Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Manufacturer / Distributor: JVCKENWOOD, T. : 905.670.7211, <https://ca.jvckenwood.com/>

Equipment used for this review

JVC *RS3100 8K eShiftX* laser projector

Stewart Filmscreen *StudioTek 130 G4*

PixelgenDesign *THX Certified HDMI* Cables

PixelgenDesign *THX Certified PXLdrive HDMI* extender

Panasonic *UB9000mkII THX Certified 4K Bluray* Disc player

Note : a quick setup guide for the new **JVC** laser projector lineup is available at [YouTube.com/c/DavidSusiloUnscripted](https://www.youtube.com/c/DavidSusiloUnscripted)

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Buon Gusto -Recipe

By Léa Gariépy

Ham, Cheese and Pesto Sandwich

You are hungry and you don't want to prepare a whole meal ...
so here's a suggestion for a quick sandwich
that will satisfy you quickly while satiating you.

Ingredients :

- 4 to 5 slices of ham
- 1 tbsp. of homemade pesto
- 2 to 3 slices of fresh mozzarella
- 1 large lettuce leaf
- 2 slices of sourdough bread

Homemade Pesto

- 2 cups of basil leaves
- 1/4 cup of toasted pine nuts
- 1/3 cup of olive oil
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 1/4 cup of Parmesan cheese
- Salt and pepper to taste

Preparation:

Prepare the *homemade* pesto. In a food processor, blend all ingredients together until a smooth spread is obtained.

Spread both slices of sourdough bread with a tablespoon of *homemade* pesto. Place ham, mozzarella and lettuce on a slice.

Close the sandwich.

Enjoy!



Photos : Luto Photography

ROCK PROG

BY RICHARD GUAY



JETHRO TULL

The Zealot Gene

<https://jethrotull.com/>

In the midst of the pandemic, **Ian Anderson** announced some unlikely news: **Jethro Tull** was about to release its 23rd album, ten years after its last studio production. The latter was an uninteresting sequel to *Thick as a Brick* (1972), also known as *TAAB2* (2012). Hyper active during 70s and 80s with an album per year, **Jethro Tull** seriously decreased the pace during the '90s. After 54 years in the business, it seemed like it was time to retire. The mythical group had little more to say. After **Martin Barre** left in 2015, it was, against all odds, kept alive by **Ian Anderson**. It is under this prestigious trademark that he presents his latest opus, *The Zealot Gene*. Assisted by a solid team, the same one he has been working with for many years for his shows, namely **David Goodier** (bass), **Florian Opahle** (guitars), **Joe Parrish-James** (guitars), **John O'hara** (keyboard, piano, accordion) and **Scott Hammond** (drums), **Ian Anderson** takes up the challenge and offers us an album able to continue the cult band's mission and to make **Martin Barre** lie when he stated that **Jethro Tull** would not exist without him. Is this true? One can doubt it considering that **Ian Anderson** is the founder, the spiritual father and the main composer of his music. He is the one we hear, who we see on the covers and who manages their destiny. It is above all he who built all the

characteristics and forged its personality. And this is even more evident with this opus that came out of nowhere. Well seated on his throne, the charismatic master offers us twelve short songs varying from two to six minutes. His texts, nebulous as usual, draw a parallel between biblical themes and the reality of today's world. Forget the epic sequels and the twisted progressive passages. This album will delight the first **Jethro Tull** fans, especially those who were lulled by the serenades and the soft folk prog and medieval melodies of *Aqualung* (1971), *Thick as a Brick* (1972) or *Minstrel in the Gallery* (1975). Short and bewitching verses, researched choruses, complex instrumental passages, incessant dialogues between a bewitched flute and the other instruments, as well as obligatory passages with the guitar, but much less hard than those that **Martin Barre** often offered us. The minstrel's voice, which has not aged one iota, still presents his words with great delicacy. The latter has lost none of his dexterity in handling the flute, acoustic guitar and harmonica. *The Zealot Gene* takes us back in time throughout its twelve songs. Quite a contrast with the dull rock'n'roll albums of the 1980s and 1990s. Although I didn't believe in it anymore, I have to make amends and acknowledge that this is an excellent **Jethro Tull**. As **Lao Tzu** said: *Live a hundred times a hundred years and you will experience many more wonders!*

BIG BIG TRAIN

Welcome to the Planet

www.bigbigtrain.com ;

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

Only six months after the release of *Common Ground* (2021), British band **Big Big Train** already offers us its fourteenth album. First of all, I have to admit that this group is not my favorite although it is still at the top of my list of preferences. I am a fan of Italian, Norwegian and Swedish bands, but the lack of audacity of **Big Big Train's** first opuses and their too conventional musical structure left me hungry. It was with the sixth opus, *The Underfall Yard* (2009), that **Big Big Train** began to forge a stronger personality and, consequently, to arouse my interest. The arrival of **David Longdon**, the third singer of the series, is partly the reason. This last one, with his hoarse voice, warm and at ease in any register, brought a wind of revival to a group which needed it well. The arrival of trendy musicians from different worlds such as ex-**Beardfish Rikard Sjöblom** (guitars, keyboards and vocals) or ex-**Spock's Beard Nick D'Virgilio** (drums, vocals), offered new possibilities to **Gregory Spawton** (bass), the only remaining founding member, and the one who still keeps **Big Big Train** on track. *Welcome to the Planet*, very different from its predecessors, contains nine beautifully constructed songs of various musical styles. The theme deals with human contact, problems related to the lack of communication

between individuals and celebrates the happiness of being alive. The title track, particularly successful thanks to its female chorus and its transcendence, concludes the album with a resolutely optimistic speech, which is good for the times. *Welcome to the Planet* is not the most expansive **Big Big Train**, nor the most symphonic, nor, let's say it, the most progressive. In this regard, let's remember the two *English Electric* (2013, 2014), the most ambitious work of the formation and which called upon dozens of guest artists, *Folklore* (2016) or *Grand Tour* (2019). These opuses clearly made strong connections with the precious British progressive rock heritage of the 1970s. On the other hand, one can only recognize the impeccable musicality of this new release, its lush arrangements and its enveloping melodies. Each of the nine tracks offers its share of surprises and different styles that are solidly based on a proven progressive foundation. The vocal harmonies are remarkable, especially with the addition of the two singer-musicians **Carly Bryant** (vocals, keyboards) and **Clare Lindley** (vocals, violin). *Welcome to the Planet* is therefore a complete and balanced album that offers a delightful musical diversity that will surely please everyone. Finally, we cannot ignore the tragic and recent accidental death of **David Longdon**, a pivotal figure in the revival of and invaluable contribution to the revival of our company. *Welcome to the Planet* will be his most vivid and vibrant legacy.

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