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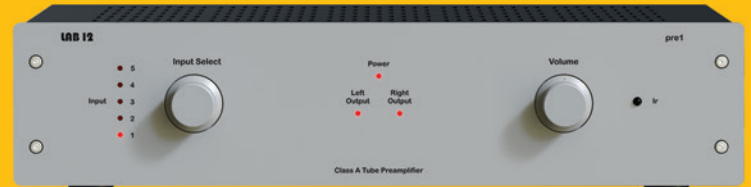
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Suara – Class A Power Amp



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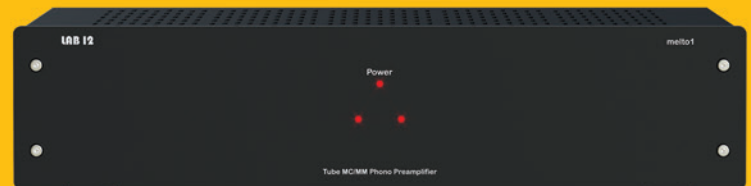
Pre1 – Preamp



Dac1 reference – DAC



Melto 2 – Phonostage



Melto 1 – Phonostage



Gordian – Power Distributor /Conditioner



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Goodness always has its place...

I know that this magazine is not a sports magazine, but I could not keep silent on the fairly recent death of two Canadian hockey heroes, **Mike Bossy** and **Guy Lafleur**. These two field hockey players from the 1970's and 1980's have both marked us in their own way. As hockey players, they were both very talented, there is no doubt about it, and as human beings, while different from each other, they were also equally great. These two gentlemen made us all very proud to be Canadians. They also showed us kindness towards each other in a very natural way. Two giants!

The whole of Quebec as well as Canada recognized these two men at their true value and paid tribute to them following their deaths. All the commentators as well as the general public had nothing but praise. They frequently mentioned how **Guy Lafleur** always took the time to sign autographs without forgetting anyone. He also had this ability to listen carefully to each person, as if they were the only one. The public has shown him undying love and loyalty, and **Guy** has always returned that love and loyalty

to the community as a hockey player and later as an ambassador for the **Montreal Canadiens**. Kindness itself and unfailing generosity! He really wanted everyone to feel good... to be good. It is a perfect example of kindness to one's fellow man.

We will miss these two great men, that's for sure. We offer the families of **Mike Bossy** and **Guy Lafleur** our deepest condolences and wish them all the best in the days to come.

Now, I invite you to read carefully all our articles that aim to inform you about the features and qualities of several audiovisual devices. A reminder to check our *Buon Gusto* columns as well as the *CD* reviews in the *Rhythm & Music* section. Chances are you'll discover either a great bottle of wine or a delicious recipe to enjoy with family and friends while listening to a *CD* of your choice. Let's have a good time, always in moderation, and see you next time! Happy end of spring and welcome to summer which will start at the end of June!

L. Beauchamp

A TIMELESS CLASSIC WHICH BRINGS US BACK TO THE ESSENTIAL

By JEAN-DENIS DOYLE

If, like me, you are looking for a simple device, designed to listen to music without flabbing, this 3510 amplifier from Exposure should catch your attention. It is an evolution of the excellent and arch-classic Exposure 3010S2D. The 3510 comes with more modern circuitry, new features, a headphone amp and a new remote control. The Exposure 3510 amplifier is an accomplished amplifier that has everything to please. This test bench has, for me, a particular flavor, since I have just bought a Exposure 3510 for my personal use. I invite you to discover,

through this text, what made my heart of audiophile-melomaniac-reviewer fall for the 3510. Who knows? This may be the amplifier you are looking for too.

Exposure is a British manufacturer of high-fidelity electronics, in business since 1974. Based in Sussex, it is probably the most conservative of the English manufacturers. The company is managed by **Tony Brady** and has only changed hands once since its founding by **John Farlowe**. At **Exposure**, it seems that time has practically stood still, in the noble sense of the word of course. Even though the company is now a decidedly modern manufacturer, the philosophy, vision and spirit behind the design of each device have not wavered since 1974. **Exposure** mainly produces



high performance hi-fi equipment for music lovers who don't want to waste money on unnecessary items. The products are designed and proudly assembled in England, while maintaining reasonable prices. Everything that goes into an **Exposure** product has been designed with music reproduction in mind. Long-term reliability is also a priority, as is compatibility with other equipment in an audio system. The **Exposure 3510** amplifier is the direct descendant of the **3010 S2D**, a classic that has made many music lovers happy. Although **Exposure's 3010** series was already very successful, it was due for an upgrade, while retaining its many qualities.

With these objectives in mind, **Exposure** engineers created the **3510** series. The **3510** integrated amplifier was the first of the series and it comes with a new sober and elegant look. Like its predecessor, it is possible to add an optional **MM** or **MC** phono card, or a **DAC** card, as desired. Now let's take a look at the insides of this amplifier.

Technical Description

As soon as you lift the lid of the **Exposure 3510**, you are immediately impressed by the perfection of the different technical choices. Here I am talking about perfection, not in the absolute sense of the word, but rather in what ensures a perfect balance between

efficiency, uncompromising quality and common sense. Each of the elements, each of the electronic parts, in short everything that makes up this device, has been rigorously chosen after careful consideration. Thanks, first of all, to the magnificent 400 VA **Noratel** transformer, which will allow the amplifier to deliver the 110 W announced with ease. The unit is very cleverly split in two by a substantial metal cooler that runs through it from front to back. This provides a very effective insulation against electromagnetic radiation from the transformer and increases the rigidity of the chassis.

The power amplification section is equipped with four 10,000 uf fast charging capacitors from Italian manufacturer **Kendiel**. Although this value is not excessive, it is the quality of these capacitors and the speed at which they can recharge that will make the difference. The power section layout was inherited from **Exposure's** top-of-the-line **5010** series. This configuration of power circuits allows the **3510** to have an improved bass tone, more definition and a better reaction time than its predecessor.

The preamp section offers a veritable feast of beautiful electronics, nothing crazy, but exactly what you need to put together a quality unit. Whether it is the **Tyffany** sockets, the styroflex capacitors, the **Panasonic** relays, the **Nichicon** electrolytics or the **Alps** potentiometer, everything has been carefully chosen and integrated. The path that the signal has to travel has been studied so that it remains as short as possible, thus reducing losses to a minimum. An interesting aspect, and one that is often overlooked by many manufacturers, is the finesse of the internal wiring layout. Here, not a single piece of wire protrudes and it is easy to appreciate all the care that has been taken in the assembly work.

The **3510** has several inputs on beautiful RCA jacks, but what is new is this A/V input. This is actually an input that plugs directly into the power section, and can be selected from a button on the front of the unit. It will come in handy for those who want to integrate the **3510** into a home theater system, or use a device that already has a volume

control. The **Exposure 3510** also has two preamplifier outputs, making it easy to add a separate power amplifier or subwoofer.

Unpacking and Installation

I received my **3510** from **Exposure** on a beautiful Thursday in January, a nice way to put some joy in this winter which was terribly gloomy, thank you! I ordered it with the classic black color, but it also comes with a silver front with blue **LEDs**. I also ordered it with the optional **MM** photo card, installed at the factory. The packaging of the device is rather basic, but very well designed. Again, not a penny is wasted on unnecessary luxury. It comes with a comprehensive instruction manual, in the form of a handy, easy-to-read pamphlet. The **3510** looks great with its clean, classic aesthetic, and you won't get tired of it anytime soon.

As for the connection aspect, the speaker terminals only accept banana plugs and nothing else. Therefore, you should definitely take this into account when purchasing the device. Also, beware of the A/V socket by making sure you don't plug in a source that has a fixed volume, an accident happens so quickly... In my opinion, this input should have been doubly secured by a cover on the sockets and a small selector next to it.

This **3510** series has a new remote control, quite nice and functional. It is pleasant to use, and above all, the speed of rotation of the motorized volume control is perfectly spread. This allows for fine volume adjustments. Moreover, this remote control works with the same codes as those of **Naim** devices. This is a very practical initiative, since the two brands are often used together in the same audio system.

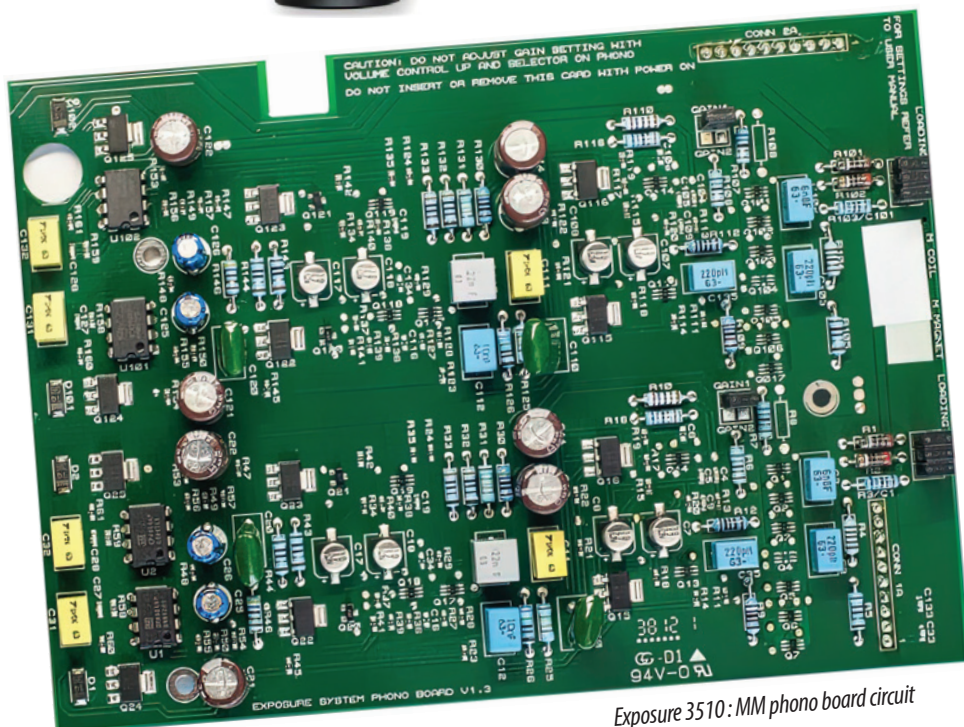
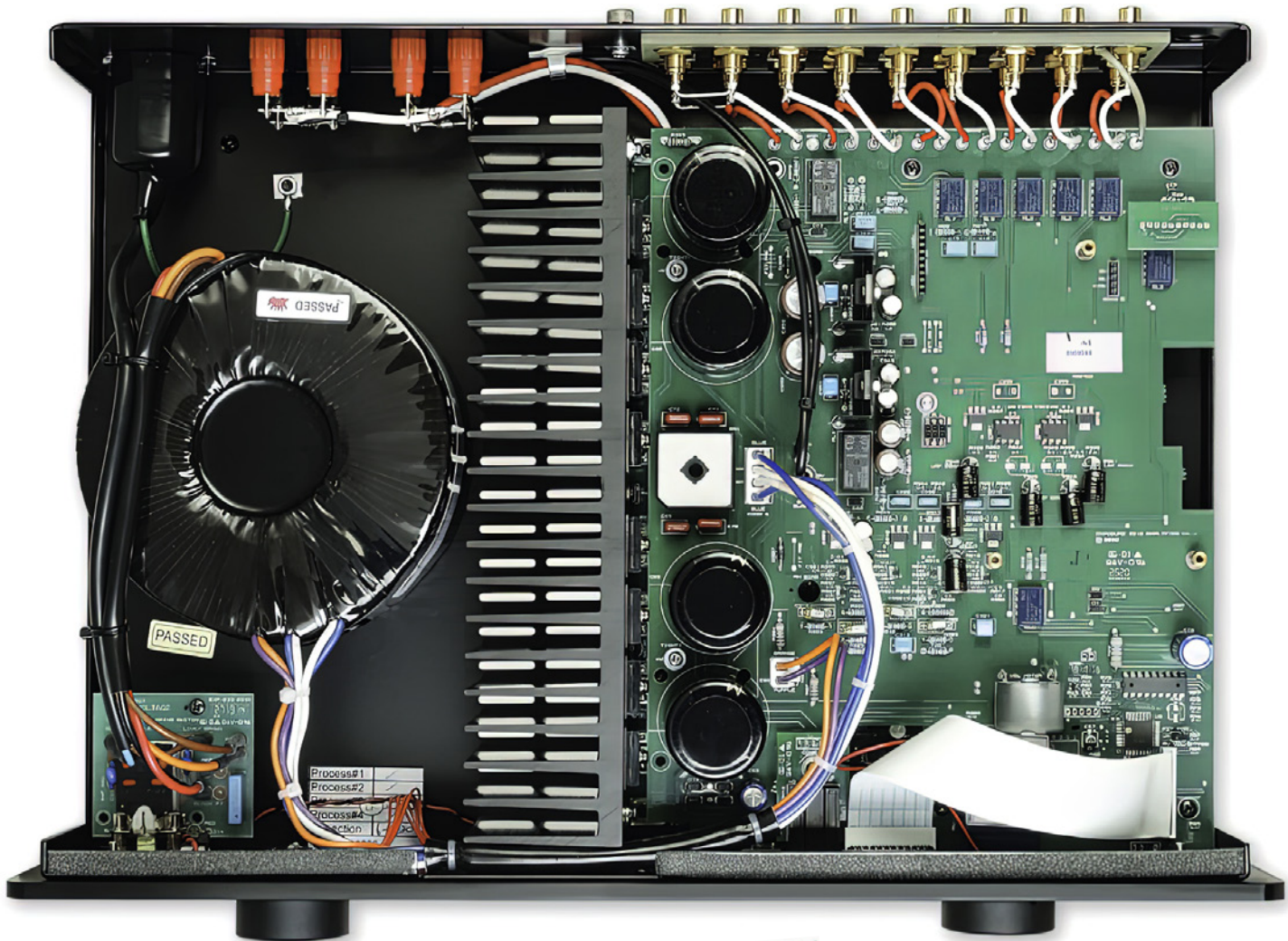
After several hours of operation, the temperature of the **Exposure 3510** becomes barely warm, which should facilitate its installation in an audio-video cabinet. My device took a good 48 hours to perform well, but it was after a month that the magic happened.

A much more modern tone

This is really the aspect that strikes you from the first listen. The tonal balance of the **3510** has evolved and modernized considerably



EXPOSURE 3510 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



Exposure 3510: MM phono board circuit

since the old 3010 series. The small surplus of weight in the low register of the 3010 S2D, has been replaced by a much firmer, faster and more articulate bass. In fact, all the foundations of the sound building have been improved. The new amplifier circuit inspired by the 5010 series really works wonders.

Listening to guitarist **Dominic Miller's** *5th House* album, the bass control is superb and worthy of a much more powerful and expensive amplifier. It digs into the bass as if we were dealing with a big power amplifier in separate elements. Despite this obvious modernization of the sound, **Exposure** was able to keep a nice warmth to the tone of the 3510. Here, no aggressiveness is to be expected. We are in the kingdom of velvety softness. If the quality of the sources is up to par, the **Exposure 3510** will be able to render the music with fluidity and a creamy side. However, the 3510 also knows how



to remain neutral and let the sources that feed it speak for themselves.

Between my **Audio Note** DAC and my **Naim** CD player, there is a world of difference. The **Exposure 3510** allows me to appreciate the difference in the sound signature of each device, an essential quality for my work as a reviewer. The **Exposure** team has succeeded in giving the **3510** tonal qualities that can often seem contradictory. Indeed, it is a real tour de force to manage to conceive an amplifier whose bass is firm, which keeps a

« Listening to guitarist **Dominic Miller's** *5th House* album, the bass control is superb and worthy of a much more powerful and expensive amplifier. It digs into the bass as if we were dealing with a big power amplifier in separate elements. »

good neutrality and whose top of the spectrum is returned all in softness.

The phono stage – a nice surprise

My version of the **3510** arrived with the substantial MM phono card for this series. I was very eager to discover it, since this phono stage is essential to me in many ways. The quality of this phono card really surprised me by its silence and by the finesse of its sound. Listening to **Leonard Cohen's** *Ten New Songs* album, it becomes obvious that the noise level of this circuit is really very low. Total silence, a real tomb. The bandwidth is excellent, the singer's voice has a lot of weight and the high frequencies are really high.

This phono stage is different because it does not try to attenuate the high frequencies at any time. Here, no unnecessary false heat that would warm up the midrange register. Rather, it is a circuit that allows the entire sound spectrum to pass through, from the lowest to the highest note. The **Exposure 3510's** phono stage is able to bring out small details hidden in the grooves of vinyl records thanks, among other things, to this rendering of the treble which is neither compressed nor limited. It brings a new light and a new sound to my records, exactly what I wanted to achieve.

When your amp loves everyone

When I began my search for a new integrated amplifier, compatibility was a priority, for obvious reasons. From this point of view, the **3510** from **Exposure** answers perfectly. In fact, the **3510** is everyone's friend. With extensive input and output connectivity, the **Exposure** is easy to pair with many types of speakers and electronics. The impedances of the inputs and outputs have been perfectly studied. This avoids unpleasant surprises when using different sources and ensures predictable results. In fact, most of the time everything plays well with **Exposure**. This is, in my humble opinion, the most beautiful quality of this British brand. As for the power amplifier, it is not afraid of any pair of loudspeakers, even those afflicted with a rather difficult low impedance. He's the boss! He always stays in control by holding the speakers with an iron hand and making them sing with a velvet tone.

In closing, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the excellent headphone amplifier included in the unit. Its sound performance is solid and it will be able to get excellent results with most headphones. An interesting bonus to add to a device that, for its price, already offers so much.

Conclusion

The **Exposure 3510** from is really a great device. Carefully built, well thought out, sober, elegant, complete, it achieves a flawless design. With its many sound qualities and its outstanding compatibility, it will fit successfully into many audio systems. Thanks to its entirely British manufacture and its really reasonable price, it represents an exception which deserves to be underlined. Here is a timeless classic that serves the essential purpose of listening to music. This is exactly what I needed. What about you?

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$3,999

Warranty: 3 years, parts and labor

Distributor: Nation Imports, T.: 514.604.1698, <https://www.nationimports.com>

Mediagraphy

Dominic Miller, *5th House*, Q-Rious Music, QRM, 116-2

Leonard Cohen, *Ten New Songs*, Columbia, C85953

BRYSTON BR-20 PREAMPLIFIER + DAC, STREAMER & HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER

A NEW *ALL-IN-ONE* THAT SURPASSES EVERYTHING THAT CAME BEFORE...

By GEORGE DE SA



Specialist or *jack-of-all-trades*? Typically, if you are budget conscious or cost constrained, it's a *jack-of-all-trades* that's sought for bang-for-the-buck; however, if you're after the best, a specialist is most often the way to go. That rule-of-thumb holds true for a lot of things, from construction to healthcare and auto-service. Most may feel it applies to audio equipment as well, where the specialist is the dedicated separate component vs. the multi-function, *all-in-one* a.k.a. *jack-of-all-trades*. Hold that thought.

In October 2020, Bryston Limited (Bryston) announced their latest preamplifier, the *BR-20*. Originally dubbed the *BP-18*, with the untimely passing of Brian Russell, company president and 45+-year staffer, just a prior month prior

to product release, the *BP-18* was renamed *BR-20*, in honour of Brian. Fittingly, the *BR-20* is not just another preamplifier but the culmination of almost a half-century of experience and knowledge the company has acquired and hailed by the company as their "...*best preamp ever!*". Yet, the *BR-20* is not just a preamplifier but significantly more. How so? You might call the *BR-20* a *4-in-one*, offering a fully balanced analog preamplifier; high-res *DAC*; high-res music *streamer*; and a full-fledged headphone amplifier in a single box. But wait...there's the optional *MM* phono stage. Hmm, maybe it's a *4+1-in-one*? Recall my opening comments? Could the *BR-20*, a *jack-of-all-trades* sit in the performance camp of separates? The answer lies in the listening.

I need to mention that I've had a lot of experience with **Bryston** products over the years, just speaking to their preamplifiers, I have auditioned and owned several of them, starting with their *BP-6*, then a *BP-26* and just a couple years ago, a *BP-17*³. The *BR-20* is now the fourth **Bryston** analog preamplifier from **Bryston** that I've had the chance to experience. Familiar as I am with **Bryston** preamplifiers, I was just stoked to get to the listening.

Its physical appearance

The overall form factor of the *BR-20* is matter of fact, favouring functionality and utility over extravagance. Fit and finish, though not exotic, is excellent and in keeping with **Bryston's** built-to-last tradition. It weighs only 12-pounds looks and feels robust. A ¼" thick aluminum front dress panel with bevelled edges and an etched **Bryston** logo, comes in 17" or 19" widths with a choice of micro-bead blasted silver or black. The face hosts a volume knob, ¼" headphone jack and black & white *OLED* display, along with an abundance of buttons and *LEDs* – 18 buttons for input selection, power, balance, and mute, with 36 *LEDs* around the volume knob to indicate its position. In addition, there are just as many more *LEDs* to for sample rate, inputs etc. While the front panel of the *BR-20* is anything but minimalist, it's well-ordered and functional.

Its connectivity

On the back, analog audio connections include: 2 pairs balanced (*XLR*) and 2 pairs single ended (*RCA*) inputs, along with 2 pairs of balanced (*XLR*) outputs; however, no single ended / unbalanced audio outputs are provided. Digital audio connections include: 2 x *AES/EBU*, 2 x *TOSLINK*, 2 x *S/PDIF (RCA)* and a *USB*. The rear also hosts connections for: *IEC* power, two *Ethernet* ports, 4 *USB* accessory, 1 *USB* control, 1 *RS232* jack, and a trigger-in and two trigger-outs. Two options on the *BR-20* are:



BRYSTON BR-20 PREAMPLIFIER + DAC, STREAMER & HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER

an HDMI card (4 inputs / 1 output) and a MM phono stage (both absent on the review sample). A full function, black metal jacket IR remote is included; however, most will likely use the **Bryston** web interface that provides full control, including inputs, volume, streamer functions, and firmware.

The all-in-one

The **Bryston BR-20** is constructed using surface mount components, which are smaller, allow for tighter spacing and use of multi-layer boards. This permits **Bryston** to design and build more functions within a single box, without compromising critical performance. In fact, the cohabitation of functions, such as preamplifier, DAC and streamer within the **BR-20** allow **Bryston** to optimize components connections, eliminate the compromises of external interconnects. The **BR-20** preamplifier is the first **Bryston** preamplifier to be 'fully balanced' input-to-output, providing additional performance advantages. It's THD is vanishingly low, rated at below 0.0006% with an IMD of <0.0003%, while it's signal-to-noise rating is -110dB.

The DAC within the **BR-20** is capable of up to PCM 32-bit/384 kHz via USB/internal streamer, as well as DSD-256 via USB/DSD-128 via streamer. The optional HDMI card can pass 4K/HDR video and handling PCM 24-bit/192 kHz as well as DSD-64 audio. The DAC is essentially the same as found in **Bryston's** own award-winning **BDA-3** and **BDA-3.14** and re-clocks all incoming PCM with its own master clock to achieve the lowest jitter.

The **BR-20's** internal streamer is built around a **Raspberry Pi 4** and uses **Bryston's** home developed **Manic Moose** user-interface software together with its **MPD** media player app. The media player is compatible with music streaming services such as **TIDAL** and **Qobuz**, as well as being setup with internet radio (**bRadio**). Most recently, this March 2022, the **BR-20** received **Roon Ready** certification making it possible to seamlessly use **Roon** as your music player interface if you choose.

The installation

I evaluated the **BR-20** in concert with a pair of **Bryston 7B³** amplifiers and **Dynaudio C2 Signature** loudspeakers.

Interconnects were balanced / XLR between the **BR-20** and **7B³** and internet was via **Ethernet** from my router to the **BR-20** 'streaming' port. The analog source, was my **VPI Scout** and **Gold Note PH-10/PSU-10** stage, also connected via balanced / XLR. To access the **BR-20** streamer, no app is required, you just type: **mybryston.com** in your mobile or computer browser to get to the **Bryston Network Portal**, where you will see the **BR-20** that's connected to your network. Note that you must have your mobile or computer device on the same network as the **BR-20** for it to be seen. A tap takes you into the **Manic Moose** interface where you can select 'Media Player'. The **Bryston Manic Moose** Media player is pre setup for **Tidal** and **Qobuz** as well as internet radio. **Tidal** was my music source of choice, though I did use a USB thumb drive with music files.

If you are using a streaming service, like **Tidal HiFi**, you must ensure you go to **Settings** (gear icon) and select 'Lossless' as opposed to 'High' from the **Tidal** dropdown, to get maximum resolution, otherwise, with **High** you'll only get up to a 320 kbps bitrate. This I discovered in my trials but couldn't find noted within the manual. Though the **BR-20** supports high resolution streaming with **TIDAL HiFi**, it does not enable full MQA – **Bryston** doesn't drink the **MQA Kool-Aid**. At a point, I had some issues with occasional remote function and panel control freezing that required unplugging the **BR-20** to rectify. It turned out that a **BR-20** firmware update was required, which was easily done and from there it was smooth sailing.

Tidal is not the smoothest running on **Manic Moose**. First, **Manic Moose** is not as intuitive and feature rich as the **Tidal App**; second, **Tidal** account info in **Manic Moose** after 24 hrs of non-use, requiring re-entry; third, occasionally some of my **Tidal** 'collection' albums would not reveal the track list or take a long time to do so; fourth, there's no track fast forward / rewind but only stop, pause and skip. **Adam Tanner** at **Bryston** explained that the present **Tidal** interface limitations are due to the API solution used; however, a fix is in the works for later this year.

Listening sessions

Listening to music with the **BR-20** was immediately a new experience. The presentation was effortless. Perhaps this might



be due to the utterly low distortion it imparts on the audio signal or it may also involve its low noise, regardless, there was a noticeable freeing of the music. Too often, we hear music delivered in a heavy-handed forward manner that may initially captivate us but over time overwhelms our senses and prevents us from appreciating the inherent musical complexities, not so with the *BR-20*. In this regard, the *BR-20* is a different animal with a presentation that's not laid-back but also not forward, a delivery that you might say falls in that rare *goldilocks* zone. Jumping into the sultry and sexual rendition of *Everybody Hurts* by **Karen Souza**, from her album *Essentials II*, the effortlessness, detail retrieval, and transparency capabilities of the *BR-20* were revealed. The opening percussion notes were clear, quick, and natural; dynamics delivered without any sense of strain. This ease in dynamics went beyond the macro-level of the kick drum but also extended into the micro-dynamics, exemplified in the feathery snare strokes and soft cymbal taps, all leading to superb realism. Muscular bass notes on the synth revealed the control and precision of the low frequencies that the *BR-20* possesses, presenting the low drone of the organ-like synth with fine articulation, rather than smoothing over the tone variations. Yet, **Karen's** voice was the emotion grabber given the level of delicacy and detail that the **Bryston** rendered her vocal expressions. The smallest nuances and inflections were most apparent, yet there was not sense of detail emphasis or exaggeration. Putting on **Marie Spaemann's** album *Gap* and her interpretation of the **Cure's** *Lovesong*, I was mesmerized by her hauntingly beautiful voice and the emotion it evoked through the *BR-20*. Yet her voice just wasn't there but was *there* before me, seemingly in the flesh, held in space with her breaths not only heard but felt, so well were dynamics communicated through the *BR-20*. The string plucks were portrayed with authority, tight and sinewy, while **Marie's** cello was conveyed with a sweetly authentic timbre and tone. Details were not smoothed over and liquified, as can be the case with some preamplifiers but neither



did it manifest in a forensic way. It seemed the *BR-20* could render exacting detail, gradation, and nuances in a most musically informative manner. Image lock within the soundstage was exceptional, with elements easily perceived in three-dimensional space, fore and aft, left and right as well as up and down. Spinning a little vinyl, **Leonard Cohen's** *Popular Problems*, I was once again astonished with the ability of the *BR-20* to step out of the way of the music. The surreal clarity of the shaker stood out, along with the living presence of Leonard's baritone voice. The tone of the instrumentation, complimented by the rhythm and speed of the delivery was amazingly lifelike and natural, the *BR-20* allowing the upstream analog source to do its magic without intrusion. Delicacy and finesse were notable strengths of the *BR-20*. One of the greatest compliments I can offer here is that the *BR-20* allowed me to enjoy my vinyl more thoroughly and to a higher level of appreciation than before.

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PURE TRANSMISSION

HF-X-NCF

HF-A-NCF

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« The string plucks were portrayed with authority, tight and sinewy, while Marie's cello was conveyed with a sweetly authentic timbre and tone. Details were not smoothed over and liquified, as can be the case with some preamplifiers but neither did it manifest in a forensic way. It seemed the BR-20 could render exacting detail, gradation, and nuances in a most musically informative manner. Image lock within the soundstage was exceptional, with elements easily perceived in three-dimensional space, fore and aft, left and right as well as up and down. »

I spent some time listening to the BR-20's headphone amplifier, with my Grado 325e, it was apparent that the headphone circuit provides loads of power and with that grip, control and accuracy, as well as resolution. Bass was both tuneful and full, yet controlled, with effortless dynamics. The soundstage is well sorted with a good sense of space. If you seek a truthful, tonally neutral headphone amp with oodles of power and detail, its sure to please.

How does it compare to its predecessors?

I mentioned my experience with other Bryston preamplifiers, so I'll provide some insight on how they compare; however, I'm working off a few years' memories. The BP26 is bolder, with heavier mid-bass that manifest as harder hitting than the BR-20, also the BP-26 might sound a slight touch warmer, smoothing

over detail and so more forgiving; however, on all other counts I would say the BR-20 is its superior with greater fine detail, delicacy, expansiveness, focus, articulation, tonal complexity and transparency, while remaining musically engaging. The BP-17³ is very similar to the BR-20 in many respects but to my recollection, a little cooler, lacking some musical warmth in comparison and perhaps not with quite the same level of bass weight or dynamic prowess as the BR-20. In fact, I would have thought the BR-20 would have replaced the BP-17³ but for the latter having a lower price point, U.S. \$1,300 less, and additional single-ended connections.

Conclusion

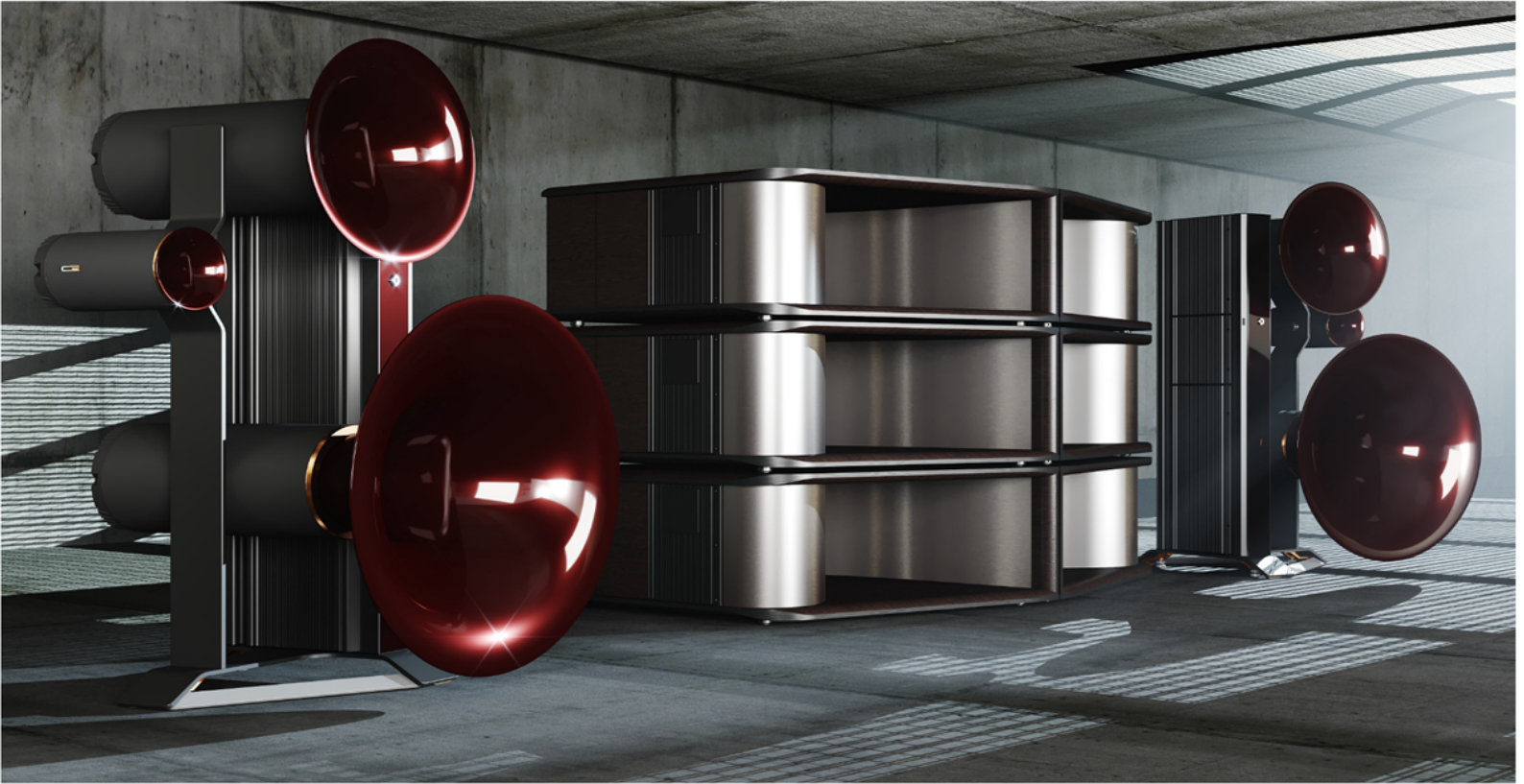
The Bryston BR-20 is just a superb multi-function component; but, let there be no doubt, it is also a phenomenal stand-alone stereo preamplifier. Recall my opening comments, do you choose a specialist over a jack-of-all-trades if you seek the highest level of performance? I think, with the BR-20, Bryston has broken that rule of thumb. As far as I'm concerned, the BR-20 is indeed Bryston's greatest achievement in a preamplifier to date and sits competitively with stand-alone preamplifiers that not only cost more but are significantly less feature laden. All credit to Bryston to what they have achieved with the BR-20, a fine tribute to Brian.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$5,995

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Manufacturer/Distributor: Bryston Ltd., T.: 705.742.5325, www.bryston.com



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CLASSICAL MUSIC

By CHRISTOPHE HUSS

RECORD OF THE MONTH

**KLAUS MÄKELÄ
JEAN SIBELIUS**

The Seven Symphonies. Tapiola.

Three fragments.

Oslo Philharmonic

Decca, 3 CDs, 485 2256.

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

Turtleneck sweater, blue eyes in full view: does **Decca** mean to imply that we have a potential **Karajan** seed here? In any case, **Klaus Mäkelä's CV** suggests it. At 21, he was appointed principal guest conductor of the **Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra**, at 22 music director of the **Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra**, at 24 music director of the **Orchestre de Paris**, and at 26 he recorded the complete **Sibelius** works for his first **Decca** record. One cannot understand the piquancy of the enterprise without decoding what makes this conductor so exceptional for his young age, namely his absolute concentration and an obsession with sonic saturation (also called harmonic density). **Mäkelä** doesn't get carried away or intoxicated by the movement. His music is bursting with sound like a juicy peach. He thus opposes the translucent **Sibelius** of **Osmo Vänskä (Bis)** with a more nourished, tense and dense approach. These are fascinating debuts on recordings, much more so than the critically acclaimed *Symphonies 1 and 2* by **Santtu-Matias Rouvali (Alpha)**.

SOUND RECORDING OF THE MONTH

**SERGEĪ RACHMANINOV
STEVEN OSBORNE (piano)**

Sonata for piano no 1. Moments musicaux op 16. Nunc Dimittis, etc.

Hyperion, CDA 68365

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

The opportunity was too good. In the wake of the last issue, which featured the 2nd Sonata by **Jean-Paul Gasparian**, celebrating the underrated

1st Sonata by the great **Steven Osborne**, a 35-minute work, seemed timely. So yes, there is the duplicate of the *Moments musicaux op. 16*. But isn't it the magic of classical music to be able to receive two artistic proposals of such high interest in close proximity? Basically, there are 45 minutes of music here that you don't find in **Gasparian**. And there is a pianist whose sound awareness is just as sharp. The sound is a bit richer than in **Gasparian's CD**, but no less precise and responsive, thanks to a perfect piano tuning by **Nigel Polmeier** and a perfect remote recording by **David Hinitt**. A deluge of music falls upon us, all of it perfectly channeled.

THE BEST NEW QUEBEC RELEASE

**ELINOR FREY, ROSA BAROCCA,
CLAUDE LAPALME.
EARLY ITALIAN
CELLO CONCERTOS**

Works by **Sammartini, Vivaldi, Tartini and Leo**.

Analekta. AN2 9163

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

Gambist and cellist **Elinor Frey** is an American musician, Montrealer by adoption, who has performed on stages here and in Europe. We had noticed her on the releases of Belgian label **Passacaille**. She is back on **Analekta** with works that mark the advent of the baroque cello. The musician distinguishes this instrument, with 4 strings, from the later cello, with 5 strings, the instrument we know today. What's more, she plays instruments of two

sizes here, a piccolo or tenor cello, in the works of **Sammartini** and **Tartini**, and a larger instrument in **Vivaldi** and **Leo Tartini's Concerto in A major** is the jewel in the crown of this program, with a very original *Larghetto* in its final part. **Elinor Frey** is accompanied by an excellent **Albertan Baroque** ensemble, beautifully captured by **Carl Talbot** in Calgary in September 2021. This release not only documentary, it is inexhaustible.

BOXSETS OF THE MONTH

**JOHN WILLIAMS AND
THE BOSTON POPS ORCHESTRA**

Complete Philips Recordings

Decca, 21 CD, 485 1590

Interpretations: *** and *****

Technique: *****

Film composer **John Williams**, who is celebrating his 90th birthday, was working in Los Angeles studios as a conductor when in 1979 **Arthur Fiedler** left the **Boston Pops** after a glorious 50-year tenure. **Williams**, tempted by a career as a concert conductor, applied for his succession and was awarded the position in January 1980. His leadership of the **Boston Pops** coincided with the advent of digital recording, and later the *CD*, giving valuable exposure to his work. In just over 10 years, **Philips**, the new partner of this iconic **Boston Symphony** emanation, has released over 20 *CDs*. The repertoire includes film music, Broadway hits and classical hits, from **Pachelbel's Canon** to **Holst's Planets**, without forgetting **Gershwin** and **Leonard Bernstein**. There are also

two *CDs* with **Jessye Norman**, where she sings **Michel Legrand**, **Jerome Kern** and **Richard Rodgers**. **Glenn Miller** is next to **Rimsky-Korsakov** for what we will call an orchestral experience, which will suit the ears of all kinds of music lovers, including Christmas records and marches in a rather unique and entertaining box set.

KAREL ANČERL CZECH PHILHARMONIC

Karel Ancerl Live Recordings

Supraphon, 15 CDs, SU 4308-2

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

Technique: ** and ***

A concentration camp survivor, **Karel Ancerl** was the legendary post-war conductor of the **Czech Philharmonic Orchestra**. His discography has been well reissued by **Supraphon**, but what we find here is quite different, since it consists of mostly unpublished radio tapes adding to **Ancerl's** documented repertoire such essential works as **Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 4** or **Beethoven's Symphonies No. 2 and 8**. Most importantly, we find four great Czech scores, **Dvorak's 7th Symphony**, **Suk's Asrael**, **Novak's Pan and Autumn Symphony**. All these recordings were made with the **Czech Philharmonic**, between 1949 and 1968, when **Ancerl** left for Toronto after the repression of the Prague Spring. The vast majority of the concerts from the turn of the 1960s are of quite decent quality on well-preserved tapes. The musical level is, for the most part, fascinating.



HEINRICH SCHIFF

Heinrich Schiff Complete
Recordings on Philips & DG
Decca, 21 CD, 485 1899
Interpretation: *****

Technique: *****

Austrian cellist, conductor and pedagogue **Heinrich Schiff**, who died in December 2016 at the age of 65, was never a media star of the **Mstislav Rostropovich** kind. But what a solid musician! Unlike **Rostropovich**, **Schiff** was not a seducer and did not take the cover and the works to himself. He sought to extract the essence of the music on one of his two instruments, the *Stradivarius Mara* and a *Montagnana* called *Sleeping Beauty*. **Schiff** carved out most of his legacy at **Philips**. The only thing substantially missing here is his *Bach Suites*, which he recorded for **EMI**. **Schiff** remains a beacon in the **Shostakovich Concertos**, the **Schumann Concerto** (with **Haitink**) and many other works. Thus, his musicality prevents the **Rachmaninov Sonata** from falling into false sentimentality. The box set includes **Friedrich Gulda's** insane *Concerto*, released on the **Amadeo** label, an irresistible and quite rare disc.

PREVIEW OF THE MONTH

RICCARDO CHAILLY
FILARMONICA DELLA SCALA
MUSA ITALIANA

Mendelssohn: Symphony no 4.
Schubert: Overtures in the Italian style D. 590 and 591.

Mozart: Mitridate, Ascanio in Alba and Lucio Silla Overtures.

Decca, 2944 485

Interpretation: ****

Technique: *****

Released on May 20, 2022, this recording by the man who has become arguably the greatest active conductor offers works more or less related to Italy. With the closure of **La Scala** during the pandemic, the **Orchestra** was installed in the hall, thus ensuring a flattering acoustic setting for the orchestra. The originality of the *CD* is the choice of the 1834 version of **Mendelssohn's 4th Symphony**. The alterations made after the creation of 1833, are notable on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th movements. This ground-breaking score was only published in 1997. According to **Chailly**, the revision enhances the dramatic side of the work and strengthens and clarifies the characteristics of the extra-musical allusions in the work. In our opinion, it dilutes the effectiveness and musical impact a bit by adding measures. In his two overtures, **Schubert** pays tribute to **Rossini's** Italy. **Chailly** completes his disc with three early **Mozart** overtures. At the time, the

overtures were called Italian symphonies, i.e. in three sections, fast-slow-fast. The orchestra is, here, a little rich, but the program is interesting and very well realized.

NEW RELEASES

KASPARS PUTNINŠ
SERGEÏ RACHMANINOV
ESTONIAN PHILHARMONIC
CHAMBER CHOIR

Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Op. 31
BIS, SACD, BIS-2571

Interpretation: ****

Technique: *****

The *Vespers* are **Rachmaninoff's** primary choral work. If you have the *Vespers* in your music library, consider complementing it with this wonderful *Liturgy*. The first challenge here is to combine sound recording and music, i.e. to place the singing in a space that is sufficiently reverberant to give the impression of participating in an Orthodox service. In short, the dome of the basilica must be simulated and this is what **Jens Braun's** capture does perfectly. **Rachmaninoff**, who fled Russia during the Revolution, set the entire text of the service to music in 1910 and expressed his own fascination with the work. Fascination is indeed the dominant feeling when listening. The new version has as main competitor (besides the **Polyanski** Russian version) the **Vlaams Radiokoor** at **Glossa**. **Kaspars Putninš's** approach has the advantage of not getting lost in ecstatic meanderings and of preserving a natural musical flow. The various choir divisions are superbly balanced.

FRANZ SCHUBERT
SAMUEL HASSELHORN
(baritone),
JOSEPH MIDDLETON (piano)
Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe: Melodies.

Harmonia Mundi, HMM, 902 689

Interpretation: ****

Technique: **

The 32-year-old German baritone **Samuel Hasselhorn**, winner of the 2018 *Queen Elisabeth of Belgium International Music Competition*, is certainly one of the greatest hopes for singing, especially *Lieder*. This first **Schubert** recital was awaited as much as the first recording of the collaboration between **André Schuen** (38) and **Deutsche Grammophon**. But unlike **Schuen's** brilliant *The Fair Maid of the Mill*, something is

not right here. **Hasselhorn** may be impressive on stage, but on record he hardly touches (cf. *Des Fischers Liebesglück*). But, above all, this record is a textbook case, because the positioning of the singer, who appears almost in the background of the piano (or next to it), is not credible. It's the same problem as with **Marianne Lambert's** record below: the singer doesn't seem to talk to us directly. The capture was however much easier and codified than for the **Lambert-Milot** tandem. The failure is signed **Alban Moraud**. Weak!

MARIANNE LAMBERT
(soprano),
VALÉRIE MILOT (harp).

Canzone di Notte

Fidelio, FACD 052

Interpretation: ***

Technique: **

Recorded by **René Laflamme** at St-Joseph's Church in Rivière-des-Prairies, this album has the particularity of having **Stéphane Tétrault** as artistic director. The exercise is delicate: a voice and a harp in a church. The choice made is to have a harp rather in front on the right and the voice rather behind in the center left in a more reverberated space (as if it were in the place of the animator in the choir of the church). We thus have two plans with two more or less distant relationships to the sound sources, the voice sometimes giving the impression of accompanying the harp rather than the opposite. The repertoire includes arias by **Mozart**, **Schubert**, **Gluck**, **Donizetti**, **Rossini** by artists who are enthusiastic about their project. A record that is sympathetic, but cannot be recommended without warnings.



THE HOME STUDIO



By MICHEL DALLAIRE

French speaker manufacturer Focal is already well established in the field of monitors for professional studios. Focal has recently launched a new *Alpha Evo* series which represents the entry level of professional monitors. This series includes four models of active type and two ways of which the *Alpha 80 Evo*, the *65 Evo*, the *50 Evo* and the *Twin Evo* for the central way. All of these speakers are bookshelf type except, of course, the *Sub Evo*. They are designed for close monitoring, once installed on the mixing console or on a stand in a close field. The model that I am proposed to test is the smallest of the *Alpha* speakers, the *50 Evo*. Its compact size will allow me to use it in three different places in my home. Let's see how the *Alpha 50 Evo* can be used in a home environment.



FOCAL ALPHA 50 EVO SPEAKERS



Monitoring is becoming more accessible

In 2020, one of our colleagues had the opportunity to test another professional monitor from the manufacturer **Focal** which was the *Shape 65*. The *Shape* series is a step up from the *Alpha Evo* series and uses *FLAX* diaphragm transducers with a linen fabric cone covered on both sides with a layer of fiberglass. The *Alpha Evo* series, at a lower price, uses *Slatefiber* cones whose membrane was developed and manufactured entirely in **Focal's** workshops located in Saint-Etienne, France. This composite material uses recycled, non-woven carbon fibers. They are oriented radially from the center to the outside and then solidified by a thermoplastic polymer. The fact that these fibers are oriented, but not woven, increases their damping and stiffness. The *Slatefiber* cone has a visually appealing slate effect. These cones are also used in the *Chora* series, which represents the entry-level of **Focal's** high-fidelity speakers.

Two active channels for close control

The *Alpha 50 Evo* is equipped with a 25 mm aluminum inverted dome tweeter. It is surrounded by a shallow horn that improves its horizontal dispersion. Its 13 cm woofer / midrange is acoustically loaded into a bass reflex cabinet with a laminar port that occupies almost the entire width of the bottom of the speaker. It is flared on the outside as well as the inside to eliminate the compression noise of the air flowing through it. Two amplifiers

operating in class *D* power the tweeter with 25 W and the mid-range / low frequency driver with 35 W. The *Alpha 50 Evo* is the smallest speaker in the series with dimensions of 23 cm wide by 24 cm deep and a total height of 31.5 cm. This last measurement includes the small rubber washers to be glued under the speaker to isolate it from its support.

Both transducers are protected by perforated metal grills that are attached to their edges. The cabinet is made entirely of 15 mm *MDF* panels with a black textured paint finish. On each side of the enclosure, molded thermoplastic panels are screwed in place. These wings round the front and rear edges of the speaker to eliminate diffraction effects. These inserts have the word **FOCAL** molded into the panel as well as two triangular cavities that point to the back of the speaker. On the top of the speaker is the manufacturer's graphic logo inlaid in the *MDF* panel. All of these details give the *Alpha 50 Evo* monitor a decidedly professional look while providing grip points that make it easy to handle and move.

The rear dashboard of the Alpha 50 Evo

Since this speaker is amplified and designed specifically for studio monitoring, it must be connected to a console, preamplifier, streamer, or other device with a line output with adjustable gain and volume control. So on the back of the speaker there is no digital input. The options are an analog input on *RCA*

connector and two balanced inputs, one on XLR connector and the other on TRS jack. A small switch allows to adjust the sensitivity of the input from 0 to +6 dB.

There is also the *On/Off* toggle switch. In the *On* position, the system automatically switches to standby after 15 minutes without an incoming signal. It can be disengaged if necessary with another small switch. In automatic mode, the speaker will turn on as soon as an audio signal is detected at the input. Next come the adjustments of the response curve with two rotary control knobs. One for low frequencies below 250 Hz and the other for high frequencies above 4500 Hz. The adjustment levels for low frequencies range from -6 to +6 dB in 2 dB steps, while those for high frequencies range from -3 to +3 dB in 1 dB steps. The tonal balance of the **Focal Alpha 50 Evo** can thus be subtly adapted according to its location in the listening room. To complete the description of the rear panel, there is of course the IEC socket for the detachable 110 V cord and two threaded holes to mount the speaker on the wall with a mounting system.

Installation and context of use

In order to reproduce the close-field listening conditions of a small recording studio, I first set up the *Alpha 50 Evo* speakers

in my office and on either side of my computer monitor. I was able to test this speaker from a very close distance, a bit like an artist working at home in his personal studio. Then I put them on a cabinet in my small TV room in the basement and plugged them directly into the audio output of my TV. For a slightly more distant field listening, I finally installed them in my living room on the first floor where my main stereo system is located. In this case, the two *Alpha 50 Evos* were placed on a good support in an equilateral triangle of about 8', and oriented towards my chair. I connected them to the *Preamp Out* of my integrated amplifier. The cables used for this purpose are **Mogami Gold** on RCA connectors and are 12' long. This brand of cable is often found in professional audio circles. The music files used for this test bench come mainly from my **CeolBOX** server and their decoding was done by a **Chord Qutest DAC**.

Listening in a more or less close field

In all three of my setups, I was able to get good results with the two response curve adjustment knobs. Of these three conditions of use of the *Alpha 50 Evo*, I feel that the best results were obtained in my main channel located in the first floor lounge. The rigid stand and the distance from the walls helped bring out the speaker's performance to the fullest. The three 8' sides



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FOCAL ALPHA 50 EVO SPEAKERS

formed an equilateral triangle with the speakers and my chair and gave me a wider soundstage and a more neutral sound balance by minimizing reflections from the walls.

I started listening to French jazz group **Amaury Faye Trio**. What strikes me immediately with the *Alpha 50 Evo* is its presence and its speed of execution. The fact that the transducers are directly connected to their respective amplifiers, without passing through a passive frequency filter, certainly has something to do with it. The cohesion between the tweeter and the woofer gives me instruments with an incredible presence in my listening room and an openness in the midrange that would make many more expensive speakers blush. Thanks to its compactness and the rounded corners of its front panel, the stereophonic image is improved in width, but also in depth. Obviously, the tweeter version of the *Alpha 50 Evo* is a bit less refined than the higher end series that use magnesium or beryllium alloys. However, this transducer does well in all circumstances, especially since it is possible to adjust its presence by more or less 3 dB according to our preferences or the acoustics of the room. I continue with the album *New Moon Daughter* by jazz singer **Cassandra Wilson**. The *Alpha 50 Evo* offers me its warm voice, in the center and in the foreground of the stereo image. Compared to a passive speaker, the reproduction of the *Alpha 50 Evo* is more projected towards the front, which is a characteristic of monitoring speakers allowing to hear what is happening in the recording well. This projection is however controlled and interesting in the case where one listens, like I do, at a good distance rather than in close field. On this album, the instruments are perfectly localized and they literally float around Ms. **Wilson**. The dynamics are there and the low frequencies are impressive even if they are limited by the small size of the speaker.

I end this description with an album simply entitled **Vivaldi** by the **Les Violons du Roy** ensemble directed by **Mathieu Lussier**. This album, on the **Atma** label, is superbly produced and incredibly dynamic for a classical concert recording. With the *Alpha 50 Evo*, the playing of the string instruments is cheerful and they keep their respective tonality. In the concerto for two trumpets and strings in *C major RV 537*, the brass instruments are gleaming and lightning fast in their execution. The violins have a surprising attack of the notes and with a hell of a tempo. Thanks to a well-sustained definition at low levels, the strings remain silky and well defined in slower movements. In short, the *Alpha 50 Evo* is a good witness of what is going on in a recording without losing any musicality.

A professional speaker, yes, but..

With a relatively affordable unit price of \$500, I feel that **Focal's** *Alpha 50 Evo* proximity control speaker is a good entry-level speaker in the professional studio monitor arena. I also believe that it can be easily adapted to home use given its input tone and gain adjustments. Since it is active, it does not require the addition of an external amplifier to power it either. The *Alpha*



50 Evo does not have digital inputs. It should therefore be connected to a preamplifier, a DAC/Streamer or any other device equipped with analog outputs controlled by a potentiometer. You will also need two monophonic cables to feed the audio signal to the left and right channels separately. By using one of the new compact *DAC/Streamer* models or even a *Walkman* with a 3.5 mm jack to *RCA* output adapter, it is possible to assemble a very space-saving high-fidelity system with a more than respectable sound quality. In a studio or at home, whether it's set up on a good stand or simply placed on a piece of furniture, the *Alpha 50 Evo* speaker will adapt to your musical tastes and your environment. Its size even allows you to easily transport it to friends' houses to temporarily transform yourself into a *DJ* for a night. It's up to you!

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$499 per unit

Warranty: 2 years, parts and labor

Manufacturer / Distributor: Focal Naim, T.: 1 866.271.5689, www.focalnaimamerica.com

Mediagraphy

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

Cassandra Wilson, *New Moon Daughter*, Blue Note, 7243 8 32861 2 6

Les Violons du Roy, *Vivaldi*, ATMA Classique, ACD, 22602

Fink, *Sort of Revolution*, ZENCD146

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

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TOTEM ACOUSTIC'S *READY-TO-LISTEN* SPEAKERS

By JEAN-DENIS DOYLE

The Totem KIN series from Totem Acoustics is the entry-level product from the popular Montreal-based manufacturer. Launched with great success a few years ago, this series is affordable, easy to use and focused on wireless connectivity. The advantage of this speaker is that it can be connected wirelessly to the *KIN SUB 10*. It also allows a *party mode* (the 5.0 chip). This means that a source, for example TIDAL, can play on a pair of *KIN Play Tower* speakers or on a *KIN Play Soundbar*. The *KIN Play* bookshelf speaker is already a hit with users around the world. Totem is now introducing a more powerful and efficient self-supporting version. Named *KIN Play Tower*, this new speaker is more ambitious. It should be of interest to customers who have a large space to sound and who want a quality sound and a speaker that has more impact. The *KIN Play Towers* were a hit at the Montreal Audio Show. So I requisitioned a pair for a test bench. Let's see how they will perform in my home environment.

Who hasn't heard of Totem? The Quebec manufacturer is a true success story and is certainly a pride for all audiophiles here. Totem, despite its enviable reputation in the high-end market, has always been concerned with offering products at reasonable prices. Totem speakers have always had their own signature sound. They are the result of a long tradition of design masterfully implemented by Totem's founder, Vince Bruzzeze. The main principles that have always guided the design of

Totem speakers have remained the same since the beginning: the use of small, low-vibration cabinets, simple phase-matched crossovers, flawless harmonic reproduction and a wide frequency response. Vince Bruzzeze, over the years, has maintained consistent audio quality for Totem's traditional speakers. However, designing an affordable, standalone, connected speaker was quite a challenge. And yet, anyone who has used the first *KIN Play* speaker has seen how much it has inherited from its big sisters. And this is where the *KIN* series comes into its own. As you surely know, connected speakers and *Bluetooth* sound bars are not lacking on the market. When a high-end manufacturer like Totem applies all its know-how in the elaboration of a series of products like the *KIN* speakers, it becomes really interesting. Especially if, for a reasonable price, this product offers you a good part of the impact, the finesse and the coherence of a Totem speaker, it is even better. Let's see what magic trick the wizard used to make these *KIN Play Towers*.

Technical Description

Totem's *KIN Play Tower* speakers are what I would call powered and self-contained. By this I mean that you will only have to add a music source such as your smart TV, a computer, a CD player or even a vinyl turntable. In fact, you could call them active speakers, but that wouldn't be quite right. Active speakers are usually equipped with custom-made amplifiers to power each speaker.

In the case of the *KIN Play Towers* that we are interested in, the configuration is a little different. They are in fact two conventional two-way speakers with a conventional passive crossover in each. The trick is that one of the two speakers contains an electronic module. It provides 200W stereo amplification for both speakers. The module contains a preamplifier to manage the volume and inputs, as well as a digital to analog converter, equipped with a *Bluetooth* transmitter. Phew! All hidden behind



« These speakers have excellent rhythmic tracking. They brilliantly rendered the drumming duo, composed of **Phil Collins** and **Chester Thomson**, with the most convincing veracity. One can easily hear the distinct playing of the two drummers and appreciate the synergy between these two great musicians. It sounds live, lively, dynamic and not at all sanitized. What a pleasure! »



one of the two speakers. This concept has the advantage of completely eliminating the need for a variety of devices to perform all these tasks.

If the wires are carefully arranged, these speakers make for a super clean and minimalist setup. An advantage that the decorator in you will surely appreciate. Okay, you'll tell me that this is all very nice, but what can you plug into a pair of *KIN Play Tower*? These speakers have a single pair of *RCA*-format terminals that allow you to connect any conventional analog source. This can be a preamplifier, an *FM* tuner, a *CD* player or a digital to analog converter. You can even connect a turntable to it, since a small switch allows you to transform the line input into an *MM* phono input. A grounding plug for the turntable is also provided. A second analog input, in 3.5 mm minijack format, will allow you to connect a portable device such as an *Android* phone or an *MP3* player.

Totem's *KIN Play Towers* have two optical format digital inputs that support a digital signal up to 192 kHz sampling, which will allow you to connect a TV or a game console. But the connection that is likely to be the most popular among users is, without a doubt, the *Bluetooth APTX HD* format. It accepts *Bluetooth* transmissions up to 48 kHz and will allow to enjoy a very respectable audio quality for this format.

The *KIN Play Tower* speakers also have an output for a separate subwoofer. Since all the connections and electronics are located in one cabinet, it has a speaker output to power the second cabinet. As for the speakers, the *KIN Play Tower* is equipped with two five-inch woofers and a textile dome tweeter. These components are of very high quality and have been developed with great care.

Unpacking and Installation

When unpacking and installing, you must take into account that the enclosure containing the electronics must be placed to your left as well as when planning the path of the wires and especially the electricity. The *KIN Play Tower* speakers come with a nice remote control. It is all metal and beautifully made. Do not misplace it, as it

is the only way to access the tone control functions.

A multi-function button on the front of the left speaker controls volume, selects inputs and pairs *Bluetooth*. A color-changing and status indicator light shows which input is selected. When it flashes blue, it indicates the connection status, which is essential for *Bluetooth*. In order to indicate at what level the speakers are at, it would have been really nice if there was a second indicator. In the current configuration, it will be recommended to lower the volume a little before turning off the speakers, in order to prevent bad surprises.

It's a breeze to place the *KIN Play Tower* speakers in your environment. Plus, it's really easy to get a nice tone, since adjustments for bass and treble are available from the remote. All necessary cables and accessories are included. These speakers are really *plug and play*. You should be able to take advantage of it quickly, without breaking your head.

Cinema sound in widescreen format

My first tests were made while watching *No Time To Die* starring the famous *agent 007, James Bond*. Initially, I put this movie on just to see if the speakers worked well with the optical input. Finally, I rewatched the whole movie! What a great pair of home theater speakers. First of all, these speakers have an unrivalled bass response in this price category. The bass is solid, goes down deep with a power that surprises. Frankly, I even wonder what the output for a subwoofer is for, since these speakers are really good in this area. By the way, I had the opportunity to jump out of my skin many times with this latest edition of *James Bond*.

Since the sound image is large and superbly detailed, it becomes easy to catch small details of diction during the movie. No need for a center channel or rear channels. These speakers project the sound image forward and to the sides with amazing depth. Want some good advice? Before you invest in any sound bar, or a rather average home theater set, go listen to a good movie using these *KIN Play Towers* from **Totem**. You'll find that for a reasonable price, it's much more enjoyable to listen to your movies with a pair of quality speakers.

TOTEM ACOUSTIC KIN PLAY TOWER SPEAKERS



Tailored for music in all formats

Of course, I had fun playing music on the *KIN Play Tower*. The tone of these speakers is very accurate, the tuning breathes **Totem's** know-how, and it is audible. I ventured into many different repertoires, including old progressive rock, not always well recorded. Each time, the *KIN Play Towers* have been able to pull off the trick, focusing on the essence of the musical message. All music plays with ease through these speakers, whether it comes from *Bluetooth* or a high-resolution file. The result is always musical and not at all analytical. I actually treated myself to a whole listening session, with **Genesis** and their live album *When in Rome*. These speakers have excellent rhythmic tracking. They brilliantly rendered the drumming duo, composed of **Phil Collins** and **Chester Thomson**, with the most convincing veracity. One can easily hear the distinct playing of the two drummers and appreciate the synergy between these two great musicians. It sounds live, lively, dynamic and not at all sanitized. What a pleasure! The *KIN Towers* have a quality that I really appreciate. They are able to reproduce the sound well and keep a rich tone, even at low volume. From my point of view, this is a fundamental quality, since the vast majority of our daily listening is done at low volume. Moreover, the tone controls, which are very well staggered, make it possible to make fine adjustments to compensate for a lower volume.

At the end of the evening, with a jazz band like the **Bill Charlap Trio** and the album *Note from New-York*, the *Totem KIN Play Tower* plays a soft music that fills the room with warmth and relaxing presence. The piano is right, the double bass has body and the fine play of the drums floats behind the speakers. Very musical ! Even if it is an entry-level series for **Totem**, the manufacturer has still managed to protect its sound signature.

Of course, the more sophisticated **Totem** models perform better, especially when installed within an equivalent high-end chain. As such, a pair of *KIN Play Towers* will give you much of the pleasure of owning a pair of **Totem** speakers.

How about a little vinyl or two?

Since the *KIN Play Towers* are equipped with a phono input for turntables, I would have been remiss if I hadn't tried it. Well, you know what? It's not so bad, not bad at all. The entrance is completely silent, no *bzz*, no *buzz*, no residual breath, only silence. The listening is very soft and allows to enjoy the records while keeping a fleshy and musical tone. This entry is a nice bonus that should be seen as the icing on the cake. It will fit perfectly with an entry-level turntable such as a **Pro-Ject Debut Carbon EVO** or a **Rega P2**.

Conclusion

Totem should be a great success with its new *KIN Play Tower*. The configuration of these speakers is quite unique. They are perfect for customers looking for quality sound with the most simplified equipment. Champion of home theater, they are also very musical and especially connected to today's needs. Here are ready-to-listen speakers that bear the **Totem** label. Take the time to go and listen to them using your dealer. They may surprise you pleasantly.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price : \$2250 per pair

Warranty: coming soon

Manufacturer / Distributor : Totem Acoustic,
T.: 514.259.1062, www.totemacoustic.com;
kinbytotem.totemacoustic.com

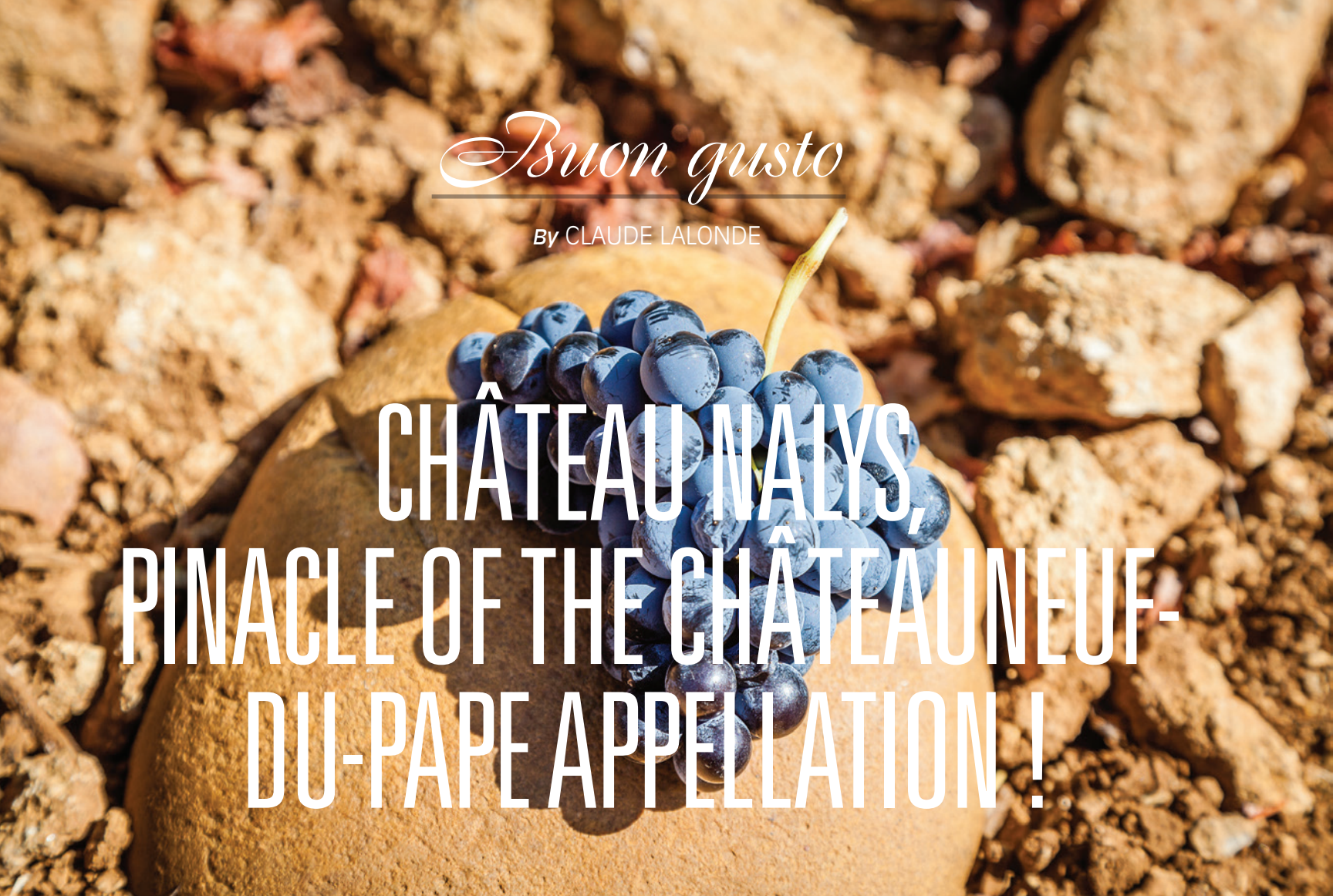
Mediagraphy

No Time To Die, Blue-Ray MGM, 1931213789

Genesis, When in Rome, Atlantic DVD, R2
511400

Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE



CHÂTEAU NALYS, PINACLE OF THE CHÂTEAUNEUF- DU-PAPE APPELLATION !

Let's see what happens when people from the North of France come to *Châteauneuf-du-Pape* to make wines with Southern grape varieties!

Founded in 1946 by **Etienne Guigal**, **Maison Guigal** will become a beacon of the Northern Rhône Valley with its mythical vintages such as *La Landonne*, *La Turquie*, *La Mouline*, *Ex Voto Ermitage*, *La Doriane* and many others that I had the pleasure to taste during my visit

While the company was growing internationally, it had been dreaming for the past twenty years of owning a domain in **Châteauneuf-du-Pape** and making wines worthy of the company's reputation. Although she was already making wines in the appellation, she did not have a domain there.

An opportunity arose in 2017 and the family acquired **Domaine de Nalys**, whose terroirs are worthy of great wines. The estate enjoys an exceptional location in the heart of the *Châteauneuf-du-Pape* appellation. Not only is it next to **Château Rayas**, but it is also the highest terroir in *Châteauneuf-du-Pape* which allows it to better cope with global warming.

to **Maison Guigal** as well as during various meetings with **Philippe** and **Eve Guigal** including one, at the end of March 2022, at the restaurant *La Chronique*, a high gastronomic place where we tasted the portfolio of the house including the famous *Brune* and *Blonde*, *Château d'Ampuis*, *La Turquie* from the *Côte Rôtie* appellation as well as all the **Château de Nalys** wines of the *Châteauneuf-du-Pape* appellation.

As **Philippe Guigal** says, *my grandfather had always dreamed of this investment. My father and I also. But opportunities were rare, we had, until now, only seen small offers that did not correspond to what we wanted to do.*

Initially reluctant about the quality of this opportunity, it was after a visit to the vineyard that they all understood the vast qualitative potential of the estate. *I was stunned*, said **Philippe**. *I didn't sleep for a week. We did not acquire it for the prestige of its wines, but because of its immense potential.*

At the beginning, three parcels out of 53 ha (of a single block which touch each other, which is rare in the appellation)



encircle the **Château**, the first one bears the name *Nalys*, and the two others are located on two major terroirs of the appellation *Le Bois Sénéchal* (13 ha) and *La Crau* (20 ha). Each of these three terroirs supports all of the 13 grape varieties of the appellation, which brings the potential expressions to 39. Today, following an expansion in 2019 of 6 ha and 16 ha in 2020, the estate now totals 77 ha.

The imprint of the philosophy of the **Guigal** has already made its work at the cost of much effort. The size of the team assigned to the vineyards is doubled, the entire trellis system is changed, all missing or dead vines are replanted, a few smaller tanks are added to increase the blending possibilities. On the way, they realized that to get the full potential, they will have to rebuild

the cellar and multiply the number of vats. They will also switch to organic viticulture in 2023.

The 2016 vintage was the first to bear the stamp of the Guigal style with a red dominated by Grenache instead of Syrah and with a healthy dose of Mourvedre. The 2017 vintage is the first one entirely vinified by the new administration. In order to clearly define the change of custody, the brand **Domaine de Nalys** has been abandoned to become **Château de Nalys**. A second wine is also produced in red and white, the **Saintes Pierres de Nalys** which brings a lot of flexibility to any vintage.

The results? **Château de Nalys** has risen to 10th place in the **Wine Spectator Top 100**.



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

WHITE WINES

Surprisingly, while the white production of the *Châteauneuf-du-Pape* appellation is only 7% of the total, that of **Château Nalys** is 18%, one of the largest in the appellation. The **Nalys** range will include a great wine dominated by roussanne and a second wine with clairette, which will avoid making whites that are too soft.

E. Guigal, Saintes Pierres de Nalys Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC, 2019

This wine is made from three exceptional terroirs: *Nalys* (34%), *Bois Sénéchal* (37%) and *Crau* (27%). The average age of the vines is 45 years.

After manual harvesting, the grapes are pressed and then settled before vinification in stainless steel vats. The wine is aged for eight months, of which about 20% is aged in wood (barrels and demi-muids).

Tasting Notes

Considered the second wine of the house, this beautiful white *Châteauneuf* reveals aromas of almonds, ripe white fruits and a hint of citrus and yellow fruits.

In the mouth, the texture is slightly fat and supported by a fresh acidity which creates a nice contrast and harmony. Beautiful matter on flavors of yellow fruits and notes of almonds. Beautiful vivacity and full of energy. And what about its length! You will make beautiful agreements with fish in salt crust, grilled or in tartar.

E. Guigal, Saintes Pierres de Nalys Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC, 2019

Price: \$50.50

Grape varieties: 36% Clairette, 29% Bourboulenc, 25% Grenache blanc, 7% Roussanne, 3% Picardan

Alcohol: 13%

SAQ Code: 14728406

<https://www.saq.com/en/14728406>



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

WHITE WINES

E. Guigal, Château de Nalys Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC, 2018

This wine is made from three exceptional terroirs: *Nalys* (36%), *Bois Sénéchal* (63%) and *Crau* (3%). The average age of the vines is 45 years.

As a result of manual harvests with very low yields in 2018, we move to pressing, then clarification of the must before vinification in wood for 70% and 30% in stainless steel tanks.

Tasting Notes

This superb wine is discovered on floral scents, notes of white fruits as well as a hint of citrus.

In the mouth, the texture is rich and pleasantly supported by a fresh acidity. What is surprising is the amplitude and persistence of the vanilla flavors, well-integrated woody notes, a hint of yellow fruit and some spicy notes.

Elegant and particularly enjoyable finish.

You will make a good match with scampi, fish with white butter sauce and mature goat cheese.

E. Guigal, Saintes Pierres de Nalys Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC, 2018

Price: \$99.75

Grape varieties: 43% Roussanne, 33% Grenache blanc, 15% Clairette, 6% Bourboulenc, 3% Piquepoul

Alcohol: 14%

SAQ Code: 14728393

<https://www.saq.com/en/14728393>



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

RED WINES

E. Guigal, Saintes Pierres de Nalys Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC, 2017

This wine is made from three exceptional terroirs: *Nalys* (33%), *Bois Sénéchal* (33%) and *Crau* (34%). The average age of the vines is 45 years.

Following manual harvesting, the vinification is carried out in stainless steel vats for a period of four weeks. The wine is aged for 18 months in stainless steel vats and in tuns (10%).

Tasting Notes

This wine exhales aromas of fresh red fruits with a dominance of strawberry and a light framework of sweet spices.

On the palate, it is the velvety texture that surprises with a fresh acidity and balanced, round and supple tannins. Beautiful flavors of ripe red fruits fill the palate and combine with a hint of sweet spices for our pleasure.

Of modern construction, this wine has an aromatic persistence that lasts and lasts... Delicious!

It goes well with grilled red meat or meat in sauce such as navarin of lamb.

E. Guigal, Saintes Pierres de Nalys Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC, 2017

Price: \$67.00

Grape varieties: 69% Grenache, 20% Syrah, 5% Cinsault, 4% Muscardin, 1% Counoise, 1% Mourvèdre

Alcohol: 14.5%

SAQ Code: 14728625

<https://www.saq.com/en/14728625>



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

E. Guigal, Château de Nalys Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC, 2017

This wine is made from three exceptional terroirs: *Nalys* (27%), *Bois Sénéchal* (23%) and *Crau* (50%). The average age of the vines is 45 years. This is the first vintage following the acquisition of the **Domaine**.

Following manual harvesting, the vinification is carried out in stainless steel vats for a period of four weeks. The vatting time is about four weeks. The wine is aged for 18 months, 30% of which is in wood (barrels, tuns).

Tasting Notes

The nose reveals intense aromas of ripe red and black fruits, including blackberry and blackcurrant.

In the mouth, the texture is velvety and charming, supported by fresh acidity and balanced, round and supple tannins. Flavors of plums, black fruits and spices are expressed in a superb aromatic amplitude that lasts a long time.

Beautiful matter and power while remaining elegant!

You will make good agreements with game and red meats.

The 2018 vintage, with its fairly lower yields, presents itself with beautifully intense aromas of ripe red and black fruits and a hint of sweet spice notes.

On the palate, it is a very complex wine with a velvety texture and well-structured tannins that give it more power than the 2017.

Quite intense flavors of woody notes and black fruits take flight and last for a surprising length.

Power, elegance and persistence!

You will make good matches with grilled red meats and game meats.

E. Guigal, Château de Nalys Châteauneuf-du-Pape AOC, 2017

Price: \$127.50

Grape varieties: 60% Grenache, 30% Syrah, 8% Mourvèdre, 2% Counoise and Muscardin

Alcohol: 15%

SAQ Code: 14728617

<https://www.saq.com/en/14728617>

All products will be available between the end of May and the end of July in **SAQ** stores.

Agency: Sélection Fréchette Vins d'Exception

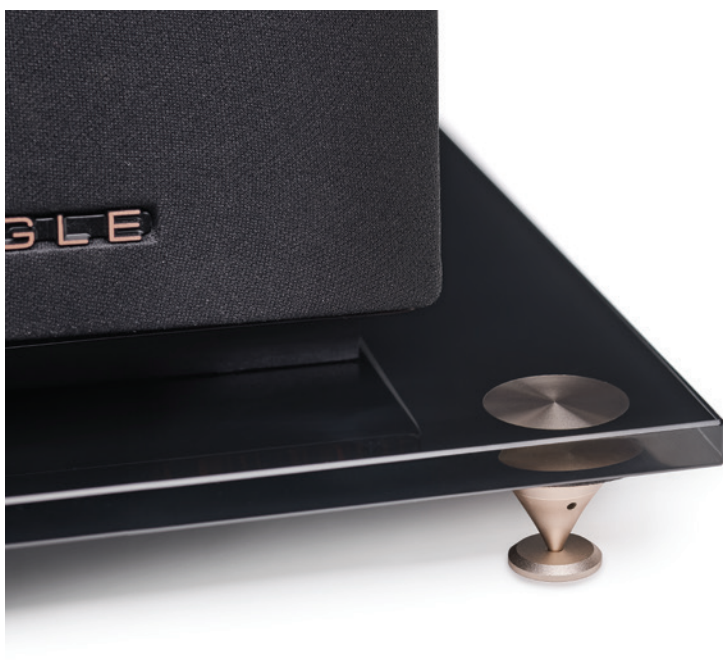


LIVELY AND DETAILED SOUND

By MICHEL DALLAIRE

French electroacoustic manufacturer **Triangle** was founded in 1980 by **Renaud de Vergnette**. For more than 40 years, this company has evolved into one of the largest speaker manufacturers, including the design and manufacture of its own speakers. I was personally introduced to **Triangle** products in the mid-1990s. In the early 2000s, I even bought a pair of *Zays* freestanding speakers that I kept for several years. Afterwards, I had the opportunity to test, for this magazine, the *Titus Ez* bookshelf-type speaker and the *Delta Signature* freestanding speaker. So, I'm pretty familiar with the sound of **Triangle** products that have evolved over the decades. For this test bench, I am offered the *Antal 40th anniversary* which is a limited edition of the *Antal Esprit Ez*. The *Antal* model has been around for at least 25 years, so let's see what the new *Antal 40th anniversary* has in store for us.





It has a new look

The *Antal 40th Anniversary* speaker looks just like the *Antal Esprit Ez*, but with some changes that are not limited to visual aspects.

The *Antal 40th Anniversary* is still a three-way speaker with four drivers. Its 25 mm dome tweeter has a horn with a central phasing piece in the form of a small ogive. The dome of this tweeter is no longer made of aluminum, but cast in an anodized magnesium alloy.

The midrange transducer is 16.5 cm in diameter with a white membrane and made of untreated paper. The latter is combined with a relatively stiff, small-ply perimeter suspension, a recipe long retained by **Triangle**. The profile of this midrange cone has been optimized to improve its high frequency linearity.

The two low frequency woofers are also 16.5 cm in diameter and have a large metal core cover. Their membrane is no longer made of fiberglass, but of a mixture of different wood, flax and carbon pulps as for the *Australe Ez* woofers. The *Antal 40th Anniversary*'s crossover circuitry has also been modified to accommodate the new transducer improvements. The internal wiring and terminal blocks are also of high quality.

In terms of cabinetry, *MDF* panels of higher density are used than for the *Antal Ez*. This construction still has internal bracing to support the back of the low frequency drivers. The partition that separates the midrange from the woofers is, in this case, installed in an inclined plane to limit the effects of

internal resonances. This layout also provides more load volume for the woofers, which are still tuned in bass reflex with a tubular port that opens out of the front of the speaker.

The Antal 40th anniversary in evening dress

This *anniversary* speaker is available in two different wood finishes including *Blond Sycamore* with a matte lacquer finish and *Santos Rosewood* with a clear mirror finish lacquer. The Santos Rosewood is the one that was sent to me and it is the most beautiful sight. Its distinctive wood veneer and dark stain give us the impression of a much more expensive speaker than its suggested retail price. Its tweeter is anodized in a rose gold color, while its transducers are surrounded by a metal ring of the same color, which adds class to its very *chic* look. Its base is made of tempered glass and includes height-adjustable legs whose metal spikes can be replaced with rubber stoppers to protect wooden floors.

Even if some parts or components come from China, **Triangle** has relocated its production to its workshops in Soissons, France, where all assembly and quality control are performed. The protective grille covers the entire front panel and is held in place by invisible magnets hidden under the wood veneer. On the front of the speaker, a commemorative plate 1980-2020 was affixed with the logo of the manufacturer as well as the base which includes the *40th Anniversary* signature.

Installation and Usage Tips

With its installed base, the **Antal 40th Anniversary** has imposing dimensions (1,128 x 300 x 424 mm), but it remains relatively easy to place in a living room ranging from 30 to 50 m². In some rooms, a clearance of 15 to 20 cm from the walls may be sufficient. Its efficiency of 93 dB/W/meter is good. Its nominal impedance of 8 ohms can go down to 3 ohms, which means that a relatively powerful amplifier that easily doubles its power at 4 ohms is recommended. When the speaker is new and fresh out of the box, bass may seem absent, but it takes at least a hundred hours of break-in for the speaker suspensions to soften. In my open-plan living room, I positioned the speakers more than a meter away from the side walls and about 40 cm from the back wall. The electronics used are my usual integrated amplifier as well as another French product which is a very good value for money. My main source is my **CeolBOX** server associated with a **Chord Qutest DAC**. My usual player was also used, but most of my listening was done with the music server for its convenience and its playlists.

Listening to the lady in evening dress

To begin the test bench of a French speaker associated with a French integrated amplifier, what better than to call upon an album of classical music on a French label. Let's start with a recording on the **Naïve** label, **Vivaldi: Nisi Dominus, Stabat Mater** featuring magnificent Quebec contralto **Marie-Nicole Lemieux**. Conductor

TRIANGLE ANTAL 40TH ANNIVERSARY SPEAKERS

Jean-Christophe Spinosi leads the **Ensemble Matheus** in a masterly manner. Listening to these melancholic pieces, what strikes me immediately with the *Antal 40th Anniversary* speaker is its very expressive and incredibly open midrange. **Marie-Nicole Lemieux's** superb voice is well positioned in the center of the soundstage while the aeration of this medium presents her well surrounded by the orchestra and at a certain distance from the microphones. **Marie-Nicole Lemieux** is not immobile,

she moves on the stage. The level of transparency of this speaker allows me to perceive every movement of the singer. In this baroque work of sacred music, Ms. **Lemieux** makes us feel the pain of a mother who loses her son. The expressive midrange of this **Triangle** speaker lets all the emotion linked to this magnificent work come through very well. The fusion between the highs and the midrange is very well done, which adds to the coherence of the message. The sound of the *Antal 40th Anniversary* is crisp and detailed while maintaining a certain sweetness. I think the lightness of the paper diaphragm in the midrange contributes to its quickness. The result is an ample presentation and a strict respect for the timbre of the instruments.

I continue with another French album which often comes back in test bench listening sessions. It is *Now* by jazz group **Hadouk Trio**. We are talking about a style that is between jazz and world music. This group was founded by **Didier Malherbe** who plays several wind instruments from different continents. The other co-founder is multi-instrumentalist **Loy Ehrlich** who plays various keyboards as well as bass guitar and some African instruments like the hajouj, gumbass and kora. They were joined by percussionist **Steve Shehan** with his often self-designed percussion instruments. All these instruments have a particular sound that the *Antal 40th Anniversary* reproduces very well thanks to its medium which is fast and of a surprising agility. The openness of this medium associated with well-dosed high frequencies allows me to locate precisely the musicians in the recording studio. **Steve Shehan's** percussions have a good, straightforward impact, while the movement of his brushes on the drums' skins is astounding. In this *Now* album, the low frequencies are deep and relatively generous. The *Antal 40th Anniversary* presents them to me in a precise way and without any loudness effect, which gives me the impression that they are slightly behind. Is it due to its rigid and very well damped cabinetry? I can't say. Nevertheless, these two woofers need to be listened to at a slightly higher volume to take full advantage of their potential. And in this sense, I feel that the *Antal 40th Anniversary* can handle a lot of power without becoming confused or messy. The high frequencies, the midrange and the lower midrange are, as for them, of such a coherence and such a presence that they make us forget this small restraint of the low frequencies.

I finish my listening with one last French album. It is by jazz ensemble **Amaury Faye Trio**. Their album entitled *Clearway* has superb recording quality and incredible dynamics. The first track, *Believe It or Not*, starts with a short drum solo followed by a double bass before the entrance of pianist **Amaury Faye**. This composition is very playful and the *Antal 40th Anniversary* follows the pace very well, with aplomb and above average verve. In spite of its slight reticence in the low frequencies, the speaker still allows me to follow the notes of the double bass, which retains the woody character of its resonance box. The pianist's playing is also well served and the piano's timbre is very credible for an instrument whose capture and reproduction are not always obvious. The drums are punchy and the cymbals keep their metallic character. The level of transparency and



TRIANGLE ANTAL 40TH ANNIVERSARY SPEAKERS



refinement of the *Antal 40th Anniversary* speaker is also above the average for speakers in this price range.

Conclusion

For my part, and as a former owner of a pair of **Triangle Zays**, I was not confused when listening to the *Antal 40th Anniversary*. It is a good summary of the know-how of this manufacturer who has been working for over 40 years in the research and development of loudspeakers. The improvements made by **Triangle** to the *Antal 40th Anniversary* are not only aesthetic, but also technical, bringing it closer to the more high-end series such as the *Signature* or even the *Magellan*. Its price remains reasonable, however, while its sound is exciting and relatively neutral while not losing sight of musicality. The *Antal 40th Anniversary* speaker is manufactured, for the moment, in limited series, as is the *Comet 40th Anniversary*, which is the bookshelf version. I wish this series a commercial success that will lead the manufacturer to produce it on a more regular basis, notwithstanding the music lovers who will have had the idea to buy one of these commemorative beauties as a collector's item.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$4999.99 per pair

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labor

Distributor: Motet Distribution, T.: 514.335.3131,
<https://motetdistribution.com>; <https://www.trianglehifi.fr>

Mediagraphy

Vivaldi: Nisi Dominus, Stabat Mater, Naïve, FLAC, 16 bits / 44.1 kHz

Hadouk Trio, Now, Celluloid, 67039-2

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

Sohn, Rennen, 4AD, FLAC, 16 bits / 44.1 kHz

Frank Woeste, Pocket Rhapsody II, ACT 9917-2, FLAC, 24 bits



BLUES

By PIERRE JOBIN

ANGEL FORREST

Angel's 11, Vol. II

Ad Litteram, ALCD-0721

Angel Forrest 11., Vol. II is a demanding project for a simple album of eleven tracks. It is a question, here, draw both interest and participation from 12 singers, among which a duet, each one for one song integrating their talents souls, in company of singer and experienced songwriter **Angel**. She wrote, with **Denis Coulombe**, a very special song for each of them, even personalized to their own style. These musicians and singers, relatives or soul mates are, in order, **Ricky Paquette**, **Denis Coulombe**, **Rob Lutes**, **Harry Manx**, **Crystal Shawanda**, **Wellbad**, **Reney Ray**, **Kal David** and **Lauri Bono**, **Brandon Isaak**, **Dawn Tyler Watson** and **Jonas Tomalty**. The essence of the songs, the lyrics and the musical genres immerse us in a diversity of popular and roots music styles ranging from rock to country to folk rock to folk ballads, etc. I appreciated the solid and consistent composition of each piece on this album as well as the moving interpretation and the complicit commitment between each performer and the musicians who, in my opinion, gave it their all. Everyone will be able to find their favorites according to their own tastes, and perhaps make discoveries depending on the moment. In addition, I appreciated the accuracy and beauty of the lyrics of the song *Hope*, performed with **Crystal Shawanda**, *Your faith and my faith they ain't the same faith... oh no no no no Sometimes we have to be the change we want to see... Sometimes you have to give the love you need to live... Your hope and my*



hope are just the same hope. And I was touched and transported by the invigorating energy of the song *Everything Changes* performed with **Wellbad**. Lyrics connected to this dynamic, catchy music, and **Wellbad's** deep, hushed, and warm voice that transforms and mixes with **Angel's** rougher and higher voice. In this song, the wildest of dreams merge harmoniously with catchy melodies... **Ricky Paquette's** subtle transitions and soaring guitar solos are the air and fire that help ignite this song to an even greater degree! The performance with **Harry Manx** also surprised me very pleasantly by its unexpected and paradoxical side, perhaps in the sixties-seventies movement which integrates the East and the West, the sound of the mohan veena with a seemingly radio friendly chorus! I would be remiss if I didn't mention the simple, fairy-tale country complicity, enhanced by pedal steel in *My Favourite*, performed with **Denis Coulombe**, or the singular, distinctive voices in beautiful folk track *Mad River* that she performs with **Rob Lutes**. And this artist's list of treasures and gold nuggets goes up to the *gypsy heart* heart of her guests of style and heart!

BUBBA AND THE BIG BAD BLUES

Drifting

Fullerton Gold Records

Drifting is the second album by **Christopher Bubba Clerc**, Southern Californian guitarist, singer and songwriter.

To do this, he surrounded himself with two drummers-directors with a solid reputation, **Tony Braunagel** and **Nick D'Virgilio**. Drawing his main influences from **Freddie King**, **SRV**, **Allman Brothers**, **The Meters** and **Gov't Mule**, he is heavily influenced by Texas Blues, Southern California Blues Rock, as well as New Orleans R&B / funk. Having studied with, among others, the legendary **Wilson Pickett** and **Ike Turner**, he has been the leader of his band for over ten years. Said band is completed by **Jason JR Lozano** on drums and **Doug Mug Swanson** on bass. **Bubba Clerc**, a powerful guitarist and singer, has not skimped on the variety of styles, nor on the quality of the musicians hired for this second record. In addition to the two drummer-directors who play on several tracks, he has secured the presence of top quality organists and pianists including the recently deceased **Mike Finnigan** and **Phantom Blues Horns**, a sax, trumpet, trombone section. *Drifting* is an opus of twelve tracks that is a real blast and whose tempos vary. From sophisticated Texas blues to psychedelic rock, **Bubba** doesn't shy away from any blues or rock music territory. He also excels in Texas shuffle, funk and soulful ballads. We are dealing here with an experienced musician and entertainer who has all the ingredients to get the party going, and who leaves no one wanting more!

MIKE GULDIN

Tumblin'

Blue Heart Records, BHR022

Guitarist, singer and songwriter **Mike Guldin** started playing guitar at the age of 15. Anchored in the blues, he has over 45 years of experience. His influences range from **Muddy Waters**, **Howlin' Wolf**, **Willie Dixon**, those **Chicago Blues** legends to **Albert Collins**, **B.B. Albert** and **Freddie King**, **The Allman Brothers**, **Eric Clapton**, **SRV**, **The Rolling Stones**, not to mention the R&B / Soul greats, **Sam and Dave**, **Booker T** and the **MG's**, **Al Green** and other musicians who lean toward a mix of styles including country. He is a blue collar bluesman who has been touring roadhouses, clubs, bars, festivals and theaters doing what he loves, making music with his friends. He is the leader of The Tumblers completed by **CJ Clark** on bass, **Billy Wear** on drums and **Tim Hooper** on piano and organ. The band has been a finalist twice at the *International Blues Challenge* in Memphis, TN. *Tumblin'* is the fourth release from these veterans and **Guldin** signs the 13 originals on the generous fifteen tracks that the album contains. To give an idea, the covers are the classic *She Caught The Katy*, popularized by **Taj Mahal** and *Key to the Highway* by **Big Bill Broonzy**. **Mike Guldin's** music, blues, rock, country and soul, is simple, direct, energetic, and also reflective at times. He knows how to surround himself and let the good times roll!

PROG ROCK

By RICHARD GUAY



THE FLOWER KINGS

By Royal Decree

www.roinestolt.com ;
<https://theflowerkings.ink.to/ByRoyal-Decree> ; <https://www.facebook.com/TheFlowerKings/>

Cult band **The Flower Kings** is back at the same pace as in the first ten years of their existence, when they released an album every year or two. *By Royal Decree* becomes the fifteenth in the series and the seventh double album. Recall that the previous two, *Waiting for Miracles* (2019) and *Islands* (2020) also have two discs. Few bands can boast such a production in 27 years of career! Yet, this unbridled productivity, far from diluting the quality of the product, rather keeps these leading artists alert and creative. The faithful and unavoidable pillars of the beginning, **Hasse Fröberg** (lead vocals, guitars) and **Jonas Reingold** (bass) are still well established, as well as **Zach Kamins** (keyboards), recently replacing **Tomas Bodin**, which he does masterfully. Let us add to this team two revenants from the early days, **Michael Stolt** (**Roine Stolt's** brother), and **Hasse Bruniusson** (percussions), present in the very first **Flower Kings** releases. **Roine Stolt** is now surrounded by all his people and can proceed to the elaboration of another album that will amaze us. *By Royal Decree* continues to perpetuate this quest for musical nirvana on which **Stolt** and his brothers in arms have embarked. The texts, always rather enigmatic, are hopeful and, while recognizing the difficulties of living in today's world, suggest simple solutions to

get through it. The first disc goes back to the simpler albums of the beginning and returns with familiar elements like cinematic style themes and catchy melodies. However, we are still very far from the original material. There is no shortage of new arrangements, nor of new musical and harmonic structures. The second song, the catchy *World Gone Crazy*, takes us right back to the blessed days of *Sum of No Evil*. The second album, on the other hand, is more avant-garde and daring. There is more risk. The latter is the best indication of the level of creation to which the course is currently committed. The complex arrangements are legion and there are several surprises such as an epic medieval score reminiscent of the theme from the film *Les Visiteurs*. There are also shorter tracks throughout the two discs, but they follow each other effortlessly, with several recurring themes that ensure a certain continuity in the concept. Some things fortunately do not change, whether it is **Fröberg's** powerful voice in the foreground or **Stolt's** magical and bewitching guitar. Those who are interested in visual art will not be left out with what is, definitely, the most beautiful cover of the band's history, thus justifying the purchase of the vinyl format. *By Royal Decree* is the most significant **Flower Kings** of recent years. Without reinventing the wheel, the band proposes a healthy evolution of an already rather complex music and, contrary to some previous opuses, addresses itself to all the fans of this divine ensemble, whoever they are.

MARILLION

An Hour before it's Dark

<https://www.marillion.com/>

It is reassuring to know that **Marillion** never lets us down. This familiar band continues to offer us regularly solid, interesting and honest albums, and this, since the beginning of the 1980s. The current **Marillion** imprint, forged since the arrival of **Steve Hogarth** in 1987, is easily recognizable, known by all, and ages very well. We do not ask for more. This doesn't mean that all of them are similar, far from it! We all have our favorite and least favorite **Marillion**. Even if some are more inspired, more creative and more refined than others, the product will never be bad. The 19th album was conceived in the middle of a pandemic and like the other releases from this period, *An Hour Before It's Dark* is dark, despairing, while containing some hints of the end of the world without extinguishing the hope of a better life. But this forced break, which deeply disrupted our lives, was paradoxically conducive to the composition of great records, the time available and the gloom helping. And that's exactly what happened here! *An Hour Before It's Dark* takes us back to the days of epic, introspective, serious and dreamy **Marillion**. The format chosen, which is presented in 18 scenes of a few minutes each are, for the most part, grouped into four themes of 4 or 5 songs that follow each other in quick succession. Apart from a few more rocking tracks like *Murder Machines*, for example, the general tone is rather ethereal and meditative while

reconnecting us with works like *Misplaced Childhood*, *Brave* or *Afraid of Sunlight*. The first suite, *Be Hard on Yourself*, invites us to adopt a less materialistic lifestyle and to take charge of our lives. *Rothery's* lyrics are harsh and the music is powerful. We are glued to our seats while understanding that this **Marillion** will be imposing and striking. The last suite, *Care*, pays tribute to all the heroes of the shadows who do not hesitate to risk their health and their lives to help people in difficulty, *let's take care of each other!* What did I like most about this album? Unquestionably **Hogarth's** voice, the star of this 19th release. In addition to his deep and intelligent lyrics, his voice sounds better than ever and shows a remarkable accuracy and an exacerbated lyricism. Overwhelmed by the emotions, this extraordinary singer succeeds in reproducing all the intonations and nuances necessary to the numerous states of mind and feelings that abound in the musical content of this disc. It is worth listening to the work at least once with headphones so as not to lose any of this pleasure. Full of darkness and gravity, *An Hour Before It's Dark* succeeds in grafting a powerful and serene writing unto the best of **Marillion's** music. This 19th opus, because of its musical richness and its text, will go down in history.



TRANSPARENT, DETAILED AND VERY DYNAMIC RESTITUTION!

By RICHARD SCHNEIDER

The craze for vinyl is not going away. Thus, British company **Roksan** follows the wave and presents us its new analog turntable, the *Attesa*. This article is the logical continuation of a recent test bench where we reviewed the integrated broadcast amplifier of the same name, from **Roksan** of course, which it fits

perfectly, by the way. The *Attesa* is the extension of several years of development. With this product, **Roksan** has combined advanced technology with an aesthetic refinement that leaves no one indifferent. The *Attesa* is a belt-driven analog turntable with a switchable phono pre-amp that allows it to be easily connected to



ROKSAN ATTESSA TURNTABLE

Roksan's Attesa integrated amplifiers or to any stereo amplifier or phono preamp. Are you one of those who are looking for an exemplary sound and simplicity of use? If so, this turntable deserves your attention.

Analog is no stranger to **Roksan** as we have seen. The firm took its first steps in this field around 1985 with the release of its very first work, the *Xerxes*, celebrating its first foray into the high-end audio industry, acclaimed by the industry. Designed and assembled in England, the turntable joins the *Attesa* team which includes a CD transport, an integrated amplifier and an integrated broadcast amplifier.

The vinyl turntable

The *Attesa* deck is largely inspired by the advances of its predecessor, the *Xerxes*. It is delivered with a unipivot pickup arm, a moving magnet (MM) cell, the *Dana*, a manufacturer's exclusive. It is equipped with an elliptical diamond fixed on a titanium tip and a conical aluminum shaft. Everything is pre-installed at the factory. The sound reproduction is the responsibility of a switchable phono stage as mentioned above, which is very rare in this price range. By switchable, we mean that you can either use the turntable's built-in phono preamplifier or bypass it with a switch on the back that will allow you to listen to your precious vinyl records with an external phono preamplifier.

The 10 mm thick reading plate is made of tempered glass. It is curved with a bonded aluminum edge to reduce resonance and vibration. As you can see, a lot of effort has been put into

minimizing internal and external interference. According to **Roksan**, the use of this plate would also have the effect of significantly increasing the inertia during its rotation without increasing the overall mass of the plate. According to the manufacturer, the wool felt cover that is placed on the glass top, from which six triangles have been cut, will have a definite effect on the sound reproduction. I have to admit that putting my vinyl records directly on the glass tray would be particularly stressful for me anyway.

The frame has a one-piece, rounded-corner MDF anti-vibration base that rests on three shock-absorbing legs. By using this

« I did not perceive any background noise either in the mechanism or in the musical performances. The reproduction of the highs and the high-medium is detailed without ever sinking into excess. The midrange, whose importance cannot be reduced, offers us rich and textured voices. Also in this respect, the reproduction of acoustic instruments, especially guitars, is amazing. The bass is deep, but well controlled. »

base with three feet, **Roksan** limits the points of contact with the surface on which the turntable is placed, thus minimizing vibration transmission. This technique was developed during the creation of the *Xerxes*. The tone arm, the unipivot made of computer-modelled composite material, owes its name to





the glass pivot on which it rests. It allows a fluid lateral movement ensuring an optimal tracking of the grooves of our precious vinyls.

The design is very sober in the tradition of British components. **Roksan** has opted for the softening of the quasi-military lines of the old aircraft. The sides are rounded, a real treat for the eye, and the front is set with a black band revealing, on the left, the on-off and 33 and 45 rpm gear controls. The very discreet lighting of these controls is orange like all the devices of the *Attesa* range. The plexiglass cover has no hinges. As such, I am a little disappointed, as I personally prefer a hinged hood. However, it is doubtful that

the lowered profile of the case would have offered enough grip for the latter.

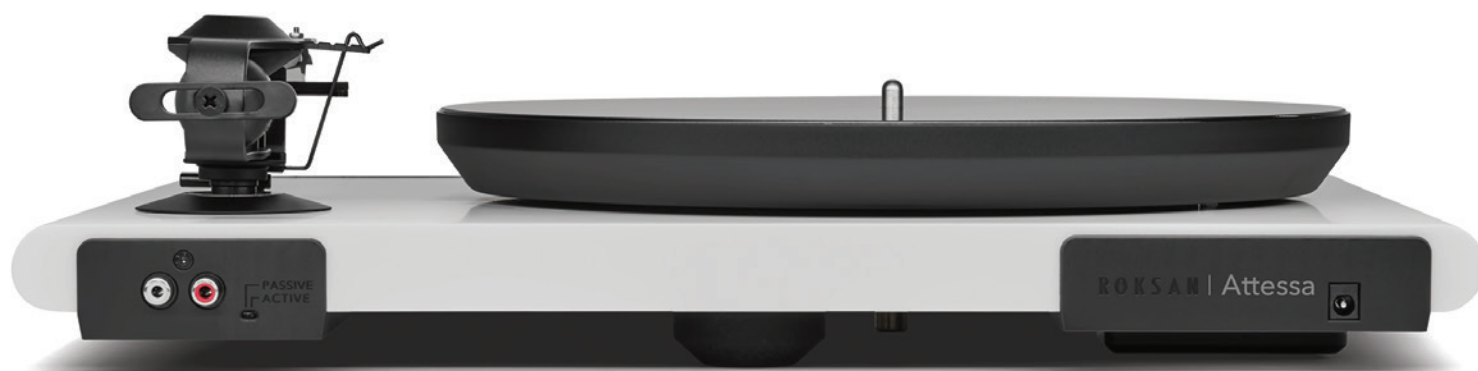
A little more details..

The *Attesa* is a belt-driven turntable. The 12V synchronous motor is combined with a digital control interface to ensure stable and accurate turntable rotation. The motor is isolated and decoupled from the baseboard to eliminate vibration and resonance. It is attached to the underside of the case with a foam ring. An aluminum pulley drives a counter-platter, on which the tray that holds the vinyl records is placed. The gear change is managed electronically by a very precise regulator that will avoid the task of doing it

manually. Moreover, unlike some competitors, with this mechanism, **Roksan** avoids changing the belt placement when we go from 33 to 45 rpm or vice versa.

The internal preamplification is still surprising for a device in this price range. Its circuits are equipped with two *OP N5532* amplifiers that offer an audio reproduction without reproach. They are characterized by low noise and impeccable response.

The turntable comes with a few accessories including a belt, which is very easy to install, very good *RCA* cables, a power converter for the power supply, a spirit level, a mechanical scale and a few other useful trinkets for maintenance.



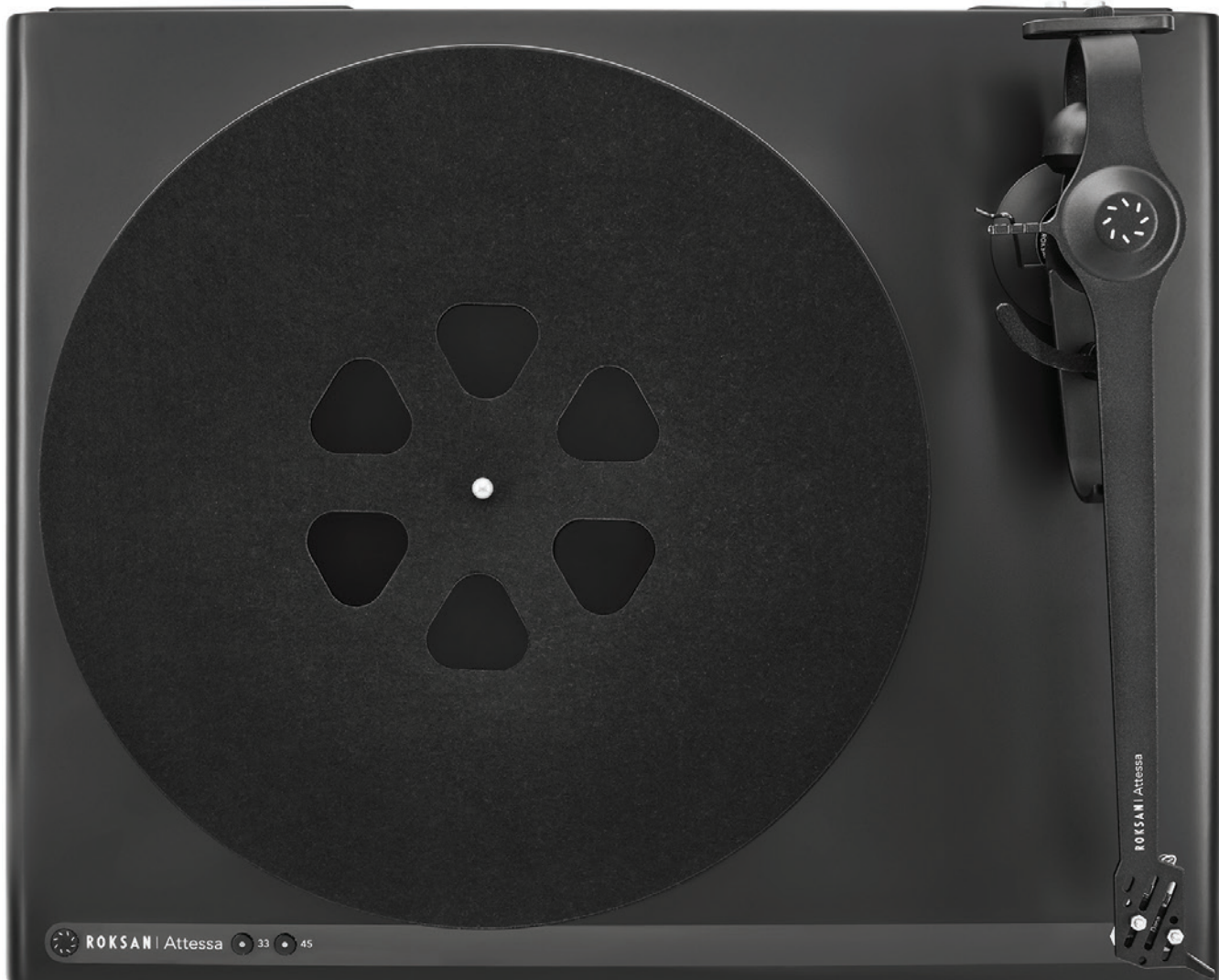
ROKSAN ATTESSA TURNTABLE



Let's see what it is for the installation

The installation of the components is very simple. Here are the main points. As soon as I opened the package, I could only congratulate the manufacturer for taking such great care in

protecting the contents of the box. Detailed graphical instructions guide the user through the installation process. The belt is already installed, so there is no need to worry about that. Then, it is a matter of installing the turntable and the felt on top. The





power cable box contains different plugs. Therefore, you should choose one that meets North American standards.

In the next step, remove the cell protector by pulling slightly forward. Among the accessories, there is a weight held by a very light wire. This weight, which regulates the anti-skid, must be installed at the back of the tone arm. The graphics show exactly where it should be inserted. Once this operation is completed, remove the protector that holds the tone arm. It is impossible to mistake the protectors, as both are orange.

Roksan provides a small plastic rocker scale with a spirit level. It will allow you to adjust the counterweight located at the back which will probably have been disturbed during the packing process. Don't worry, it's a very simple process. Now the turntable is ready for use.

As for the control of the preamplification, there is a switch on the back that offers the choice of using the turntable in active (internal preamplification) or in passive (external preamplification) mode. It is important to reiterate that it is possible to connect the turntable directly to one of the auxiliary inputs without using an external preamplifier. If only monetarily, this is a wise choice. Depending on your type of installation, the

selector switch may be difficult to access. To activate or deactivate this function, I suggest you use a paper clip for example. Following this brief overview, it should be noted that the *Atessa* line is covered by a five-year non-transferable warranty. Although the *Atessa* is an entry-level analog turntable from **Roksan**, it's a different story when it comes to the competition, as this turntable far exceeds its rivals in the same price range. As we have seen, its characteristics make it a high level element.

My overall impressions

The deck is very user-friendly and all members of the family will be able to use it without constraint. In contrast to my reference turntable, the sound seems to me much less colored from the first notes, at least when using the internal preamplification. The sound reproduction is free of what is described as a warm or honeyed sound. This is not a negative criticism, on the contrary, because this characteristic translates into a neutrality that I found very pleasant and that will please many users. Therefore, the performance is transparent, detailed and very dynamic. I did not perceive any background noise either in the mechanism or in the musical performances. The reproduction

of the highs and the high-medium is detailed without ever sinking into excess. The midrange, whose importance cannot be reduced, offers us rich and textured voices. Also in this respect, the reproduction of acoustic instruments, especially guitars, is amazing. The bass is deep, but well controlled.

When using the turntable via my phono preamplifier, it is clear that the reproduction has gone up a few notches. However, there is no need to make a big deal about it, as the turntable stands up very well with its own attributes and for me, it is a device that I would go a long way with as offered. Yes, I recommend this turntable without reservation, because in this price range, it is clearly at the top of the list of purchases that will offer you excellent value for money.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$2199

Warranty: 5 years for the turntable and 2 years for the cell, parts and labor

Distributor: Kevro International Inc,

T.: 905.428.2800, <https://www.kevro.com>

MERGING+PLAYER MUSIC SERVER, **MERGING+CLOCK** EXTERNAL CLOCK
AND **MERGING+POWER** EXTERNAL POWER SUPPLY

MERGING PRODUCTS, AN EXCEPTIONAL ENCOUNTER

By MICHEL DALLAIRE

Swiss manufacturer **Merging Technologies** is well known internationally for its digital equipment that is widely used in recording studios. In 2017, **TRENDS in Electronics & Design** Magazine (**TED**) had the opportunity to test its **NADAC** (**Network Attached Digital to Analogue Converter**) converter. This digital-to-analog converter is a version specially designed for the audiophile market. The **NADAC** is derived directly from the technology used in the *Horus* and *Hapi* professional converters from this manufacturer. What I am proposed for this test bench, is to take again in test the **Merging+Player** which is a **NADAC** equipped with a network music player. It will be accompanied by its **Merging+Clock** external clock and its **Merging+Power** external power supply. Let's see what this high-class trio brings us as an improvement over the simple **NADAC**.

The origins of Merging Technologies

This company, which manufactures specialized equipment for professional recording, was founded in the early 1990s by **Claude Cellier**. This engineer first worked, in the 1970s, for the **Kudelski Group**, which is at the origin of the famous and legendary **Nagra** brand. It was in the early 1990s that **Merging Technologies** was founded in the town of Puidoux, Switzerland. The first devices were dedicated to professional digital audio recording and editing, and it is in 2012 that the **NADAC** device is born under the aegis of the chief programmer **Dominique Brulhart**.

Merging+Player

As mentioned earlier, the **Merging+Player** is a **NADAC** converter equipped with a microcomputer on which the **ROON** playback software's **RoonCore** is installed. It is designed to be connected to any server,

music player or **NAS** via *Cat5e* or *Cat6e* cable and through a router. It can support **ASIO** on *Windows* and **CoreAudio** on *Mac OS X*.

The **Merging+NADAC** and **Merging+Player** are available in two versions, one with two channels and the other with eight channels. The particularity of these devices is that they use the **RAVENNA** protocol to communicate in network with other devices or music sources. The model of the **Merging+Player** that I have been entrusted with is the **PL2** stereo version, whose casing is the same as for all the other **Merging** devices. With their rounded corners, beautiful textured finish and precision machining, these units have no problem standing proudly in your living room.

In the case of the **PL2** I was lent, the **IEC** receptacle (for the power cord at the back) has been replaced by a **Hirose HR10-7P-4P** bayonet connector. It is designed to work with the **Merging+Power** external power



supply, so it is necessary to order the **Merging+NADAC** or the **Merging+Player** with this type of connector. Otherwise the modification can be done retrospectively, but will have additional costs.

The **Merging+Player's** converter chip is an **ESS Sabre ES9008S Reference** with eight channels combined into a two-channel output. The connection to the *Ethernet* network is made through a **Neutrik Ethercon RJ45** connector that looks like an *XLR* plug. The **Merging+Player** can support sample rates from 44.1 kHz to 384 kHz in *PCM* and *DXD* as well as *DSD* 64, 128 and 256. As for the digital inputs, there is an *AES/EBU* connection on an *XLR* connector, an optical *S/PDIF* on a *Toslink* connector,

a coaxial *S/PDIF* on an *RCA* plug as well as two *USB-A* inputs to connect *USB* drives or external hard drives. A *BNC* input called *Wordclock* is provided to connect the **Merging+Player** to its **Merging+Clock** external clock.

On the front, on the left, we find the **Merging Technologies** logo in the form of a triangular button that lights up when the **Merging+Player** is turned on and that changes color according to the type of music file being played or if the device is in mute mode.

A small display shows us the type of file being played and the level of the volume control. The latter also allows you to navigate through the different settings of the device and to select



MERGING+PLAYER MUSIC SERVER, MERGING+CLOCK EXTERNAL CLOCK AND MERGING+POWER EXTERNAL POWER SUPPLY

inputs. In addition, there are two headphone outputs, one at 6.35 mm and the other at 3.5 mm. These are connected to a dedicated amplifier. A universal app has been developed by **Merging Technologies** to allow multiple **Merging+Player** to be daisy-chained together and controlled wirelessly and remotely using a smartphone, tablet or computer.

RAVENNA

The **RAVENNA** protocol is based on a non-proprietary type 3 network transport standard that can operate within an existing network structure. It was chosen by **Merging Technologies** because it is compatible with the **AES67** standard and can carry **PCM**, **DXD** and **DSD** audio signals in very high definition and natively. In the **RAVENNA** protocol, there is a layer reserved for synchronization that allows very low latency, which is essential when various devices are connected remotely, as in recording studios. For this reason, only a **Cat5e** or **Cat6e** wired Internet network with **RJ45** connection is used. In a professional context, **Merging Technologies** does not recommend the use of the **USB** wired connection for computers, which is incompatible with long distances and very sensitive to electronic pollution from computer devices such as computers. In addition, audio transmitted over Internet Protocol (**IP**) allows for a higher density of digital channel transport, up to a total of 256 channels. This is an essential feature in the field of recording or broadcasting.

Merging+Clock

According to **Merging Technologies**, the synchronization of digital data transfer is essential to achieve accurate and natural reproduction of dematerialized music. In the **Merging+Clock**, two **OCXO** (**Oven Controlled Crystal Oscillator**) precision clocks are used, one for the 44.1 kHz frequency and its multiples and the other for the 48 kHz multiples. For each of the frequencies, we are talking about a quartz oscillator that has been tested in an oven to verify its stability under different operating temperatures. These clocks are protected by a solid aluminum housing and mechanically isolated from the rest of the circuit. This stability is important to accurately maintain the 44.1 kHz and 48 kHz reference frequencies. The **Merging+Clock** is available in two versions, the **Clock-L** with a frequency stability of ± 50 ppb and

the more expensive **Clock-U** with an even more accurate stability of ± 20 ppb.

These clocks use the same housing as the **Merging+Player** with a series of six small illuminated buttons on the front right. At the back, there are, from left to right, two **BNC** connectors which are signal synchronization outputs at a frequency of 10 MHz. They can be used to synchronize two other high-fidelity devices with an external clock input. The six buttons on the front correspond to six other **BNC** outputs on the back, where you can connect different devices and independently select 44.1 kHz or 48 kHz sample rates. These can be multiplied by 2, 4, 8, 16 or 32.

A ninth **BNC** output is specially dedicated to the synchronization of **Merging+NADAC** or **Merging+Player** at a frequency of 625 kHz. This allows these two converters to automatically switch between 44.1 kHz and 48 kHz clock frequencies or vice versa, without having to select them on the **Merging+Clock**. Finally, there is another **Neutrik Ethercon RJ45** connector for network synchronization via a router of another **Merging** device using the **RAVENNA/AES67** protocol available in the future. Several companies manufacture external synchronization clocks, but as you can see, the **Merging+Clock** is designed not only for audiophiles who want to optimize the performance of their digital equipment, but also to meet the needs of audio professionals.

Merging+Power

This external power supply unit is housed, as with other **Merging** devices, in a beautiful case with rounded corners. The latter has the same triangular logo on its left side, which serves as an indicator light for the start-up. The small display shows, in this case, the different voltages available. At the back, there is simply the **IEC** receptacle for the detachable power cord as well as the outlet for the **Hirose HR10-7P-4P** multi-pin bayonet connector. This last one provides in voltage the different sections of the **Merging+Player**.

Inside, you can see that the power supply is hybrid and in two sections. A switching power supply takes care of supplying power to the digital section including the **DSP/SPGA** and the networked player. The linear section is based on a toroidal transformer with copper foil inductors as well as military or aerospace grade capacitors. It supplies the analog output stage





as well as certain parts of the digital circuitry that are more sensitive to background noise due to induction or radiation.

Setting up and listening to this superb trio

With the **ROON** application on my tablet, it was easy to use the *RoonCore* installed on the **Merging+Player's** network player section. Through my Ethernet network, which covers almost every room in my house, the **Merging+Player** was able to index all the albums on my **CeolBOX** server. Once all the connections between the three devices were installed, I connected the **Merging+Player** to my integrated amplifier via balanced XLR cables. The manufacturer recommends that you first turn on the **Merging+Clock** one hour before any serious listening. This allows the clocks to stabilize. The **Merging+Player** and the **Merging+Power** are switched on separately.

Listening

I started my listening with the album *Quercus* of the trio formed by singer **June Trabor** accompanied by **Huw Warren** on piano and **Iain Ballamy** on saxophone. This trio, largely inspired by British and Celtic folklore, highlights **June Trabor's** superb deep voice. From the very first notes, I am completely overwhelmed by the emotional charge of his melancholic voice. **Huw Warren's** piano performance is fluid and follows perfectly the

singer in her melodies. When **Iain Ballamy's** saxophone comes into play, I can hear more accurately the slapping of the key buttons as well as the musician's breath in the reed. The timbres are of a confusing naturalness and the ends of notes are better perceived until their total extinction. It's hard for me to determine how much of this precision and transparency I should attribute to synchronization by the external **Merging+Clock** or the **Merging+Power** external power supply. I have already tested the **Merging+DAC** alone and in its basic version, at least two years ago. I liked its performance and musicality, but if my auditory memory is reliable, it seems to me that with the trio, we win on all levels from the point of view of *audiophile* criteria while not losing sight of the notion of musicality.

I continue my listening with the album entitled *Rythme de Passage* by jazz group **Emie R. Roussel Trio**. This Quebec-based band now has its own recording studio and the least we can say is that the production of this album was very well done. Through the **Merging Technologies** trio, my 24-bit / 88.2 kHz version of this recording exudes health with excellent airiness between instruments. **Dominic Cloutier's** drums have an incredible aplomb and a hell of a dynamic. The hits on the drum-heads are clean, straightforward and unmistakable. The bass drum strokes have a powerful impact and the most assumed. **Nicolas Bédard's** double bass and electric bass are perfectly

SERVEUR DE MUSIQUE **MERGING+PLAYER**, HORLOGE EXTERNE **MERGING+CLOCK**
ET ALIMENTATION EXTERNE **MERGING+POWER**



identifiable in their respective sounds and with a foundation in the low frequencies that I did not know coming from my speakers. The keyboards like the piano, the electric piano and the synthesizer are also very well differentiated while under the fingers of **Emie R. Roussel**, the notes fly away in a frantic and voluble rhythm. At other times, the pianist's playing becomes fluid and clear like the sound of water flowing in a stream in the spring.

I continue with the album *Medulla* by **Björk** which I have had in CD version since its release in 2001. I found this opus in DFF DSD64 version, which prompted me to listen to it again. The **Merging** trio made me rediscover this rather experimental work that is out of the ordinary. **Björk** explores the ritual power of human voices by calling on two choirs, one Icelandic and the other British. The Icelandic choir also uses Inuit throat singing. The lyrics are sung in the Icelandic language which adds to the guttural and meditative side of the performance. The **Merging Technologies** trio has the ability to process DSD files natively. Consequently, on this album, the trio gives me a very organic and well differentiated aspect of all these very dense layers of voice which are superimposed on **Björk's voice**. **The singular voice of this artist is recorded very close to the microphone and the dynamics of the Merging** trio present it to me as if it were in front of me, in my listening room. This opus is definitely oriented towards an audience that loves contemporary or *avant-garde* works. The *NADAC+Player PL2* trio, with its clock and external power supply, makes it easier for us to understand and appreciate this complex work by letting us hear all the details of this recording without any secretiveness.

Conclusion

What more can you say when you are close to perfection with devices of such a high level of quality? By using this trio from the Swiss manufacturer **Merging Technologies**, I was able to experience, for the first time, the real potential of my integrated amplifier and my loudspeakers. Obviously, my devices surely didn't live up to the quality of this source, but they sounded like I've never heard them before. And believe me, I tested DAC's and networked music players for **Trends, Electronics &**

Design magazine. We must consider the **Merging+Player**, the **Merging+Clock** and the **Merging+Power** as real professional work tools even if they were originally designed for an audiophile market in search of the absolute. In this sense, the question of price becomes more or less important, especially when we know that the last iotas of definition and transparency lead to exponential manufacturing costs. In my opinion, these three **Merging Technologies** are totally competitive with such prestigious brands as **dCS, Meitner, MSB, Nagra, Soulution, Simaudio** and **Wadax** to name a few. Obviously, this trio for playing digital music is not affordable for everyone, but I was happy and privileged to be able to test them in my living room. I was able to appreciate these three devices at their fair value and they gave me a benchmark sound experience that will be very useful for my future evaluations of high-fidelity equipment.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Merging+Player PL2 Music Server

Price: \$18,799

Merging+Clock External Clock

Price: \$26,999

Merging+Power External Power Supply

Price: \$11,999

Distributor : HIFIPRO, T.: 514.522.2020 ou 1 888.738.HIFI, <https://www.hifipro.ca>

Mediagraphy

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

Emie R Roussel Trio, Rythme De Passage, FLAC, 24 bits / 88.2 kHz

Björk, *Medulla*, Elektra, CD 62981, version DFF, DSD 64

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

Dominique Fils-Aimée, *Nameless*, Ensol Records, FLAC, 16 bits / 44.1 kHz

Thanks

The editorial staff would like to thank the distributor **HIFIPRO** for the loan of the devices as well as **Michel Forbes** for the technical support.

MORE ADVANCED THAN EVER !

By DAVID SUSILO

It's been a while since **Pioneer Elite** released their *VSX-LX504* into the wild. If my mind isn't muddled, I think it's been three years. However, as there is not much of new innovations introduced in the past three years anyway, I welcome the longer lifespan of any given product model offerings. So after many years sitting with the *VSX-LX504*, **Pioneer** finally released the updated version of it, called *VSX-LX505*.

Connectivity

Connectivity on the *VSX-LX505* is quite comprehensive, with seven *HDMI* inputs and a host of wireless options complete with legacy connections including a phono input for a turntable. Six

out of the seven *HDMI* inputs are all *8K HDMI 2.1* capable with *HDCP 2.3*. Just don't forget to activate them by going to the receiver's settings before using them. The front *HDMI* is unfortunately only *4K* rated which I think is a big omission as usually people use the front *HDMI* to plug in their gaming system, which for all intents and purposes – at least for the time being –, needs *HDMI 2.1* features more than any other inputs.

Functionality

Onboard apps are provided for many popular network streaming services including **Tidal**, **Pandora**, **Amazon Music**, **TuneIn Radio**, and **Spotify**. Other wireless devices can also be connected to the receiver using Bluetooth, *Wi-Fi*, *Chromecast* built-in, *AirPlay2*, *DTS Play-Fi*, and *FlareConnect*.





Three main features that I find important are the *Preset*, *DIRAC LIVE*, and *IMAX Enhanced* sound decoding, which is essentially a special *DTS:X* mix that is designated for *IMAX Enhanced* movies like *Angry Birds 2* and *Jumanji*.

Preset function is a derivative of **Yamaha's Scene Mode** and was introduced originally with the predecessor, the *504*, a couple of years back. This essentially allows the user to create (for example) separate settings for the same input. I created presets to listen to *CD* (input: **Panasonic UB9000**, sound setting: *Stereo Direct*), to watch movies with immersive soundtrack (input: **Panasonic UB9000**, sound setting: *Surround Direct*) and to watch movies with regular soundtrack (input: **Panasonic UB9000**, sound setting: *DTS Neural:X*). This way, I didn't have to scroll through the sound modes every time I wanted to use the **Panasonic UB9000** for a different purpose.

DIRAC LIVE

A first for **Pioneer**, is now an included feature in this receiver. Interestingly enough, user can choose whether to use *DIRAC* or ye-olde and trusty *MCACC*. You can use the supplied microphone to do the classic *Advanced MCACC* to calibrate the receiver, which is the phase-based calibration, or the new *Dirac Live*, which is an *EQ*-based calibration.

« This film is tailor-made for immersive sound as the blend of audio objects placed in the height channels contains atmospheric and discrete effects. Using my new **MK Sound** setup, even without *Atmos* activated, at times created a tangible level of *3D* immersion that is attention grabbing. »

For those who are new to this technology, *Dirac Live* is a mixed-phase room correction technology used not only in home, but also commercial cinemas, mastering studios, and cars including my 2022 **Volvo XC40 T5**. While correcting the frequency response (*EQ*-based), but the newest version of it also improves impulse response for better staging, clarity and bass reproduction. The *Dirac Live* functionality on the **Pioneer VS-LX505** took about 25 minutes to complete and I measured 3 different locations as my room is small although the system allows you to calculate up to 9 different points for a much larger room. As usual, the number one pet peeve of me using *Dirac* is the fact that it does not allow the room being measured to have any floor noise whatsoever. This means I had to turn off the *HVAC* in my home theatre as even the lowest fan setting triggered *high ambient noise* warning. I personally think that this is unrealistic

as the floor noise should be taken into consideration when creating any sound profile. While the *Dirac Live* is very good in *EQ*-ing the room, at the end of the day I still prefer to use *Advanced MCACC* phase correction with *EQ* turned off. This may not be reflective of what most people will do as my speakers are all identical all around (**MK Sound S150** for all 5 channels). If your speakers are all different; usually left / right, centre, and surrounds are different models, then yes the *Dirac Live EQ* may help more than the phase-based *Advanced MCACC*.

The Installation

Looking beyond those three features, **Pioneer's VSX-LX505** is similar to last year's *VSX-LX504*. With nine channels of onboard *Direct Energy* amplification, you can configure the receiver multiple ways to meet your needs. While you could go with a 7.1.2 setup with rear surrounds and a single pair of overhead speakers, I chose to instead connect a 5.1.4 speaker layout as per **Dolby's** original reference speaker layout for immersive audio, which allowed me to more fully evaluate the receiver's immersive potential. If you really want to have it all, you could build a 7.1.4 system by connecting an external two-channel amplifier to the receiver's preamp outputs and then add rear surround speakers.

PIONEER ELITE VSX-LX504 RECEIVER



For the speakers, I used **MKSound S150** (all around) with **Revel C263** for the height channels. For the subwoofer output, I usually use one output for my sub (**MKSound V12+**) and another for my tactile transducers. This is when I realized that while the **VSX-LX505** does feature dual subwoofer outputs, they cannot be levelled, delayed, or equalized independently. As far as the system is concerned, you've got one subwoofer output with a virtual Y-splitter on it. Power amplification has been improved from 120 watts per channel, with a full bandwidth signal, two channels driven into 8 ohms, with 0.08% *THD*. Using the same measurement methodology, last year's *503* yields around 95 watts per channel in stereo mode.

As for the remote, while sadly not backlit, it is my favourite *AVR* remote that I've come across in quite some time. It only took me minutes to get used to the layout.

Listening

I used a *UHD* disc of *Godzilla King of the Monsters*. Listening to the **Dolby Atmos** surround mix I found it to be of the active variety that makes effective use of the platform. This film is tailor-made for immersive sound as the blend of audio objects placed in the height channels contains atmospheric and discrete effects. Using my new **MK Sound** setup, even without *Atmos* activated, at times created a tangible level of *3D* immersion that is attention grabbing.

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For example, **Godzilla's** first encounter with **Ghidorah** in the Antarctic is the film's first big action sequence, with the various sounds/effects turning the room into a multi-dimensional listening space. The mix effectively places effects/sounds within the soundstage, which in turn places you within the scene, adding an enriching element that heightens the intended feeling like something is passing overhead, traveling through the room, or emanating from a specific location. Switching to *Atmos* by adding the **Revel C263** in-ceiling speakers, of course, makes the immersion even more so.

There are both large set pieces and smaller/brief sequences/moments that show off this well-crafted immersive sound design, be it in *Atmos* or regular 5.1. Everything comes together during the final act's battle as sounds rotate and revolve around the soundstage from both above and at ear level. I enjoyed the balance of atmosphere, discrete object placement and foundation rattling bass. I consider the reproduction of both 5.1 and **Dolby Atmos** mixes to be involving, entertaining, and among the best that I have heard compared to other receivers in the sub-\$1,500 price range.

What about 2-channel?

The same goes for its 2-channel presentation. I played **Steinway Celebration's** *A Steinway Celebration* audio CD, and the receiver yielded a *the piano is in the room with you* sound while preserving the forward and clear tonality for which **Steinway** instruments are so well-known. The same goes when playing a hi-res file of **Haydn – String Quartet in D, Op. 76, No. 5 – Finale: Presto** performed by **Engegård Quartet**. The string tones were amazing and the imaging sounded both deep and wide. The DAC handles the higher bitrates and delivers stunning sound.

Pioneer's MCACC is, to this day, still my favourite built-in calibration system. Yes, in terms of EQ-ing, **Audyssey**, **Dirac** (as

mentioned, also included with this receiver), and **ARC** all have more EQ points than **MCACC**. However, **MCACC's** standing wave correction and phase correction are day and night from what I've heard from any receiver room correction system.

This holds true when listening to music in both 2-channel mode or surround; I tested this receiver not only using my newly acquired **MK Sound S150** with **MK Sound V12+** setup but also with my previous **System Audio Aura 50** towers with **PSB SubSeries 450** subwoofer. I even tested the receiver in *pre-pro* mode, bypassing all the built-in power amps and use my trusty **Marantz MA-500 THX Certified** monoblocks. The results are always consistently satisfying.

Bottom Line

While by no means that this receiver is perfect, it is very close to it. The fact that it comes with all inputs (except one) to be 8K capable is a huge bonus that is future proofing this receiver into the foreseeable future. Adding **Dirac Live** but still leaving **Pioneer's** own **Advanced MCACC** intact is also something that no other receiver using **Dirac Live** ever do and it is highly commendable. Really, the only drawback I can find on this receiver is the inability to calibrate two subwoofers although it has two subwoofer outputs. All in all, with this level of sound quality and versatility coming from this \$2,000 receiver is very good. Not only *very good for a receiver*, but *very good, period*. Highly recommended.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$2,099.99

Warranty : 3 years, parts and labour

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