

HiFi Magazine

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Loudspeakers

Platinum PL200 3G by Monitor Audio

— *Captivating musical realism*

EXCLUSIVE Interview with a creator

**René Laflamme of NAGRA,
2XHD & Fidelio Music**



Rhythm & Music: *Classical Music, Blues, Jazz & Progressive Rock*

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Fezz EVO Titania Power Amplifier [Sunlight]



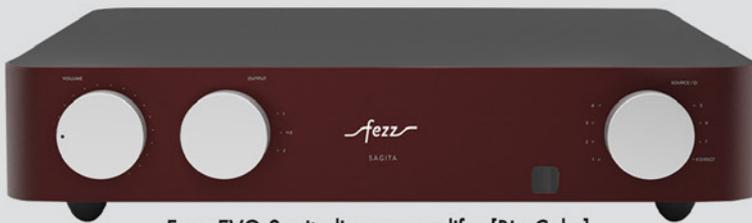
Fezz EVO Titania [Black ICE]



Fezz EVO Silver Luna Prestige [Evergreen]



Fezz EVO Alfa Lupi [Big calm]



Fezz EVO Sagita line preamplifier [Big Calm]



Fezz EVO Gratia phono-stage [Burning red]



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Can peace be learned?

Peace, this state of calm, tranquility, conciliation – can it be learned as one would learn a song, a poem, etc? It seems so, fortunately. By doing some research, I found a site on the Web that talks about it (https://www.irenees.net/bdf_dossier-152_fr.html). A file talks about the role of the imagination at the service of education for peace. Fascinating, really! We only have to remember the words to the song *Imagine* by **John Lennon** and we quickly realize that it is an achievable goal even if it could take a long time.

At present, we really need to arrive at this state of peace. We only have to think of all the evils on the planet, in general, and if we look closer to us, we can observe people and situations that sometimes worry us and require our help. It is refreshing to also see all the gestures of kindness and heroism that many citizens make mechanically, by reflex. Congratulations to these people, and let's take their example to help our loved ones. Often, it's the little things that make the difference. Let's aim for better living together and respect each other just as we would like to be. We have to accept that we are all different from each other, and that is fine.

The imagination also helps to achieve this search for peace and balance. Imagination, manufacturers and craftsmen in the field of audio show us that they have it, and it is interesting to see the realization of projects and especially of different and innovative products that they offer us.

I think, among other things, of the various articles that our collaborators have written for your pleasure. We can only applaud the results obtained by the manufacturers. Take the example of **Focal**, whose wireless headphones, named *Bathys*, allow music to be listened to no matter where we are. Let's go on an adventure with this one! We then move on to the **Dali's Opticon 6 MKII** loudspeakers, which have undeniable audio quality. Then, let's discover the *Platinum PL 200 3G* loudspeakers from **Monitor Audio** – which captivate us with their musical realism. With **Naim**, we discover a new version of the *New Classic* series equipped with several technological innovations. We follow up with a complete **Audiolab / Mission** package (an **Audiolab 9000A** integrated amp, *9000CDT* transport and *Block 6* paired with **Mission 700** loudspeakers), which gives us versatile products at a fairly affordable price. And we end the product reviews section with a **Velodyne DB-12** subwoofer where, once again, we discover a very efficient product for both two-channel listening and home theater application.

Our collaborator **Yves Bérubé** had a unique opportunity to speak with **René Laflamme** of **2XHD, Fidelio Music** and **Nagra**. **René** is a very busy man and it is very interesting to see his progress and the way he combines all his profession activities. Bravo for the new vinyl album celebrating **Nagra's 70th** anniversary!

The team joins me in greeting you all and wishing you *happy reading* and above all, a great time listening to your favorite music! May it help you achieve this state of peace and serenity! See you at the next May / June edition!


Lucie Beauchamp

Co-publisher & Public Relations Coordinator

GO ON AN ADVENTURE WITH YOUR LISTENING ROOM

By JEAN-DENIS DOYLE

The market for wireless headphones, transmitting in *Bluetooth* format, is growing rapidly. It already offers an impressive choice for mobile consumers looking for good headphones. In addition, the *Bluetooth* transmission protocol has greatly

improved in recent years. *Bluetooth* now allows for good-quality transmission with minimal compression. It was only a matter of time before a well-known audiophile manufacturer took the plunge. **Focal** is one of the very first and now offers us its



Bathys model. This ambitious, high-level product is likely to set the bar very high in this product category. The *Bathys* headphones by **Focal** have some pretty unique and innovative features. So I invite you to come and take a lap around the track with these wireless *racing* headphones.

The first time I tried the *Bathys* headphones from **Focal**, I couldn't help but recall a distant conversation from my teenage years. On a slightly too drunken and psychedelic evening, a friend mentioned to me that my passion for the audio devices of the time would one day become completely useless.

According to my friend, who was floating a little too high that night, all this nice equipment would one day be replaced by implants, which would be fitted to our auditory nerves. Music would be transmitted to us through a terminal, without any distortion and the musical choice would be infinite...you know what? My *buzzed* friend wasn't that far off in his predictions! Although the implants still remain a science fiction dream, a pair of *Bathys* headphones from **Focal**, a smartphone and subscription to the online **Tidal** service and we're almost there. Having access to 79 million tracks of music in *CD quality*, with a sound worthy of a high-end audio system, wherever the heart desires is a pretty incredible treat. The least we can say is that we are far from the *Walkman* of the 1980's.

This wireless and perfectly portable pair of headphones was made possible by the experience and know-how of the French

manufacturer **Focal**, from Saint-Étienne, France. The latter is now a major player in the field of headphones, both at a professional and an audiophile level. The **Focal** range spans a wide range of prices, culminating with the *Utopia* benchmark model, which ranks among the best headphones currently available. For the *Bathys* model, **Focal** had brilliant and completely new ideas in its specifications. The engineers at **Focal** also applied several technologies to the *Bathys* model that they had already mastered perfectly. Let's take a look from a technical perspective

Technical description

The *Bathys* headphones from **Focal** are headphones you can take anywhere you want. They have internal batteries, their own amplifiers, a digital to analogue converter and of course, a *Bluetooth* receiver. Physically, they are quite large headphones, which makes their portability a matter of personal preference. They weigh 350 g and the earpieces are covered with good-quality leather. The transducers used are made from an alloy of aluminium and magnesium, a material that **Focal's** engineers have mastered perfectly and which they have already used in some speaker models. To facilitate storage, the earphones themselves can be turned horizontally. You can use the *Bathys* from **Focal** in three ways: with a classic 3.5 mm wire when no *Bluetooth* connection is possible, with a *USB-C* cable and of course, via a *Bluetooth* wireless connection. The *Bathys* from **Focal** uses the *Bluetooth APTX adaptif* codec, the most advanced available on the market, enabling the best wireless transmission quality currently possible. The **Focal** headphone is also compatible with *SBC* and *AAC* formats from **Apple**.



FOCAL BATHYS WIRELESS HEADPHONES

This pair of headphones has a very interesting and unique feature. A small switch on the right earpiece allows you to select the DAC mode. For this type of connection, you will absolutely have to use the USB-C cable that is provided. Plugged in this way, the *Bathys* by **Focal** no longer use the *Bluetooth* protocol, but rather a wired digital link. The digital signal is then routed directly to the digital-to-analogue converter in the headphones. This way of plugging in the *Bathys* from **Focal**, is definitely the royal way to get a top quality audiophile sound.

Unpacking and setting up

The first thing you will need to do will be to install the **Focal-Naim app**, either on your tablet or on your smartphone. This is essential because it manages the settings for the headphones. It allows, among other things, to adjust the display of the luminous logos on the side of the headphones and above all to be able to turn them off, thank you **Focal**! The app offers a five-band equalizer to adjust the tone to your liking. Thanks to the app, you will be

« With the album *Night Club* by **Patricia Barber**, the song *Invitation* flows admirably. The singer's voice has a nice presence, no unpleasant sibilance, just a very nice diction that makes the lyrics easy to understand. The piano retains a natural tone even during *forte*. Not bad for wireless transmission! In fact, it's a totally amazing result. »

informed about the battery status and the type of *Bluetooth* codec used.

The application also allows adjustment of the level of the ambient noise reducer. This function is very practical, as it allows you to choose between three settings. For example, you can choose one that allows you to hear certain sounds like human speech, while reducing other unwanted noise. The application also displays the battery status of the headphones, which in itself is essential. Speaking of the battery, it lasts for about 30 hours and its performance obviously depends on the type of mode used. The *Bathys* by **Focal**, are comfortable headphones and easy to adjust. They are not the lightest of their kind, but certainly not the heaviest. Thanks to their good-quality leather

earpieces, their comfort is similar to other high-end **Focal** models. The *Bathys* headphones from **Focal** come with an attractive carry case. Well made and rigid, it will adequately protect your precious earphones while on the go.

Wireless freedom first

I first tried my listening using my *iPhone 12* using **Tidal** with maximum resolution. The tonal balance is rather warm with a bass that has a lot of foundation. With the album *Night Club* by **Patricia Barber**, the song *Invitation* flows admirably. The singer's voice has a nice presence, no unpleasant sibilance, just a very nice diction that makes the lyrics easy to understand. The





piano retains a natural tone even during *forte*. Not bad for wireless transmission! In fact, it's a totally amazing result. With the album *Morning Phase* by **Beck**, the *Bathys* by **Focal** offer a splendid spatiality, with an amazing three-dimensional rendering. This excellent album is a real audio equipment trap. The recording quality of this excellent album is very questionable. Nevertheless, the *Bathys* by **Focal** manage to get the best out of the album with a not too analytical presentation and a very musical rendering. That's exactly what you'd expect from a pair of wireless headphones. In everyday use, there are not only audiophile recordings and our headphones must accommodate a maximum of musical genres and different technical qualities. In addition, when using wireless mode, you can adjust the tone accurately thanks to the app's small five-band equalizer. This feature is great since it allows you to adjust the *Bathys* from **Focal** exactly to your liking. Note that the settings made will remain the same from one device to another, even in *USB mode*.

In *USB*, you literally change the level. This mode of connection, via *USB cable*, makes your music travel directly from the emissive source to the digital to analogue converter included in the *Bathys* by **Focal**. In the absence of the *Bluetooth* circuit, there is no more compression and the music appears under a new light. This is particularly evident with **Shelby Lynne's** album, *Just A Little Lovin'*. Suddenly the grain is finer, the treble runs higher and the bass is better defined. Thanks to the increased resolution, the bass is firmer and the ambiances of the recording are now much easier to perceive. There is beauty in the music that settles

in, clarity, calm, as if suddenly the singer has more time to sing her song. This method of connection via *USB cable*, changes the rules of the game a little in the field of high-end headphones. It allows you to go on a trip, with just a computer and your *Bathys* headphones by **Focal**. A very interesting feature, which allows the user to choose between two transmission modes, according to their needs.

Conclusion

The *Bathys* headphones by **Focal** really have it all. It is a very well-made product and managed by a perfectly functional application. The noise reduction mode works well and the wireless sound, in *Bluetooth* mode, is among the best with this mode of transmission. As for the mode of connection via *USB cable*, it brings the *Bathys* by **Focal** to a whole new level, which is close to that of a good Hi-Fi channel. What else could you ask for? With the *Bathys* by **Focal**, you will have the impression that your audio room is with you everywhere you go.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$999

Warranty: 2 years. The warranty covers the costs of parts, labour and transport

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

Mediagraphy:

Patricia Barber, Nighthclub, Tidal file

Beck, Morning Phase, Spotify file

Shelby Lynne, Just a Little Lovin, Tidal file



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An **exertis** | JAA business

Encounter with a charming Dane

By MICHEL DALLAIRE

DALI stands for **Danish Audiophile Loudspeakers Industries**. This Danish manufacturer of high-end loudspeakers was founded in 1983 by **Peter Lyngdorf**. The company's aim was, and still is, to meet the increasing demands for audio quality, and this even more, especially with the advent of digital technology. **DALI** has more than one million satisfied consumers worldwide in more than 70 countries. I'd already listened briefly through **DALI** loudspeakers at

various trade shows and hi-fi stores but this was the first time I had the opportunity to test one of these loudspeakers at home. The new *OPTICON MK2* series replaces the original series with some improvements in transducers, crossover and cabinet. The *OPTICON MK2* series falls in the middle of the **Dali** Brand ranges. I have been asked to test the *OPTICON 6 MK2* loudspeaker which is the smallest of the floor standing loudspeakers in this series.

The *OPTICON MK2* series replaces the original series with some improvements in transducers and cabinet. The new *OPTICON MK2* series offers two bookshelf formats of loudspeakers: the *OPTICON 1 MK2* and the *OPTICON 2 MK2*. There are also two floor standing loudspeakers models: *OPTICON 6 MK2* and *OPTICON 8 MK2*. For home theatre, a wall loudspeaker named *OPTICON LCR MK2* is available as well as a central loudspeaker for voices, the *OPTICON VOKAL MK2*.

All cabinets in the *OPTICON MK2* series are entirely manufactured in **DALI's** workshops located in Norager in central Denmark. In their factory, *MDF* panels are precisely cut by computer-controlled machines / tools. The fronts are 25 mm thick, rounded on the sides and chamfered on the top to avoid diffraction effects. Multiple reinforcements are added to the interior to increase the rigidity of the cabinet.

The available finishes are satin white and black. A third finish in textured oak and coffee color is also available. It is obtained thanks to a high-quality vinyl that perfectly imitates wood. So much so, that the untrained eye can hardly

see any difference from a real veneer. The protective grilles are made of fabrics reminiscent of quality burlap, which gives the *OPTICON MK2* series a delightfully retro look.

The *OPTICON 6 MK2* loudspeaker

The dimensions of the *OPTICON 6 MK2* are one meter high with a width of 19.5 cm and a depth of 30 cm. This relative compactness makes it easy to place in a medium-sized room. The acoustic load of this floor standing loudspeaker is of the *bass reflex* type with two circular vents that open out at the rear of the loudspeaker. They are flared at each end of the tube to eliminate the noises of turbulence from the air circulating therein. These vents are conveniently placed behind each *woofer*.

The positive and negative connection terminals are doubled for bi-amplification or bi-wiring. They are of very good quality as well as the bridges that are used to link them together in single-wire mode. The *OPTICON 6 MK2* comes with four cast aluminium feet which are simply attached to the underside of the loudspeaker. The screws and tools for fixing the feet are included in the package. The



DALI OPTICON 6 MK2 LOUDSPEAKERS



decoupling spikes or rubber pads also supplied in the package can be used to protect hardwood floor surfaces.

SMC technology

At **DALI**, virtually all loudspeaker series use *SMC (Soft Magnetic Compound)* technology. This patented technology offers a high magnetic field and low electrical conductivity of the magnet. *SMC* magnets are manufactured from a moulding of multiple compacted magnetic granules. According to the manufacturer **DALI**, its *SMC* technology greatly reduces the undesirable distortion caused by the mechanical losses of the magnetic system. In a traditional ferrite magnet system, the current flowing through the voice coil will modulate the flux in the magnet air gap. This flux modulation causes distortion and makes operating conditions difficult for the speaker voice coil. These interactions have detrimental effects on the frequency response and can even cause third order distortion. *SMC* technology aims to eliminate this phenomenon.

Wood fibre woofers

The *OPTICON 6 MK2* is equipped with two *woofers* with a diameter of 16.5 cm. The membrane of these *woofers* is moulded from a paper pulp reinforced with wood fibres. This composite material was developed by **DALI** over several years. Its mid-range frequencies and timbres are natural and better reproduced even at low volume. It constantly makes it possible to make the cone as light and rigid as possible. These cones deform very little under the pressure of these movements and are mounted on a low-loss rubber suspension. The speaker baskets are made of die-cast aluminium for excellent rigidity and low resonance.



The hybrid tweeter

At **DALI**, the hybrid *tweeter* technique has been used for several years. It is a 29 mm soft dome *tweeter* combined with a 17 mm wide by 45 mm high ribbon *tweeter*. These two transducers are mounted together on a cast aluminium plate which provides a solid mounting platform. This plate incorporates control elements to improve high-frequency dispersion. According to **DALI**, this hybrid *tweeter* offers the best of both worlds- the clarity, speed and dynamics of the dome combined with the high-frequency extension, the smoothness and finesse of the ribbon. The frequency response of the

to the listener, but I still tilted them slightly towards me. They are powered by my usual electronics which include a **CeolBOX** server, an *Emerson Digital* network music player by **Wattson Audio** and my built-in *IN300* amplifier by **Atoll**. The *DAC* used is a *Qutest* from **Chord** connected to a 5-volt linear power supply **Sbooster** (*BOTW P&P ECO MKII*).

Listening to the beautiful Dane

After a good week of breaking it in, I started listening to the album *Autour De Ton Cou* by **Stephan Eicher**, released in 2022. This album features only four tracks, which is exceptional for an artist

« The singer has a very *soulful* voice that could just as well be adapted to *gospel*. Their music gives me a good idea of the dynamics of the loudspeaker as well as its extension into the extremities of the sound spectrum. The slight emphasis in the lower midrange once again gives me a very present voice in the centre of a very wide stereo image. This feature gives the *OPTICON 6 MK2* a lively, fast midrange and a stereophonic image that is formed more in front of the loudspeakers than on the same plane or behind them. »

OPTICON 6 MK2 is specified from 49 Hz to 30 kHz. The tuning in *reflex bass* is 43 Hz and the sensitivity is 88 dB/w/m. The nominal impedance is 4 ohms and the suggested power for the amplification is 25 to 200 W. The cut-off frequencies of the filter are 800 Hz, 2.2 kHz and 14 kHz for the ribbon *tweeter*.

Installation and related equipment

As they are only slightly larger than my loudspeakers, I installed the *OPTICON 6 MK2* loudspeakers in approximately the same place, i.e.: more than one metre from the side walls and about 50 cm from the rear wall. **DALI** suggests that it is not necessary to direct them

of his calibre. He justifies this unusual choice by the fact that nowadays, most people do not have the time to listen to an album in its entirety, especially since it is possible to selectively listen to the various tracks of an album in *streaming*. Nevertheless, these four songs are little jewels of which only he has the secret and in which he tells us the feelings of isolation that the pandemic has caused us. His distinctive and warm voice is superbly served by the *OPTICON 6 MK2* loudspeakers. The first words that come to mind are gentleness, finesse and human warmth. Indeed, the ribbon *tweeter* takes over above 14,000 Hz to give light and transparency to the performance.

DALI OPTICON 6 MK2 LOUDSPEAKERS

For its part, the dome *tweeter* remains subtle and refined at all times, even at high volume. This hybrid *tweeter* is perfectly paired with both *woofers* / midrange, so the *OPTICON 6 MK2* offers me an incredible presence of the singer in my audio listening room. In this case, the cellulose pulp reinforced with wood fibres surely has something to do with the naturalness of the timbres, the instruments and the voices that he projects. I note a slight physiological effect (*loudness*) in the lower midrange which gives body to the performance. Incidentally, the performer takes on an even more human character rather than presenting a more cerebral lead vocal. On this superb recording, the low frequencies are not a priority but let's say that they appear to me to be well-focused and relatively deep.

I continue with the Norwegian jazz band **Beady Belle** founded by singer **Beate S. Lech** in 1999. Her songs are a mix of *acid jazz*, *soul*, *pop*, and *trip hop* supported by *drum and bass*. They combine *up tempo* electronic rhythms, vocal harmonies and strings. Their album *Nothing But The Truth* comprises sixteen equally well-crafted tracks. The singer has a very *soulful* voice that could just as well be adapted to *gospel*. Their music gives me a good idea of the dynamics of the loudspeaker as well as its extension into the extremities of the sound spectrum. The slight emphasis in the lower midrange once again gives me a very present voice in the centre of a very wide stereo image. This feature gives the *OPTICON 6 MK2* a lively, fast midrange and a stereophonic image that is formed more in front of the loudspeakers than on the same plane or behind them. This physiological effect deviates somewhat from absolute neutrality, but it makes the performance very flattering and appealing to the listener.

I follow up with another Nordic jazz album called *Nightjar in the Northern Sky* by the singer and pianist **Anna Gréta**. She is a native of Reykjavik, Iceland, but now lives in Stockholm, Sweden.

She accompanies herself on the piano and her voice is captivating. Her piano playing is superbly jazzy while her compositions combine elements of his Icelandic folklore. The *OPTICON 6 MK2* loudspeaker gives me a fluid piano, superbly reproduced in its harmonics and which occupies a good part of the stereophonic image. The saxophonist **Sigurður Flosason** plays on two tracks and his instrument is reproduced in a rich and relaxing way. The double bass of **Skúll Sverisson** is full-bodied and retains the woody sound of its resonance box. The playing of drummer **Elnar Scheving** still retains its impact with a very credible sweeping action on the skin of his snare drum. But it is above all the voice of **Anna Gréta** and her piano that charms us thanks to the warmth provided by the *OPTICON 6 MK2*. Transparency and detail are very high but the small **DALI tower** seems to favour musicality and listening comfort rather than providing hyper definition which would be rather selective as to the choice of music to listen to. I end with the album *Riopelle Symphonique*, a creation by **Serge Fiori** and **Blair Thompson** for the arrangements. The work is performed by the **Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal** under the direction of conductor **Adam Johnson**. This classic recording, which I downloaded as a high-resolution file, has incredible dynamics. The *OPTICON 6 MK2* loudspeaker does not hesitate to

remind me of this and its stereophonic image is vast, not to say grandiose. I can easily locate the location of the different instrumental sections. The dynamic range of the *OPTICON 6 MK2* is such that I don't miss anything from the smoothest passages to the most frenzied crescendos. The brass instruments are majestic and the string instruments are silky smooth. Again, I find that the stereophonic image is very slightly projected forward, but still retains a realistic depth effect.

Conclusion

I have not had the opportunity to listen to the first generation of *OPTICON 6* so I cannot comment on the improvements made by the *MK2* version. However, I can assure you after this test bench that the *OPTICON 6 MK2* loudspeaker by **DALI** is a great buy. At a price of \$3,999, it can easily compete with loudspeakers costing \$5,000 and over. Its tonal balance is very pleasant and it is not too demanding on the type of amplifier to use. It will blend in easily with your décor and can play all types of music whether it be *hard rock*, *jazz* or *classical*. At its price, I don't know if it can really be called entry-level, but one thing is for sure, the *OPTICON 6 MK2* loudspeaker is an open door to the high end of the hi-fi loudspeakers market. What more could you ask for, than to have a listen session at a specialist retailer near you?

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$3,999.00 a pair

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Lenbrook Industries,
T.: 1.905.831.6555, <https://lenbrook.com>;
<https://www.dali-speakers.com/fr/>

Mediagraphy

Stephan Eicher, *Autour De Ton Cou*, FLAC,
24 bits/44.1 kHz

Beady Belle, *Nothing but The Truth*, FLAC,
24 bits/44.1kHz

Anna Gréta, *Nightjar in the Northern Sky*,
FLAC, 24 bits/48 kHz

Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal,

Riopelle Symphonique, FLAC, 24 bits/96 kHz





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Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Visit of the iconic Alphonse Mellot house, a true jewel of the Sancerre terroir

Photo : Anne-Emmanuelle Thion

Incredible is the word I used most often during my visit, last April, at **Domaine Alphonse Mellot** located in Sancerre in the Loire Valley, as much for the uniqueness of the premises, the organic and biodynamic philosophy that underpins the development of the wines, as for the wines themselves, which optimise and transmit all that the Sancerre terroir has to offer.

I arrived with my sidekick **Luc** at the shop of this house which is located in the centre of Sancerre not knowing where this visit was going to take place. Since we were in the

centre of town, we expected to have to take the car to get to the vineyards and the winery.

So, we met **Alphonse Mellot Senior** who welcomed us with great warmth and anecdotes about the development of the Quebec market that he has carried out over the years with his agency **Charton Hobbs**. It should be noted that he knows Quebec very well and has a soft spot for our part of the country. His wines have been present here for over 60 years!

And now **Alphonse Mellot Senior** opens large doors at street level and we enter the cellar and underground cellars of the house built between the 15th and 17th centuries. I would never have believed that the entire winemaking process took

place in the heart of Sancerre in cellars that wind under the village!
It should be noted that wine has been made since 1513 by the Mellot family. Towards the end of the 19th century, the family began to export its wines to the four corners of France and abroad. Gradually the name of the estate of **La**

Moussière disappeared in favour of that of the winegrowing family. **For nineteen generations, the know-how has been passed down from father to son, all of whom share the same first name. Continuing this tradition Alphonse Senior** (18th of the name) has recently given his place to **Alphonse**



Photo : Anne-Emmanuelle Thion



Photo : Anne-Emmanuelle Thion

Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Photo : Anne-Emmanuelle Thion

Junior (19th) and his daughter **Emmanuelle**. And since 2005, the siblings have taken on the challenge of running the **Domaine des Pénitents**, 35 kilometres from Sancerre, in parallel.

Alphonse Mellot (AM): *All the cellars were built by hand. None of the cellars are of troglodyte origin. In this maze, we manage to circulate the wine through a system of fixed and flexible pipes, which at first glance does not seem very obvious...*

...The house operates 57 ha of vines in Sancerre and 18 ha in Côtes de la Charité which is the ancestor of Pouilly with its Cistercian monks who started planting long ago on limestone soils. As they say, great wines can only be made on limestone soils with billions of years of marine deposits where everything is assimilated into the wine. This is not the case with flint, granite or shale soils. In Sancerre, it is very chalky with a Burgundian character unlike Pouilly...

...The Sancerre region, with its unique soils and a variety of limestone, deserves to have its own crus, grands crus and premiers crus like in Burgundy. It is a little Burgundy Sancerre. I proposed the idea of crus 30 years ago, but we thought it was too complicated. In my opinion, the only way to give credibility to an appellation is to make crus.

On limestone, the slightest rain is retained by the microporosity of the limestone. These are good terroirs that can keep water. Limestone is osmotic. If you know how to make the roots dive, they will go and get their nutrients down to 10-15 m. They will go and get the geological memory. That's what makes wine interesting. That's what real minerality is all about...

...There are about 40 to 50 people who work at the Domaine year-round and we have been doing everything organically for 30 years and biodynamically for 15 years. This is 3 to 4 times more than the others for the same area. Consequently, it takes a lot of well-trained staff to carry out all the operations in the vineyards. Many young people are trained by us which ultimately creates a nice family atmosphere...

...To make good wine, you have to overcome your fears. Sometimes it is necessary to remove half of the crop to remove the splits and the internodes (the small non-fruiting shoots that grow between the shoot and the leaf) and keep only the good. It takes balls to make these decisions (as it can greatly affect returns). And when it freezes or it hails, it's a big deal! Hence the expression you have to overcome your fears. The green harvest is nothing. It's when you take drastic decisions in the search for quality that it's important! The real work is done much earlier than during the green harvest...



Photo: H el ene Bellan e Mellot

...The cultivation of the vine is a whole. It starts with the preparation of the soil, the choice of terroir, then the choice of rootstocks and the planting density etc., etc. It's a thoughtful process before you get to the music in the vineyard or anything else esoteric. Making wine is a way of life!

At **Alphonse Mellot**, we use wood wisely and in all its formats. We find a multiplicity of containers that we don't see elsewhere, which is surprising. Containers from 12 to 15 hl up to 80 hl. Unusually, we work with egg-shaped barrels that were made especially for the house. It has the property of creating a vortex during malolactic conversion. There are also amphorae in this cellar and rectangular barrels made by *companions*. The highlight of the visit is a completely round barrel, the first in the world, which can be swung in all directions. It was used to vinify a *Pinot Noir* planted at 20,000 feet/ha density that is not often seen. The cuv e is called *20,000 pieds sous Sancerre*.

What is surprising during this visit is the rather incredible number of vats of different sizes. The vinification is done on a parcel-by-parcel basis. We can find up to two vinification vats for the same parcel and everything is bottled terroir by terroir.

...Wood is only used for micro-oxygenation. The wood may add a little tannin, but it's really the oxygenation of the wine that counts. We work a lot with volumes, because the larger the container, the less the wood will contribute. You have to work on the balance according to

the years, the maturity, etc. Moreover, we change from 1/4 to 1/5 of the barrels each year...

...The grapes are harvested by hand with boxes of 20 kilos maximum, not in large bins to avoid the grapes on top crushing those below and thus avoiding the beginning of oxidation. Then everything goes to a sorting table. The red ones are destemmed but the white ones are not.

...The Sauvignon and the Riesling are ampelographic brothers and the two best varieties for great whites. Malolactic conversion is not carried out with these grape varieties, which need very good maturities. I was saying this 25 years ago and everyone laughed. Now we're not kidding. We went from cat piss due to a lack of maturity to citrus. These are wines that age well. **Alphonse Junior** found me 6 bottles from 1959. If it is well-preserved, one will find truffled and slightly oily aromas like Riesling, especially if they come from limestone soils...

...All fermentations are carried out in wood except La Moussi re, of which 50% is vinified in cement vats. A grand cru or a locality or a climate, it comes from a terroir that is easily recognisable as for example the soils of La Moussi re...

...There are very few barrels (at the time of our visit), as everything has been sub-titled and bottled, including La Moussi re Classique, which is one year on top of another. All the other cuv es are aged for a minimum of 2 or sometimes 3 years, especially for the reds and even for some of the whites. La Moussi re is what keeps the shop going...

Tasting

What a joy and an honour to be tasting with **Alphonse Mellot**. He was incredibly generous. In fact, for a few hours we tasted everything he could lay his hands on, with all the anecdotes necessary to enrich our knowledge.

Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

La Moussière, Alphonse Mellot Organic white wine, 2021

The *Cuvée La Moussière* is made from vines whose age is approximately between 4 and 40 years. Sequential pneumatic pressing. Static settling at a temperature below 10°C for about 48 hours. Fermentation is carried out in cement tanks for 50 % and the rest in new barrels, at temperatures between 18 and 23°C. Maturing on fine lees over a period of 7 to 8 months. The production of the *Cuvée La Moussière* represents about 240,000 bottles.

Tasting notes

Superb aromatic richness with notes of candied lemons. On the palate, there is a very nice sensation of minerality underlined by a very present acidity as well as a zest of grapefruit and candied lemons. Straightforward and incisive. Superb length.

La Moussière, Alphonse Mellot Organic white wine, 2021

Sugar: 3.4 g/l

Alcohol: 13%

Price: \$38.75

SAQ code: 33480

<https://www.saq.com/fr/33480>



Les Romains, Alphonse Mellot Organic white wine, 2020

From flint and limestone soils, from vines planted in 1951, it shows superb floral notes on the nose, some notes of yellow fruit, candied citrus and a touch of minerality. The palate is rich, unctuous and elegant with great length and amplitude.

**Les Romains, Alphonse Mellot
Organic white wine, 2020**

Price: \$62.50

SAQ code: 14867342

<https://www.saq.com/fr/14867342>



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

La Demoiselle, Alphonse Mellot Organic white wine, 2020

Some obvious notes of flint, black powder and a smooth, elegant texture.

**La Demoiselle, Alphonse Mellot
Organic white wine, 2020**

Price: \$54.00

SAQ code: 14867351

<https://www.saq.com/fr/14867351>



Satellite, Alphonse Mellot Organic white wine, 2018

The nose reveals lemon and citrus aromas. On the palate, a light lemon zest is combined with a strong acidity and a sensation of minerality.

Satellite, Alphonse Mellot
Organic white wine, 2018

SAQ code: 13010460

<https://www.saq.com/fr/13010460>



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Génération Dix-Neuf Organic white wine, 2018

Sequential pneumatic pressing. Static settling at a temperature below 10 C for about 48 hours. Fermentation is carried out in a 900-litre truncated cone tank. Matured on fine lees for a variable period depending on the year (on average 10 to 12 months). The production of *Cuvée Génération XIX* white represents about 6,000 bottles.

Tasting notes

On the nose, beautiful vanilla notes as well as a cream of citrus fruits, honeyed and floral notes. On the palate, a sensation of light woody notes underlined by a rich, suave texture and a superb sensation of minerality.

Génération XIX Organic white wine, 2018

Price: \$80.50

SAQ code: 14296367

<https://www.saq.com/fr/14296367>



Edmond, Alphonse Mellot Organic white wine, 2018

The *Cuvée Edmond* is made from the old vines of *La Moussière* whose age is between 40 and 87 years.

Pneumatic pressing and settling at a temperature below 10°C for about 48 hours.

Fermentation is carried out for 60% in new barrels, 20% in barrels of one wine and 20% in barrels of two wines, at temperatures between 18 and 24°C. Matured on fine lees with regular stirring over a variable period according to the years (on average 10 to 14 months). The production of *Cuvée Edmond* represents about 26,000 bottles.

Tasting notes

Particularly aromatic, the nose reveals floral and lemon notes of great concentration with a hint of vanilla and yeast, and a framework of sweet spices that continues in a sustained manner throughout the tasting...

The palate is rich, crisp and indulgent underlined by a very present acidity as well as some discreet woody notes. Superb aromatic amplitude of an astonishing length. Finishes with complex citrus notes as well as a nice sensation of minerality.

Edmond, Alphonse Mellot Organic white wine, 2018

Price: \$84.25

SAQ code: 14867377

<https://www.saq.com/fr/14867377>



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

La Moussière, Alphonse Mellot Organic red wine, 2019

Cold soak: 5 to 10 days then the fermentations start. During this period, very light crushing and pumping over is carried out (about once a day). The fermentation temperatures do not exceed 28°C in order to keep all the aromas of *Pinot Noir*.

The average vatting time is 4 weeks. The wine is devatted on a conveyor belt followed by a light pressing.

The press juices are incorporated into the free-run juices or vinified separately. After settling, all the juice is put directly into barrels for malolactic conversion. Maturing on fine lees over a variable period of 10 to 18 months. The percentage of new barrels is between 80 and 100%.

The production of *Cuvée La Moussière Rouge* is about 23,000 bottles.

Tasting notes

The nose reveals notes of raspberries, redcurrants, blackberries and morello cherries, with a hint of spicy notes.

On the palate, it is round and mellow with a good structure. Spicy notes and sour fruit aromas are underlined by some woody and undergrowth notes. Beautiful amplitude, appreciable length and a hint of salinity on the finish.

La Moussière, Alphonse Mellot Organic red wine, 2019

Price: \$67.00

Grape variety: Pinot Noir

SAQ code: 14299023

<https://www.saq.com/fr/14299023>



Génération Dix-Neuf, Alphonse Mellot Organic red wine, 2018

A cold soak: 8 to 12 days then the fermentations start. During this period, very light crushing and pumping over is carried out (about once a day). The fermentation temperatures do not exceed 28°C in order to keep all the aromas of *Pinot Noir*. The average vatting time is 4 weeks. The wine is devatted on a conveyor belt followed by a light pressing. The press juice is incorporated into the free-run juice or vinified separately. After settling, all the juice is put directly into barrels for malolactic fermentation. The wine is aged in new barrels for an average of 14 months. The production of the *Cuvée Génération* is 2,800 bottles.

Tasting notes

Very nice concentration of blackberry and morello cherry aromas with a hint of sweet spices. On the palate, there is a beautiful, velvety texture, black fruit flavours, notes of undergrowth, and an earthy, slightly austere side. It is a powerful and generous wine.

Generation XIX, Alphonse Mellot Organic red wine, 2018

Price: \$121.75

Grape variety: Pinot Noir

SAQ code: 863282

<https://www.saq.com/fr/863282>



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

En Grands Champs, Alphonse Mellot Organic red wine, 2018

A cold soak: 8 to 12 days then the fermentations start. During this period, very light crushing and pumping over is carried out (about once a day). The fermentation temperatures do not exceed 28°C in order to keep all the aromas of *Pinot Noir*. The average vatting time is 4 weeks.

The wine is devatted on a conveyor belt followed by a light pressing.

The press juice is incorporated into the free-run juice or vinified separately. After settling, all the juice is put directly into barrels for malolactic fermentation. The wine is aged in new barrels for an average of 14 months.

The production of *En Grands Champs* is about 3,000 bottles.

Tasting notes

A very large terroir located on the Kimmeridgian at the top of La Moussière where a pocket of Buzançais limestone gives it a dense and fine-grained character.

The nose reveals aromas of very ripe red and black fruits, with some notes of undergrowth. The palate is elegant with a smooth texture, supported by very fine tannins.

En Grands Champs, Alphonse Mellot Organic red wine, 2018

Grape variety: Pinot Noir

Price: \$150.25

SAQ code: 14296092

<https://www.saq.com/fr/14296092>



Les Pénitents, Alphonse Mellot Côte de la Charité, 2016

My favourite from the tasting session! It reveals animal, leather and evolutionary notes on the nose.
On the palate, the tannins are very fine and very tightly woven. Chocolate notes, earthy side, dark fruits and breathtaking length.

Les Pénitents, Alphonse Mellot

Côte de la Charité, 2016

Grape variety: Pinot Noir

Price: \$41.50

SAQ code: 13235811

<https://www.saq.com/fr/13235811>



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

La Demoiselle, Alphonse Mellot Organic red wine, 2018

This wine is aged for 14 months in new barrels. We discover notes of black fruits and undergrowth. On the palate, we perceive flavours of black fruits, black cherries, undergrowth and a sensation of minerality. Tightly woven tannins.



Le Paradis,
Alphonse Mellot
Organic red wine, 2019

Another favourite! It reveals animal and ripe black fruit notes. Incredible amplitude and length.





Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Photo : Pierre Merat

New cellar : Domaine Alphonse Mellot



Photo : Pierre Merat

Domaine Alphonse Mellot : cellar and spherical barrel (Galile Oak)



Vingt mille pieds sous Sancerre Organic rosé wine, 2019

We discover notes of red fruit cream and floral notes. The palate is unctuous, rich and endowed with a sensation of minerality.

Claude Lalonde - biography

Sommelier by trade, for me wine is a matter of passion and pleasure.

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

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

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Photo: Anne-Emmanuelle Trignon

Cellar - chai Domaine Alphonse Mellot: egg-shaped barrel

Progressive Rock

By RICHARD GUAY



RIVERSIDE

ID.Entity

<https://riversideband.pl/en/>

Twenty years after their first album, here is the eighth opus of the Polish band **Riverside**. After the difficult passage of the last few years, this is good news! This band, which appeared two decades ago, quickly made a name for itself with its cheeky music that combined various forms of progressive rock, including *prog metal*, *cross-over*, *psychedelic prog* and *neo prog*. The line-up remains unchanged: **Mariusz Duda** (bass, vocals), **Michał Łapaj** (keyboards), **Piotr Kozieradzki** (drums) and **Maciej Meller** (guitar), who is now a full-time replacement for founding guitarist **Piotr Grudziński**, who passed away in 2016 following a heart attack. This loss had a heavy impact on the band, which found it difficult to recover given the bonds of friendship forged over the years between the members, but also the transcendence that the deceased guitarist exerted on the musical content. *ID.entity* thus appears five years after the sad *Wasteland* and marks the rebirth of the band after some rather chaotic years. It offers an introspective reflection on our existence in a universe where the real and the virtual are intertwined on a daily basis. **Duda's** lyrics are rich in meaning and relate to the brutality of the world around us. The lyrics are much less acidic than on previous albums, and are more in

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the *cross-over* vein, favouring short, accessible and comforting tracks. The melodies are stimulating and the instrumental passages rather well crafted, complex and efficient. **Duda's** soft voice blends very well with a less aggressive guitar than before and more atmospheric. Very different from the first records with strong personalities, *ID.entity* is an album of continuity, with varied content, very playful, hopeful and of undeniable interest. It should bring everyone back into the fold, especially those who were somewhat disappointed by the last opuses.



CARAVELA ESCARLATE

III

<https://caravelaescarlata.bandcamp.com/album/iii>

Caravela Escarlata is a Brazilian trio composed of **Ronaldo Rodrigues** (keyboards), **David Paiva** (vocals, bass, guitars) and **Elcio Cáfaró** (drums). Some of you who are particularly observant will quickly notice that this structure is the same as that of the now defunct **Emerson, Lake & Palmer**. It is not by chance that many similarities with this mythical band can be found in the music of this Brazilian ensemble. As its name unequivocally indicates, *III* is **Caravela Escarlata's** third attempt, the second (2017) being eponymous. The first, *Rascunho*

(2016), is entirely instrumental and frankly uninteresting. It is therefore after the second album when the band really took off. If these three musicians obviously have no imagination for the titles, the same cannot be said for the musical content. *///* is a logical evolution of the previous album. Considering the quality levels of the latter, this is no small feat! More refined, better put together and more homogeneous, its seven extracts fit naturally into each other to give us a wild musical fiesta. The introduction, *Bússola do Tempo*, quickly establishes the tempo and warns us that we are going to have a damn good time! There's no time to waste, we're challenged from all sides and are surprised constantly like by fireworks. **Rodrigues'** rather acerbic

and incisive keyboards are demented and their omnipresence keeps us on our toes. At times, you'd swear the great **Keith** had come back from the dead! Some more syrupy passages offer, here and there, well-deserved breaks! Let's underline that the instrumental melodies so bewitching of the second opus come back here in force! **David Paiva** also has a lot to do with his guitars of all registers, and he does it admirably well. His soft, honeyed voice is talkative and constantly in action to deliver his generous lyrics sung in Portuguese. This language, which sounds like a mixture of Spanish and Italian, is perfectly suited to progressive rock. **Caravela Escarlata III** is therefore an album that is a joy to listen to over and over again!



SUNCHILD

Exotic Creatures and a Stolen Dream

<https://antonykalugin.bandcamp.com/album/exotic-creatures-and-a-stolen-dream-24-48>

Sunchild is a Ukrainian band founded in **Kharkiv** in 2008. It is one of **Antony Kalugin's** three projects (vocals, keyboard), the other two being **Karfagen** and **Hoggwash**. For **Sunchild**, this talented and prolific Ukrainian artist has gathered a plethora of musicians from his country to assist him. After seven solo

albums, the last one, *Rebirth*, from last year, fourteen **Karfagen** including the one that just appeared, two **Hoggwash** and finally eight **Sunchild**, it was high time I introduced you to this progressive rock genius that not even a pandemic and the savage invasion of his country could stop. First of all, let's mention that **Antony Kalugin** is not an avant-garde musician, let alone an eclectic music producer. His music is rooted in a rather pure and emotionally charged symphonic progressive rock. Of his four working platforms, **Sunchild** is my favourite because it best brings all the balance and cohesion that is the hallmark of great records. Like *As Far as the Eye Can See* (2011) or **Messages from Afar - The Division and Illusion of Time** (2018), **Exotic Creatures and a Stolen Dream** features a dozen musicians in various positions, be it vocals (male and female), guitars, wind instruments (saxophones, horns, woodwinds) or even accordion. The result is a vast and imposing stage as well as an unheard-of musical richness that forces the listener to process a host of details. **Kalugin's** gentle voice (English lyrics) and his hopeful text serve as cement to all his music generous in catchy melodies and sought-after chords. His refined and omnipresent keyboards are the backbone of this enveloping sound environment. The first single, *Life Lines*, lasts 26 minutes and plunges us straight back into this comfort zone from which it is difficult to escape. Probably the most unifying opus of the series, *Exotic Creatures and a Stolen Dream* is a masterful piece of symphonic progressive rock, joyful to the core and becoming a showcase of resilience for a young Ukrainian musician and his friends who have no intention of letting life intimidate them.



At Monitor Audio, evolution equals captivating musical realism!

By GEORGE DE SA

Alchemy is the medieval quasi-science that emerged in the Middle Ages. Its proponents were convinced that ordinary metals could be transmuted into the most precious... gold. Though the attempts of alchemists were never truly realized, the practice of *refining* metals has existed for centuries. Refining metals, is a process that seeks to remove impurities from the metal and get to the purist possible element; thus, attaining the most desirable qualities and the greatest value. Keeping that in mind, let me turn your attention to the noteworthy British audio product manufacturer, **Monitor Audio**. In 2022, **Monitor Audio** released their latest iteration of the *Platinum Series* loudspeaker models; the third generation (3G).

This latest *Platinum Series 3G*, carries on the evolution of the last full line update, with the series maintaining its status as the company's flagship loudspeaker line. The *Platinum Series 3G* is the fullest refinement of the series and incorporates decades of research and development. **Monitor Audio** claims its *Platinum Series 3G* is their highest performing series ever, which is something of a claim given the company celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2022, as well. Those knowing something about anniversary celebrations will be aware that a 50th is traditionally commemorated as a golden anniversary, yet I'm sure, **Monitor Audio** was ever happier to celebrate with *Platinum*.

At introduction, the **Monitor Audio** *Platinum 3G Series* included four models: the *Platinum 100 3G* bookshelf loudspeaker; the *200 3G* mid-size floor standing; the *300 3G* floor standing and; the *C250 3G* centre channel. Since the initial introduction, **Monitor Audio** has expanded on the *Platinum 3G* lineup, adding a couple architectural speaker models: the *Platinum In-Wall 3G* and the *Platinum PLIC II* in ceiling speakers. Together, these models are the companies most premium offerings for both two channel and multi-channel applications. With the *Platinum Series 3G*, **Monitor Audio** has refined their series line-up holistically, building towards their goal of bringing the listener even closer to sonic purity and perfection. **Monitor Audio** has stated that their new *Platinum Series 3G*, provides, ... *a visceral experience for the ears as well as the eyes... deepens the connection between listening and making audio human*. Living-and-breathing

musical performances are a most thrilling endeavor and it is the latest of their innovations, incorporated into the new *Platinum Series 3G* that aim to deliver on that endeavor.

What's New with this 3rd generation?

First, there is a ground up re-creation of their *Micro Pleated Diaphragm* tweeter, their third iteration, which they refer to as the *MPD III*. The *MPD III* is, as both prior versions were, a **Monitor Audio** in-house design. The *MPD III* comes from a lineage that began with the **Monitor Audio** engineering team's initial exploration in their *Concept 50* prototype, a few years back and now leverages all **Monitor Audio**'s learnings from their ground-breaking *Hyphn* loudspeaker.

This latest *MPD III* integrates the company's latest R&D that serves to further reduce distortion and provide a most even frequency response with an extended passband of > 60 kHz. The *MPD III* is coupled to an optimized waveguide that maximizes control directivity while optimizing the

ENCEINTES ACOUSTIQUES **PLATINUM PL200 3G** DE **MONITOR AUDIO**

soundstage and the sensitivity. To what effect? **Monitor Audio** claims that with the *MPD III* and optimized waveguide, the sound is larger, clearer, and more consistent with an even greater level of accuracy and detail.

Beyond the *MPD III* tweeter, the *Platinum Series 3G* loudspeakers employ **Monitor Audio's RDT III** cones for the mid-bass and bass drivers. The *RDT III* brings three improvements over the prior generation, including: new rear layer carbon fiber skin, optimized cone edge treatment and, optimized rubber surround.

The *RDT III* is comprised of three distinct layers, with a Nomex honeycombed core that is sandwiched between an extremely thin yet rigid *Ceramic-Coated Aluminum*

(*C-CAM*) front layer and an all-new Carbon Fiber twin-layer rear skin, which is comprised of twin layers of carbon fiber melded at 90-degrees against their grain; maximizing their combined strength. In the real-world terms, the *Platinum Series 3G* mid and bass drivers are boasted by **Monitor Audio** to be their lowest distortion drivers of all time!

The *Platinum 200 3G* and *Platinum 300 3G* models now use **Monitor Audio's Dynamic Coupling Filter (DCF)** mechanism, which controls cone breakup, along with more powerful Neodymium magnets in a new motor design with underhung edge-wound voice-coil. These enhancements ensure a smoother transition across the frequency range resulting in greater

consistency with the *MPD III* tweeter. Specific to the bass drivers, large-diameter, edge-wound, underhung voice coils provide improved power handling and allow greater and more linear driver excursion for a wider dynamic range with greater control and tighter harder-hitting bass. The crossovers have been improved with elliptical filters for absolute time alignment of the drive units at crossover points supporting a claimed great improvement to directivity. **Monitor Audio** has asserted that hundreds of iterations of the crossovers were examined through their state-of-the-art virtual simulation and prototyping techniques to arrive at a final system that harmonises all elements into a completely optimized acoustic package.



This enhanced crossover performance is reinforced by an improved plinth that uses four new cast outrigger assemblies, which are locked together with a robust steel brace, ensuring maximum isolation of the crossover from any cabinet interaction.

What do they look like?

Careful thought and development were carried through to the cabinets and aesthetic design of the *Platinum Series 3G*, as well. The all-new cabinets come in luxurious and contemporary finishes, including Piano Ebony, Piano Black and Pure White Satin. These cabinets now possess a unique curved front profile to reduce diffraction. Gone is the leatherette front baffle covering, replaced with elegant looking wraparound real wood veneer and bold driver surrounds. New aluminum driver frames continue to use front to back tension rods to secure the drivers to the cabinet and augment the inert and vibration free characteristics of the cabinet. The *Platinum PL 200 3G* is a mid-sized, 3-way, dual rear-port bass reflex floor standing loudspeaker. It has been designed to provide dynamic high-end performance with tight, controlled bass within a relatively compact enclosure. The *PL 200 3G* uses **Monitor Audio's** latest *MPD III* high-frequency transducer, mated to a 4" *RDT III* midrange driver and twin 6" *RDT III* bass drivers. Both spike and flat surface feet are also supplied. Dual 5-way binding posts are found on the rear, which allow for bi-amp or bi-wire configurations and it's great to see true cable jumpers rather than poor conducting brass jumper bars.

The *Platinum PL 200 3G* provide a frequency response of (-6dB) 32 Hz – 60 kHz (anechoic) / 23 Hz – 60 kHz (in room), with a sensitivity rating of 88 dB (2.83 Vrms @ 1 m, Free-Field). Nominal & minimum impedance are 4 Ohms, while power handling is 300 Watts (RMS). Dimensions come in at: 41" (H) x 14.5" (W) x 17.8" (D), with outrigger feet and spikes, while

weight is 35.8 kg / 78 lb 14 oz per loudspeaker.

The *Platinum 200 3G* loudspeaker is undeniably beautiful, with traditional form and contemporary appointments. The various finishes will unarguably enhance the décor of any room that they are situated. My review sample was in the Piano Ebony, perhaps the boldest of finishes but also in my eyes the most glorious example of the finest furniture and audio appointment. The veneer and lacquer are of highest quality, with a finish and construction that is nothing less than impeccable. I'd expect the *Platinum 200 3G* would meet the aesthetic desires of virtually any potential buyer and can offer no criticisms on its form, function, and functionality.

Reviewing conditions

I reviewed the **Monitor Audio Platinum 200 3G** in my dedicated and acoustically treated listening room, with my **Bryston BR20** preamp/streamer/DAC and *7B³* monoblocks and toward the end of my evaluation put a **MOON** by **Simaudio 860 v2** in, just for fun. Sources included **Tidal HiFi** via the **Bryston BR20** streamer, as well as *CD* via my **Rega Apollo CDP**. Vinyl too was part of the experience, delivered by way of my long-term resident **VPI Scout 1.1** turntable with **Gold Note PH-10 & PSU-10** phonostage. **Audio Sensibility Statement Single-Wire** speaker cables were used in all listening sessions. In my room 13' x 18 ½' X 7 ¾' studio, I experimented with speaker setup and found



MONITOR AUDIO PLATINUM PL200 3G LOUDSPEAKERS

that the *Platinum 200 3G* worked best about 4.5 feet from the back wall, just over 2 feet from the side walls and with 9 feet between them. I also found that to get the best treble presence and central image lock, it called for setting them just a couple degrees out from dead-on my listening position. Every room is different, and we all have different preferences, but I mention this just to let you know that the *PL 200 3G* do call for some placement experimentation.

Listening Sessions

I did some listening to vinyl and during that course was particularly taken by **Leonard Cohen's** *Popular Problems* LP. *Almost Like the Blues* is a track that provides a good understanding of realism given the various acoustic elements. With that song spinning, the **Monitor Audio PL 200 3G** effectively

disappeared, laying out before me a well delineated and very generously sized soundstage. The images had a very natural presentation with image outlines non-emphasized but possessing a roundness and physicality that was nothing less than entrancing. The sound of the sole shaker at opening was exceptional in its realism, not only was the resonance of the granules ever clear but accompanying that was a micro dynamism that presented the instruments sound with an authentic physical presence. The late **Leonard** seemed to be raised to life with his voice most present and delivered with a ghostly deep and throaty character, yet impeccably clear. The images, whether from voice or instrument, had slightly greater width, depth, and height and took their place in space within the soundstage, the *PL 200* delivery absent of any cookie cutter silhouettes. In fact, **Leonard's** voice was



larger than I've ever heard it on this track, within my room and his quiet poetic rhyme had me enthralled. The tactility of the percussion, bongo play, relayed not only the skins but the impact of the hand and the resonance of the slaps most authentically, its image off to the left, behind and higher on the holographic stage. It was evident that the *PL 200* had an aptitude for delivering music in an uncannily lifelike manner. I moved to the track *Keep the Wolves Away* by **Uncle Lucius**, from the album *And You Are Me*, streamed via **Tidal HiFi**. This was truly an... *oh.. wow* track with the *PL 200 3G*. The opening bass drum hits were gloriously masterful, dynamic having tremendous heft and solidity. The bass frequencies were superbly dense with the trailing resonance depicting a deep and high soundstage. The *PL 200 3G* portrays such bass notes with the slight partiality for weight over texture with the result being that low bass notes sound grander and more masterful in comparison with my own **Dynaudio C2 Signatures**. This is bass that can be not only heard but felt, punchy and concussive. In fact, despite the *PL 200 3G* only having about 75% of the internal volume of the *C2's*, they sounded like larger full-size floor standing loudspeakers. In short, the *PL 200 3G* should not be underestimated given their modest dimensions – they play like full sized loudspeakers and should be more than enough for most rooms in terms of sheer bass output.

Still with track, *Keep the Wolves Away*, the acoustic guitar bodies were very well communicated by the *PL 200*, with string textures evident, while there being a touch of roundness on the leading edge of the string snaps. Midrange, as exemplified through the vocals were smooth and very natural, the focus apparently on communicating the humanness of the voice rather than focusing on the recording. As mentioned earlier, the *PL 200 3G* deliver images with a softness to the outlines and greater dimension to images, lending to a heightened perception of realness in the music. One other endearing quality of the *PL 200 3G* was its strength to communicate harmonic colour. On this track, this technical harmonic presentation was heard in a most deliciously sweet glow and tubey resonance of the electric guitar. The track served to solidify the *PL 200 3G's* ability to not only play music but provide an emotional connection during the listening experience.

A different listening session

During my time with the *PL 200 3G*, I had the opportunity to visit a nearby dealer, EQ Audio, located north of Toronto, in Barrie, Ontario. **Ed O'Helihiy**, the friendly and gracious owner had the *PL 200 3G* loudspeakers setup in a meticulously treated demonstration room. **Ed** took us through a curated list of tracks that included *Fluid* by **Yosi Horikawa**; *Eleanor Rigby* by **Musica Nuda**, *Say Something* by **Justin Timberlake** and; *Train Out of Hollywood* by **Keb Mo**, as well as numerous others. The accompanying equipment was a **Naim** stack,

including: *NSC 222*, *NAP250* and *NPX 300*, with **Audience Adept Response** power conditioning and **Frontrow** cables. The soundstage was tremendous, both wide and astoundingly deep. Dynamic impact was visceral and clear across the expansive soundstage. The *PL 200 3G* confidently and efficaciously energized the 17' by 23' space, delivering a commanding performance. The traits of realism, naturalness, warmth, solidity, and dynamic prowess were all evident, in spades. The demonstration proved the *PL 200 3G* very capable of delivering credible scale.

Moon River by **Lori Cullen** is one of my favourite tracks, both because of **Lori's** artistic rendering of this classic song but also for the diversity of sonic elements - low level details, detailed instrumentation and deep, textured bass notes. Listening to the *PL 200 3G* play this song, I found myself surrender to the sweet splendor of the music. **Lori's** voice was most captivating given the human trueness in which the *PL 200 3G* was able to conjure it. The high frequencies possessed a most graceful and svelte characterisation of the innate detail. I did note there was just a slight shyness in air, a little less glint and sparkle in the upper treble and a softening of leading edges, which I'm accustomed to; however, none of this took away from the pleasure in the listening experience. In fact, the *PL 200 3G* in all its repertoire consistently avoided drawing undue attention, absent of theatrics that less designs seem to us to awe-and-shock. You might even say that its skilful reticent nature serves to provide the listener with a greater appreciation of the holistic performance, rather than distracting antics. Bass notes on *Moon River* were just as I became to expect from the *PL 200 3G*, possessing high density, excellent low reach, deft control, and intimidating weight.

Conclusion

Monitor Audio's PL 200 3G is a most successful evolution of their well proven *Platinum Series*. It possesses a propensity for naturalness, timbral accuracy and image dimensionality. These are loudspeakers that not only adeptly play music but extraordinarily recreate the live performance. At \$17,500 CAD, the *PL 200 3G* are also an attainable high-end loudspeaker. I talked about alchemy being unachievable but refinement, now with that **Monitor Audio** has undoubtedly achieved their greatest performance success with the *Platinum Series 3G*. The *PL 200 3G* successfully possesses that most desirable quality in high-end audio... **captivating musical realism**; accordingly, this is a loudspeaker of astounding value.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: 17 500 \$ CAD / a pair

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Kevro International Inc., T.: 1 800.667.6065,
<https://www.kevro.ca/>

Classical Music

By CHRISTOPHE HUSS

RECORD OF THE MONTH

GUSTAV MAHLER
ORCHESTRE SYMPHONIQUE DE MONTRÉAL,
RAFAEL PAYARE.

Symphony No 5

Pentatone, PTC 5187067

Performance: *****

Technique: *****

This is **Rafael Payare's** second disc, after **Shostakovich's 11th Symphony** (in digital version only), the first with the **OSM**. The success is great and, above all, the projected image is excellent, from two points of view.

Firstly, **Pentatone** is engaged in a complete performance of **Mahler's** symphonies in Prague with the **Czech Philharmonic** and **Semyon Bychkov**, and their *Fifth* had just been released three months before this disc. But the Montreal version is much more astringent, biting, supple, and captured with a clearer overall picture. **Payare**, who doesn't pour his heart out in the *Adagietto* (*Death in Venice*) but transitions poetically to an exuberant *Finale*, does a particularly good job of conveying the bite of the 2nd movement. He also finds the right mood in the great central *Scherzo*, a movement where many conductors go astray.

On a second level, such a recording will give the **OSM-Payare** duo a vibrant and energetic image internationally, in contrast to **Kent Nagano's** more intellectual and measured musical approach.



* * *

SOUND RECORDING OF THE MONTH

FRANZ SCHUBERT
CHRISTIAN AND TANJA TETZLAFF, LARS VOGT.
Les Trios, Arpeggione Sonate.

Ondine, 2 CD, ODE 1394

Performance: *****

Technique: *****

The album is a monument in itself, as two of the most beautiful trios in the repertoire come to us after the death of **Lars Vogt**, the pianist, on September 5th, 2022. The two *CDs* contain the *Trios op. 99* and *100* and the *Arpeggione Sonata*, plus a *Nocturne* and a *Rondo* recorded in February and June 2021, i.e., before **Vogt** was diagnosed with cancer and after his treatment had begun. But one should not expect a musical atmosphere fraught with tragic sentiment. The characteristic feature of the recording is more the subtlety of the features, the exploration of the borderline between the material and the immaterial, which is

subtly hidden, for example, in the transitions between the themes. This subtlety had to be rendered as accurately as possible, and sound engineer **Christoph Franke** fully succeeded, both in the balance and in the neutrality of the instrumental timbres, which were never too colourful.



REMASTERING OF THE MONTH

VIENNA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA, GEORG SOLTI.

Das Rheingold. Die Walküre.

Decca, SACDs 485 315-9 and 485 316-0.

Performance: *****

Technique: *****

Solti's Ring (Wagner's tetralogy) has always been an immense source of pride for **Decca**, on which its image of technical supremacy was based, compared to, for example, **Deutsche Grammophon** or **EMI**. It is true that the adventure that began at the end of September 1958 (*Or du Rhin*) and continued into the 1960s has never aged. Moreover, these versions served as demonstration discs for opera recordings, while **Karajan's Ring** (**DG**, 1967-1970) sounded more melted and coated, and **Böhm's** (**Philips**, 1966) made the most of a more monochrome live recording in Bayreuth.

Solti's Ring has therefore always been sold on musical *and* technical criteria. Its

last *remastering*, in 2012, was truly spectacular. But it is clear that there is even more presence here. This one is really striking, both on the orchestra and on the voices. To enjoy it, the ideal (and the main reason) is to have an *SACD* player because the release is of 2-channel *SACDs* (playable on *CD*). What is equally



stunning is the presentation, in *LP* format, with the printed booklet, photos of the recordings, gilding... In short, the fantastic luxury.



BOX SET OF THE MONTH

JACQUELINE DU PRÉ

Complete Warner Recordings

Warner, 23 CDs, 0190296611384

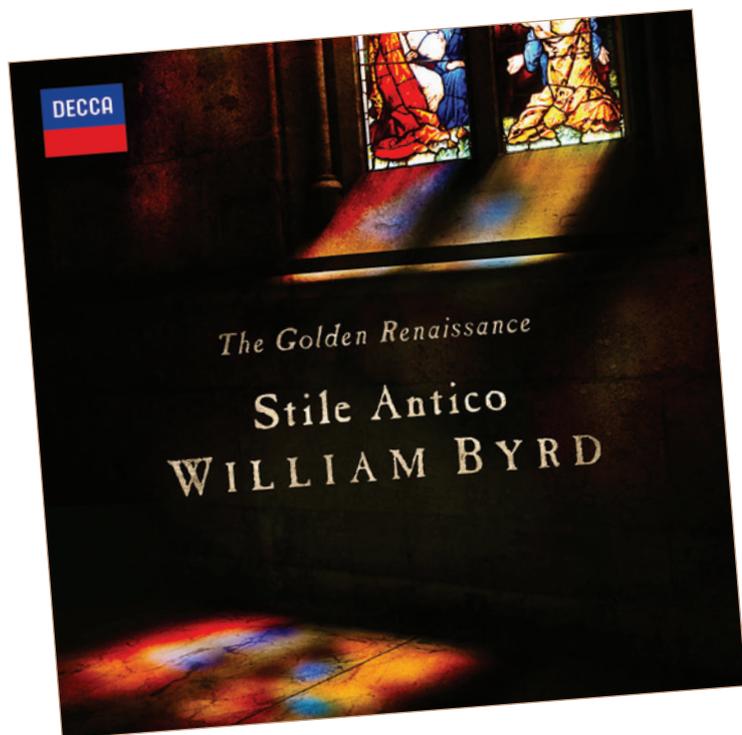
Performance: *** to *****

Technique: *** to ****

This is a useful box set celebrating a legendary artist.

Jacqueline du Pré, a British cellist born in 1945, died in 1987 of multiple sclerosis. Her career was short-lived, for from 1971 onwards the effects of her degenerative disease began to make themselves felt, with consequences for her playing and her career, as it irreversibly affected her dexterity. Her last studio recording, in December 1971, was a pair of **Chopin** and **Frank** *Sonatas* with **Daniel Barenboim**, whom she had married in 1967. A testimony is added to it: a concert of the **Tchaikovsky Trio** in July 1972 in Tel Aviv with **Pinchas Zukerman** on violin. **Jacqueline du Pré's** legacy, begun at the age of 16, in 1961, dominated by his famous **Elgar Concerto** with **John Barbirolli**, has so far been published sparsely, with the rarities collected in a boxed set of *Introuvables*. To have everything, at last, was necessary. This is done with order, quality materials and the reproduction of the original covers.

Classical Music



OTHER RELEASES

WILLIAM BYRD STILE ANTICO *The Golden Renaissance*

Decca, 485 3951

Performance: *****

Technique: *****

We have already spoken here of the hypnotic potential of Renaissance vocal music. Many vocal ensembles have distinguished themselves in this repertoire, including **Paul van Nevel's Huelgas Ensemble** and the **Tallis Scholars**. But today it is **Stile Antico** that dominates the field. This new disc pays tribute to **William Byrd**, who died 400 years ago. Unlike many other periods, the Tudor reign was a golden age for English music, hence the title *Golden Renaissance*. As is so often the case, **Stile Antico** bases the programme on a mass, the *Mass for Four Voices*

and inserts motets by the same composer between the various movements. The voices are perfect, as is the sound recording.



GEORG FRIEDRICH HÄNDEL LEA DESANDRE, IESTYN DAVIES, JUPITER, THOMAS DUNFORD.

Eternal Heaven

Erato, 5054197196775

Performance: ***

Technique: *****

This disc sounds uniformly angelic in a repertoire that is not necessarily so. In these **Händel** arias and duets, mezzo **Lea Desandre**, countertenor **Iestyn Davies** and the **Jupiter** Ensemble choose ethereal lightness and transparency rather than the kind of solemnity often associated with **Händel**. This can be felt, for example, in the aria *Will the Sun Forget to Streak* from **Solomon** compared to **Leonardo García Alarcón's** complete work reviewed below. In the same way, **Lea Desandre's** voice is very *light* compared to what she expresses (*With Darkness deep* from **Theodora**) at times. All this is very elegant, very pleasant to listen to, but one must be aware of the limits of this pastorality.



GEORG FRIEDRICH HÄNDEL

CHRISTOPHER LOWREY, ANA MARIA LABIN, GWENDOLINE BLONDEEL, MATTHEW NEWLIN, NAMUR CHAMBER CHOIR, MILLENIUM ORCHESTRA, LEONARDO GARCÍA ALARCÓN

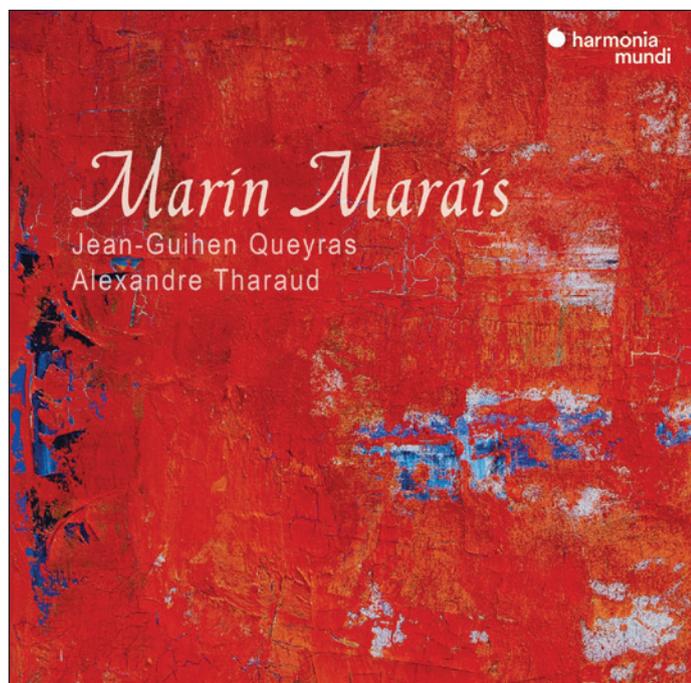
Solomon

Ricercar, 2 CDs, RIC, 449

Performance: ****

Technique: ****

This release of *Solomon* is part of a complete set of **Handel's** English oratorios, entrusted by the **Beaune Festival** to **Leonardo García Alarcón**. It is this oratorio that includes the famous visit of the Queen of Sheba. Although the work was created in 1749, it was not a great success and is now much more popular. The wisdom of King **Solomon** is illustrated by the story of two women who claim the same child. **Solomon** suggests cutting the child in two with his sword, and giving half to each. The real mother refuses and agrees to give the baby to the other woman; **Solomon** thus acknowledging her maternal instinct. As for the visit of the Queen of Sheba, it is a circumvented royal tribute. **Leonardo García Alarcón's** new work restores the entirety of *Solomon's* original version with energy and evocative power. The big star is an impressive Namur choir, with an unstoppable expressive accuracy. The cast is also excellent. It is worth noting that the Argentine conductor entrusts the title role to a countertenor like **Paul McCreech**, whereas the **Reuss (HM)**, our first choice) and **Gardiner (Philips)** versions use a mezzo.



MARIN MARAIS

JEAN-GUIHEN QUEYRAS (CELLO), ALEXANDRE THARAUD (PIANO).

La Rêveuse, Folies d'Espagne, etc.

Harmonia Mundi, HMM, 902 315

Performance: *****

Technique: ****

This is a singular invention and to grasp its originality, but also its extraordinary invention and quality, it may be useful to begin with track 3, the *Musette* from the *Suite in A minor* of the 4^e Livre de *Pièces de viole*. Here we hear a cello and piano but we have all the spirit of **Marin Marais**. From track 4, the *Couplets des Folies d'Espagne*, we forget that the sound universe has nothing to do with that of the composer. Here the piano can be as light as a lute, while the cello is *does not butter thick*. The variety of timbres is breath-taking and the journey memorable. One can hope that people who would never have gone to **Marais**, because it is too *old*, will discover these gems because **Queyras** and **Tharaud** play them.

Classical Music



OTHER RELEASES

ROBERT SCHUMANN
BENJAMIN GROSVENOR

Kreisleriana. 2nd Romance op. 28, Blumenstück, Abendlied, the Andantino of the 3rd Sonata. + Brahms: Intermezzi op. 117.

Decca, 485 3945

Performance: *****

Technique: *****

Of all the active pianists, **Benjamin Grosvenor** is the one who, along with **Steven Osborne**, **Pavel Kolesnikov** and a few others, has the most interesting sound. It should be noted that sound production (does it come from the fingers, the fore-arms, the whole body?) strongly distinguishes pianists. But in **Schumann** this is not everything. The German composer is notorious for his whims and reversals. **Benjamin Grosvenor** does them justice in a very complex work, the *Kreisleriana*, in a slightly less crazy way than **Eric Le Sage**. But his poetry is at its best in **Brahms' Opus 117**. This CD, completed by **Clara Schumann's Variations op. 20**, is an immense piano recording.



JEAN SIBELIUS
METROPOLITAN ORCHESTRA, YANNICK NÉZET-SÉGUIN.
Symphonies No 3 and 4.

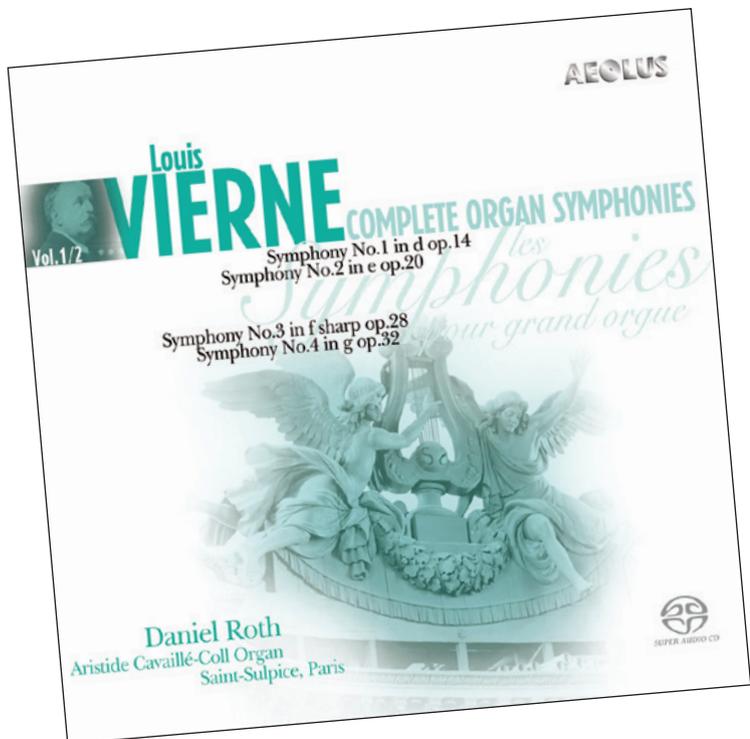
Atma, ACD22454

Performance: ***

Technique: *****

A half empty bottle or half full... **Yannick Nézet-Séguin** began his *Sibelius* collection for **Atma** with *Symphony No 1*. Here are the *Symphonies No 3 and 4* recorded in concert at the **Maison symphonique** in 2021 and 2022. While the Quebec conductor has a fine affinity with the *Third*, he tends to tone down the tragic character and the gravity of the *Fourth*, which is really too anodyne and smooth compared to great references, such as the recordings in **Lahti** or in Minnesota by **Osmo Vänskä**, both published by **BIS**. For fans only.





**LOUIS VIERNE
DANIEL ROTH**

Complete Organ Symphonies (vols. 1 and 2). Symphonies No 1 to 4.

Aeolus, 2 SACD, AE 11231

Performance: *****

Technique: *****

Oh, the wonder! Long dominated by **Pierre Cochereau's Philips** version, which gave **Vierne** a rather ferocious image, the discography of **Vierne's Organ Symphonies** has seen its centre of gravity shift to Germany, with **Ben van Oosten** and a more *focused* sound on **MDG**. But here we have a grand achievement: **Daniel Roth's** 2003 and 2009 recordings of the Cavallé-Coll in Saint-Sulpice in Paris by **Christoph Martin Frommen**. For those who love to hear an organ in its natural setting and **Vierne** with extraordinary registrations of beauty, this is the album to buy (a limited-edition reissue for **Roth's** 80th birthday). For some reason, **Roth** never finished this complete set, the 3rd volume of which was finally recorded in 2010 and 2014 by **Stephen Tharp**.

* * *

SO ROMANTIC!

**CYRILLE DUBOIS (TENOR), ORCHESTRE NATIONAL DE LILLE,
PIERRE DUMOUSAUD.**

French opera arias 1830-1900

Alpha, 924

Performance: *****

Technique: ****

This CD is the tenor equivalent of the soprano *CD Bijoux perdus* by **Jodie Devos**, released in 2022 by **Alpha**. It was similarly conceived on the basis of musicological research by the **Palazzetto Bru Zane** and aims to bring to light forgotten arias from French romantic operas. The only really known aria is from **Donizetti's La fille du régiment**. As for the rest, there are some *very, very, very* forgotten arias, such as *Viens ô mélodie* from *L'élève de Presbourg* by **Charles Luce-Varlet** and *Gibby la cornemuse* by **Louis Clapisson**. The bulk of the programme consists of excerpts from operas by **Halévy, Thomas, Dubois, Auber, Gounod** and **Bizet** which were the heyday of the *Opéra comique* in Paris. The singer **Cyrille Dubois** evolves in the rather light high tenor register of **Juan Diego Florez** in his debut. He is accompanied by **Pierre Dumoussaoud** with attention, tact and fervour.



RENÉ LAFLAMME OF **NAGRA**, **2XHD** AND **FIDELIO MUSIC**

Interview with a creator

By YVES BÉRUBÉ

It is with great pleasure that I meet **René Laflamme** today and I hope that you will be able to discover some of his secrets about his recordings which need no introduction and are recognised worldwide. I have known **René** for over 25 years when he worked as a consultant at **Filtronique** in Montreal. I was also his partner *in crime* as co-founder of **Fidelio Audio** (now **Fidelio Music**), and it is with great pride that I have been watching his progress and seeing how he continues to accumulate successes over the years.

Let me share with you some of his background and discuss his recent accomplishments over the past few months, including the launch of **Nagra's** new *Reference Anniversary* turntable and the **Nagra 70th Year Anniversary Collection Album**, both of which were launched to mark the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the prestigious Swiss company. They will be on display at the **Salon Audio Montréal Audiofest** for your pleasure. Let's discover this great builder together.

TED: Hello, René,
René: Hello, Yves.

TED: Thank you for welcoming me to your studio for this interview. I know you are very busy and have to travel out of the country a lot. I very much appreciate you generously

taking the time for this meeting for the readers of **TED magazine**.

René: I'm glad to see my friend again! I'm delighted!

TED: To begin with, can you tell me a little bit about your origins, where you come from?





RENÉ LAFLAMME OF NAGRA, 2XHD AND FIDELIO MUSIC



What was your first experience with high fidelity or simply your discovery of the *audiophile* world?

René: I had a quality audio system that I had set up and I had built my own

Dynaudio-style loudspeakers. I owe a lot to my electronics professor **Richard Leblond**, who is well known in the electronics design community in the Quebec City area. He had me *listen* to a system he

had designed himself with 15,000 V radio tube monoblock amplifiers that powered directly some **OTL** electrostatic panels. I was shocked, because it was so much better than the high-fidelity components I knew at that time. I then set myself a goal to achieve, which was to reproduce this sound quality. With his help, I designed tube amplifiers and microphones to achieve the sound I was looking for. I also listened to recordings on a **Nagra IV-S** with headphones: pipe organs, percussion, etc. The analogue sound in these headphones had a much truer presence and texture than any recording device I had had access to before. I then felt an intense need to have a **Nagra** recording device. It was around 1996, and these were the events that marked the beginning of my adventure.

TED: What has been your journey into high fidelity?



René: Once I finished my electronics course and my sound recording course, I worked as a technician in an audio shop in Quebec City where I adjusted vinyl turntables and tube equipment, and then I became a consultant.

I then moved to Montreal to continue my work as a technician and consultant. A year or two later, I met my future partner, the co-founder of **Fidelio Audio**. I now had access to projects that allowed me to make and produce the recordings I wanted to make.

Editor's note: I think this story should be shared with the readers of **TED magazine**. I hope it will be published in these pages one day, because I myself am surprised at the influence I have had in this adventure. And what an adventure it has been! To be continued...

TED: Did you plan all the steps you have taken in your career or did the opportunities come at the right time?

René: I knew what I wanted, but I wasn't sure how to get there. After my sound engineering courses, I worked in a few studios, but I wasn't satisfied with the result. I wanted to make recordings like taking a quality photo with the most accurate image possible.

TED: I know that you have excellent knowledge in electronics, sound engineering and that you are also a musician. What skills or qualities make the difference for you or is it the mix of these skills that allows you to bring out the magic in your projects?

René: My work as a consultant at **Filtronique** has allowed me to develop a critical mind, thanks to sound recording tests and microphone tests during demonstrations for clients, at audio shows and in the production of the official discs for the **Montreal Show**. I now use this knowledge without really thinking about it. It's natural for me to use a particular

expertise to achieve my goal of improving the sound quality of my recordings or the audio systems I install.

I always ask myself about the relationship between electronics and the challenges I face, it is often 50 % of the solution in the problems I encounter. For example, it is important to know how the impedance of microphones and preamplifiers affects the sound of the instruments and what solutions are available to adjust them.

I always aim to reproduce the shortest path for the signal, while adjusting the sound quality to achieve the desired result. As an example, in the recordings I make, following the session, the analogue signal is sent from the **Nagra 7** playback head that I have modified. This analogue signal is sent directly into point-to-point tube circuits via silver cables. If the sound needs to be processed, with an equalizer and/or a compressor, it is all done in analogue and with tubes. The same goes for the reverb and, if necessary, there is the



RENÉ LAFLAMME OF NAGRA, 2XHD AND FIDELIO MUSIC

flat EMT. Listening is always very important at each stage and allows me to anticipate the final result.

TED: Tell me a little bit about your projects at **Fidelio Music** and **2xHD**?

René: I use several **Neumann, AKG** and **OTL** tube microphones that I have developed and that I choose according to the needs and characteristics of the projects, the instruments, the room, the number of musicians, etc. I met with **André Perry** to try to push the production of quality music further. **Fidelio Music** used to produce several 24-96 recordings on USB sticks before downloading was popular. I worked a lot with **Michel Bérard** on the production of these recordings at that time.

After a week of discussions with **André**, we had a plan to approach production companies to produce more recordings available for download by obtaining rights to jazz productions. In the beginning we had several classical recordings with the **Naxos** label in particular, but the classical

market is less active, the arrival of the jazz labels has allowed us to produce recordings with recognised musicians and reach a wider audience.

A few years later we managed to attract major artists of the 1960s such as **Bill Evans, Shirley Horn** and the *Jazz at the Pawnshop* album and obtain the rights to release tracks in analogue form.

TED: How did your time at **Nagra** come about and what is your role in this prestigious organisation?

René: I was selling the **PLP** and tube **VPAs** when I was a consultant, and **Mathieu Latour** from **Nagra** came to visit us at one point and we had a very good communication. He also does sound recording and recordings. We had some nice discussions. Two years later, he asked me to meet him in Switzerland to present my recordings on a **Nagra** system at the Munich show. The presentation went so well that he decided to work with me. I am now a **Nagra** brand ambassador and North American marketing and sales manager.

Nagra is the direct distributor of its own products for this region of the world, which is unique for the company. Sales and financial performance are on track. It is a partnership that works very well.

TED: What is your involvement in the development of the new **Nagra** turntable?

René: We started the project a few years ago with a very small team to develop the basic concept. We saw several problems with the turntables and tone arms available at the time. On the market today, we see many turntables that are light and without any insulation. If you want to make a high-performance turntable, it has to have a heavy base and excellent suspension. We wanted to go in new directions with the goal of creating the best turntable on the market.

My involvement was more particularly on the listening front, I listened to several versions of prototypes. I had a turntable in Montreal, connected to my system in my studio. I tried out the different components and, at the beginning, the results



were not at all up to scratch, even without taking into account the breaking-in of the parts. We did several iterations. I worked with **André Thériault** on the development of this turntable. In a few seconds, I can detect a problem, because I know my recordings well. There are a lot of details that can make the sound quality fall like a house of cards on the technical performance of a particular piece.

We decided to develop a cartridge about a year and a half ago in order to achieve the expected result. It's been a long journey to get to a satisfactory result.

Nagra has access to materials with surprising results. It is important for **Nagra** that the products work both technically and sonically. We also tried different cables. If I have never heard a similar sound from my equipment, this is certainly not the right cable to use! I know very well the sound I have to reproduce in my studio. I know I need to hear the 2^e harmonic, but not the 3rd harmonic which produces a harsh dryness in the sound.

TED: Tell me about your recent project of the 70th vinyl record of Nagra?

René: I've done some vinyl albums in the past after doing exclusively digital recordings for a few years because the vinyl market was a bit quieter. With the resurgence of vinyl and magnetic tapes, I decided to offer analog recordings.

Each vinyl project allowed me to experiment with the recording process. For example, the choice of speed, 33 or 45 rpm, the choice of components for microphone amplification, the choice of record pressing company and the *cutting* system. In addition, the 45 rpm allowed me to discover a higher volume on the music and a reduction of the background noise. The result is so satisfying that we will soon release new versions

45s from several albums on the **2xHD** label.

Those who loved those 33 rpm recordings will be delighted by the spectacular results. All this experience was used as a basis for the production of the album



70th anniversary of **Nagra**. I had access to a limited sample of studio recordings (*masters*) in order to make this compilation and we wanted to offer a journey spanning 70 years to be in line with the anniversary concept of the album.

According to **Nagra**, *the music comes first*, but it was important to me that the sound was up to my expectations. Each of the pieces chosen required work to ensure that the dynamics and volumes were uniform, considering that the recording conditions were different from one recording to another.

TED: Without giving away your secret recipe, what sonic characteristics do you look for in your recordings?

René: What attaches us to music is the emotions, and it's quite rare that this happens depending on the musicians being recorded. Besides, we are so used to hearing 3rd harmonics in most recordings, that people think I make good recordings just because there are no 3rd harmonics. I always make a choice of microphones and components according to the music, in order to provide emotions. We have better equipment, better pressings, etc., but the goal is to get the artists to *perform in your sound room*.

TED: Indirectly, you have won several *Best Sound of the Show*, what is your approach

to get a good sound, in often terrible conditions?

René: What makes it much easier is that I use my own recordings. I know how the musicians *sounded*, how we worked in the different stages of production and I know how it should *sound* in the best conditions.

If I'm not close to the result I have in my head, we have a problem. I won't be satisfied until I hear the right deal. The position of the loudspeakers often accounts for 80 % of the result, because you can't change the acoustics of the rooms. For the *Munich Show*, we had trucks with acoustic diffusers (quadratic and absorbing). I spend a lot of time on the positioning of the diffusers, the loudspeakers, a few inches often make a big difference. I also play with the front and rear angles of the loudspeakers. I work a lot on this aspect by playing with the phase of the *crossover* in order to have a better propagation of the music in the room.

I'm looking for a way to make the sound match the number of people in the room. In Munich, we had about 100 people in the room. We also use 2-3 brands of cable and mix the brands of cable if necessary, depending on the room. All this is always validated by careful listening.

TED: Tell me a little bit about your taste in music?

RENÉ LAFLAMME OF NAGRA, 2XHD AND FIDELIO MUSIC



René: That's the killer question, I'm constantly working on my projects. I think the artists I work with are amazing. I like many styles of music. I don't listen to much new music, I just go to concerts when my schedule allows it. My son is introducing me to new music. I like the mix of music styles, it's fascinating, you can go from *country* to techno in the same *song*. I really like the music of black musicians in general, I don't know why, but I really like it. They are phenomenally talented.

TED: How do you see the future of audio? The place of analog, the development of digital? Where will the innovation point to?

René: Analog is still superior to digital and the improvement has to come from the recording studios using better quality equipment. I use **DSD, DXD**, to maintain the highest quality of recordings, with *DA* converters. Tube *AD* converters developed with today's knowledge could allow us to have digital recordings of higher quality than analog recordings. The focus is elsewhere. The profitability of music means that the choice of components and technologies is made in components that give lesser results.

TED: Thank you **René** for your generosity! You are still very young and I am sure we will have the chance to see more of your work.

René: I'm really pleased, thank you!

Conclusion

There are few people in the audio field who leave a significant mark, and although he is still very young, **René Laflamme** is one of those people who have innovated in the *audiophile* field to offer us exceptional recordings and products of the highest quality. Whenever I talk to people in the know about **René**, his work is praised. It is clear that his work has attracted attention wherever he has gone. While most people will take advantage of opportunities in their career to move forward, **René Laflamme** has charted his course ahead and the opportunities have come at the right time. It was a real pleasure to meet **René** again and an equal pleasure to share with you some thoughts on the development of the few projects he has completed over the years.

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A New Day is dawning at Naim

By JEAN-DENIS DOYLE



Here it is, the *New Classic* series from **Naim**. The manufacturer is therefore making a big splash with three new devices, being the first three within the new classic series. There are many new features under the bonnet and a new look, saying goodbye to the unmistakable green colour, long associated with the brand's image. These three new products represent a major change within the classic **Naim** series. The new series starts with an *all-in-one* preamplifier, the **Naim NSC 222** which manages

We have been waiting for a long time for this new series. There were already rumours of a revamp of the classic **Naim** series. Several of the devices in this series have been in the **Naim** catalogue for many years. However, as the British manufacturer from Salisbury is not the type to change its models every year, it was necessary to be patient. A long wait, which has now been rewarded with the arrival of these three new products. It must be said that the classic series was due for a good overhaul, not to say a good tidying up. Some of the models were a bit redundant and some of their features were from another era. The needs of music lovers have since changed and their listening habits have evolved towards other technologies. So a major change was needed. These three new devices are the first of these. Other models will follow in the *New Classic* series. However, it is still unclear which models of the former *Classic* and *XS* series will be redesigned and which will disappear. In terms of circuitry, the *New Classic* series borrows technologies, which were originally developed for the *Statement* from **Naim**. In addition, the new series of devices uses the control interface of the *Uniti* series, having proven itself in terms of user-friendliness and modernity. In terms of aesthetics, I can already hear the cries of the most hardened *Naimists*. Reading the comments on social networks, the choice to abandon the colour green has not been received well. Having had the devices in my possession, I can assure you that the new *look* is absolutely superb, with a white backlight. It even reminds me a bit of the very first **Naim**' *chrome bumper* series. So, we have before us a new series of devices, which in principle inherits the audio qualities of the classic series, benefits from the research and development carried out on the *Statement* and adopts the design and functionality of the *Uniti* series. In short, it promises a lot! First, let's dive into a technical exploration.

the music signal and provides networked file playback. To optimise its performance, it is accompanied by an optional power supply, the **Naim NPX 300**. Then the new version of the classic **Naim NAP 250** amplifier completes the set perfectly. These devices come with several technical innovations and a resolutely modern sound. This is one of the very first test benches on these new products. It will give you a good idea of the changes made and what these devices have to offer.

Technical overview

The **Naim NSC 222** preamplifier and network player

The **Naim NSC 222** is a preamplifier with a phono stage, a line stage that controls gain and inputs, a digital to analogue converter and a network player. The preamplifier has two analogue line inputs and one input for a *moving magnet* turntable. The preamplifier is equipped with two outputs, one on *RCA* socket and the other on *XLR* socket in balanced format. The big novelty for a **Naim** preamplifier is the extraordinary volume control that the *NSC 222* is equipped with. This is directly inherited from the *NAC S1 Statement* by **Naim**. It is in fact a network of sealed relays, of very high quality, coupled to a scale of fixed resistors. This type of volume control is extremely expensive to implement and is mounted on a board, taking up almost a quarter of the **Naim NSC 222**. It allows a volume adjustment without any loss, without any noise, with perfect precision, regardless of the level selected. In fact, the device would probably be worth its retail price just for this volume control! It is to be hoped that it will be found in a possible new all-analogue preamplifier. The **Naim NSC 222** also has an excellent phono input. This is designed for moving magnet cells and is very similar to the one already present in the new *Naim* amplifiers by **Naim**. This is great news, as this phono section is not just a convenience. It is very efficient and very quiet. The so-called *digital* section of the **Naim NSC 222** is based on, if not identical to, that seen in the *Uniti* series. The networked playback platform is essentially the same, as is the digital-to-analogue conversion stage. This is still based on a **Texas Instrument PCM 1791A** chip. Basically, why change a formula that sounds good and has already proven itself? The **Naim NSC 222** is equipped with four digital inputs to the usual standards and two *USB ports*, including a very practical one, located on the front of the device. All of this is operated by a very good quality two-way remote control. The unit can also be controlled by

NAIM NSC 222 PREAMPLIFICATEUR AND NETWORK PLAYER,
NAIM NPX 300 POWER SUPPLY AND **NAIM NAP 250** POWER AMPLIFIER



the **Naim-Focal** application for certain functions, such as volume and the input selection. The application also allows for adjustments and customisation of settings, as only an ultra-modern device like the **Naim NSC 222** can provide. Finally, the **Naim NSC 222** can be seriously upgraded, by the optional addition of an external power supply, the **Naim NPX 300**.

This optional power supply is entirely dedicated to the **Naim NSC 222** preamplifier and has no effect on the **Naim NAP 250** power amplifier. It can also work with other **Naim** devices such as the former **NAC-N272** and **NDX-2**. Its role is to completely free the **Naim NSC 222** from its internal power supply, thus ensuring several beneficial effects. When the **Naim NPX 300** is plugged in, the **Naim NSC 222**'s internal transformer remains off and it is no longer necessary to connect the power cable. Since the **Naim NSC 222** power transformer is inactive, it cannot vibrate, radiate or pollute the sensitive circuits of the **Naim NSC 222**. To do its job well, the **Naim NPX 300** power supply has a huge toroidal transformer and six discrete regulators. These ensure a clean and smooth flow of electricity. This allows the various circuits of the **Naim NSC 222** to operate optimally. To get the right electrical signal to the right circuit, the connection is made using two huge umbilical cables with multiple plugs. The chassis of the **Naim NPX 300** is identical to the other two devices of the **200** series, with the same quality of aluminium and finish.

The Naim NAP 250 power amplifier.

This is an update to the ultra classic and proven **Naim NAP 250DR**. This amplifier delivers a good 100 watts per channel, in class **AB**. It has been in the **Naim** catalogue since the 1970. When it was integrated into the *New Classic* series, **Naim**'s engineers took the opportunity to give it a good update. Of course, the huge toroidal transformer is still there, characterising this device and its sound signature. It is identical to the one used in the previous version. Both amplifier circuit boards have been refreshed, with new regulators and a new component layout. The big change is the incorporation of new **Naim** proprietary output transistors, from its *Statement* series. These, called **NA009**, are now cooled on ceramic heatsinks, which are in turn cooled by a tunnel-shaped metal heatsink. This tunnel ends in a micro-fan to accelerate heat removal when required. Many long-time **Naim NAP 250** enthusiasts screamed *sacrilège* when they saw a fan on the new **Naim NAP 250**. I want to reassure you right away. At no time, even after pushing the amplifier for several hours, did I feel any air escaping from the little fan or hear any noise. I really have the impression that this ventilation system has only been installed for extreme situations and that the vast majority of the time it will not even work. The **Naim NAP 250 New Classic** version is now equipped with two **XLR** sockets, which will only make people happy this time! Like the other devices in the *New Classic* series, the **Naim NAP 250** is now equipped with a standby circuit and a power switch that is (finally...) located on the front.

Unpacking and setting up

Unpacking and setting up three such ambitious devices requires patience and a good minimum of knowledge. This is a case where it would be better to have it done by your retailer. The connections of the *NPX 300* power supply are far from obvious to a novice, especially the connection of the large power umbilical cables. If you feel confident doing the installation yourself, take it step by step, making sure you read the instructions thoroughly. The first thing to do will be to install the **Naim-Focal** app on one or more of your *Android* or *iOS* devices. You will then need to inform the application of your passwords for the various online music platforms. The **Naim NSC 222** comes with a fairly advanced remote control, which performs all the functions of the device perfectly. You can operate the *NSC 222* from the controls on the front panel, the remote control or

the app. Beware of the volume control included in the application, which is done from a scroll bar that looks very much like the scroll bar of a song. It's just a terrible as an ergonomic mistake! Fortunately, in the app settings, you can change it to virtual 'plus and minus' buttons. Do it as soon as possible. The same applies to the volume control on the device. The illuminated endless wheel does not display the volume position. This one is just waiting for a child to come and play with it and turn it to the maximum... In the settings, be sure to limit the maximum volume to 50 – 60%, to prevent damage to your speakers. On the home automation side, the devices of the *New Classic* series are now equipped with sockets for small communication cables, which make it possible to switch all the devices on / off or hold all at the same time. In conclusion, these **Naim** devices need, in order to properly

express all their musicality, an anti-vibration audio cabinet, solid, high quality.

Listening impressions

A whole new musical light

I set about *listening* to this new series of **Naim** equipment, setting aside as much as possible, any preconceived ideas about the famous **Naim** sound signature. For this first listening, I didn't try to isolate the devices from each other. Instead, I approached the listening as a whole. I was in for quite a surprise. These new **Naim** devices clearly offer a sound that has been considerably modernised and improved. The *New Classic* series from **Naim**, will become part of today's high-end landscape. Any comparison with the sound of the old *olive* and *classic* series would be completely futile. While there are many features of the **Naim** sound, the overall sound quality is now on a different level and this, in



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NAIM NSC 222 PREAMPLIFICATEUR AND NETWORK PLAYER,
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«[...] when listening to the album *Le concert des nations*, masterfully conducted by **Jordi Savall**. The music opens up before me with magnificent precision and three-dimensionality. Have you ever dreamed of *hearing Naim* devices produce an amazing stereo image? With this *New Classic* series, it's done! The depth of the soundstage is very realistic and even allows a certain notion of height to be perceived. »

all respects. This is immediately obvious when listening to the album *Le concert des nations*, masterfully conducted by **Jordi Savall**. The music opens up before me with magnificent precision and three-dimensionality. Have you ever dreamed of *hearing Naim* devices produce an amazing stereo image? With this *New Classic* series, it's done! The depth of the soundstage is very realistic and even allows a certain notion of height to be perceived. To achieve this kind of result, the equipment must be able to extract all the necessary micro-details from the recording. These new **Naim** devices reproduce music that is packed with little details. The music is rendered with just the right amount of *timing*, which allows you to relax, since the brain doesn't have to work too hard to imagine them. So, on first listen, we can definitely say that this new **Naim** series provides a modern, detailed, coherent listening experience with beautiful timbres.

Naim NPX 300 power supply added

Of course, I enjoyed listening to the **Naim NSC 222**, with and without the addition of

the **NPX 300** power supply. On its own, the **NSC 222** preamplifier and network player remains an exceptional device, capable of delivering excellent music quality. It has his own personality, is very transparent and the listening has a lot of body. As such, the **Naim NSC 222** represents a considerable improvement, when compared to the **NAC-N272** model it replaces. At the time, I even wondered if I wouldn't prefer it without the **NPX 300** power supply. My opinion quickly changed, from the moment I reconnected the **Naim NPX 300** power supply. Once the **Naim NPX 300** power supply is back, the **Naim NSC 222** gets quite a boost! Its ability to render the dynamics of the music now seems tenfold. The attacks, the deviations in volume, present in the recording of the piece *Jazz Variant*, taken from the album *La Bamba* by the collective **O-Zone Percussion Group**, take on a whole new dimension. Looking for dynamics? Hold on tight! Boosted by the **NPX 300** power supply, the **Naim NSC 222** literally blows up the music. Even with very small differences in

dynamics, these become more obvious. This greatly enhances the listening experience, making it more active and alive. In terms of noise, listening is quieter too. The listening atmosphere is calmer, the music seems to have more time to play and comes from a completely silent background. This **Naim NPX 300** power supply is a nice addition and is a substantial improvement. It enhances a device, which at first, is already really good.

The NAP 250 New Classic amplifier, literally a monument

Of these three new devices, it is definitely the **Naim New Classic NAP 250** that was my favourite. I have to admit, I have always loved **Naim's 250**. This amplifier model has always known how to touch me, with its incredible base in the bass, its unalterable sense of rhythm and its solidity. This set of qualities, which makes the personality of the **NAP 250**, is still present and nothing has been lost in this new version. From now on, with the *New Classic* version, it will be necessary to add undeniable qualities, such as a new ability to recreate



a grandiose sound image, both in depth and in width. Add to this a much more refined tonal rendering, as well as better compatibility with other manufacturers' equipments. You are looking at a product that is a winner in every respect. Lovers of deep, beautiful bass will get their money's worth. **Alva Noto's** *Subterraneans* track, a *techno-drone* revival of a **David Bowie** classic, really makes it possible to appreciate the power and control qualities of the **Naim NAP 250**. The amount of quality bass that this amplifier is capable of delivering is simply mind-blowing. With small monitor-sized loudspeakers, it even feels like you've added a subwoofer! With big loudspeakers capable of going deep into the low frequencies, it's a really bliss. What an amplifier this **Naim NAP 250** is! One day I'll own one.

Nice extras very much appreciated

The **Naim NSC 222** is equipped with a very respectable phono stage and a high class headphone amplifier. The phono stage is very quiet, has a lot of gain and will work perfectly well with a very good quality moving magnet cartridge. I was able to do some excellent listening with a **Goldring 1042** cartridge. This phono stage has a very warm tone and a lot of resolution. It will probably please anyone who wants to get quality vinyl listening, without having to invest thousands of dollars in a phono stage. The headphone amplifier in the **Naim NSC 222** is derived from the one in the **Naim Uniti Atom Headphone Edition**. It is truly excellent. It's powerful, extremely quiet and will get the best out of most headphones on the market. With my **Grado Hemp** headphones on, I could enjoy a wonderful listening experience. Unless you have very high-end headphones, the vast majority of audiophiles will certainly find what they are looking for.

Conclusion

This new series of **Naim** devices is really a great success. It is never easy for a brand like **Naim**, with an ultra-loyal and also

dedicated clientele, to make changes of such magnitude. I'm sure that fans of the iconic brand will fall in love with the *New Classic* series when they see and hear it. The listening experience has improved considerably with these three new devices. Their high level of performance will now be better matched with products from other brands. The best part is that the complete overhaul of the **Naim** product ranges is probably just beginning. This should lead to several other interesting products, which will complement these, for more specific needs. A new day has dawned at **Naim** and it looks like a sunny one. It's up to you to *listen* to it out in this new light.

GENERAL INFORMATION

NAIM NSC 222 Preamplifier and network player

Price: \$11,999

Warranty: 2 years - mechanics, 5 years – electronics. The warranty covers all costs of the parts, labour and delivery

NAIM NPX 300 Power Supply

Price: \$11,999

Warranty: 2 years - mechanics, 5 years – electronics. The warranty covers all costs of the parts, labour and delivery

NAIM NAP 250 Power Amplifier

Price: \$11,999

Warranty: 2 years - mechanics, 5 years – electronics. The warranty covers all costs of the parts, labour and delivery

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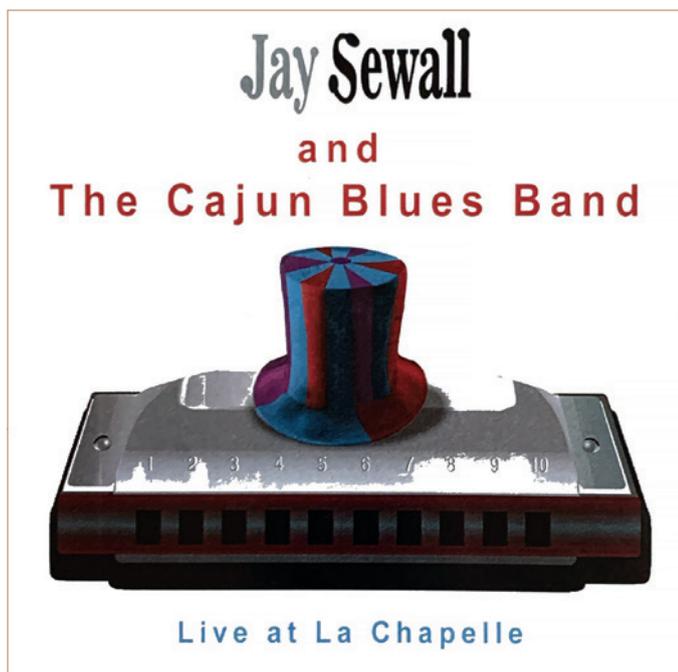
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Alva Noto, Subterraneans, Tidal file.

Blues

By PIERRE JOBIN



JAY SEWALL AND THE CAJUN BLUES BAND

Live at La Chapelle

Mack Records, 2023

Jay Sewall and The Cajun Blues Band, *Live at La Chapelle* is the ninth CD of this bluesman's experiences and travels to the land of blues, traditional music and Cajun. As he says himself, this communicative musician wanted an album to celebrate his 80th birthday. He was fortunate to find these recordings of eleven songs performed at **La Chapelle** in Québec in 2005 with one of the two versions of his **Cajun Blues Band**. This version includes **Marek Bourgeois**, violin, percussion, vocals, **Paul Hinton**, guitar, percussion, vocals, **Barry Nameth**, drums, washboard, vocals, **Serge Boutin**, bass and himself on harmonica, guitar and vocals. **Jay Sewall** is a gumbo of various musical cultures from different parts of the world, anthology pieces and personal compositions about his moods, his wanderings and his encounters. In this he is unique, a true lover of the creative and festive side of music! The album supported by an active participation of the public covers a wide range, from *Paper In My Shoes*, a 1954 hit by **Boozoo Chavis**, pioneer of Zydeco to *Zydeco Blues*, an original composition, through *Jambalaya*, a big hit by **Hank Williams** and *Cajun Waltz*, a magnificent instrumental of the catchy fiddler **Marek Bourgeois!**... **Sewall's** lyrics, which draw inspiration from his encounters, reflections and travels, tell us about *Pops*, a friend from New

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Orleans with experiences of a time of wilderness and simplicity, *Be Bop Beluga*, the surviving whale, the atypical *Indian City*, relating to an exotic trip to India, the charms of St-Pierre-et-Miquelon and New Orleans... The performance of Mr. **Jay** on harmonica are always a source of dynamism and renewed subtleties! **Jay Sewall and The Cajun Blues Band**, *Live at La Chapelle* represents a musical blend of the old and the modern, of rooted local stories that express the universal, and of diverse music infused with heartfelt and dynamic harmonica that thrills and invites you to *let the good times roll!*



JEWELL BROWN

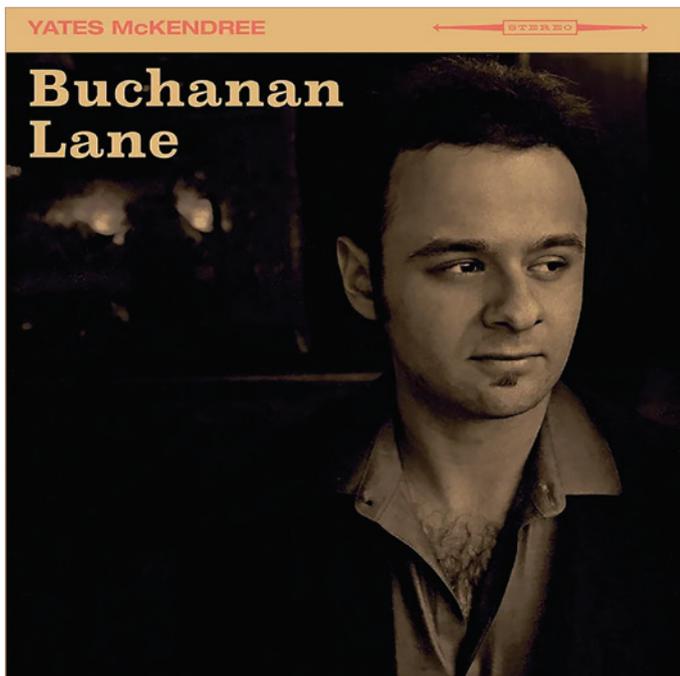
Thanks For Good Ole' Music And Memories

MF22JB010

When I listen to the *soulful* voice and feel the enthusiastic energy of **Jewell Brown**, now in her eighth decade, I can only think that, as a living legend, she has retained the ardour of youth augmented by the riches of experience. **Living Blues** magazine called her the *most jazzy-blues singer on earth*. She started singing in church at a young age. At the age of twelve,

she gave her first show and as a teenager she was already making records. In the 1950s, she worked with singer-songwriter and record producer **Clyde Otis** and in the 1960s, she was a regular on the American jazz club circuit. She is best known for her work with **Louis Armstrong and His All Star Band** from 1961 to 1968. At that time, **Satchmo** was stricken by illness. She then continued her career for a time, mainly as a headliner in Vegas. In 1970, still in demand, she retired from the limelight to care for her elderly parents and to pursue other interests until 2000, when she took a well-deserved retirement. In 2007, she was inducted into the **Smithsonian Blues**; in 2015, she received *Congressional Recognition* for her *Contribution to the Arts*; and in 2020, Houston Mayor **Sylvester Turner** declared December 12th as *Jewel Brown Day*. She says she is particularly happy and proud of the fact that, after having had the opportunity to work with several songwriters in the course of her career, her name

finally appears in the song credits. Seven of the ten tracks in this new project are by **Nic Allen** and **Jewel Brown**. It's **Allen** who produces and arranges the music and in the same vein of complicity, the production is by **Brown** and **Allen**. The ten jazz and blues selections revisit important moments in her career and showcase her colourful professional experience as well as her talents as a seasoned performer. Jazz, Latin, Blues, *Soul* and *R&B* provide a rich and well mastered musical palette that serves her wide range of interpretations that visit a whole range of emotions well. In addition to being backed by a strong jazz band, her music features *call and response* and meaningful interpretations with male choirs where her vocals and personality shine through. If you are curious about eclectic popular music with varied themes, styles and arrangements that draws on the roots of American music and updates its rich heritage, **Jewel Brown** is back, more alive, relevant and inhabited than ever!



YATES MCKENDREE

Buchanan Lane

Qualified Records

For souls nobly born valour doesn't await the passing of years, this quote from *Cid* by **Corneille** summarises the first words that come to mind when the name **Yates McKendree**, the 21-year old multi-instrumentalist and already a *Grammy Award* winner is mentioned. Born in Nashville, he was raised in the **Rock House Studio** environment operated by his father **Kevin McKendree**, a director and pianist who won multiple awards and recognitions. From the age of three, the young **Yates** taught himself music and gradually developed mastery of the guitar, bass, drums and piano. During his high school years, with more than ten years of professional experience, he had already played and participated in the making of several recordings for, among others, the renowned **Delbert McClinton** and **John Hiatt**. The latter said *Yates was our secret ingredient*. At twenty-one years old, *Buchanan Lane* is his first album. Well surrounded, with the flair of a veteran, a love and a visceral commitment to the blues tradition, he offers original songs he co-wrote with **Gary Nicholson**, two instrumentals of his composition, as well as covers of **B.B. King**, **Earl King**, **T-Bone Walker**, **Eddie Guitar Slim Jones** and **Tampa Red**, while expanding on the New Orleans piano style of **Dr John**. **Yates McKendree** plays, sings, breathes and exhales the Blues with *feeling like ringing a bell!* Above all, don't take my word for it, if you like the blues, the *feel* of the blues, the *real* blues, **Yates McKendree** is the real deal!

AUDIOLAB 9000A INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER, **AUDIOLAB 9000CDT** CD TRANSPORT
AND **AUDIOLAB BLOCK 6** POWER OPTIMIZATION DEVICE WITH **MISSION 700** LOUDSPEAKERS

Excellent sound stage focus and instruments separation!

By ROGER McCUAIG

The **Audiolab 9000A** amplifier and **9000CDT** transport that I have received are totally new, arriving in Canada just last fall. **Audiolab** enjoys a solid reputation for performance and functionality at an affordable price. The **9000** series, which they are describing as their *new flagship range* with the *best integrated amplifier they have ever made*, signals a desire to add components to their lineup that appeal to a more high-end / audiophile segment of the market. Given the fine reputation of their **6000** and **8000** series products, that's certainly something to look forward to!

The **Mission 700** speaker is also a new product. That may sound strange to many readers as the original **700** model was launched in the early 1980s; however, this is a complete remake of the famous originals that only shares the name, the aesthetics, and possibly some of the original's characteristic sound. I have also received the **Audiolab DC Block 6** which is designed to improve the

quality of the AC power delivered to your system. This is my first opportunity for in-depth evaluation of **Audiolab** and **Mission** products and what better way to start than with a full system completely composed of newly released components.

Audiolab, founded in England in the early 1980s, created products that combine simplicity, functionality and affordability. This turned out to be a recipe for success as their **8000** series amplifiers, which has been through several iterations since its initial launch in 1983, is still popular 40 years later. The more recent **6000** series amplifier has also received very high praise. **Audiolab** could have launched the **9000** series with just one product to test the water, but instead they designed two new components, an integrated amplifier and a CD transport.

The **9000A** integrated amplifier follows a trend towards multifunction products that incorporate both analog and digital inputs. Well, in fact, at this time, it may be more appropriate to call this the new normal. The more high-end products tend to leave out the *Wifi* and **Audiolab** has also taken that approach. This helps to keep the price down as well as leaving room for a Network Streamer that **Audiolab**



intends to launch in 2023. The *separate streamer* strategy has also been adopted by other manufacturers in this market segment. They have also left out *HDMI* ports, which tells us that they want this unit to be perceived as an audiophile component vs. home entertainment systems applications.

Similarly, the *9000CDT* transport is a new design that reaches for a higher level of quality in every aspect of the unit. The **Audiolab DC Block** is the first of this type of product offered by **Audiolab**. The message they are implying is that a *flagship* series of audio components requires a more careful attention to every aspect of design, including the power supply. Anyone who has been actively interested audio gear over the past four decades has surely seen the **Mission** logo. Here is another English company, founded in 1979, that has produced award-winning loudspeaker models over the years. The original **Mission 700** and **770** loudspeakers were very popular, some would say *famous*, and widely sold. The design evolved over time



and eventually the name was lost in the process. The **700** and **770** model names are now back. The **Mission 700** is a scaled down version of the **770** that incorporates the aesthetic and as much of the **770** design as possible while offering something for the more budget conscious buyer. The **700** has a smaller box, a smaller bass / mid driver unit, and about 1/3rd the price tag. It also features the renaissance of what **Mission** calls the *Inverted Driver Geometry*, with the tweeter placed below

the mid / bass driver in order to improve time-alignment.

Technical Description

The **9000A** and **9000CDT** share the same look right down to the screws. My test units are the black version which looks very sharp wrapped around the black display that takes up about 1/3rd of the front plate of each unit. The all-black design has a very well executed satin finish with precise fitting at all joints. In keeping





with their traditional styling idiom, **Audiolab** has opted for a minimalist presentation that eliminates all pushbuttons except for the *On/Off* and the tray *Open/Close* on the *CD* unit. Buttons are becoming the look of the 1970s! The power buttons and the above-mentioned screws almost disappear in the deep black finish. The difference between the two units is, of course, the controls, the amp having three large knobs where the *CD* unit only needs one. The symmetry of the control and display layout on the two units and the larger than necessary control knobs convey an understated elegance. Both units are heavy, not surprising given the very heavy gauge metal used for the boxes however, it is more than just the boxes. The *9000A* power supply features a 320 VA toroidal transformer, 60,000 uF of capacitors, and heatsinks to handle 15 amps per channel. The *CD* unit internals include a heavy frame with the transport being mounted in its own, electromagnetically shielded enclosure with a dedicated power supply.

The *9000CDT* also incorporates a data buffer to reduce disc reading failures that can occur with scratched discs. A *USB-A* port on the back of the unit will take a memory stick with up to 65k of files on it; *WMA*, *WAV*, *MP3* or *AAC*. That's something that I have seen before on a *CD* player! Note that it will not accept *FLAC* files and, if you have files in your digital music library that are higher than *CD* quality, you should confirm with your retailer if they will play through this port. The 4.5-inch display is not essential on a *CD* transport and no doubt costs more than the smaller displays that **Audiolab**

uses on the *6000* and *8000* models. The idea, of course, being to match the aesthetic of the *9000A* unit.

The *9000A* integrated amplifier covers pretty much all the bases. There are lots of analog inputs, including a set of *XLR* inputs and an *MM* phono stage, two each of optical and coax *SPDIF* inputs as well as a *USB* input to bring in network music sources. You can also play from any of your *Bluetooth* devices including in *aptX HD* and *LDAC* formats. What else would you put in a *Flagship* integrated amplifier than the *Flagship DAC* chip from **ESS**, the *9038PRO*. The *9000A* will handle up to 24 bit / 192 kHz via the *SPDIF* inputs, 32 bit / 768 kHz and up to *DSD 512* on the *USB* port, and it also handles **MQA** decoding and is **Roon** tested.

You need more power and want to use just the preamp section with a different power amp? No problem there is an output for that. You can also bypass the preamp and just use the 100-Watt power amp. You can even connect an external signal processor such as a room equalizer between the pre and power stage. The class *AB* power amp section can deliver up to 160 Watts into 4 Ohms and boasts a maximum output of up to 15 amps per channel. Enough to drive everything but the most demanding loudspeakers.

There are many menu options available on the *9000A*, far too many to list here. Here is a small sample of what you get. **ESS DAC** chips have some selectable settings however these choices are typically made by the original equipment manufacturer, not the end user. In this case, **Audiolab** has chosen to let the user decide which filter profile they want to





MISSION 700

Sensitivity	86dB
Nominal impedance	8Ω/16Ω
Frequency Response	40Hz - 20kHz
Recommended Amplifier Power	25 - 150 Watts

CE mark and other regulatory information.

AUDIOLAB 9000A INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER, **AUDIOLAB 9000CDT** CD TRANSPORT
AND **AUDIOLAB BLOCK 6** POWER OPTIMIZATION DEVICE WITH **MISSION 700** LOUDSPEAKERS

use. The idea is that these settings can adjust the sound depending on user preference, system characteristics and type of music. A bit too much tinkering for my taste and I just left it set at the factory default which is *Linear Phase/Slow Roll-Off*. The **DPLL (Digital Phase Lock Loop)** can be switched from *Normal* to *Wide*, an option that I personally have never seen offered before! Setting it to *Wide* helps if a digital input is having trouble locking on to a source. One can also set a limit to the volume at startup, which is certainly convenient for those, like me, who own very high efficiency loudspeakers. The sensitivity of all the analog inputs can be set individually in order to get the same volume from each connected device. A real nice detail.

The *DC Block 6*, as the name implies, has 6 power outlets and comes with 6 good quality *IEC* cables to connect your components plus one for the mains power to the unit. It accepts anything from 100 to 240 volts – 50/60 Hz. This device blocks *DC* from getting into your audio system and incorporates filtering to remove *RFI* and *EMI* noise. On the back plate, one finds a power switch, a resettable circuit breaker and a switch to toggle *on/off* the digital line voltage display that appears on a window on the front panel. Having the line voltage displayed to +/- 1 volt resolution is something I think that most people like to have and there are, of course, many products on the market that offer that. The unit has the same width and depth, same colour and finish and the same sturdy



design as the 9000 series units. The power source issues that the DC Block 6 is designed to mitigate certainly do exist and can potentially harm your system's performance. (Especially true for components with low quality or poorly designed power supplies) The question that comes to mind is; *How frequently and how severely do these problems occur in a typical home?* Well, I don't know the answer to that question, and it would probably take several pages just to deal with that subject, but I think that one needs to look at the DC Block 6 as a great insurance policy for your audio system investment, protecting the components and protecting the sound quality.



The **Mission 700** loudspeakers could be described as a smaller/budget version of the previously released 770 model and inherit a lot of technology and the look from their big brother. There is a new, coated micro-fibre, dome treble unit (they don't call it a tweeter!) fitted with a *specially damped* rear chamber for resonance control as well as a model-specific 6.5-inch, polypropylene bass/midrange driver. Both drivers were designed by **Mission**.

Removing the magnet-held cover reveals the white face and the inverted driver setup taken from the original 700 model of 40 years ago. The inverted driver configuration, with the high frequency driver mounted under the bass driver, is said to improve time alignment.

As is the case for the 770, the 700 cabinet is composed of a sandwich construction of different woods bonded with a damping adhesive and is further stiffened with internal bracing. It is important to note that included in the purchase price is a pair of very sturdy and handsome metal stands in a satin black finish similar to the finish on the 9000 series components. The stands are supplied with adjustable, chromed, cone feet with matching floor pads. These stands make a quality statement before the loudspeakers have even played a single note! So, there is a lot going on in the 700; from the sophisticated box design to the custom drivers and crossover, a custom-designed reflex port shape, and quality stands. One cannot help but wonder how all this is possible at \$2,500?

Unpacking and Installation

Unpacking and setup was easy. The most labour involved is in putting together the loudspeaker stands, and that turned out to be quite simple. Everything fit together perfectly as the dimensional accuracy of the parts is excellent. Absolutely no problems aligning the parts and you don't see a single screw when it is all done. By the way, the loudspeaker stands come with a pair of soft, white gloves! Some people may object to receiving the stands in a flat pack and having to do the assembly. Keep in mind that packaging and shipping these stands fully assembled would jack up the price tag! I carefully slid my 200-pound loudspeakers out of the way and setup the **Mission** units about 2,1 metres apart with the front face 0,8 metres away from the front wall and 0,9 metres from the side wall. Originally, they were setup further out, more about that in the *Listening Impressions* section.

The CDT was stacked on top of the 9000A which undoubtedly was the look that **Audiolab** was going for when they designed them. Hookup is simple however a flashlight comes in handy. If you want to stream music from your PC, you need to download and install a driver on it. That only took about 5 minutes and worked perfectly on the first try. The amplifier and the CD unit came with identical black remotes that can operate both units as well as some other **Audiolab** devices. Thus, there are some buttons that are not used depending

AUDIOLAB 9000A INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER, **AUDIOLAB 9000CDT** CD TRANSPORT
AND **AUDIOLAB BLOCK 6** POWER OPTIMIZATION DEVICE WITH **MISSION 700** LOUDSPEAKERS

on which device you own. One can scroll through all the sources with the remote and I found that, from my listening distance, some of the text on the display was little bit small, it was difficult to read what source was selected. The top face of the remotes looks like brushed aluminum, but I believe it to be plastic.

Listening Impression **The System as a whole**

The overall sound of this system is smooth and effortless with every characteristic of the soundstage maximized; width, depth, detail, focus and instrument separation. The bass is tight and precise, and the highs are very clean and natural with minimal sibilance. The loudspeakers tend to disappear completely which is a tribute to the quality of this system. The overall presentation leans towards the smooth, laid-back side as opposed to a forward or up-front sound. This should not be mistaken for a lack of detail or dynamics, not at all the case, it is about atmosphere and the way the music is laid-out in space.

The 9000A Integrated Amplifier

The sources used for most of the 9000A listening tests were either via *USB* from my *PC* or *WiFi* to a high-quality streaming box that was connected to a digital coax input. The music was mostly 16/44.1 and 24/96 *FLAC* files with a few *DSD* files. The 9000A is very good at getting out of the way of the music, sounding uncoloured and inconspicuous and most of all dead quiet. This is the kind of performance that we want and expect from genuine high-end components and the **Audiolab** flagship amplifier brings us there.

I streamed **Nils Lofgren's** *Acoustic Live* album in 16/44.1 *FLAC* format to the *SPDIF*-coax input. Track #3- *Some Must Dream* had an airy and expansive soundstage. The tone of the guitar on track #5- *Keith Don't Go* was beautiful with fat, resonating notes.

My test of the phono stage started with a \$5,000 *MC* cartridge/step-up transformer combo followed by a 25-year-old **Shure M95ED** cartridge. In both cases, the result was impressive with very low noise, lots of detail and, as was the case throughout all my testing, excellent soundstage focus and instrument separation. All together quite a good performance and certainly better than what we typically get from an internal phono stage.

This high performance also extends to the headphone output. I am not a headphone guy, I prefer a full-room experience. I do however have some fairly good headphones and with the 9000A, I found myself wanting to put them on. The sound was addicting! Smooth, rich and dynamic with no edges anywhere. It certainly appears that the 9000A design team decided that the headphone experience needed to be equally as good as the full-room experience.

The 9000CDT Dedicated CD Transport

The 9000CDT delivers a high level of detail but more than that, refined detail. Crescendos, slight variations in volume and the volume level of each instrument and voice at each instant in time are executed beautifully. This was very evident with **Jean Leloup**- *La Vallée des Réputations*, a real joy to listen to on this system. **Leloup's** unique voice was rendered with beautiful tone and loads of nuance and detail. **John Mayall's** *Spinning Coin* had brightness, punch snap and detail, with excellent instrument separation. The 9000CDT is serious high-end sound. Of course, running through the up-sampling **ESS 9038Pro DAC** chip in the 9000A certainly helps maximize its potential.

The *USB* input on the *CDT* was also tested with some *WAV* files and was found to perform quite fine. Conventional wisdom says that *USB* audio is handicapped due to noisy power, and I have experienced that on some occasions in my system. However, in this case, **Audiolab** has done a pretty good job at minimizing that issue.

DC Block 6 Power Optimization Device

I don't have any comments regarding any contribution that the *DC Block 6* is or isn't making to the overall sound of the system. As I stated earlier, I consider products like this to be an insurance policy as opposed to something that will automatically enhance the sound on a continual basis. Nonetheless, I certainly would want to have one in my system, especially as the price is quite reasonable and, for the smaller budget, **Audiolab** also has a smaller unit that does the same thing except it has only 1 outlet.

Mission 700 Loudspeakers

The most intriguing feature of these loudspeakers is the inverted drivers, that is, with the tweeter beneath the mid/bass driver.

Mission says that this improves time alignment as the mid/bass driver is at ear level and the tweeter output must travel slightly farther to reach your ear. The design objective is that better time alignment will result in better focus and enable the 2 driver units to blend seamlessly and therefore enhance the impression that there is a single, point source. This should also improve the ability for the loudspeakers to disappear. **Mission** accomplished! (Well, you had to expect that pun.) The loudspeakers sound balanced, expansive and very focused and they really do disappear.

The **Mission 700** tweeter is outstanding. Very clean and natural, never edgy and seldom any signs of sibilance. Whether it be horns, piano solos or human voices, low or high volume, the tweeters were always smooth and natural. There are a lot of loudspeakers at twice the price that don't have tweeters this smooth and refined.

The **Mission 700** are tight and fast with ample detail and excellent ability to focus. No doubt the very stiff and dense cabinet structure is contributing to this type of performance. (Very stiff, acoustically deadened cabinets are a design trait that one repeatedly finds in high-end loudspeakers.) The bass is tight, clean and precise. They are limited in bass power and low frequency range

however, still certainly respectable for a 165 mm (6 ½ inch) driver in a 24.8-litre box. Setting the loudspeakers at 52 mm from the wall did add some bass power without adding any ill effects.

Playing **Neil Young** - *Harvest Moon* and **Dead Can Dance** - *Anastasis*, the bass went surprisingly low! There was not a lot of power there but certainly more than I expected. Early on in my listening time, I found the overall presentation to be slightly darker than what I am used to however, I should add that my reference loudspeakers, which I have listened to for several years, are a bit on the bright side. After many hours of listening, I feel that the loudspeakers are quite balanced with neither driver hogging the spotlight.

Conclusion

It's a great time to be an audiophile; there are lots of new, innovative products with versatility as the keyword and some of them at quite a reasonable price for the quality and functionality included. **Audiolab** puts a lot of thought and effort into their design and the settings and the functions available are too numerous to mention in this report. There is a clear intent in the **Audiolab 9000** components. They set out to produce a series of *flagship* components that would bring together functionality and high-end sound for an affordable price. They certainly have done that, the *9000* series components impress with the build quality, the modern look, the performance and the price.

The sound of the *9000A* Integrated Amplifier is rich, refined, and effortless. It reminds me of walking into show room where a very expensive system is playing. You can hear the quality. We often use the word *effortless* when describing the sound of high-end equipment. The thing these components have in common is a very low to vanishing noise level that enhances everything about the listening experience.

There are a lot of *CD* players and transports that you could buy for less money than the *9000CDT*, but they won't sound like this! Is it the heavy frame, the shielding, the power supply, the jitter management, the buffer? Probably all of them together. This is a seriously good *CD* transport that needs to be matched with a high-performance *DAC* in order to fully realize its potential.

Anyone who is looking for a versatile / great sounding / compact system needs to have the **Audiolab 9000** components on their short list. Matched with the **Mission 700** loudspeakers, you have a lot of performance for quite a reasonable price. I would even say a bargain price. You can go another step further and go for a larger loudspeaker and the **Audiolab** should easily handle the challenge.

I am still wondering how **Mission** can sell the *700* loudspeakers with all the features they have packed into them for the price they are asking! When it comes to the ability to produce pure, natural, music that doesn't leave an impression that it is coming from an electro-mechanical device, the

Mission 700 easily beats some \$5,000 loudspeakers I have auditioned. The inverted driver design combined with a seamless crossover, results in a loudspeaker that disappears, has impeccable soundstage and never tries to be the star of the show. Maybe not the ideal match for someone who enjoys hard driving, larger than life rock music but perfect for those who just want to hear the music with all its detail and nuance and not hear their system.



GENERAL INFORMATION

Audiolab 9000A Integrated Amplifier

Price: \$3,499

Warranty: 2 years, parts and labour

Audiolab 9000CDT Dedicated CD Transport

Price: \$1,749

Warranty: 1 year, parts and labour

Audiolab DC Block 6 Power Optimization Device

Price: \$649.99

Mission 700 Loudspeakers

Price: \$2,500

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Erikson Home, T: 514.457.6674,

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

Clean bass, elegants and natural

By DAVID SUSILO

Having music and audio video as my hobby since the early 1980's, I know that, at the time, there were only three major subwoofer brands that were prominent. **Miller & Kreisel** if you are in the audio mastering crowd, **JL Audio** if you are part of the custom car audio crowd, and **Velodyne** if you are in the home theatre crowd. Of course, there are more brands than those three but only those three that were my go-to brands. Forty years later, those three brands are still the prominent ones in my book with **Velodyne** entering the *LiDAR* business and earphones nearly a decade ago. In fact, I still have the **Velodyne** earbuds from nearly a decade ago.

So, it was quite a delight when I was assigned to review the new **Velodyne DB12** subwoofer, now that **Velodyne** is owned by a German company as of around 5 years ago. One fun thing of note is that after all this time, only now I realized that *DB* stands for *Deep Blue* instead of Decibel.

Considering that **Velodyne** holds a lot of subwoofer technology patents such as auto calibration, digital accelerometer and more, it is surprising to me that **Velodyne** is playing it safe by not employing those exclusive patents. It's not servo-controlled, it's not remote-controlled, it has no adjustable equalisation and rather than use an Energy-Recovery Class *D* amplifier, it has a conventional linear Class *A/B* amplifier

inside it. And although it's not large, it does have a rather ample volume of more than 28-litres.

The only **Velodyne's** unique technology the new *DB-12* does have inside it is **Velodyne's** famous double-vented high-excursion bass driver with its four-layer voice-coil and dual ferrite magnet and it is a good thing. As its model number suggests, the bass driver has a nominal diameter of 12 inches, which makes it the second-largest bass driver in the *Deep Blue* series – the other models being the *DB-8*, *DB-10* and *DB-15*.

Its outside look

The *DB-12* introduces a new but typical industrial design for **Velodyne**, which sees the bass driver recessed into the front baffle and covered by a circular cloth grille that is also recessed into the baffle sitting flush with it, which makes for an industrial yet elegant look. The only drawback about the look is the cloth tab protruding like a cute tongue sticking out of the flush surface of the sub.

On the back of the *DB-12* is the 200 x 230 mm plate amp that doubles as the heat-sink for the 350 W Class *A/B* amplifier and nothing else. No port, no passive radiator, which makes this unit of sealed enclosure design... which I prefer in a subwoofer. Why? All things being equal, especially when *DSP* is not employed such as in this subwoofer, the frequency response of a subwoofer with a sealed enclosure will be flatter across the range with an audibly (and measurably) superior and smoother roll-off below that band-pass than that of a bass-reflex enclosure, or even one that uses passive radiator. That response will also exhibit less phase shift, lower group delay and reduced ringing. All the technical mumbo jumbo aside, it simply makes it more pleasing to the ears for long-period listening of music. Just believe me. Over the years, I have tried subwoofers of various brands in all kinds of subwoofer technologies (all at the same price levels) and I always go back to preferring a sealed enclosure over



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VELODYNE DEEP BLUE DB-12 SUBWOOFER



« Lower tones indeed suggest a much larger room. Textures in the bass, for example from the classic albums *Thriller* by **Michael Jackson**, original soundtrack of *The Greatest Showman* or *Ram it Down* by **Judas Pries** – which I probably know better than any other albums – can be followed very clearly and cleanly by the *DB-12*. »

everything else. And for music listening, sealed enclosure also provides a much more musical response over any other enclosure systems too.

On the physical side, sealed cabinet subwoofers are more forgiving of poor room placement, can be placed optimally in more positions in a room which is preferable for me as a home theatre consultant of 25 years where in nearly 100% of the case the clients (regardless where in the world they live) prefer clean look over perfectly ideal subwoofer placement in their home theatres.

Connectivity wise

As for connection, I used the *Subwoofer/LFE* input that is intended to be used in conjunction with an amplifier or an A/V receiver (or pre-pro) that has an *LFE* output. Such an output should have a filter to ensure that it will only deliver low frequencies to the *DB-12*.

Set-up

With proper setup and calibration using my **DSPeaker Antimode 8033S** unit, the *DB-12* output blends seamlessly with loudspeakers so it sounds like the bass is coming from each individual loudspeaker and not from any specific point in space. The subwoofer doesn't call attention to itself, but rather lets you hear and feel sounds naturally and make the listening experience more thrilling and immersive. Of course, subwoofer calibration and tuning are important steps to ensure your listening experience sounds its absolute best. The process is slightly different depending on whether you're setting up a multi-channel Home Theatre or a two-channel stereo system, but the **Velodyne DB-12**, after proper setup and calibration can do both without any bias toward either Home Theatre or two channel listening. That is some uncommon performance from subwoofers that are not top notch in design and execution. The **Velodyne DB-12**



truly shows off its prowess in design and execution as it is not only an all rounder but it masters both applications. In most of the subwoofers I have seen that have a separate LFE input, any signal you input via the LFE input will bypass the subwoofer's internal crossover control so you don't have two sets of high-cut filters in the signal path. The **Velodyne DB-12's** crossover control remains in-circuit all the time, irrespective of which line-level input I used, so its *Subwoofer/LFE* input is really just a duplicate of its *Line Input*. Therefore, in order not to double the crossover filters, you need to set the crossover point of the subwoofer to its highest value and if you're doing the manual calibration, a delay of at least 5 ms (in receivers' language: add 5 ft to the subwoofer's distance) to compensate the delay caused by the crossover.

Performance wise

The **Velodyne DB-12** is designed to ensure extremely low distortion, musically speaking. It should be clear that the *DB-12* which weighs almost 13 kilograms, was not designed to be combined with loudspeakers the size of monoliths or extremely loud low bass sessions. More bass but not to the extent of superfluous boom-boom.

Don't forget that subwoofer is not only crucial in Home Theatre applications as it is not only needed for the sound of bombs and thunder, but also (and more so) in the two-channel music applications. Even if you have a pair of tower loudspeakers, pretty much none of them will be able to do a full flat response all the way down to 20 Hz. Usually a very audible roll-off below 40 Hz can easily be detected and measured in pretty much

all loudspeakers even the gargantuan ones. Most start their roll-off at around 50 Hz, thus the need of subwoofer in music applications as most music require a flat frequency response to at least 35 Hz and many orchestral pieces and modern music require the frequency reach down to 24 Hz. Above and beyond all that, most people don't even realize that imaging can be enhanced more by the lower frequencies instead of the hyper-high mythical frequency response above 20 Hz.

So, how do I review a subwoofer?

The obvious answer is to haul out the bass-buster recordings you use to show off your system such as the legendary *It Came From Outer Bass CD* (played back using my trusty **Panasonic UB9000 THX Certified** player's analog output) I used to use to demo subwoofer both for my *SPL* and *SQ* car-audio competition back in the early to mid 1990s. So that's what I did, in both stereo and multichannel. Since my **Pioneer SC-LX704** has a direct button, I could instantly switch between my main loudspeakers (stereo or 5.1.4) full-range and the same set with the **Velodyne DB-12** taking over the managed bass cut off at 80 Hz.

The *DB-12* is an ideal, extremely interior-design-friendly solution for helping a rather compactly designed music system or even a small Home Theatre room to significantly more emphasis in the lower registers. In my test case is my 10 ft x 16 ft dedicated Home Theatre. It can indeed do this with an astonishing authority and sovereignty. In contrast to most competitors that tend to be concentrating more *boom-for-the-buck* as opposed to clean, elegant and natural sounding bass. Lower tones indeed suggest a much larger room. Textures in the bass, for example from the classic albums *Thriller* by **Michael Jackson**, original soundtrack of *The Greatest Showman* or *Ram it Down* by **Judas Pries** – which I probably know better than any other albums – can be followed very clearly and cleanly by the *DB-12*.

**VELODYNE DEEP BLUE
DB-12 SUBWOOFER**

And what about some Boom in the Home Theatre?

No problem either, in fact, quite the contrary. Scenes after scenes from movies such as *Top Gun – Maverick* (**Kaleidescape**), *6 Underground* (**Netflix**), and the obligatory pod race scene from *The Phantom Menace* (UHD Blu-ray Disc), the DB-12 complements the lower octave superbly and effectively and does not weaken even at high levels. Musicals such as **Netflix'** *Matilda* and *The Greatest Showman* on **Kaleidescape** showcased with all their respective glory. Even the bombastic bass kicks in various songs from regular CDs such as a variety of **Telarc** CD with all the high dynamics such as *Bach Busters*, *Time Warp* and *Beethoven or Bust* played back with tautness that has no equal from other subwoofers at this price point.

Conclusion

So, if you haven't realized by now, I do like this subwoofer a lot. Are there subwoofers that sound better? Of course; but not at this price point. For this price point, even with all of its imperfections, the **Velodyne DB-12** gives the most dynamic, most impactful, and most *boom-for-the-buck* offering I've ever heard in the past decade or so. Very highly recommended indeed.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$2,199

Warranty: 1 year for the amp and 5 years for the woofer, parts and labour

Distributor: Erikson Home, T.: 1.514.457.6674, <https://eriksonhome.com/>

Equipments Used for this Review

AppleTV 4K as a lossless streamer transmitting via *HDMI*

Kaleidescape movie server

Marantz MA-500 THX Certified power amp monoblocks

MK Sound S150 THX Certified monitors

Panasonic UB9000 THX Certified disc player

Pioneer SC-LX704 receiver in pre-pro mode

PixelGenDesign 8K HDMI cables



The following are emails between RSX's designer and the editor of Positive Feedback Online. They are unedited and unchanged except for format.

Hello David,

Have you had a chance yet to listen to the new RSX Benchmark AC Power Cords I sent you? At just US\$200, they're the first RSX cables where the actual cable part can be machine-made instead of assembled from multiple component materials by hand. That saves us a lot of money in labor, and I've put all of it into better materials and higher performance. The terminations, of course, are still all done by hand, using our own special connectors. What do you think?



Roger

Hi Roger... Yes, I've had a chance to listen at some length to your new RSX Technologies Benchmark AC Power Cords. Since you sent two samples to me, I used them to supply our PS Audio PerfectWave SACD/CD Transport and our PS Audio DirectStream DAC stack. I run a lot of SACDs through there on a regular basis. The AC end was plugged into the very fine RSX Technologies Power8 Power Distributor, which in turn was fed with your Beyond AC Power Cable. Given that the prior power cables were very expensive reference-level products, and considering the very low price (for audiophileland!) of \$200.00 per cord, I was quite surprised that your Benchmark Power Cords did so well by comparison. They punched well above their price class, sounding more like AC power cables in the \$1,000.00 – \$2000.00 range than their actual (surprising) MSRP.

Right out of the box, it was clear that the Benchmarks were going to need some break-in. They sounded congested, bass-shy, and rolled off initially. 25-50 hours of break-in cured that first impression, however. They started to bloom about 10 hours in, and then really opened up by 50 hours...not bad at all for break-in.

Once shaken down, I got a clear picture of the Benchmark Power Cords. Dynamics were excellent. Transparency was good, which in turn led to solid performance in the areas of detail, imaging, and soundstaging. They also did a creditable job with harmonic structure...much better than I would have thought, frankly. I'd say that audiophiles on a limited budget for AC power cables should be digging in on the RSX Technologies Benchmark. At \$200.00 per, this is one of those rare no-brainers in high-end audio. Benchmark is a price-performance killer!

All the best,

Dr. David W. Robinson
Editor-in-Chief
Positive Feedback



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Jazz

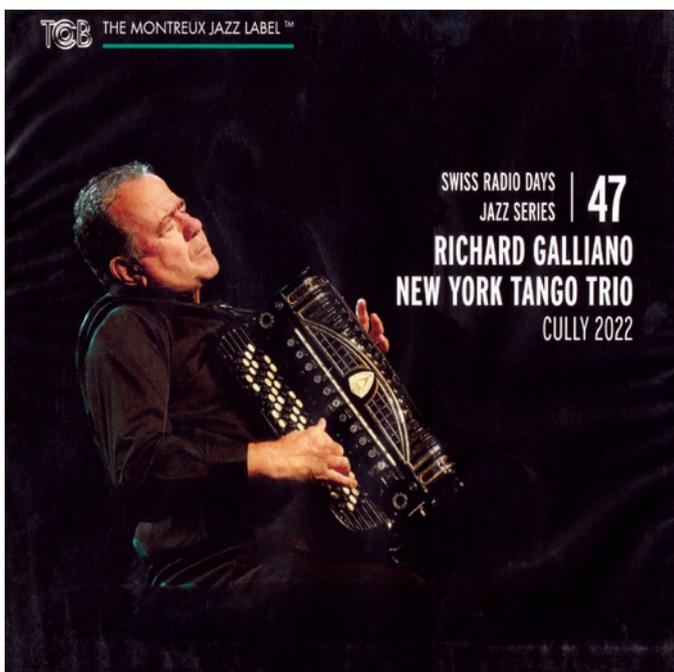
By CHRISTOPHE RODRIGUEZ

MICHEL PETRUCCIANI

Solo in Denmark

Storyville / Naxos

The pianist **Michel Petruccianni**, who died on January 6th 1999 (this beginning of the year was disastrous!), was without doubt one of the most flamboyant of his generation. Suffering from a rare bone disease, the consequences of which he knew, he made numerous recordings and gave several public concerts. Whether in the quintet of tenor saxophonist **Charles Loydd**, with his accomplice the organist **Eddy Louiss** (*Press Conference*) or in tandem with the violinist **Stéphane Grapelli**, his work made us happy every time. Among the discographic releases, a miracle slips in from time to time like this recording in front of an audience on June 23th, 1990 at the **Riverboat Jazz Festival**. **Michel pure juice** who reminds us that his pianistic knowledge ranged from **Errol Garner** to **Bud Powell**, from **Thelonious Monk** to **Duke Ellington** with a hint of **Georges Arvanitas**. In 7 tracks that sometimes stretch to 13 minutes for a medley that includes: *Autumn Leaves*, *Prelude Top A Kiss* and *Smoke Get in Your Eyes*, the **Petruccianni** hand does not falter. He never overdid it and never tried to show off. He seduces with his sensitivity, his impeccable as well as relentless approach to the piano, not to mention his choice of colours. Let's listen again to: *Estate*, this pretty ballad that will make you want to travel like *P'tit Louis*, followed by the essential: *In A Sentimental Mood*. How we miss **Michel!**



RICHARD GALLIANO

New York Trio Tango

Cully 2022

The Montreux Jazz Label / Naxos

After the new piece from **Michel Petruccianni**, we spoil you with a new album from accordionist **Richard Galliano**. The one who is nicknamed the father of the new musette, and why not tango, since he co-opts the **Piazzolla** spirit with what bosses such as **Marcel Azolla**, **Jo Privat** or **Joss Baselli** did, he offers us a particularly enticing recital. With his **New York Tango Trio** which includes guitarist / cellist **Sébastien Ginioux** as well as bassist **Diego Imbert**, our friend **Galliano** is having a ball. Having heard him several times at the **Montreal Jazz Festival**, nothing falters in his playing or in his sensitivity. Whether with the intense **Milonga Del Angel** (**Piazzolla**) or for **La Javanaise** by **Gainsbourg**, without forgetting a detour to **Satie: Gnossienne no2** and of course **New York Tango**, the master is at work. Each of these universes is so different from each other that leave us speechless. Between jazz, tango, song and waltz, we recommend listening to *Waltz for Nicky*. He imposes accordion playing by an outstanding improvisational talent. New work that will once again touch everyone, including even the most demanding.

Jazz

By CHRISTOPHE RODRIGUEZ



SOPHIANNE GIRARD

For Some Reason

Independent

Unfortunately, it took me a long time to discover the Montreal singer **Sophianne Girard**. Coming from the **McGill University** harem, but singing since she was a child, she is a voice we should look out for very carefully. An unpretentious record, with just the joy of *swing* as well as a well-placed voice, *For Some Reason* is worth all our encouragement. Supported by a solid team, this newcomer offers 8 well-felt, never scholastic and, we think, long matured tracks. A little gem available to download. An opportunity to treat yourself and to encourage this daring blue note enthusiast. We highly recommend: *Bright and Cold*, *Graceful Earth* as well as the very exciting *i*.



LES FRIVOLITÉS PARISIENNES

Cole Porter in Paris

B. Records/Naxos

Les Frivolités parisiennes is a large group (singers and musicians) that rediscovers the American composer **Cole Porter** as well as his passion for Paris. As we are unlikely to hear them in Montreal, this version on physiological support is worth its weight in gold. For those who love jazz, *swing* and musicals, this gift should not be long in coming. It is joyful and bilaterally interpreted. In short, all you need to forget life's dark moments.





RETHM

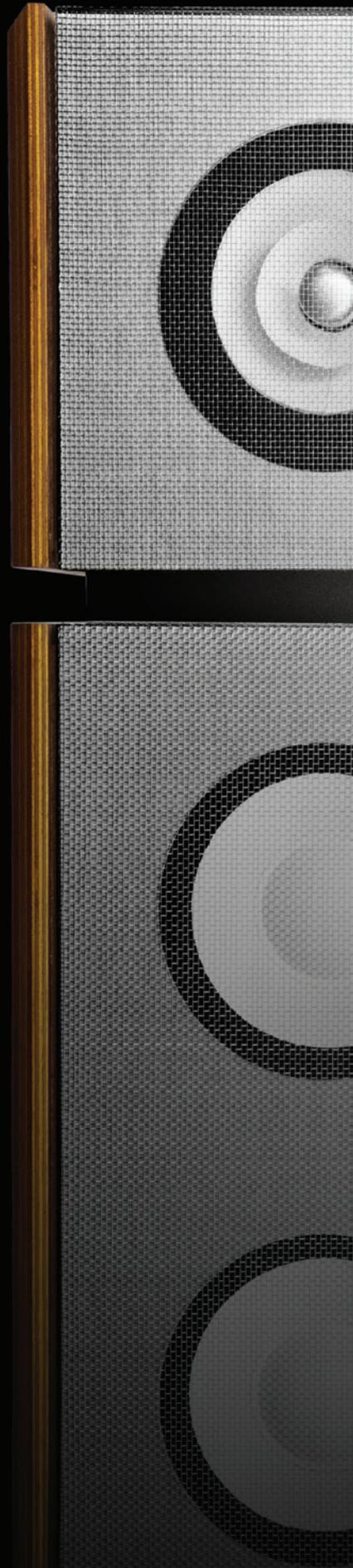
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