

HiFi Magazine

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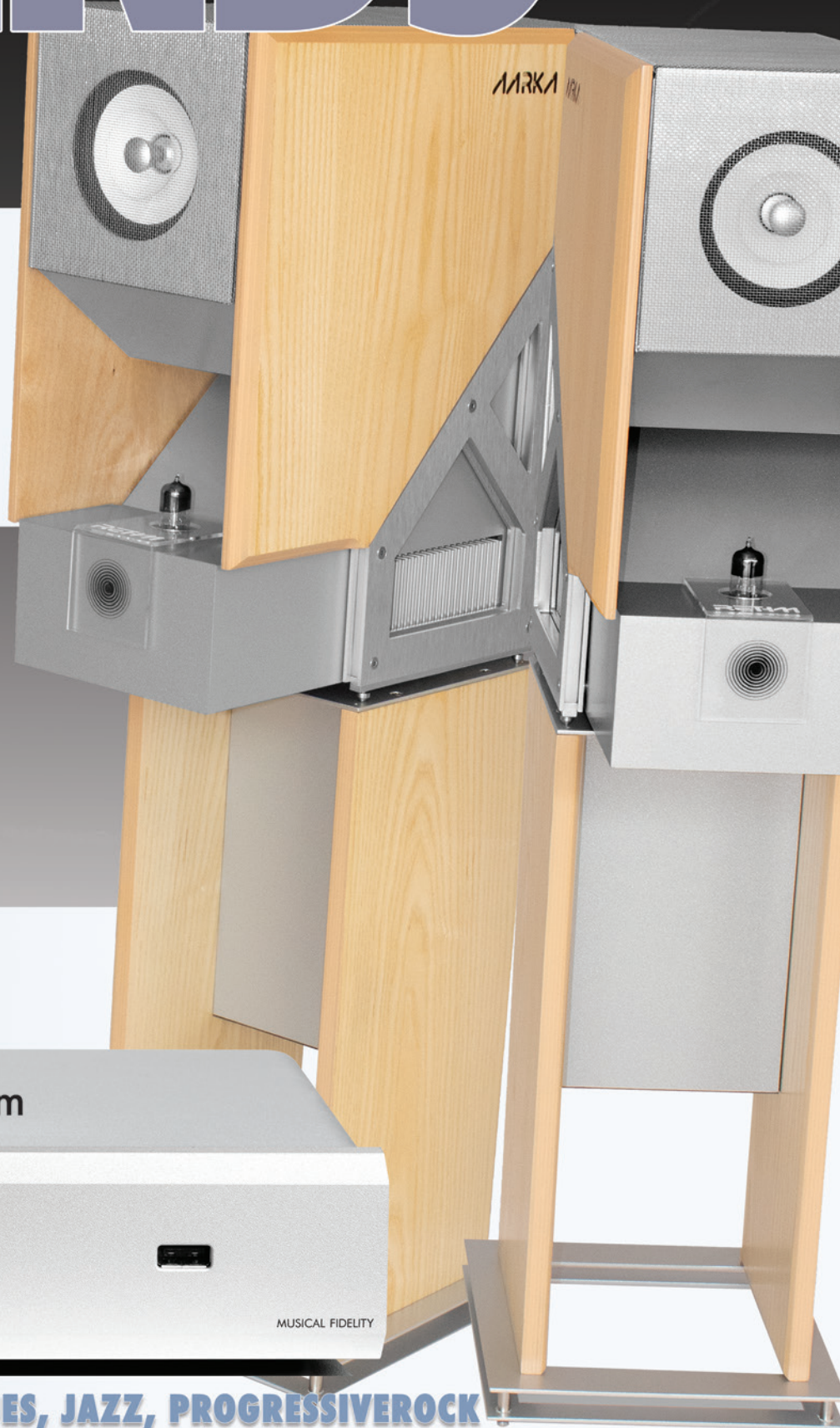
SPICE MAKES TOUT NICE!

- RETHM, Aarka

- FEZZ AUDIO, Silver Luna Prestige Evolution
- NAD, C 3050
- SIMAUDIO, MOON 250i V2
- MUSICAL FIDELITY, NSS 330
- FYNE AUDIO, F1-5
- BLUESOUND, Node X

A WINDOW INTO A WORLD OF MUSIC

- Musical Fidelity, MX-Stream



Rhythm & Music: **CLASSIC, BLUES, JAZZ, PROGRESSIVEROCK**

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Longevity

Does longevity automatically mean obsolescence? Of course not! As I look at the featured reviews in this edition, I notice that the vast majority of the companies whose products we showcase have, on average, more than 25 years of existence. And these same companies innovate and keep their products up to date for discerning audiophile consumers. How do these companies manage to stay at the forefront and meet consumer expectations? They do so by investing in research and development and by listening to the needs of their customers.

Some products are highly sought after and more expensive than others. There's something for every budget. Just like in the automotive industry, there are models from **Toyota**, **Volkswagen**, and **Ferrari** that are available to the general public. The same goes for the world of sound and image.

Some companies create and innovate at great expense, and then apply many of their findings to more affordable series, even if sometimes there are fewer features or a more modest finish, allowing them to offer everything at a lower cost to the consumer. So, there's something for everyone. It's just a matter of carefully assessing your expectations and budget.

I invite you to read all the articles carefully because you will learn many things about each product. The goal is to assist you in your quest for a high-fidelity device that better suits your needs. Whether it's needed immediately or in the more distant future, our articles should certainly inform and entertain you.

With that, I look forward to seeing you in the next edition, the one for the months of November and December 2023. Happy reading and happy listening!


Lucie Beauchamp
Co-publisher & Public Relations Coordinator

Gorgeous looking tube amp with versatility

By ANTHONY ALIAS

The **Fezz Audio Silver Luna Prestige Evolution** is a *EL34* based, vacuum tube integrated amplifier that doesn't cost an arm and a leg ...which is great to see, as there are more and more audiophiles hobbling around with missing limbs these days. This new model is part of the *Evolution* series, which was launched only a few months ago. The *Silver Luna* has a few interesting features worth mentioning. Instead of the usual *EI* laminated output transformers, it employs toroidal core transformers to drive the loudspeakers. Next, the amp includes a set of different driver tubes and as a switch for changing the operation mode of the output tubes from pentode to tetrode configuration. This gives the amplifier the possibility of four different sonic signatures, allowing the user to choose his or her preference. Pretty cool.

About the company

Part of the growing number of hi-fi companies emanating from Eastern Europe, **Fezz Audio** is a Polish company founded in 2014 and specializing in the design and production of vacuum tube amplification. **Fezz** is actually a spin-off of the well-known transformer manufacturer **Toroidy**, which has been supplying high-quality transformers to different industries, including the hi-fi market, for the past thirty years.

Description

The *Silver Luna Prestige Evolution* is a very classy-looking amplifier. The industrial design is quite a bit more successful than the company's *Legacy* series, which looks more utilitarian. The amplifier is available in seven different colours and is supplied with an elegant metal and glass tube cage. The control layout

is very simple, with a volume knob on the left and an input selector on the right, with the laser-cut backlit **Fezz** logo in the centre. The power switch is located on the back panel, which is inconvenient. If the amplifier is sitting in a rack and not on the top shelf, you risk scorching your arm every time you turn it on or off. The company should consider moving the switch to the side panel for example.

The *Silver Luna* is equipped with three *RCA* inputs along with 4 and 8 Ohm loudspeaker terminals. All connectors are of excellent quality. The included plastic remote control looks like an **Apple Magic** mouse. I found the ergonomic design kind of odd though, as I kept picking up the remote and using it backwards because, in this way, the volume button was conveniently under my thumb. So instead of lowering the volume, I was raising it, and vice versa! With the remote turned around in the proper direction, the button was then too low for my thumb and I had to shift the remote forward in my hand which didn't feel as natural. Now, I could have simply looked at the **Fezz** logo on the remote to figure out the right way to use it, but it seems I had trouble grasping that concept!

The *Silver Luna* is a 35 W per channel, push-pull design with automatic tube biasing. The latter is a nice feature as it eliminates the need to manually check and adjust the voltage of the tubes, which can be somewhat of a hassle, especially for the uninitiated. Also of note, the quality of the stock tubes that are provided with the *Evolution* series is excellent. In this case, the *EL34* and *12AX7* tubes are from **Psvane**, and the *6N2P* are from **Voskhod**. Traditionally, tube amplifiers use *EI* laminated output transformers to power the loudspeakers since toroidal core versions are judged not to be the best suited for the job. **Fezz's** parent company, **Toroidy**, set out to change that stigma and proceeded to develop a unique core and special winding technology to produce toroidal transformers capable of handling any tube topology. These innovative transformers are utilized in the *Silver Luna*. There are several options available when initially ordering the amplifier, including a *Home Theatre* bypass, a sub-out, and a *Bluetooth* module, each at \$265 retail.



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FEZZ AUDIO SILVER LUNA PRESTIGE EVOLUTION INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Unboxing and set up

The packaging is neat and well designed, with the tubes and tube cage placed separately in their specific cut-outs for added protection. In use, the amp runs pretty hot, so adequate ventilation is a must. Avoid placing the amp on a shelf close to a baseboard heater, in direct sunlight or in a closed cabinet. Each tube is numbered and should be installed in its specified socket on the amp. It's important to note that the two different types of driver tubes supplied with the amp do not have the same pinout configuration. This is why the *Silver Luna* is equipped with a 12AX7/6N2P toggle switch. But beware: if the switch is in the wrong position in relation to the type of tubes being used, the tubes will blow.

As with many tube amplifiers, the **Fezz** should not be turned on without connected loudspeakers; otherwise, damage may occur to the output transformers. With regards to the operation mode of the output tubes, the manual makes no mention of whether this can be done on the fly or not. So to be safe, I would recommend turning the amp off before switching from pentode to tetrode configuration.

Sound quality

Upon first switching on the amp, I noticed there was no noise coming from the loudspeakers, even with my ears close to the drivers. I thought something was wrong and that the amp wasn't actually on, but the orange glow of the tubes told me otherwise. I checked all my connections, and everything was fine. I was baffled. I proceeded to play a track and was startled

when I suddenly heard the music. This thing is dead quiet, which is unusual as many tube amplifiers exhibit some kind of buzz, hiss, hum, or combination thereof from the loudspeakers. The *Silver Luna* is actually quieter than many solid-state amplifiers. Very impressive. Maybe this is a benefit of those special output transformers?

Musically, the *Silver Luna Prestige Evo* sounds more like a modern tube design than the traditionally warm and mellow kind. The sound is clear, airy, fast, and dynamic. Hearing the **Simon & Garfunkel** track *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.* through the **Fezz** was a bit of a surprise, considering the track was recorded 59 years ago! The soundstage spread was very wide, with an image height that went higher than the loudspeakers themselves. **Paul** and **Art**'s voices had very good presence and articulation, which allowed their glorious harmonies to shine. I had similar results with several other older recordings, where the *Silver Luna* presented a nice big soundstage and a clear view of everything happening in the mix. To see what the amp was really capable of, I put on *So Nice* from the **Tomasz Stanko Quartet**. Here, the imaging was wide, deep, and spacious. The **Fezz** allowed me to hear the space around the instruments, something solid-state amplifiers struggle with. The brushes sweeping on the snare drum and hitting the toms and cymbals had a "you are there" vividness, and the timbre of the trumpet and piano were simply sumptuous. The overall presentation of this recording was very transparent, with excellent gradation of the dynamic scale. Moving to **Beethoven's Septet in E Flat Major** by the **Nash Ensemble**, the texture and





« To see what the amp was really capable of, I put on *So Nice* from the **Tomasz Stanko Quartet**. Here, the imaging was wide, deep, and spacious. The **Fezz** allowed me to hear the space around the instruments, something solid-state amplifiers struggle with. The brushes sweeping on the snare drum and hitting the toms and cymbals had a “*you are there*” vividness, and the timbre of the trumpet and piano were simply sumptuous. »

tone of the strings and horns were beautiful, with each instrument occupying a well-defined space on the stage. Things got interesting on the next track. **The Beatles’ *Come Together*** highlighted the excellent dynamic and rhythmic capabilities of the *Silver Luna*, qualities that are uncommon for an *EL34*-equipped tube amp in this price range. The kick drum is both powerful and well-controlled, and it drives the song along with aplomb. You can easily hear the “*whack*” of the kick pedal hitting the skin of the drum. The track is also known for **Paul’s** deep and robust bass line, but here, it was missing in action. The lower register is simply not the amp’s strong suit. The bass is taught and well-defined, but lean. The *Silver Luna* doesn’t have the kind of weight and authority of something like a *KT88*-equipped tube amp, for example. This comes as no surprise, as *EL34* tubes are known to be more subdued in the bass. So don’t expect any visceral excitement from this amp. It is more at home with acoustic music, be it folk or jazz, vocals, and smaller classical ensembles than with stuff like **Rival Sons** and **Alice Cooper**.

The combination I ended up using through most of my listening sessions was the *6N2P* driving the *EL34* in *Tetrode* mode. You lose a few watts of power but gain a more organic and

textured sound. The other combinations had a bit more dynamic kick and definition, but were also a bit cooler in character.

Conclusion

So here you have a well-made, gorgeous-looking amplifier that delivers top notch sound and good value for money. It also gives you the ability to tailor the sound to your taste or mood. Up until now, if you wanted an affordable tube amp, you had to look mostly at Chinese imports. Now, with the **Fezz *Silver Luna Prestige Evolution***, you have a serious option from Poland.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$3,865 with Psvane Tubes and Black Tube Cage

Warranty: xx months/year(s), parts & labor

Distributor: Tri-Cell Enterprises, T.: 905.265.7870, <https://tricellenterprises.com/>

Music used for the evaluation:

Anoaur Brahem: *The Astounding Eyes of Rita*

The Moody Blues: *Seventh Sojourn*

Simon & Garfunkel: *Tales From New York*

Nash Ensemble: *Beethoven: Septet in E flat, Op.20; Sextet in E flat, Op.81b*

Tomasz Stanko Quartet: *Dark Eyes*

Fleetwood Mac: *Looking Back On*

The Band: *Music from the Big Pink*

Leo Kottke: *Great Big Boy*

Nils Landgren: *The Moon, The Starts and You*

Akademie Fur Alte Musik Berlin: *Telemann; La Bizarre – Suites*

A Vintage-Inspired Device, Geared Towards the Present and Future!



By RICHARD SCHNEIDER

The world of audio is ever-evolving, and manufacturer **NAD** is no exception to this trend. In this context, they introduce a newcomer, the integrated amplifier C 3050. Additionally, **NAD** celebrates its fiftieth anniversary. Just like most audio manufacturers commemorating significant milestones in their journey by offering special

products, **NAD** is no exception, presenting a vintage-inspired device that, in many ways, resembles its distant predecessor, the C 3030, in an updated version. Before delving into details, let's acknowledge that its appearance is charming. And when you open the lid, you have to admit that the electronics are up to date.

NAD was founded in 1972. The brand was created by **Marty Borish** and **Bjorn Erik Edvardsen**, with strong support from a group associated with the European audio industry. The aim was to simplify this often inaccessible and complex world by offering simple, yet high-performing products at affordable prices. **NAD** was against the proliferation of mass-produced products, which had significantly lower quality and saturated the market at that time. Initially, **NAD** was based in London. The company underwent various changes over the years, experiencing highs and lows, but the resilience of its leaders has brought it back strongly. The research and development team is now located in Canada, near Toronto.

The *C 3050* integrated amplifier is the ideal companion for anyone who wants to join the ranks of music lovers without breaking the bank and while taking advantage of numerous technological advances. This is a stereophonic integrated amplifier. Therefore, you will not have to equip yourself with a preamplification device.

External Description of the Device

To borrow a vivid description from the manufacturer, the *C 3050* encapsulates 50 years of innovation at **NAD** and bridges the gap between the past and the future of hi-fi. As for the past, one will notice its two *VU* meters, push-button input switches, channel tone and balance controls, speaker selector, and large volume knob – just like in the good old days. And what about the **NAD** lettering from that era? **New Acoustic Dimension** presented in beautifully curved fonts reminiscent of the 1970s style. Before I forget, it's worth mentioning that there is a 6.35 mm (1/4-inch) output for headphones compatible with headphones of any impedance. The aesthetics of the *C 3050* remind us of the devices that thrilled a generation of music enthusiasts some time ago.

Technical and Functional Aspects

Behind the device's housing, which features walnut veneer, vintage is left behind because the *C 3050* is equipped with decidedly modern components. It is powered by a *HybridDigital UcD* amplifier, developed by **NAD**, which delivers a solid 2 x 100 W continuously and up to 135 W when very dynamic passages require increased power, ensuring optimal power supply for a wide range of loudspeakers. This type of amplification combines the efficiency of Class *D* amplification with the precision and low distortion of Class *AB* amplification. The company's engineers opted for the *PCM5242* (32-bit / 384 kHz) as the digital-to-analog converter, chosen for its high resolution, dynamic rendering, and immunity to clock jitter.

The *C 3050* features advanced technology known as *MDC2* for **Modular Design Construction**, which allows for adding new functions and features. This simply involves inserting an optional extension module into the *MDC2* slot on the rear panel. The *MDC2* module is a new feature that enables bidirectional communication between the extension module and the host component. This *MDC2 BluOS-D* module provides two very popular features when inserted into the *MDC2* slot on the rear panel. *BluOS* activates features such as streaming services, local network playback, multi-room audio, voice control, integration with control and command systems, and works on *Android BluOS*, *iOS*, *Kindle Fire*, *Windows*, and *macOS*. The module is equipped with both *WiFi* and *Ethernet* connectivity. *Dirac Live*, on the other hand, analyzes the acoustic properties of your listening room using a microphone and software to improve the performance of your loudspeakers. I must warn you right away that this process requires patience and a quiet environment. However, I am confident that the results will meet your expectations.



NAD C 3050 STEREO AMPLIFIER

Multiple Connections

With the C 3050, you are well served, as it offers a wide range of digital and analog inputs. If you own or plan to purchase a turntable, an *MM (Moving Magnet)* input is available. Connect your HDTV to the *HDMI eARC* port to complete a 2 or 2.1-channel home theater setup. Analog, coaxial, and optical digital *line-level* inputs are also at your disposal. A *Pre Out* output allows you to use your C 3050 as a preamplifier by connecting it to an external amplifier or receiver.

The device has two sets of loudspeaker terminals. The main speakers should be connected to terminals *A*, while a second pair of speakers, which can be set in another room, can be connected to terminals *B*. Note that you will be able to use the pairs together or separately, i.e., *A/B/AB*. Good news for bass enthusiasts – you will be able to connect the *SUBW* output of the device to the low-level input of your subwoofer. Low-frequency information up to 80 Hz will be sent to the subwoofer. Finally, I would like to add that the *Ethernet* input seems important to me because it plays a crucial role in the smooth operation of the *MDC2* module.

Unboxing and Installation

Starting up the C 3050 is very straightforward, no matter how you plan to use it. Fresh out of the packaging, we note that the C 3050 is first and foremost an integrated amplifier in its simplest form, to which you will connect your analog (turntable, cassette players) or digital (*CD/DVD* players, *TV*) devices through various inputs. So, if your setup does not include a music server or music services like **Spotify**, you're all set. Without making the installation process any more complex, adding your own music server will be done easily through the many digital inputs at your disposal.

Streaming music services and many other options of the C 3050 require the installation of the *MDC2* module and subsequently, the module installation by your dealer, with no settings required. You will only need to download the *BluOS-D* app and connect your device to your *WiFi* or *Ethernet* network, which I consider superior as mentioned earlier. The *BluOS-D* app will allow you to access more music services than you can imagine. Many are free, but some require a paid subscription. Additionally, under *BluOS-D*, you will have access to **Apple AirPlay** from your *iPhone*, *iPad*, or *Mac*. The module can also handle the operation of devices physically connected to the device, including digital audio files from your computer or *NAS* server, to name just one option. Personally, I preferred the *AMP* function to manage my devices. It all comes down to personal choices. Some will be pleased to learn that *BluOS-D* is **Roon** certified.

Multi-Room Capability

If adventure calls, using the *MDC2 BluOS-D* module allows the C 3050 to become a spectacular home music system by making up to 64 zones of different source controls and volume controls available. You can have different music styles in different zones or group zones and play the same music simultaneously. The *MDC2* architecture also allows *BluOS-D* to stream music from any source connected to the C 3050 to compatible *BluOS* components in other rooms.

The Dirac Live

I briefly mentioned another feature of the *MDC2* module, namely the *Dirac Live*. I believe it is useful to provide some details on this. The best way to present this option is the one proposed by **NAD**. *Dirac Live* allows the C 3050 to overcome the weakest link in most sound systems: the listening room itself. Using a calibrated microphone and a free application, available for smart devices or computers, *Dirac Live* sends tone tests to your loudspeakers, analyzes them, and creates filters to correct issues such as standing waves and unwanted reflections. According to the manufacturer, with *Dirac Live*, you will experience highly improved bass definition, greater clarity, improved tonal accuracy, and more precise imaging. So, if you are not satisfied with the device's tone settings, here is an alternative solution.

Remote Control

The remote control is very intuitive. Remotes have become such a part of our lives that we quickly learn how to use them. The only thing to know, and it's significant, is that when you want to use the *BluOS-D* function, you will need to press the *BLS* key. Regarding the sources connected to the device, you will press the *AMP* key, as well as the push button corresponding to the device.

The Class D

There was a time when marketing a Class *D* amplifier was risky because the sound, rather cold and emotionless, repelled audiophiles, and rightfully so. However, Class *D* amplifiers have come a long way, and some manufacturers have achieved good results with this technology. **NAD** has become a master in developing devices with this technology, offering high-fidelity playback, highly appreciated.

Personal Note

I am certainly not the only one to notice this, but there is a certain trend in the audio industry to offer products with a retro aesthetic design. Whether it's electronics or loudspeakers, the *vintage* look is in vogue. Manufacturers probably realize that the enclosures of audio components from the past were

the enclosures of audio components from the past were very elegant. It's a good bet because it allows designers like **NAD** to harness the elegance of the golden age of hi-fi while producing devices that rely on industry advancements in the production and sale of original products.

My Impressions After Listening Sessions

Most of this review was conducted based on listening to files from my *NAS* and *Roon* software using the *Line* input. Right from the start, I was drawn to the prominent midrange that characterizes the *C 3050's* sound signature. The sound is warm. The emotion of the performers is palpable. The richness of timbres is astonishing for such an affordable device. The bass is solid, deep, and reasonably articulate. The highs seem a bit recessed to me, but they are delicate, without aggressiveness. My loudspeakers have an efficiency of 94 dB, so this amplifier had plenty of room to perform at very high volumes without faltering while having enough reserve to navigate through challenging passages without showing the slightest signs of fatigue. The soundstage may be a

« Right from the start, I was drawn to the prominent midrange that characterizes the *C 3050's* sound signature. The sound is warm. The emotion of the performers is palpable. The richness of timbres is astonishing for such an affordable device. The bass is solid, deep, and reasonably articulate. »

bit less extended than some devices, but it doesn't bother during attentive listening. As many have said before me, the *C 3050's* sound is very dynamic, engaging, and lively.

Regarding the use of headphones, you will be very pleased with the performance of this integrated amplifier. I do not hesitate to use the same terms you find in the last sentence of the previous text. In fact, I challenge anyone not to tap their foot

when listening to an engaging piece of music.

Of course, many people will be attracted to the external beauty of this device, but that seems reductionist to me. The *C 3050* is very versatile in terms of audio, and what is not ordinary is that it can be paired with almost any type of loudspeakers.

Behind the retro and very romantic *VU* meters lies a deployment of powerful and high-performance technologies that integrate more than 50 years of expertise. Whether you are a fan of progressive rock, orchestral works, jazz, or folk, this amplifier ranks among the best in its category. The *C 3050* is suitable for both those starting their journey into hi-fi and those seeking a high-performing, quality device without breaking the bank.



Conclusion

Since the asking price is not excessive, it would be logical to immediately purchase the *BluOS-D* card to add extensive streaming options and create a true audio control center in your home, not to mention *Dirac Live*, which will save you many sound setup hassles.

GENERAL INFORMATION

NAD C 3050 Hybrid Digital Amplifier

Price: \$1,899

Warranty: 1 year, parts and labor

NAD C 3050 Hybrid Digital Amplifier with MDC2 BluOS-D card

Price: \$2,399

Warranty: 1 year, parts and labor

Distributor:

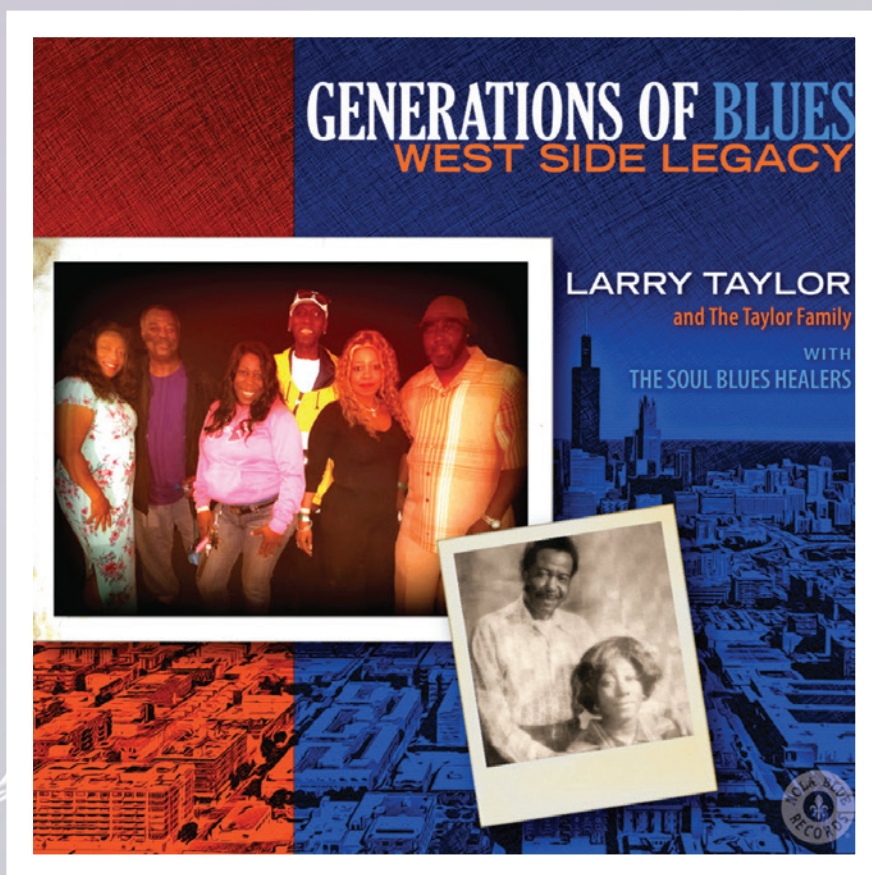
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Blues

By PIERRE JOBIN



LARRY TAYLOR AND THE TAYLOR FAMILY

Generations Of Blues : West Side Legacy
Nola Blue Records, NBR024

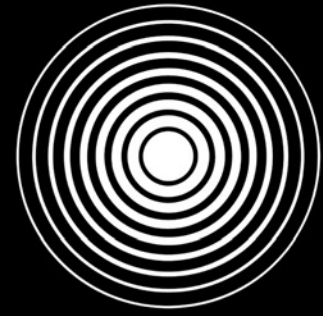
Larry Taylor is the eldest son of the famous and respected Chicago Blues guitarist and singer, Eddie Taylor, and blues singer Vera Taylor. In the 1950s, they brought their Mississippi blues to the West Side of Chicago and adapted it. In his Great Encyclopedia of the Blues, Gérard Herzhaft mentions about him, His modest, serious, and reserved temperament hardly pushes him to become the star of Chicago Blues, a position his superb music should have earned him. This means that the members of the Taylor Family have the spirit of the blues and tradition in their blood.

Larry Taylor is an excellent drummer, and his voice is full of soul! I had the privilege of experiencing his authentic blues feel in 2006 during a late-night jam at Maximum

Blues in Carleton-sur-Mer. An authentic experience, the blues feel that flows naturally! He opens this album in honor of his father, who would have turned 100 years old this year, with *She Treats Me Just The Same*, one of his funky compositions. Then, he continues with *Take Your Hand Down*, a shuffle composed by his father in the purest tradition of Chicago Blues. Following him, Demetria Taylor, one of the five family members who have pursued a career in music out of eight, takes the lead. A singer with authority and a tiger in her voice, she takes her father's shuffle *Bad Boy* and transforms it into a convincing *Bad Girl*. Further on, her brother Tim Taylor, also a talented drummer and singer,

does justice to his father's classic *I Feel So Bad*, performing it with enthusiasm and naturalness. Brenda Taylor, on the other hand, showcases *I Found Out*, a composition by her mother. An experienced and confident singer, her expertise shows that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Eddie Taylor Jr., guitar and vocals, who passed away in 2019, plays his instrument on eleven of the thirteen tracks on the album. He also takes on the vocal duties for *Big Town Playboy*, one of his father's iconic pieces. It's worth noting that ten of the thirteen recordings on this album were made in 2015, two in 2017, and one in 2023. Larry's son, Dullah "Liljet2x", also contributes to the family album with his rap, *No Shine*, dedicated to his late mother, Janice Myles, adding a more contemporary musical note. This album is a reunion of a family united by their deep roots in and dedication to the blues, which their parents passed down to them. Blues, ballads, R&B, funk, soul blues, and even rap are all interpreted here! If you love Chicago Blues and the evolution within tradition, this album is for you.

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A REVISITED CLASSIC

BY MICHEL DALLAIRE



In my 16 years of writing for this magazine, I've had the opportunity to test nearly ten **Simaudio** products across various price ranges. Over the years, these tests have consistently concluded with very positive results, resulting in impeccable sound quality. What I'm presented with this time is a new version of the *MOON 250i* integrated amplifier, an entry-level classic that was due for an update since its market launch in 2013. As an entry-level option, back in 2009, I owned a *MOON i.5* with around forty watts per channel, which served me admirably for several years before I sold it to a friend who still owns it. **Simaudio** products are renowned for their reliability. Let's explore what the new *MOON 250i V2* offers as a purely analog solution, now including a phono input. My hunch tells me I won't be disappointed with the redesign of a product that has already made its mark.

When Classicism Gets a Modern Twist!

The *MOON 250i V2* amplifier remains a purely analog integrated amplifier that now includes an *MM* phono input. In its configuration, it reminds me of English integrated amplifiers from the 1980s-90s, which aimed for purity and a focus on sound quality. The *MOON 250i V2* retains its position as an entry-level option in the Simaudio lineup. The fact that it lacks any digital inputs helps maintain a relatively affordable price of \$2,900. This makes it an interesting choice for people who already own digital sources like a *CD* player, a music server, or a *DAC/streamer*, such as the *MOON 280D*, which happens to be a good companion for the *MOON 250i V2*. Its power output remains the same, at 50 W per channel, which increases to 100 W into a 4-ohm load.

From an aesthetic perspective, nothing has changed compared to the old *MOON 250i*. The *V2* version's chassis is solidly built in-house and maintains the same dimensions of 42.9 cm in width, 8.9 cm in height, and 36.6 cm in depth. It's available in all-black or a two-tone version with black and silver on the central part of its facade. The *MOON 250i V2* doesn't feature a display screen due to its purely analog concept, simplifying its

usability. On the far left of the front panel, you'll find six push buttons for selecting inputs labeled *CD*, *DAC*, *AUX*, *TV*, *PHONO*, and *MP* for connecting a portable player to the front mini-jack input. Red indicator lights are positioned next to them to show which input is active. Following these, there's the *Standby* button in the center, for *standby* mode, with a blue indicator light indicating the amplifier's power status. Two buttons, *Speaker Off* and *Mute*, precede the volume control button on the far right. The volume control is an **Alps** motorized model, operated by an intuitive remote control. A red indicator light on the volume button shows the volume level, an interesting and very useful ergonomic detail. Unlike many amplifiers in this category, the volume control has a relatively slow adjustment for fine-tuning. A 6.35 mm headphone jack is located on the front, connected directly to the amplifier's output via an adapter circuit for this purpose. At the back, you'll find all the *RCA* connections for the mentioned inputs, as well as a grounding point for the turntable. *SimLink* and *IR* jacks are provided for using the *MOON 250i V2* with other **Simaudio** devices. The main power switch is part of the *IEC* receptacle for the power cord.



INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER **MOON 250i V2** BY SIMAUDIO



New Features of the MOON 250i V2

Simaudio has informed me that the main circuit board has been redesigned to include the *MM* phono input. All low-power transistors in the preamplification stages are now surface-mounted on the main board, reducing labor costs during assembly. The power supply block is completely separated from the main circuit board by a metal partition, which also reinforces the chassis's rigidity. This way, the phono input circuit, sensitive to interference, remains unaffected. The 320 VA toroidal transformer is generously sized and is followed by two 10,000 μ F capacitors. There are two bipolar output transistors per channel, operating in Class A/B, specifically manufactured for **Simaudio** and mounted at the bottom of the chassis, serving as a cooling surface.

Installation in My Environment

I installed the *MOON 250i V2* in my stereo cabinet since it generates very little heat. Its low power consumption in standby or active mode allows me to leave it on all the time. I used my CD player and my music server **CeolBOX** as musical sources, with content played through a streamer and my wired *Ethernet* network. The playback platform I used was **ROON**. My music was decoded by a DAC connected to a linear power supply **Sbooster BOTW P&P ECO**. The loudspeakers used were my **Proac Response D20R**, connected to the *MOON 250i V2* with **BIS Audio** cables. The headphone jack was tested with my usual headphones. To test the phono input, I borrowed a turntable from a friend, a **Technics SL-1200GR** equipped with a **Goldring 1042 MM** cartridge. This setup costs roughly the same as or slightly more than the *MOON 250i V2*. My friend also

lent me some vinyl records in excellent condition.

And now, the most important part, the sound!

While writing this review, we were in the midst of the **Montreal International**

« This recording boasts incredible dynamic range. At the beginning of the songs, there are passages close to silence, followed by the music exploding to the point where I need to lower the volume. The *MOON 250i V2* amplifier follows this rhythm without getting out of breath, and the music doesn't become harsh or aggressive. The *MOON 250i V2* has bite and verve but manages to stay cool in its reproduction. »

Jazz Festival. I took the opportunity to attend a performance by **Anouar Brahem**, accompanied by three excellent musicians. This virtuoso of Tunisian origin specializes in the oud and traditional Arab music, which he has adeptly adapted to contemporary jazz. His album titled *The Astounding Eyes of Rita*, released in 2009 under the **ECM** label, pays tribute to the late Palestinian poet **Mahmoud Darwich**. In this album, he forms a quartet with **Klaus Gesing** on bass clarinet, **Bjorn Meyer** on electric bass, and **Khaled Yassine** on percussion (Darbouka and Bendir). All of **Anouar Brahem's** compositions exude extraordinary sensuality, and he knows how to immerse us in an emotional world tinged with the Middle East. The *MOON 250i V2* amplifier has no trouble delivering the exact measure of this magnificent quartet's performance. The oud is a plucked string instrument akin to the lute. Oud wood is a highly sought-after raw material worldwide, known for its high cost and dark-colored fragrant resin. With the *MOON 250i V2* integrated amplifier, I wouldn't go as far as to say I can smell the oud through my loudspeakers, but I can clearly perceive the unique sound of its resonance box. **Klaus Gesing's** bass clarinet adds to the sensuality of this ethereal music, while **Bjorn Meyer** closely follows the oud's playing. Percussionist **Khaled Yassine** is

fast, precise, and impresses me as much as when I saw and heard him at the **FIJM**. The transparency of the *MOON 250i V2* allows me to decipher this sublime interaction among the musicians perfectly. I continue with classical music recorded in 24 bits on the **Reference Recording**

label. These are works by **Stravinsky**, such as *The Song of The Nightingale*, *The Firebird*, and *The Rite of Spring*. The pieces on this 1996 album are performed by the **Minnesota Symphony Orchestra** conducted by **Eiji Oue**. This recording boasts incredible dynamic range. At the beginning of the songs, there are passages close to silence, followed by the music exploding to the point where I need to lower

the volume. The *MOON 250i V2* amplifier follows this rhythm without getting out of breath, and the music doesn't become harsh or aggressive. The *MOON 250i V2* has bite and verve but manages to stay cool in its reproduction. The kicks of the bass drum at the back of the hall are perfectly reproduced with a flair worthy of much more powerful amplifiers. I don't know the damping factor of the *MOON 250i V2*, but it seems to have a strong grip on the low frequencies. With a large orchestra like this, the stereo image extends well beyond the loudspeaker boundaries, and its transparency provides a believable depth. To conclude this description of the *MOON 250i V2's* sound, I will also use the headphone output. To do so, I turn to the sumptuous Polish jazz singer **Anna Maria Jopek**. On her album titled *Barefoot*, she is accompanied by several Polish musicians and composers. At the beginning of the first track, **Leszek Mozdzier's** prepared piano is struck to add percussion to his playing. The sounds emanating from this piano are unique, if not unusual, and they add a serious ambiance to the song. **Anna Maria Jopek's** captivating voice



INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER MOON 250i V2 BY SIMAUDIO

then comes into play, and I'm easily seduced by her emotion. The *MOON 250i V2* presents her well-centered in the stereo image, or at least in my head. The highs are crystalline, and I hear her diction perfectly without the sibilant notes becoming exaggerated. All the various wind and brass instruments are well-positioned in the stereo image, with a respect for timbre. Guitarist **Marek Napiorkowski's** playing is sublime and exquisitely velvety. **Derek Oleszkiewicz's** double bass maintains its natural weight and a woody character that is unimpaired. My **HiFiMan Sundara** headphones operate on the isodynamic principle, which demands power. The *MOON 250i V2's* headphone output has no trouble driving this headphone at almost indecent volume levels.

Regarding the phono input, well, what can I say except that it is seriously well-designed. This stage is optimized to accommodate all *MM* cartridges with a gain of 2.5 to 5 mV. Its operation is super quiet and entirely free of background noise without increasing the surface noise of vinyl records. The shielding added between the power supply and the main circuit board plays its role perfectly in this case. This phono input offers good dynamics and excellent channel separation. I note a beautiful extension of both high and low frequencies with impeccable tonal balance. Even old pop-rock recordings from the 1980s benefit from this phono circuit's performance. So, I believe the owner of the *MOON 250i V2* could eventually use it with turntable-cartridge setups much more expensive than the amplifier itself, possibly achieving higher listening levels.

Conclusion

The *MOON 250i V2* integrated amplifier is aimed at a clientele that still has a valuable collection of vinyl records and wants to retain some freedom in choosing digital sources. Since changes in the digital realm are frequent, the purely analog design of the *MOON 250i V2* makes it a good long-term investment. Its configuration and ease of use protect it from becoming obsolete too quickly. In my usage conditions, I didn't feel a difference in power between the 150 W per channel of my **Atoll IN300** integrated amplifier and the 50 W of the *MOON 250i V2*. However, I must admit that my **Proac Response D20R** loudspeakers do not present a challenging load for amplifiers.

The sound of the *MOON 250i V2* is vibrant, transparent, and neutral, allowing it to adapt to all types of music or artists. Its sound is detailed, and its power is sufficient for most loudspeakers in a normal-sized room. At the beginning of this review, I described the *MOON 250i V2* as an entry-level amplifier from **Simaudio**, but it is by no means a budget device. Like all other **Simaudio** products, it is well-built, has a sturdy chassis, and should be highly reliable. Its warranty extends over a period of 10 years. I consider the *MOON 250i V2* amplifier as one of the best purchases to make, blindfolded, in its price category. Its phono input is more than a bonus, and it competes favorably with its English or European competitors. You can enjoy it for many years, and if necessary, your children will be pleased to inherit it.



GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$2,900

Warranty: 10 years, parts and labor

Manufacturer: Simaudio Limited, Phone: 450.449.2212, <https://simaudio.com/en/>

Mediagraphy

Digital Files

Anouar Brahem, *The Astounding Eyes of Rita*, ECM

Stravinsky, *The Song of The Nightingale...*, FLAC, 24 bits / 88.2 kHz

Anna Maria Jopek, *Barefoot*, Emarcy, Q16 299-2

Vinyl Records

Joël Xavier & Ron Carter, *In New York*, Galileo, GMCLP02

Marillion, *Misplaced Childhood*, EMI, ST 12431

Jean Leloup, *Le Dome*, Sony Music, AD10096

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editorial team thanks **Simaudio** for providing the amplifier.



Blues

By PIERRE JOBIN



MIKE GULDIN AND ROLLIN' & TUMBLIN'

The Franklin Sessions
Blue Heart Records, BHR 046

Mike Guildin, a seasoned blues scene traveler, wanted to return to an album that would be produced more organically, with as few overdubs or overlays as possible. To achieve this, he went to **Kevin McKendree's** studio, **The Rock House**, in Franklin, TN. **Kevin McKendree**, a Grammy winner, assembled a band of excellent musicians, including his son **Yates McKendree** on drums, guitar, lap steel, and **James Pennebaker** on guitar, both also *Grammy* winners. The four selected tracks and the working environment impressed **Mike Guildin** so much that nine months later, he returned with

his band of the last twenty years, **Rollin' & Tumblin'**, and together they recorded nine tracks in two days. Listening to the album, you can tell that this production of eight original songs and three covers of his blues heroes (**Howlin' Wolf's** *Killing Floor*, **Muddy Waters' Blow Wind Blow**, and **Sleepy John Estes' Divin' Duck Blues**) benefited from the participation of talented and dedicated musicians, as well as from a warm and friendly studio atmosphere. Nothing was left to chance, and the guest artists, **The McCrary Sisters** on vocals, **The Philly Funk Authority Horns**, singer **Su Tears**, harmonica player **Mickey**

Junior, and guitarist **James Pennebaker**, complement the instrumentation beautifully when the styles require it or when they add flavor and authenticity. Another point, **Mike Guildin** knows how to write songs that capture attention and are relevant in different styles such as blues, soul, funk, and more. I particularly liked his song *The Right Thing*, which has gospel accents. The three **McCrary Sisters** add the touch of vocals that makes this piece even more beautiful and inspiring. **Mike Guildin** has several aces up his sleeve! It's up to you to discover the results on this varied and well-balanced album!

Small *Racing* Loudspeakers for Your Pure Pleasure

By JEAN-DENIS DOYLE



I have often advocated for the solution of choosing a small pair of high-end loudspeakers and installing them in a small room. This approach has its advantages and also allows for savings. The money saved can be used to invest in better equipment and refine the room's acoustics. So, I decided to delve into this idea by conducting a test bench of the *F1-5* mini speakers from **Fyne Audio**. At the Scottish manufacturer **Fyne Audio**, the *F1* series represents the highest tier of products offered by the company. It is the result of considerable research and development work. This particular model, the *F1-5*, is perfectly suited for this very interesting experiment. They are exceptional small speakers. Although they are the smallest in the family, they have inherited the same technological advancements as their larger siblings in the *F1* series. So, let's take the time to discover them.

Fyne Audio, do you know them? If you find that the presentation of Fyne loudspeakers has a hint of Tannoy, all is well, you haven't imagined it. Indeed, this Scottish company was founded by several former talents from Tannoy. In the realm of acoustic loudspeakers, Fyne Audio carries on the tradition of a certain classic expertise. In reality, for a young loudspeaker manufacturer, its approach remains quite traditional, with technological choices very similar to those that brought Tannoy fame. In the pure Scottish tradition, the attention to cabinet craftsmanship is truly exceptional. And it works! In just a few years, Fyne Audio has become a major player in the British acoustic loudspeaker market. The manufacturer's offerings are divided into several ranges, from home theater speakers to in-wall models. Fyne Audio, therefore, manufactures several product ranges designed for audiophiles, covering all budgets. Like many companies today, Fyne Audio manufactures its most ambitious products locally, at its Bellshill factory near Glasgow in Scotland. The more affordable products, although designed and engineered by Fyne Audio, are manufactured in Asia. What is remarkable about Fyne Audio is that it has managed to maintain the tradition and winning formulas that made Tannoy's reputation while continuing to introduce innovative technical improvements.

Technical Description

The F1-5 loudspeakers use a speaker technology that Fyne Audio calls *Isoflare Driver*. This two-way loudspeaker design places the tweeter in the center of the moving coil of the bass driver. This technological choice is very classical and has been around for a long time. Although it is costly to implement, it provides a stable and highly three-dimensional stereo image. Since the tweeter is placed in the center of the bass driver, they act as a single transducer, ensuring impeccable timing since there can be no phase and

timing issues. The tweeter has a wide magnesium dome and is equipped with a powerful neodymium magnet. With an aluminum voice coil and a copper gap, it can handle a lot of power. This allowed the engineers at Fyne Audio to cut it at a fairly low frequency of 1,850 Hz. This way, the engineers were able to simplify the design of the speaker's crossover filter and maximize coherence and integration. The 125 mm bass driver is made from a clever blend of fibers and features a particularly well-designed suspension. Called Fyne Flute, this rubber suspension contains several notches designed to prevent cone deformation. The frequency crossover filter consists of top-quality components and even includes an adjustment knob on the front of the loudspeaker. This allows for a level adjustment of plus or

minus three decibels, in a frequency range from 2,500 Hz to 5,000 Hz. This type of adjustment is quite ingenious and practical. It allows for optimizing the tonal balance of the F1-5 loudspeakers in the listening room.

These small loudspeakers feature a ported design to recover some of the energy inside them. The port has been carefully designed. Made from aluminum parts, it emits downward and has a diffuser that ensures a 360-degree dispersion. Additionally, the aluminum parts of the port improve rigidity and act as a base. The optional stand can securely anchor them. The cabinet of the F1-5 is the *pièce de résistance* of these mini-loudspeakers. Made from cherry plywood, it is adorned with a walnut burl finish, simply extraordinary. One never tires of looking at and



FYNE AUDIO F1-5 ACOUSTIC LOUDSPEAKERS

admiring these wonderful little loudspeakers, so beautiful and of high quality.

In conclusion, **Fyne Audio** has not skimped on the quality of the speaker terminals, as they are from **WBT**.

Installation and Listening Conditions

The *F1-5* loudspeakers from **Fyne** must be mounted on a rigid stand to place them at the correct height. With their distinctive oval shapes, they will not be easy to aesthetically integrate on a conventional stand. The optional stand is highly recommended and only enhances the intrinsic beauty of the *F1-5* from **Fyne**.

Ensure they are well clear of the walls, as they need air to perform at their best. A small to medium-sized room is ideal for making them sing. The *F1-5*s favor the power of a solid-state amplifier. Without needing a powerhouse, it should provide quality watts and good current capacity to properly drive and control them.

My various listening sessions took place with two different audio setups of varying quality levels. During the first listening

session, the system was mainly comprised of quality **Naim** equipment, with the *F1-5* loudspeakers from **Fyne** remaining the most expensive component of the system. In the second setup, the listening occurred in a larger room. To better appreciate the real capabilities of the *F1-5*, the session was conducted with higher-end *MOON* equipment from **Simaudio**.

A Very Promising First Listen

I started my listening with **Tilman Hoppstock's** guitar. This album of baroque classical guitar is exquisitely refined. It highlights all the finesse of **Fyne's** *F1-5*. Right away, it's easy to understand that we are dealing with a pair of exceptional loudspeakers. The timbres are simply gorgeous with astonishing density, giving the impression that much larger loudspeakers are playing. What splendid articulation! Everything effortlessly emerges from the loudspeakers.

The soundstage seems locked in space and doesn't waver a millimeter. There's no need to sit dead center between the speakers to appreciate their remarkable coherence. The stereo effect fills the entire room and extends well behind the *F1-5*





loudspeakers. The sound is a bit laid back, with very gentle highs that never draw attention to themselves. This allows them to be placed closer to the listening position, providing a highly holographic soundstage. With the *F1-5s*, in the context of a small room and a quality audio system, listening to this kind of chamber music becomes a genuine delight. With the **Helge Lien Trio**, the track *What Are You Doing with the Rest of Your Life* allowed me to appreciate their tonal accuracy and their ability to reproduce the piano. The piano sounds clear without falling into the trap of overly sharp notes, which often lead to lowering the volume. The double bass has weight and remarkable power, considering the size of the *F1-5s*. The percussion work is delicate and nuanced, contributing to creating a spacious effect that allows you to follow the jazz trio's music effortlessly. The double bass resonates with all the desired impact, and at no point did I feel the need to add a subwoofer.

Let's See What They're Made Of

Despite the fact that with intermediate-level equipment, the performance of the *F1-5s* from **Fyne** is impeccable, I wanted to hear their sound with higher-end equipment. Armed with a *MOON 680D* streamer and a *700i* integrated amplifier from the same manufacturer, I was treated to an utterly epic listening session.

« Cet album de guitare classique baroque est d'un raffinement inouï. Il permet de mettre en valeur toute la finesse des *F1-5* de **Fyne**. Tout de suite, il est aisé de comprendre qu'on a affaire à une paire d'enceintes d'exception. »

With **Dominic Miller's** album, *Second Nature*, the music now fills the room with astonishing ease. The soundstage is focused with surgical precision. Held in an iron grip by high-level amplification, the bass has perfect control and gives the impression that much larger loudspeakers are at play. These *F1-5s* are capable of reproducing a sea of details in which you'll take



FYNE AUDIO F1-5 ACOUSTIC LOUDSPEAKERS

pleasure in getting lost. Nothing escapes them; everything is faithfully and confidently rendered.

I then had fun pushing them with Leifur James's techno music. The *F1-5s* from **Fyne** had no difficulty keeping up with the rhythm of the track *Argonaut*, at a volume that would be hard to imagine for monitors of this size. The goal of this exercise was to see if it was possible to build a very high-level system for sound in a small room around the *F1-5s*. The answer is an unequivocal yes. Surrounded by approximately \$35,000 worth of electronics, they demonstrated that their tonal qualities, transparency, and coherence were capable of shining alongside equipment several times their price.

Conclusion

The *F1-5* speakers from **Fyne** undoubtedly represent an investment in the pleasure of listening to music. With their beautiful aesthetics and impeccable finish, they are assembled by passionate artisans who clearly love what they do. Comfortable with both basic quality equipment and high-end products, these little gems will make your daily listening experience

thrilling for many years to come. In my opinion, the *F1-5* loudspeakers from **Fyne** are undeniable classics that are well worth their weight in gold. Truly, they are small racing loudspeakers that allow you to take the time to stop and enjoy.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$6,950

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labor

Distributor: The Gramophone, T.: 780.428.2356,
<https://gramophone.ca>

Mediagraphy

Tilman Hopstock, *Variations for guitar*, Christoforus, Qobuz file.

Helge Lien Trio, *What Are You Doing with the Rest of Your Life?*, *Curling Legs*, Qobuz file.

Dominic Miller, *Second Nature*, Rutis Music Ltee, Qobuz file.

Leifur James, *A Louder Silence*, *Night Time Stories*, Qobuz file.

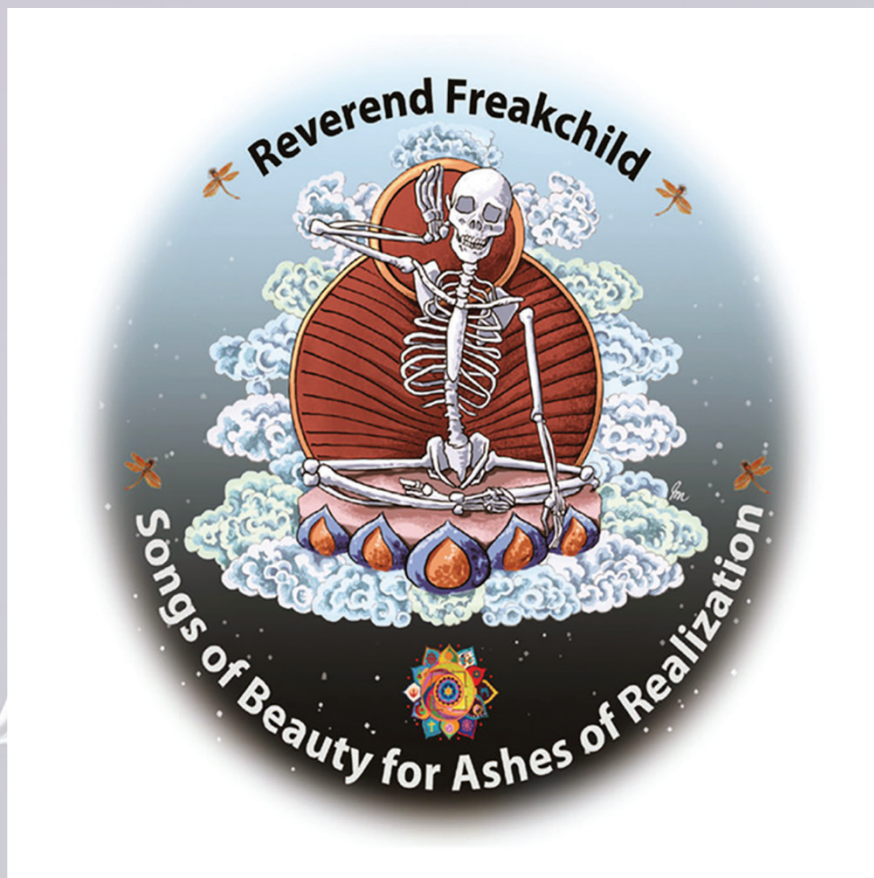
Acknowledgment

A big thank you to Filtronique store and its team for their hospitality and collaboration in making this test bench possible.



Blues

By PIERRE JOBIN



REVEREND FREAKCHILD

Songs of Beauty for Ashes of Realization
TreatedandReleasedRecords.com, TNR -017

Reverend Freakchild, is a creative and irreverent artist who tirelessly explores the roots and boundaries of the blues. He began his musical quest at a young age, leading him to travel the world and explore countless musical universes. He started his recording career in 2001, and *Songs Of Beauty For Ashes of Realization* is his seventeenth album. This album includes nine tracks and is a musical reinterpretation of selected pieces from his discography. On this project, he is surrounded by excellent musicians, some of whom have played with **Bob Dylan** and **Joe Cocker**, among others, **Bob Weir**, the singer, guitarist, and founding member of the

Grateful Dead, and, notably, **Reverend Shawn Amos**, another original musician with eclectic musical tastes. On this record, **Rev. Freakchild** is mainly on vocals, guitar, and harmonica. The primary inspiration for his artistic journey is the music of the **Grateful Dead**, a fusion of folk, blues, rock, country, soul, and even psychedelic elements. **Reverend Freakchild's** vocal styles and intonations sometimes remind me of the voices of **Lou Reed** or **Everlast**. The lyrics, which play a significant role, con-

tain little gems here and there, sometimes with a philosophical or spiritual flavor, like those from the opening track, *All I Got is Now: Yesterday is a history, tomorrows are a mystery, but all I got is now, but, I keep forgetting that, somehow...* As **Willie Dixon** said, The blues can be about anything pertaining to the facts of life. Having *paid his dues to the blues*, **Reverend Freakchild** expands and broadens his creative expression through experiences and musical fusions as he discovers and fantasizes. If you are open to fused musical styles where the blues always remains a base and reference, albeit sometimes distant, this album might interest you and pique your curiosity.

Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

The World of Port Wines Taylor Fladgate House

I was invited to a *Port* wine tasting event featuring the iconic **Taylor Fladgate House**, with **Joao Rebelo** representing the house. **Taylor Fladgate House**, established since 1692, is one of the oldest producers of *Port* wines. It owns the following properties: **Quinta de Vargellas**, **Quinta de Terra Feita**, **Quinta do Jonco**, **Nogueira Winery**, and cellars in **Vila Nova de Gaia**. The house was among the top 100 wineries in 2019, according to **Wine and Spirits** magazine.



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE



Port wine, the mythical fortified wine of Portugal from the iconic Douro Valley, a true wine treasure trove, has seen many changes over the years. Not so much in terms of its centuries-old traditions, which trace a glorious path that continues, but rather in terms of consumption and the introduction of new products developed to cater to changing consumer tastes. To illustrate these trends, we were treated to cocktails made with the dry white Port, *Chip Dry*, and *Croft Pink*, the first-ever rosé Port. Surprising!

Taylor Fladgate, Chip Dry Dry White Port

White Ports come in two different styles, either drier or sweeter.

Taylor was the first house to produce a dry *white Port*, called *Chip Dry*. Introduced to the market in 1934, it is still one of the most well-known dry aperitif *Ports*.

It can be served in various ways: chilled in a classic *Port* glass, neat, or with a twist of lemon, accompanied by roasted almonds, olives, or appetizer crackers. It also makes an excellent summer cocktail.

Taylor Fladgate, Chip Dry Dry White Port

Grapes: Malvasia Fina 40 %, Arinto 20 %, Rabigato 20 %, Viosinho 20 %

Sugar: 26 g/l

Alcohol: 20 %

Price: \$23.85

SAQ Code: 14000562

<https://www.saq.com/en/14000562>



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Croft, Pink Port

Launched in 2008, *Croft Pink* was the first **rosé Port** on the market. It is a lighter, very fruity *Port* with a delicious, fine, and dry taste. Unwooded, its soft pink color is obtained from the brief contact of the juice with the grape skins during low-temperature fermentation. The grapes used are the same as those for *red Ports*.

Croft Pink should be served well chilled, between 6° and 7° C, like white *Ports*. It is recommended to enjoy it in a large glass with ice. *Croft Pink* is an excellent aperitif that pairs well with light desserts. Try it in a cocktail, diluted with soda or jasmine tea; you'll love it. Ready to drink but can be stored for 1 year.

Croft, Pink Port

Grapes: Tinta barroca 25%,
Tinta Francisca 25%,
Tinta Roriz 25%,
Touriga Nacional 25%

Sugar: 100 g/l

Alcohol: 19,5%

Price: \$21,05

SAQ Code: 11305029

<https://www.saq.com/en/11305029>



In addition, we tasted the entire range of *Tawny Ports*, with age indications from the house, which included the brand new *50-Year Golden Age Port*. *Tawnies* are wines generally made from red grapes aged in wooden barrels, exposing them to oxidation and gradual evaporation. Following this oxidation, they soften and acquire a golden-brown color. Exposure to oxygen imparts hazelnut flavors to the wine, which is blended to match the house's style.

There are several categories of *Tawny Ports*: *Tawnies*, *Tawny Reserva*, *Tawny* with age indication (10 years, 20 years, 30 years, 40 years, and now 50 years old), and *Colheita*.

Tawnies with an age indication are made and aged in oak barrels, blending several vintages with an average age as indicated, such as 10, 20, 30, 40, and now 50 years. In my opinion, the *20-year Tawny* best represents the quintessence of balance, combining the primacy of fine Douro fruits with complexity resulting from aging in barrels.

In fact, the secret to a good *20-year Tawny* is the right balance between age and freshness, making the wine both drinkable and affordable. The *10-year* one is good, but 10 more years make it even better. The *20-year Tawny* has just the right balance. However, as we will see, the 30, 40, and 50 years lead us to unexpected sensations.

Taylor Fladgate, Porto Tawny, 10 years old

Each wine is aged in large oak barrels of approximately 630 liters for an average period of 10 years. During this time, it loses its dark black-purple color and takes on the delicate tawny hue that gives it its name.

Tasting Notes

The nose is quite aromatic, rich, and elegant with aromas of candied cherries, hazelnuts, chocolate, sweet spices, floral notes, and well-integrated woody notes. The palate demonstrates a beautiful balance between fruity notes and those from oxidation, such as hazelnuts. The tannins are balanced, and the acidity shows an ability to balance the 20% alcohol, creating remarkable sweetness. Flavors of ripe

figs and very ripe cherries persist in a long finish.

It pairs beautifully with almond flavors, small fruits, or dark chocolate. It can also accompany rich blue cheese or a plate of roasted nuts or almonds.

Taylor Fladgate, Porto Tawny 10 years old

Sugar: 120 g/l

Alcohol 20%

Price: \$37.25

SAQ Code: 121749

<https://www.saq.com/en/121749>



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Taylor Fladgate, Porto Tawny 20 years old

Over the years, Taylor has built up a vast reserve of old Ports, aged in barrels in the lodges - in the city of Porto, on the Atlantic coast of Portugal. And it is from these stocks that the superb 20-year-old Tawny is blended. An additional decade of aging gives it a riper fruitiness than its younger sibling, the 10-year-old Tawny, with more powerful and intense hazelnut tertiary aromas.

Tasting Notes

This 20-year Tawny has less intense fruit aromas than the 10-year version, but it features spicier and denser hazelnut aromas resulting from extended aging.

The nose is opulent and voluptuous with complex aromas of spices, dried apricots, hazelnuts, and well-integrated oak. The palate is brimming with rich and concentrated flavors of dried Corinthian grapes, butterscotch, and roasted hazelnuts that intertwine with fresh acidity. The overall experience is elegant, complex, with great breadth and endless persistence.

This Tawny pairs well with many desserts and complements flavors of figs, almonds, and caramel. It's an excellent match for crème brûlée or a plate of wild strawberries. It can also be enjoyed on its own at the end of a meal, with nuts or dried fruits.

Taylor Fladgate, Porto Tawny – 20 years old

Sugar: 120 g/l

Alcohol: 20%

Price: \$72.50

SAQ Code: 149047

<https://www.saq.com/en/149047>



Taylor Fladgate, Porto Tawny 30 years old

Taylor Fladgate is one of the few houses still producing a 30-year-old Tawny Port. Only once every two or three years do wines from **Taylor's** own vineyards display the structure, fruity component, and sufficient power to withstand 30 years of aging in oak barrels. At the end of this period, the matured wines are blended for balance and finesse, ensuring consistent quality and style.

Tasting Notes

This *Port* begins to show tertiary mushroom notes accentuated by very ripe red fruit, dried fruit, and caramel notes. On the palate, some plum notes harmonize with slightly oxidized and nutty notes. An absolutely delicious and sustained finish.

Taylor Fladgate, Porto Tawny, 30 ans d'âge

Sugar: 130 g/l

Alcohol: 20%

Price: \$193.25

SAQ Code: 540252

<https://www.saq.com/en/540252>



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Taylor Fladgate, Porto Tawny 40 years old

After each harvest, a certain quantity of very powerful and concentrated *red Ports* is set aside for aging in oak barrels. Those that reach their peak after more than forty years are then blended for balance and finesse to ensure uniform quality and style. To standardize aging characteristics, it is often necessary to blend wines from different vintages rather than wines from a specific year.

Tasting Notes

Just like the *30-year version*, tertiary notes join this *Port* in a concert of very ripe red fruits and dried fruits. Very ample and entirely supported in a long and enjoyable finish.

Taylor Fladgate, Porto Tawny, 40 years old

Sugar: 170 g/l

Alcohol: 20%

Price: \$253.25

SAQ Code: 540260

<https://www.saq.com/en/540260>



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Taylor Fladgate, Porto Tawny 50 years old - 'Golden Age'

This brand new *50-year-old Port* comes from the eastern part of the Douro, where the most beautiful vineyards produce wines that can be aged the longest. Before being blended, individual wines are aged in previously seasoned barrels, set aside by **Taylor's** team. After half a century of aging under wood, this exceptional wine combines enchanting complexity with irresistible smoothness and density.

Tasting Notes

Possibly the most beautiful with an entirely fused profile, very smooth with tertiary notes of tobacco and dried fruits culminating in incredible amplitude.

Taylor Fladgate, Porto Tawny, 50 years old 'Golden Age'

Sugar: 170 g / l

Alcohol: 20 %

Price: \$301.50

SAQ Code: 14843906 <https://www.saq.com/en/14843906>

Tasting: Sylvestre Agency

Claude Lalonde - bio

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.



VINFORMATEUR.com
S'f d'apprendre!

Spice Makes All Nice !

By GEORGE de SA

Spice. What's the first thought that comes to mind? Perhaps a favorite dish you recently indulged in or maybe a craving you yearn to satisfy. Of course, you may think of the greatly anticipated **Denis Villeneuve** film – the sequel, *DUNE: Part Two*, or it might simply be that you connect 'spice' with excitement or zest. If we were to list the countries most synonymous with spice, I'm sure India would be near the *top*. India is a country inseparable from spice, a country alive with culture, colour, and music. Yet, the western world just began to become familiar with Indian musical instruments when **The Beatles** experimentally incorporated the sitar, on their track Norwegian Wood (*This Bird Has Flown*), from their *Rubber Soul* album of 1965. Since then, Indian instruments and music have made their appearances globally in different forms. Keeping this in mind, I'd like to tell you about a recent Indian expression of music, in this case through loudspeaker products, from a company named **Rethm**.

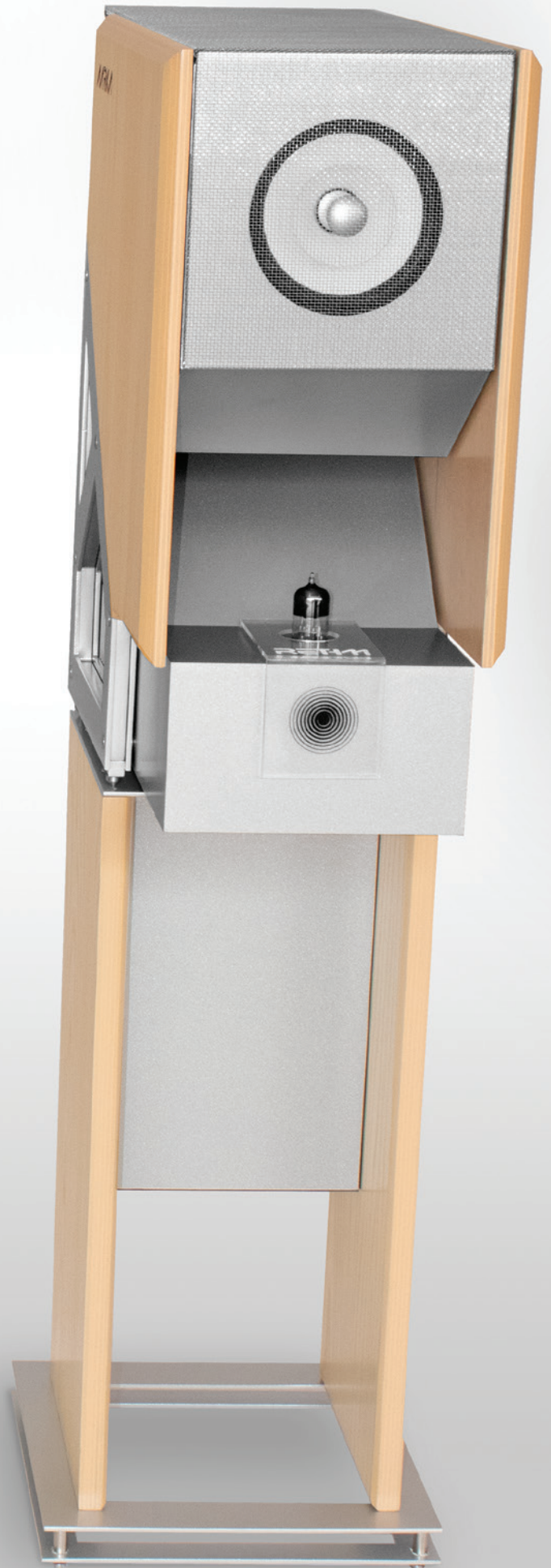
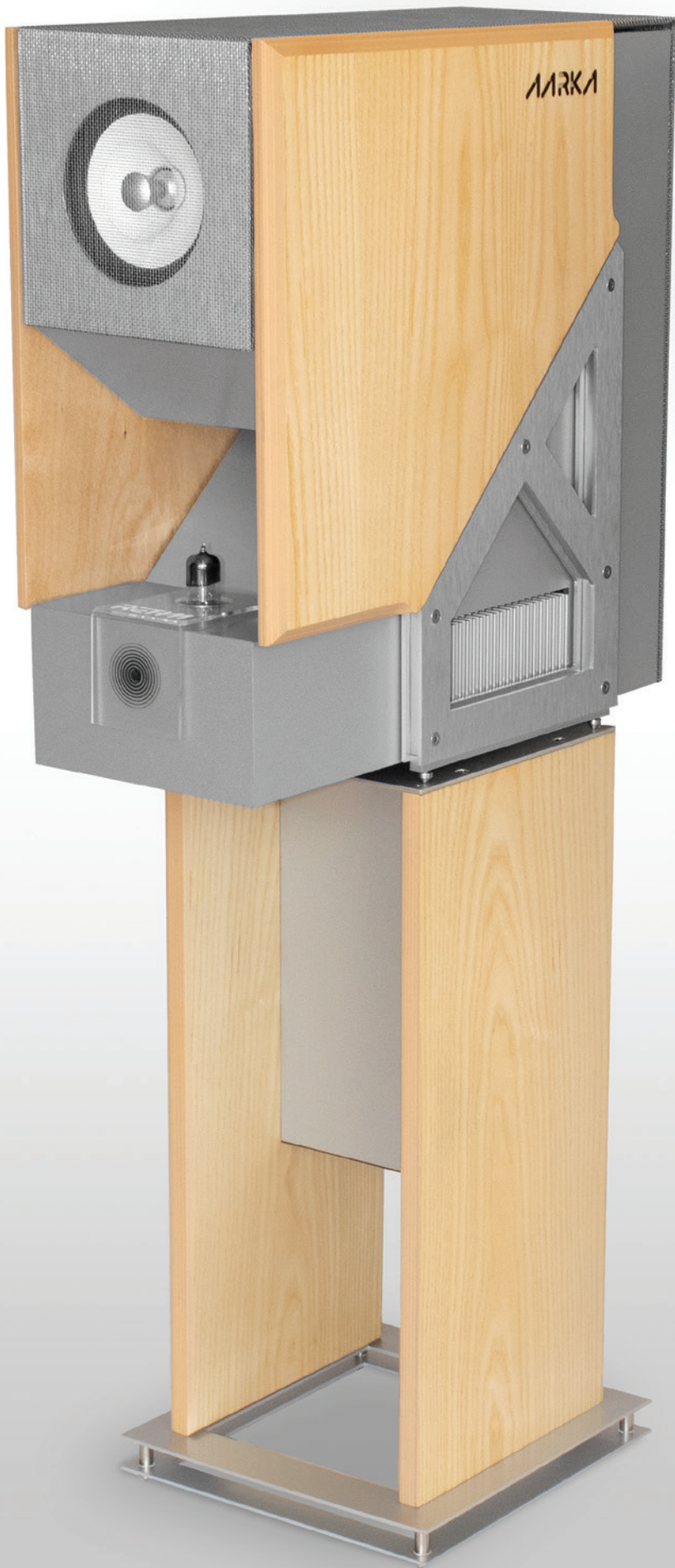
Rethm was founded in 2000 by **Jacob George**, an architect by profession. I corresponded with Jacob recently to get some background on his company and its start. **Jacob** explained that his passion for music began at a young age, music was part of his family environment, and he was a member of a choir before learning to play the violin. As a young man, he began seeking affordable loudspeakers that in his own words, might '*satisfy my soul*'. This led him to some adventuring with **Lowther** drivers, which hooked him on high-efficiency speakers. **Jacob's** education in architectural design led him to take his experiments further and eventually launch **Rethm**, a loudspeaker design and manufacturing company. **Rethm** is based out of Cochin (Kochi), in the southwestern state of Kerala, India. The company currently produces four loudspeaker models – each endowed a Sanskrit name with a purposeful if not inspirational meaning. The **Rethm** stable includes: the **Rethm Saadhana** (devotion to practice – to reach the pinnacle of musical attainment), the largest model in the line, a floorstander with an active bass section; the **Rethm Maarga** (the path, the method – to attaining musical bliss) a mid-size floorstander with active bass section; **Rethm Trishna** (the desire to search – for musical enlightenment), a compact floorstander with active bass section, and finally; the **Rethm Aarka** (to sing in praise), a stand-mount model with full/semi active operation.

The Rethm' philosophy

These latest **Rethm** loudspeaker models had their genesis during the Covid induced slowdown. The quieter period provided the time for the company to self-reflect, re-examine, and reinvent its entire loudspeaker line. Four new models reflect a novel direction in design, aesthetics, and sonic attributes for **Rethm**. This was no evolution but rather a ground-up re-creation to produce four loudspeaker models worthy to carry the **Rethm** moniker. The new models, as claimed by **Rethm**, provide added heft and density in the lower midrange and upper bass regions, along with better dynamics. Gone is the bottom directed bass, replaced by front facing bass drivers in all models apart from their *Aarka* standmount that feature twin rear firing woofers. The new aesthetic of the **Rethm** loudspeaker models incorporates a "*Form follows Function*" approach, where form incorporates precepts of architectural design. All **Rethm** loudspeaker models utilize wide-band drivers, which **Rethm** feel "*embodies an elegance – that comes from simplicity*" and produces a most realistic and natural sound and other natural or man-made materials.

Technical information

Rethm loudspeaker models use a wide-band driver to reproduce a broad critical bandwidth, from 80 Hz to 16 kHz; thus, avoiding the problems associated with crossover filters, which plague other speakers. The wide-band custom drivers are manufactured by **Rethm** and are the result of several years of





development and key to the heart of the “*Rethm’s advantage*”, as stated on their website. **Rethm** uses a custom wide-band driver for each loudspeaker model, optimizing to each model’s design and cabinet. Neodymium magnets are used in all their drivers, those drivers all being high efficiency, to deliver all the subtleties and nuances contained in the music. This results in the easy driving characteristics of **Rethm** loudspeakers and their inherent friendliness to valve amplification, including low output *SET* amplifiers.

The wide-band single driver used in each **Rethm** loudspeaker is implemented in the company’s own horn-loaded analogous design that involves a shortened labyrinth, due to the use of complementary active bass drivers. This shortened labyrinth, improves lower midrange and mid-bass performance, in turn. A driver compression chamber design also eliminates back-wave reflections and driver colouration. Further, unique custom phase plugs, tailored to each loudspeaker model, smoothen out frequency response. The internal wiring is all single-core, with a single flat cryogenically treated copper tape, which optimizes signal transmission.

The active bass in all **Rethm** loudspeaker models was chosen to ensure matching of the bass drivers (inherently less efficient) to the 98 dB sensitivity high-efficiency wide-band driver. The active bass has adjustable gain and cross-over to allow tailoring the loudspeaker to the room and ancillary electronics used. All **Rethm** floorstanding models use an isobaric design for deep controlled bass within a relatively compact cabinet and are mated to high wattage **Hypex** *N*-core class *D* amplifier modules that maximize driver control.

Let’s look at the Aarka model specifically

When it comes to the **Rethm Aarka** stand mount loudspeaker, here we have a fully active or selectable semi-active loudspeaker. The Aarka has a contemporary design, not quite modern but possessing a touch of industrial styling. The non-removeable top cover



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



RSX Technologies | Rancho Cucamonga, USA
1-909-870-9292 | See rsxtech.com. For Info, info@rsxtech.com

RETHM AARKA STANDMOUNT ACTIVE LOUSPEAKERS

and removable magnet-affixed front and rear driver covers are wire mesh, and reminiscent of chainmail. Though aesthetically unique, I found the material choice perplexing given my suspicion of its susceptibility to vibration. However, I was assured by the manufacturer that vibration is a non-issue and throughout my listening trials I never did hear any vibration from the mesh. According to the distributor the loudspeakers are meant to be listened to with the mesh grills on as they are acoustically transparent. The front of the *Aarka* hosts the 5" wide-band driver, which is bordered below by a mouth like opening for the driver to breathe, while the chin of the *Aarka* hosts a single 6H6P vacuum tube.

The *Aarka* has removable side dress panels that match the included pedestal stands. The side panels literally hang on two upper screws on the inner MDF structural cabinet. The structural cabinet is a satin grey, but the side dress panels come in a choice of three standard oak finishes: light, medium and dark, with matching stands. The review sample was in an all-new premium 'milky white' acrylic, which I found attractive. I do hear that a black finish is presently in the works.

Triangular aluminum skeletal frames brace the sides of the structural cabinet, tastefully framing the internal amplifier's exposed heat sink. Twin 6" bass drivers are found on the back, bordered by a control panel below that hosts IEC power inlet; power button; active / passive button; single RCA input; volume trim knob; crossover adjustment knob and a pair of speaker binding posts for driving the wide-band driver when in passive mode.

The *Aarka* contains 1 x 95 W class A/B solid-state amplifier and 1 x 25 W hybrid amplifier; it's a true hybrid amplifier, with the 6H6P vacuum tube directly coupled to the FET.

Experimenting with placement, I settled with the *Aarka* front baffles about 6' away from the back wall with a slight toe in, under 10°, delivering the best tonal balance, soundstage, and centre lock. The *Aarka* does respond to small position changes, so I'd recommend spending some time finding what work best in your room. As critical is the adjustment of the woofer crossovers and gain via the rear controls – setting them wrong can result in a lack of driver cohesion – so they do need some time to fine tune. Speaker grills were customarily removed, laying bare the drivers. I did notice that on power up the **Rethm Aarka** did emit a low level 60 Hz hum through the rear bass drivers that remained there consistently. I confirmed that this is expected; however, from my listening seat, just about 8 ft away, barely audible in a quiet room and never a concern while music was playing, even at low volume.

Equipment used during this review

Ancillary equipment used included: the signal source via my **Bryston BR20** preamplifier / DAC-streamer. For passive-mode evaluation of the wide-band driver, my **Rega Elex-R** was used

for amplification. *OEM* (original equipment manufacturer) power cords were used in combination with my **Zafino Fusion XLR** interconnects, sporting *RCA* adapters. Digital music was streamed from both **Tidal Audio** and **Qobuz**, while my **Rega Apollo** (as transport) for *CD*. For analog, I used my **VPI Scout 1.1** / **Dynavector 10x5** / **Gold Note PH-10** with *PSU-10*.

Listening Sessions

Getting into listening, I'll start with my impressions of **Angus and Julia Stone's** track, 'Silver Coin' from their album *A Book Like This*. The more I listen to this Australian brother and sister duo, the more I love them. This track is well recorded and its well delineated and laid out soundstage did well to evaluate the *Aarka's* imaging. The opening violin stings were heard in the distance – clear and distinctly placed, with the soft tremor of the bow coming lifting off the stings lucidly heard, set within the reverb of the recorded space. The *Aarka's* then placed the guitar centre stage, focused and clear, while most distinctly more forward in space on the stage than the violin. **Angus** voice was extremely clear, yet very natural. When the piano notes came in on the right, I was well surprised at the buoyancy of the note decays and the wrap around soundstage effect. The *Aarka's* are very effective at imaging and laying out a clear and large soundstage that has front-to-back layering, generous width, as well as height. They generally play instruments within their inner bounds but are capable of relaying atmosphere and effects well outside their stations.

Kat Edmonson, and her track 'I Don't Know' was another memorable song played on the **Rethm Aarka**. **Kat's** adorably sweet expressions were vividly conjured through the **Aarka**. Her girlish and delicate vocalizations were delivered with nuance and detail, while absent of any treble etch or highlighting; all impressively coherent across that vital midrange. The presence of the midrange was delightful, bringing Kat to life, while she gracefully phrased the song. The guitar and the open tambourine jumped out with remarkable verve, having what the spice of a well-balanced Indian dish. There was a correctness in the tone of the guitar, accompanied with convincing touch - a truthful presentation of dynamics. This sense of mid-dynamic realism rang true also for the open tambourine, the ring of the castanets possessing their characteristic patina with vibrancy. This entrancing energy of the *Aarka* was only taken to a higher level with the rolling strikes on kettledrum that were deep, textured, tuneful and controlled. The bass of the *Aarka* strikes a nice balance of control and bloom, taking almost that *Goldilock's* position within the two and making the sound so engaging that it called for several repeat of this track. Delving further into the lower bass, I put on the track *Celestial Echo*, from **Malia** and **Boris Blank's** *Convergence* album. The bass notes of the opening percussion can be gigantic and thunderous on the most capable systems; through the **Rethm**

Aarka, the percussion was dense, full, and saturated in tone—possessing a cavernous boom accompanied by a touch of woodiness. Bass textures are well preserved through the *Aarka* when dialed-in and in my rooms was apparently reaching below 40 Hz, just short of that bottom audible octave. On this same track, I was taken by the velvet like smoothness of the treble, which also revealed an exciting bite on the leading edge of cymbals. The **Rethm** loudspeakers did an excellent job of portraying **Malia's** voice in a corporeal manner, keeping details of the recording and production integrated within the music. The background vocal effects were also notably expansive, filling my room and surrounding me, with the sense of height expressed. Back to bass, I put on **Hugh Laurie's** *Six Cold Feet* where the big weighty drum thumps and low double bass notes manifested in a powerful dynamic exhibition; the *Aarka's* managing to shake my seat if just coming shy of shaking the room. Finally on the bass kick, I went to **Boz Scags, Thanks to You** and found lovely melodic grippy bass rendered through the *Aarka's*, combined with a caramel smooth expression of **Boz'** voice. I also took note of the crisp metallic timbre of the cymbals and their well preserved sustain through the **Rethm Aarka**.

At some point, I played *Lovesong*; no not the original version from the *Cure* but a classical-jazz fusion of the track from **Marie Spaemann** on her album *GAP*. The **Rethm Aarka's** were able to deliver the delicious beauty of **Marie's** gently peppered satin like voice masterfully. Her whispery expressions perfectly complimenting the tight pinch of strings beneath fingers as well as the haunting play of the cello, under her bow. It was here, there was no doubt of the *Aarka's* talent with connecting music with emotion—the two seemingly inseparable within the *Aarka's* sonic vocabulary.

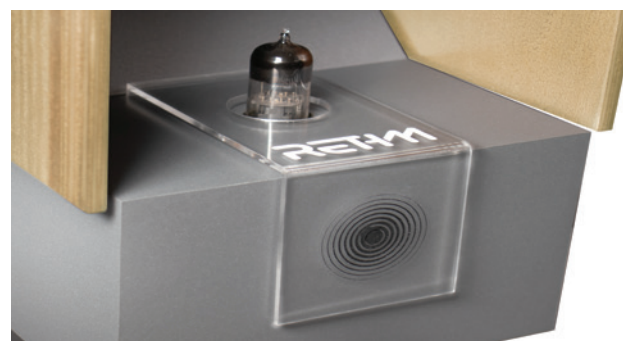
Performing in a semi-active mode

I've described the *Aarka* in its fully-active mode; however, I did try the *Aarka* with my **Rega Elex-R** integrated amplifier—using them in semi-active mode, with the wide-band driver powered by my *Elex-R*. Powered as such, the **Aarka's** took on a very different character. Their presentation was more forceful and heavy-handed and accordingly, less delicate and finessed. Though still very much engaging with the **Rega** handling amplification, it could not match the grace of the *Aarka's* own hybrid amplifier. Speaking to the **Jacob George, Rethm** founder, he explained that the *Aarka* works best in semi-active, when paired to a low powered high-performance amplifier, such as a fine valve/*SET* amp. My own conclusion was that the integrated *Aarka* hybrid amplifier should not be underestimated and is well set to deliver beautiful sound.



Overall Conclusion

My time with the *Aarka* has been great introduction to the **Rethm** brand. The *Aarka* delivers music in an exuberant, delicate, and delightful manner, while providing the simplicity of a full-active solution, combined with the customizability of a semi-active. The mids are delightful but more surprising was how wonderfully complete and finessed the top-end was through *Aarka's* wide-band driver. The *Aarka* might not have an ultra-airy top end or full command of the bottom octave, but it truly presents music in a natural and authentic manner, with a dynamic spice that breaths life to the music. If you are looking for a compact yet high-end solution to connect emotionally with your music, you would do yourself a disfavor to not give the **Rethm Aarka** a serious listen...it may just turn out to be the spice you've been looking for.



GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: Please contact the distributor

Warranty period: Please contact the distributor

Distributor: Audio Pathways

T.: 905.773.7810

<https://audiopathways.com/>

This product is currently available at: American Sound

T.: 905.772.7810

Classical Music

By CHRISTOPHE HUSS

RHYTHM & MUSIC



CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI

Vespro della Beata Vergine
Pygmalion, Raphaël Pichon.

Harmonia Mundi, 2 CD, 902 710/11

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

What a way to start the 2023-24 music season! **Raphaël Pichon** had already offered – on *DVD* only – an interpretation of **Monteverdi's Vespers**, immortalizing a concert at the **Château de Versailles** in 2019 with soloists **Lea Desandre, Eva Zaïcik, Lucile Richardot, Emiliano Gonzalez Toro, Zachary Wilder, Olivier Coiffet, Nicolas Brooymans, Renaud Brès, and Geoffroy Buffière**. Here, in 2022, in a meticulously crafted studio recording with

every breath and resonance fine-tuned at the **Temple du Saint-Esprit in Paris**, the main changes are with the two sopranos. **Céline Scheen** and **Perrine Devillers**, while equaling their predecessors, replace **Desandre** and **Zaïcik**. Important elements: the mezzo-soprano parts are still performed by **Richardot**, and **Gonzalez Toro** remains the principal tenor. But what stands out is the breath, the flexibility of the ensemble, and the inventiveness of the nuances that sometimes seem to merge into space. Returning to a work in 2022 that they had sung and resung on tour three or four years earlier allows **Pygmalion** to achieve unprecedented levels of refinement in expressive sensitivity. Despite the richness of the discography, this is a must-have.



PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKI
PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA
MANFRED HONECK
Symphony N° 5. Schulhoff : 5 Pieces.

Reference Recordings, SACD, FR-752SACD

Interpretation : ****

Technique : *****

Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony is a favorite for **Manfred Honeck**, who recorded it for the first time about fifteen years ago when he arrived in Pittsburgh. He also performed it at Lanaudière with this orchestra, known for its

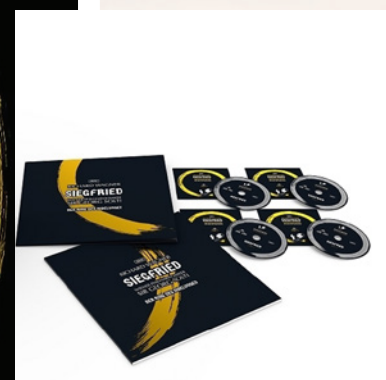
beautiful horn section, which plays a significant role in this symphony.

The first recording was released on the Japanese label **Exton**, partially distributed in Canada by **SRI** (a company that has since disappeared). This easily accessible new recording confirms two things: the fantastic rapport between the **Pittsburgh Orchestra** and its conductor and the relevance of the partnership with **Reference Recordings** and the best technicians in orchestral recordings. **Mark Donahue** of **Soundmirror**, a Boston-based company, brilliantly captures the most exhilarating **Tchaikovsky Fifth** since **Svetlanov's** in Tokyo in 1990. The coupling is slightly more demanding than usual, but this immense **Fifth Symphony** is worth the effort.

Classical Music

By CHRISTOPHE HUSS

RHYTHM & MUSIC



RICHARD WAGNER SINGERS, VIENNA PHILARMONIQUE ORCHESTRA, GEORG SOLTI.

Siegfried. Götterdämmerung.

Decca, 2 x 4 SACDs, 485 316-1 et 485 316-2

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

Pure joy: **Decca** has continued and completed the re-mastering and hyper-luxurious release of **Solti's Wagner Ring** (**Wagner's** tetralogy) with the remaining two operas, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*.

We presented the first two parts (*Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*) in March 2023. **Solti's Ring** in Vienna, begun in 1958 and completed in the 1960s, immediately became **Decca's** emblem of technical superiority compared to

DG or **EMI**. This project also served as a demonstration of an aesthetic of clarity and vitality in opera recording compared to **Karajan's** melded and enveloped *Ring* (**DG**, 1967-1970) and **Karl Böhm's** live recording in Bayreuth (**Philips**, 1966).

Solti's Ring has always been promoted based on musical and technical criteria. *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* confirm the added value (orchestra and vocals) compared to the already superb 2012 remastering. Life has never been more present. This work, done in 24-bit – 192 kHz, is published on hybrid stereo *SACDs*. Ideally, you should have an *SACD* player to fully enjoy it, but the quality of the remastering is apparent from the *CD* listening experience. The *LP*-sized presentation, with the booklet, recording photos, and gilded accents, makes these editions definitive heritage objects.

BOX SET OF THE MONTH



RHYTHM & MUSIC

HERBERT BLOMSTEDT

Complete Decca Recordings

Decca, 33 CD, 485 3281

Interpretation: **** to *****

Technique: **** to *****

This box set is a boon for both music enthusiasts and audiophiles. **Herbert Blomstedt**, at 96 years old, is the oldest prominent active conductor. When you see a *Complete Recordings* theme, you might be overwhelmed by the scope, but the conductor, born in 1927, whose career truly took off at the age of 40 when he became the conductor of the **Danish Radio Orchestra** (1967-1977) and later the **Staatskapelle Dresden** (1975-1985), only caught **Decca's** attention during his tenure as the conductor of the **San Francisco Symphony Orchestra** from 1985 to 1995, the golden years of the CD. A few

recordings from his time in Leipzig, where the Swedish conductor worked from 1998 to 2005, complete a musically exciting collection that is also financially very affordable.

Blomstedt's time in San Francisco includes a reference recording of **Nielsen's** complete works, an almost complete **Sibelius** collection, the finest recording of **Grieg's** *Peer Gynt* ever made, and a slew of spectacular albums: *Carmina Burana*, **Mahler's 2nd Symphony**, three **Richard Strauss** discs, and **Hindemith's** best works, all captured by a top-notch technical team. These recordings span from 1987 to 2004. If you want something truly beautiful and spectacular for around \$3 per CD, it's hard to find better.

Classical Music

By CHRISTOPHE HUSS

RHYTHM & MUSIC



**BÉLA BARTOK,
PIERRE-LAURENT AIMARD,
SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA,
ESA-PEKKA SALONEN.**
Piano Concertos N^{os} 1 - 3.

Pentatone PTC 5187029.

Interpretation : **

Technique : ***

Released on September 15th, 2023, this recording is highly anticipated. Over the past two years, a significant part of the music scene has been revitalized in San Francisco,

with a hub of artistic and technological expertise centered around the Conservatory, bringing together artist agencies and record companies. When we received the 24-192 files of this paragon of excellence, we expected a miracle but got lukewarm water instead. Technically, this new release doesn't showcase any sonic or recording advantages compared to **Pollini-Abbado** (*Concertos N^{os} 1 and 2*) or **Kocsis-Fischer** (all three *Concertos*). Compare the impact, depth, and sensation of percussion in the *Finale of the 2nd Concerto*. Additionally, the overall sound (piano, woodwinds) lacks high harmonics and feels somewhat stifled. To make matters worse, the interpretation is laborious and dull. The modern alternative to these references remains **Bavouzet-Nosedá** (**Chandos**).



GABRIEL FAURÉ
MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN (piano)
Nocturnes and Barcarolles.

Hyperion 2 CD CDA 68331.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : ****

First and foremost, this album is a gem with a significant competitive advantage: it features all 13 *Nocturnes*, all 13 *Barcarolles*, as well as *Dolly* (a work for four hands played with his wife, **Cathy Fuller**), totaling 2 hours and 44 minutes on 2 CDs.

The discography was long dominated by **Jean Philippe Collard**'s versions (EMI). Recently, **Éric Le Sage** added a

unique voice in the *Nocturnes*, while we rediscovered **Éric Heidsieck**'s earlier version in a **Warner** box set. **Collard** revisited the *Barcarolles* for *La Dolce Volta*, with these works bearing the personal touch of **Pierre-Alain Volondat** (Naxos). After listening to **Marc-André Hamelin**, it's clear that in the *Nocturnes*, the truly revolutionary version is **Éric Le Sage**'s, unexpected in its fluidity and liveliness. **Marc-André Hamelin** returns to more measured readings, beautifully nuanced. In the *Barcarolles*, **Hamelin** strikes a balance between the deeply explored **Collard** (new version) and the mysterious and haunting **Volondat**. It's a balanced, radiant **Fauré**, less idiosyncratic than others but still admirable.

Classical Music

By CHRISTOPHE HUSS

RHYTHM & MUSIC



PIETRO ANTONIO LOCATELLI ISABELLE FAUST (violin), IL GIARDINO ARMONICO, GIOVANNI ANTONINI

Il virtuoso, il poeta.
Concertos and concertos grossos.

Harmonia Mundi, HMMM, 902398

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

As volume 14 of the complete **Haydn** collection (*Symphonies Nos. 33, 53, and 54, Imperial*) from **Alpha** approaches, the brilliant **Giovanni Antonini** explores the

music of **Pietro Antonio Locatelli** (1695-1764) with **Isabelle Faust**. **Locatelli** is nearly a generation after **Vivaldi**. His inspiration came from Rome and Corelli more than Venice and **Vivaldi**, although his music somehow sounds like a synthesis of both. In the notes, **Cesare Fertonani** perfectly describes **Locatelli**'s language, calling it music of imagination, mood, and unpredictability, shifting from controlled eloquence to graceful cantabile with surprises, changes in atmosphere, and mood swings. **Faust** and **Antonini** cultivate these surprises, atmosphere changes, and mood swings with exceptional dexterity and refined artistry, served by transparent recording and perfectly tuned timbres.



**SERGEÏ RACHMANINOV
YUJA WANG,
LOS ANGELES
PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA,
GUSTAVO DUDAMEL.**

**The Four Piano Concertos.
Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini.**

DG, 2 CD, 486 475 9

Interpretation : ****

Technique : ****

More than **Yannick Nézet-Séguin's** complete symphony set for the same label (see the July issue), this album is the centerpiece of **Rachmaninov's** 150th anniversary. While the symphonies are pre-pandemic recordings

with a delayed release to coincide with the commemoration, this album features live performances from February 2023 in Los Angeles. **Yuja Wang** had previously presented all four concertos and the *Rhapsody* with the **Philadelphia Orchestra** and **Yannick Nézet-Séguin** in a single evening in Philadelphia and at **Carnegie Hall** just 15 days earlier. However, **Yannick** had already recorded the concertos with **Daniil Trifonov** for **DG** and could not be her recording partner.

Fortunately, **Dudamel**, who had recently done questionable things with **Dvořák's Symphonies Nos. 7 to 9**, is kept in check by his dynamic pianist, who delivers an energetic **Rachmaninov**, devoid of hesitations. The recording places the piano prominently in the mix. The ensemble lacks a bit of subtlety in dynamics and orchestral depth.

Classical Music

By CHRISTOPHE HUSS

FALL RELEASES

RHYTHM & MUSIC



HÉLÈNE GRIMAUD KONSTANTIN KRIMMEL (baritone), HÉLÈNE GRIMAUD (piano).

« For Clara ». Schumann : Kreisleriana.
Brahms : Lieder op. 32. Pieces op. 117.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : **

By publishing everything under the sun, elevator music, film music (which is quite good), and tailored records (Renaud Capuçon), is DG still a credible and reliable label? We've been eagerly awaiting Héléne Grimaud's recital, scheduled for September 8th, 2023. However, unlike Yannick Nézet-Séguin's excellent Rachmaninov recording, it takes just a few notes here to be disappointed.

Despite being a meticulous instrument selector, Grimaud's recording of this album, by Stephan Flock in the library of an abbey, is colorful, resonant, and harsh in the treble range. A comparison with Benjamin Grosvenor's recent and fabulous *Kreisleriana* (Decca) instantly puts Grimaud to shame on the sole criterion of sound. It's a shame because Grimaud also breathes Schumann's essence, his yearnings, and his palpitations. The Brahms recorded in Berlin is better tamed, but Grosvenor surpasses Grimaud in the subtlety of the *Opus 117* tremors. In a well-executed *Opus 32*, Konstantin Krimmel makes up for his recent eccentricities in Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* with Alpha.

FALL RELEASES

The Autumn of the Viola da Gamba
Galanterie

André Lislevand
Jadran Duncumb
Emil Duncumb



RHYTHM & MUSIC

ANDRÉ LISLEVAND
(viola da gamba),
JADRAN DUNCUMB
(lute and theorbo),
EMIL DUNCUMB (fortepiano).

Galanterie
The autumn of the Viola de Gamba.
Works by Abel, J.S. Bach,
CPE Bach and Telemann.

Arcana, A 549.

Interpretation : *****


Technique : *****

This is **André Lislevand's** second album, dedicated to German repertoire from the mid-17th century, marking the twilight of his instrument, the viola da gamba. It

brings together **C.P.E. Bach's** *Sonatas Wq. 136* and **Abel's** *Sonata in A minor*, **Telemann's** *Fantasy in D minor for solo viola da gamba*, and **Jean Sébastien Bach's** *Suite BWV 1025*, presented in a version for viola da gamba and concert lute. **Lislevand** reunites with lutenist **Jadran Duncumb**, his collaborator from his previous album, *Forqueray*, and the latter's brother on the fortepiano. The quality of the program and the sensitivity of the interpretation make this release a historically and musically exciting overview. The renowned lutenist and theorbist **Rolf Lislevand**, the artist's father, oversees the recording in his studio in Norway. The recording is very precise, slightly clinical, with some intrusion of the artists' breathing. A word of caution for those who detest such sounds...

A WORTHY SPECIAL ADDITION

BY ANTHONY SIGNOROTTI



Launched in 2013, **Bluesound** has quickly become a critical pillar in **Lenbrook's** trifecta of audio brands. Based in Pickering, Ontario and sitting alongside legendary audiophile brands **NAD** and **PSB**, the Canadian brand's award-winning wireless streaming products and *BlueOS* operating system have brought affordable, high resolution music streaming to both die hard audiophiles and the larger music listening public. In 2015, **Bluesound** released a new product called simply, *Node*, which gave users an astonishingly flexible way to enjoy a broad range of music streaming services in true high resolution through their existing hi-fi systems.

To celebrate **Bluesound's** 10th anniversary, the company has released a special edition *Node*, dubbed the X, (\$999 CAD). Like me, you might be wary of anything that carries the special edition moniker, as these products are often simply a new paint job and a price bump but come with very little of substance under the hood. Would the *Node X* be just another special edition? Let's find out.

What's New and What's Not

Built on an identical chassis to the *Node* (2021), but painted an attractive silver colour, you'd be forgiven for jumping to the conclusion that not much has changed. And while it's true that the overall dimensions, form factor, streaming capabilities and connectivity options are nearly identical to the *Node* (2021), the *Node X* has three important upgrades: an **ESS Sabre**

DAC, a dedicated **THX AAA** headphone amplifier and a **RC1** remote control.

If you haven't been paying attention to the *Node* generally, what does it bring to the table? Weighing in at a solid feeling 2.5 pounds, measuring less than 9 inches by 7 inches and standing just shy of 2 inches high, this little unit comes with a gigantic feature set.

Immediately noticeable on the top of both the *Node X* and *Node* (2021) is a large glass touch pad. Proximity activated, it

lights up when your hand moves near, and it stays active for a few seconds afterwards. That glass panel gives us a volume slider, play / pause / next / previous controls and 5 pre-sets. Up front on the *Node X*, you'll find the **Bluesound** logo, a blue power *LED* and a headphone socket. Aside from the silver colour of the *Node X*, the only way to tell it apart from the *Node* (2021) version is the larger 6.35 mm headphone socket that replaces the rather pedestrian 3.5 mm socket available on the previous version.

Connectivity

On the back of both the *Node X* and *Node* (2021), we find a single set of *RCA* analog outputs, along with digital coax, *TOSLINK*, *USB* and, rare at this price point, a subwoofer output and *HDMI eARC* connection. We also get two-way *Bluetooth* with *aptX* support. This combination of output options allows us enormous flexibility; we can use the *Node's* *DAC* to send an analog signal to a set of powered speakers, integrated amplifier or a preamplifier. But if we'd rather just use the *Node* as a streamer and use our own digital to analogue converter, we can connect the *Node* via our choice of digital outputs, and if we want to use the *Node* as part of a larger entertainment system, you can easily connect to your TV and subwoofer.

Who is It for?

For me, however, the *Node* has always been about the streaming. Plug it in, connect it to your home's *WiFi* network (or connect to the internet via an *ethernet* cable), and get about the business of streaming from a plethora of streaming services such as **Spotify**, **Tidal**, **Qobuz**, **Apple Music** or even **ROON**, just to name a few. The *BlueOS* app is well designed, easy to use and works on both *iOS* and *Android* devices, not to mention *MAC* or *PC*.

For the average audiophile, the ease of bolting a streamer like the *Node* onto our existing hi-fi systems for well under a grand is a no brainer. It provides an affordable, well-built way to get into hi-res streaming that doesn't feel like a rickety *DIY* project (we're looking at a *Raspberry Pi*). That said, the streaming

components in the *Node X* are identical to the previous version, and I couldn't perceive a difference when listening to both units, so if you're currently using *Node* (2021) as a streamer only, then you likely don't need to upgrade.

That said, the *Node* really is greater than the sum of its parts; for folks just beginning their audiophile journey, the device is a wonderful way to start. Simply plug the *Node* into a pair of powered speakers or add a set of headphones, and you are listening to hi-res audio out of the box – streamer, headphone amp and *DAC* ready to go.

The problem is, the headphone amplifier and *DAC* were just average in the *Node* (2021). They weren't terrible, but neither were they standouts in what is quickly becoming a crowded streaming *DAC* market and users would quickly outgrow them as their tastes and budget matured.

Enter the *Node X's* upgraded *DAC* and headphone amplifier. Gone is the slightly muddy, compressed soundstage, somewhat blurry imaging and soft sounding **Texas Instruments / Burr Brown** *DAC* circuit. In its place, we find a much more transparent, expansive, and solid sounding **ESS Sabre 9028Q2M** chipset.

Even more noticeable, however, are the improvements to the headphone amplifier. The **THX AAA (Achromatic Audio Amplifier)** amp built into the *Node X* is clearly more powerful than that of the **Node** 2021. Plugging my surprisingly power hungry **AKG 7XX** headphones into the older model required the volume uncomfortable close to the maximum, offering far less headroom than I would prefer, especially for quieter passages on some tracks. When listening with the more efficient **Grado Prestige 325x** open back headphones, things got easier, more open and well lit.

With the *Node X*, we get significantly more headroom and far less distortion. **Bluesound** claims the *THD+N* on the *Node X* is a vanishingly low 0.002 %, and indeed, during listening tests, the *Node X* was by far the better headphone amp when compared to the *Node* (2021).

Factor in the *RC1* remote control that now comes with the *Node X* and the usability goes even higher. Those with thicker,



BLUESOUND NODE X WIRELESS HI-RES MULTI-ROOM MUSIC STREAMER

less nimble fingers will surely appreciate being able to more accurately control the volume with easy to locate buttons on the remote instead of using the somewhat finicky volume slider on the glass touch panel or the tiny volume slider on your smartphone.

Like its predecessor, the *Node X* offers true high-resolution listening with audio qualities up to 24-bit/192 kHz, and connectivity for **MQA**, **Airplay 2**, **Spotify Connect**, **Tidal Connect**, **Qobuz** and **ROON**. I used **Apple Music** via lossy **Airplay 2** which worked fine, but for critical hi-res or CD quality listening on this review I used **Qobuz**. There was a marked improvement in audio quality in moving from **Airplay 2** to **Qobuz** through the **BlueOS** app.

Also of note was that the **BlueOS** app can support up to 64 players simultaneously around your house, all streaming in 24-bit high resolution. While I didn't test the upper limits of this feature (who even has 64 rooms?), I did control two separate *Nodes* (the *X* and the *2021* version) at the same time via the **BlueOS** app. Connectivity was solid and switching back and forth between the controls for both units was fairly easy. Interestingly, the **RC1** remote supplied with the *Node X* also works with the *Node 2021*.

Associated Equipment Used for Review

While using the *Node X*'s headphone amplifier and **DAC**, I used two headphones for this review: the aforementioned **Grado Prestige 325x** and the **AKG 7XX**.

I also listened to the *Node X*'s **DAC** via **Schiit Audio**'s **Asgard 2** headphone amp and assessed the streamer alone by connecting it via digital coax to the **Schiit Audio Bifrost 2 DAC** for both headphone and non-headphone listening.

For non-headphone listening, I used a **Schiit Audio Freya+** preamplifier via its balanced connection into a **Parasound A23** amplifier and 6th generation **Monitor Audio Bronze 500** loudspeakers via a set of **Atlas Hyper** loudspeaker cables.

Listening Session Using Headphones

The Talking Heads 1982 *Live* album *The Name of this Band is The Talking Heads* is an absolute treasure – an unflinching look at a *New Wave* band still in its ascendancy. Starting with the **AKG 7XX**, on disk 1's *Psycho Killer*, the top end was clean and present, cymbals exhibiting a satisfying shimmer with long decay. The electric guitar was finely grained, with good bite, but with none of that digital glare present on lower quality units. Nor was it too finely etched or harsh. Switching out to the **Grado**'s, we get an even more open and airy head stage. The drum strikes were considerably cleaner and more direct, while the bass felt like it had more bounce, weight and a finer texture.

For comparison's sake, I switched back to the *Node 2021*, listening with both sets of headphones. The sound took a not subtle step backwards in quality – the head stage collapsed noticeably, with each instrument becoming less distinctly drawn. The whole thing just got a bit muddy and unpleasant by comparison.

Switching over to the **Schiit** stack, comprised of the **Asgard 2** headphone amp driven by the **Bifrost 2** multibit **DAC** and the *Node X* taking on the streaming duties, the head stage expanded again noticeably, with even finer layer separation, realistic tonality on the instruments and a far more comfortable listening experience, especially with the occasionally more forward **Grado**'s.

Craving something a little more acoustic in nature, I turned to *Birds*, from **Dominique Fils-Aimé**'s 2018 album *Nameless*. **Fils-Aimé**'s use of space is very effective on this track and the **THX** headphone amp in the *Node X* presents the recording with tremendous air and space. The bass plucks were realistically rendered with a good sense of resonant texture and reverb. I'm not sure what was used to create the sound of a bird flapping its wings, but whatever it was didn't sound like a digital sound effect and listening through the *Node X* immediately brought to mind the sound of a pigeon furiously flapping its wings as it took off from its perch in some back alley – a sound anyone





who has walked the streets of **Fils-Aimé's** native Montreal (or, indeed any big city) would be familiar with. Very realistically and naturally presented through the *Node X*.

Listening Using an HiFi System

Moving the *Node X* into my hi-fi system and acting as streamer and DAC, I played two large scale orchestral pieces to see how the *Node's* DAC dealt with more complex material. **Gustav Mahler's** *Symphonie N°.5 (Deutsche Grammophon, Qobuz)* is about as big as they come. Lesser DAC's often struggle with these recordings, resulting in lack of layer separation and blurry imaging as a myriad of instruments all compete for our attention. This was exactly the result when playing this piece through the *Node (2021)*. The upgraded **ESS** DAC in the *Node X*, however, gave us a significantly improved soundstage, layer separation and a superior sense of space.

Hanz Zimmer and **Lisa Gerrard'** brilliant score from the *Oscar* winning film *Gladiator* presents several wonderful tracks. *On The Battle*, possibly the most thrilling piece of the lot, the strength and power of the horn section demanded my attention. Through lesser DAC's my instinct was to turn down the volume as the horns would feel bloated, shouty and irritating. But through the *Node X*, my hand went to the volume control, not to turn it down, but to turn it up. If there's a better compliment in hi-fi, I'm not aware of one.

Conclusion

All in all, the **Bluesound's** *Node X* makes a compelling case for the simplicity of high-resolution streaming. But, when you factor in the upgraded **ESS** DAC, that excellent **THX** headphone

amplifier, not to mention the solidly built remote control, and the decision is suddenly very easy.

The *Node X* is no longer a great streamer with an OK DAC and an after-thought headphone socket. In fact, from my listening, the DAC in the *Node X* is much closer to the **Schiit Audio** *Bifrost 2* than it is to the *Node (2021)*. This new special edition is indeed **special**, and while we don't know how many units **Bluesound** intends on making, it's definitely worth a serious look, both for new audiophiles putting together their first systems, or for experienced audiophiles looking for a seriously competent streamer. Make no mistake: this is a special edition worthy of the title.



GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: 999\$ CAD

Warranty period: 1 year, parts and labour

Distributor: Lenbrook Industries Limited, T.: 1.905.831.6555

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

MUSICAL FIDELITY MX-STREAM NETWORK PLAYER



A WINDOW INTO A WORLD OF MUSIC

BY JEAN-DENIS DOYLE

If there's one subject that polarizes the opinions of audiophiles, it's digital network audio. For a long time, discussions about cables sparked many debates on social media. Nowadays, topics related to digital network audio take center stage in the contentious audiophile argumentation. And it's easy to understand why. There are so many ways, devices, and technologies for accessing data from network music providers that it's challenging for an audiophile to navigate. For this review, I present to you the *MX-Stream* from **Musical Fidelity**. I'm well aware that the arrival of this new device won't simplify the debate in any way. However, it's a different and relevant device, aimed at a somewhat niche audience. At a reasonable price, it does things its own way and does them very well. It's up to you, as you read on, to decide if the **Musical Fidelity** *MX-Stream* will tempt you.

Musical Fidelity is a high-fidelity product manufacturer based in England. The company was founded in 1982 by clarinetist **Anthony Michaelson**. It became known for its warm and highly musical sound signature. This choice, boldly made by **Anthony Michaelson**, didn't necessarily receive unanimous praise from the specialized press at the time. However,

the sales success and customer loyalty of **Musical Fidelity** affirmed the correctness of his choices. Their most iconic product was undoubtedly the *A1* integrated amplifier. This legendary small amplifier operated in pure Class A, was affordable, incredibly musical, and brought joy to many audiophiles worldwide.

In 2018, **Anthony Michaelson** retired from **Musical Fidelity**, having earned a well-deserved break. Since then, the company



was sold to **Heinz Lichtenegger**. Through his company, **Audio Tuning**, which also owns **Pro-Jeck**, he took up the torch and continues the excellent work started by his predecessor. Nowadays, **Musical Fidelity** manufactures several product lines, catering to various budgets. Many new products have recently been introduced, including two acoustic loudspeaker models based on classic **BBC** designs and a reissue of the famous **A1** integrated amplifier. We are eagerly looking forward to reviewing that one! The device we're interested in here, the **MX-Stream**, belongs to the **MX** series, which is the most affordable lineup at **Musical Fidelity**. Let's now see what sets it apart from a technical perspective.

Technical Description

The **Musical Fidelity MX-Stream** is a device that bridges the gap between the digital sources you use and your audio system. These sources can be located on a local hard drive, a laptop connected via **USB**, or online music sites like **Tidal** or **Qobuz**. The **MX-Stream** allows you to route their digital data to your audio system while ensuring a minimal introduction of temporal errors (jitter). In fact, **Musical Fidelity** has labeled it a *Bit Perfect Streamer*. To achieve this, **Musical Fidelity** first and foremost

focused on improving the power supply of the **MX-Stream**. If you take a closer look, a significant portion of the device's chassis is dedicated to the electrical power supply of its circuits. Particular attention has been paid to voltage stabilization in various sections of the device.

Musical Fidelity engineers have placed great emphasis on the stability of the **MX-Stream's** internal clocks. The initial stages use an advanced multi-stage re-synchronization circuit. This circuit also cleans the digital signal to ensure its integrity and quality. Even the internal microcomputer has an audio-optimized clock. **Musical Fidelity** claims that this level of attention is well above the norm for a network player. The efforts of the **Musical Fidelity** team have produced excellent results, with the **MX-Stream** demonstrating clock stability at an output level of approximately plus or minus twelve picoseconds. This is a figure that a non-audio-dedicated computer would struggle to achieve. The internal microcomputer is based on a *Raspberry Pi CM3* board. Since it's an open-architecture microcomputer, **Musical Fidelity** promises that it will still be possible to update and optimize the **MX-Stream** even in the coming years. The **Musical Fidelity MX-Stream** has two **USB-A** format inputs and another in

USB-B format. The latter is intended for a computer and incorporates a circuit called *Detox* to prevent any form of contamination from it. Another **USB-A** port is located at the front and is designed for easy use with a **USB** stick or portable hard drive. An **RJ45** input is also present and allows the **MX-Stream** to connect to the world.

The **Musical Fidelity MX-Stream** can record digital music in its internal 16 Gb memory. Although this memory has limited capacity, it can still store a few albums for portable use when a network connection is unavailable. The **MX-Stream** has only one **USB-A** format output, optimized for audio, capable of transmitting signals in **DSD** up to the **DSD256** standard, as well as **PCM** signals up to 32 bits at 352.8 kHz. An **HDMI** video output allows you to connect a screen or television to display what's happening inside the **MX-Stream**. The device comes with a **Wi-Fi** antenna. The **MX-Stream** is powered by a small external 18-volt power supply, which is necessary for its operation.

Setup and Start-Up

Like all network players, the **Musical Fidelity MX-Stream** requires an app to operate. This app is also called **MX-Stream** and can be found in the app store on your tablet or smartphone. The operating

MUSICAL FIDELITY MX-STREAM NETWORK PLAYER

firmware chosen by **Musical Fidelity** is *Volumio*. This firmware offers several adjustments that audiophiles will appreciate, allowing them to optimize the *MX-Stream*'s settings according to the needs of their audio system. However, it falls short in terms of user-friendliness and presentation when compared to an app like *BlueOS* offered by **BlueSound**. This leads me to believe that the *MX-Stream* is probably better suited for a technologically savvy audiophile audience rather than the average consumer. It's also worth noting that the *MX-Stream* has only a single *USB* output. Therefore, your converter must have a high-quality *USB* input, which is not always the case.

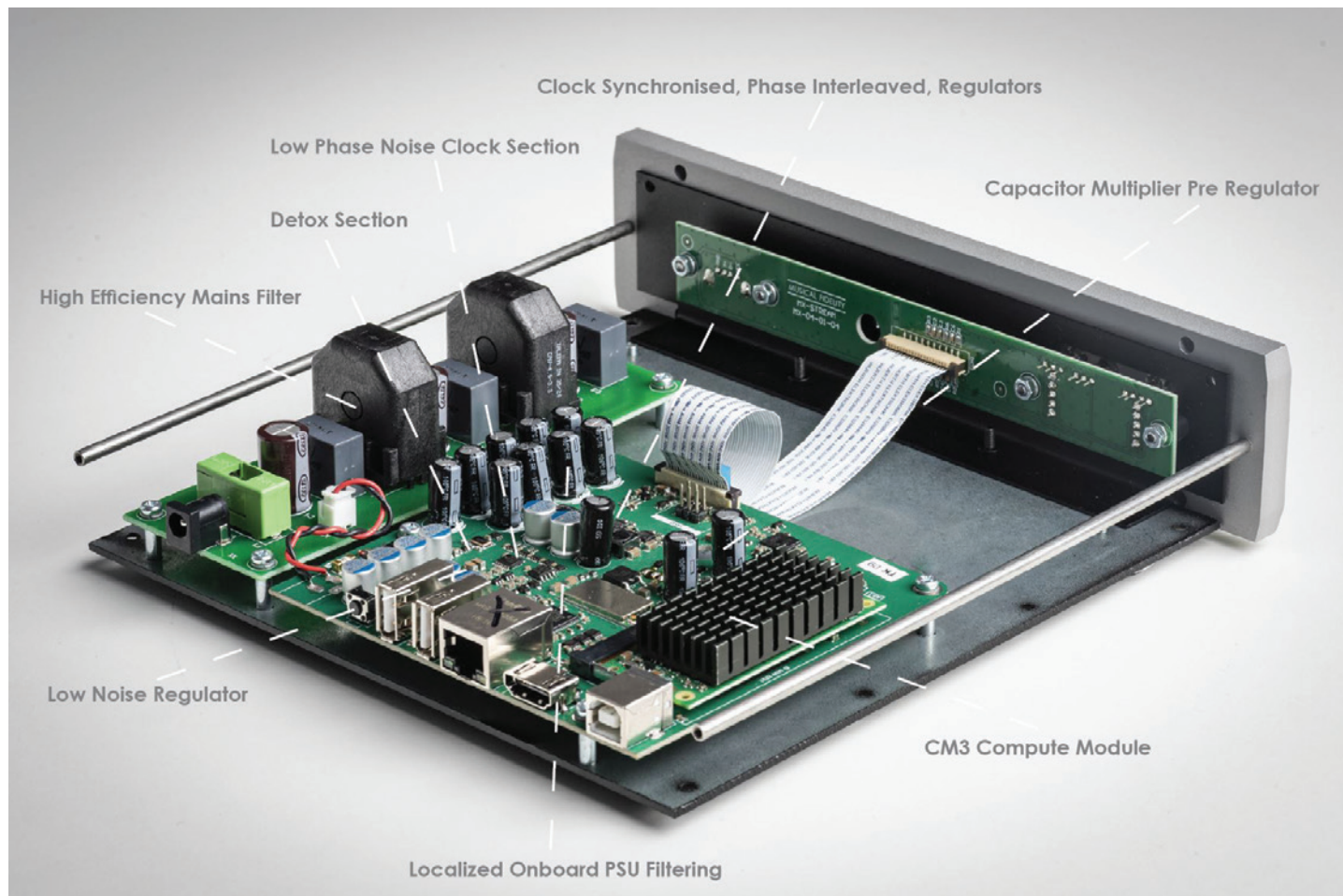
The *MX-Stream* also allows for connection via the **Apple AirPlay** protocol through the *Shareport* function. I conducted this review primarily using its natural companion, the *MX-DAC* from **Musical Fidelity**. The results exceeded my expectations, considering the price of both devices. The *MX-Stream* is of sufficient quality to feed a high-level converter like the *M6x DAC* from **Musical Fidelity**. There's no doubt that this pair should deliver absolutely stunning results.

I'd like to make a clarification now. Some *DIY* audiophiles might be tempted to claim that the *MX-Stream* is nothing more than a *Raspberry Pi* in a fancy box and that they could easily build a similar one at home. Not so fast! The *MX-Stream* is much

more than that in terms of engineering. I highly doubt that *DIY* enthusiasts can achieve results comparable to what the *MX-Stream* can deliver. In reality, the **Musical Fidelity** *MX-Stream* should be seen as the ultimate network player based on a *Raspberry Pi*, designed by a genuine and serious audio manufacturer with a strong engineering team.

As Smooth as Crystal Clear Water

I admit I was completely surprised by the audio quality of this small network player. The music it served was incredibly smooth, with a very clear and unburdened quality. It allows you to peer deep into the mix of recordings with apparent ease. With **Pat Metheny** and **Charlie Haden**'s album, *Beyond the Missouri Sky*, the music flows in a relaxing manner, allowing a multitude of micro-details to find their place in the sonic landscape. This fluid and transparent sound doesn't demand any effort from the listener. That's precisely what you want when listening to digital music. This small network player adds a silky and luxurious quality to the listening experience and is worthy of a network player with a much higher price tag. **Pat Metheny**'s guitar is incisive and well-defined, engaging in a coherent dialogue with **Charlie Haden**'s double bass, and the album's 65 minutes pass by without you even realizing it.





A Beautiful Tonality

The tonal accuracy of the *MX-Stream* is just as impressive as its fluidity. The bass is perfectly full without being overwhelming. The cymbals have just the right amount of brightness without becoming fatiguing. **Shelby Lynne's** vocals are delightful to listen to, with impeccable articulation. There's no hint of sibilance to mar the performance. Her voice is rich and realistic. The presence of the singer's voice, especially on the track *I Only Want To Be With You*, is outstanding. The music is exquisite, and the *MX-Stream* from **Musical Fidelity** allows it the space it needs for better appreciation. In short, to perfectly describe the **Musical Fidelity's** sound, it offers abundant beauty.

A Word About Its Companion

I conducted most of my listening tests with its companion, the **Musical Fidelity MX-DAC**. Although this device has been on

the market for a while, it complements the *MX-Stream* so well that I couldn't overlook it. The synergy between the two devices is absolutely perfect. Together, they form a formidable pair with astonishing performance considering the asking price. In fact, for around \$2,500, this combination is simply unbeatable in terms of musicality. The range of musical qualities it offers is quite impressive.

Conclusion

Here we have a remarkable network player whose sound qualities in terms of fluidity, timbre, and timing deliver top-tier musicality. Extremely transparent, it's like an open window to music. It's more suitable for a technologically savvy and informed clientele who can fully appreciate its performance. And please note that under optimal conditions, especially when paired with its companion, the *MX-DAC*, the **Musical Fidelity MX-Stream** is a true

champion capable of delivering the best. Manufactured with care in Europe, its price is reasonable, and it truly deserves the time it takes to listen to it.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Musical Fidelity MX-Stream

Price: \$1,099

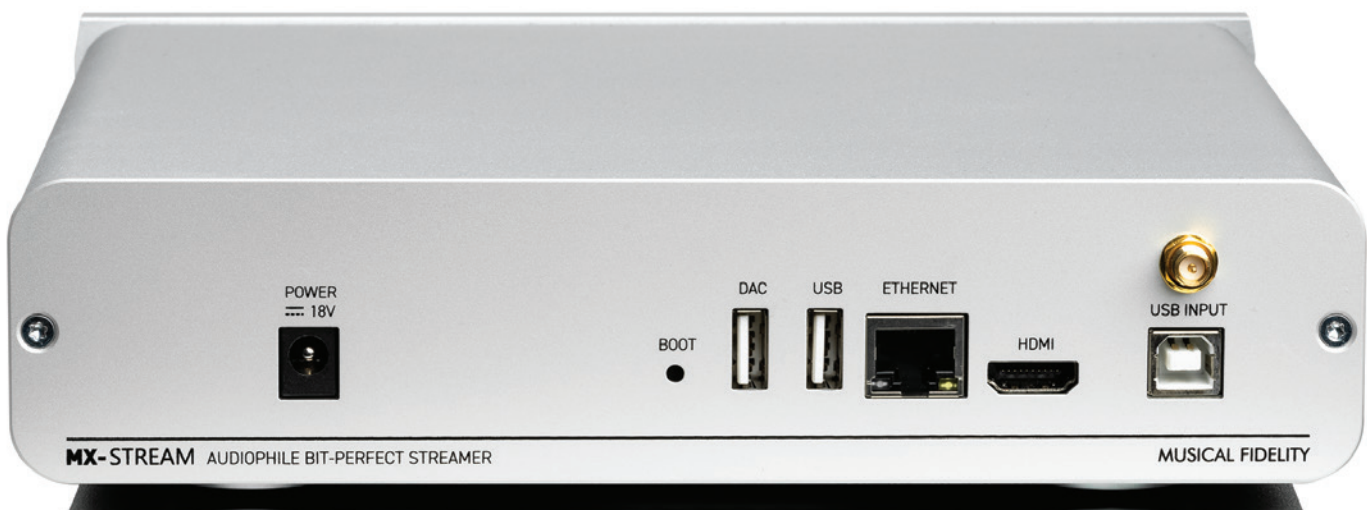
Warranty: 5 years for electronic and server parts and labor; 2 years for mechanical section; 1 year for the remote control

Distributor: Focal Naim Canada,
Phone: 1 866.271.5689,
<https://www.focalnaimamerica.com/>

Mediagraphy:

Pat Metheney & Charlie Haden,
Beyond the Missouri Sky, ECM, Qobuz file.

Shelby Lynne, Just a Little Lovin',
Lost Highway, Qobuz file.



Jazz

By CHRISTOPHE RODRIGUEZ

RHYTHM & MUSIC



ANNE BISSON

Be My Lover
Independent

After 7 albums, she is far from the time when the host **Anne Bisson** brought joy to lonely hearts. On May 17th, she released *Be My Lover*. Without fanfare, the pianist has carved out an enviable place in the world of mainstream jazz, which is to her credit. A talented pianist with a pleasant voice, she blends a judicious mix of popular, personal compositions, and jazz with no other purpose than to make her audience happy.

Far from being a piano bar act, *Be My Lover* brings together the invaluable drummer **Paul Brochu**, a long-time collaborator, and the French double bassist **Jean-Bertrand**

Carbou, as well as her son **Samuel** on the piano for the classic *Nature Boy* that made the singer/pianist **Nat King Cole** famous. With finesse and without seeking to reinterpret, she revisits several classics like *Moondance*. In a somewhat lascivious manner, this gem finds very summery tones, as does *Blue Bayou*, which transports us on a vacation road trip with slightly country accents.

She also pays a nice tribute to progressive rock by covering *The Four Horsemen*

from the significant **Emerson/Lake/Palmer** era. Let's assert that we are far from jazz here. However, *Nature Boy* is absolutely worth a listen. The clear voice adheres to the codes of this great standard, supported by two pianos that respond with very classical intonations, like the musical current.

It's an album of multiple atmospheres, skillfully executed, located at the boundaries of pure and unadulterated jazz. Drawing from an immense catalog as we mentioned, singer/pianist **Anne Bisson** is making her way, knowing that she will find a receptive audience, regardless of age, without being sensational.



GABRIELLA GARRUBO

Rodando
NXN / Naxos

Norwegian and Brazilian, the young singer **Gabriella Garrubo** is unknown in our lands, and that's a shame. As we are always on the lookout for new talents, we highly recommend *Rodando*. Having evolved since

the days of **Stan Getz** and **João Gilberto**, the singer-pianist offers us more modern and ethereal pieces in line with our century without forsaking the festive or joyful aspect. Even though the compositions are short, around 3 minutes, the *bossa nova* spirit is very much present, as you can hear in tracks like *Um Dia, Nao* or the beautiful *O Mundo*, supported by a cello. Backed by a very solid team, the approach lies between danceable spirit and certain forms of poetry. The harmonies are sophisticated, and passion and lyricism are present. We eagerly await her visit!



FRANÇOIS BOURASSA QUINTET

Live at Piccolo – Swirl
Effendi / Naxos

After a solo album conceived during the pandemic, pianist **François Bourassa** has reunited with his

faithful companions for an explosive new release. With **André Leroux** (saxophones, flute), **Guy Boisvert** on double bass, and **Guillaume Pilote** on drums, the newcomer, Swirl, recorded in front of a live audience at **Studio Piccolo**, fits into a very strong jazz current, reminiscent of the shooting star that was saxophonist **Eric Dolphy**. The compositions are ambitious, dominated by **André Leroux's** undeniable talent in creating long atmospheric textures such as *Poolop* and *Prologue*. It requires an attentive, trained ear because abstraction is present from start to finish. This field of improvisation, which we hear less and less, is the work of a tight-knit quartet, with fragments of themes that allow them to bounce off other ideas. A limitless march in jazz!

NAIM NSS 333 HIGH-RESOLUTION STREAMER





CAN WE STILL PUSH THE DIGITAL BOUNDARIES ?

By YVES BÉRUBÉ

While digital music has been with us for several years, manufacturers continue to innovate. Their goal is to reproduce music as faithfully as possible to the original version. It's this quest that drives us all. It leads us to audition different components to find the best matches based on our means and the approval of our significant others. The addition of an external power supply often enhances the quality of components, especially when it comes to network players and *DACs*. When a manufacturer offers the option of a higher-quality external power supply, it further optimizes the listening quality. Additionally, the addition of a higher-quality clock can also improve the sound quality of the aforementioned products. In the specific case that interests us today, **Naim's NSS 333** has taken this path of innovation and presents us with a superior device with the option to add an external power supply. I invite you to discover it with me.

NAIM NSS 333 HIGH-RESOLUTION STREAMER



British manufacturer **Naim** has been a leader in the audiophile market for 50 years and offers a wide and varied gamut of products in ranges that can satisfy all budgets. **Naim** has partnered with the firm **Focal** and created the **VerVent Audio Group**, which handles the distribution of products from both parent companies worldwide. This partnership allows them to offer interesting synergies in terms of products and integration with their partner.

In this test bench, we are presenting only one **Naim** product. The company has been offering us a new range of separate products with its new *Classic* series for the past few months. We reviewed a *200 Series* product review of this new series last spring. The *New Classic Series* adds four additional high-end devices to the *300 Series*. This new range of very high-quality devices sits between the *Classic* and the *500 Series* in the **Naim** family.

Technical Description

The **Naim NSS 333** is a network player offering high-resolution streaming capabilities with an integrated *DAC* that can also be bypassed when connected to an external *DAC*. **Naim** has chosen the highest-quality components in the design of this product, such as the *NP800* streaming board, an exclusive *DSP* with integrated oversampling filter (705.6 kHz/768 kHz), and

a high-end internal *DAC* (*PCM1791A*) accompanied by Class *A* transistors and high-quality filters. The device can be optionally delivered with the external power supply *NXP 300*. Finally, the **Naim NSS 333** adds a bi-directional *ZigBee* remote control to the package. It was not used during this product review.

On its front panel, the **Naim** network player comes with a 5.5-inch illuminated screen that can be turned off and four buttons (*standby*, *play/pause*, *input selection*, and *favorites*). Digital files in various formats can be stored on a network drive, an external *USB* drive (up to 1 Tb), or a *USB* stick (up to 128 Gb) connected to the two **Naim** *USB* inputs (Type *A*).

At the rear, for audio input, the **Naim NSS 333** offers a network input (*RJ45*), two *TOSLink* optical inputs, a pair of coaxial *SPDIF-BNC* inputs, two *USB* Type *A* audio inputs, and, for output, a pair of outputs with *XLR* connectors and another *RCA*, both balanced. The network player supports most known digital formats, allowing for *WAV* resolutions up to 32 bits/384 kHz, *PCM* up to 24 bits/384 kHz, as well as *DSD 64* and *DSD 128*.

Unboxing and Installation

Once again, **Naim**, the manufacturer, continues to impress me with the quality of its packaging. Each item has its place, and you can be certain that nothing will be damaged during transport. After unpacking and setting it up on a stand, I connected the network cable to the internet and then plugged the device



into the wall. One of the peculiarities of the **Naim NSS 333** is that it's designed to be installed with an external power supply, which is not the case for this product review. Therefore, we must connect two connectors (referred to as jumper plugs in the documentation) at the back to indicate to the Naim to draw its electrical power directly from the *IEC* socket rather than from the optional power supply. By default, the *NSS 333* expects the external power supply to be present. The device won't function until both connectors are plugged in at the back.

I chose not to connect my **Roon Core** with the USB connection for this review in hopes of also removing the risks of jitter and potential noise with the *USB* connection. The **Roon Core** is connected to the same *Ethernet* network. I was able to quickly make connections with **Roon** and streaming sites via **Roon**, as well as the **Naim** app downloaded to my tablet.

I allowed the **Naim** to burn in for over a week to give it ample time to perform at its best. **Naim** also provides detailed documentation in a nice booklet in multiple languages, beautifully packaged in folded cardboard and delivered with a cloth for screen cleaning.

Listening Impressions

I wanted to quickly compare the *NSS 333* from **Naim** to the **Naim Uniti Atom Headphone Edition**, which I reviewed here exactly 12 months ago. I re-listened to the same soundtracks used in that review. While it's the same manufacturer, we're not at all in the same price range, and the difference in quality is significant. Those who don't believe that the quality of an already excellent component can be improved should consider comparing higher-end components from the same manufacturer. This allows us to better appreciate the potential that the manufacturer can offer in its product range.

NAIM NSS 333 HIGH-RESOLUTION STREAMER

The album *Sunset In The Blue* by French singer **Melody Gardot** is a good choice to illustrate the capabilities of the **Naim NSS 333**. One of the particularities of the network player is that it is somewhat recessed in terms of stereo image compared to competing devices in this price range. The sound level is also lower than other devices I've evaluated in recent years, partly because the *XLR* output is not balanced and perhaps because I don't have the external power supply connected. Often, we are impressed with a device initially because the sound is louder, but it's important to compare them by adjusting the levels between devices. I appreciate that the manufacturer did not want to add more than necessary to create an initial impact. It's when the volume is adjusted that **Melody Gardot's** voice reveals all its warmth and distinctive timbre. The different instruments are also well positioned in the stereo image, and it's even noticeable that the instruments extend beyond the loudspeakers in width.

The song *C'est Magnifique* is my favorite from the album. The singer's voice captivates us from the first seconds. The strings follow and sway us to the melody's rhythm. **Melody** is joined by a male singer, and the duo remains at the forefront of the ensemble of musicians. It's amazing to hear how well the depth of the ensemble is reproduced by the *NSS 333*. The depth effect is a characteristic that is difficult to reproduce, and **Naim** presents it with musicality. We find ourselves in front of a device capable of delivering music and making us quickly forget technical details.

In the following track, *There Where He Lives In Me*, the guitar and piano join the other instruments. These two instruments literally sing with the *NSS 333*. We savor all the harmonics produced by these instruments without losing the detail of the rest of the ensemble. There is a lot of information here, but it never feels analytical. There is no listening fatigue with the **Naim NSS 333**. One could spend the entire evening and night listening to **Melody's** voice and her music. If I could use one word, I would say softness. This word also characterizes the **Naim NSS 333**. Without sacrificing presence, **Naim's**

presentation is more laid-back; it's not better or worse, just different compared to other network players and *DACs* on the market. You also hear a bit less bass than with other players I've recently heard. It's hard to say if this is better; extended listening over several months might give me a more precise idea. That said, the bass is present; it's just slightly less pronounced. This depends a lot on the style of music you listen to. In this case, the double bass and electric bass shine in this range, but these low frequencies are not always present in the music we listen to on a daily basis.

The song *Moon River* is masterfully interpreted on this album, and the *NSS 333* captures all the subtleties of the voice and instruments, especially the percussion. You can hear the movements of her tongue, mouth, and breath in detail, and everything remains very natural. The guitar is particularly well reproduced on this album; you can clearly hear the strings continue to vibrate for a long time without adding confusion to the overall sound.

The album *Rêveries* produced by **Reference Recordings** presents orchestral versions of relatively well-known pieces from the classical repertoire with the **Minnesota Orchestra** conducted by **Eiji Oue**. We are no longer surprised by the quality of the recording of **Reference Recordings**. The orchestra is very well situated in the stereo image. You feel as if you're sitting in the best seat in the concert hall and are treated to a private performance. You are alone in the hall, with no other sounds but the music produced by the instruments and the acoustics of the concert hall.

The musicians are easy to spot in the stereo image, and the overall rendition is very natural. **Gabriel Fauré's Pavane** is presented with great delicacy, as is **Debussy's Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun** and **Maurice Ravel's Pavane for a Dead Princess**. These are all relatively gentle songs that could easily be boring if performed without nuance and emotion. We want to stay as far away as possible from elevator music. The *NSS 333* reproduces the dynamics in these scores very well. Crescendos and decrescendos are well rendered, and the



resulting dynamics make listening very enjoyable. The sound of the horns and wind instruments in general in the *Pavane for a Dead Princess* is so natural! It's one thing to reproduce instruments well; it's another to present these instruments well, especially those in solo or melodic roles, while maintaining balance with the rest of the orchestra. All that's left is to close your eyes and enjoy the concert.

I present here a recent discovery with the album *From a Room: Volume 1* by singer **Chris Stapleton**. Some may remember his masterful rendition of the American national anthem at the *Super Bowl* earlier this year. This singer quickly caught the public's attention since his debut in 2015, and the timbre of

« The song *Either Way* again demonstrates the qualities of the singer's enchanting voice in a piece accompanied only by his acoustic guitar. The voice is layered over the guitar in the middle of the loudspeakers. The **Naim** makes us forget the technical details of the recording and delivers everything that is most beautiful in this exquisitely performed piece. »

his voice immediately piqued my curiosity to hear more. The album presented here is the second produced by the artist, and we have less than 35 minutes of very high-quality music. It's a studio album, so the acoustics are much drier than in the other recordings presented here. The **Naim** reproduces **Chris Stapleton's** voice with great dynamic range. The singer often moves from soft moments to more intense moments, and the **Naim** does the job admirably. The first track, *Broken Halos*, is an excellent start to this album. We are quickly introduced to this voice that I greatly appreciate and the style of music that will be presented. In this album, he transitions from country to blues and then to rock, giving us a lot in half the usual *CD* playing time (75 minutes). The song *Either Way* again demonstrates the qualities of the singer's enchanting voice in a piece accompanied only by his acoustic guitar. The voice is layered over the guitar in the middle of the loudspeakers. The **Naim** makes us forget the technical details of the recording and delivers everything that is most beautiful in this exquisitely performed piece. The bass (with the electric bass in some tracks) is more pronounced in this album and allows the **Naim** to shine more than in the other albums presented.

The song *Death Row* is one of my favorites; the instruments are presented one by one until the entry of the guitar and then the voice sets the tone for the rest of the song. We are treated to a melody exchange between the singer and his guitar against a backdrop of slow and steady percussion. The sound of the electric guitar combined with the intensity of the singer's voice

captivates us in this regular and monotonous rhythm, leading to a climax at the end. I believe this is what the musician wanted to convey here. It's important to note here that the **Naim** can deliver as much quality in a high-quality recording as it can deliver musicality in a recording with less acoustic qualities.

Conclusion

The **Naim NSS 333** is truly a device in a class of its own. Unfortunately, it's not within everyone's budget. It's aimed at connoisseurs who are willing to invest in its specific features, even within **Naim's** other product ranges. I have a system that provides a lot of detail, which is necessary for my work in writing product reviews and evaluating components and recordings. The **NSS 333** was able to take its place in an enviable manner and add that touch of gentleness that is not usually present in my listening room.

If you're looking for a streamer that supports all digital formats and music streaming platforms, and you want a smooth and musical sound, don't forget to add the **Naim NSS 333** to your shortlist for listening. If you want to add a streamer to your system that has musical characteristics and won't add analytical detail to your setup, the **NSS 333** by **Naim** will deliver the goods. Are you ready to follow **Naim** on its path of innovation?



GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$10,999

Warranty: 5 years for electronic components and labor, 2 years for mechanical components

Manufacturer-Distributor: Focal Naim Canada, Phone: 1 866.271.5689, <https://www.focalnaimamerica.com/>

Mediagraphy

Melody Gardot, *Sunset In The Blue*, Universal Music (Decca), B08H6746J1, FLAC 24/96

Réveries, Ejjie Oue – Minesota Orchestra, Reference Recordings, 0030911109929, DSD 128

Chris Stapleton, *From the Room; Volume 1*, Mercury Nashville, 0602557542837, FLAC 24 / 96

Progressive Rock

By RICHARD GUAY

RYTHM & MUSIC



THE FLOWER KINGS

Look At You Now

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

Reviewing a new album by **The Flower Kings** is a common practice in this column, as they've released practically one every year since the formation of this Swedish cult group in the mid-1990s. Quite a journey spanning nearly 30 years with 16 well-packed albums, including 7 double albums. There's no need to search for a more productive band! And the most beautiful part is that they still manage to surprise and delight us. This will also be the case with their sixteenth album, which arrives while *By Royal Decree* (2022) is still

fresh! And one always thinks that fatigue should set in, but no! We still get our fair share of surprises, creativity, and pleasures!

However, the original lineup has gradually thinned out over the years, and once again, we've lost some players. The only remaining original members are the two pillars, **Roine Stolt** (lyricist, founder, composer, vocals, guitars, keyboards, percussion) and **Hasse Fröberg** (vocals, guitar, percussion). **The Flower Kings'** career has almost exclusively rested on these two sets of shoulders. The other brother, **Michael Stolt** (bass, vocals, moogbass), the official bassist on their very first records and a guest on the others, has returned as a full member on **Royal Decree** and remains part of the lineup. Add to that **Mirko Demaio** (drums, percussion), who has been with them for a few years now, and we're back in business

for a new chapter in this never-ending saga! Is this new effort different? Why, yes, of course! After all, are there even two **Flower Kings** alike?

That doesn't mean we don't quickly recognize several common elements established in the early days. Firstly, the omnipresence of these immersive cinematic melodies that unfold throughout the album like a film score, with all the tempos that come with it, supporting the dramatic content of the lyrics and all the emotions they convey. Secondly, the complementarity of **Fröberg's** powerful voice and **Stolt's** more nuanced one, which gives the songs a theatrical aspect. And, of course, the cerebral instrumental compositions that follow very catchy refrains, highly complex and lasting for long minutes. But we've known all that for a long time. Let's focus instead on what catches our

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Progressive Rock

By RICHARD GUAY

...suite from page 70

attention on this sixteenth album, with 13 songs, 12 of which are rather short, which still makes for a nearly... 70-minute album, as tradition dictates!

The band comments on this new record as follows: *Like a ghost ship from distant horizons, a series of new songs leave their mark on 2023 – a year most of us will remember for wars, migrations, refugees, forest fires, lost youth, melting ice, economic crisis, too many heroes lost, political turmoil. But it's also a year that opens possibilities, a rebirth, new ways of thinking. We believe this new album offers a bit of both. The album is a celebration of the imagination and art of those who lead rather than follow.* In other words, expect a text that is sometimes sad but mostly hopeful and enthusiastic, all supported by imaginative and refined music. What more can be said? The lyrical themes of **The Flower Kings** have always focused on mainly positive and uplifting messages. *Look At You Now* does not deviate from this tradition, with a notable emphasis on important current issues. The general themes might seem like an uplifting story about humanity that has fallen short of its task. It's not despairing or moralizing, but rather an invitation to do better, to surpass ourselves, to consider new ways of doing things. Ultimately, the album concludes that we are all searching for a piece of paradise. These are once again deep, intelligent, and impactful lyrics that **Roine Stolt** has accustomed us to. Nothing surprising there. But what about the music on *Look At You Now*? Without surprise, it's music that bears the signature and is recognizable from the first notes. The subtleties lie within the songs themselves, where the vocals are omnipresent and very convincing. The choruses are always captivating, and the melodic foundation is well-structured. On the other hand, several experiments are attempted, and various musical genres are explored. The instrumental part still relies on an

unwavering symphonic foundation, and the compositions are complex.

Apart from the title track, *Look At You Now*, the longest excerpt from the album, which serves as a synthesis of its lyrical and musical themes, the other pieces are short, very different from each other, and rather concise. Endless instrumental developments seem to be a thing of the past. As mentioned earlier, they are striving for a balance between uplifting and hopeful songs and those that are more meditative and analytical, as in the past.

You can probably guess that *Look At You Now* is a fantastic record, which is hardly surprising from a group with such a reputation and expertise. However, this work is aimed exclusively at *die-hard* fans of **The Flower Kings**, the addicts, the purists. A newcomer might get lost in this whirlwind of fast-paced melodies, multidirectional music, occasionally twisted chords, and destabilizing refrains. So, this is a **Flower Kings** album that doesn't bring anything new in terms of style but offers renewed and inventive content, a sign that this band continues to evolve and has things to say!

RHYTHM & MUSIC



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