

TRENDS

Electronics & Design

HiFi Magazine

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WHAT'S NEW? AND MORE...
NOV/DEC 2023 • VOLUME 04 ISSUE 06

CLEAN, CLEAR AND ARTICULATE SPEAKERS

- Vestia No. 2, Focal

- DAN CLAR AUDIO, AEON 2 NOIRE
- NAIM, NAIT 50
- FINAL AUDIO, MODEL 5 HYBRID
- MARTIN LOGAN, MOTION XT F100
- TECHNICS, SU-GX70

THE WAY TO MUSICAL ENLIGHTENMENT

- Michi X3 S2, Rotel

Rhythm & Music: **CLASSIC, BLUES, JAZZ, PROGRESSIVE ROCK**





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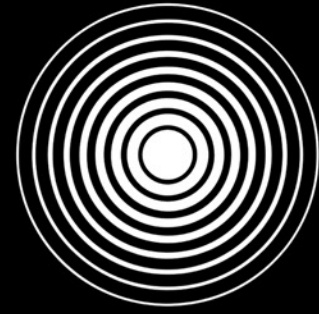


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Trends Electronics & Design Magazine
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<https://www.tedpublications.com/fr/en/home-2023/>
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 Address Change/Correction**
 Trends, Electronics & Design Magazine
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<https://www.tedpublications.com/fr/en/home-2023/>

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LEGAL DEPOT
 Quebec National Library, 1994
 Canada National Library: 994-6872

ISSN 1498-4318

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Imagination To Improve Our Life!

In moments like the ones we are all currently experiencing, it is sometimes difficult to imagine that everything will return to normal, with less war between peoples, fewer diseases, lower prices, salary increases, and so on. However, imagination allows us to believe that it is possible to make a difference, to contribute in some form, each in our own way. A smile without any ulterior motive given freely to others, a small gesture of courtesy while driving, or waiting at the checkout counter, etc., sometimes make a big difference. Even if only for a brief moment, and sometimes longer than initially thought.

Imagination allows us to improve our lives. Just think that when the telephone was invented, the goal was to improve the speed at which we could communicate with each other, either in an emergency or simply to give news to family members living in another region... And thanks to imagination, we now travel all over the globe and can easily call home from the other side of the world. We can even show our loved ones what we discover during a journey, in photos or even in videos.

All of this is made possible by researchers, creators who have thought and found ways to improve something that can benefit a large majority of people. Others have completely changed our ways of seeing things and understanding the world we live in. Let us applaud loudly the genius of imagination, as our

lives are often improved by new technologies put forward as a result of research and development. Of course, there is a price to all of this. But more often than not, the endgame is worth it. And if one does not find it worthwhile, one can overlook it, and no one loses. It's each person's choice, and that's fine.

Returning to audio gear, our collaborators had a great time testing for you a very interesting selection of quality products. An article, signed by **Jean-Denis Doyle**, on a pair of headphones from California, two texts on integrated amplifiers – one by **Jean-Denis** and the other by **George de Sa**, three articles on acoustic loudspeakers – one signed by **Michel Dallaire**, another by **Roger McCuaig**, and the third by **Richard Schneider**. Let's not forget a text on a network player-amplifier signed by **Yves Bérubé**.

If you are looking for new *CD* releases, I hasten to direct you to the pages of our reviewers in the *Rhythm and Music* section where you will surely find a disc that you will enjoy.

As the holiday season approaches, our *Buon Gusto* columnist, **Claude Lalonde**, has not forgotten you and suggests drinking champagne!
Let's go with bubbles!

I invite you to read each of the articles in this edition carefully, which will conclude the year 2023. The entire team joins me in wishing you a *Merry Holiday Season*, and we'll see you in early 2024!


Lucie Beauchamp
Co-Publisher & Public Relations Manager

CALIFORNIA SMOOTHNESS FOR YOUR PURE PLEASURE

By JEAN-DENIS DOYLE

I adore the fascinating world of headphones. If there's a category where high-fidelity equipment manufacturers aren't afraid to launch products with character, it's the realm of headphones. Unlike traditional electronic devices, where the pursuit of holy neutrality is often the goal, in the world of headphones, there's no fear of offering headphones with a very distinct personality. These various headphone models invite us to appreciate their interpretations of sonic truth. Here's an incredibly interesting headphone model introduced by a relatively unknown company in Quebec – the *Aeon 2 Noire* by **Dan Clark Audio**. In order to provide a unique way of reproducing music, this model adopts an unprecedented configuration. As we'll see, it offers a bouquet of truly attractive qualities. Will it become the headphone of your dreams? Follow me to find out.

In the realm of headphones, **Dan Clark Audio** is a new player in the Quebec market. Founded by **Dan Clark** in 2012, the company initially gained recognition under the name **Mr. Speaker**, specializing in modifying various existing headphone models. Of course, it was only a matter of time before **Dan Clark** produced his own model. Thus, the *Alpha Dog* model was born, aiming to offer a closed model with unparalleled performance in this type of technology. Today, **Dan Clark Audio** markets several headphone models, including some high-end ones for a demanding clientele. The *Aeon 2*

Noire headphones we are particularly interested in belong to **Dan Clark Audio's** *Aeon* series and represent the entry-level range for the California-based manufacturer. The *Aeon 2 Noire* model originated from specific requests from **Dan Clark Audio's** clientele, wanting a *closed* pair of headphones similar to the *Aeon* model but with a frequency response that aligns with the **Harman** curve. Request granted! The *Aeon 2 Noire* thus made its appearance on the market. Let's delve into its technical specifications.



« On the track *Zarmen*, the percussion instruments delicately tickle the ears. The bass is well-articulated, without any trailing effects or blurring. The piano approaches perfection and never becomes too incisive in the most intense passages. »

Technical Description

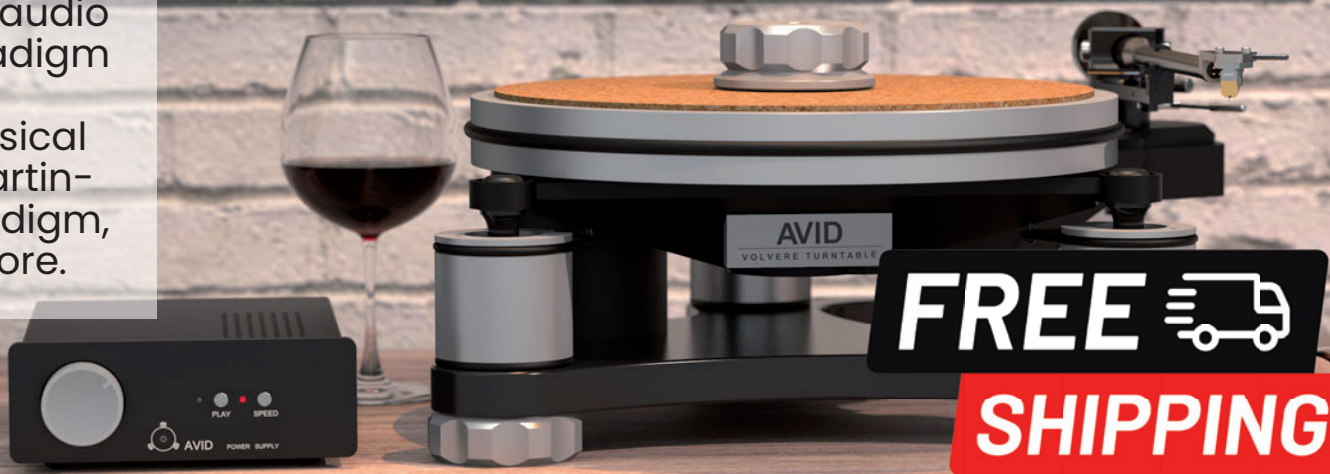
The *Aeon 2 Noire* headphones by **Dan Clark Audio** are closed-back, providing good isolation from the external world and, consequently, excellent response in the low frequencies. The headphone shells and certain parts of the supporting headband are made from carbon fiber, ensuring maximum rigidity,

minimal resonance, and a featherweight of approximately 328 gm. The interior of the headband is crafted from a titanium and nickel alloy called *Nitinol*, which exhibits remarkable memory properties when bent, contributing to the longevity of the *Aeon 2 Noire* headphones.

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DAN CLARK AUDIO AEON 2 NOIRE HEADPHONE

The planar magnetic transducers used are entirely homemade by **Dan Clark Audio**. Although in French, it might be preferable to refer to them as *transducteur magnétique planaire*, in reality, everyone agrees to simply say planar. This type of transducer combines the speed and transparency of an electrostatic transducer while eliminating the need for the adaptation transformer and specific amplifier essential in the case of electrostatic headphones. Furthermore, planar magnetic transducers allow for a low-frequency response similar to that of a conventional dome. However, they are more challenging to drive and often require powerful, high-quality amplification. The *Aeon 2 Noire* adopts the famous **Harman** curve, which significantly influences the tonal presentation. This frequency response curve was selected following an in-depth study involving several hundred participants, revealing that the preferred headphones generally had quite similar sonic characteristics. The most popular curve featured slightly boosted low frequencies, a slightly recessed midrange, and slightly elevated high frequencies. After extensive data analysis, **Harman International** established a frequency response curve designed to please a broad audience. The *Aeon 2 Noire* headphones by **Dan Clark Audio**, therefore, adopt this curve. The ear cushions of the *Aeon 2 Noire* are made from a Japanese-origin vegan leather. They are perforated to better conform to the **Harman** curve. Consequently, they should be replaced with the exact original model.

Unboxing and Setup

The *Aeon 2 Noire* headphones come with a sturdy carrying case for safe travel. To minimize the case's size, these headphones feature a clever mechanism allowing them to fold like origami. However, it's not necessarily a model intended for *on-the-go* activities, although it's still possible. You might find it a bit imposing for such use.

The headphones come with a quality approximately six-foot connecting cable. It's flexible and has a rubberized appearance, making it pleasant to use without constant tangling. The vegan leather ear cushions are very comfortable and gentle on the skin. After some time, they may become a bit warm, like most cushions of this type.

As we'll observe during listening sessions, you'll need a powerful and high-quality headphone amplifier to do justice to the *Aeon 2 Noire* headphones. Being a closed-back headphone, it provides a relative level of isolation against ambient noise, preventing disturbance to those around you.

The Cruel Piano Test

Comfortably seated, I began my listening with the music of pianist **Diego Amador** and his album *Scherzo Flamenco*. This particularly well-recorded production immediately showcased the brilliance of the *Aeon 2 Noire* headphones by **Dan Clark**



Audio. What a magnificent reproduction of the piano! These headphones literally transported me to the recording studio. The piano's sound is full, well-grounded, with an extension in the bass that leaves no doubt about the capabilities of these magnificent headphones.

On the track *Zarmen*, the percussion instruments delicately tickle the ears. The bass is well-articulated, without any trailing effects or blurring. The piano approaches perfection and never becomes too incisive in the most intense passages.

In a similar musical style, but this time with the guitar, **Gino D'Auri's** album *Flamenco Mystico* is a joy to listen to. Once again, the recording space is rendered with very credible realism. There are things happening all around my head, and the effect is truly captivating. This particular type of guitar music can quickly become aggressive, but with the *Aeon 2* headphones, the opposite happens. They establish an intimate connection with the guitarist, allowing you to enjoy the entire album until the end. 3,7973

Regardless of the musical genre, the result is impressive.

Thanks to the choice of adopting the **Harman** curve, the **Dan Clark Audio** *Aeon 2 Noire* headphones offer excellent versatility, allowing the listening of some of the most eclectic music genres. The song *Coastline* by **Goeffroy** illustrates the headphones' beautiful adaptability. The bassline is well-present, entirely impeccable in its intensity and rhythmic tracking. The vocals are slightly subdued, just enough to allow the song to remain smooth and enjoyable. This is the ultimate quality of these headphones — maintaining a perfect balance between listenability and absolute resolution. Never too bright or incisive, this headphone easily carried me from one song to another.

With singer **Philémon Cimon**, his album *Les Sessions Cubaines* is rendered with its raw, acoustic, and intimate side. Listening to it with the *Aeon 2 Noire* headphones, one pays attention to the lyrics, atmospheres, and the message that this splendid album conveys.

Although it may not be the best-recorded album, the *Aeon 2 Noire* allows us to appreciate it in a new light. During my listening sessions, I rarely had to adjust the volume level. A sign that, in my opinion, gives a good idea of how full and relaxing the sound of these headphones can be.

The Other Side of the Coin

While the *Aeon 2 Noire* headphones by **Dan Clark Audio** have many qualities, they still have some distinctive characteristics. This is due to the type of transducers used, as well as the overall headphone configuration. One might wish for them to be a bit more responsive and demonstrate a bit more punch. Despite impedance values promising excellent efficiency, the *Aeon 2 Noire* headphones require a good headphone amplifier

to bring them to their full potential. Forget the idea of powering them with your phone's jack.

Due to certain design choices made by **Dan Clark Audio**, including following the **Harman** curve, some listeners may find that the midrange frequencies lack bite. Therefore, it's essential to listen to the *Aeon 2 Noire* headphones in a context similar to the one you'll have at home. While the choice of headphones remains a highly personal matter, the *Aeon 2 Noire* by **Dan Clark Audio** has its own and self-assured sound. It remains very smooth, open, and certainly deserves attention.

Conclusion

With the *Aeon 2 Noire* model, **Dan Clark Audio** presents us with an extremely well-built and comfortable headphone. It has its own sound, portraying a musical image with great gentleness. Like a gentle breeze from the California coast, it will enhance your audio chain with a calming and refined tranquility. Thanks to its closed configuration, it will discreetly blend into your immediate environment. A quality headphone to try and discover, offered at a reasonable price.



GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$1,999

Warranty: 2 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Asona Ltd., T.: 905.947.9229, <https://asonaltd.com/>

Mediagraphy

Diego Amador, Scherzo Flamenco, Qobuz file.

Goeffroy, Coastline, Bonsound, Qobuz file.

Philémon Cimon, Les sessions cubaines, Les Disques du Règne, Qobuz file.

A SMALL JOY FROM ANOTHER ERA

BY JEAN-DENIS DOYLE

For a high-end electronics manufacturer, celebrating its 50th anniversary is an event that deserves grand recognition. After all, for a cult British brand like **Naim**, it means half a century of satisfied customers and innovations. It also signifies years of maintaining a unique sound, eagerly demanded by its loyal customer base. Ample reasons to celebrate, and what better way than with this reissue of **Naim**'s very first integrated amplifier, the *Nait 1*, now named *Nait 50*. Visually reminiscent of the original model, this new version has big shoes to fill. Indeed, **Naim**'s *Nait 1* is a true legend still fetching high prices. Has the **Naim** team succeeded in reviving the charm and musicality that made the original model renowned? That's what we are about to find out.



Naim Audio is a well-established British manufacturer founded by **Julian Vereker**, and it has been a fixture in the audiophile landscape since 1973. The company has cultivated an extremely loyal customer base over the years, with some **Naim** enthusiasts exclusively owning the brand's products for a lifetime. In the early 1980s, the brand was closely associated with **Linn** products, and to democratize the purchase of a **Linn-Naim** system, some distributors and retailers asked **Naim** to create an integrated version of their preamplifier and power amplifier. **Julian Vereker** and his team took on the project somewhat reluctantly. It's important to note that Mr. **Vereker** was not one to compromise easily. In fact, he couldn't envision how an integrated amplifier could

« With the song *I Only Want to be With You*, the rhythm of the subtle percussion instruments transports us with a very pleasant ease. The **Naim Nait 50** delves deep into the records to bring out the most minute details without necessarily magnifying the surface noise of the records. This is the hallmark of an exceptional phono stage, like the one equipped in the *Nait 50*. »

meet the high standards required to carry the **Naim Audio** name. Despite his skepticism, the result of their work shocked the audiophile world — a compact 13 W amplifier with extraordinary musicality and the typical **Naim** sound quality. The **Naim Nait 1** was born, allowing many audiophiles to afford a high-quality audio system at a reasonable price. Upon its release in 1983, the *Nait 1* was a device that went against the market trends. With its minimalist design

and seemingly limited power on paper, it had nothing to impress specification enthusiasts. Nevertheless, with its fabulous sound, the *Nait 1* achieved immense success and became a true legend, still highly sought even today. So, what better way to celebrate the company's 50 years of success than to resurrect the *Nait 1* in a new version called *Nait 50*? This new integrated amplifier is not just a nostalgic exercise in a vintage-looking case. It is a

NAIM NAIT 50 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

new device whose meticulous design reflects the spirit of the original *Nait 1* from **Naim**.

Technical Description

The **Naim Nait 50** is an integrated amplifier, meaning it contains both phono and line preamplifiers, along with the necessary amplification circuits to power a pair of loudspeakers. This integrated amplifier does not feature a digital-to-analog converter (DAC) or any Bluetooth input. In fact, it is a purely analog amplifier in the truest sense. It has three inputs — two line inputs on *DIN* connectors and a *Moving Magnet* phono input on *RCA* connectors. The *Nait 50* has only one pair of loudspeaker terminals, making it a minimalist product similar to the original model.

The **Naim Nait 50** is equipped with a high-class phono stage, entirely made from discrete transistors. This phono stage is more than just a convenient addition with decent sound; it is a high-quality phono stage assembled on two small independent boards for the left and right channels. This stage is similar to the one that made the original *Nait 1* famous, with complete silence, ample gain, and separation. Next is the line preamplification stage, a true preamplifier that genuinely adds gain to the musical signals rather than being a simple passive circuit. This allows the signals to optimally drive the amplification stage. Once again, the configuration consists of discrete transistors in a dual-mono setup.

The amplifier itself is a classic class *A/B* circuit, delivering 25 W per channel. Yes, you read that correctly, only 25 W. However, these numbers should be taken with a grain of salt, as the power supply of the **Naim Nait 50** is robust, providing excellent current reserves. Two ultra-fast-charging **Kelmet** capacitors, each with a capacity of 10,000 μF , ensure that the *Nait 50* won't run out of steam easily. The *Nait 50* uses only one

pair of **Sanken** output transistors per channel, and these are cooled by the bottom of the chassis. In my opinion, and technically speaking, having only one pair of transistors per side, combined with the advertised low power, is a huge advantage from a musical perspective. Assuming that in a domestic setting, rarely more than a few watts are used, the configuration of this amplifier makes perfect sense. Therefore, the **Naim Nait 50** is designed to be highly responsive and lively within its power range. The front panel of the device is identical to the original *Nait 1*, except for the addition of a headphone jack in the place of the old balance control. Since we're on the subject, the **Naim Nait 50** includes a high-quality pure class *A* headphone amplifier. With a capacity of 1.5 W, this headphone amplifier should easily drive various types of headphones. This is a nice bonus that adds to the overall feeling of quality provided by the aluminum chassis and impeccable finish.

Unboxing and Setup

The **Naim Nait 50** is delivered in a vintage-looking cardboard packaging identical to that of the 1983 *Nait 1* amplifier in terms of design and conception. A nice touch that demonstrates **Naim's** commitment to recreating the experience of the original *Nait 1*. Upon initial contact, the device exudes perfection in assembly and is absolutely stunning with its chrome bumper appearance. When unpacking, do not search for the remote control, as none is included with the device, nor is it offered as an option. To fully enjoy the exceptional sound of the *Nait 50*, you will have to relearn to get up to adjust the volume. I understand that **Naim** wanted to respect the spirit of the original device, but a well-thought-out remote for the *Nait 50* wouldn't have hurt.

The *Nait 50* features a circuit that automatically turns off the device after 17 minutes without a musical signal. According





to the instruction manual, it is possible to disable this circuit with a small switch located at the back. There is a minor annoyance, namely the new indicator, a very bright and quite luminous white light, which contrasts with the overall sobriety of the *Nait 50*. Originally, the indicator light on the *Nait 1* was a beautiful, discreet green. In my opinion, the addition of this new bright indicator is not a very happy choice. Too bad! As usual with **Naim** amplifiers, you will need to use interconnect cables with *DIN* connectors for the line inputs and loudspeaker cables with banana plugs. The **Naim Nait 50** has the advantage of not generating any heat, which makes it easy to position in your furniture and certainly contributes to its reliability and longevity.

What better way to start than with a good vinyl record?

The **Naim Nait 1** from 1983 was designed with the idea of allowing music enthusiasts to fully enjoy the **Linn LP-12** turntable while spending a little less on amplification. To the point that at the time, a salesman at **Audio Club** jokingly told me that the **Naim Nait 1** was, in reality, a phono stage capable of powering loudspeakers... I can confirm that the **Naim Nait 50** from 2023 is exactly in the same spirit, as it seems to favor vinyl playback. Spending an evening listening to different vinyl records with the *Nait 50* is a true delight.

I started my listening sessions with **Shelby Lynne's** album, *Just a Little Lovin'*. From the first notes, I immediately understood that I was dealing with a truly special amplifier. The **Naim Nait 50** is genuinely tailored for vinyl listening, manifested by a very full and rich sound. The singer's voice has ample body and texture. The music is well-anchored, perfectly seated on a significant and controlled presence of low frequencies. The gain is exceptionally high, just like with the 1983 *Nait 1*. The highs soar with plenty of variety and subtleties. The noise level is virtually

non-existent, and for a phono stage, it is on par with those sold as separate units.

With the song *I Only Want to be With You*, the rhythm of the subtle percussion instruments transports us with a very pleasant ease. The **Naim Nait 50** delves deep into the records to bring out the most minute details without necessarily magnifying the surface noise of the records. This is the hallmark of an exceptional phono stage, like the one equipped in the *Nait 50*. Next, I chose to revisit the 1980s with the album from the band **Marillion**, *Misplaced Childhood*. By the time I played the first side of the album, the *Nait 50* had already awakened numerous memories of my youth from the 1980s. For a moment, I felt exactly like I was back in the time when the song *Kayleigh* was playing on the radio. That's the beauty of this device, its ability to establish an emotional connection between the music and its listener. Listening to vinyl records with the **Naim Nait 50** is a bit like activating a time-travel machine. The timbres have this slightly indefinable vintage touch, so sought after by many audiophiles. If vinyl records are your primary source, you'll re-discover with the *Nait 50* the emotions and tonality that originally led you to prefer this medium.

A Beautiful Palette of Colors

For the rest of my listening sessions, **Roger Waters' new album**, *Dark Side of the Moon Redux*, fit perfectly. This reissue of **Pink Floyd's** classic album sounds particularly good with the **Naim Nait 50**. Once again, this small amplifier manages to focus on the essential musical message with a different and very interesting tonality. Indeed, the *Nait 50* deviates slightly from the sacrosanct neutrality that has become the norm today. It has a perfectly balanced extra dose of bass, which complements the entire rock and progressive repertoire, without any *boom-boom* effects. It's just full, with a lot of substance

NAIM NAIT 50 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



around the bone. The same phenomenon occurs with the highs, which are slightly forward, bringing beautiful light to many recordings. These subtle colorations, which give such a beautiful hue to this amplifier, were clearly and intentionally desired by **Naim** and were implemented with a great deal of measure. In reality, the unique color of the *Nait 50* fits perfectly with the spirit of the original *Nait 1* from **Naim**. The little miracle to highlight is that **Naim's** engineers found a way to impart this color to the *Nait 50* while maintaining a top-notch sound quality, worthy of the best amplifiers today.

Conclusion

Here is a fantastic little amplifier that celebrates Naim's fifty years in a glorious way. The **Naim Nait 50** is a special product that will immediately appeal to its target audience. Those who appreciate it will easily forgive its limitations and will enjoy an unparalleled journey through their record collection. Vinyl enthusiasts will rediscover sensations buried in their musical subconscious for a long time. As a small joy from another era,

the **Naim Nait 50** is an amplifier that doesn't even need recommendations. It will find its audience on its own, the one that wants to enjoy its unique sound and the remarkable heritage it celebrates.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$4,599

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

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

Mediagraphy

Shelby Lynne, *Just a Little Lovin'*, Analogue Productions, Universal, APP 041

Marillion, *Misplaced Childhood*, Capitol, EMI, ST 12431

Roger Waters, *Dark Side of The Moon Redux*, Tidal File

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THE WAY TO MUSICAL ENLIGHTENMENT



BY GEORGE DE SA

Michi. In Japanese, it is both a meaningful word as well as a personal name. Though just five letters and relatively easy to pronounce — “mé-chée” it carries a rich meaning. The direct translation of *Michi* would be — route; way; or path and it conveys the idea of purity, righteousness, or proper course. Knowing the meaning of *Michi* brings greater understanding of why it is the name given to the flagship audio product series

from the long-established Japanese manufacturer — **Rotel** (est. 1961). **Rotel's** flagship *Michi* series of products can be seen as ‘a path’ to deliver the listener the highest level of music purity...the proper course to musical enlightenment. Introduced in 2018, the *Michi* flagship series is hailed by the company as delivering: ‘acoustic elevation; sonic evolution; and visual perfection’.



Integrated amplifiers, especially full-featured models have become all the rage in most recent years, as technological and engineering advancements have allowed for smaller components with increased performance. Just as computers have gotten smaller and more powerful with time, audio components can be designed now with smaller footprints, without compromising audio performance. In fact, improved circuit boards, allowing for shorter pathways and optimization interconnections between modules, it is possible to even improve performance though bringing together function within a single enclosure. Cost too is a key consideration. An audio component's casework is a significant portion of the overall component cost, even more so with top-tier or flagship lines. Hence, strategically integrating two or more components, within a single case, provides an opportunity to reduce cost. A properly

designed and optimized integrated amplifier no longer needs to mean a compromise in performance over separates. This is just the reason that integrated amplifiers need to be considered even when pursuing high-end components. This is just the reason why the *Michi X3 Series 2* Integrated amplifier caught my attention; being not only a preamplifier and power amplifier in a single box but also having a digital-to-analog converter (DAC); moving magnet (MM) phono pre-amplifier and a headphone amplifier.

Michi most recently raised the bar on the performance of several its models, introducing its *Series 2 (S2)* range in April 2023. Within the line-up of *Michi* models, an S2 applies to three of models. First there is the new *Michi X3 Series 2* Integrated Amplifier, then the *Michi X5 Series 2* Integrated Amplifier, and finally, the *Michi P5 Series 2* Preamplifier. In addition to

these *Series 2* models, *Michi* continues to include the *S5* Stereo Amplifier and the *M8* Monoblock Power Amplifier within its stable of products. The *Series 2* brings several updates and enhancements to the *Michi* models. In particular, the *X3 S2* has been updated with 90 component upgrades, including a new 8-channel **ESS SABRE ES9028PRO** 32-bit 768 kHz digital-to-analog converter (DAC) and reengineered power supplies and audio paths to reduce noise and distortion.

Technical Features

The *X3 S2* Integrated amplifier incorporates a highly regulated power supply with *Michi's* own custom-designed toroidal power transformer, as well as custom slit foil capacitors. The low impedance power supply is designed to ensure ample power to ensure it can comfortably and faithfully deliver needed power. The printed circuit boards (PCB) include *Symmetrical Circuit*

ROTEL MICHI X3 SERIES 2 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



Traces to ensure precise music signal timing and metal film resistors and polystyrene, or polypropylene capacitors are also employed in the important signal paths.

The power amplification is Class A/B amplifier with a stated maximum power output of 350 Watts/channel (4 Ω) or a continuous power output of 200 Watts/channel (8 Ω). Frequency response exceed the audible spectrum with a low total harmonic distortion (THD) rating of < 0.008%, accompanied with intermodulation distortion of (60 Hz:7 kHz, 4:1) < 0.03%. The signal-to-noise ratio of both line and digital inputs is 102 dB (IHF "A" Weighted), while the phono input is rated as 80 dB

SNR. Channel separation is rated as > 55 dB. The preamplifier output (pre out) level has a maximum level of 1.9 V, with 100 Ω output impedance. The input sensitivity / impedance ratings are: (RCA): 340 mV / 100 k Ω , (XLR): 540 mV / 100 k Ω and (MM Phono) 5.2 mV / 47 k Ω . The 32-bit **ESS Sabre** 8-channel DAC is capable via **SPDIF LPCM** (Coax/Optical) of 24-bit / 192 kHz, while via **USB Class 1**, up to 24-bit / 96 kHz and **USB Class 2**, up to 24-bit / 384 kHz, providing support for **DSD & DoP** and **MQA & MQA Studio**, as well as **Roon Tested**. There is also wireless **aptX HD Bluetooth** source support.

Construction & Build

The *Michi X3 S2* is: 485 mm (W) x 150 mm (H) x 452 mm (D) / 19" x 6" x 17 3/4" with a weight of 28.9 kg / 63.7 lbs. The dimensions and weight don't lie, the *X3* is no lightweight, to the contrary its big and heavy, which gives confidence in its power capability, yet despite its stature, the *X3*'s simple lines and accoutrements— just a pair of knobs (volume / source), power button, headphone socket and inconspicuous *IR* sensor, present a very contemporary design aesthetic. The eye-catcher is the *Michi X3*'s very attractive and useful large white-on-black *LCD* information display. The *X3*'s chassis is curved on all four upright corners, which serves to perfectly soften the rather imposing squared form. Looking down at the top of the *X3* gives you the only glimpse you'll get of the heatsinks— the ribs effectively concealed by the *X3*'s smooth exterior panels. Like the *Model T*, the *X3 S2* comes black and black only with a micro bead-blasted finish that is almost suede like to the touch. The overall build is exemplary for a product at this price point. Form and feel of the *Michi X3 S2* exudes an understated elegance and are fully in keeping with its flagship status. This integrated comes with a svelte *IR* full-function wand remote that is exquisitely built that was a pleasure to use. A double box contains a microfiber slipcover for the *X3*, along with *IEC* power, *USB-Type B* and *Ethernet* cables.

Functions and Functionality

The *Michi X3 S2* was a pleasure to use, with simple and clear functions that the remote allows full and easy access to, while the large display allows you to also see all options clearly. Inputs can be given custom names and the display can be set to provide *dB Peak Power Meter* or a *Frequency Spectrum Analyzer* (8, 12 or 16 bands), as well as *Status*. There are also *Bass* and *Treble* controls, along with a *Direct Bypass*. There are settings for *Power On* volume, *Balance*, *Auto Mute* and *Signal Sense* power on. There is also an *HT Bypass*. On the back you will find *RCA* analog inputs for *CD*, *Tuner*, *Aux*, and *MM Phono*,

as well as one pair of *Balance In (XLR)* inputs. Two mono sub-out *RCA* jacks are provided along with stereo *RCA* pre out jacks. Digital inputs include: *SPDIF* (3 optical, 3 coax) and both *Network* and 2 x *USB* jacks. There is also an *RS232* service port. A master power switch and 12 V triggers (in / out) are also out pack along with 8 (2 stereo sets) of high quality, five-way binding posts that are intended to separate *Low* and *High* frequency hook-ups. Finally, an *IEC* mains power socket allows for experimenting with aftermarket power cables.

Setup / Use

I placed the *Michi X3 S2* atop my **Quadraspire SV3T** rack with a **Pangea AC-9** power cable substituted for the *OEM* zip-cord supplied. The digital source was my **Rega Apollo** as a *CD* transport connected via *SPDIF* coax; while I also used my **Bryston BR20** streamer / *DAC* connected to the *Michi X3 S2* via *XLR* and set at its unity gain (0). **Qobuz** as well as **Tidal HiFi** were used for streaming sources. The analog source used was my **VPI Scout 1.1 / Dynavector 10x5**; with my **Gold Note PH-10 & PSU-10** phono amplifier used for comparison. Though I did start the evaluation with my **Focal Electra Be II** standmount loudspeakers I did most of my listening with my **Dynaudio C2 Signatures**.

Listening

I began with a level-matched *A/B* comparison against my long-term cost-effective reference, the **Rega Elex-R** integrated. Within a couple minutes of the first swap-out, I was convinced that the *Michi X3 S2* sat clearly in a higher league; relaying finer detail, increased bass definition, greater openness, and overall composure. Music through the *X3* sounded more relaxed and freer flowing, with clearer more nuance sound that demonstrated how the *Michie X3* can step out of the way of the music. I recently discovered the musical track (*Looks Like*) *Somebody Got Ahead Of Schedule On Their Medication* from **Charlie Hunter's** album *Everybody Has A Plan Until They Get Punched*



ROTEL MICHI X3 SERIES 2 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



In the Mouth. Yeah, a mouthful of a track and album name but this is one seriously good bluesy track that can sound spectacular on a capable system. The *Michi X3 S2* delivered the opening kick drum hits with amazing density and weight. Thunderous was how I described it in my listening notes. Not only were the strikes concussive but they relayed the shudder around the drum hits in a well-controlled and voluminous manner. An iron fist in a velvet glove would apply here. Though the sheer power of the percussion was attention grabbing, I was also very impressed with the crisp attack of the cymbal hits and the preservation of natural shimmer and sustain around the treble notes. Brass tones were lively and accompanied by authentic timbre that convincingly constructed a captivating illusion of a live performance.

The fabulous Quebec music artist, **Dominique Fils-Aimé**, with her title track *Nameless* was nothing less than room filling with the *Michi X3 S2*. Her voice was graceful and silky smooth via the *Michi* absent of brittleness or oversaturation. Not only was **Dominique's** lead vocals clear and focused but the background vocals were also very well defined, separated in space, and easily interpreted individually. The embodied sense of these voices was something I took note of, as the *Michi* in relaying detail does not forego the need to produce a convincingly lifelike rendition. The soundstage produced was both remarkably wide and open sounding with both focus and dimension obvious. Within the soundstage, images portrayed seemed suspended, as if on an invisible string, with dimension and relief; the *X3 S2* demonstrating a capacity not only for

producing a sense depth and width but also height. The sound was airy yet had a slight lean to the warm. On **Dominique's** track *Birds* from the same album, I was most impressed with the flesh like quality of the hand claps; the *X3* drawing out the clap and avoiding any distracting sharpness or etch. This same naturalness applied to the percussion and the flapping wing effects which are so well captured on this track.

Not to be cliché but I would have to say the term musical would apply to the *Michi X3 S2*. However, I only say this because of its proficiency in relaying music with a consistently enjoyable manner, and across a wide spectrum of music genres and recording qualities. However, the *X3* is also truthful and avoids overt embellishment. It is not mushy or romantic and its also not analytical in any sense but rather serves up definition, detail and clarity in spades while preserving the sense of ease, tonal richness, and dynamics.

Listening to the musical track *Creep* from **Daniela Andrade's** *Cover Vol. 1* album, the *Michi's* grip and focus on the track was most apparent, and the vocal delivery was undeniably vivid, her voice and phrasing being nothing less than stunning. There was not smoothing over of essential and desired details yet the *Michi X3 S2* does most gracefully and adeptly smooth that which is most abrasive and egregious within a recording and / or the upstream playback chain. On this same track, guitar strums were spirited and dynamic, tight, and impactful. **Zack Bryan's** track *I Remember Everything* featuring **Kacey Musgraves**, has some inherent dryness within the recording, perhaps a combination of the mic and perhaps the recording

chain but most noticeable on the male vocalization of **Zack**. Here, the *Michi X3 S2*, relaying the dryness but also avoided emphasising it, diverting focus somewhat away from the recording and towards the music.

I spent time assessing the *Michi X3 S2*'s built-in 32-bit **ESS Sabre DAC** using my **Rega** Apollo as a transport. I can assure you the included *DAC* is no afterthought but a very capable implementation, able to provide generous soundstages, with substantial detail, distinct images, and clear element separation. Across the audible frequency the **Sabre DAC** came across as very even handed, portraying a hint of warmth while not drawing attention to any sub-band. The bottom-end was full and rich, favouring weight and fullness over exacting definition. The mids were natural, without a sense of forwardness

« Listening to the musical track *Creep* from **Daniela Andrade's** *Cover Vol. 1* album, the *Michi's* grip and focus on the track was most apparent, and the vocal delivery was undeniably vivid, her voice and phrasing being nothing less than stunning. There was not smoothing over of essential and desired details yet the *Michi X3 S2* does most gracefully and adeptly smooth that which is most abrasive and egregious within a recording and/or the upstream playback chain. »

and seamlessly blending into a smooth and polite top end. Only in back-to-back comparison with my *BR20 DAC*, did I find the **ESS Sabre DAC** to be slightly less transparent and revealing of detail with less bass control and articulation on the lowest notes; however, the *X3 S2* having the edge on bass fullness. The *Michi's* integrated *MM* phono stage was a strong performer, delivering vinyl with characteristic warmth, texture, and harmonic colour. Bass had richness and texture, the midrange was even-handed and well developed, with a clear though slightly modest treble presence. Putting the *X3's* phono stage against my **Gold Note** PH-10/PSU-10 stage, I did find the **Gold Note** was able to extract more detail from the grooves, with increased tonal complexity, greater dynamic variance and upper treble presence. Mind you the **Gold Note** pair is over \$4,000 CAD vs. \$6,799.99 CAD for the *Michi X3 S2* integrated with phonostage. Hence, not a fair comparison but did allow me to confidently conclude that the *X3 S2's* phonostage is very capable and should well support turntable setups at up to half the price of the *X3 S2* itself.

I used my **Grado 325e** and a borrowed set of **AKG K7XX** (thanks **Anthony**) to assess the headphone output on the *X3 S2*. The



headphone amplifier was very quiet, providing black backgrounds with a relaxed and composed personality that ably separated elements within the mix. The laid-back presentation complemented my **Grado's** beautifully, keeping their forward mids and treble in check. Power was always abundant to reach obscene levels with clarity and the presentation was able to hold my interest as well as provide a comforting listening experience.

What I concluded about the *DAC*, phonostage and headphone output of the *Michi X3 S2* was that each of these modules on their own were of high quality. I'm confident that most will find them more than enough; however, those seeking to get the absolute most out of their *X3* can be assured that this amplifier can well deliver on the goods even when paired high-end stand-alone components.

Conclusion

Does the *Michi X3 Series 2* Integrated Amplifier do the brand justice? Most definitely! It's a superbly designed and built integrated amplifier, with great attention to detail. The *X3* provides a broad feature set without compromising on the quality of the parts; delivering performance that goes beyond the sum of its parts. It has a neutral tonal balance with a dash of added warmth, smoothness, and fullness that allows it to work wonders across all music genres, while providing source forgiveness combined with great insight and excitement. As the name *Michi* implies, the *Michi X3 S2* Integrated Amplifier provides a righteous way to musical enlightenment. A top-notch integrated amplifier that is strongly recommended.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$ 6,999

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Kevro International Inc., T.: 905.428.2800,
<https://www.kevro.ca/>; <https://www.rotel.com/en-ca>

Buon gusto


BY CLAUDE LALONDE



CHAMPAGNE AYALA, THE PUREST EXPRESSION OF CHARDONNAY

Photo: Liza Miri



CHAMPAGNE

AYALA
MAISON FONDÉE EN 1860
AY-FRANCE

Buon gusto

BY CLAUDE LALONDE



Champagne Ayala

This Champagne house was founded in 1860 by **Edmond de Ayala**. Even then, it comprised terroirs of great crus in Ay. It pioneered the introduction of a drier style (dry champagne) with 21 g/l of residual sugar, while champagnes of the past could contain over 100 g/l.

Champagne Ayala is a founding member of the **Syndicat des Grandes Marques**, the current **Union des Maisons de Champagne**, in 1882. It became the official supplier to the British and Spanish Royal Courts with the Royal Warrant in 1908. By the 1920s, it was already producing a million bottles.

In 2005, the **Bollinger** family acquired **Champagne Ayala**, leading to major investments. This marked the beginning of the house's renewal, starting with the appointment of **Hadrien Mouflard** as Managing Director. He proposed a new strategic direction focusing on the

development of the house through 5 cuvées and *Chardonnay* as the flagship grape.

In 2018, a new winery opened with a large number of tanks (120), allowing independent vinification of several cuvées based on the origin of the grapes.

In 2022, another winery was established for reserve wines, revealing the diverse terroirs from which the grapes originate. These grapes come from a maximum of 350 km around exceptional vineyards such as Ay, Dizy, Chouilly, Oger, Champvoisy, and Passy-Grigny. They work towards *HVE* certification and are in the process of converting to organic.

The grapes come from approximately 115 hectares of vineyards, of which 22 hectares belong to the **Ayala** house.

I had the pleasure of attending a superb tasting of **Ayala** champagnes with

Hadrien Mouflard, the managing director of the house, at the **H3** restaurant in Montreal. Rich in history, **Champagne Ayala** was established in 1860, producing multi-vintage and multi-crus champagnes with the aim of conveying the purest expression of *Chardonnay*.

What sets **Champagne Ayala** apart is that over 50% of the composition of all its champagnes comes from *Chardonnay*. Additionally, the dosage is minimalist (around 6 g/l of residual sugar), and the aging time is a minimum of 3 years, which is definitely longer than what the AOC requires for non-vintage champagnes (a period of 15 months).

Finally, the grapes come from over 70 crus, with around fifty being *Chardonnay*, and reserve wines account for around 55% for added complexity. It's truly a precision job!

Champagne Ayala, Brut Majeur

Brut Majeur is a blend of 70 crus from the 2019 (base year), 2018, 2017, and 2016 vintages, with 43% reserve wines. It comes from microvinification in 120 small stainless steel tanks and is aged for a minimum of 3 years. The grapes come from Côte des Blancs, Montagne de Reims, Vallée de la Marne, Aube, Vitryat, and Sézannais.

Tasting Notes

Brut Majeur reveals aromas of citrus, flowers, yeast notes, and breadcrumbs on the nose, along with hints of white fruits.

The palate is perfectly balanced and precise, with a beautiful sense of minerality that lingers with the flavors of white fruits.

It pairs well with white fish, shellfish, scallop ceviche, poultry, and cheeses.

It has been available at the **SAQ** since late September — early October 2023.

Champagne Ayala, Brut Majeur

Sugar: 6 g/l

Grape varieties: Chardonnay 55%, Pinot Noir 30%, Pinot Meunier 15%

Price: \$68.50

SAQ Code: 11553137

<https://www.saq.com/fr/11553137>



Buon gusto

BY CLAUDE LALONDE

Champagne Ayala, Rosé Majeur

Rosé Majeur is a blend of 24 crus, with the majority being Chardonnay (51%), which is quite rare for a rosé champagne. It contains 17% reserve wines from the 2019, 2018, 2017, and 2016 base years. It has been aged for 3 years.

Tasting Notes

Immediately, aromas of raspberries and currants dominate the nose, along with some peach notes.

On the palate, it is airy, reminiscent of the aromas on the nose, highlighted by fresh acidity and a mineral sensation. The creamy bubbles create a beautiful contrast with the slightly vinous character of the wine (39% Pinot Noir).

It pairs well with rosé lamb chops or tuna and shrimp tataki.

It has been available at the **SAQ** since mid-September and the end of September 2023.

Champagne Ayala, Rosé Majeur

Sugar: 6 g/l

Grape varieties: Chardonnay 51%, Pinot Noir 39%, Pinot Meunier 10%, and 6% red wine from Ay

Price: \$77.75

SAQ Code: 11674529

<https://www.saq.com/fr/11674529>



Champagne Ayala, La Perle 2013

Unfortunately, this wine will not be available for the rest of 2023.

Chardonnay grapes come exclusively from grand crus in the Côte de Blancs, including Chouilly and Le Mesnil sur Oger. *Pinot Noir* grapes come from Montagne de Reims and Ay. It has been aged for an average of 8 years on lees under cork. Riddling and disgorging were done by hand.

Tasting Notes

It reveals notes of citrus, yeast, toasty and brioche notes, sweet spices, and a hint of hazelnuts on the nose.

On the palate, the aromatic amplitude and complexity dominate, along with the creamy density and finesse of the bubbles. Beautiful tension and an incisive style on an astonishing length in the mouth.

It pairs well with beef tataki, long-simmered meats, or a duck breast with fruity sauce.

Champagne Ayala, La Perle 2013

Sugar: 6 g/l

Grape varieties exclusively from grand crus: Chardonnay 80% and Pinot Noir 20%

Price: \$172.75

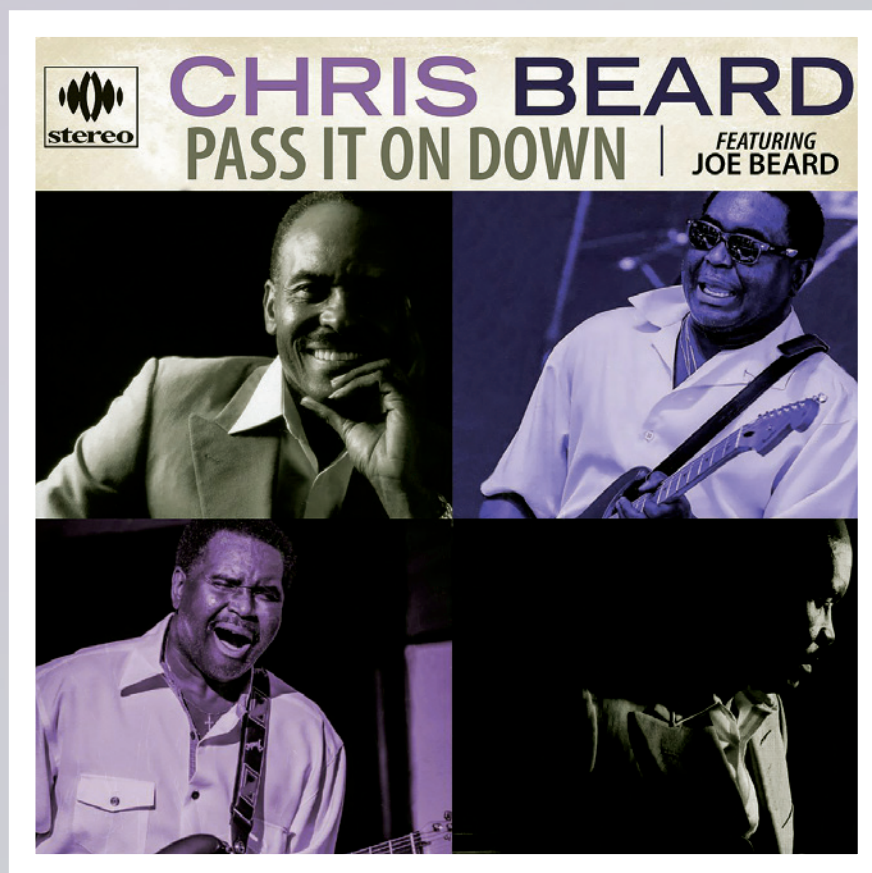
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Blues

BY PIERRE JOBIN



CHRIS BEARD

Pass It On

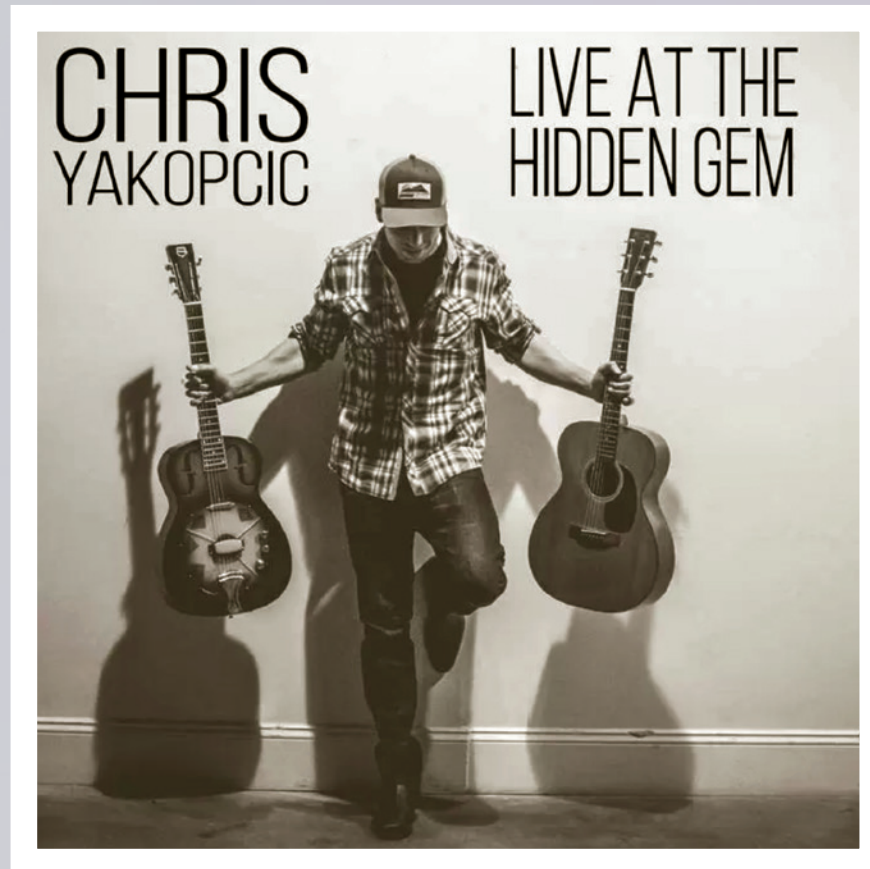
Blue Heart Records, BHR 033

Chris Beard is a bluesman rooted in a family tradition that he transmits with a more modern sound, his unique style. He is the son of the renowned blues singer and guitarist **Joe Beard**. Growing up in a blues environment, by the age of 5, he had already learned *Green Onions* on the guitar, giving his mother great thrills. The title track of the album, *Pass It On Down*, is a ballad featuring a guitar and vocal duo that he shares with his father in a dialogue centered on the importance of passing the blues to future generations. In response to this request for transmission, which is clearly important to his father, who has long carried the torch, **Chris** simply

says that he does what he has been taught, that he can't do otherwise, that the blues is in his blood! **Chris Beard** is a passionate, powerful, and committed singer and guitarist. On this record, he expresses himself mainly through lively funks, intense sentimental ballads, danceable *R&B* and grooves, not forgetting a dirty blues, *Bitter Baby*, which closes the album fittingly. Finally, I would be remiss not to highlight the participation of **Kenny Neal** and his band, composed of family members, on the cover of *Son I Never Knew*, taken from **Neal's** 1989 album *Devil Child*. *Pass It On Down*, **Chris Beard's** seventh release, passionately expresses the love for the blues and visceral commitment!

Blues

BY PIERRE JOBIN



CHRIS YAKOPCIC

Live at the Hidden Gem
Yako Records, Yako 702

From the start, I was captivated by the dynamic and fluid acoustic guitar playing, as well as the well-placed and expressive voice, in harmony. Then, the pleasure grew as I continued listening. As an acoustic blues player in fingerpicking and quality slide, **Chris Yakopcic** has showcased his talents in bars and small venues for over a decade. His first of three albums had a flavorful title for a blues guitar enthusiast, *Done Found My Freedom 'fore My Technique*. Now that he has paid his dues, made it to the finals of the **International Blues Challenge** in Memphis, and performed at festivals, **Yakopcic** continues his blues journey. He plays, composes, and teaches! His recent album, *Live At the Hidden Gem*,

was recorded in one evening on March 30th, 2023, at the club in Dayton, Ohio. The well-balanced album offers six covers and six original pieces with varied tempos. If you enjoy Delta Blues, you'll find three pieces by **Robert Johnson**, *Piedmont Blues*, a beautiful interpretation of **Blind Blake's** *Chump Blues*, and care-free and unpretentious acoustic guitar, knowing that he is also influenced by **Leonard Cohen** and **Tom Waits**... As for his original titles, with playful and cheerful playing at times, slow and winding at others, they present solid singing and impeccable articulation, seamlessly integrating into the overall opus! With *Live at the Hidden Gem*, Chris Yakopcic offers the freshness of the revitalized old and the refreshing new!

Blues

BY PIERRE JOBIN



JOHNNY RAWLS

Walking Heart Attack
Catfood Records, CFR -033

Johnny Rawls, the legend of *Soul Blues*, brings forth an infectious, irresistible groove and an expressive voice, soaked in soul and feeling! With over fifty years of experience, more than fifteen albums to his name, and hundreds of his songs finding their way into studios, he currently leads a successful international career with around two hundred shows per year. Prestigious recognitions and awards have marked his prodigious journey as a musician, arranger, and producer. *Walking Heart Attack*, his latest release, is solid soul with six

original pieces written by himself or co-written with his bassist and head of his record company, **Bob Trenchard**. His long-time team of eight musicians, **The Rays**, is once again present, augmented by a percussionist and two excellent female vocalists. The result is warm, the lyrics are poignant, and the performance merges into a perfect match with the finely crafted music! Each track tells a particular story that anyone could relate to! The whole is treated with care, assembled with precision, taste, and craftsmanship. Impeccable, relevant!

Blues

BY PIERRE JOBIN



SANDY CARROLL

Love On It

Blue Heart Records, BHR052

Sandy Carroll is a singer, keyboardist, and composer with a rich and acclaimed background, hailing from Tennessee. Performing since her teenage years in a melting pot of blues, rock, soul, and country, preferred styles in Memphis, she and her partner **Jim Gaines**, a *Grammy Award*-winning producer, are reputed to be at the forefront of a new genre, *Smooth Blues*, which she graces with her warm and sensual singing coupled with her elegant piano playing. With a good dose of philosophy and experience, she addresses themes

of love, life, and its inherent losses... Her velvet glove approach coupled with quality sound stirs the soul and caresses the ear. Sweetness, tenderness, and life spices! What a delight! Her expressive voice, a refreshing breeze, and her beautifully simple lyrics deserve your attention. The whole is enhanced by exquisite musical interpretations and impeccable production! It's up to you to discover whether your heart desires it or if the voice seduces or pleases you!

A NORTH-AMERICAN FIRST ON THE TEST BENCH

BY MICHEL DALLAIRE

Final Audio is a Dutch company specializing in the production of electrostatic acoustic loudspeakers since 1989. The company was founded by brothers **Maartin** and **Michiel Smits**, two experts who evolved the electrostatic principle, which is not new in itself. Since 1989, at **Final Audio**, there has been continuous evolution of this technology up to the latest generation of products launched around 2021. The product proposed for testing is the *Model 5*, a hybrid loudspeaker with an electrostatic membrane panel supported by a low-frequency subwoofer. The latter includes a woofer that extends the frequency response in the lower end of the sound spectrum. Shortened low frequencies are one of the characteristics of the electrostatic principle. Let's explore to what extent this technology, born in 1927, has evolved over several decades to remain current in high fidelity.

Indeed, it was in 1927 that the first electrostatic loudspeaker designs appeared. This technology involves an ultra-light plastic membrane impregnated with an electrically conductive material. This membrane is stretched between two perforated metal grilles serving as stators. The membrane is charged with a continuous voltage. The audio signal from the amplifier is transformed into high voltage through a transformer and applied to the two grilles serving as stators. The membrane is thus statically attracted or repelled according to the audio signal sent to the electrostatic panel.

Among the pioneers of this technology are Englishman **Colin Kyle**, Germans **Eugen Reitz** and **Hans Vogt**, Frenchman **André Charlin**, and American **Edward Kellogg**. However, it was in 1957 that the first truly marketable electrostatic panel appeared with the famous **QUAD ESL 57**. Designed by **Peter Walker**, this panel would benefit from the development of the *Mylar* membrane introduced by **Dupont** in 1949.



« I perceive the singer precisely at the center of a stable and expansive stereo image, both in width and height. Her sibilant notes are not exaggerated, and her voice retains its sensual quality. The transition between the electrostatic panel and the subwoofer occurs quite well, without feeling a gap in the mid-bass. In this sense, the double bass is well reproduced with all the weight it deserves and a good attack on the plucking of the strings. »

FINAL AUDIO MODEL 5 ACOUSTIC LOUDSPEAKERS

This membrane would allow, to a certain extent, overcoming the inherent limitations of this type of speaker. Electrostatic panels are known for their transparency and almost total absence of distortion. There is no break between high, mid-range, and low frequencies, which is the prerogative of loudspeakers using different transducers to reproduce the entire audible frequency range. The very low mass of the membrane and its speed of movement result in quick and drag-free reproduction, as well as a message coherence very faithful to the recording. Moreover, this type of speaker is not affected by the colorations of the cabinet that equips conventional loudspeakers.

However, the electrostatic loudspeaker is directional with a bipolar dispersion that must be taken into account during its installation. Depending on its size, it can be relatively limited in low frequencies, but its tonal balance remains balanced in terms of musical reproduction and in frequencies most sensitive to the human ear. Even though the electrostatic principle is relatively simple, it has several problems to solve. Since it is a very high-voltage system, very effective isolation techniques must be used. The quality of the audio transformer's manufacturing is also crucial to achieve good sound.

Research at Final Audio

The evolution of technology and new materials has allowed **Final Audio** to improve the electrostatic principle to eliminate its weaknesses as much as possible. Thanks to the use of a patented technique, **Final's** electrostatic panels use a new membrane called *Teonex PEN Film*. This membrane is made conductive by a patented coating principle. It is stretched between two perforated plexiglass plates. Inside these plates, a layer of conductive ink is printed, which is then covered with a polyester film to achieve good electrical insulation on its stators. This improves the performance of the electrostatic panel and, consequently, provides better protection against the high voltage used to actuate the membrane. The new membrane, called *Teonex PEN Film*, is less sensitive to UV rays, dust, smoke, and humidity. It is a known fact that old *Mylar* membranes required regular replacements. The new membrane is stronger, more heat-resistant, thinner, and lighter.

At **Final Audio**, it is believed that these plates serving as grilles / stators should remain flat rather than curved, as on some competitor models. The idea behind this configuration is to ensure, at all times, the most linear displacement possible of the membrane across its surface. Electrostatic loudspeakers must be permanently connected to a wall outlet at a voltage of 115 V. **Final Audio** engineers have incorporated an automatic power-on system into their models. When the panels are not used for a short period, their power supply automatically turns off and restarts as soon as an audio signal reaches the speaker terminals. In this way, the membrane attracts less dust over long periods and therefore, no regular replacement is needed, as with old electrostatic panels.

Final Audio Product Catalog

At the moment, **Final Audio** products come in two series, namely models that are purely electrostatic and those categorized as hybrids with an added subwoofer at the bottom of the panel. *Models 7, 12, and 15* are self-supporting and available without a subwoofer. Hybrid models *3, 5, and 7* have a subwoofer at the base of the panel, which also serves to widen the footprint. All these hybrid models have passively powered

woofers, but it seems that at **Final Audio**, work is being done on active subwoofer versions that incorporate a Class *D* amplification module and a *DSP* that will allow adjusting the low frequencies according to the user's preferences or the room's acoustics.

The Model 5

As mentioned earlier, the *Model 5* that was sent to me is a hybrid, meaning it consists of an electrostatic panel and a subwoofer. The latter is asymmetrical with curved sides. This subwoofer is mounted behind the electrostatic panel, and its upper surface is slightly inclined towards the panel. It features a 22 cm metallic woofer with a soft, long-travel suspension. The electrostatic panel is slightly tilted backward, allowing an increase in its vertical dispersion.

The perforated grilles on each side of the membrane have a glossy and immaculate surface. They allow me to see the transparency of the membrane very well. These two grilles are held together vertically by two extruded tubes made of a robust alloy and an oval profile. Metal angle iron crossbars securely close the top and bottom of the frame in which the membrane is stretched. These plexiglass grilles can be ordered in different colors, while the panel frame can be optionally ordered in brushed silver finish.

The subwoofer cabinet comes only in black paint. It is simply equipped with a single pair of **WBT**-type connectors and an *IEC* receptacle for the power cord. A removable black fabric grille covers the woofer and protects it from dust.

The Model 5 in a Few Figures

The dimensions of the electrostatic panel are 142 cm in height, 29 cm in width, and only 3 cm in thickness. The depth of the loudspeaker, including the subwoofer cabinet, is 40 cm. The frequency response is from 45 Hz to 23 kHz +/- 3 dB, and the sensitivity is specified at 88 dB / 2.83 V / 1 m. The nominal impedance is 4 ohms with a decrease to 3 ohms at 20 kHz. **Final Audio** recommends an amplifier of 20 to 200 W per channel, compatible with impedances of 4, 5, or 8 ohms. The power supply and frequency filtering circuit components are made using a *C-core* transformer, polypropylene capacitors, and coil inductances wound with an empty center. However, the cut-off frequency between the electrostatic panel and the subwoofer is not specified by **Final Audio**.

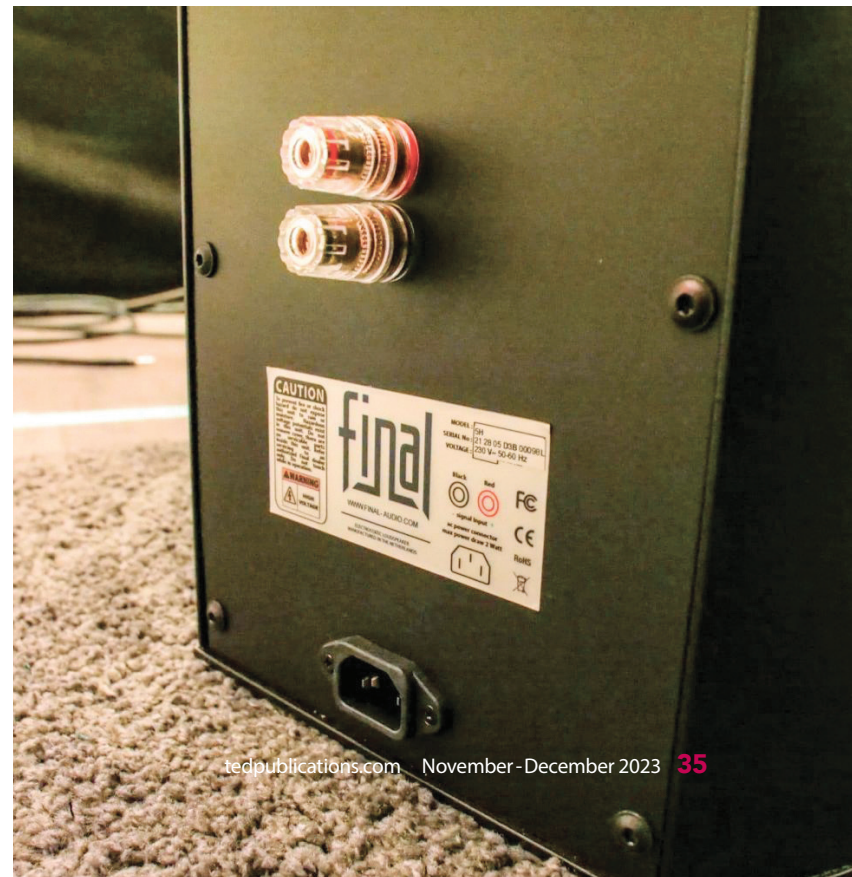
Installation and Equipment Used

I placed the *Model 5* loudspeakers roughly in the same position as my **Proac Response D20R** and to achieve a distance of about 75 cm from the mid-height of the panel to the rear wall. I tilted them towards the listener given their relatively restricted dispersion angle of 20 degrees. I tried positioning the panel

with the high-frequency band located towards the inside and towards the outside of the panel. As recommended by the manufacturer, I stayed with the high-frequency band located towards the inside of the panel, which provides better stereo image coherence. My faithful **Atoll IN300** integrated amplifier was more than sufficient to power these electrostatic panels. My sources were, as usual, my **CeolBOX** music server followed by my **Wattson Emerson Digital** streamer and my **Chord Qutest DAC** connected to a linear **Sbooster BOTW P&P ECO** power supply. The transparency of the *Model 5* makes it sensitive to the cables used for its connection to the amplifier. In my opinion, cables that overly soften the sound should be avoided.

FINALLY, the Listening Sessions

I started my listening sessions with an album by the famous Tunisian oud player **Anouar Brahem**. He significantly modified the traditional role of the oud to adapt it to Western music, particularly jazz. His album titled *The Astounding Eyes of Rita* is my favorite from this musician-composer, and its recording on the **ECM** label is of incredible quality. From the first notes, I felt that the hybrid *Model 5* panel had been specially designed to play this music. It's as if there were no intermediaries between the musicians and me. I heard this ensemble at the last **Montreal International Jazz Festival**, and believe me, the *Model 5* puts me directly in the concert hall because the instruments are of a bewildering naturalness. No detail is left to chance, and the music flows smoothly without any hindrance.



FINAL AUDIO MODEL 5 ACOUSTIC LOUDSPEAKERS

Everything happens smoothly, and there is no harshness to be expected, except of course, if the recording is not of good quality. Undoubtedly, the quick execution of the electrostatic membrane pays off to serve me a round and fruity music, to borrow terms from the oenology domain.

I continue with the album titled *Immersion* by the magnificent jazz singer **Youn Sun Nah**. This 2019 release on the **ACT** label includes, to a large extent, her own compositions. You have to see, or rather hear, what the *Model 5* can do as a miracle with voices and acoustic instruments. Everything happens with a certain restrained grace and a serenity that invites relaxation while listening to music. I perceive the singer precisely at the center of a stable and expansive stereo image, both in width and height. Her sibilant notes are not exaggerated, and her voice retains its sensual quality. The transition between the electrostatic panel and the subwoofer occurs quite well, without feeling a gap in the mid-bass. In this sense, the double bass is well reproduced with all the weight it deserves and a good attack on the plucking of the strings. The coherence of the **Final Model 5** is certainly due to the fact that a single membrane handles the majority of frequencies from the mid-bass to the high frequencies without having to go through different transducers and their cut-off filters that can introduce phase rotations.

I conclude my listening with rock-pop music featuring electronic keyboards. It's the latest album from the singer and songwriter **FKA twigs**. Her album titled *Caprisongs* is less experimental than her previous albums and is more influenced by *R&B*, *Hip-Hop*, and *Rap* genres. The dynamics of these recordings are impressive and packed with punch. The *Model 5* presents this somewhat gut-punching music with moderation and an assumed temperance. Understand me well, this electrostatic loudspeaker can play any style of music, but let's say its strength lies in voices and acoustic music ensembles associated with jazz and classical. This characteristic inherent to the electrostatic principle is highly sought after by audiophiles. In this regard, I would say that fans of *Dance Music* and *Heavy Metal* looking for intense sensations may need to look elsewhere.

Conclusion

The *Model 5* is not designed to impress with spectacular and enticing sounds. It is rather designed to listen to music in all its emotional aspects. Some problems encountered in



previous generations of electrostatic panels have been elegantly solved by the manufacturer **Final Audio**. So much so that their products are now loudspeakers that are easy to live with and love. In my living room, the *Model 5* found its place easily with a reasonable distance between the rear wall and the side walls. The sound of the *Model 5* is full, vibrant, fast, and without trailing. This loudspeaker presents a stereo image that is expansive in both width and depth. Its sound performance has a sobriety that does not allow any part of its audio band to become predominant or exaggerated. Personally, I have experienced nothing but satisfaction listening to the *Model 5*. It just takes time to get used to not hearing the inherent colorations of conventional loudspeakers equipped with multiple transducers. The **Final Audio Model 5** is an eminently desirable loudspeaker for both its aesthetics and its sound. Its price is very competitive in its high-end loudspeaker category. Not listening to it would mean missing out on one of the most interesting options in the field of high-fidelity music reproduction.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$9,599

Warranty: 3 years, parts and labor

Distributor: Atoll Électronique Canada, T.: 514.522.8336,
<https://atoll-electronique.ca/>; <https://final-audio.com/>

Mediagraphy

Anouar Brahem, *The Astounding Eyes of Rita*, ECM, FLAC, 16 bits / 44.1 kHz

Youn Sun Nah, *Immersion*, ACT, FLAC, 24 bits / 48 kHz

FKA Twigs, *Caprisongs*, Atlantic, FLAC, 24 bits / 88.2 kHz

Nils Frahm, *All Melody*, Erased Tapes Records, 16 bits / 44.1 kHz

Ensemble Correspondances, *Litanies de la Vierge*, Harmonia Mundi. HMC, 902169

Jazz

BY CRISTOPHE RODRIGUEZ



QUINCY JONES COMPLETE WORKS

1957 - 1962

Soul Bossa Nova
Frémeaux & Associés, 4 CD

Born on March 14th, 1933, **Quincy Jones**, known as **Q**, is, at 90, one of the last living legends in music, spanning all genres. From the trilogy as a producer with **Michael Jackson** to **We Are The World**, not to mention his work as an orchestral conductor with **Frank Sinatra**, **Count Basie**, **Ray Charles**, **Sarah Vaughan**, **Gene Krupa**, or **Dinah Washington**, the list is endless. With 20 *Grammy Awards* to his name, respect is certainly due. Reading his biography, *The Autobiography of Quincy Jones*, this determined young man

was initially a trumpeter, with the immense **Clark Terry** as his teacher, leading him, at the age of 20, to the big band of vibraphonist **Lionel Hampton** and later to that of trumpeter **Dizzy Gillespie** on an impressive tour of the Middle East and Latin America.

This musical genius, with varying degrees of financial success, managed to assemble a large orchestra, and that's what you're about to discover. Under the direction of the ingenious **Olivier Julien**, who works wonders every time, we are presented with four discs containing, in fact, 8 discs,

including the indispensable *Soul Bossa Nova*. If this title doesn't ring a bell, know that it achieved monstrous success many years later thanks to the film featuring **Austin Powers**, with a remix by **Ludacris**.

From *The Great World of Quincy Jones* through *This is How I Feel about Jazz*, *Quintessence* (arguably the most captivating), or *Around The World*, the magic of **Jones** unfolds with top-notch instrumentalists, including trumpeters **Clark Terry**, **Joe Newman**, **Art Farmer**, and saxophonists **Sahib Shibab**, **Billy Myers**, **Phil Woods**, or guitarist **Les Spann**. All these luminaries come together in this celebration of jazz in all its forms. Yes, there are standards, personal compositions too, and, of course, the *Soul Bossa Nova* that joyfully concludes this more than enchanting box set. A Christmas gift for everyone, and once again, **Olivier Julien** hits the bullseye with passion!

CLEAN, CLEAR AND ARTICULATE SPEAKERS



BY ROGER McCUAIG

Vestia is a new line from **Focal** consisting of 5 models including bookshelf, floor-standing and center units. It is so new that this may be, in fact, the first Canadian review of this product. **Focal** describes the *Vestia* line as something that will fit well in both stereo and home cinema applications. Now, of course, **Focal** is far from being the first loudspeaker company to attempt to please these two, often incompatible, client groups with a loudspeaker lineup and, at about \$3,600 a pair, the *Vestia No.2* is right in the thick of it with many formidable competitors. It will be interesting to discover how they have approached this challenge. First impressions are important as they set a certain frame of mind for the audition, and in this case, the *Vestia No.2* loudspeakers have an aura of quality and solidity. Do they have a sound that lives up to it?

Focal produced their first speaker in 1982 and by 1995, they had pushed their technological and design innovations all the way to the *Utopia* series. Focal now has 10,000 dealers around the world, in fact, there is one 5 minutes away from me in the small town where I live! In 2011, a merger between Focal and Naim Audio took place and we are now seeing the opening of new dealerships under the name **Focal Powered by Naim**. I believe that we are up to 5 such locations here in Canada. Their web site describes these as experiential and luxurious. Sounds like a place I would want to visit. It is interesting to note that all Focal's high-end loudspeakers are made in France, and those words were prominently displayed on the *Vestia* boxes I received. When I think of Focal, the first thing that usually comes to mind is models like the *Kanta*, the *Sopra* and the *Utopia* series, models with a distinctive look, a high-end sound and a corresponding high-end price tag. Well, Focal also makes models for those who don't have the budget for such high-priced loudspeakers and the *Vestia* series is their most recent entry into this category. We find, in descending order of pricing, the *Aria*, the *Vestia* and the *Theva* series. I have not had any serious listening time with any of these three designs, and interestingly, I now have for audition the *Vestia No.2* which is the mid-sized model of the middle series of the three.

Technical Description

The *Vestia No.2* is a 3-way loudspeaker with two 6.5-inch woofers, a 6.5-inch mid-bass and a tweeter. The tweeter is an M-shaped inverted dome which is made of an aluminum/magnesium alloy. The M-shape is a Focal idea that is said to increase rigidity and therefore reduce distortion. The mid-bass and woofer cones are made of a material invented by Focal called *Slatefiber*. Focal describes this material as recycled, non-woven carbon fibers ... sandwiched between two layers of thermoplastic polymer. Drivers featuring *Slatefiber* cones are not used exclusively on the *Vestia* loudspeakers; however, I don't have any details on which other models use it. The *Vestia No.2* has both a front and rear port, something one doesn't see often. The only explanation Focal gives for this is no dynamic compression. This configuration may certainly be beneficial when it comes to flexibility of speaker placement. The Focal spec sheet lists a -6 dB point of 37 Hz and a sensitivity of 91.5 dB. I found the loudspeakers very easy to drive in my system and had to drop my amp's power output considerably from my usual setting. Focal suggests a minimum of 40 Watts to drive these units and this sounds quite reasonable to me based on my own experience.



At a little over 1 metre tall and 26 mm wide, the cabinets will be relatively easy to place in a room. They are made of *MDF* and are very stiff and rigid. A knuckle wrap anywhere on the cabinet produces a dead thud. At 26 kg, they are also relatively easy to move around. My units came in gloss black, dark and light wood finishes are also available. The gloss finish is very good and smooth as a mirror. All three colours have a leather-effect on the front and top. I have not found any explanation of what this is, it may be simply a pattern embossed on the surface of the *MDF*. The overall fit and finish of this loudspeaker is extremely well done.

The woofers and the mid-bass drivers are mounted in brushed metal rings, combined with the colour of the *Slatefiber* cones, the aluminum/magnesium tweeter, and the black leather-effect front panel, this loudspeaker is truly a pleasure to look at. I think many owners will opt for leaving the grills off. The *Vestia No.2* loudspeakers haven't got high-tech, multi-segmented cabinets, exotic woods or some unique visual styling, the overall aesthetic of the *Vestia* speakers is understated elegance. In my opinion, the Focal design team did a wonderful job on the aesthetic of this speaker. Many speakers at higher price tags don't compare well to the simple yet elegant presentation of this model.



Unpacking and Installation

The loudspeaker's base is cast aluminum. It, and the magnetic grill, are the only things that require assembly. Of course, the grills just click in place and pretty much align themselves. The bases are quite sturdy and are held on by four large set screws. They tilt the loudspeakers a bit back at the top which is said to improve time alignment and tweeter aiming. Adjustable spikes are supplied, ideal for carpet placement, as well as push-on plastic feet for hard floors. In order to obtain levelling capability on a hard floor you would have to install the spikes and put something under them to protect the floor.

The recommended listening height is level with the tweeter to 15 degrees above that line. Given the height of the loudspeaker this worked out fine with my listening chair as my ears ended up just a bit above tweeter height. **Focal** suggests placement away from the wall, however, the loudspeakers can be placed close to the front wall if one is willing to accept a 3 dB increase in the bass response. In my case, I initially placed them 125 cm from the front wall and found that to work well. I moved the loudspeakers as close as 70 cm from the wall with only a small increase in the bass level. (Measured from the wall to the driver face) **Focal** does not recommend corner placement as it will produce a 6 dB rise in the bass level. Given their small size and light weight, they are fairly easy to move around.

Listening Impression

The first words that I wrote down in my notebook after a few minutes of listening time were *clean*, *clear* and *articulate*. There is never a hint of vague or muddy through the mids and highs from these loudspeakers. This clarity leads to an excellent definition of voices and instruments. On her album *Nameless*, **Dominique Fils-Aimé** shows off the

depth of colours and textures in her voice and the *Vestia* presented it beautifully. This was a truly enjoyable listening experience. If you want to hear the *Vestia No.2* at its best, I encourage you to try this album. The tweeters are smooth, not dry or brittle sounding in any way, with very little sibilance detected during my listening time. The bass output was good, the two woofers being able to move enough air for my medium sized room. The bass was tight and fast which bodes well for service in a home entertainment system. Loose bass is really a problem when it comes to action movies! A serious movie fan would likely want to add a subwoofer which is quite a normal setup with loudspeakers of

bit more. I eventually settled on 1 meter from the wall. The soundstage fills the whole space between the loudspeakers and I found that it didn't extend much outside them. Focus and instrument location are good, the level of detail and accuracy provided by the mid-bass and the tweeter contribute significantly in this aspect. Solo instruments and voices really stood out distinctly.

From time to time, the loudspeakers faded almost out of existence. This was the case while playing some of the beautiful, soft, melodic trumpet and piano passages from **Enrico Rava's** *Tati*. On the other hand, **Denny Jiosa's** album *Inner Voices* re-wards speed, separation and soundstage

« **Grant Green's** *Idle Moments* is one of my favorite albums. **Green** has his tube amp set up so that playing lightly produces clear notes and picking harder sends the guitar tone into slight overdrive and the *Vestia* picked up these qualities easily. »

this size. I found the overall tonal characteristics and balance to be neutral. It is not dry, nor is it warm, and I didn't detect any frequency bumps or cabinet artifacts at any time. The *Vestia No.2* would not be at its best in a large room but would be quite at home in a medium to small room. I played a lot of jazz during my listening sessions, mostly *Hard Bop* and *Fusion* albums. It just seemed to be the right direction to go, the smoothness and clarity of the loudspeakers sending me there. One thing that I noted was that an upright bass really sounded like an upright bass. On **Charlie Haden's** *Quartet West*, the *Vestia* woofers delivered the woody, resonant qualities of this instrument. With the loudspeaker placed out in the room, the sound was airy and clear. I discovered that moving the loudspeakers closer to the front wall produced what I would describe as a fuller overall sound that seemed to fill the room just a slight

accuracy. With sounds suddenly appearing all over the place, the *Vestia* delivered as **Denny** intended his music to be heard. **Grant Green's** *Idle Moments* is one of my favorite albums. **Green** has his tube amp set up so that playing lightly produces clear notes and picking harder sends the guitar tone into slight overdrive and the *Vestia* picked up these qualities easily. I played several classical string quartets including Schubert's String Quartet #14 by the Alban Berg Quartett. As noted above, the *Vestia's* were clean, crisp and dynamic and low volume passages came out with fine clarity. The four instruments always remained distinct and well defined. The overall characteristic of these loudspeakers is the absence of a dominant character! They are mostly about delivering the music without messing with it. If I had to name just one thing that the *Vestia No.2* does best of all, I would have to say the smoothness and clarity of the

FOCAL VESTIA NO 2 ACOUSTIC LOUDSPEAKERS



tweeter. Not often can we find high-frequency performance this good in a loudspeaker at this price.

Conclusion

There are some loudspeakers at this price level, and higher, that have obvious

issues; mushy bass, one-note bass, brittle tweeters, exaggerated mids, cabinet resonance... When one finds a loudspeaker that is relatively free of all these gremlins it is worth noting. The *Vestia No.2* loudspeakers offer balance, clarity, accuracy and smoothness with an absence of a dominating character and no nagging flaws. They tend to blend into the room. I am not here referring to the ability of loudspeakers to disappear as in unable to identify the source of the sound, I mean that you hear the music, you hear the instruments and the voices, you don't hear the box or the drivers. A lot of alternatives have garnered popularity based on a larger-than-life presentation, and that's fine, a lot of people like that style. The *Vestia No.2* is more for those who prefer to just hear the music as it was originally intended.

I have typically associated **Focal** with high-end, money is no object loudspeakers. Good value for money was not something that I really thought about with **Focal**. Well, the *Vestia No.2* are very honest loudspeakers; they give the owner exceptional value in the sound as well as in the look and feel. You will never feel like you paid too much money for these. In fact, after some listening time, you may start to thinking that you got a really good deal!

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$1,799

Warranty: 5 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Focal Naim

Canada, T.: 1 866 271.5689,

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

Mediagraphy

Dominique Fils-Aimée, Nameless

Miles Davis, Bitches Brew

Charlie Haden, Quartet West

Enrico Ravi, Tati

Denny Jiosa, Inner Voices



Grant Green, Idle Moments

Schubert String Quartet #14 and 15, Alban Berg Quartett

Ralph Towner, Diary

Oregon, Out of the Woods

Robbie Robertson, Robbie Robertson

Jazz

BY CRISTOPHE RODRIGUEZ



YVAN BELLEAU

Quintissime
Préambule Productions

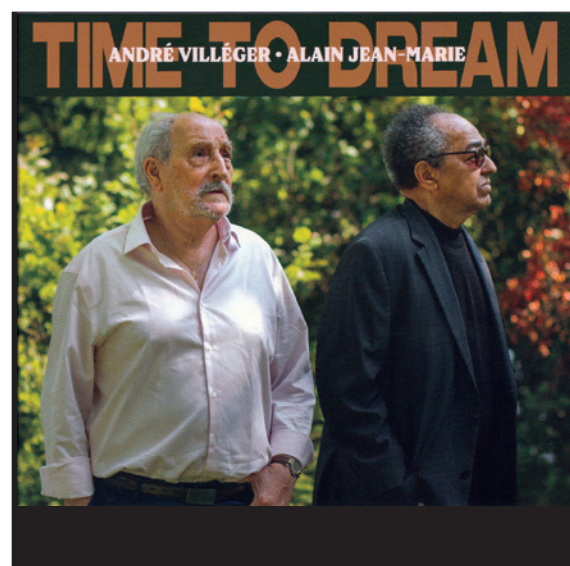
A discreet pillar of the Montreal jazz scene, clarinetist **Yvan Belleau** knows how to strike a chord, even with those who listen to little jazz. Let's say it outright,

Quintissime is beautiful simply because poetry is present. Inspired by a documentary on the *Burning Man* event in the Nevada desert, this new release is a reflection on different artistic approaches. The opening piece, *Inclusion*, falls into the classical domain, and the instrumentalist knows his... notes perfectly. On modes that are entirely festive and conducive to reverie, we highly recommend *Corporation créative*. A lovely form of Brazilian samba executed perfectly. Meanwhile, *Homme d'étincelle* appropriately evokes the soundtrack of a documentary film. To carry out his project, the clarinetist surrounded himself with some solid colleagues, including **Norman Lachapelle** on double bass, **Guillaume Martineau** on piano, **Yvon Plouffe** on drums, **Sylvain Provost** on guitar, and **Alain Juteau** on electric guitar, only for track 9. A beautiful success.

ANDRÉ VILLÉGER & ALAIN JEAN-MARIE

Time to Dream
Camille productions, (import)

They were both born in 1945. On one side, we have the Martinican pianist **Alain Jean-Marie**, and on the other, the tenor saxophonist **André Villéger**. In the heyday when jazz reigned, especially across the Atlantic, these two immense musicians were key players. *Time To Dream* is a rare reunion, a privileged moment where they perform standards and some compositions from their repertoire. From *Blues du Caméléon* to *Aquarius Mood* (**Raymond Fol**), passing through *You've Changed* and *Monsieur Henri*, what memories and beauty!





MARTINLOGAN MOTION XT F100 ACOUSTIC LOUDSPEAKERS

MORE DETAILS, PRECISION, AND POWER

BY RICHARD SCHNEIDER

MartinLogan was founded by two individuals named **Gayle Martin Sanders** and **Ron Logan Sutherland**. They joined forces in the late 1970s. Their fields of expertise were poles apart, but they shared a passion for music. This is how they discovered electrostatic loudspeakers. Armed with a simple model and a few photos, they presented the concept at the **1982 Consumer Electronics Show** in Chicago. Against all expectations, it was love at first sight during the event. The design was awarded and received the **CES Design and Engineering Award**.

While many people believed that the *Motion* series was a completed project, the manufacturer offers significant innovations in this product range. The latest generation, especially the *Motion*[®] *XT F100*, is inspired slightly by the legacy of its predecessors, but the majority of aspects have been revised and corrected, including the transducers, the internal cabinet configuration, and the crossovers. Since the series was launched about 15 years ago, it was deemed appropriate to return to the drawing board to update the range.

Although **MartinLogan (ML)** earned its reputation in electrostatic loudspeaker design, the *Motion*[®] *XT F100* is a floor standing loudspeaker. This rather classic format is opposite to electrostatic loudspeakers, but the sound signature still reflects the manufacturer's iconic heritage. However, I must not draw conclusions too hastily.



The *Motion*® *XT F100* are *Bass Reflex* loudspeakers. The bass signals inside the cabinet are dispersed through a vent. The design requires finesse because these signals must be in phase with the signals emitted by the loudspeaker's drivers. The vent of the *Motion*® *XT F100* is located under the cabinet. I liked this concept because the distance between the speakers and the rear walls is much less critical, as the waves emitted by the vent are redirected forward by the floor.

The speakers for the bass and midrange are attached to a plate integrated into the cabinet. From an aesthetic point of view, it is very successful. There are no visible anchors or screws. As for the tweeter, the plate is molded around it (*Folded Motion*® waveguide) to maximize the dispersion of high frequencies in the room.

The loudspeaker has three aluminum bass drivers. Aluminum is the most widely used material today in the construction of bass drivers. Aluminum membranes offer the best balance between lightness and rigidity, resulting in excellent reproduction of low frequencies.

The midrange is the *Nomex-Reinforced Kevlar*® Midrange. *Kevlar* is known for its low mass, high rigidity, low absorption, and high heat resistance.

In 2010, the *Folded Motion Tweeter* technology was integrated into the *Motion* speakers. These differ significantly from a standard dome tweeter. They have four main parts: the front plate, the diaphragm, the magnet, and the back plate. If the design seems simple, in reality, the assembly is complex and requires coordinated planning. The *Motion*® *XT F100* benefits from the latest generation of this speaker, the *Gen2 Obsidian Folded Motion*® *XT*. It has a pleated diaphragm that works similarly to an accordion by compressing the air to produce sound. In order to provide more details and precision, this new version uses larger magnets, allowing a significant improvement in the dispersion of high frequencies.

The stability of the *Motion XT* cabinet adjusts without tools, using the provided rubber feet or spikes. The user can easily adjust the loudspeakers to achieve optimal balance. The integrated anti-vibration properties reduce the transfer of energy from the speaker to the floor.

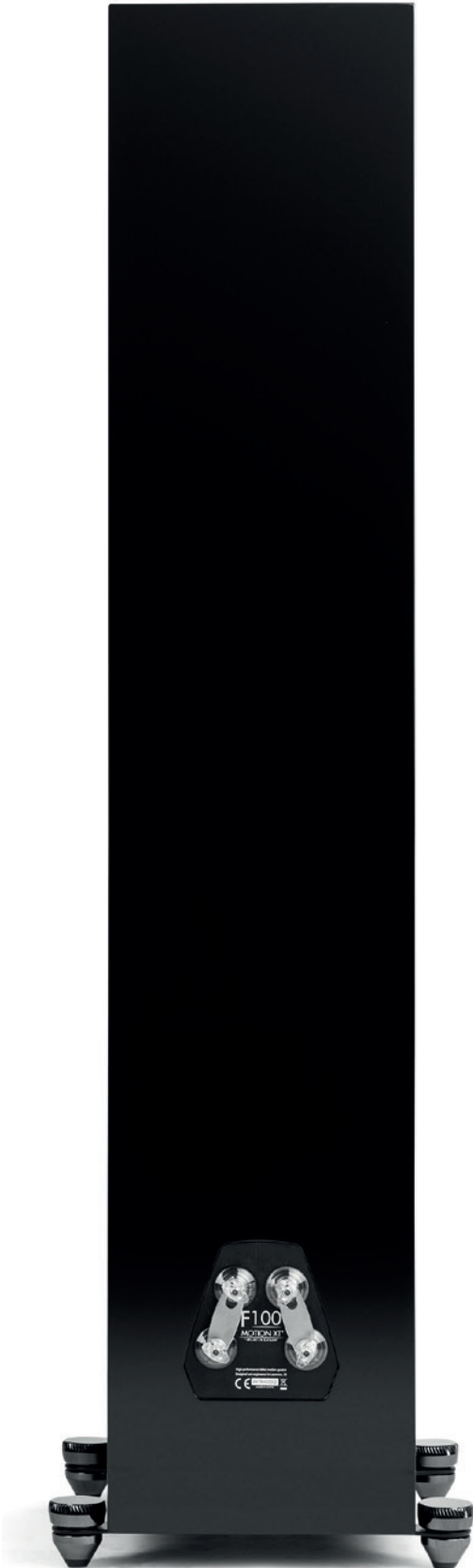
The grilles covering the speakers are rather original. Mounting tabs ensure a secure attachment. You will be able to change the appearance of the front of your loudspeakers according to your mood. For my part, I covered only the low-frequency speakers, leaving the midrange one exposed. The result is beautiful, I assure you. The centerpiece of the loudspeaker is the frequency separator, better known as the crossover. It is the conductor of the loudspeaker. Once all the parts are in place, it is essential to ensure perfect integration of the entire system. **MartinLogan** has concocted a brand new one, the **McCracken-Vojtko**. The names of the engineers from the firm who designed the separator are the origin of the name.

The **Motion**® **XT F100** has a frequency response of 31 Hz – 25 kHz. The impedance is 4 ohms, and their sensitivity is 92 dB. According to the manufacturer, they are compatible with amplifiers of 6 or 8 ohms. The manufacturer suggests using an amplifier ranging from 20 to 45 W. Judging by these figures, it can be understood that they are easy to power, which is indeed the case. I opted for a 4-ohm 200 W *RMS* amplifier (my everyday amplifier) that has a large reserve to ensure optimal performance of the loudspeakers.

Unboxing and Placement

Please pay special attention to the manufacturer's recommendations regarding unboxing. However, I can offer you some useful tips. The loudspeakers measure 122 cm in height, and their weight is 75 lbs. It's quite sturdy. First and foremost, it is necessary to open the packaging from the indicated side, i.e., from the bottom. You will then be able to install the feet, which are in a box that you will easily spot. Once this step is complete, you need to

MARTIN LOGAN MOTION XT F100 ACOUSTIC LOUDSPEAKERS



turn the box so that the feet are in contact with the floor. Finally, you remove the packaging by pulling the boxes upwards. If your ceilings are not high enough, this will require some acrobatics, and that's why you shouldn't hesitate to ask for help. Take your time, as the packaging of the *Motion*® XT F100 is imposing, to say the least.

It was easy to position the loudspeakers in my listening room, even if it is imperfect. I left a distance of 1.83 m between the cabinets, and the listening distance was 4.27 m. I placed the loudspeakers about 38 cm from the rear wall. As always, I attached great importance to tuning the ideal listening area or, if you prefer the term, the sweet spot.

Listening Impressions

For this review, I took a slightly different approach. I started with two musical tracks that took me out of my own beaten paths by choosing two beautiful songs that I had neglected over time. **Musica Nuda** is an Italian duo formed by **Petra Magoni** on vocals and **Ferruccio Spinetti** on double bass. They have a unique style that blends jazz, pop, and classical in a minimalist form. The musical score is **Una notte disperata**

« The musical score is **Una notte disperata** from the album **Complici**. I have rarely heard this piece, yet devoid of artifice, being rendered with so much authority. »

from the album **Complici**. I have rarely heard this piece, yet devoid of artifice, being rendered with so much authority. The double bass is beautifully reproduced, while the vocals are well served by all the transducers. The emotion is palpable, but what is even better is that you can feel the great complicity of the duo. The result is energetic, I repeat, and very coherent.

Next was **Serena Ryder** with *Weak in the Knees* from the LP *If Your Memory Serves You Right*. **Serena Ryder** is a very intense singer. The *Motion*® XT F100 knows how to convey this intensity well. The tremolo and the sadness in her voice are palpable. Do not listen to it after a breakup. The song starts simply, voice and piano, but as the performance progresses, the orchestra grows, and the soundstage widens to finally fill the room. In the end, I completely forgot about the loudspeakers to focus strictly on **Serena Ryder** and her musicians. It's a real success because as soon as I start analyzing a sound result, it's a bad sign.

In a very different register, I took out *Dark Side of the Moon*. I have heard *Time* on countless loudspeakers over time. However, I did not expect what was coming. I thought I knew *Time* by heart, but what a surprise to find out that there were more clock sounds at the beginning of the



piece, which I had not heard before, all reproduced with surgical precision without any aggressiveness. When the song comes to life after the intro, you feel all the power and dynamics that the *Motion® XT F100* can offer.

When the amplification has a high reserve, they can be pushed unreasonably without failure. But at a more normal level, you will find that while being very dynamic and authoritative, the perfect harmony between the highs and the midrange is not compromised. In fact, the coherence and balance between frequencies could surely become a reference in the field.

Une nuit à Paris by **10cc** from the LP *The Original Soundtrack* is interesting. Everything is there in terms of sound effects, instrumentation, etc. Treat yourself and listen to this musical track using these loudspeakers. It's exhilarating!

Conclusion

I must say, the *Motion® XT F100* has impressed me. Too often, no matter the product, we are promised new versions with very performance-enhancing improvements when, in reality, they are rather marginal. I know the loudspeakers they replace very well, and believe me, it's worth it. This is also the opinion of friends who have had the pleasure of hearing them. I suggest you listen to them if you plan to get new loudspeakers. You will not be disappointed.



GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$2,999.99/each

Distributeur : Martin Logan Loudspeakers, T.: 1 785.749-0133,

<https://www.martinlogan.com/en/category/our-speakers>

Progressive Rock

BY RICHARD GUAY



UNITOPIA

Seven Chambers

<https://unitopia.bandcamp.com/album/seven-chambers-16-bit>

The Australian band **Unitopia**, which enjoyed its heyday in the second half of the 2000s, was highly appreciated by the readers of this column. Its audacity, creativity, and innovative approach to presenting music quickly made it a favorite within our community. Unfortunately, there was radio silence for 10 years, to the point where everyone thought it was time to talk about **Unitopia** in the past tense. During this period, each of its two founders dedicated themselves to a solo project. **Mark Trueack** founded the **United Progressive Fraternity (UPF)** and released three epic eco-themed light prog albums, with concepts related to nature preservation. It was primarily a multi-artist collaboration with an endless list, where each contributed their own touch to the endeavor.

Three releases emerged from this exercise: *Fall in Love with the World* (2014), *Planetary Overload, Part 1 - Loss* (2019), and recently, *Planetary Overload, Part 2 - Hope* (2023).

As for the other half of **Unitopia**, **Sean Timms** invested in **Southern Empire**, a more traditional project where hard rock and heavy prog blend seamlessly, resulting in three albums: *Southern Empire* (2026), *Civilisation* (2018), and *Another World* (2023). A mid-year release for each side project reinforced the belief that the **Unitopia** adventure was over.

Then, a small miracle happened. **Mark Trueack** (vocals) and **Sean Timms** (keyboards) reconnected and agreed to restart the machine! This time, however, it would be without guitarist **Matt Williams**, who left the ship, bringing us back to the first album, *More than a Dream* (2005), when the duo was solely in charge of the young band.

This presented an opportunity to renew the lineup for the third time, relying on seasoned veterans whose talent is unquestionable: **John Greenwood** on

guitars, **Steve Unruh** (*The Samurai Of Prog*) on flutes and violin, **Chester Thompson**, the former live drummer for **Genesis**, and **Alphonso Johnson** on bass.

But what about this unexpectedly released album? Let's say it's quite a surprise! Even after all this time, the creative genius of **Trueack** and **Timms** continues to work vigorously. It's a solid album as we like them, relying heavily on an eclectic mix of styles, each as unique as the next. The recognizable musical style has fortunately not changed much over time and still rests on classic progressive rock but with a strong character, featuring a mix of mismatched melodies and strong, inspiring choruses.

Trueack's somewhat rough voice is still omnipresent and blends with an ensemble that is sometimes a bit heavy but tasteful, along with a somewhat dark and nebulous theme. The seven chambers referred to in *Seven Chambers* are, in fact, the stages of life, with the seventh being death. The concept thus represents the journey of peoples towards death, which is not very cheerful! **Johnson's** thunderous bass adds a new element, drawing on

distinctly neo-prog chords, adding an additional color to an already well-endowed ensemble. Aboriginal-flavored rhythms are still present, though less insistent. The absence of **Williams** and his multidirectional guitars is somewhat felt, and the very classic content of *The Garden* (2008) and *Artificial* (2010) gives more space to the crossover-prog sauce of the first album. While the

catchy tracks *The Broken* and *Mania* electrify us, the centerpiece *Helen* is part of a long epic suite and reintroduces us to the nirvana by presenting nothing less than the best of progressive rock. *Seven Chambers* is already, in itself, a pleasant surprise considering it is a completely unexpected and unforeseen opus. It is even more so, perhaps, the best **Unitopia** in the series, which is saying a lot.



THE EMERALD DAWN

In Time

<https://theemeralddawn.bandcamp.com/album/in-time>

The Emerald Dawn is a British band created in 2010 in Edinburgh by **Katrina Stewart** (keyboards, piano, flute, acoustic guitar, percussion, and vocals) and **Alan**

Carter (electric and acoustic guitars, synthesizer guitar, tenor and soprano saxophones, keyboards, and vocals) before moving to the southwest of England, where they were joined by jazz drummer **Thomas Jackson**. **Dave Greenaway** (bass) completes the trio. *In Time* is their fifth album, following *Searching for the Lost Key* (2014), *Visions* (2017), *Nocturne* (2019), and *To Touch the Sky* (2021).

The Emerald Dawn is a pure product of the British progressive rock school of the 1970s, relying on heightened symphonic content, epic suites with strong concepts, enchanting melodies, and dreamy, fragrant flavors. The vocals are discreet, serving as support to the numerous sensations and emotions generated by the music. The voices of **Stewart** and **Carter** are smooth and extremely gentle. The band describes itself as a multi-instrumentalist symphonic progressive rock group that combines elements of classical music, jazz, and rock to produce its own original sound. Its name suggests an environmentalist revolution. More directly, the numerous references to yesteryear's bands mean that we are not at all out of place, making accessibility easy.

In Time was written around the concept of time. The opening track, *Out Of Time*, is a suite of five movements and lasts 23 minutes. Broad and stretched melodies, psychedelic and Middle Eastern variations, as well as several approaches to numerous redundancies, literally glue us to our seats. *Timeless* (14 min) is a slow conclusion to this masterful piece, while *The March of Time* ends the set on solemn and ceremonial airs. *In Time* is **The Emerald Dawn's** most accomplished album, although the first four are excellent and highly recommended. This opus is a breath of fresh air for fans of British progressive rock.

DOING IT ALL WITH EXCELLENCE!

BY YVES BÉRUBÉ

There are, probably like me, people among your family and friends seeking your advice on choosing a home audio system. These individuals may not be willing to spend astronomical amounts like some of us. They are primarily looking for both quality and affordability. The choices in such a range of products are vast, making it challenging to find an affordable device that can deliver quality music while being user-friendly. Well, **Technics** presents us with a network player that seems to be a good example to consider. Let's see together if the **Technics SU-GX70** is the device you might recommend.

The Japanese company **Technics** needs no introduction. Anyone interested in turntables has undoubtedly seen or even used one of the models offered by this company. These turntables have brought joy to many music enthusiasts, radio stations, and *DJs* over the years. **Technics** was the first company to introduce a direct-drive turntable to the market, the SP-10 model, in 1970. The famous *SL-1200* from

Technics, launched two years later, was an improvement. It is even believed that *hip-hop* scratching was invented on these turntables. Both turntables are still on the market today with anniversary or revised versions.

Technics' reputation is excellent, enjoying solid recognition in the industry for offering high-quality products with durability superior to most of its competitors. **Technics** is one of the trademarks of the large **Panasonic** family, also established

in Japan. The company aims to build a brand that provides emotional musical experiences to music enthusiasts. Due to its wide range of products, there are several **Technics** series, offering the opportunity to enjoy the latest technological developments.

Technical Description

The **Technics SU-GX70** network amplifier offers a wide range of features. It



combines a streamer, a 40 W digital integrated amplifier, a phono input (*moving magnet*), and an FM tuner in one device. This allows you to choose to listen to your favorite radio stations on the Internet or using the FM antenna provided with the device. Additionally, it enables a connection to your television through its *HDMI ARC* function, which can be deactivated to improve the sound quality of the amplifier. The *SU-GX70* also comes with a complete remote control and a free **Technics Audio Center** application that works on **Apple** and **Google** devices.

In the range of **Technics** products, this device is just below the *SU-G700 MkII* network amplifier, although it shares some features with its flagship product, the *SU-R1000*.

On the front panel, the *SU-G700* network amplifier has, in addition to the power button, a headphone jack (6.3 mm), a *USB-A* port, a display with basic touch controls. The volume button is centered and has a smooth and precise feel. Finally, an input selection button is located all the way to the right.

The rear of the *SU-GX70* is quite busy. It includes phono input terminals and grounding for connecting a turntable, a pair of *RCA* inputs, *FM* antenna, *HDMI ARC* connector, digital inputs (1 coaxial, 2 optical, and 1 *USB-B*), and a network port (*RJ45*). Between the two network antennas, there are terminals for loudspeakers and an analog output to an external amplifier for those who want more power or want to connect a subwoofer.

The **Technics SU-GX70** has some interesting technological features, some of which are worth noting. The entire amplification of this device is digital, but it is not a *Class D* amplifier. So, how does it work? The signal passes through several stages of 100% digital amplification. The phono and line inputs are converted to 24/192 digital using a **Burr-Brown PCM1804** analog-to-digital converter. Except for this digitization of the device's analog inputs, there is no digital-to-analog converter in this device. The *DAC* is the amplifier. This eliminates any trace of distortion and ensures superior sound quality. All the amplification work is done digitally through different amplification stages to the output to the loudspeakers.

In particular, the *SU-GX70* uses the *JENO* (*Jitter Elimination and Noise-shaping Optimization*) technology, which eliminates digital signal degradation across the frequency spectrum through different clock signals for bass and high frequencies. *JENO* is used when converting the *PCM* signal to *PWM* at 32/768, a format very similar to *DSD*. The 1-bit signal is then converted to *Delta-Sigma* modulation before being routed to *GaN FET* transistors. Subsequently, the signal is reconverted to *PWM* (2 bits this time) to *GaN FET* transistors before eventually reaching the loudspeakers.

One of the many available features worth noting is *LAPC* (*Load Adaptive Phase Calibration*), which measures the output gain between the loudspeaker impedance phase at different



TECHNICS SU-GX70 ALL-IN-ONE NETWORK AMPLIFIER



frequencies and the amplifier. This allows for the creation of an ideal signal to your loudspeakers. Just press a button on the remote or in the application to complete the setup. The **Technics** also offers frequency correction, Space Tune, according to your listening room.

Unboxing and Installation

Once everything was unpacked, I connected the network cable (it also works with *WiFi*) to the **Technics SU-GX70**, then plugged in the power cord. I was able to complete the setup with the **Google Home** and **Technics Audio Center** apps downloaded to my tablet. If you don't use **Google Home**, it is necessary for the device's installation, and you can delete it

« La pièce *Moonglow* est une belle démonstration de l'équilibre des musiciens qui laissent la chanteuse exprimer son talent. Les paroles sont claires, le timbre de voix caractéristique de la chanteuse est déjà présent, particulièrement dans le registre plus grave. »

afterward. Simply answer the questions in **Google Home** to activate the Internet connection on the device. Afterward, you can control it with the **Technics Audio Center** app or via the device's panel. The **Audio Center** application could use an update in terms of user interface. The visuals and menu usage are not quite up to par with what is available from its competitors, and the application's execution speed could be improved. Out of curiosity, I also set up **LAPC** in less than 5 minutes. The device sends some sounds to each loudspeaker and configures itself. The **SU-GX70** network amplifier accepts several network functions such as *WiFi* (2.4 GHz and 5 GHz), *Bluetooth* (5.1), *Airplay 2*, and *Chromecast*, to name a few. It can connect to most available streaming platforms. In fact, the only missing feature is the connection to a **Roon** music server, while everything else seems to be available.

Listening Impressions

The album *Adagietto* by cellist **Mischa Maisky** offers a collection of popular songs from the classical repertoire. These are not necessarily songs composed specifically for the cello, and most listeners will recognize most of the tunes. The first score, taken from **Mahler's Symphony No. 5**, gives its name to the album and is a beautiful introduction to the rest of the album. The cello remains the centerpiece throughout the album. It is often accompanied on the piano by his daughter or by **Deutsche Grammophon** musicians or an orchestra. The balance of instruments is well presented by the **SU-GX70**. The song *Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix* reveals the qualities of the device by reproducing the subtleties of the piano's harmonics with the warmth of the cello. It is a lyrical piece that should evoke a lot of emotion provided the reproduction is up to par. Here, the instruments deliver a surprising result for a device in this price range.

The voice of jazz singer **Cassandra Wilson** enchants us with her album *Moonglow*. This analog album, recorded at the beginning of the artist's career, presents songs recorded with a small ensemble of musicians accompanying her in the studio. The musical score *Moonglow* is a beautiful demonstration of the musicians' balance who allow the singer to express her talent. The lyrics are clear, the characteristic timbre of the singer's voice is already present, especially in the lower register. The flute is not a common instrument in this style of music. It could interfere with the work of the singer or the musicians in its strongest moments. The **SU-GX70** presents this particularly in this title musical score. **Cassandra Wilson's** voice becomes more sensual in the song *Two Sleepy People*. The beginning of the song is more intimate, the voice accompanied only by the flute and guitar. Each has its place in the stereo image, no noise comes from the background, only the music is heard. The other instruments join in a little later. The drums are expressed more distinctly in the song *Unit 7*. The cymbals are clearly reproduced by the **SU-GX70**.



The album *Crime of the Century* by the **Supertramp** group needs no introduction. The version listened to here was remixed in 2010. I must have heard this record thousands of times, starting with the introductory piece, *School*, which played in the hallways during lunch breaks when I was in high school. Music has this quality of taking us back to moments when we discovered a particular piece of music or a significant event in our lives. The songs *School* and *Dreamer* are probably in the list of the 100 most popular rock songs. The *SU-GX70* presents the entire dynamic range of the album, the soft and intense moments of *School* are precise. It is a studio recording that has been compressed in the mix, but the **Technics** does nothing more than present the music as it is. It is important to be able to deliver the music, regardless of the recording quality. In this specific product review, we are looking for a versatile device capable of playing various styles of music. The *SU-GX70* delivers the goods and gives a beautiful demonstration of the capabilities of the different digital amplification stages. All I have to do is sit back, enjoy the music, and tap my foot.

Conclusion

The **Technics SU-GX70** is a network amplifier capable of playing quality music without needing a computer specialist for installation and use. This 100% digital amplifier benefits from several features derived from technological advances offered in higher-end **Technics** products. I recommend it for your friends and family, and who knows? Maybe you would like to buy it too? It has happened to me a few times! The sound result will please those who want quality music at an affordable price and are looking for an easy-to-use product. With its free application, the **Technics SU-GX70** offers several features and connections to streaming platforms in a single unit, which will meet the needs of most customers.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$2,499.99

Warranty: 3 years, parts and labor

Distribution: Technics Canada, <https://www.technics.com/ca/>

Mediagraphy

Mischa Maisky & Lily Maisky, *Adagietto*, Deutsche Grammophon, 0028948355624, FLAC, 16 / 44

Cassandra Wilson, *Moonglow*, 2xHD, 2XHDF1230, DSD128

Supertramp, *Crime of the Century*, Universal, 75021-3647-2, AIFF, 24 / 192

Classical Music

BY CHRISTOPHE HUSS

THE FOUR MAJOR QUEBEC RELEASES OF THE YEAR



MARIE-NICOLE LEMIEUX Monte-Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra, Kazuki Yamada.

Berlioz : *Les nuits d'été*. **Ravel** : *Shéhérazade*.
Saint-Saëns : *Mélodies persanes*.

Erato, 505419659478.

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

There's always a fear of being a bit biased when praising a local artist, as I did with this record by **Marie-Nicole Lemieux** on the day of its release, stating in **Le Devoir**: *More*

than a recording, it is a legacy for history, the quintessence of an art that far surpasses singing. Reassuringly, when reading serious European critics or media, one encounters rarely seen phrases like: This record is perfection itself. The reason is simple: there's no escape. No escape from the dazzle provoked by this unique alliance of singing and declamation. Lemieux illuminates a poem by singing it, turning it into the greatest of things. The diction serves the music, the music serves the diction — everything is alchemy, and everything is profoundly unique and moving. It's the record of the year, anyway.



BRUCE LIU

« **Waves** » : Works by Rameau, Ravel and Alkan.

Deutsche Grammophon, 486 440 0.

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

This is somewhat equivalent to **Marie-Nicole Lemieux's** record. With each listen, and there have been at least half a dozen, something new is discovered. And with each listen, one is stunned by an element, a detail, even more incredible than what was remembered. *Waves* juxtaposes compositions by **Rameau** (*Gavotte et six doubles*, *Les Sauvages*, *Les Tendres plaintes*, *Les Cyclopes*, *Menuet I et II*, *La Poule*), **Alkan** (*Barcarolle*, *Le Festin d'Ésope*), and **Ravel**

(*Miroirs*). One succumbs to the distinction of **Rameau**, the tenderness of *Barcarolle*, and the playful virtuosity of *Festin d'Ésope*. But, as with **Marie-Nicole**, faced with **Ravel**, these *Oiseaux tristes*, or these climates, these sound perspectives in *Alborada* or *La Vallée des cloches*, words fail to describe the boundless richness of the universes created by this brilliant pianist. Miraculously, the recording by **René Möller** and **Jupp Wegner** translates all these sound perspectives, as **DG** has been rather uninspired recently in its piano recordings (ie: **Hélène Grimaud's CD**).

Classical Music

BY CHRISTOPHE HUSS

The Four Major Quebec Releases ... suite



CHARLES RICHARD-HAMELIN LES VIOLONS DU ROY, JONATHAN COHEN.

Mozart: Piano Concertos Nos 20 and 23.

Analekta, AN 2 0926.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : *****

After a recording of *Concertos Nos. 22 and 24*, we are delighted to finally have a second volume of **Mozart's Piano Concertos** with **Charles Richard-Hamelin**. First observation: he is very consistent stylistically, as we find the same association with **Les Violons du Roy** and **Jonathan Cohen**. In a live performance, there might be an imbalance between the **Steinway** and

the reduced-size orchestra, but on *CD*, the microphones compensate well. **Charles Richard-Hamelin** stands out by recomposing the cadenzas (passages where the piano plays alone) of the *20th Concerto*. The risky endeavor is successful, and the pianist's natural elegance, embellishing the *2nd movement* of the *23rd Concerto*, hits the mark. **Jonathan Cohen** delivers a very transparent accompaniment, hyper-attentive to the nuances of the pianist. It's not overflowing with human warmth, but very much in the musicological spirit of the time. A very convincing *CD*.



YANNICK NÉZET-SÉGUIN PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA

Florence Price: *Symphony No 4.*
William Levi Dawson: *Negro Folk Symphony*

Deutsche Grammophon, 486 513 7

Interpretation : ****

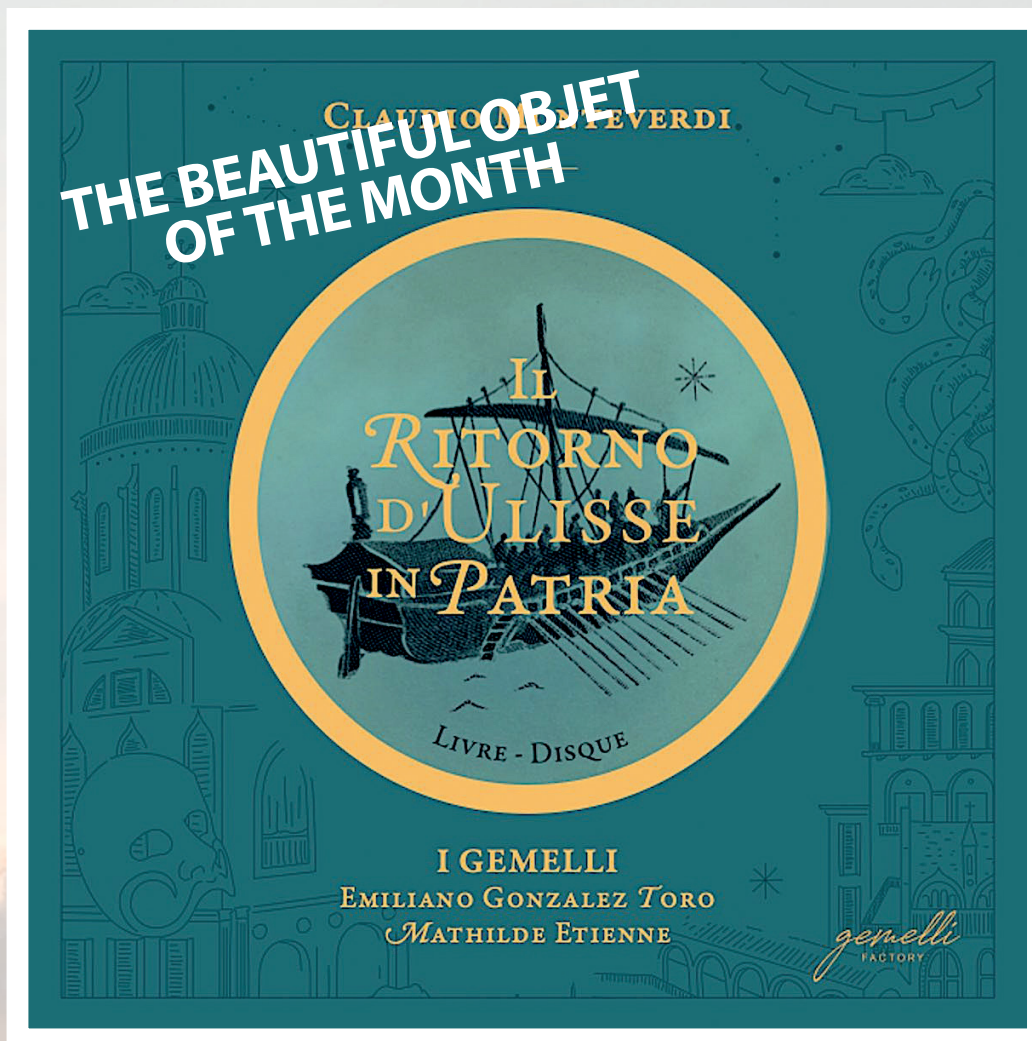
Technique : *****

This release, which does not (yet?) exist on CD format, follows the release of **Florence Price's** *Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3*, which earned **Yannick Nézet-Séguin** numerous awards. It seems that *Symphony No. 2*, considered lost or incomplete (as was this 4th, revealed by **John Jeter** at **Naxos**), is currently being reconstructed. In any case, this program is doubly important, as the

conductor will come to Quebec with his orchestra to perform this symphony in spring, and, moreover, the coupling presents an important Afro-American symphony: **Dawson's** *Negro Folk Symphony*. It is, in fact, triply important, as the luxury offered by the **Philadelphia Orchestra**, unprecedented in this repertoire, gives an unexpected relief to the music. The *Fourth* is very symbolic of **Florence Price's** style, with spiritual themes in the 1st movement, a **Dvořák** pastiche in the 2nd, and a *Juba Dance* in the 3rd. **Dawson's** *Symphony* might have an even more tense and profound 2nd movement, but it is beautifully interpreted as well.

Classical Music

BY CHRISTOPHE HUSS



CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI

Il Ritorno D'Ulisse in Patria (opera, Venice 1639).

Emiliano Gonzalez Toro, Rihab Chaieb,

Emöke Barath, Zachary Wilder, Philippe Talbot, Philippe Jaroussky, I Gemelli.

Gemelli Factory, 3 CD, 3770031472011.

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

What an incredible release! Even more impressive than the book-discs from **Alia Vox** and **Bru Zane**! Two versions of this book-disc have been published: one in French and one in English. The languages are not mixed, and the book, accompanied by the 3 CDs, is 230 pages long! This is unprecedented... The publisher is the ensemble **I Gemelli** led by **Emiliano Gonzalez Toro**, who received support from several foundations

and a patron we'll mention on this occasion, Mrs. **Aline Foriel-Destezet**. **Emiliano Gonzalez Toro** is this tenor possessed by his art, whose extraordinary performance in **Monteverdi's L'Orfeo** we praised. He was recording with **Naïve** at that time. He now flies with his own wings, and this release of an opera twice as long as *L'Orfeo* is distributed by **Naïve's** parent company.

Everything here, as in **Leonardo Garcia Alarcon's Monteverdi** projects, is carefully weighed and thought out to the smallest detail. Scenes that exist in the libretto but lack music in the only recovered manuscript have been reinvented with care and talent. The orchestra's constitution is convincing, and the distribution of unbelievable perfection, combined with the Montreal project involving **Rihab Chaieb**, is associated with this music.



OTTO KLEMPERER

The Warner Classics Remastered Edition, Vol. 2.

Warner, 29 CD, 5054197528996.

Interpretation: *** à *****

Technique: *** à *****

Déjà vu? Yes, but very logical presence here, as we presented volume 1 of this complete edition in our July/August edition. This much more substantial box set brought together the symphonic recordings of conductor **Otto Klemperer** (1885-1973), all remastered by **Art et Son**, the French company that had previously worked on **Wilhelm Furtwängler's** legacy, with a sound clarified, respectful, and particularly impressive, especially in **Gustav Mahler's** music recordings. In conclusion, we wrote: a second box, to come, will gather his opera recordings, even more important. **Warner** did not wait long, and the big surprise

is to realize that the vocal legacy, i.e., operas and religious works, only fills 29 CDs. There are essentials like *The Flying Dutchman*, *Fidelio*, or *The Magic Flute* (version without dialogues). In opera, everything (*Così*, *Les Noces*, *Don Giovanni*) is good. In sacred music, things are a bit stiffer (*Messiah*, *St. Matthew Passion*, and *Mass in B minor*), but grandiose, with **Beethoven's** *Missa Solemnis* and **Brahms's** *German Requiem* remaining references. Highly recommended.

Classical Music

BY CHRISTOPHE HUSS

FOCUS ON THE GUITAR

Big moves in the phonographic edition of this popular and mainstream discipline. Every respectable label now has its star guitarist, sometimes with surprising transfers, like in major sports teams. After popularizing his name and shaping his image on **Deutsche Grammophon**, **Miloš** signed with rival **Sony DG** immediately responded by signing **Raphaël Feuillâtre**, an artist from diversity. **Feuillâtre**, completely revamped for the occasion, released *Visages Baroques* on March 31st, 2023. And now **Miloš** responds in October with *Baroque* on his first **Sony CD**. A look at the five guitar CDs that catch attention in 2023.



PLÍNIO FERNANDES

Bacheando

Decca Gold, B 0038493-02.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : *****

Plínio Fernandes is a 28-year-old Brazilian guitarist, born and raised in São Paulo, discovered in his country at the age of 12, and trained between 2014 and 2020 at the **Royal Academy of Music** in London. In short, very serious. **Fernandes** was launched by **Decca's** American branch in 2022 with *Saudade*, a nostalgic album about the country of his birth, featuring

transcriptions of **Jobim's** *The Girl From Ipanema* and **Villa-Lobos's** *Bachianas brasileiras No. 5*. The second album, *Bacheando*, is no less successful. It includes many arrangements by **Sérgio Assad**, who, in the vein of *Bachianas brasileiras*, attempts to blend **Bach** and the Brazilian spirit. **Assad's** contribution extends to the composition of an original piece for this album, *Prélude, Fugue et Vivace*, in the style of the project's atmosphere. Impressive are also the two *Bachianinhas* by **Paulinho Nogueira** that open the CD.



RAPHAËL FEUILLÂTRE

Visages baroques

DG, 486 407 3

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

Honors are restored! **Deutsche Grammophon** compensated for **Miloš's** defection, the artist whose image the label had shaped, with real skill: the engagement of an artist from diversity who proves to be a real musical asset in the catalog. Firstly, unlike **Miloš, Feuillâtre**, a 27-year-old artist, assumes from A to Z a recital for solo guitar without fearing to bore. Like **Plínio**

Fernandes, he celebrates **Bach** but in a much more classical vein, with very sober transcriptions of harpsichord pieces. He navigates with sobriety, tact, and precision, scrutinized by a dreamlike recording, clear and ideal in distance and breath. In addition to **Bach, Raphaël Feuillâtre** interprets transcriptions of works from the French Baroque: **Royer, Duphy, Forqueray, Rameau**. A must-listen: **Bach's Largetto BWV 972** and **Rameau's Les Cyclopes**.

Classical Music

BY CHRISTOPHE HUSS

Focus On The Guitar... Suite



THIBAUT GARCIA El Bohemio

Warner, 5054197726170.

Interpretation: *****

Technique: *****

Thibaut Garcia is Warner's guitarist, facing off against **Feuillâtre** at **DG** and **Miloš** at **Sony**. And **Warner** struck gold with its first record, *Concierto d'Aranjuez*, where **Thibaut Garcia** made quite an impression. Here, he pays homage to **Agustín Barrios Mangoré**, born in 1885 in Paraguay and died on

August 7th, 1944, in San Salvador. His real name is **Agustín Barrios**, with **Mangoré** being the name of a Guarani resistance fighter against Spanish colonization in Paraguay, added to his surname by **Barrios**. **Barrios** is one of the most important composers for classical guitar, and it is important to have a worthy anthology dedicated to him. A selection of representative works here is interspersed with his transcriptions of famous pieces by **Chopin**, **Beethoven**, and **Schumann**. As a bonus, **Warner** added a track where **Barrios** can be heard playing in 1928.



MILOŠ

Baroque

Sony, 19658822942.

Interpretation: ***

Technique: ****

Released on October 13th, **Miloš's** first **Sony** recital is both beautiful, frustrating, and strange. The tracks of intense nostalgia are breathtakingly beautiful. One thinks here of **Scarlatti's** *Sonatas K. 32 or 466*, the *l'Entrée pour les Muses, les Zéphyres, les Saisons, les Heures* and *les Arts des Boréades* from **Rameau's** *Boréades*. In the middle, there is also the great challenge of measuring up

to the famous *Chaconne* from the *2nd Partita for solo violin* (quite straight-toned). But there is better. And better is the enemy of good. It's wanting to change the air, wanting to enrich the discourse and give a more luxurious patita to the project. So, just as you immerse yourself in the most beautiful meditative atmosphere, you are treated to an excerpt of cheerful music with an orchestra that is out of place. **Jonathan Cohen** and **Arcangelo** are associated with these 6 tracks (out of 14). At least three of them (the first three **Vivaldi**) have nothing to do there and disrupt the flow of the disc.

Classical Music

BY CHRISTOPHE HUSS

Focus On The Guitar... Suite



SEAN SHIBE

Profesión

Pentatone, PTC 518 7054.

Interpretation : **

Technique : ***

The guitarist of **Pentatone** for some years now does not go unnoticed. **Sean Shibe**, a 31-year-old Scottish musician of British and Japanese descent, is an electric and classical guitarist who once recorded for **Delphian**. His trowel-like **Bach**, roughly recorded, was everything but convincing. Since his time at **Pentatone**, he has stood out for his appearance, which becomes a

kind of visual event with each release. From this point of view, *Profesión* is both a return to the classical guitar and a quasi-sobriety. The journey is at the confluence of others with **Villa-Lobos's** *Homage to Bach*, *La Catedral* and *Julia Florida* by **Barrios**, followed by *12 Études* by **Villa-Lobos** and the *Sonata op. 47* by **Ginastera**. But here (compare *Julia Florida* with the **Garcia** version), a style: a guitar that sounds globular like in a giant goldfish bowl, and **Shibe** makes it vibrate to show that he feels things. We move on. It will generate enough clicks on platforms.

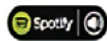
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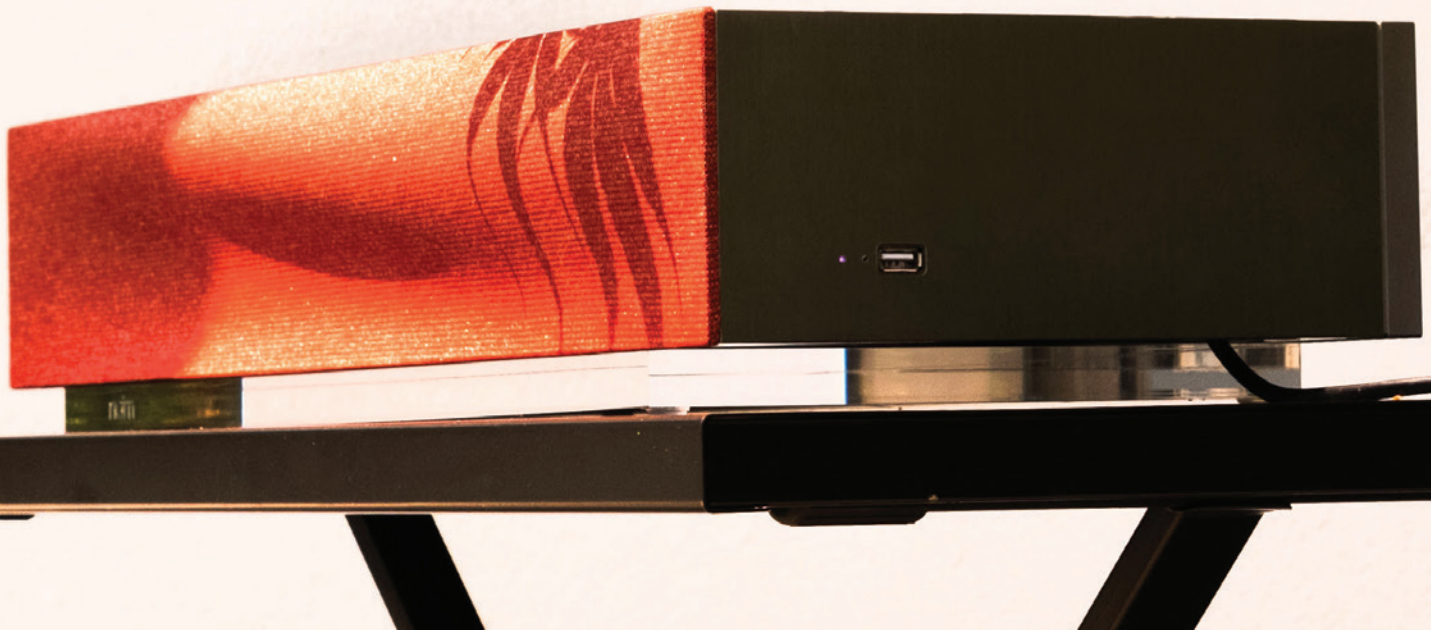


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