

TRENDS

Electronics & Design

HiFi Magazine

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WHAT
does it bring
to the table?

- Linn ARKO Tonearm



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Contents

48



70

Buon gusto

- 22 **Domaine Chanson Wines**
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Product Reviews

ACCESSORY

- 6 **LINN ARKO TONEARM**
Linn's first new tonearm design in over 15 years.
What does it bring to the table?

ELECTRONICS SYSTEMS

- 10 **NAGRA CLASSIC II DAC**
Is continual improvement possible?
- 16 **SBOOSTER NODE**
POWER SUPPLY UPGRADE
Power... In Silence?
- 38 **BRYSTON BP-19 ANALOG PREAMPLIFIER**
In which camp, do you place yourself?
- 48 **HEGEL VIKING REFERENCE CD PLAYER**
AND H600 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER
A duo of Virtuosos Serving Music

Product Reviews

ELECTROSTATIC LOUDSPEAKERS

- 64 **MARTINLOGAN IMPRESSION ESL 11A**
A Hybrid Electrostatic Panel

ALL-IN-ONE (STREAMER) SYSTEMS

- 70 **ALL-IN-ONE MYCONNECT 250 SYSTEM BY**
ADVANCE PARIS
Beauty and the Beast
- 76 **YAMAHA R-N1000A ALL-IN-ONE**
NETWORK RECEIVER
Are Your Beliefs Up for a Challenge?

Rhythm & Music

- 54 **Classical Music**
- 43 **Blues**
- 81 **Jazz**
- 46 **Progressive Rock**

76



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www.tedpublications.com/fr/en
lucieb@quebecaudio.com

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450 436-1777

Publisher and Publication Manager
Franco Moggia

**Co-publisher and
Public Relations Manager**
Lucie Beauchamp

Writing Team Contributors

Lucie Beauchamp, Anthony Alias, Yves Bérubé,
Michel Dallaire, George de Sa, Jean-Denis Doyle,
Claude Lalonde, Roger McCuaig,
Anthony Signorotti, and David Susilo.

Writing Contributors

Rhythm & Music Section

Richard Guay Christophe Huss,
Pierre Jobin and Christophe Rodriguez.

Translation & Text Revision
Lucie Beauchamp

Infographics
Editions Mizka Inc.



Photography
Franco Moggia

Advertising Sales Representative

Lucie Beauchamp
lucieb@quebecaudio.com
450.436.1777

Subscription and

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www.tedpublications.com/fr/en

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We Can Be Proud!

Time flies at an incredible speed. In the realm of audio, music enthusiasts began with analog products, then transitioned through home cinema products for some, as well as multi-room audio, to finally arrive at high-quality music streaming products. High-fidelity devices started becoming more accessible to consumers in the 1950s and 1960s. Nowadays, we can all listen to our music practically anywhere we go, thanks to our smartphones using streaming services such as **Qobuz**, **Tidal**, **Spotify**, not to mention **Apple Music**. We've come a long way in over 70 years.

Both past and present manufacturers share the same passion: delivering the most faithful reproduction of artists' original performances. They work tirelessly to constantly improve their products to achieve this honorable goal. However, let's be honest because the pursuit of perfection is subjective. What one person considers high-fidelity may not be the same for another. Everyone must realize that this quest comes with its challenges, but when we succeed, happiness awaits.

In this regard, I invite you to read our product reviews, as our contributors have written about various devices: from an exceptionally high-quality tonearm manufactured by a company with over 50 years of experience (**Linn**), to an innovative digital-to-analog converter (*DAC*) from **NAGRA**, a company that constantly surprises us with its high-quality products, to

an interface improving the power quality of **Bluesound's** *NODE* by **Sbooster**, at an affordable price. We also have a review of **Bryston's** analog preamplifier *BP-19*, offering unmatched transparency and precision. Following that, there's a review of a duo of devices from **Hegel**, highlighting the exceptional sound quality of the *CD* player (*Viking Reference*) and the all-in-one amplifier (*H600*) of very good quality. Next is a review of a pair of hybrid electrostatic panels (*Impression ESL 11A*) from **MartinLogan**, which have an advantage in terms of neutrality and precision of instrument and vocal timbre. The review of an all-in-one system (*MyConnect 250*) by **Advance Paris** was done by a collaborator who appreciated its elegant classic design and top-notch versatility. Despite being mentioned last in our list, we could easily place it first because **Yamaha's** all-in-one network receiver (*R-N1000A*) not only looks beautiful but also functions perfectly, greatly simplifying the listening setup and sounding incredibly good.

All these companies have put their expertise into designing and manufacturing their products. They are rightfully proud of them. My team and I invite you to take a look and, most importantly, to carefully listen to the products mentioned in our reviews as they will undoubtedly provide you with great moments!

So, take care and I look forward to meeting you again for the next edition, that of May-June. Happy reading and happy listening!


Lucie Beauchamp
Co-Publisher & Public Relations Manager



LINN ARKO TONEARM

Linn's first new tonearm design
in over 15 years.

WHAT does it bring
to the table?

By ANTHONY ALIAS

The *Arko* is **Linn's** first original tonearm design since the *Ekos SE* in 2006. It is a high-performance model benefiting from ultra-modern manufacturing techniques that allow it to attain tolerances that were not possible only a few years ago. The *Arko's* price point slots it in between the now-discontinued *Akito 3* and **Linn's** flagship *Ekos SE*. **Linn's** new arm is, of course, available separately but is also part of the *Selekt LP12* bundle, along with the new *Kendo* moving coil cartridge. For those not familiar with the current incarnation of this iconic turntable, the *LP12* is a modular and upgradeable design that is available in three performance levels: *Majik*, *Selekt*, and *Klimax*. For the purpose of this review, I'll be pitting the *Arko* directly against the **Linn Akito 3** tonearm to see just how much of an upgrade it really is.

About the company

This will be the abbreviated version of **Linn's** long and storied history. The company was founded back in 1973 when Scottish engineer **Ivor Tiefenbrun**, unhappy with his recently purchased turntable, set forth to make a better one. Thus, the **Linn Sondek LP12** was born. It went on to make a huge impact in the hi-fi world and became the reference high-end turntable for many years. Today, under the direction of Ivor's son **Gilad, Linn** is one of the only high-end manufacturers to be involved in the entire signal chain, from producing their own recordings to manufacturing every component of the music system, from cartridges to loudspeakers. The *Sondek LP12* is now in its 51st year of continuous production (it's like the *Porsche 911* of hi-fi!), and although it still looks the same, every single part of the turntable has been improved with retrofittable upgrades. Many experts still consider the *LP12* to be one of the best turntables for the money.

Description and set up

The *Arko* is a beautifully engineered tonearm that is built in-house. Its design focuses on superior rigidity, bearing accuracy, and extremely tight tolerances throughout. The arm wand is constructed of high-precision, cold-drawn 7075-grade aluminum, while both the headshell and gimbal are machined from the same grade aluminum to ensure maximum strength and stiffness. The material synergy also maximizes the dissipation of unwanted resonances away from the cartridge and out through the sub-chassis. The structural integrity of the gimbal has been improved relative to **Linn's** previous tonearms, therefore increasing performance levels. The new headshell design is now larger and accommodates a much wider range of cartridges. The *Arko* foregoes the common powder coat finish in

favour of a vapour-blast finish, which is said to further improve sonics. The overall fit and finish are positively top-notch.

For this comparison, I used a *Selekt LP12*, which consists of the *Karousel* bearing, *Kore* sub-chassis, *Trampoline 2* baseboard, and *Lingo 4* power supply, along with the *Akito 3* and a **Linn Krystal** moving coil cartridge. I chose ten LPs, which I listened to several times over a two-week period. I then replaced the *Akito* with the *Arko* and used the exact same *Krystal* cartridge.

The comparison

The **Linn Akito** was first introduced back in 1989, then upgraded to version 2 in 1994, and further upgraded in 2015 with the *Akito 3*. **Linn** discontinued the model in 2022, which is somewhat unfortunate as the *Akito 3* is clearly a better-sounding arm than the entry-level *Krane*. Don't get me wrong, the *Krane* is a good performer and offers excellent value for the money, but it's outclassed by the *Akito 3* in terms of dynamics, bass extension, texture, and size of soundstage.

Now well acquainted with the *Akito 3*, it was time to move on to the *Arko*. I started with *Meaning Of The Blues* from **Keith Jarrett's Standards Vol. 1**, and after a minute or so into the song, I chuckled in amazement at how obvious the differences were. The music's foundation was more solid, with drums sounding bigger with greater impact and definition. The double bass and piano had added weight and texture, along with a woodier tone. The overall resolution and transparency were superior to those of the *Akito*. **Keith Jarrett's** humming was a little more noticeable, his voice sounding fuller, less compressed, and with greater space around it. But where I found his vocalizations to be slightly distracting with the *Akito*, here, I was now aware of how invested **Keith** was in the moment and how his playing had extra sensitivity. Plucked bass strings





were better defined and articulate. **Jack DeJohnette's** hi-hat splashes on *It Never Entered My Mind*, had more sheen and longer decays, and there were bigger differences in timbre between the various cymbals.

To see how the *Arko* would handle more complex, multi-layered music, I turned to **Frank Zappa's** *One Size Fits All*. The *Akito* sounded a little confused on certain parts of the album, having trouble keeping things tidy and intelligible, but the *Arko*, on the other hand, was totally unfazed by the challenge. In fact, it made me realize just how much stuff was going on here. Background instruments were now easier to follow, and the improved dynamics and transient response brought out greater intensity in everyone's playing. I particularly enjoyed **Chester Thompson's** amazing drumming! The *Arko* showed off the

LP12's superior rhythmic qualities — that famous *PRaT* (*Pace, Rhythm, and Timing*) the *Sondek* is known for — and that is so important in music. I intended to listen to just a couple of tracks from this record, but I ended up playing both sides. The *Arko* really made this album come alive and very entertaining.

Tonal accuracy and imaging were other areas that were improved with the *Arko*. The violin intro to **Rimsky-Korsakov's** *Scheherazade* by the **Chicago Symphony Orchestra / Fritz Reiner** had a sweeter, more resonant, and more complex tone. The recording venue now seemed larger, with the various sections of the orchestra better defined in space. Record after record sounded more detailed, extended, dynamic, and lifelike, while never sounding edgy or bright. As you can see, the *Arko's* sonic qualities are substantial. Actually,

to be more precise, the *Arko* was letting more of what the *LP12* was doing shine through. What I especially loved about this combo was how I was connecting to the music. There was a higher level of expressiveness, emotion, and intensity in the music. For instance, the haunting sound effects on **Pink Floyd's** *Echoes* (from the *Meddle* album) were downright spookier with the *Arko*. **Neil Young's** intimate performance on *Live at Massey Hall* was more gripping. His singing on *A Man Needs A Maid* sounded more heartfelt and passionate. The **Temptation's** rendition of *Law Of The Land* had such an infectious groove and such soulful vocals. I was having so much fun that I went beyond the ten *LPs* I had reserved for this review and started pulling out album after album for the pure pleasure of the music.

LINN ARKO TONEARM



« To see how the *Arko* would handle more complex, multi-layered music, I turned to **Frank Zappa's** *One Size Fits All*. The *Akito* sounded a little confused on certain parts of the album, having trouble keeping things tidy and intelligible, but the *Arko*, on the other hand, was totally unfazed by the challenge. In fact, it made me realize just how much stuff was going on here. Background instruments were now easier to follow, and the improved dynamics and transient response brought out greater intensity in everyone's playing. »

The *Arko* also brought out even more of the *LP12's* organic quality. Organic not only in the sense that instruments and voices had a pleasingly "natural" quality to them, but in how the different musical strands were organized and flowed in harmony as well. The *LP12* always seems to prioritize the melody and groove, with everything else having its proper place in the mix and not fighting for the centre of attention, until it's time for a solo, for instance. I like this particular trait because it makes more musical sense to me.

Conclusion

While the *Akito 3* has proven to be a very competent tonearm, the *Arko* is simply in another league! It is a simple yet extremely well-built tonearm that outshines the *Akito 3* in every single category and is well worth the money. The fact that there was such an obvious difference between the two tonearms is a testament to the *LP12's* considerable potential. The synergy between both was perfect and made for a highly entertaining listening experience; in fact, I can honestly say that this Linn *LP12* combo is one of the most exciting and involving turntables I've ever heard in my forty plus years in the Canadian hi-fi industry.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$5,200

Distributor: Linn, <https://www.linn.co.uk/ca/>

Mediagraphy

Pink Floyd: Meddle

Frank Zappa: One Size Fits all

Neil Young: Live At Massey Hall

The Temptations: Masterpiece

Keith Jarrett: Standards Vol. 1

Stan Getz: Pure Getz

Weather Report: Sportin' Life

Rimsky-Korsakov: Scheherazade, Fritz Reiner /
Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Stokowski: Rhapsodies, Liszt, Unesco, Smetana, Wagner

Vivaldi: 5 Bassoon Concertos, Maurice Allard, I Solisti Veneti /
Claudio Scimone

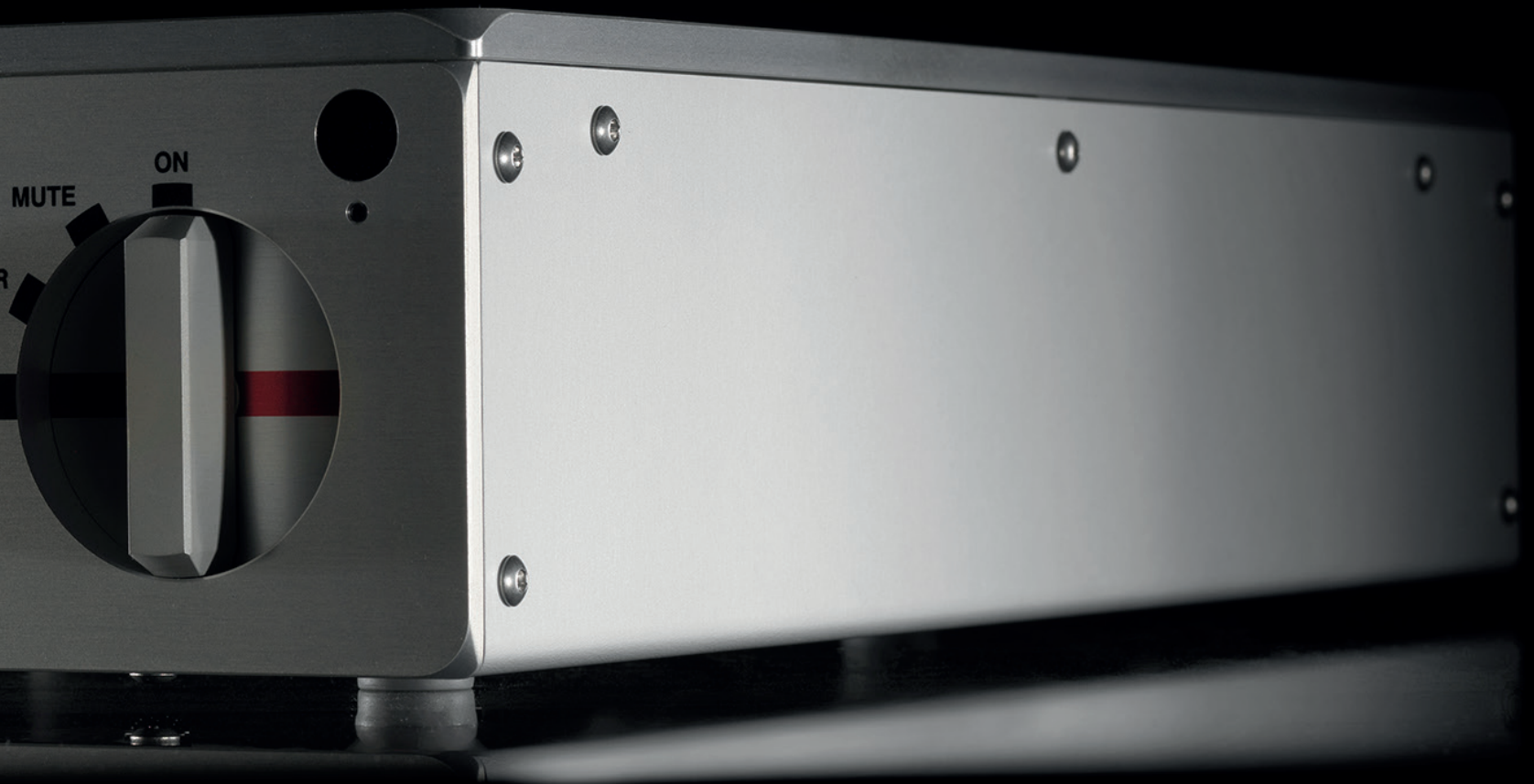
THE **NAGRA CLASSIC II** DIGITAL-TO-ANALOG CONVERTER

Is Continual Improvement Possible ?



By YVES BÉRUBÉ

I was eagerly anticipating writing this review to introduce you to **Nagra's** new DAC. Just under a year ago, I had a lot of fun discovering and listening to Nagra's Tube DAC. I wrote that *this DAC... is undoubtedly the device with which I have had the most pleasure listening to music simply, forgetting all analysis efforts and letting emotions come naturally*. How can a company release a new product and continue to successfully dismantle its innovation efforts? That's what I would like to explore with you in this review. Follow me!



THE **NAGRA CLASSIC II** DIGITAL-TO-ANALOG CONVERTER



I've already talked to you about **Nagra** and its history last time. They haven't been sitting still since then, far from it! It's interesting to note that, over the past year, they've launched an excellent turntable with its tonearm and cartridge! **Nagra** is already globally recognized for its analog signature. In a way, it's not surprising that this company wants to innovate in this direction even though launching a high-end turntable remains a colossal task. The success of this new turntable launch has led to the birth of a new range of superior products called the *REFERENCE Series*. We also witnessed the launch of an excellent vinyl album to celebrate Nagra's 70th anniversary. The *HD* and *Classic* ranges remain unchanged. The *Tube DAC* and *Classic II DAC* are thus at the same level of product offerings, which is the entry level at **Nagra**. Note that the original *Classic DAC* ceased production in 2021.

Technical Description

The **Nagra Classic II DAC** shares the same *NADM (Nagra Audio Digital Module)* engine used in the *HD DAC X* and *Tube DAC*. The significant difference from the *Tube DAC* is that the *Classic II* does not have isolation transformers and *AFETs*.

The significant innovation of the *Classic II* is the analog output stage built using a discrete topology in pure Class A. As always, component selection has been made with great care to use top-quality parts. The power supply of the *Classic II* has also

been improved, notably in terms of the extremely quiet noise it produces. An optional *Classic PSU* external power supply can also be added to further improve performance. It can play *DSD* formats up to *DSD 4x (256)* and *PCM* up to 384 kHz, but the development has mainly focused on the *Red Book* format 44.1 kHz/16 bits to reveal all its musicality.

Externally, the *Classic II* looks similar to its predecessor. At the back, the **Nagra DAC** offers several audio inputs: a *USB (UCA2)*, an *AES/EBU*, an optical, and two *S/PDIF*, and, for output, a pair of unbalanced *RCA* connectors. *XLR* connectors can be requested as options but are not included by default. **Nagra Links** optical inputs and outputs are also available for future needs. Are the rumors of a separate **Nagra** streamer true? The *Classic II DAC* comes with its remote control.

All music is converted at the input to the *DSD256* format, which is the native format with which the **Nagra** operates. The *FPGA (Field Programmable Gate Array)* developed at **Nagra** and the high-precision *VCXO (Voltage Control Crystal Oscillation)* clock perform this task with astonishing results.

Nagra's DACs have the ability to deliver superior performance regardless of the recording format. With each digital-to-analog converter development, tests are particularly carried out with 44.1 kHz/16-bit recordings. I am always pleasantly surprised to hear recordings that I have owned for several years and rediscover them with **Nagra's DACs**.

Unpacking and Installation

The **Nagra Classic II** digital-to-analog converter has multiple inputs; I chose the *USB* input with a high-quality cable connected directly to a **Mac M1** configured with **Roon Core**. The **Nagra DAC** was installed on a *Vibration Free System* support. I connected the device to my tube preamplifier with *RCA* cables. The *Classic II* does not allow direct connection to an amplifier as was the case with the *Tube DAC*.

Listening Impressions

Mozart's complete piano sonatas is a good test to evaluate the quality of a component. I have often mentioned that the piano is difficult to reproduce due to the richness of its harmonics and the breadth of its frequency spectrum. The **Oehms Classics** label's recording is excellent. Remember this name well! German pianist **Michael Endres** delivers an excellent interpretation of the sonatas in an album that is very enjoyable to listen to. **Mozart** did not experience pianos as we know them today. These *sonatas* were composed on a pianoforte, which is the ancestor of the modern piano. Musicians

« German pianist **Michael Endres** delivers an excellent interpretation of the sonatas in an album that is very enjoyable to listen to. **Mozart** did not experience pianos as we know them today. These *sonatas* were composed on a pianoforte, which is the ancestor of the modern piano. Musicians must therefore add nuances when interpreting these *sonatas*, and **Endres** does an admirable job. The quality of the recording is highlighted by the *Classic II* because you can clearly hear the acoustics of the room where the recording took place. »

must therefore add nuances when interpreting these *sonatas*, and **Endres** does an admirable job. The quality of the recording is highlighted by the *Classic II* because you can clearly hear the acoustics of the room where the recording took place. The sound of the piano is well-centered, and the microphones may be closer than my usual preference for a piano recording. Overall, I find it to be a very well-made album.

During a recent listening session, I rediscovered this magnificent piece with a friend, and I wanted to hear it again on **Nagra's Classic II**. **Schubert's String Quartet "Death and the Maiden"** by the **Amadeus**

Quartet is one of the first *CDs* I bought when this format appeared on the market. The interpretation delivered by the **Amadeus Quartet** in this version may not be the best, but I find the combination of interpretation and recording quality very good. Each instrument is well-positioned in the stereo image, and you can hear the musicians express themselves and even breathe occasionally. The **Nagra** gives the impression of experiencing a concert with all the dynamics of the violins and the cello. Throughout this composition, each instrument expresses itself and takes the lead over the others. Since the musicians are seated, they cannot stand up to take



THE **NAGRA CLASSIC II** DIGITAL-TO-ANALOG CONVERTER



the stage with a dialogue as one would see in an opera. The other musicians must therefore step back a bit to make room for the one with the solo part. This dance where each takes the lead in turn can be difficult to reproduce when you also have to consider the acoustics of the concert hall and avoid confusion in the dialogues. **Nagra's Classic II** reproduces the complexity of this romantic work here with disarming simplicity. The second movement is more languid and the longest movement of the work. It begins with a cadence that intensifies. In the softer passages, you can hear the bow friction on the strings and the musicians' breathing. It's hard to imagine that the four musicians are not in my listening room. I close my eyes and enjoy the show.

The album *L.A. Woman* by **The Doors** is a classic in the rock repertoire. Even though it is a studio recording with compressors, I like to see the capabilities of **Nagra** components to reproduce music even if the playback conditions are not optimal. A device of this price would not make sense if you could only enjoy it with a limited number of albums. This version of the album was remastered in 2021. The iconic song *Riders on the Storm* shines in all its glory. The sound of rain falling and thunder remains present, and each instrument in the introduction presents itself clearly and in balance. **Jim Morrison's** voice is at the center surrounded by the musicians. Here, we can clearly see the work of **Nagra's** artisans in successfully reproducing any music, regardless of the format.

As you probably know, **Nagra** is closely associated with the **Montreux Jazz Festival**. Jazz is somewhat part of its DNA.

Bill Evans shines here with his album *Some Other Time: The Lost Session from the Black Forest* under the **2xHD** label. In the track *My Funny Valentine*, the instruments are delicately played by the musicians to offer an exceptional presentation. The brush friction on the snare drum is clear. It harmonizes with the bass and the piano, which, together, do not overshadow the drum, which is all smoothness in this piece. It's really a treat! **Nagra's Classic II DAC** precisely places each instrument of the trio in the stereo image while respecting the volume levels. In a small ensemble of three musicians, you can feel the space between the instruments, giving the impression of a well-constructed uniform image.

Conclusion

I was curious to hear **Nagra's** new DAC, the *Classic II*. After having so much pleasure with the *Tube DAC* during my review last year, I wanted to hear how the newcomer compared to its big brother. I must say it's very close in terms of musical qualities. The newcomer shares several elements with its older siblings, making it a very interesting candidate for anyone looking to get a **Nagra** device at a lower price. The majority of the music catalog is in the 44.1 kHz / 16-bit format, and too little innovation has been made in terms of recording. I have noticed that much progress has been made in reproduction, and **Nagra** has always been one of the leaders in this regard. Honestly, I don't see how **Nagra** can stop progressing, and I'm curious to hear about its upcoming releases.



GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$25,000

Warranty: 3 years, parts and labour

Distribution: Audio Technologies Switzerland (NAGRA)

Mediagraphy

Bill Evans, "Some Other Time: The Lost Session from the Black Forest," 2016, 2xHD, AIFF 24 / 196.

The Doors, "L.A. Woman" (50th Anniversary Deluxe Edition), Rhino - Elektra, 0603497843381, FLAC 24 / 192.

Schubert: String Quartet No. 14 in D minor ("Death and the Maiden"), D.810, Amadeus Quartet, Deutsche Gramophone, 1982, 0028947986782, AIFF 16 / 48.

Mozart: Complete Piano Sonatas, Michael Endres, Oehms Classics, 2016, 4260034862531, FLAC 16 / 44.1.

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SBOOSTER NODE POWER SUPPLY UPGRADE



POWER... In Silence ?

BY ANTHONY SIGNOROTTI

In 2008, **Wiebren Draaijer** received a **Squeezebox** streamer as a present. While he loved the convenience of streaming music, he didn't love the sound. The **Squeezebox** simply couldn't match the sound quality he was getting from his high-end *CD* player, and he wondered why. Given his background in electronics, he was uniquely positioned to find an answer. After some tinkering, he concluded that the best way to improve the sound of the **Squeezebox** was to improve its meager power supply. Two years later, **Wiebren** and **Karin Hoks** founded **Sbooster** and the **Sbooster** linear power supply was born.



Clean Power for the Bluesound NODE

We don't generally give a lot of thought to what powers our devices. If something is electronic, we understand that it needs to be plugged into a wall socket or have a battery to work, and as long as the device turns on when we plug it in, we're happy campers.

But I'll let you in on a little secret that high-end audio designers already know: the decidedly unsexy power supply may be the most important part of your favorite component.

In one of my conversations with **Rene Evans**, the Canadian distributor for **Sbooster**, he compared the difference in sound quality between a quality linear power supply and the tiny, built-to-a-price switch mode supply spec'd on many components to a truck trying to tow a boat up a hill. Can a smaller engine with less torque get the job done? Yes, but it's going to struggle, and the steeper and longer the hill, the more it's going to struggle. That steep, long hill in our truck example is like a particularly complex piece of music, with lots of dynamic swings and complex arrangements. The small, switch mode power supply simply cannot deliver

the torque needed to allow everything a recording has to come through during playback. So, a component's power supply really does matter, whether it's an amplifier, a DAC and yes, even a streamer.

Take for example, the **Bluesound NODE**. Well-made, compact, with a killer app and at a price mortals can afford, the **NODE** continues to be one of the world's most popular music streamers. For less than 600 bucks, the **NODE** allows music lovers and audiophiles to get into quality hi-res music streaming without breaking the bank. Are there other streamers on the market that sound better? Definitely! But they cost significantly more, sometimes as much as 4 to 5 times more.

A few months ago, I reviewed **Bluesound's** special edition **NODE X** for **TED Magazine** and loved it. It took the standard **NODE N130** (the **NODE N130** being the 3rd generation of the **NODE**) and improved it in nearly every way, especially when using its upgraded **ESS DAC** and **THX** headphone amplifier. However, in my set-up, I typically only use the **NODE's** streamer, preferring to listen using my own **DAC** and headphone amp from **Schiit Audio**. Since the streamer tech was the same in both the **NODE N130** and the **NODE X**, I ended up staying with my **NODE**

N130. But listening to the **NODE X** convinced me that my **NODE N130** had more in the tank.

While exploring last year's **Toronto Audio Fest** with fellow **TED** contributor, **George DeSa**, we got to talking with **Audio Sensibility** founder **Steven Huang** and he pointed out that he was now carrying **Sbooster's** linear power supply upgrade for the **Bluesound NODE**. I was vaguely aware that other power supply upgrades existed, and I was intrigued, so **Steven** suggested we chat with **Rene Evans**. We tracked **Rene** down in one of the larger lower-level rooms he was sharing with **Don Corby**, and boy am I glad we did.

I'd never spoken with **Rene** before, but his reputation as manufacturer of his well-regarded **Saturn Audio** components preceded him. In an industry filled with really nice people, **Rene** may just be one of the nicest and most down to earth people I've had the pleasure of speaking with. He told us a bit about the **Sbooster NODE** upgrade, emphasizing how easy the upgrade was to complete (music to my non-DIY ears) and what a huge difference it made to the **NODE's** already excellent sound quality. I requested a review sample.

SBOOSTER NODE POWER SUPPLY UPGRADE

When the first production models finally arrived in Canada, I was one of **Rene's** first calls. We talked a bit about how we'd like to approach the review. He offered to upgrade one of his own *NODE N130's* and ship both units over to me so that I could compare to my stock *NODE N130*, but because purchasers of the **Sbooster** *NODE* upgrade were going to complete the installation process themselves, I figured a true test of this product should be from that perspective. **Rene** readily agreed and a few days later, I received the extremely well packed **Sbooster** power supply, along with a stock version *NODE N130* so that could easily compare with my soon to be upgraded *NODE*.

Installation

A quick digression about me: I am not a technical person. I don't own a soldering iron and I've never *DIY'd* anything in my audio collection. The closest I get to *DIY* is adjusting the *DIP* switches on my phono preamplifier, a task I consider to be a notch below harrowing. Would this upgrade, which would require that I crack open my treasured *NODE N130*, rummage around inside and then rip out and replace some of its guts be an operation that would prove to overmatch my admittedly meager technical skills? Read on.

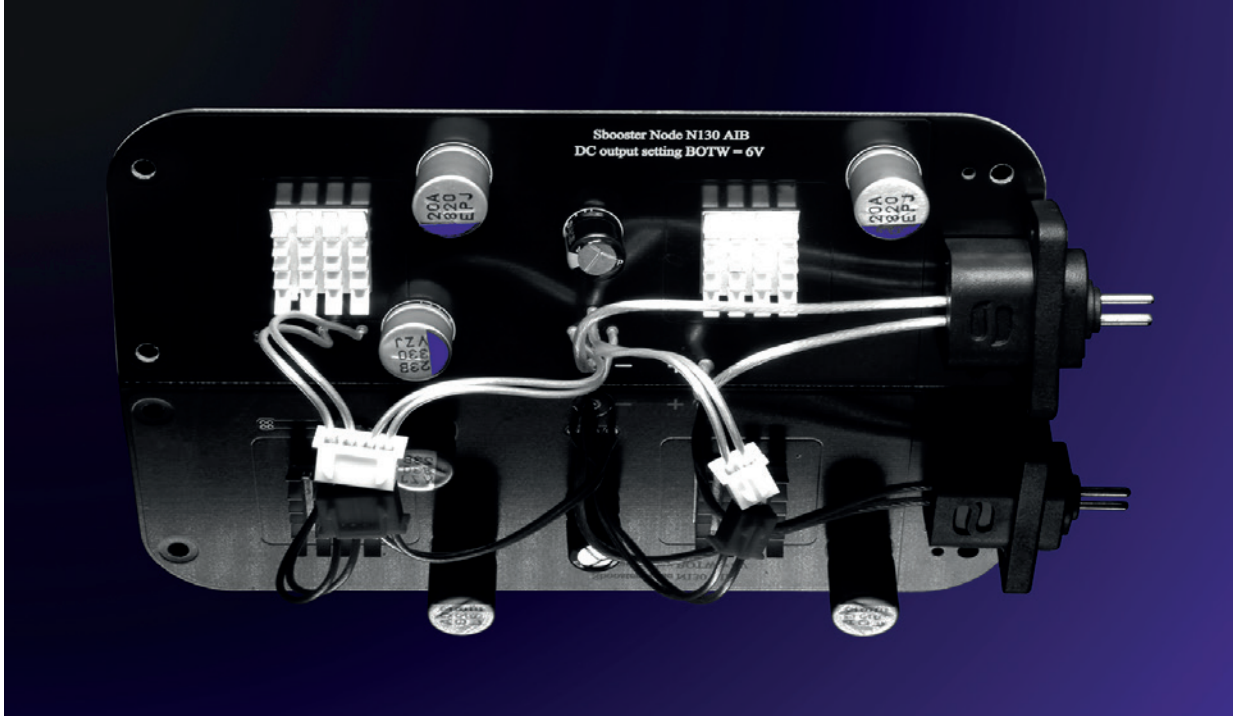
Spoiler alert: I needn't have fretted. As mentioned above, the **Sbooster** upgrade comes with two main pieces. First is the **Sbooster** *BOTW P&P ECO MKII 5-6V* power supply (\$519), which aside from its somewhat ungainly name, is a smallish black box (roughly 9 inches high, 5 inches wide and 3 inches high) that contains, among other things, a healthy sized toroidal transformer and several capacitors. I've seen wimpier power supplies on power amplifiers, so this was a good sign.

The other piece is something **Sbooster** calls an *AIB* or **Active Interface Board** (\$199.99), which replaces the stock power supply inside the *NODE* itself. It's worth noting here that this *AIB* was custom designed for the *NODE N130*. **Sbooster** confirmed that while the *AIB* also works on the *NODE X*, it is not backwards compatible with previous versions of the *NODE*.

In order to install this new board, one needs to remove the magnetic backer on the *NODE*, remove a few screws and open the unit. Aside from a totally normal yet heart-stopping crackling sound (don't worry, it's just some clips releasing, not breaking) that comes from opening the clamshell *NODE*, this is super easy, even for someone of my decidedly non-tech background. The removal of the *NODE's* stock internal power supply involves disconnecting two leads, removing a few screws, removing the stock power supply board, and popping the *AIB* in its place. Everything lined up and fit to perfection. If I'm honest, the trickiest part of the entire process was getting the clamshell properly aligned and closed up again. After a bit of finagling, I got the *NODE* reassembled, connected the nicely designed custom connector to the outboard power supply, attached the removable included power cord and my *NODE* was ready to (literally, as it turns out) rock and roll.

I should say that I was not left on my own here. Not only are the *step-by-step* instructions clearly written by someone which a solid command of the English language, but the accompanying pictures proved extremely helpful. To cap things off, **Sbooster** also included a link to a helpful how-to video, which I trepidatiously watched several times (see aforementioned pre-*DIY* fretting) before attempting the upgrade myself. All this to say: if you have a screwdriver and a pulse, you can install this yourself.





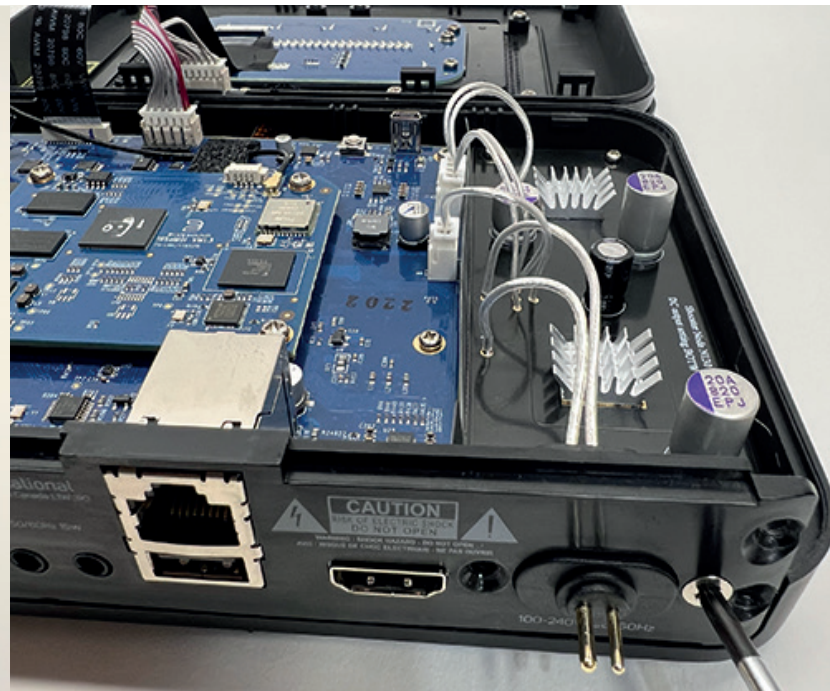
Set-Up

I think it's worth a moment to talk about how I set up the *NODEs* to work with my gear. Both upgraded and stock *NODEs* sat together on my equipment rack and were connected with identical sets of *RCA* cables into my **Schiit Audio Freya+** preamplifier. The output for both *NODEs* was set to fixed, so I didn't have to worry about level matching the two. Finally, in the *BluOS* app, I added both *NODEs* to a group, so that when I started, stopped, and paused tracks, it was one set of controls that applied to both units. Super easy! Now I could go back and forth between both stock and upgrade *NODEs* and control the volume using my *Freya+* remote. Score another win for the excellent *BluOS* app.

Listening Conditions

After waiting the recommended 100 hours for the **Sbooster** to break in, I started listening. But, switching back and forth between upgraded and stock *NODEs* while listening to a series of tracks initially left me feeling confused. Somehow, the **Sbooster** equipped *NODE* sounded quieter. I checked and rechecked my physical connections and volume settings in the *BluOS* app, even checking the decibel levels with an *iPhone* app. Everything was identical and the volumes were indeed the same. I asked my son, whose 13-year-old year ears are demonstrably more sensitive than mine (except when being reminded to do his chores, natch) and after listening for a few minutes, the first thing he noted was that switching back to

the stock *NODE* made things louder. Why louder? My working theory is that the **Sbooster** equipped *NODE* sounds slightly quieter because the enhanced power supply is calming everything down. We're not talking about a loss of dynamics or detail—it's all still there. Ever been cooking in a kitchen with the stove's exhaust fan on? Often, you don't actually realize it's on. Until you turn it off. Immediately you take a breath, relax your shoulders and that unrealized sense of tension vanishes. That was my overwhelming take away when listening via the **Sbooster**. It removed all that noise and distraction and artificial tension, which at once improves every single part of the listening experience.



SBOOSTER NODE POWER SUPPLY UPGRADE



« On *Rocket*, **Billy Corgan's** and **James Iha's** guitars sang and shook, **Darcy Wretsky's** bass grooved, **Jimmy Chamberlain's** drum strikes thundered while **Billy's** voice was right there – as sharp and biting as ever. But instead of the artificial tension imposed on an already tense and driving recording, the **Sbooster** allowed all that transcendent power and emotion to shine through. »

The listening sessions themselves

Teddy Thompson's gorgeous cover of **Leonard Cohen's** *Tonight Will be Fine*, from the **Leonard Cohen** *I'm Your Man* motion picture soundtrack sounds great on both versions of the *NODE*, however, on the unmodified *N130*, **Teddy's** voice had more sibilance and felt somehow edgier and hotter than when listening through the **Sbooster** version. At the same time, the stage felt less expansive, the imaging a bit fuzzy. When I listened to the same recording on my upgraded *NODE*, the differences

became immediately and unforgettably obvious. **Teddy's** voice came forward slightly, sounding smoother and sweeter, while his guitar strums and plucks felt more full-bodied and sure. In fact, the entire performance became more energetic and self-assured. The size of the performance space itself also leapt into focus with the **Sbooster** equipped *NODE N130*, the player locations on the stage were more clearly drawn on a wider, deeper and more expansive soundstage. These same differences showed up again when I played **Agnes Obel's** hauntingly

beautiful *The Curse*, from *Aventine*.

Listening via the **Sbooster** equipped *NODE* allowed the music to flow with observable smoothness and clarity.

Agnes's voice is full bodied and warm, her bow work with the cello felt deeper, smoother and cleaner. On the unmodified *NODE*, **Agnes's** voice and her cello are noticeably thinner and more grating, sitting on a flatter, smaller, less precise soundstage.

Over and over again, this palpable reduction in tension came back to me. Whenever I switched to the stock *NODE N130*, I couldn't wait to go back to the **Sbooster** equipped version. I would feel an immediate sense of unease and tension with the old power supply. With the **Sbooster**, the music flowed with a sense of commanding power and ease. It's just clean, clear and calm – even when playing decided uncalm music.

As a rowdy teenager growing up in the 1990's I was huge fan of the **Smashing Pumpkins**. Now in sunset dotage of my mid-forties, I have a tough time with the hard rock of my youth. It was brash, loud, unrefined, and angry and it wasn't recorded particularly well. These days, I find myself gravitating towards the peace and tranquility of more refined recordings. But I wondered, could the **Sbooster** allow me to listen to the some of my most treasured music with a greater sense of calm? Would the quieter version of hard rock rob it of everything that made it amazing? There was only one way to find out. I cued up the **Pumpkins's** the unabashedly intense 1993 effort, *Siamese Dream*, took a deep breath and hit *Play*. What emerged from my stereo was jaw droppingly different from what I remembered. Gone was the edgy metallic taste, annoying sibilance and grain that defined previous listening of this record, even on good equipment. On *Rocket*, **Billy**



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

Hello David,



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

Roger

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

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

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

All the best,

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



Corgan's and James Iha's guitars sang and shook, Darcy Wretsky's bass grooved, Jimmy Chamberlain's drum strikes thundered while Billy's voice was right there - as sharp and biting as ever. But instead of the artificial tension imposed on an already tense and driving recording, the **Sbooster** allowed all that transcendent power and emotion to shine through. Little details, riffs and effects I'd missed all these years revealed themselves and I was transported back to the 15-year-old me - rocking out to this incredible music of the early 1990's.

Conclusion

Suffice it say, the improvements the **Sbooster** brings to the *NODE N130* is far from subtle and at roughly \$700 Canadian, represents an astonishing value, easily elevating the already great **Bluesound NODE** from value component to potentially end-game status. If you're looking to upgrade your streamer to a whole new unit, consider improving your power supply and you might just discover that indeed there is more power in silence.

GENERAL INFORMATION

5-6V BOTW MKII Power Supply

Price: \$519.00 CAD
Warranty: 2 Years parts and labour.

**Bluesound Node N130
AIB Upgrade Module**

Price: \$199.00 CAD
Distributor: Saturn Audio Ltd.
(Cambridge, Ontario),
T.: 519.623.1212,
<http://saturnaudio.com>

Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

DC
CH

*Domaine Chanson
Wines
In Burgundy
since 1750!*



MAINE ANSON

I recently tasted the wines of **Domaine Chanson**, one of Burgundy's oldest estates, with **Vincent Wallays**, the company's export manager. We tasted 8 wines which included 3 whites and 5 reds, all from Burgundy, the vast majority of which are classified *Premier Crus*. Two of these wines are available at the **SAQ** (at the time of writing) and the others may be available as private imports, depending on quantities at the time of publication.

The tasting organized by **Authentic Vins & Spiritueux**, took place at **Les Cavistes Bistro de Quartier**. Six of the wines were accompanied by a dish specifically prepared for each wine.

Domaine Chanson is one of the oldest houses in Beaune, Burgundy, and one of six producers in the region dating back to the 17th century and earlier. It extends over 45 hectares (including 25 ha in *Premiers Crus*) exclusively in *Premiers* and *Grands Crus* on the Côte de Beaune in the heart of Burgundy: Santenay, Chassagne Montrachet, Puligny Montrachet, Beaune, Savigny Les Beaune, Pernand Vergelesses, Corton.

The company also produces wines in the Chablis appellation. It recently acquired 50 ha in Côte Chalonnaise.

It's worth noting that all their whites and reds are vinified in 100% whole bunches at their ultra-modern facilities on the outskirts of Beaune. They use fractional pressing à la champenoise to gently extract the juice, then mature the wines in barrel, with no more than 30% new barrels for the reds and 20% new barrels for the whites.

Aging takes place in the Bastion they own, one of the 5 massive towers of the 15th-century fortifications that encircle the heart of medieval Beaune.

Remarkably, **Chanson** acquired the Bastion just after the French Revolution. The Bastion's thick walls (an astonishing 7 to 11 meters thick at the base) ensure constant temperature and humidity levels.

Red wines are stored for 18 to 24 months in oak barrels in the vaulted cellars on the first 3 levels, each dedicated to a distinct vintage. On the 4th level, an immense circular cellar with a gigantic radial structure supported by beams houses the white wines during fermentation, vinification and aging in oak barrels.

Buon gusto

Par CLAUDE LALONDE

*Interview with
Vincent Wallays,
Export Manager,
Domaine Chanson*



Chanson is one of the oldest houses in Burgundy, in fact one of the 3 oldest still in business and still family-owned. The **Chanson** family settled in Beaune in 1750 because they were able to lease the military fortress from King **Louis XI**, who began the fortifications of Beaune completed by **François 1^{er}**. These fortifications were there to regain the power of the Dukes of Burgundy at the time.

Burgundy was a huge region stretching from the Netherlands to the south of France, including part of Saxony. The Burgundians allied themselves with the English during the 100 Years' War against the King of France. Incidentally, it was they who delivered **Jean d'Arc** to the English. These Dukes of Burgundy with the wine trade were wealthy and had their own armies. So, when the King set out to reclaim some of their wealth in return for protection, the Dukes thought: "Nice, but not for us".

History tells us that since then, some of the Dukes have disappeared, lost to the English and **Louis XI** decided to fortify the city with the famous Bastions.

So back to the **Chanson** family, who in 1750 were able to lease to the King one of these Bastions, which is now one of the Domaine's cellars. This Bastion, this cellar, is 4 stories high, with walls 7 to

11 meters thick, built of medieval rock to withstand cannon fire. This Bastion was built around a well so that soldiers could drink in case of conflict. By 1750, the fortress was empty and the **Chanson** family received permission to rent it out.

They were lucky, because in 1789, the French Revolution arrived. The King was no longer King, and all his properties became public property. The **Chanson** family, bourgeois merchants, were thus able to acquire the fortress. They enlarged and improved it, and in 1999, after several generations, the **Bollinger** family bought **Domaine Chanson**.

During this period, Burgundy was not doing so well with the economic crisis raging in Europe. And **Bollinger** saw that **Chanson** was a diamond in the rough that needed investment. So they invested in the vines in 2007, in the winery, acquiring new vines in Santenay, Chassagne and Pulligny Montrachet, and investing in a new vinification cellar started in 2009 and completed in 2013.

This winery was designed (for operations) by gravity and for whole-cluster maceration, because over 20 years ago, the winery returned to this tradition of whole-cluster vinification, which brings structure to the wine, terroir typicity, freshness and some spicy aromas.

Buon gusto

Par CLAUDE LALONDE





In fact, whole bunch vinification is now fashionable, but for us it's tradition. Man has been making wine with whole bunches for 2,000 years. The de-stemmer didn't exist, and it's a very recent development in the history of wine.

*So at **Chanson**, we've always dreamed of increasing the size of the vineyard. It was a dream we never thought we'd realize so quickly. With the advent of the 2021 vintage, we had very low yields due to frost, skyrocketing grape prices and the fact that we wanted more control over our production. So we acquired 50 hectares 25 minutes from Beaune in the Rully and Mercurey terroirs. We more than doubled the surface area of the vineyard from 45 ha to over 95 ha.*

*This acquisition puts **Chanson** in the top 7-8 of Burgundy's largest estates. And it gives us control over our grapes. We've been using organic methods for over 20 years. We hadn't been certified before, but during Covid we had time to take care of it and this year, the 2024 vintage will be certified organic.*

As for the 50 ha we've just bought, they'll go from conventional to organic certification. We therefore need to make the necessary investments, including more tractors, tools and staff training, among other things, to enable us to make this conversion. And all the vinification will take place at the Beaune winery.



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Domaine Chanson, Beaune-Bastion Premier Cru, 2018

This unique cuvée brings together different parcels selected from the estate's *Premiers Crus* located on the hillside of Beaune: Beaune Clos du Roi, Beaune Clos des Marconnets, Beaune Bressandes, Beaune Teurons, Beaune Champimonts, Beaune Clos des Mouches and Beaune Clos des Fèves Monopole.

Tasting notes

On the nose, this *Premier Cru* exhales concentrated aromas of red and black fruits (blackberries and raspberries) and a hint of sweet spices.

On the palate, you can feel the effect of the 2018 vintage, which was particularly sunny, with beautifully concentrated flavors of ripe plums, cherries and raspberries. Balanced, velvety, fleshy tannins provide just the right amount of structure. Full-bodied, with surprising length!

Pair well with roasted meats and game birds.

Available at SAQ (at time of writing)
**Domaine Chanson, Beaune-Bastion
Premier Cru 2018
Red wine, Burgundy**

Sugar: 2.1 g/l

Alcohol: 13%

Price: \$58.25

SAQ Code: 15171849.

<https://www.saq.com/fr/15171849>



Domaine Chanson, Savigny-Dominode Premier Cru 2017

This *Savigny-Dominode* comes from the commune of Savignyles-Beaune, in a privileged mid-slope site, at the entrance to the Savigny valley, in the lower slope of the Jarons, this vineyard, facing north-east, takes its name from the Latin *Dominus*, as it belonged to the Lord of Savigny.

Tasting notes

This *Savigny-Dominode* opens with notes of red fruits (raspberries) and a hint of black fruits and mild spices.

On the palate, it's airy and fine, with raspberry flavors, a hint of black fruit and a hint of well-integrated roasting. The tannins are balanced, fine and tightly woven. Plenty of freshness on the finish.

A fine match for roasted meats or meats in sauce, game, cheeses (Epoisses, Langres, Citeaux, Brillat-Savarin).

Domaine Chanson, Savigny-Dominode Premier Cru 2017

Red wine, Burgundy

Price: \$63.25

Sugar: 2.1 g/l

Alcohol content: 13.5%

SAQ Code: 15172825

<https://www.saq.com/fr/15172825>



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Domaine Chanson, Pernand-Vergelesses Premier Cru, Les Vergelesses Red wine, 2020, Burgundy

South of the Corton hill, **Chanson** owns 5.4 hectares in *Les Vergelesses*, the most famous *Premier Cru* that actually gave its name to the village of Pernand.

Tasting notes

Definitely my favorite! Dense and concentrated on the nose, it reveals notes of blackberry, blackcurrant and very ripe raspberry.

On the palate, it's dense and beautifully concentrated, with abundant fruit flavors that open out into spectacular amplitude. Layers of aromas that unfold throughout the tasting testify to a brilliant iron-fist-in-a-velvet complexity. Get your hands on a few bottles!

You'll make a fine pairing with grilled entrecôte, red meats and game.

The dish paired with this wine was quail egg meurettes.

Domaine Chanson, Pernand-Vergelesses Premier Cru, Les Vergelesses Red wine, 2020, Burgundy,

Price: \$78.00/btl, available as a private import (case of 6 btles).

Red wines – available by private import
(depending on quantities).

You can reach **Authentic Vins & Spiritueux** to place your private import order by contacting them at 1 514 356-5222 or by e-mail at contact.qc@awsm.ca.



Domaine Chanson, Savigny-Lès-Beaune Red wine, 2020, Burgundy

This *Savigny-Lès-Beaune* comes from the commune of Savigny-les-Beaune, in a privileged mid-slope location at the entrance to the Savigny valley, at the foot of the Jarons hillside. This north-east-facing vineyard takes its name from the Latin *Dominus*, as it belonged to the *Seigneur de Savigny*.

Tasting notes

Concentrated on the nose, with notes of ripe red fruit, a hint of black fruit and a touch of graphite and floral notes.

Velvety, dense and concentrated, it shows an airy side that I really like! It's lacy and graceful, supported by fine, balanced tannins. Some black fruit notes and a hint of graphite. A great success!

A great match for roasted meats, game and meat in sauce.

The dish paired with this wine was roast celeriac steak, grilled lion's mane, root vegetables and veg jus.

Domaine Chanson, Savigny-Lès-Beaune

Premier Cru, La Dominode

Red wine, 2020, Burgundy

Price: \$80.00/btle, available as a private import (case of 6 btles).

Red wines – available by private import

(depending on quantities).

You can reach **Authentic Vins & Spiritueux** to place your private import order by contacting them at 1 514 356-5222 or by e-mail at contact.qc@awsm.ca.



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Domaine Chanson, Beaune Premier Cru, Clos des Marconnets Red wine, Burgundy

The *Marconnets* are located at the top of the hill at the northern tip of the Beaune territory. This climate takes its name from the Germanic tribe of Marcomans, who settled here in the 3rd century AD. A perennial fountain gushes out in the middle of the village. Chanson owns approximately 4 hectares, or 40% of the climat.

Tasting notes

Power, generosity and a certain sweetness! My other favorite wine of this tasting. The nose reveals aromas of lightly jammy red fruits, a hint of black fruits and a few floral notes.

This complex, full-bodied wine shows great amplitude on the palate, with black fruit flavors, a hint of graphite and lightly toasted roasting notes. The tannins are particularly robust and tightly woven. Enjoyable length.

Pair well with grilled or roasted red meats (baked beef tenderloin, tournedos Rossini), game.

This wine was a perfect match for a layer of duck confit, potato pavé with red wine, mustard leaf salad and meat jus.

Domaine Chanson, Beaune Premier Cru, Clos des Marconnets Red wine, 2020, Burgundy

Price: \$118.50/btle, available as a private import (case of 6 btles).

Red wines – available by private import
(depending on quantities).

You can reach **Authentic Vins & Spiritueux** to place your private import order by contacting them at 1 514 356-5222 or by e-mail at contact.qc@awsm.ca.



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Domaine Chanson, Pouilly Fuissé White wine, 2022, Burgundy

This *Pouilly Fuissé* comes from the Mâconnais appellation in southern Burgundy. The production area covers the communes of Fuissé, Solutré-Pouilly, Vergisson and Chaintré.

For all white wines: after gentle pressing, the wines are aged in oak barrels (demi-muids) for 12 to 14 months, with a moderate proportion of new wood.

Tasting notes

On the nose, this *Pouilly Fuissé* reveals aromas of pear, a hint of milk, citrus, yeast and vanilla.

The palate is rich and slightly unctuous, with ripe peach flavors contrasting with a beautiful sensation of minerality and fairly present acidity. Beautiful amplitude and impeccable generosity.

A perfect match for fish, charcuterie (parsley ham), white meats and certain goat cheeses.

The dish paired with this wine was clams in chicken sauce, salicornia salad, celery, tarragon, olive oil and lemon.

Domaine Chanson, Pouilly Fuissé

White wine, 2022, Burgundy

Price: \$79.00 / btl, available as a private import (case of 6 btles).

White wines – available by private import

(depending on quantities)

You can reach **Authentic Vins & Spiritueux** to place your private import order by contacting them at 1 514 356-5222 or by e-mail at contact.qc@awsm.ca.



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Domaine Chanson, Chablis *Premier Cru*, Montmains White wine, 2022

This *Chablis Premier Cru Montmains* is located south of the commune of Chablis. Two particularly well-exposed hillside plots have been selected for this *Premier Cru*, one of the most famous in Chablis.

Tasting notes

Slightly less expressive than its predecessor, the nose reveals notes of citrus and pure, fresh white fruit.

On the palate, the crystalline, straightforward character of wines from this appellation combines with a superb, slightly oily texture and acidity to create a wine of astonishing complexity. A beautiful sensation of minerality that culminates on the finish with notes of citrus and white fruit.

A perfect match for *pâté chaud*, scallops, turbot, *poularde à la crème* and certain goat's cheeses.

The dish paired with this wine was grilled shrimp, tiger lick and green papaya salad.

Domaine Chanson, Chablis Premier Cru Montmains, White wine, 2022

Price: \$77.25/btle, available as a private import (case of 6 btles).

White wines – available by private import (depending on quantities)

You can reach **Authentic Vins & Spiritueux** to place your private import order by contacting them at 1 514 356-5222 or by e-mail at contact.qc@awsm.ca.



Domaine Chanson, Chassagne Montrachet White wine, 2022, Burgundy

This *Chassagne Montrachet* is made from three parcels selected from Chassagne Montrachet winemakers, located in the heart of the Village, on the edge of the *Premiers Crus* and ideally facing South, South-East.

Tasting notes

This *Chassagne Montrachet* exudes aromas of apples, fresh citrus, white fruits and floral notes.

On the palate, the flavors perceived on the nose are sustained and underlined by lovely, well-integrated woody notes. Beautiful amplitude and a complex finish with a sensation of delightful minerality.

A fine match for *foie gras*, grilled fish, white meats and certain cheeses (Epoisses, Roquefort and Munster).

The dish paired with this wine was brillat-savarin, gingerbread crumble, served on gingerbread, apple purée.

Domaine Chanson, Chassagne Montrachet White wine, 2022, Burgundy,

Price: \$119.00 / btl, available as a private import (case of 6 btles).

White wines – available by private import (depending on quantities)

You can reach **Authentic Vins & Spiritueux** to place your private import order by contacting them at 1 514 356-5222 or by e-mail at contact.qc@awsm.ca.



Buon gusto

By CLAUDE LALONDE

Vintages - according to Domaine Chanson data sheets

2017 – After a classic winter, spring set in with a bang, with very high temperatures. A cold snap at the beginning of April slowed the vines' progress, and May proved rainy. Summer was hot and punctuated by heat waves. A few thunderstorms at the end of August brought rain that was beneficial to the vines, which were thus able to continue their ripening. Harvesting began on September 6th in excellent conditions, with the grapes in impeccable health.

2018 – After a very rainy winter and March, spring set in for good in April, with the first warm spell. The mild weather in May and early June then favored dazzling vine growth. Summer was hot and marked by several heatwaves, leading to drought conditions. As a result, harvesting began early, on August 28th. Harvesting took place in glorious sunshine.

2022 – After a winter marked by fluctuating temperatures between January and February, spring got off to a gentle start. Cool and hot weather followed in April and May, with a significant rainfall deficit that could not be offset by the storms of June. The summer was marked by several long heatwaves, and the arrival of thunderstorms at the end of August had a very beneficial effect before the start of the harvest. At **Chanson**, harvesting began on August 30th and ended on September 13th. The 2022 vintage was very generous in terms of volume, and the quality was equally impressive, with well-balanced, precise and fresh white wines.

Claude Lalonde - bio

Sommelier by trade, for me wine is a matter of passion and pleasure. Visit my *Vinformateur* page on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/vinformateur/> for your dose of humor daily wine suggestions.

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

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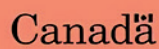
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BRYSTON BP-19 ANALOG PREAMPLIFIER



In which **CAMP**, do you place yourself?

By GEORGE DE SA

In March of 2023, **Bryston** launched its latest product...their *BP-19* preamplifier. Over the past weeks have had some intimate time with it but before I *kiss and tell*, let me provide some context. Purity in music playback is an ideal that some music enthusiasts value but most audiophiles strive for. Such goals for purity tend to fall into two main camps: on one side is the absolute sound – audio playback manifested in a manner that is virtually indistinguishable from the live unamplified experience; while, on the other side is absolute fidelity in playback of music

recordings with nothing added and nothing taken away. Of course, given these are absolutes, they are in practical terms impossible to achieve, yet that doesn't stop the passionate from pursuing. **Bryston Limited (Bryston)** is a Canadian audio product manufacturer with a long heritage in professional audio. **Bryston** has built a reputation of producing audio products that fall into the second camp, that of seeking to deliver solutions that offer the highest possible fidelity to the source recording, as possible.

Bryston, with the new *BP-19*, is focused on taking yet another step closer to absolute fidelity. Though the *BP-19* is a new preamplifier product, it isn't a whole new concept, rather it is born out of the company's own highly successful and acclaimed *BR-20* preamplifier (launched in 2020). Where the *BR-20* is a Swiss Army knife of a preamplifier, with a digital streamer and DAC, the *BP-19* eschews digital functionality – remaining 100% focused on handling the analog music signal.

The new *BP-19* joins the *BR-20* in **Bryston's** line-up of two-channel stereo preamplifiers, and effectively replaces the now discontinued *BP-17³* and the very long-lived *BP-26* preamplifier models. Over the years, I've owned a **Bryston** *BP-6* preamplifier that was replaced by a *BP-26* before I moved to a *BP-17³* that preceded my current reference preamplifier, the *BR-20*. The *BP-19* is the fifth **Bryston** preamplifier I've had a chance to evaluate. My hope was the *BP-19* would help me to experience something new, if not also to take me closer than ever before towards the unachievable – absolute fidelity.

Product Description & Technical Specifications

The *BP-19* is utilitarian in form much like **Bryston's** other product offerings. Bryston produces products that are neat and tidy in appearance and the *BP-19* has an unmistakable family resemblance. The face of the *BP-19* has a half dozen of buttons,

which makes its face much less busy than the *BR-20* with three times the buttons. In addition, the *BP-19* sports **Bryston's** all-new faceplate finishes, introduced in March 2023. These new faceplates come in five standard choices: Champagne, Silver, Gun Metal Grey, Black and White; replacing the former traditional black and silver micro-bead blasted anodized finishes. With these new finishes there come new benefits: in-house daily production; consistent batch-to-batch colour matching, anti-fade, improved scuff & scratch resistance and, more environmentally friendly. There is also now an option to order custom colours, for **NO FEE**. The *BP-19* review sample was faced in the new Silver finish. As my own *BR-20* is in the traditional anodized silver, I was able to compare the *BP-19* with it side-by-side. The new silver has a whiter hue with less sheen, yet it's the feel of the finishes that differ most. The new finish is more textured and rougher under the fingertip, similar to unfinished concrete, while the traditional anodized finish has an ultra-smooth, satin-like feel. In addition, the **Bryston** logo on the faceplate of the *BP-19* is now silk-screened on, in a pencil line format, with the traditional deep engraved company logo now gone the wayside. I find the new finish simple and attractive; however, I'm partial to their traditional but now defunct anodized finish with engraved, which to me offered an extra level of panache. The *BP-19* weighs in at just 12-pounds, yet the casework feels solid. The faceplate remains as a ¼" thick aluminum plate,

available in 17" or 19" widths (as well as a *Pro 19* rackmount). The five previously mentioned colours are standard, but **Bryston** also offers optional custom colours at **NO FEE**.

The faceplate hosts a **Bryston** well sized volume control knob, as well as a ¼" headphone jack, black & white *OLED* display and, 10 direct control selection buttons for inputs, R/L balance, mute and power. The operation *LED's* can be switched from green to blue using control menu that can be quickly accessed with just a push of the volume knob. Like its older *BR-20* sibling, the *BP-19* incorporates **Bryston's** most powerful onboard, *Low Z*, headphone amplifier.

Moving to the back of the *BP-19*, we find a plethora of analog audio connections: 2 pairs of balanced (*XLR*) inputs and 2 pairs of balanced (*XLR*) outputs (preamp and fixed); 4 pairs of un-balanced (*RCA*) inputs and 2 pairs of un-balanced (*RCA*) outputs (preamp and fixed). In addition, there is an *IEC* power inlet, 1 *Ethernet* control port, 1 *USB* control port, 1 *RS232* jack, 2 trigger-in and 1 trigger-out jack. A ground connection is also on the back, for use with the optional (*MM* and *MC*) phono-stage that was absent from the review sample. A full function, black metal jacket *IR* remote is also included.

Internally, the **Bryston** *BR-19* is a fully analog preamplifier, its analog section identical to that of the *BR-20*. The *BR-19's* power supply uses the same oversized toroidal transformer and filter capacitance as the *BR-20*. The toroid has two windings, one



BRYSTON BP-19 ANALOG PREAMPLIFIER



being dedicated to the control circuitry. As is the case in the *BR-20*, the *BR-19* employs tightly matched components and compact circuit design that is aided by surface mount construction, which achieves the lowest noise and common mode rejection. The *BR-19*'s advanced volume control chipset allows for optimal execution of its fully balanced signal path.

The *BR-19* has vanishingly low distortion with a rated *THD + Noise* of just 0.0006% from 20 Hz – 20 KHz, and an *IMD* of < 0.0003%. The rated signal-to-noise is -110 dB; however, **Bryston** says this is a conservative figure and that the *BR-19* has a noise floor that is a couple dB lower than their *BR-20*. Power consumption is 0.5 W (standby) and 12 W (idle/in-play), with a maximum output voltage of 12V (*XLR/RCA*), making it very versatile in pairing with amplifiers.

Setup

For evaluation, I set the *BR-19* atop my **Quadraspire SV3T** rack and hooked it up to my own **Bryston 7B³** amplifiers. Listening was done using my **Dynaudio C2 Signature** loudspeakers; **Focal Electra 1008 Be** standmount loudspeakers and my **Grado 325e** headphones. I was intent on getting a good sense of the **Bryston BR-19** in its own right, as well as evaluating its relative performance to its sibling, my own *BR-20*, also a fully balanced analog preamplifier from input to output but incorporating a digital section (*DAC/streamer*). For back-to-back comparisons, I used

« Dès que la voix de **Guy Garvey** s'est fait entendre, il était évident que non seulement le *BP-19* était capable de présenter de la netteté et des détails fins, mais il était également un communicateur efficace de l'émotion que le lyrisme de **Garvey** transmettait. Les subtilités et les intonations dans le phrasé de **Guy** étaient presque trop faciles à entendre, y compris les textures de la voix humaine. »

three sources: 1. **Rega Apollo** CD player as digital source via unbalanced *RCA*; 2. **VPI Scout** with **Dynavector 10x5** and **Gold Note PH-10/PSU-10** via balanced *XLR*; and 3. *BR-20* as streamer & *DAC* (at unity gain) via balanced *XLR*, streaming from **Tidal HiFi** and **Qobuz**.

Listening Sessions

I began listening to the *BR-19* with the *BR-20* as the digital source. First up was one of my old favourite reference tracks, *Lippy Kids* by the band **Elbow**. This track opens with a repeating keyboard key, which through the *BR-19* was very clean sounding yet revealed the glow I noted. The background hum of the synth was distinct. Tight and tuneful bass notes ensued, the snap and body of the string sounding honest to the instrument. From the instant **Guy Garvey**'s vocals began, it was evident that not only was the *BR-19* able to present focus and fine details but it also was an effective communicator of the emotion that **Garvey**'s lyricism conveyed.

The subtleties and intonations in **Guy**'s phrasing were almost too easy to hear, including the textures in the human voice. The *BR-19* produced a generous soundstage, framed by the background vocals that spanned across the back wall from one side to the other, drifting off into the corners. Though tonally, the *BR-19* seemed truthful and neutral, I did get just a hint of coolness in the presentation; however, I attribute this not to a deviation from linearity but rather the outcome of the *BR-19*'s superb focus, grip and precision in the handling of the audio signal. Images were very well defined in space, distinct from the background, with nothing less than clarity in imaging. Putting on the track *Against The Wind* by the artist, **Victory Boyd**, I was shocked with the tightness of the opening kick drum hits despite their hefty wallop. There was tremendous tautness in strikes, each thud relaying the tension of the drumskin. Her voice was high in the soundstage, as if sung from a raised pedestal, coming

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BRYSTON BP-19 ANALOG PREAMPLIFIER

from a place higher than the instrumentation. **Victory's** voice was lucidly conveyed, her wispy sonorous yet strong vocal character exposed; clean, crisp, and pure. The massed background vocals came across with a gentle quality, the individual voices clearly distinguishable both audibly and in space, across the soundstage. The soundstage laid out by the choral elements stretched wide, and at the left and right edges seemed to begin to wrap around me, placing me amid the imagery. Listening to this same track with my own **Bryston BR-20** conveyed additional top-to-bottom warmth; the mids slightly fuller, yet the treble somewhat less airy and open with the vocals, than the **BR-19**. The drum dynamics seemed blunter with the **BR-20**, slightly less tension... as if relaxing the grip on the notes. Through the **BR-20**, the guitar body seemed more evident, while the strings were less forward in their attack, less sharp. The slightly fuller midrange of the **BR-20** did produce a more lifelike presence to voices, making them more corporeal, yet there was less delineated in the voices of the choir than the **BR-19**.

I wanted to ensure that the difference I was hearing between the **BR-19** and **BR-20** were not the result of the **BR-20** acting as a source. So, next, I used my **Rega Apollo CDP** as a common analog source to both the **BR-19** and **BR-20**, in turn, connected via a set of **RCA** interconnects from **ADL** by **Furutech**. Using my dB meter, I found that the **BR-19** and **BR-20** produced the dB output when set to the same volume setting. I put on **Chris Botti's To Love Again CD** album, and the track *What Are You Doing with the Rest of Your Life?* The **BR-19** was stunningly tight and defined with the bass notes, sounding slightly tighter and quicker than my **BR-20**, when compared back-to-back. Bass notes through the **BR-19** were also more contained, the edges of images more apparent with a slightly smaller image size. The bell chimes on this track were very fine and delicately produced, having a crystalline quality via the **BR-19**, while in comparison the **BR-20** presented the bell chimes with slightly more warmth having a somewhat burnished and brassy quality. The trumpet notes via the **BR-19** were exacting, having a chiselled quality with a quick decay on the notes. In comparison, the **BR-20** portrayed **Botti's** trumpet with a little additional bloom, glow and with a somewhat larger size. I would attribute much of this difference in sonic presentation to the **BR-19's** propensity for focus and exactness... it seemed as though the **BR-19** had greater control over the elements, more grip on the notes, and a more exacting image placement. This impression carried over to the strings, which through the **BR-19** had superb focus and definition.

Moving to the vinyl source, I put on my copy of *Morning Phase* by **Beck**. The first track was *Heart Is A Drum*. Through the **Bryston BR-19** preamplifier, the sound was warm and rich with full bass notes. The guitar notes were very detailed, the string detail most apparent, while sounding very natural, while

the rattle of the guitar's fret made a surreal impression. **Beck's** vocals were portrayed across the soundstage with buoyancy, clearly demonstrating height, along with having definition and separation within the wraparound soundstage. The layering of elements within the soundstage was excellent; guitars left and right forefront, while bass guitar notes remained centred with a sustain that was resounding and nebulous. In comparison to the **BR-20**, the **BR-19** delivered consonants in a more incisive manner, with sibilants slightly more evident. The fabric of the soundstage, delivered with the **BR-19** was not black but rather, invisible, especially noticeable when compared to the **BR-20** with its velvet black soundstage quality. I can only presume this is the result of the vanishingly low noise of the **BR-19** but also its proficiency with image delineation. The soundstages produced by the **BR-19** were large; however, the **BR-20** did consistently deliver even larger soundstages with larger images and a softer edge to the elements within the soundstage. I spent some time listening to **Peter Gabriel's** track *Mercy Street* from his *Shaking the Tree* album, via the headphone output of the **Bryston BR-19**, using my **Grado 325e** headphones. **Gabriel's** voice sounded was very distinct but also forward. The trailing backing vocals that shadowed **Peter's** own voice, was noticeably lower in tone. Listening to the bassline, there texture and spring of the strings demonstrated speed, definition, and rhythm. In comparison, via the **BR-20's** headphone output provided a somewhat warmer presentation **BR-19**— fuller, thicker, more rounded notes, chimes possessing a more brassy and less sharp nature, with a tangible sense of the space versus the more invisible background presented with the **BR-19**.

Final Thoughts

As I mentioned in my introduction, absolute fidelity to the source recording, is unachievable; however, after spending many hours of critical listening to the **BR-19**, I can confidently say that it is the most transparent preamplifier I've had chance to review. This is a preamplifier that truly stands out of the way of the music signal, revealing minute details in a well ordered and pristine manner. The **BR-19** delivers without concealment nor embellishment of the music signal. Its strengths are linearity, the absence of noise and distortion, as well as unwavering precision. When the recording and source chain are up to it, the **Bryston BR-19** can also bring you close to the absolute sound. If you value the truth, then the **Bryston BR-19** may just set you free.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$5,795 CAD, \$5,795 US

Warranty: 20 years, parts and labour

Manufacturer / Distributor: Bryston Ltd., T.: 1 800.632.8217 or 705.742.5323, <https://bryston.com/>

Blues

By PIERRE JOBIN



JACK DE KEYZER

Solo

Blue Star, CD 2513

During the pandemic, what better way for a seasoned blues guitarist and singer to keep in shape and in good spirits than to immerse himself in the interpretation and recording of roots blues, mainly in the acoustic and traditional style, in order to live out his deepest emotions and feelings, and evacuate them, even sublimate them through music? This is the solution and the medicine that **Jack de Keyzer** has found, killing two birds with one stone: preserving his dynamic balance and producing an authentic, high-quality album! Among the artists chosen are Reverend **Robert Wilkins**, **J.B. Lenoir**, **Robert Johnson**, **Slim Harpo**, **Eddie Taylor**, and even more modern surprises, **Jimmy Page (Led Zeppelin)** and **Steve Winwood**. Recorded at his home studio, *Solo* is his 13th album, and the adverse circumstances that led to the making of this anthology allow us to appreciate **de Keyzer** in other facets and lights of his vast experience and incredible talent. With the exception of a tenor sax and conga overdubbed on **J.B. Lenoir's** *Feeling Good* by

Richard Thornton, the master craftsman plays all the additional instruments, including harmonica on rack, maracas on guitar case, drum on guitar case and **Fender Jazz Bass**. Two **Junos** and a **Maple Blues Lifetime Achievement Award** in 2001, this figurehead of Canadian blues is a household name. What's more, over the course of his career, he's worked with a host of big names, from **Bo Diddley** to Canada's **King Biscuit Boy (Richard Newell)**, **Etta James**, **Otis Rush**, **John Hammond Jr.** and many more! **Jack de Keyzer** is an exceptional singer, expressing soul with a rare intensity that will move you on this album. He's also a fabulous musician and guitarist, both acoustic and electric, which is obvious on this 4.5 out of 5 star opus, as far as I'm concerned! A certain **Robert Zimmerman** a.k.a. **Bob Dylan** once said of him: *If Jack de Keyzer came from New York, Chicago or Los Angeles, he'd be famous.* And **Jeff Healy** had this to say about him: *The best blues player in Canada.* I very much hope that *Solo* will be brought to the stage. I think the show and the resulting performances would be worth touring the world and would make people feel good. By the way, these days, you don't have to be born in New York, Chicago or Los Angeles to be *famous*.

Blues

By PIERRE JOBIN



MIKE GOUDREAU BAND

Just Wanna Have Fun
Autoproduction, PMG-CD-22

Just Wanna Have Fun is the 23rd album by the prolific **Mike Goudreau**. It features twelve of his original pieces, and was co-produced and recorded with his long-time friend **Dany Roy**, the brilliant saxophonist and arranger who also plays trumpet and flute on this opus. This polished, jazzy production features excellent musicians from the Montreal jazz scene, including **Richard Irwin** on drums, **Normand Lachapelle** on bass, **Paul Schrofel** on keyboards and **Frank Young** on gypsy jazz guitar, on *Country Cabin Hideway*. The care taken in selecting, assembling and producing the tracks is a clear indication of the **Goudreau-Roy** tandem's quest for optimum coherence and diversity. Special guest on two tracks, harmonica player **Guy Bélanger** imbues his melodic, dynamic style with his characteristic energy and fluidity. He doesn't go unnoticed, especially on the medium tempo shuffle *Come Back Home*, on which he excels in his usual catchy style! As is often the case, this new offering from **Mike Goudreau** is a successful, integrated amalgam of Swing Jazz, Jump Blues, Chicago Blues, Motown,

Gypsy Jazz, Funk and Rock, all in the personal style and refined taste of the experienced guitarist and singer from the Quebec's Eastern Townships. Perhaps this is what we call talent, passion, experience and sharing? Not for nothing is his world-class music heard on dozens of Hollywood and American TV productions, including the films *The Banker* (with **Samuel Jackson**, 2020) and *Dark Waters* (**Mark Ruffalo**, 2019), the TV show *Dynasty* (CBS, 2020) and the Christmas TV movie, *The Happiest Season* (Hulu, 2020). Of Quebecois origin on his father's side and American on his mother's, this aficionado of the stage has managed to immerse and integrate both cultures intimately and beautifully, making him perhaps the most American of our Quebecois blues performers. Thanks to his skills, perseverance and perceptiveness, he's been able to make the most of his strategic advantage and make a better living from his contribution to the musical world in all its aspects, from creation to live performance. *Just Wanna Have Fun* is a title that defines and represents **Mike Goudreau** and his hand-picked band's relaxed, playful approach to music! Enjoy!

Blues

By PIERRE JOBIN



RICK VITO Cadillac Man

Blue Heart Records, BHR-62

Rick Vito, born in 1949, had, I must say, escaped my attention, like an invisible man who has nevertheless played on over a hundred records, including a dozen releases, *CDs* and *DVDs* under his own signature. When I listened to him blind, I was seduced by his slide guitar playing! His sound and know-how made me open my ears and all my senses, wide! This guitarist and singer went to the right school, learning slide guitar from **Elmore James** and **Robert Nighthawk**, not to mention **B.B. King**, **Les Paul** and many others. By the 1970s, he had played on albums by such diverse artists as **Todd Rundgren**, **Bobby Whitlock**, **John Mayall**, **John Prine**, **Roger McGuinn**, **Steve Goodman** and **Maria Muldaur**. His contributions have since multiplied, including **Bob Seger**, **Bonnie Raitt**, **Albert Collins**, **Jackson Browne**, **Little Richard**, **Roy Orbison**, **John Fogerty**, and the list goes on... From 1987 to 1991, he was a member of the legendary band **Fleetwood Mac**. Nominated

for a **Grammy** in 2010 in the *Best Traditional Blues* category, as both artist and producer, he also won a **W.C. Handy Award** in 2001 for his song *It's Two A.M.*, then performed by the warm **Shemekia Copeland**, the daughter of **Texas Twister**. Returning to his *Cadillac Man* album, on which, incidentally, he enlists the help of Canadian harmonica player **Steve Marriner** on the upbeat, danceable *Little Sheba*, it sounds like a comfortable ride in a **Cadillac**, cruising through different blues styles and the vagaries of the road! I'd like to mention two tracks from this enchanting roots musical odyssey! First, *Crying At Midnight* is a slow blues with a solemn style, soaring guitar tones and expressive vocals. The result is an intense, atmospheric blues! *Sliding In The Blue*, which closes the album, is a slow, slide-instrumental blues that showcases all the finesse and subtlety of a musician with refined taste and enhanced experience. With the release of *Cadillac Blues*, **Rick Vito** proves once again that he is a high-caliber artist to be discovered or revisited, as the case may be. *Cadillac Man*, if you like creative blues that draws on the roots of the genre! Enjoy the ride!

Progressive Rock

By RICHARD GUAY



OVERWORLD DREAMS

Geography

<https://overworlddreams.bandcamp.com/album/geography>

Overworld Dreams is a young American band based in New Jersey and composed of **Ken Walker** (keyboards, vocals), **Chris Parsons** (bass), **Randy Sandmann** (guitars), **Matt Maugeri** (guitars, vocals) and **Liz Holder** (vocals, keyboards) who are the founding members. **Paul Higginbotham** (guitars) will join them a little later. The group offers us its third studio album, *Geography*, which follows *Voyage* (2018) and *Gateway* (2019). **Overworld Dreams** was born just before the pandemic and unfortunately went under the radar of many prog rock fans. *Voyage*, very friendly, already displays a certain desire to produce sophisticated progressive music. *Gateway*, for its part, flirts extensively with British progressive rock from the golden years and symphonic rock. The last piece is also orchestral in design, which gives us clear

46 tedpublications.com/fr/en March-April 2024

indications about the rest and the desire of these young musicians to want to offer exceptional progressive rock. It therefore took five years of work to produce a third opus which confirms in every way what we expected. *Geography* is presented in the form of two long epic sequels. The title track, which stretches over 26 minutes, is divided into eight parts. *Forces of Nature*, for its part, is structured into three chapters which follow one another throughout its 23 minutes. An album that can be described as ambitious as it is rare these days for progressive groups to venture into this type of courageous exercise. **Overworld Dreams** presents an elaborate, multi-directional and multi-faceted style. The work is also very melodic, which makes it accessible to everyone. The *Geography* suite is grandiose, despite its length. The eight parts follow one another brilliantly, starting slowly and finally giving way to a feverish rise in power of the synthesizers. Drawing on multiple changes in tempo and mood,

the alternating vocals of **Liz Holder** and **Matt Maugeri** add undeniable interest to the composition. The interactions between guitars and keyboards forge increasingly sophisticated melodies. *Forces of Nature*, the next track, has three parts as well as a majestic electronic piano intro spiced with choirs. The music will quickly gain intensity and complexity. Even if the basic elements of progressive rock are retained, it is rather the more accentuated elements of symphonic rock that take over. It's difficult to transcribe all the musical richness of *Geography*, an album which rushes in all directions at once and which contains enough textures and musical elements to lead us to heights of emotion. Although personally I find the first two records more fun, we have to admit that *Geography* is the most evolved, the most cerebral and the most complete album of these newcomers even if the efforts required to get to grips with it are more important.

Progressive Rock

By RICHARD GUAY



ELLESMERE

Stranger Skies

<https://ellesmere-ams.bandcamp.com/album/stranger-skies>

Ellesmere is an island located in the Arctic Ocean. It is also the project of **Roberto Vitelli** (bass, guitar). After a short stint with the group **Taproban** in the mid-2010s, this Italian multi-instrumentalist devoted himself to building a new group strongly inspired by those of the 1970s. *Stranger Skies*, his fourth opus, follows *Les Châteaux de la Loire* (2015), *From Sea and Beyond* (2018) and *Wyrd* (2020). As is usual, **Vitelli** has brought together a solid team of collaborators for this new adventure. We find, of course, the regular members of the group, namely **Giacomo Anselmi** (guitars), **Mattias Olsson** (drums, percussion) and **John Wilkinson** (vocals). Added to these are around ten big names including **Tomas Bodin** (keyboards), **Clive Nolan** (keyboards), **John Hackett** (flute), **Stefano Vicarelli** (mellotron, mini Moog) and **David Jackson** (saxophone, wind instruments), to name just a few and who appear on different pieces of the album. Like

the last two opuses, **Vitelli** again attempts, on *Stranger Skies*, to impose a complex symphonic progressive rock strongly related to the music of **Genesis**, **Collins** period. The singing in English reinforces this orientation and contributes to excluding this Italian album from the *IPR* genre. The result is very effective and does not lack audacity with muscular pieces, soaring atmospheres, twisted arrangements and catchy melodies. **Vitelli** therefore offers us very energetic music but without ever falling into brutality. The last two extracts, *Stranger Skies* and *Another World*, seem to come straight out of **Genesis** albums from the 1980s with stretched keyboard scores and an infernal rhythm. **Wilkinson**'s voice sounds very similar to that of **Phil Collins**. *Stranger Skies* is therefore a superb album of modern symphonic progressive rock, of incredible richness and which is immersed in surreal and completely delirious musical universes.

HEGEL VIKING REFERENCE CD PLAYER AND H600 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

A Duo of Virtuoso Serving Music

By JEAN-DENIS DOYLE

Here are two products manufactured by **Hegel**, a brand that is gaining more and more popularity in Quebec. Like the Vikings, they came from Norway and crossed the Atlantic to reach us, much to our delight. These are the **Hegel Viking CD** player, a high-end device dedicated exclusively to playing your favorite compact discs and for this review, it is accompanied by the **Hegel H600** integrated amplifier. This monumental integrated amplifier is ultra-complete and presents itself as the ultimate *all-in-one* amplifier. Indeed, it is a powerful integrated amplifier equipped with everything necessary for network playback and digital source management. In short, it promises a lot, as together, the two devices should demonstrate a beautiful synergy and an extremely enticing sound. So, without further ado, let's explore this ambitious **Hegel** device tandem together.



Hegel is an electronics manufacturer that offers a fairly complete range of products. Hegel offers power amplifiers, integrated amplifiers, preamplifiers, as well as a CD player in its catalog. The company's philosophy is to offer high-quality devices, using advanced technologies, presented in a simple and sober manner. Hegel was founded in 1988 by **Bent Holter**, a student at the **Technical University of Trondheim**. For his thesis topic, he decided to study the behavior of transistors in an electronic circuit. The main goal was to better understand why they tend to add distortion to amplified signals. As **Bent Holter** was a musician in a rock band, he decided to venture into manufacturing his own amplifiers for sound reinforcement at his band's shows. Thus, **Hegel** was born, and since the band was called **The Hegel Band**, the company's name was already obvious. Of course, embarking on the development of electronic products requires funds. **Bent Holter** found the necessary support from a local telecommunications company called Telenor. This enabled him to develop his famous *SoundEngine* circuit and several other advanced technologies that are now the hallmark of **Hegel**. Since then, **Hegel's** sales have continued to grow, and the company exports its products worldwide. Hegel products are designed in Norway

and assembled in Asia. Despite any reservations that this method might raise, Hegel's reputation for reliability endures. Now let's take a closer look at the two devices that **Hegel** has submitted to us for this review.

The Hegel Viking CD Player

This is a rare example that is gradually disappearing, a true CD player. It does nothing else but play CDs in the *Red Book* standard, in the best possible way. At **Hegel**, the team believes that the CD is still the best available source of music in digital format. For those who have a fine collection of CDs, investing in a quality player like the **Hegel Viking** is truly worthwhile. Since it belongs to the manufacturer's *Reference Series*, **Hegel** has spared no expense. Starting with the device's power supply, which is equipped with two toroidal transformers. These would probably be large enough to power a small integrated amplifier. They allow for the separation of power supplies for digital circuits from those for analog outputs. For a CD player, the quantity of filtering capacitors is impressive. These ensure excellent regulation and isolation of circuits. The mechanism is of the trayless insertion type, and its implementation has been greatly optimized by **Hegel's** engineers. The conversion circuit is entrusted to an **AKM 4493SEQ** chip. This chip, renowned for its audio quality in the professional

field, has been carefully implemented by Hegel. Thanks to a discrete clock circuit and **Hegel's SoundEngine** circuit, the performance in terms of time jitter reaches the theoretical limits of the **AKM** chip. The analog circuits use a combination of discrete components and high-quality operational amplifiers. It is a true balanced circuit, so it is advantageous to use the device's *XLR* outputs. A pair of *RCA* connectors is also present. On the front panel, two large multifunction buttons group the essential controls of the device. An *OLED* display was chosen for its low noise level. The device's housing is very substantial due to the thickness of its aluminum plates and rests on three feet to isolate it from vibrations. The **Hegel Viking CD** player comes with a very nice all-metal remote control.

The Hegel H600 Integrated Amplifier

This integrated amplifier is a monumental 22-kilogram machine. It ranks among the largest and most powerful devices of its kind available on the market. It is a device equipped with a preamplification stage, a network player, a digital-to-analog converter, and a power amplifier. It is therefore quite complete, lacking only a phono stage to accommodate a turntable. The preamplification stage has four inputs, two *XLR* and two *RCA*. Each of these inputs is configurable and can thus become a volume-control-free input, to facilitate integration of the **Hegel H600**

HEGEL VIKING REFERENCE CD PLAYER AND H600 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



into a home cinema system. The preamplification stage allows volume adjustment using a ladder controller associated with an endless wheel. The volume displayed on the front screen is perfectly stepped and very progressive. The precision of the adjustment at low volume is impeccable. The **Hegel H600** is equipped with a section that provides network playback and adheres to the *UPNP* format. This section is located on the same card as the digital-to-analog converter. This converter has several inputs: one *USB*, three optical, one coaxial in *BNC*, and another coaxial in *RCA*. This device has an interesting and rather rare feature. Indeed, it is equipped with a loop dedicated to digital signals. This allows the signal from the network player to be rerouted to an external digital-to-analog converter and return to analog in the *H600*.

As we will see during listening sessions, the internal converter of the device is of very good quality. It is based on a very advanced **EES Sabre ES9038Q2M** chip. The power amplification stage of the **Hegel H600** is absolutely colossal and occupies most of the space inside the device. This amplifier is powered by a large 800 VA transformer and two other much smaller ones, which power the other sections of the device. A bank of twelve 8,200 microfarad capacitors ensures excellent current

reserve. This power supply is symmetrically distributed, exactly as if the device were composed of two mono blocks. This power supply allows the **Hegel H600** to deliver an impressive power of 303 W per channel into 8 ohms. Furthermore, the amplifier displays a damping factor of 4,000. A very high and rather unusual value, which combined with the power of the *H600*, should ensure absolute control of the loudspeakers. This power stage is managed by **Hegel's SoundEngine2** circuit. This ensures tracking and distortion reduction, using a topology similar to that of a noise reduction circuit for headphones. *SoundEngine2* allows for listening of great purity, thanks to minimal distortion of the original signals.

First, the Viking CD player

Ah, simplicity reigns! There is nothing simpler than unpacking and connecting a traditional *CD* player and setting it up. Just make sure it is level and installed on a non-vibrating shelf. The **Hegel Viking** player comes with its own metal remote control, which strangely resembles that of the *H600* amplifier. Fortunately, the screen printing is of a slightly different shade, which helps to distinguish them. I suggest using the balanced outputs of the *Viking* player whenever possible to maximize listening quality. The front panel controls

work quite well but have a rather ordinary tactile sensation. **Hegel** could have done better, especially on a device of this quality level.

The Hegel H600 Integrated Amplifier

To my surprise, this large integrated amplifier was surprisingly easy to install. Thanks to its adherence to the *UPNP* protocol, it was immediately visible on my network. I was able to start playing my music on the **Tidal** application, using **Tidal Connect** mode, and that was it. Similarly easy with **Apple AirPlay2** and **Spotify**. Since the device includes **Google Chromecast** function, this adds another way to connect to the *H600* easily. The **Hegel H600** does not have a dedicated application as such, but you can always use a third-party application like *MConnect* if needed. It is worth noting that the **Hegel H600** will soon be **Room Ready**. Also, the *H600* amplifier generates some heat, and it is best to avoid enclosing it inside a cabinet. Like all new European devices, the *H600* amplifier and the **Hegel Viking CD** player are equipped with an automatic switch-off feature, which turns off the device after fifteen minutes if no music signal is present. This function can be disabled in the settings menu of each device.



The Viking CD player

This player immediately displays its colors from the first listening session. It offers a listening experience that I could describe as creamy, even velvety. The music is rendered with a relaxing softness that predisposes to listening. This rich and textured tone is typical of a high-end device that has been carefully developed. With **Francis Cabrel's** album, *Des roses et des orties*, the entire sound reproduction is very impressive, with several sonic qualities that leave no doubt about the quality of this CD player. Indeed, the singer's voice is beautifully expressive, and the various rhythmic sections of the accompanying band have a lot of confidence. The songs are rendered with unshakable solidity, easily prompting foot tapping.

In comparison, the same version of the album available online does not have the same calmness or confidence as the CD version played by the **Hegel Viking** player. This demonstrates that a high-end machine like the *Viking* reminds us that the CD format still has its place.

The music rendition has a sense of fullness and completeness that is difficult to define. As with the album by **John Abercrombie Quartet**, *39 Steps*, which I know by heart, but I rediscover with pleasure thanks to the *Viking* player. Yet, it is the exact same file available on online download sites. But once played by the *Viking CD* player, the reproduction of this album reaches another level. Now, the music has more time to play, allowing each guitar note to flow calmly, always with that velvety tone. The cymbals are beautiful, with a soft and well-crafted sound. Everything is in its place, with clarity and stability.

Moreover, this CD player demonstrates excellent ability to render the dynamics of music. When necessary, it can be explosively musical. Thus, it allows the gaps present in the recordings to express themselves in all their greatness. Truly, this CD

player is simply superb and would certainly benefit from being better known. If you have the chance to listen to it, do not miss it. It could make you rediscover your CD collection and pleasantly surprise you.

The Hegel H600 Integrated Amplifier

Accuracy, neutrality, and power. These are the three initial qualifiers that struck me from the beginning of my listening sessions. The **Hegel H600** has a tone of great accuracy, neither too warm nor too cold. The device has a good level of definition that allows it to delve deeply into recordings, but without falling into the trap of overly analytical sound. It is evident that the sound of this device has been carefully balanced and

« Moreover, this CD player demonstrates excellent ability to render the dynamics of music. When necessary, it can be explosively musical. Thus, it allows the gaps present in the recordings to express themselves in all their greatness. Truly, this CD player is simply superb and would certainly benefit from being better known. »

calibrated. In reality, the *H600* is an updated and more refined version of the famous *H590*, whose reputation speaks for itself. If the **Hegel H590** was a powerhouse, the *H600* is exactly in the same vein, and it shows from the first notes.

With the album *Utopies*, by the **Hadouk Trio** collective, the **Hegel H600** produces an absolutely phenomenal quality and quantity of low frequencies. My small **Harbeth P3ESR XD** loudspeakers literally loved the power and control provided by the

HEGEL VIKING REFERENCE CD PLAYER AND H600 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



Hegel H600. Fans of mini racing loudspeakers, in bookshelf formats, will find in the H600 an amplifier capable of exploiting them to the maximum. Indeed, thanks to its remarkably high damping factor of 4,000, the **H600** holds the loudspeakers with an iron grip and absolute control. With stand-alone three-way loudspeakers, the power and control of the **Hegel H600** prove equally beneficial. The **H600** is not just a powerhouse. It has the knack of channeling this power just at the right moment to add excitement and thrills to listening to your favorite recordings. While its power seems infinite, it always remains well measured to offer a truly realistic dynamic range. As for the stereo image, the **Hegel H600** reproduces a wide and deep stage while maintaining credible proportions. Instruments are easy to locate with this amplifier. The space in which the musicians perform is well outlined with beautiful clarity, making the listening experience very realistic.

A Network Player and Excellent Quality Converter

Since the **Hegel H600** integrated amplifier is an all-in-one device, I wondered about the quality of the network player and the converter included with the device. Good news, this section is of very good quality and easily compares to a device costing around \$3,000. Therefore, to do better or differently, you will have to invest in a quality converter or player. Although the internal converter does not have the absolute velvety aspect of the *Viking CD* player, listening to high-resolution files proved to be very pleasant and functional. It is easy to hear the difference between the resolution levels offered and also between different online music services. The overall quality of the internal converter is therefore really there. It is highly likely that the vast majority of **H600** owners will be perfectly happy with the network player and converter installed in the device. This is a major element that completely changes the playing field in terms of the price-quality ratio of the **H600**,

since in most cases, you will only need the **Hegel H600** and a pair of loudspeakers.

Conclusion

With these two new virtuosos, **Hegel** successfully consolidates its product offering in the high-end market. The *Viking CD* player is exceptional, with its unique tone of incredible softness, offering exceptional musicality. It is aimed at those who have a fine collection of *CDs* and want to invest in a high-quality player that will showcase it. The **Hegel Viking CD** player is a solid and performing machine that would certainly benefit from being better known.

The **Hegel H600** amplifier is also a great success. It is a somewhat unique device, aimed at a slightly more specific clientele. It will delight those who want to acquire an all-in-one amplifier of exceptional power, capable of handling and controlling all imaginable types of loudspeakers. It has very good audio quality and is equipped with a very good digital section, which softens its price and greatly facilitates the purchasing decision. Listening is a must, well done **Hegel!**

GENERAL INFORMATION

Hegel H600 Amplifier

Price: \$14,995 CAD

Warranty: 2 years, parts & labour

Hegel Viking Reference CD Player

Price: \$5,995 CAD

Manufacturer / Distributor: Hegel Music Systems, Tel: 805.934.9409, <https://www.hegel.com/en>

Mediagraphy

Francis Cabrel, Des Roses et des Orties, Chandelle Production, TMUCD, 5800

John Abercrombie Quartet, 39 Steps, ECM, 2334 BOD19093-02

Hadouk Trio, Utopies (Deluxe Edition), Qobuz File



Classical Music

by CHRISTOPHE HUSS



YANNICK NÉZET-SÉGUIN - ORCHESTRE MÉTROPOLITAIN JEAN SIBELIUS Symphonies Nos 2 and 5.

Atma, ACD2 2453.

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

Even though he is conductor at the **Metropolitan Opera** and the **Philadelphia Orchestra**, **Yannick Nézet-Séguin** remains faithful to his **Orchestre Métropolitain**, which he brings to a very remarkable level and with which he records important projects. A complete set of **Bruckner's** symphonies for **Atma** marked the beginning of their rise in the musical world. The **Sibelius** integral materializes its consolidation.

This volume is the most important, the one to which everyone will have their eyes turned, because it brings together the two best-known and most accessible symphonies. It is also the most spectacularly successful. *Symphony No. 3* marked a turning point in the understanding of how to record the orchestra at the **Maison symphonique de Montréal**. We find this clarity and depth here. It greatly serves the musical purpose nourished by the attention to detail and the sense of construction and gradation. These interpretations are marked by a real breath that comes from a conscientious reading of the score and its mastery. It is more than remarkable and often exhilarating.



**RAFAEL PAYARE -
MONTREAL SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA
RICHARD STRAUSS
With SONYA YONCHEVA (soprano).
Ein Heldenleben. + Mahler : Rückert-Lieder.**

Pentatone, PTC 5187201.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : *****

After a dazzling *5th Symphony* by **Mahler**, which received a remarkable international critical reception, the **OSM** and **Rafael Payare** have chosen *Ein Heldeleben (A Hero's Life)* by **Richard Strauss** for their 2nd disc. It is a spectacular orchestral score, where the composer puts himself on stage facing his critics, in his battles or with his partner.

Just like **Mahler's** *5th Symphony*, *Ein Heldenleben* is appreciated by conductors who approach it as a sort of showcase of their work with their orchestra. The score is very spectacular, notably the famous *Battle (Bataille)*, but it is also of suave beauty in the section of the *Hero's Peace Works (Oeuvres de paix du héros)* which means that in the end we always keep the same versions or the same orchestras (Dresden , Berlin, Amsterdam, Vienna, Bavaria) because of the warmth and softness of the texture of the strings. **Payare** and the **OSM** have once again produced a biting and flamboyant but also superbly textured recording, with an experienced technical team: **Martin Sauer** and **Carl Talbot** associated with artistic direction and **Richard King** and **Stéphane Brochu** on sound recording. The strange idea of involving the belcantist **Sonya Yoncheva** in **Mahler Lieder** somewhat diminishes the impact of the *CD*. **Yoncheva** sings very well, but the German *Lied* is not in her blood. The disc nonetheless remains a **must**.

Classical Music

by CHRISTOPHE HUSS



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SOUND
OF THE MONTH

VIVALDI
LE QUATTRO STAGIONI
LA FOLLIA

LE CONCERT DE LA LOGE
JULIEN CHAUVIN

ANTONIO VIVALDI

The four Seasons. Sovvente il soles. La Follia.

Julien Chauvin (violon and direction),

Le Concert de la Loge,

with Pierre-Antoine Bénos-Djian (contertenor).

Alpha, 1005.

Interpretation : ****

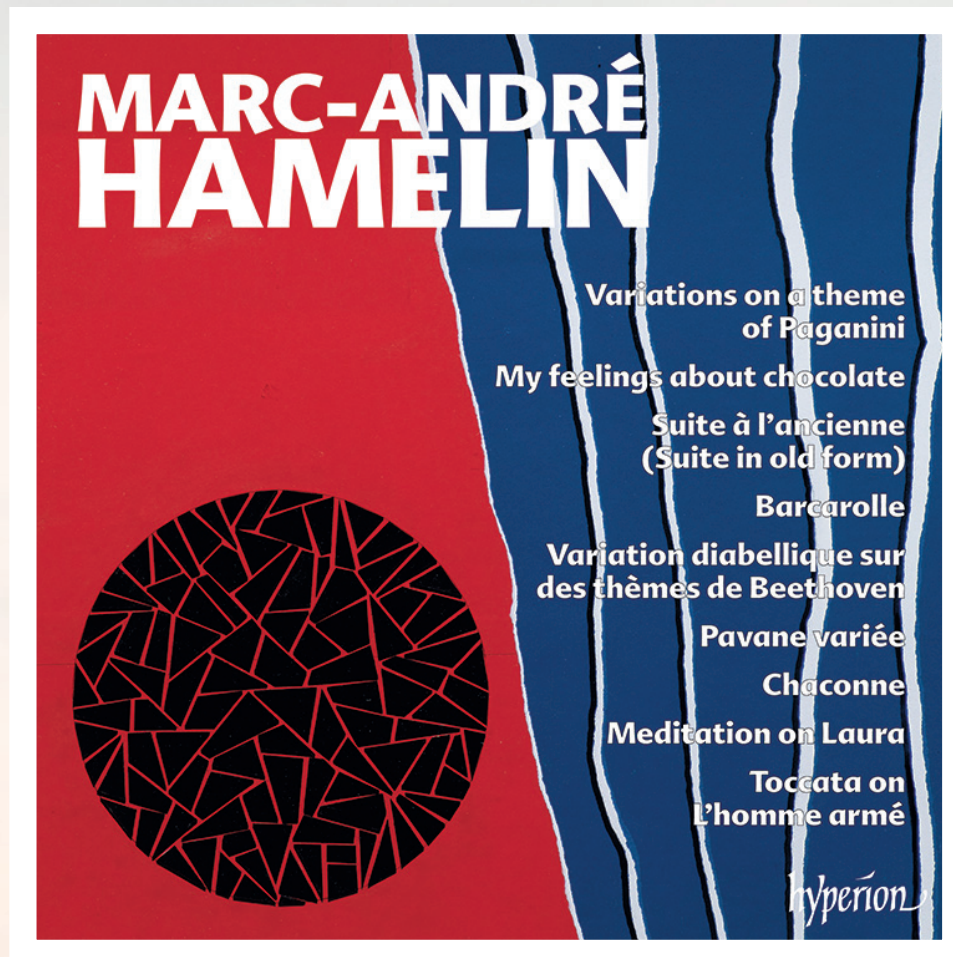
Technique : *****

What if we looked back at *The Four Seasons*? It's been a while since there's been a really interesting version to listen to! This one is. This is a small-scale performance (eight musicians), a system that works very well for several reasons. It must be remembered that the *concert halls* of **Vivaldi's** time were palaces. There is therefore no need for orchestral one-upmanship. Furthermore, in the balance of timbres, the fact of having a solo violin, a quartet, a double bass, a theorbo and a

harpichord allows these last two instruments to assert themselves more and to color much more judiciously, when necessary, musical discourse.

So it is, here, with the harpsichord, absolutely magical, in support of the slow complaint of the slow *Autumn* movement. Just as sweet: the raindrop effect under the solo violin in the 2nd movement of *Winter*. Interpretatively, **Chauvin** is distinguished by very refined ornamentation. As if his natural qualities were not enough, he thinks he is being clever by starting the cycle with *Autumn* rather than *Spring* and inserts an opera aria in the middle. But we put up with it. The little miracle is captured with exquisite finesse by **Ken Yoshida's** microphones.

CANADIAN RECORDS



MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

**Variations on a theme by Paganini
and other works for piano.**

Hyperion, CDA 68308.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : *****

This is starting to become known: **Marc-André Hamelin** is not only a keyboard magician, he is also a diligent composer who instills in his compositions the technical traps that he likes to tame, his tastes and his musical culture. He is lucky to record for **Hyperion**, a label very open to experimentation by its stars. After the compositions of **Stephen Hough**, here are those of **Marc-André Hamelin** and we immediately have fun gauging the way in which he will vary **Paganini's** 24th *Caprice*. We catch

him slide in a tribute to the most glorious of his predecessors, **Rachmaninov**. This is no coincidence, because the culture of the pianistic and musical repertoire in general greatly nourishes his creative spirit (*Diabellie Variation* on a **Beethoven Theme**). We will listen with immense pleasure to the *Suite à l'Ancienne* or the *Pavane Variée*. But the Quebec pianist's references are vast and *Meditation on Laura* (the film by **Otto Preminger**) will not fail to touch moviegoers in this pleasant and endearing disc.

Classical Music

by CHRISTOPHE HUSS

CANADIAN RECORDS ... suite



OLIVIER MESSIAEN
MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN (piano),
NATHALIE FORGET (ondes martenot),
TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA,
GUSTAVO GIMENO.
Turangalîla-Symphonie.

Harmonia Mundi, HMM 905 336.

Interpretation : ***

Technique : ****

Is it a coincidence that for their first release with **Harmonia Mundi**, **Gustavo Gimeno** and the **Toronto Symphony** chose **Messiaen's Turangalîla-Symphonie** which had propelled the

Toronto-Seiji Ozawa tandem to notoriety in 1967? The comparison stops there. The **Ozawa** recording, whose memory has largely been forgotten and which awaits a serious reissue outside Japan, was sharp, scathing, determined, constructed, layered, patient. This one is good paste, nice, quite superficial, often a little rushed, with few edges, lacking that solemnity which is the style of **Messiaen**. Obviously **Marc-André Hamelin** and the ondist **Nathalie Forget** are excellent protagonists and the musicians are beyond reproach but there is no bias, no exaltation, no backbone and, if we know the competing versions from **Ozawa**, **Chailly** or **Wit**, we feel quite far from the unique musical and sensory experience promised by the publisher.



**BRAVURA
LOUIS-PIERRE BERGERON,
MEAGAN MILATZ.**

**Works for natural horn and pianoforte by Righini,
Potter, Beethoven, Süssmayr and von Krufft.**

ATMA, ACD2 2864.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : *****

Regarding this disc which is, to say, the least original (natural horn and pianoforte!) we will first start by congratulating **Anne-Marie Sylvestre** for having been able to find a balance on the sound level, at the **Saint-Benoît** church in Mirabel. Then there is the *miracle of impeccability*, since the natural

horn is a formidable instrument. Still, listening to an hour of horn and pianoforte is an austere thing. But for lovers of this instrument, it was necessary to point out the existence of this remarkable *CD* displaying the mastery of **Pierre-Étienne Bergeron**, horn player at the **National Arts Center**. Anyone who digs deeper will find astonishing moments of very beautiful music, such as *Variation IV, Adagio sostenuto*, from the *Sonata di bravura* by **Cipriano Potter** (1792-1871) which probably gives its edge to this sharp disc, certainly, but very well done.

Classical Music

by CHRISTOPHE HUSS

CLASSICS OF THE MONTH



LANG LANG AND GINA ALICE (piano), GEWANDHAUSORCHESTER LEIPZIG, ANDRIS NELSONS.

**Saint-Saëns : *Carnaval of the Animals*,
Piano Concerto No 2.**

+ Piano pieces from the French repertoire.

DG, 485 9224.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : ***

Chinese pianist **Lang Lang** has become a business of his own. The skillful marketing of his talent generally earned him the scorn of critics and the support of a wide audience. Trying to take an objective look, we must recognize that two of his last three records (*Piano Book* and *The Disney Book*) were clever

products intended to generate clicks on listening platforms. We are happy to have a more solid project here, carried out with his wife and a real desire. The downside is that the publisher perhaps gives his star more than he asks for when, in *The Elephant of the Carnival of the Animals*, we hear the pianists' punctuation almost more than the double bass. But the **Lang Lang-Gina Alice** couple pays great attention to poetic moments like *Aquarium du Carnaval* or the *Petite suite* of the program without orchestra. We will also appreciate **Lang Lang's** finesse of touch in the French solo pieces, including those by several female composers, and his unbridled verve in the *2nd Concerto* of **Saint-Sans**.



Smetana *Má Vlast*
Czech Philharmonic
Semyon Bychkov

BEDŘICH SMETANA
CZECH PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA,
SEMYON BYCHKOV.
Ma Vlast (My Homeland).

Pentatone, PTC 5187 203

Interpretation : ***

Technique : ****

This publication comes very timely, March 2nd, 2024 being the date of the bicentenary of the birth of **Bedřich Smetana**, the father of Czech music. The *window of opportunity* ends there, since rarely in its history, if ever, has the **Czech Philharmonic Orchestra** produced such a flat and boring version of the

symbolic *My Homeland* cycle. Perhaps **Semyon Bychkov** wanted to play the card of solemnity, but above all he extinguished the movement and the general momentum of the paintings, their conquering verve, which does not compensate for certain achievements in terms of the search for colors and balances.

We will have fun comparing what the **Orchestra of... Malaysia (!)** does in this score under the direction of **Claus Peter Flor** in a magnificently recorded **Bis SACD**. As for the Czech references with this orchestra, there is no shortage of them, from **Talich** to **Belohlavek** via **Ancerl**, **Neumann**, **Kubelik** (his return to the country) and, above all, **Mackerras**.

Classical Music

by CHRISTOPHE HUSS

CLASSICS OF THE MONTH ... suite



GIACOMO PUCCINI WALES NATIONAL OPERA ORCHESTRA, CARLO RIZZI.

«*Symphonic Suites*» (designed by Carlo Rizzi).

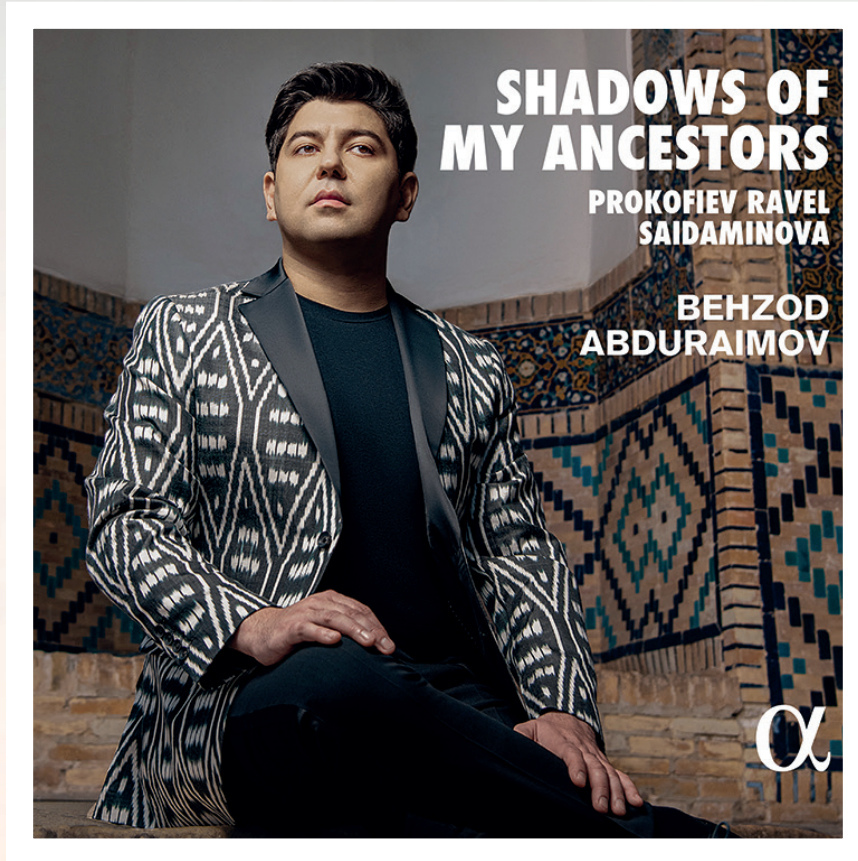
Signum, SIG 778.

Interpretation : ****

Technique : **

Puccini symphonic suites? This doesn't exist, obviously. But, as with **Smetana**, we are in an anniversary year, the centenary of his death (in November 2024) and there could be potential interest in bringing **Puccini** into symphony concert halls. This is what the renowned opera conductor **Carlo Rizzi** apparently

said, who has compiled Suites from *Madame Butterfly* and *Tosca* into a CD supplemented by the *Rizzi* editions of two versions of the *Symphonic Prelude*, as well as the *Symphonic capriccio*. The genre of the symphonic suite is obviously very popular for ballets. It was applied to operas by **Richard Strauss** during his lifetime and, recently, with success, to **Leoš Janáček**, on several occasions. The idea for **Puccini** is good and the themes well articulated (**Rizzi** does not try to cover the lack of vocal line and remains faithful to the orchestration) in suites of 17 and 20 minutes. We mention this disc because **Puccini's** melodic vein is obviously irresistible and the production pleasant. Downside, however: the acoustics are dry.



BEHZOD ABDURAIMOV

« Shadows of My Ancestors ».

Prokofiev : Roméo and Juliette, 10 pieces.
Saïdaminova : The Walls of Ancient Bukhara.
Ravel : Gaspard of the night.

Alpha, 1028.

Interpretation : *****

Technique : *****

Oh, the wonder! I was reluctant to select this disc, because putting forward a program showing *Romeo and Juliet* a little over a year after the CD *La Dolce Volta* by **Jean-Baptiste Fonlupt** was a little redundant. And then, what's the point of a new *Gaspard of the night*? But it's impossible not to shine the spotlight on this miracle. **Behzod Abduraimov**, a 33-year-old Uzbek pianist, launched his career twelve years ago, supported by **Vladimir Ashkenazy** and recorded by **Decca**. At the time, he had an

image of an *ivory breaker* (pianist with a fist) which stuck a little to him. This is precisely why we must talk about this second recital with **Alpha**, its publisher from now on, because it demonstrates the opposite: an art of lace, cutting, characterization and climate. The famous *Scarbo* by *Gaspard of the night* is a perfect example: **Abduraimov** does not splash it with his talent, but carves it and doses it to the millimeter. Between **Prokofiev**, fascinating for his characterizations, and **Ravel**, we discover a work by **Dilorom Saidaminova**, an Uzbek composer trained in Moscow. His composition is a kind of *Paintings from a mysterious exhibition* of his country.

A HYBRID Electrostatic Panel

By MICHEL DALLAIRE

Until recently, and since my beginnings with this magazine in 2006, I had not yet had the opportunity to test electrostatic-type loudspeakers. I've had the chance to briefly listen to them in the past at high-fidelity trade shows, but not as part of a proper review. However, since the last issue, it's the second time I've been offered to review a transducer using this technology. The previous model came from a Dutch manufacturer and was a hybrid electrostatic panel with a bass cabinet at its base. What is proposed to me here is another hybrid electrostatic transducer, but this time from the American manufacturer **MartinLogan**. For this review, I am offered a model from the *Masterpiece* series, the Impression *ESL 11A*. Let's see together if the magic of the electrostatic principle will once again captivate me? Follow me in the following lines to understand the workings of this superb speaker.

History of the Manufacturer MartinLogan

In the first half of the 20th century, most experiments with electrostatic transducers were not technically successful. However, there are two manufacturers who managed to market their products: the **KLH Model 9**, which had a short existence, and the legendary **ESL 57** from **Quad**, which was born in 1957. The latter was the only real commercial success as an electrostatic loudspeaker until the first prototype of the **MartinLogan** transducer was demonstrated in the early 1980s.

Based in Kansas at the time, **MartinLogan** was founded by **Gayle Martin Sanders** and **Ron Logan Sutherland**. In 1983, the team developed the first hybrid electrostatic and wideband panel named the *Monolith*. Since 1985, sales have continued to increase, as well as its reputation worldwide. By the end of 2005, **MartinLogan** was acquired by a small financial firm named **Shoreview Industries**. This firm specializes in financing and supporting very promising private companies. This financial firm allowed **MartinLogan** to expand its facilities and become a major player internationally in the field of sound reproduction.

In 2019, the company was acquired by **Scott Bagby**, the co-founder of **Paradigm** speakers. Along with his son **John**, they also head **Anthem** electronics. The research and development offices are still based in Kansas, but the manufacturing is entirely Canadian.

The CLS (Curvilinear Line Source) Panel

MartinLogan engineers developed a conductive coating that can be sprayed onto a very thin Mylar membrane without affecting its transparency. The metal grilles serving as stators use an insulating material like Teflon, which also improves the transparency of the *CLS* panel without needing to cover it with fabric or a protective grille. The **MartinLogan** transducer differs from other electrostatic panels in that a way was found to bend it while

maintaining a regular spacing between the membrane and the stators. It should be noted that the thin Mylar membrane must withstand charges of 5,000 volts while the stators are subject to a charge of up to 10,000 volts each. The risk of electrical arcing must be avoided to prevent damage to the membrane. By adopting this convex curvature in the horizontal direction, this *CLS* panel (*Curvilinear Line Source*) corrects the directivity of high and mid-range frequencies, a characteristic of flat electrostatic panels.

Subsequently, the issue of missing low frequencies was addressed. At **MartinLogan**, they tackled the complex task of associating this ultra-fast membrane with a low-frequency bass cabinet equipped with cone drivers. However, cone drivers are generally heavier and slower than a thin membrane only 12 microns thick, which is thinner than a **Saran Wrap** packaging film. At this point, engineer **Joe Vojtko** came into play to create a filtering system that would effectively and actively associate the subwoofers of the cabinet with the electrostatic membrane. **Anthem's Active Room Correction (ARC)** technology was also used to correct the bass frequency response based on the listening room's acoustics.

The MartinLogan Impression ESL 11A

A panel is generally considered flat. In the case of **MartinLogan's** *CLS* transducers, it is rather ironic to speak of a panel since they all have a convex curve horizontally. However, to simplify things, I will still use the word panel to refer to the electrostatic part of the *Impression ESL 11A* model. This speaker is part of the *Masterpiece* series, which includes the *Neolith* (\$150,000), the *Renaissance ESL 15A* (\$37,500), the *Expression ESL 13A* (\$23,500), the *Impression ESL 11A* (\$15,500), and finally the *Classic ESL 9* (\$9,500) with a passive bass cabinet. These prices are in Canadian dollars, and the number indicates the actual width of the panel in inches, while the suffix *A* indicates hybrid models equipped with an *active* bass cabinet.



MARTINLOGAN IMPRESSION ESL 11A ELECTROSTATIC LOUDSPEAKERS



« I continue with the music from the **Pink Panther** film, but this time interpreted by saxophonist **Markus Philippe**. On his album *Saxnbass*, he is accompanied only by a double bassist. The presence of the musician is accentuated by the hiss of air passing through the mouthpiece and the neck of his saxophone. The double bass has body, and I can perfectly follow its play as well as its plucked strings thanks to the exceptional coherence of the electrostatic panel. »

The *Impression ESL 11A* model is equipped with an 11-inch wide panel and a cabinet with two 20 cm aluminum woofers. One projects forward and the other backward. These are separately amplified by a Class D amplifier module of 275 watts each. A filtering electronic circuit is associated with a DSP, which in turn manages the ARC function. To perform this calibration, you must purchase a kit called **PBK (Perfect Bass Kit)**, which includes a microphone with a specially dedicated stand and *Ethernet* and *USB* cables. You need to use a laptop running *Windows 7/8/10* or *Mac OS X 10.12+*. Then, you need to download software available on the manufacturer's website and install it on your computer. This bass frequency adjustment process based on the listening room may seem complicated for some users, but it brings real benefits to the final sound quality of the *Impression ESL 11A*. However, you can ask your authorized **MartinLogan** dealer to do it for you during installation. Alternatively, you can simply use the *ARC Room EQ* switches located on the back of the cabinet. Each woofer is installed in its own sealed cavity. When the *ARC* correction system is activated, the phase of each woofer is adjusted independently to avoid cancellation or exaggeration of bass frequencies according to the standing waves present

in your listening room. The position of the *Impression ESL 11A* model is also taken into account depending on whether it is closer to or farther from the rear wall. The *Votjko* filtering circuit intervenes only on the cabinet's woofers and below 300 Hz. The latter is handcrafted using the best polypropylene capacitors and air-core coils. The overall power supply of this system is linear and made from a toroidal transformer and high-value capacitors. Above 300 Hz, the electrostatic panel is not filtered and is directly connected to the amplifier. All the amplifier and cabinet filtering circuits are housed in a sturdy dampened compartment located under the cabinet base. This compartment is easily accessible for maintenance or repair. The cabinet's depth is almost 28 inches (71 cm), which is generous but necessary for the two sealed woofer cavities. At the back of the enclosure, there is an *RJ45* input (*ARC* setup) to pair the two speakers during the *ARC* calibration process. There is also a mini *USB* input (*ARC Setup*) for connection with a laptop computer. Following this is the switch (*ARC Room EQ*) used to activate or disengage the acoustic correction function. Another switch with three positions (-2 dB, 0, +2 dB) allows for adjusting the level of the mid-bass. This adjustment is



independent of the ARC function. Finally, there is a volume control for the low frequencies and superb **WBT** type connection terminals. A switch is also provided to turn off the *LED* indicators located at the back of the enclosure.

The Impression ESL 11A in a nutshell

The overall dimensions of the *Impression ESL 11A* are 194 cm in height by 30 cm in width for a total depth of 89 cm. A solid frame made of extruded aerospace-grade aluminum solidifies the entire front. This front panel is slightly tilted backwards by 5 degrees. The electrostatic panel is directly connected to the output of the external amplifier and operates within a wide frequency range from about 300 Hz to 23,000 Hz. Below 300 Hz, the two woofers take over down to 29 Hz. The sensitivity is 91 dB/2.83 volts/1 meter in an impedance of 4 ohms. The impedance of the entire system is 4 ohms, but since the woofers below 300 Hz have their own amplification, an integrated amplifier of 50 W per channel should suffice to power the electrostatic panels. However,

the performance level of this speaker demands quality amplification and good digital and/or analog sources.

Test bench conditions

Given the weight of 40.9 kg and the considerable dimensions of the *Impression ESL 11A* model, I had to go to the **Planète Haute Fidélité** store in Repentigny, Qc to listen to it. The two speakers were placed in a newly furnished room with irregular dimensions of about 23 ft by 24 ft. This room underwent proper acoustic treatment. Additionally, the ARC calibration of the two *Impression ESL 11A* panels was done before my arrival by **MartinLogan** representative **Pierre Blais**.

The *Impression ESL 11A* speakers were connected to a **Hegel H600** amplifier. This electrostatic panel doesn't necessarily require all the power of this amplifier, but it can handle quite impressive volume levels. My listening was done using the streamer/DAC of this amplifier, which is compatible with the **Tidal Connect** application. So, thanks to a subscription to

the **Tidal Hi-Fi+** platform, I could listen to artists I know well in *FLAC* 24-bit/192 kHz files. All my listening sessions were conducted with the ARC correction system enabled. A switch allowed us to disable it, but we decided to keep the ARC function active to fully enjoy the performance of the *Impression ESL 11A* loudspeaker.

A transparent panel to see through the music

Anette Askvik is a singer-songwriter and pianist who lives in Oslo, Norway. She writes and records her music on her own label. Her first album, *Liberty*, dates back to 2011. It's a carefully crafted and superbly recorded production. For the second time, the magic of the electrostatic transducer operates and resonates in my ears. **Madame Askvik's** soft and warm voice is conveyed naturally, almost intimately. Her piano is superbly reproduced in all its authenticity. The sliding of bows on violins is smooth and without any acidity. The level of definition of the electrostatic panel allows me to even hear the creaking

MARTINLOGAN IMPRESSION ESL 11A ELECTROSTATIC LOUDSPEAKERS

of her piano bench. The double bass and percussion are deep but not exaggerated. The saxophone is fluid and not overly forward, while retaining its natural patina. The electrostatic panel is transparent both visually and in terms of sound. Its dipole dispersion offers me a stereophonic image

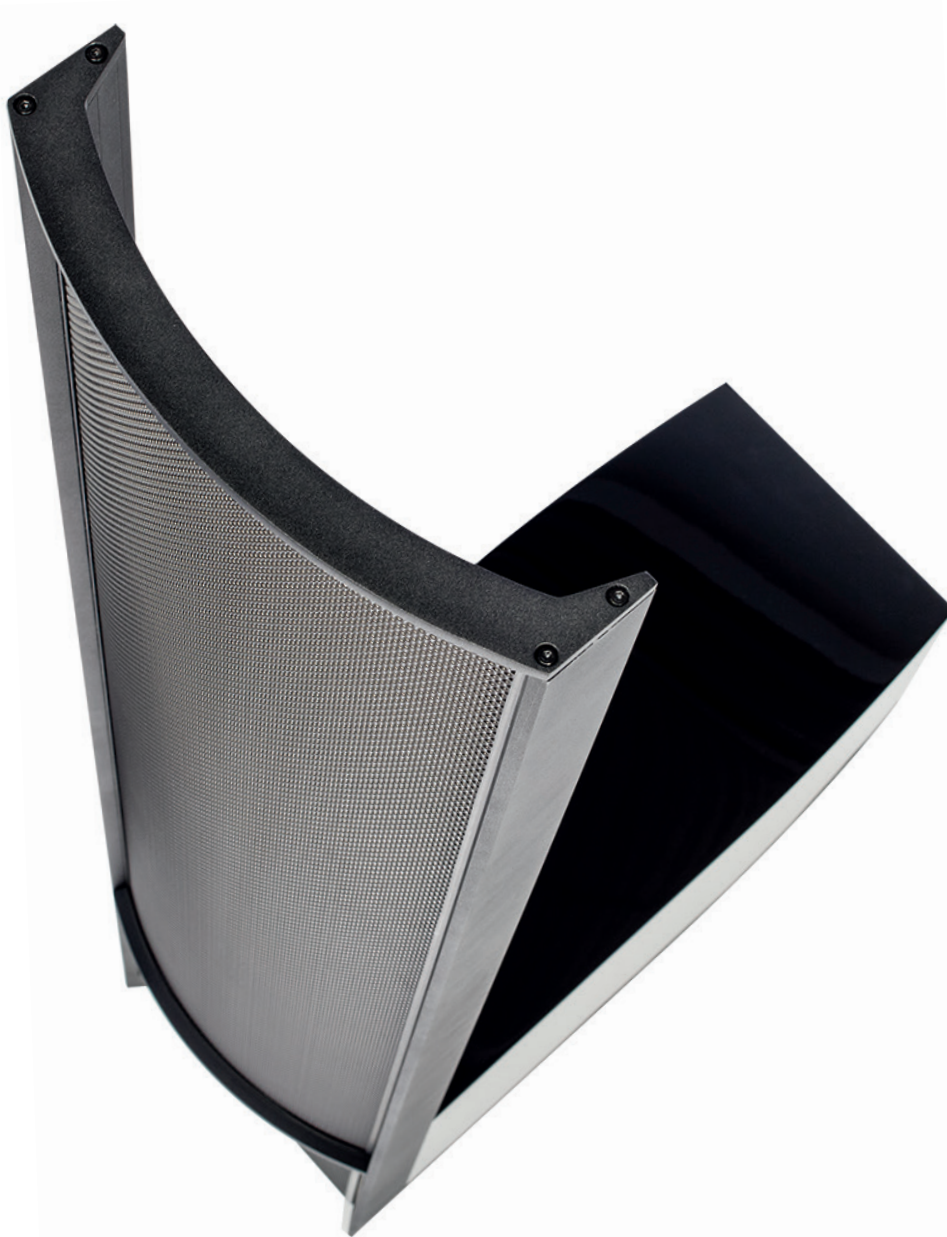
that expands both in width and depth. I know it's a cliché to say, but I feel like the back wall of the room just fell down. I continue with the music from the **Pink Panther** film, but this time interpreted by saxophonist **Markus Philippe**. On his album *Saxnbass*, he is accompanied only

by a double bassist. The presence of the musician is accentuated by the hiss of air passing through the mouthpiece and the neck of his saxophone. The double bass has body, and I can perfectly follow its play as well as its plucked strings thanks to the exceptional coherence of the electrostatic panel. Subjectively, I don't hear any anomalies in the frequency response curve from about 300 Hz to 20,000 Hz. The tonal balance is perfect and shows no cuts, bumps, or phase rotations, even down to the lowest frequencies. The transition from the panel to the active subwoofer woofers is practically imperceptible to me. The *Votjko* frequency filter assisted by a 24-bit *DSP* and the *ARC* system undoubtedly play a role in this coherence.

I conclude with one of my favorite jazz singers, **Youn Sun Nah**. On her album titled *Immersion*, I can perfectly hear her diction with all the little mouth noises that accompany it. On sibilant notes like *S*, I don't notice any exaggeration as on some poorly designed metal tweeters. The cymbals are well rendered, and subjectively, I don't perceive any limitation in the high end of the spectrum. The double bass and electric bass are very well differentiated. They have a seat and a depth that spread throughout the listening room. The stereophonic image benefits greatly from the generous dimensions of this room. Even though the latter is acoustically treated, I consider the *ARC* correction for the frequency response of the *Immersion ESL 11A* to be an undeniable advantage.

Conclusion

I can already confirm that the electrostatic principle has once again worked its magic on me. Listening to music without frequency cuts or possible phase rotations caused by a passive filtering circuit is an important benefit in music reproduction. Possible colorations can also come from an insufficiently damped enclosure. In this





regard, the low-frequency enclosure of the *Impression ESL 11A* is very well designed. On its side, the electrostatic membrane has an immeasurable advantage in terms of the neutrality and precision of the timbre of instruments or voices. The transition between the *CLS* panel and the low-frequency enclosure is superbly mastered by the Votjko electronic crossover. The *ARC* correction system is a tool not to be overlooked in order to finely adapt the *Impression ESL 11A* to the acoustics of your listening room. Obviously, this speaker requires a room that allows for good clearance of the panels from the rear wall and side walls. When all these conditions are met, you get a musically thrilling listening experience. The hybrid panel *Impression ESL 11A* directly competes with conventional speakers priced at \$15,000 and above. The latter, without dipole radiation, may be easier to install in a given room, but in my opinion, they rarely achieve the coherence of the electrostatic panel. It's up to you to see and, most importantly, hear the difference.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$15,499.98 / pair

Limited Warranty: 90 days. For the 5-year limited warranty, you must fill out the registration certificate within 30 days of the purchase date.

Manufacturer / Distributor: MartinLogan, T.: 785.749.0133, <https://www.martinlogan.com/fr/product/impression-esl-11a>

Mediagraphy

Anette Askvik, Liberty, Tidal Hi-Fi+, FLAC Master Quality

Markus Philippe, Saxnbass, Tidal Hi-Fi+, FLAC Master Quality

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

Al Di Meola, The Grande Passion, Tidal Hi-Fi+, FLAC Master Quality

Bliss, Quiet Letters, Music for Dreams, ZZZCD0006



Canadian
Cancer
Society

Soci t 
canadienne
du cancer

ALL-IN-ONE **MYCONNECT250** SYSTEM BY **ADVANCE PARIS**



BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

These days, many audio companies are adding *all-in-one* products to their offerings and **Advance Paris (AP)** has gone *all-in* on this trend with three *MyConnect* models that they describe as audiophile amplifiers for those who *don't want to fill their living room with electronics*. The *MyConnect 250* is the top model of this series featuring some definitely audiophile characteristics.

It is also packed with features and a very large inventory of I/O capabilities. Connect a smart TV and a turntable and you have pretty much everything covered. Of course, **AP** is not alone in offering audiophile performance and *all-in-one* convenience, but is there another that packs in this many features?

BY ROGER MCCUAIG

Advance Paris started out in 1995 as a speaker company under the name **Advance Acoustic**. The name change to **Advance Paris** took place in 2013 and by that time they had expanded into electronic products with international distribution. **Advance Paris** produces a very large range and quantity of products ranging from the *top-of-the-line Classic* series components to speakers and cables. The size, weight and power ratings of the *MyConnect 250* together with the astounding array of connectors on the backplate explain the \$4,700 price tag. This is a beast! With the *MC250*, **Advance Paris** has taken *all-in-one* to the next level; not only does it cover all the bases, but it does it with huge power and a tube front end. **Advance Paris** has not neglected the aesthetic aspect either, the *MyConnect* series copies the overall aesthetic of the

Classic series and there is certainly a classic theme going on.

Advance Paris has created a product to appeal to those who need audiophile level performance but also want a single box that will cover all their listening alternatives, including multi-room capabilities and home cinema.

Technical Description

The front plate of the *MC250* is a 7 mm thick slab of translucent black tempered glass. The large power meters, two alpha-numeric displays, the preamp tubes and some status lights are behind the glass and can only be seen from up close until the power is turned on and everything lights up. The high power rating of the unit results in the top and sides being mostly composed of larger than normal ventilation holes that reveal the red circuit boards and other components which is fun. Another nice touch is the goldish

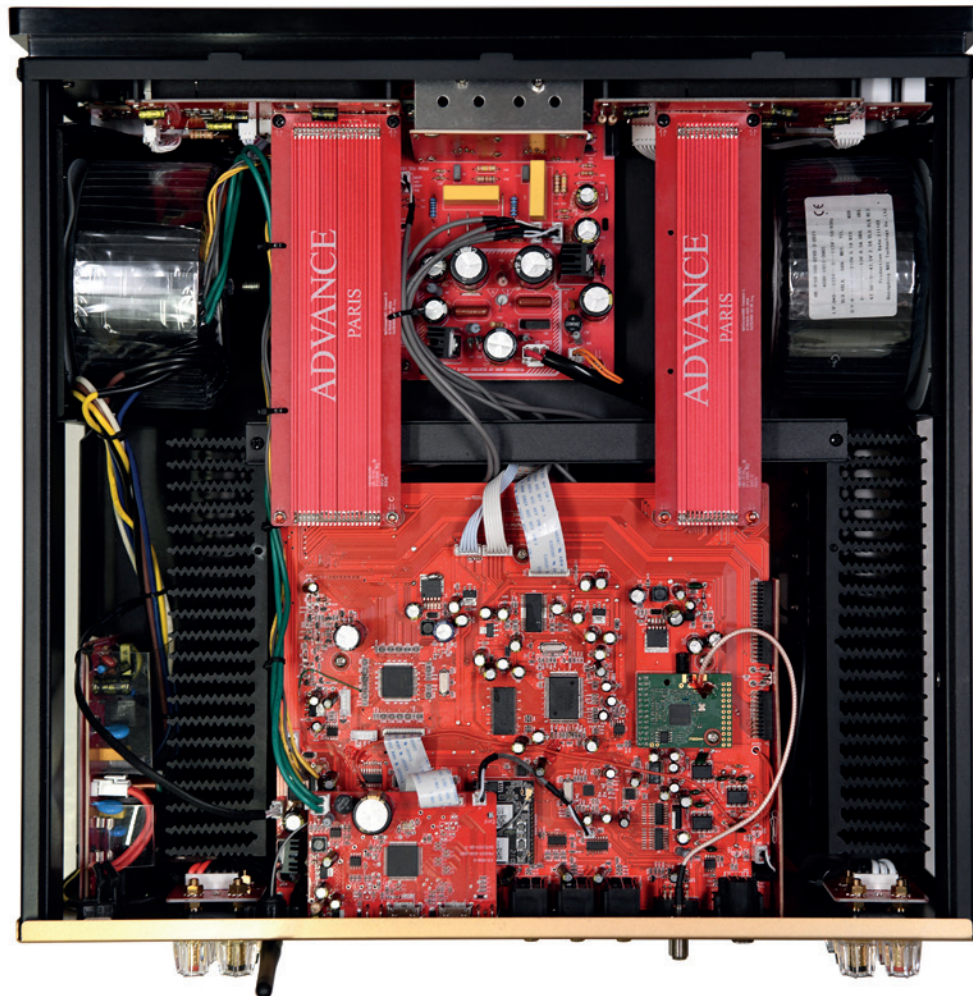
coloured backplate. Some may find it a bit too old school, I think it looks great.

At the heart of the unit is a tube preamplifier based on two *ECC81 (12AT7)* medium gain dual triodes, a popular choice for preamp designers. But **Advance Paris** goes one step further and has added a *High Bias* switch which is described as producing a sound comparable to a Class A amplifier for the first watts. The 190-W power amp is a dual-mono configuration supplied from separate 300 VA toroidal transformers. No danger that the power amps will ever run out of juice!

Versatility was clearly a priority for the *MC250* designers with the inclusion of features like preamp-out and power-amp-in ports. You also have the choice of *RCA* or balanced *XLR* connectors for feeding an external power amp, the *XLR* option offering lower noise and a longer cable run. Three pairs of speaker connectors are supplied, and the unit can be configured



ALL-IN-ONE MYCONNECT250 SYSTEM BY ADVANCE PARIS



to run one pair, any two pairs, or all three. We don't see that very often!

Two headphone jacks are located on the front panel; ¼ inch and 3.5 mm, each switchable for low or high impedance headphones and for three gain settings; +6/0 / -4 dB.

Home theatre and big-room stereo users will appreciate having outputs for two subwoofers, each switchable for a 75 or 150 Hz crossover point. The MC250 bucks the trend of reducing the number of analog inputs and provides eight; 6 RCA, including one for phono, plus two XLR inputs. The phono stage will accept both MM and MC with switching for two gain settings for the MC stage as well as three capacitance values.

The digital music capabilities are equally as well served with 14 ways to input a

digital signal to a **Burr-Brown PCM1796 DAC**. You get up to 24/192 through the coax inputs and 24/96 via optical inputs, which is pretty much the industry standard. A USB port for connecting a memory stick can accept up to 32 bit/192 kHz and if you want to run a USB cable from your PC or laptop there is another USB port for that; it channels through an XMOS chip to deal with PCM as well as DSD up to 128x. You can connect the unit to your home network via an external Wi-Fi antenna or an Ethernet cable port and with the aid of an Android/iOS App called *Advance PlayStream* you can stream from 10 popular music sources as well as from your mobile device. HDMI and ARC inputs are also available for home theatre applications and an optional Bluetooth adapter is also offered.

Controls on the front of the unit include small CD control buttons and 2 large button/wheels labelled *Input* and *Volume/Menu*. All the unit's configuration and Wi-Fi connection data can be accessed through the *Menu* button or from the remote. This includes a full tone control capability, *Bass, Treble, Balance, Loudness* as well as a *Bypass* mode. I preferred using the front plate knob to adjust settings, but it didn't take long to get used to using the remote.

Unpacking and Installation

The MC250 is easy to set up as the layout of the back plate is well organized with the various inputs and outputs arranged in delineated zones and well identified. Once your components are all hooked up, all that is left to do is connect the unit to



« What impressed me the most during my listening time was the **Grammy** winning (2013), **Chick Corea Trio** album, *Trilogy*. It had punch and pop and jump and filled the room with sound, notes popped into existence out of thin air. It's just a trio but sometimes they sounded like much more! »

your *Home Wi-Fi* network and install the *Advance PlayStream App* on a smart device(s). This enables you to use your smart phone or tablet as a remote for wireless streaming. I salvaged my wife's old *Galaxy* tablet a couple of years ago and use it full time for all my music-room streaming activities. The brief instructions provided by **Advance Paris** were very easy to follow and I was streaming music from my **Qobuz** account in about three minutes. If you don't remember your *Home Network* password, you will have to dig it up!

After the initial set-up, I spent a few minutes scanning through the settings. All settings menu items scroll on the right-side display on the front panel. Most of them are easy to understand and they are all explained in the manual. This is where the network connection is made, after that, all I had to do was set the speaker selector to *A Only*, the tone selector was set to *bypass* and **Automatic Power Down (APD)** was set to *ON* and I left these that way. The **APD** turns off the amp after 30 minutes if not in use, a feature that I really like. If you want to connect to a *Smart TV* or run the unit just as a power amp, there are some settings for that.

Listening Impression

The *MyConnect 250* sounds just like you would imagine from looking at it and reading the spec sheet: big, airy, dynamic, and punchy with a touch of rich silkiness. Paired with my **Gershman** loudspeakers, the bass was huge but at the same time precise and always under control. On many occasions I felt the bass in my chest as much as heard it. The sound was on the warm side, which was not surprising given that my speaker-room combination is always a bit warm. Matching the *MC250* with a different loudspeaker could, no doubt, balance out the warm side.

I switched to *High Bias* mode shortly after my initial listening sessions and left it there for the rest of my tests. The *MC250* found my loudspeakers quite easy to drive and, at my normal listening levels, the power meters were indicating less than 1 W most of the time. The manual indicates that high gain mode will make the amp run hotter and while there was some increase in the heat coming out of the unit, it was really not significant. A noticeable change in the sound was not detected when switching to high gain mode but if it's there why not use it?

ALL-IN-ONE **MYCONNECT250** SYSTEM BY **ADVANCE PARIS**



The CD drawer has a black cover that fits so perfectly in the front plate that it virtually disappears from 10 feet away. The unit arrived with a **Bonnie Raitt** CD in it; *Luck of the Draw*, so that's what got played first. The music delivered a strong beat and a great sense of rhythm. Track 3, *I Can't Make You Love Me*, had a beautiful richness from its thick, luxurious instrumentation. Like floating on a wave of sound. I hit the repeat button, audiophiles chase moments like this.

The moving coil and moving magnet phono stages are quite good. Better than what a casual user would expect. Surprisingly, the MC stage didn't sound any noisier than the MM stage, an excellent achievement. I didn't find a significant performance gap when compared head-to-head with a \$600 phono stage. I was a bit surprised to find included an FM-DAB capability given that one has access to a massive number of Internet Radio stations via the *Advance PlayStream App*. I guess if Internet service is not available, you can

still listen to the radio. Of course, DAB is no longer available in Canada but I did try the FM and was able to pick up several local stations and the sound was fine. The *Advance PlayStream App* worked well and without bugs on my Android phone and tablet for the whole test period, and I streamed from several music services to test its performance. It is almost identical to the streaming apps supplied with other components that I have tested recently

which leads me to conclude that they all bought the same software. The **Advance Paris** version was the fastest at connecting of any that I have tried so far. Most of my listening time used music streamed from my **Qobuz HD** account. On *Stravinski's Violin Concerto*, **James Ehnes'** violin sounded sometimes woody and sometimes floating on a cloud. The call and response of various instruments across the stage was rendered in great



detail and clarity and it was easy to visualize them in the space behind the lead instrument. **Meshell Ndegocello's** new release, *The Omnichord Real Book* is well over an hour long and has a bit of everything and the *MC250* gave it a warm glow and a touch of velvet that I really enjoyed, while keeping all the detail. Tracks like *Virgo* require speed, detail and big bass, the *MC250* generated the bigness that it demanded. What impressed me the most during my listening time was the **Grammy** winning (2013), **Chick Corea Trio** album, *Trilogy*. It had punch and pop and jump and filled the room with sound, notes popped into existence out of thin air. It's just a trio but sometimes they sounded like much more!

All the way through my listening sessions there were two constantly recurring impressions, the first was extremely low noise, a deep pitch-black background with everything I played. Even with the tubes set to high gain. Low level music was

clean and clear and detailed. The second was filling the whole space with a big, airy atmosphere of music. I mentioned it regarding the **Bonnie Raitt** album and the **Chick Corea Trio**, but I could list pretty much everything I listened to. The **Hans Zimmer Live** album was another example of this, on pretty much every track.

Conclusion

With the *MyConnect Series*, **Advance Paris** clearly took aim at a very specific target sector, and I would say that they hit a

bull's eye. The *MyConnect 250* is a classic, elegant design with top of class versatility, big power and audiophile sound. Being capable of doing everything in one box is great, and the *MyConnect 250* really does everything, but doing it with big, airy, silky smooth, room filling sound is special. There are a lot of loudspeakers that could be an exciting match with this amplifier.

Advance Paris hasn't tried to dazzle buyers with tech-talk about state-of-the-art this and revolutionary that! They let the performance do the talking.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Price: \$4,700

Warranty: 2 years, parts and labour

Distributor: Tri-Cell Enterprises,
T.: 905.265.7870,
<https://tricellentersprises.com/>;
<https://www.advanceparis.com/>

Mediagraphy

Bonnie Raitt, Luck of the Draw

Dave Grusen, Collection

Stravinsky, Violin Concerto,
Orchestral Works

Meshell Ndegocello,
The Omnichord Real Book

Chick Corea Trio, Trilogy

The Flaming Lips,
The Soft Bulletin

Tsuyoshi Yamamoto Trio,
A Shade of Blue

Larkin Poe, Blood Harmony

The Black Crows,
Southern Harmony





YAMAHA R-N1000A ALL-IN-ONE NETWORK RECEIVER

Are Your BELIEFS Up for a CHALLENGE?

Par ANTHONY SIGNOROTTI

“A true audiophile would never use an integrated amplifier in their primary system.”

If I were to post this statement in an online audiophile forum, one of two things would happen: either the post would be flagged as an egregious attempt at online trolling and ignored, or the discussion would explode into a protracted and heated argument until a moderator stepped in to stop the bleeding. Both sides would retreat to lick their wounds and prepare for the next controversy, probably over cables.

The argument over whether the use of an integrated amplifier constitutes audiophile heresy is as old as time, but the advantages of moving away from separates are legion: fewer boxes, fewer cables, smaller footprint, with less fiddling and nervosa, just to name a few. Aiding and abetting this trend is the rise of serious, well built, all-in-one units and powered speakers with built in streamers which continue to challenge the old ways of thinking.

Yamaha Music is a big company that makes everything from musical instruments to professional grade playback gear to home theatre sets and sound bars. In the context of hi-fi equipment, iconic models like CA-1000 integrated amplifier and the CR-2020 stereo receiver of the high flying 1970's may come to mind. More recently, their VU-meter festooned M-5000 and A-S3200 integrated amplifiers are impressive no-compromise systems.

Some Technical Specifications

Benefiting from some of the trickle-down tech from its much more expensive older siblings, the R-N1000a is an impressive unit on spec alone. Boasting a very respectable 100 W per channel into 8 ohms, an **ESS Sabre DAC** (384 kHz/32-bit), comprehensive streaming connectivity via *Bluetooth*, *Airplay 2* and the well-designed *MusicCast* app, a moving magnet phono stage, and even *AM/FM* radio for those who still dabble in dark arts of over-the-air public broadcast listening, this receiver has it all.

Connectivity around back is extensive, complete with 2 sets of gold-plated loudspeaker terminals, 3 *RCA* line inputs, *RCA* pre-outs, 2 optical inputs, *Coaxial*,



« Listening to **Chris Stapleton's** *Death Row* from the *From a Room: Volume 1* album on **Qobuz** gave me all the starkness I could handle from this pure blues track. **Chris'** powerful, raspy voice was high and forward on the soundstage, the shapes and locations of the backing instruments clearly outlined. The *R-N1000a's* onboard streamer allowed me to clearly make out the distinct metal on metal sounds of a prison door grinding shut (or is that the sound of distant metal shop – you be the judge) in the distance, giving the recording an eery, stark feel. »



YAMAHA R-N1000A ALL-IN-ONE NETWORK RECEIVER



USB, Ethernet, HDMI eARC, 12 V trigger and a dedicated sub out.

Around the front of my silver test unit (it also comes in black), we find a clean and modern looking set of controls, including *bass*, *treble* and *balance* knobs and, in a boon (and a throwback) for late night listeners, a *loudness* dial. The pretty face is completed with an *input* dial, large volume knob and a 6.5 mm headphone jack. While the knobs lacked tactile weight and perhaps tended towards a plastic feel, they worked well. Toward the bottom of the unit is a very readable *OLED* screen that confirms input choice, user prompts for various settings, and a volume display. In a nod to anxious audiophiles everywhere, **Yamaha** also thoughtfully provided a *Pure Direct* button that defeats the tone, balance and loudness controls. Very nice.

Let's have a closer look at things

Grunting slightly as I hoisted the *R-N1000a* out of the box reminded me that build quality matters and that I should maybe consider hitting the gym. Weighing in at hair over 27 pounds, standing 6 inches high, 17 inches wide and 15 inches deep, the silver and black *R-N1000a* means

78 tedpublications.com/fr/en March-April 2024

business. Part of that heft is a generous power supply, but Yamaha built the *R-N1000a* with a double bottom chassis which includes a 1 mm iron damping plate that helps reduce parasitic vibrations. While we're on the subject of build quality, **Yamaha** leaves nothing to chance; in addition to adding a resin base under its internals to further isolate and reduce vibrations, the *R-N1000a* includes vibration damping feet, while thicker than average internal wiring and thoughtful signal path and circuit design reduces energy loss and degradation of the audio signal. The included remote control takes care of all functions simply and easily, feels good in the hand and isn't embarrassing to keep out in the open.

Room Correction

Not all of us have the means (or space) for dedicated listening rooms. Even fewer of us have any sort of useful room treatments in those rooms, even if we should. **Yamaha** knows this, and thoughtfully supplied their *YPAO™ (Yamaha Parametric Room Acoustic Optimizer)* room correction software in the box. *YPAO* has been around for quite a while, and for good reason, it works! Mounting the supplied

microphone to my camera tripod was a snap and, after connecting it to the small jack on the front of the *R-N1000a*, placing it in the listening position and following the simple instructions in the user manual, the *R-N1000a* quickly calibrated the *EQ* to make the best of a less than perfect listening space. Were the changes the computer made to the *EQ* earth shattering? Of course not, but the bass was cleaner (as if somewhat quieter) and less boomy, while the highs were ever so slightly smoother. I listened to each test track with the *EQ* on and off and always preferred it on.

Set-Up

For those of you keeping score at home, what do we have here? We have an amplifier, a pre-amplifier, a *DAC*, a streamer, a headphone amplifier and a phono stage, in a single box. Looking at my very full rack, I did an experiment: I removed every piece from the rack except my turntable and *CD* player and replaced them all with the *R-N1000a*. As I removed component after component from my rack and set them aside, pulling away now suddenly superfluous cables in the process, the advantages I mentioned earlier came into



stark relief. Other than a spot to stash my turntable, what did I need a rack for, exactly?

As a reviewer, I find it very useful to have separate boxes, because it allows me to play with and review different pieces and combinations, not to mention all the attendant cabling. But that comes at a cost, both in terms of expense (quality cables aren't cheap) and space. As a user, the staggering simplicity of having a single box was coming into **clear focus**. Simple is definitely... simpler. But is it better? Time to listen.

My Installation and My Initial Take

Overall, the *R-N1000a* sounded great when paired with the **Monitor Audio Bronze 500's**, easily powering them to room filling, and even house filling sound levels. If you're concerned about 100 W into 8 ohms not being enough, don't be. While certainly not as warm as my **Parasound A23** Stereo Power Amplifier and **Schiit Freya+** Preamp combination, I didn't feel like a little extra leanness and a tendency toward a somewhat cooler sound was in any way problematic, although if you have very cool and analytical loudspeakers, this combination might be a bit much.

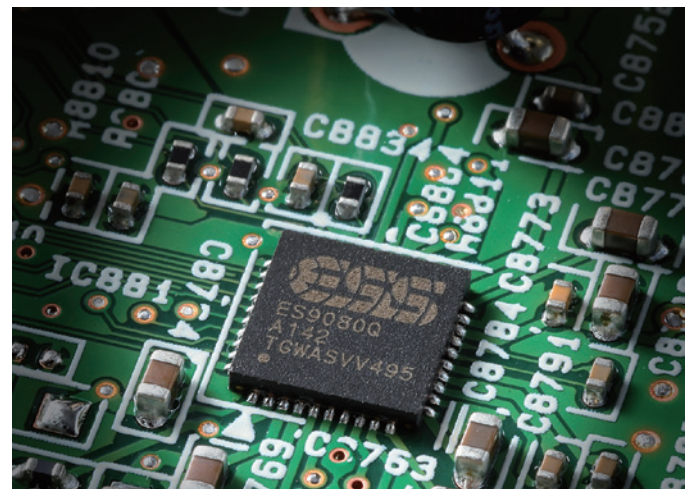
Bass was overall well balanced but lacked that last bit of punch, heft and weight of the **Parasound A23 / Schiit Freya+** combination. Midrange was definitely on the cooler side, but as always, you can counteract this with some adjustments to the tone controls – that's why they're there! Treble is definitely on the clearer side but falls well short of being bright or fatiguing. While the soundstage isn't as precise as I would like, it's certainly large, perhaps more in line with that wall of sound style rather than a super precise stage layout.

Most of my listening with the *R-N1000a* was done by streaming **Qobuz** using the **Yamaha MusicCast** app. The *R-N1000a* supports a plethora of streaming services, including but not limited to **Apple Music**, **Spotify Connect**, **Tidal Connect**, **Amazon Music** and **Deezer**. The app is well designed and easy to use, coming awfully close to *BluOS* app I use with a

Sbooster hot-rodded *Bluesound NODE* (see review in this issue), although I did find the *MusicCast* app just a hair slower to load and navigate.

Although the upgraded *NODE N130* bested the streamer onboard the **Yamaha R-N1000a**, it wasn't orders of magnitude better, and given the incredible value of having a single box, I never felt like my experience was left wanting.

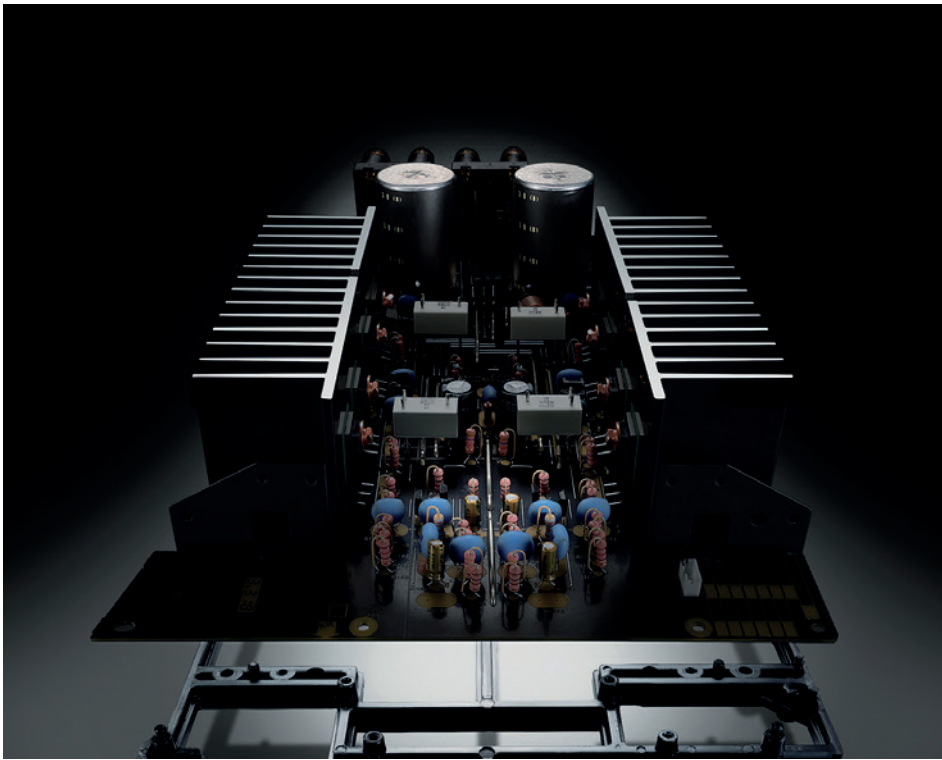
Just a small note regarding the **Apple Music** which is that it is not supported through the *MusicCast* app but can be played



back via the *AirPlay WiFi* protocol. *AirPlay* resides outside of the *MusicCast* app.

Let's Listen to the Music

Listening to **Chris Stapleton's** *Death Row* from the *From a Room: Volume 1* album on **Qobuz** gave me all the starkness I could handle from this pure blues track. **Chris'** powerful, raspy voice was high and forward on the soundstage, the shapes and locations of the backing instruments clearly outlined. The *R-N1000a's* onboard streamer allowed me to clearly make out the distinct metal on metal sounds of a prison door grinding



shut (or is that the sound of distant metal shop – you be the judge) in the distance, giving the recording an eerie, stark feel.

Listening to *Tanya*, from the *Tone Poet* release of **Dexter Gordon's One Flight Up** via the *R-N1000a's* onboard moving magnet phono stage was eye opening. While it couldn't quite best my modest **Schiit Audio Mani**, the phono stage in the *R-N1000a* came uncomfortably close. **Gordon's** saxophone, which can sometimes sound shrill on lesser stages, sounded full, clean and smooth, while drummer **Art Taylor's** symbol work came across with a minimum of grain and lots of metallic shimmer. While the *R-N1000a's* phono stage includes

neither a moving coil option nor any setting adjustments, for those of us who are content with moving magnet cartridges, the phono stage on the *R-N1000a* does not disappoint.

Listening to the onboard headphone amplifier using my **AKG 7XX** open back headphones plugged into the *R-N1000a's* 6.5 mm headphone jack, I cued up some **Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds**. On *Red Right Hand* from the 2011 remaster of Let

Love In, via **Qobuz**, there was loads of detail to unpack, from **Nick's** various and sundry breath intakes to the lighting of a cigarette, all clearly and realistically drawn. While the sound was somewhat cooler and leaner than on my Class A room heater of a headphone amp from **Schiit Audio**, I never felt fatigued while listening, even for long sessions. The headphone jack on the *R-N1000a* was of excellent quality and the *R-N1000a* automatically mutes the loudspeaker output when the headphones are connected.

Conclusion

One of the last audiophile walls to crumble may just be the notion that a stereo receiver is not an acceptable audiophile option. If I amended my online forum post above to "a true audiophile would never use a receiver in their primary system", the resulting argument might just be a touch more muted, because

most audiophiles tend to look down their collective noses at the very notion of a receiver. But my time with the *R-N1000a* convinces me that it's time to challenge those old beliefs.

Not only does the *R-N1000a* look great, work flawlessly and significantly streamline one's listening set up, it *sounds* amazing. If you're looking to keep a high level of listening pleasure with way fewer boxes and cables, you owe it to yourself to check out **Yamaha**.

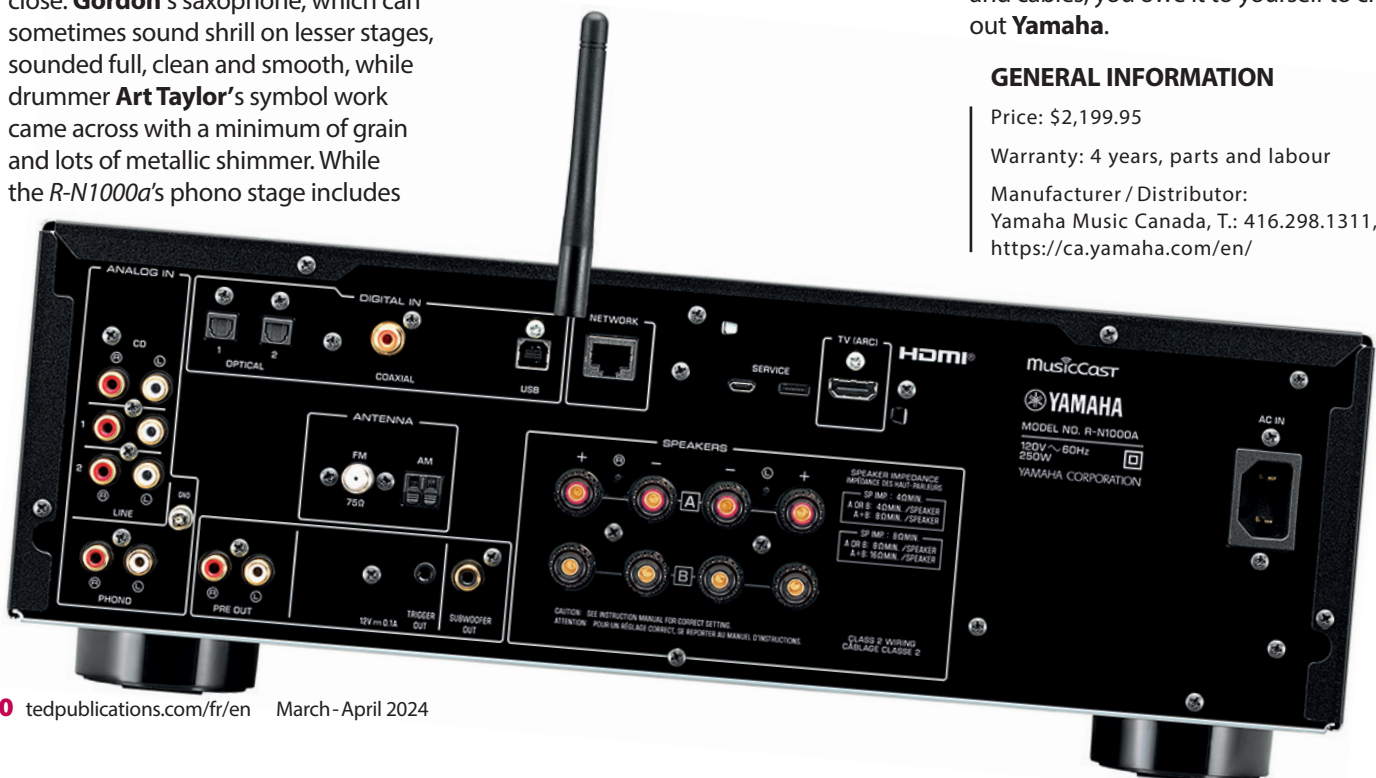
GENERAL INFORMATION

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Warranty: 4 years, parts and labour

Manufacturer / Distributor:

Yamaha Music Canada, T.: 416.298.1311,
<https://ca.yamaha.com/en/>



Jazz

By CHRISTOPHE RODRIGUEZ

SAMMY DAVIS JR

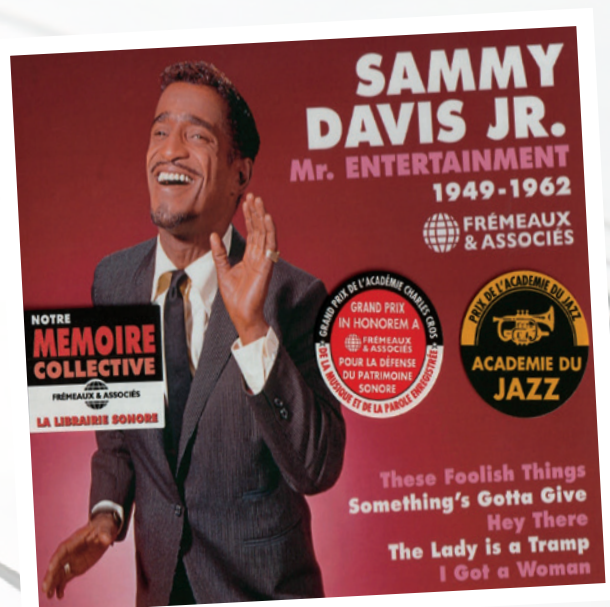
Mr. Entertainment

1949 - 1962

Frémeaux & associés, 3CD / Naxos

There is within the record company **Frémeaux**, a researcher, and he is called **Olivier Julien**. After a fabulous box set on the world of **Quincy Jones** and a brick dedicated to the pianist, composer, conductor **Michel Legrand**, he went after **Sammy Davis Jr.** (1925-1990). Known as an active member of the legendary *Rat Pack* (**Sinatra, Martin, Lawford**), **Sammy Davis Jr.** was also an actor, singer, dancer, in short, everything you needed to succeed.

Through this kit, we discover his talents as a singer and no one should be disappointed. Because he was popular, the great conductors jostled at the gate such as **Morty Stevens, Sy Oliver** or **Marty Paich**. Never syrupy, his performances are full of Broadway classics. From *My Funny Valentine*, sublime to *I Can't Get Started* and from *You'Be So Nice To Come To Home To* to *You're The Top*, what a story and what a know-how. A success that he won dearly in an America that saw very badly a personality of major colors.



SWR BIG BAND X TORSTEN MAAB

Music Written by Real Life

SWR / Naxos

And we will conclude this column on a festive note always with the **SWR Big Band**. Under the direction of **Torsten Maab**, that winks to jazz. *Basie Day* evokes the career of the conductor, while *Blues* and *Outdoor Truth*, refers to *Blues and The Abstract Truth*. An exciting initiative.



Jazz

By CHRISTOPHE RODRIGUEZ



SWR BIG BAND X

Fola Dada
SWR / Naxos

Large groups are becoming increasingly rare, especially during festivals. For economic reasons above all, it is very difficult for organizers to make such a visit profitable. A chance that we have here in Montreal, the **National Jazz Orchestra** which with much less means brighten our evenings. I have a special affection for the **SWR Big Band**, coming from Germany who shoot all over with brilliance and intelligence. In her formation, we find guest singer **Fola Dada**, whose influence of **Nina Simone** and **Tina Turner** to a lesser extent is obvious. *So We Speak* (in digital or physical format) will be part of your little purchases if you feel like giving yourself a freshness that will make you happy and not just for one evening. Princely, in every sense of the word, the **SWR** is one with its singer as you can see. With a feline voice, **Fola Dada** will give you some chills when you hear: *The More I See You*, *My Foolish Heart* (immense ballad) *You Go To My Head* and the formidable *Mr. Paganini* who made the beautiful hours of the iconic **Ella Fitzgerald**. We also have a weakness for *Bluesette*, a composition by harmonica player **Toots Thielemans** as well as: *Love Me Or Leave Me*, favorite song of the late **Nina Simone**. Happiness at all, well tied and well arranged.



RAY ANDERSON BOBBY PREVITE

Double Trouble
Challenge Record / Naxos

Jazz keeps its musician in the right sense of the word. I remember the vitality of the saxophonists **Frank Morgan** or the immense **Sonny Rollins** who, alas, decided to hang up his instrument, the pianist **Hank Jones**, the famous lineage composed of the brothers **Thad** and **Elvin**, not to mention the funk organist **Lonnie Smith**, whose every visit to Montreal was a real pleasure. In this line of thinking, what gives us more pleasure than to hear trombone player **Ray Anderson** (71) talking with drummer **Bobby Previte** (72). Let's say it right now, it's a left field jazz for savvy gills. In seven personal compositions emanating from our two protagonists, you will recognize many influences that range from the first jazz bands to the most exploded blue note. But fear not, the ear quickly gets it and with a little attention, we end up *tapping our foot* to summarize a familiar expression. As much drum lesson as trombone, this dialogue between friends of which **Ecaroo** is the matrix, is well worth the detour. Free as air, our two companions.

audiolab

9000 Series

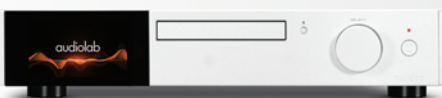
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