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STEREO

THE GERMAN HIFI MAGAZINE

ISSUE #14 2018

AVANTGARDE ZERO TA



**NO MATCHING:
ONE SPEAKER
TO MAKE ANY
SYSTEM SHINE!**

**AMPLIFIER SHOOTOUT
PURE OR PACKED?
HOW TO CHOOSE
YOUR NEXT AMP**



**REVIEWS: MARANTZ SA-10/PM-10 +++ GAUDER VESCOVA MKII
+++ QUAD ESL-2912 +++ BATMAN'S TURNTABLE? AND MORE!**



SIMPLE OR SMARTER?
AMPLIFIERS – want them stripped back or fully loaded? Rivals from Audio Analogue, Exposure and Musical Fidelity shoot it out

POLISHED PERFORMERS
GAUDER refines its speaker design further with its latest Vescova series model, a classic example of knowing your materials



PERFECT FOR DARK KNIGHTS?
SME's Model 15 is low-slung and matt black, and what looks like Batman's turntable has scintillating sound to match its style



STRONG CAST



The whole amplifier world seems to be talking about Class D and switching power supplies. All the world? Not quite – the developers of the three amplifiers we have here see it quite differently.

By Tom Frantzen and Michael Lang

In recent decades, the integrated amplifier has clearly replaced the classic stereo receiver as the basic component and control centre of a hi-fi system. Of late, however, connections for the surprisingly revived turntable have found their way back into many amplifiers, and we have seen the addition of digital connectivity for numerous new sources such as streamers, PCs or satellite receivers, either

in the living room or as part of a networked system. In this test Musical Fidelity and Exposure take both trends into account with amps at 1550 euros apiece, while Italian purist Audio Analogue focuses exclusively on the analogue world – as you might expect from the name – and presumably strives for its own music room with correspondingly specialized partnering components.

ON TEST:
AUDIO ANALOGUE AACENTO
EXPOSURE XM 5
MUSICAL FIDELITY M5SI

MOLTO VIVACE

This purist amplifier from Audio Analogue is designed to combine pure emotionality and sheer power to create an absolute musical experience. Does it succeed?



Audio Analogue's new integrated amplifier, part of its Pure AA series, is entirely designed in Italy, where it's also manufactured by hand. This is a purely analog audio concept, with no sign of any digital inputs. Yes, there is digital technology onboard, but only for volume control – of which more in a moment.

Its power at 1% (THD+N, i.e. distortion plus noise) is 2x100 watts at 8 ohms, 2x200 watts at 4 ohms and 2x330 watts at 2 ohms (!). A power rating at 2 ohms is rare, as such low impedances are dangerous for most amplifiers and they can even start smoking at such a load – Infinity's infamous Kappa 9 sends greetings. It is therefore a sign of self-confidence, but above all of the current delivery capability of an amplifier, when it is published, and here owes much to the use of a hefty 500VA transformer

The inputs, which include an MM/MC phono stage with switchable subsonic filter, are selected using relays, and the volume is controlled by digital technology without the use of operational amplifiers. A Class A headphone amplifier with variable impedance is also onboard, and the components, which can be seen under the

housing cover in a functionally superlative circuit design (see picture on the next page), are consistently of high quality and even seem to be oversized, in the positive sense. Four high-level connections, one of which is balanced, provide connectivity, preamplifier outputs – an additional mono version for subwoofer outputs – extend the possible application spectrum as well as the possibility of direct power amplifiers, and there's also a unity-gain option for use with an AV processor, for example.

A special feature of the 14 kg amp Italian, whose older brothers "Fortissimo" and "Puccini Anniversary" we already had the chance to test, is the renunciation of global feedback in both the preamp and power amp sections – instead, only local feedback is used in selected areas of the circuitry. According to the developers, this should increase the input impedances, lower the output impedances, stabilize the gain factor and the operating points of the circuit, reduce interference to the power supply and reduce distortion overall. The purpose of this design is to create a particularly light-hearted and dynamic – but still stable and very powerful – reproduction of music.

KEYWORD

Feedback: Common circuit design to help amplifiers achieve low distortion and higher attenuation factor.

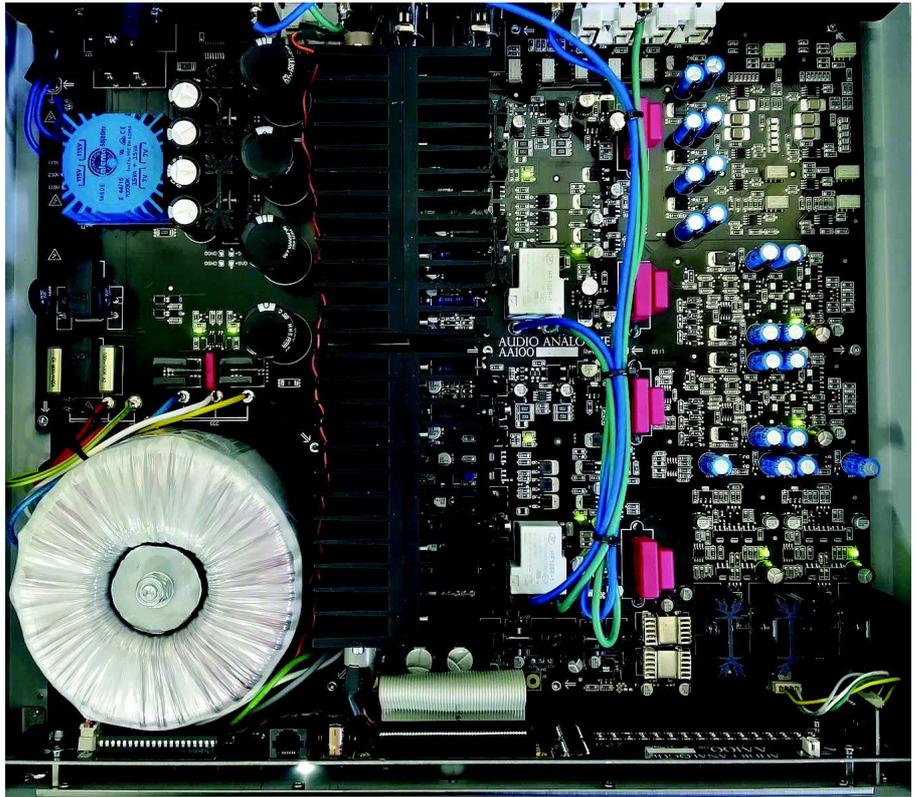
The remote control unit of Audio Analogue is beautifully finished and controls the most necessary functions. ▶



The operation of the amplifier is also quite smart, even if it does take a little initial familiarization. For example, a short press on the volume control switches the device off and into standby, while four different selectable characteristics are available for the volume control itself, which makes sense depending on the efficiency of the speakers and listening habits used. For example, with very sensitive speakers one can set the volume control to give finer control in its initial rotation, or conversely to ramp up output quickly for harder-to-drive designs.

This increased user-convenience sets the PureAA line apart from the purist Anniversary series, but as we will see, soundwise they are still quite close. This is inherent in the company's design, including that rejection of global feedback, and the "family sound" of certain brands is also due to the fact that the same

An object of style from Italy: the majesty of sound originates here. ▶



developers act according to their own sound preferences under the same conditions and with the same philosophy.

It was to be expected that the distortion values in the STEREO measurement laboratory would be somewhat worse than competitors of a more restrained design, at least on paper, but would of course be completely uncritical. It's not so much the zeros behind the decimal point that are captured in the lab, but rather whether a device touches and convinces during dynamic music playback.

Pure emotion

The development approach, to achieve high current capability almost without the infamous panacea of feedback, works perfectly with the Analogue Audio, because this amplifier starts like a champ, sweeping temperamentally and powerfully through scores, developing timbres that are usually denser than those delivered by tube amplifiers. The AAcento delivers both coarse and fine dynamics, is a real treat and has loudspeakers – in this case B&W 802D3, DALI Epicon 6 and the Wolf von Langa “Son” – under control in an exemplary manner. The fact that it

delivered a virtually balanced shootout with the Symphonic Line Edition, one of our preferred tools in this class, is a definite compliment to the developers.

Due to the spectacular development of force and energy, the image is large, expansive and vivid, which not only benefits large orchestral works, but also particularly dynamic tracks such as “Thunderstruck” by AC/DC. Nevertheless, with Tori Amos’s “Winter” the AAcento seems delicate and refined, maybe almost soft, and with “Friday Night in San Francisco”

No digital: The Italian has a well thought-out, purely analog connection concept, which includes an XLR input and sub/preamp outputs. ▼

extremely fast, precise and taut, making it easy to follow Paco de Lucia, Al di Meola and John McLaughlin and the sounds of their characteristic guitar virtuosity. It's undoubtedly a very “emotional” and multifaceted device, this AAcento.

This is a simple amplifier and, in the truest sense, incredibly empathetic and adaptable, supple and full-bodied, making the music live and breathe while letting you forget the technology behind it. It helps that the soundstage image is virtually detached from the speakers and that the height and width impression is superior – yes, you need speakers able to allow this, but the Audio Analogue definitely plays its part. Outstanding!

Tom Frantzen



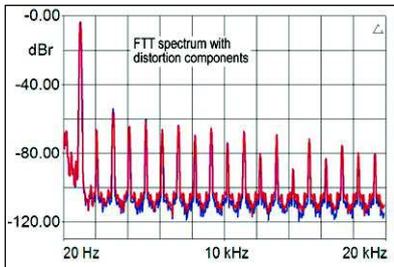
AUDIO ANALOGUE AACENTO



around 3250 €
 (available in black or silver)
 Dimensions: 45 x 10 x 40 cm (WxHxD)
 Warranty: 2 years
 Contact: Audio Analogue
 Phone: +39 0572 030964
 www.audioanalogue.com

Extremely emotional and musical, this powerful amplifier from Italy offers MM/MC phono, and very careful technical conception (without over-all feedback) and build. This is a device designed to make great friends.

LAB MEASUREMENTS



Continuous power (8 Ohm / 40hm)	102 W/148 W
Pulse power 4 Ohm (1kHz)	200 W
Distortion at 50mW/5W/1dB Pmax	0.4 %/0.2 %/0.4 %
Intermod. 50mW/5W/1dB Pmax	0.3 %/0.06 %/0.1 %
Signal-to-noise ratio at 50mW/ 5W	7.8 dB/95.2 dB
Phono MM (5 mV for 5 Watt)	79.3 dB (A)
Noise ratio Phono MC (0.5 mV for 5 Watt)	61.4 dB (A)
attenuation at 4 Ohm (63Hz/1kHz/14kHz)	100/83/60
Upper cut-off frequency (-3dB/40hm)	>80 kHz
Crosstalk Line 1 > Line 2	67.6 dB
Synchronization error volume at -60dB	0.1 dB
Stereo channel separation at 10kHz	77.8 dB
Power consumption Standby/Idle	0.5 W/39W

LAB COMMENTS: Good to very good measured values: the low feedback is "betrayed" by the only moderate but uncritical distortion values – but not by the damping factor, which remains high.



FEATURES

Remote control, Phono-MM/-MC, balanced high level input, switchable volume characteristics.

STEREO-TEST
 SOUND QUALITY **82%**
 PRICE/PERFORMANCE
 ★★★★★ ☆
EXCELLENT

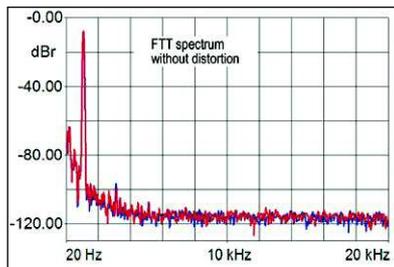
EXPOSURE XM 5



around 1500 €
 (available in silver or black)
 Dimensions: 22 x9 x41 cm (WxHxD)
 Warranty: 2 years
 Contact: Exposure
 Phone: +44 1273 423877
 www.exposurehifi.com

The compact Exposure is based on the full-size 2010 S2D, and according to the manufacturer only loses a little power to fit into the smaller housing. It has generous features (MM phono/DAC/USB), and is also a real Exposure in terms of its lifelike, tight audiophile sound.

LAB MEASUREMENTS



Continuous power (8 Ohm / 40hm)	63 W/94 W
Pulse power 4 Ohm (1kHz)	122 W
Dist. at 50mW/5W/1dB Pmax	0.02 %/0.005 %/0.02 %
Intermod. 50mW/5W/1dB Pmax	0.006 %/0.02 %/0.3 %
Signal-to-noise ratio at 50mW/ 5W	75.4 dB/82.4 dB
Phono MM (5 mV for 5 Watt)	81 dB (A)
attenuation at 4 Ohm (63Hz/1kHz/14kHz)	100/90/80
Upper cut-off frequency (-3dB/40hm)	45 kHz
Crosstalk Line 1 > Line 2	86.8 dB
Synchronization error volume at -60dB	0.3 dB
Stereo channel separation at 10kHz	56.4 dB
Service recording Stby/Idle.	(at) /18 W

LAB COMMENTS: Consistently very good in all signal-quality-related matters, decent output power and particularly good distortion values.



FEATURES

Remote control, MM phono, DAC, USB, preouts. The speaker outputs are designed exclusively for bananas and hollow bananas.

STEREO-TEST
 SOUND QUALITY **66%**
 PRICE/PERFORMANCE
 ★★★★★ ☆
EXCELLENT

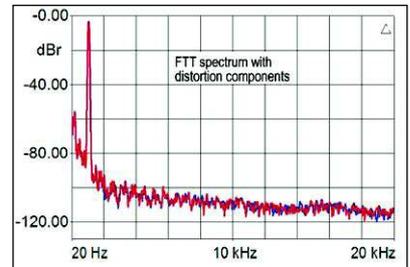
MUSICAL FIDELITY M5Si



around 1800 €
 (available in silver and black)
 Dimensions: 44 x 11 x 41 cm (WxHxD)
 Warranty: 2 years
 Contact: Musical Fidelity Limited
 Phone: +44 20 8900 2866
 www.musicalfidelity.com

In terms of price close to the junior M3si, the M5si is conceptually and sonically on the heels of its big brother, the M6si. A powerful, more musically and warmly drawn amplifier that harmonizes with most loudspeakers.

LAB MEASUREMENTS



Continuous power (8 Ohm / 40hm)	133 W/203 W
Pulse power 4 Ohm (1kHz)	256 W
Dist. at 50mW/5W/1dB Pmax	0.02 %/0.002 %/0.003 %
Intermod. 50mW/5W/1dB Pmax	0.03 %/0.004 %/0.05 %
Signal-to-noise ratio at 50mW/ 5W	73.1 dB/87.7 dB
Phono MM (5 mV for 5 Watt)	74.2 dB (A)
attenuation at 4 Ohm (63Hz/1kHz/14kHz)	20/25/40
Upper cut-off frequency (-3dB/40hm)	>80 kHz
Crosstalk Line 1 > Line 2	71.5 dB
Synchronisation error volume at -60dB	0.012 dB
Power consumption Stby/Idle (at)	<2 W/33 W

LAB COMMENTS: A shining example in the measuring laboratory, with only the damping factor rather modest. Impressive channel separation and high performance go hand in hand with low distortion, and the volume potentiometer is extremely accurate.



FEATURES

4 x line-in, MM phono; USB input for computer; home theatre function; preouts; trigger connector.

STEREO-TEST
 SOUND QUALITY **78%**
 PRICE/PERFORMANCE
 ★★★★★ ☆
EXCELLENT