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Audio Analogue Maestro Duecento Integrated Amp and Maestro CD Player

Bellissimo!

September 2008



Associated Equipment:

Digital Front End

Classé Audio CDP502
OPPO Digital DV-980H
Universal Disc Player
Magnum Dynalab DT-5
AM/FM Tuner

Amplification

ASR Emitter II Exclusive
Vitus Audio SS-010
Amplifier
BAT VK31SE Preamp
BAT VK1000 Mono
Amplifiers

Loudspeakers

Escalante Design Fremont
Xavian Giulietta
Loudspeakers

Cabling

Stealth Audio GS5050
Interconnect
Stealth Audio Metacarbon
Interconnects
Stealth Audio Petite Dream
Speaker Cables
Revelation Audio Paradise
Cryo-Silver™ Reference
RCA Cables

AC Conditioners

Modified APC Power
Conditioner

Accessories

Osiris Amp Stands



On a trip to Paris a few years ago, I was in a taxi heading to the *Musée d'Orsay* when I commented to the driver that I was amazed at how beautiful and well preserved the architecture was, especially the sculptures, many of which were centuries old. He told me that in Europe, taking great care to preserve their art and architecture is serious business and, quite frankly, big business. "A great part of our economy is tourism and a big attraction for tourists is the art and architecture," he said. "Preservation is what helps art seem timeless."

By contrast, the only American architecture that I could think of that gets treated with this same sort reverence is Wrigley Field and Elizabeth Taylor. All kidding aside, that sense of something being "timeless" is one of the key attributes of high-end audio. Think about it. A system featuring a Linn

Sondek LP12 turntable and Wilson Audio Watt/Puppy loudspeakers is just as contemporary today as it was nearly ten or fifteen-years ago. Sure that system may also include an iPod and a pocket sized ICE-powered amplifier, but still quality works of audio art never go out of style. That's what I was reminded of while spending some time with products from Italian audio manufacturer Audio Analogue.



Audio Analogue

Audio Analogue is located in Monsummano Terme (PT) Italy, and has been part of the high-end audio scene since 1995. Its chief designer is a classical music-loving "golden ear" named Claudio Bertini. He and a group of audiophiles and electronics professionals have dedicated themselves to creating a full line of high-quality, excellent sounding audio components for all kinds of music lovers; whether they are entry-level enthusiasts or the more demanding connoisseur who only wants the finest components available. Their devotion to the art of music and audio is apparent in the thoughtfulness of the design and physical beauty of the products they make, not to mention the fact that they've named many of their products after great Italian composers such as Puccini, Paganini, and Verdi.



CES 2008

It was during the 2008 CES that I stopped in the room featuring the stunningly gorgeous Eventus Audio Lysithea loudspeakers, Audio Analogue Maestro Duecento integrated amp and Maestro CD player. Admittedly I was drawn into the room by the looks of the Lysitheas but I was quickly seduced by the overall sound from the room. By happenstance this room ended up on that long list of, "rooms that I could only spend a brief moment in but who I'd planned to get back to but never did." But as luck would have it, a few months after returning from CES I found out that both the Eventus and Audio Analogue gear was being imported into the U.S. by a distributor who was local to me.



Eventus Audio U.S.A. is located in Batavia, Illinois just 40 minutes west of Chicago. The general manager is a super-friendly, musician and audiophile named Greg Onesti. Onesti was very accommodating in getting me review samples of the Maestro CD player and the Duecento integrated and has even offered to allow me to review a pair of the Eventus speakers at a future date. By the way, I think it's worth mentioning that not only is Onesti an avid music-lover, but he also knows his way around a kitchen. He was kind enough to treat my brother and I to a feast of some delicious homemade enchiladas. To this day, I have never tasted any as good and I love enchiladas.

The Maestro CD Player



All Audio Analogue "Maestro Series" products have a distinctive family resemblance. They're finished in gorgeous, thick slats of soft-silver brushed aluminum with clean lines and smooth edges. The middle of the faceplate protrudes about an

inch and then elegantly slopes back on each side. The CD player features a PLED dot-matrix display that can be easily



seen at moderate distances. To the right of the display is a cluster of soft-touch function control buttons. For whatever reason they decided to make the color of the lettering for these buttons white, which against the silver, makes them darn-near impossible to read from more than a couple of feet away. To the left is a power "standby" button and beneath the display is a fairly rigid disc drawer. Nicely laid out on the rear of the player are an S/PDIF digital output, a set of balanced (XLR) and unbalanced (RCA) outputs, an RS232 connector for home system integration and an IEC receptacle which allows you to use the stock cord or your favorite brand of power cord. The infra-red remote control (which appears to be made from a solid chunk of polished aluminum) sort of looks like a miniature surfboard and has buttons that mimic those on the faceplate.



The Maestro CD player is built with high quality parts particularly its 24-bit/192kHz DAC. The power supply has two transformers and eight separated set-up sections. It uses low-jitter, sample-rate conversion and analogical circuits with separated components. It also uses low-tolerance metallic-layered resistors and non-polarized polyester/propylene capacitors; high-speed, low-loss, high-capacity electrolytic capacitors and organic-electrolyte, low-capacity electrolytic capacitors.



The Maestro Duecento Integrated Amp

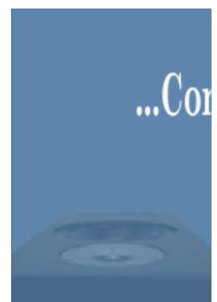
The phrase "built like a tank" is a pretty clichéd way of saying that something is rather sturdily constructed. Well, sorry, but there simply is no other way to describe the physical beauty of the



Maestro Duecento integrated amp. It's handsome, rugged, and Italian. If Robert DeNiro were an amplifier he'd be the Duecento. You get my meaning.



The Duecento's good looks come in a massive, 132 lbs. chassis which meant setting it up in my system was going to be a two person job. I enlisted the aid of my 120 lbs. girlfriend to help me get it out of my car, through the garage, down a flight of stairs and onto my amp stand. Needless to say, I'm still paying for the earrings that I promised her after she broke two fingernails. The Duecento's faceplate sports the same dot matrix display as the CD player but is flanked on each side by two knobs which use microprocessors to control volume and input selection. On each side of the amp is a row of black heatsinks which run the length and height of the amp. The rear of the amp is busy, as you might expect of an integrated. Near the top of the rear plate are a pair of five-way binding posts. Down the center are six sets of unbalanced (RCA) connectors. The top set are the tape outputs and below them are five sets of source inputs. Flanking those five inputs is a sixth input for a balanced (XLR) source. On the lower left corner of the rear plate is the power-on toggle switch, on the right is the IEC receptacle and above that is a fuse holder. The remote looks the same as the CD player's but the buttons are of course for controlling the amp's volume, input selection, mute and standby modes.



Internally, the Duecento is a dual mono design sporting two 1300VA toroidal transformers; one for each channel. The amp puts out a robust 200 watts per channel into 8 Ohms and doubles its output as the impedance halves. According to the Audio Analogue literature, the preamp section uses a regulated power supply and boasts zero capacitors in the signal path. The protection and control sections are galvanically insulated from the analog sections to minimize digital noise. This ensures you'll always enjoy quiet operation from the Duecento.

CDP-502
Reference
Disc Player

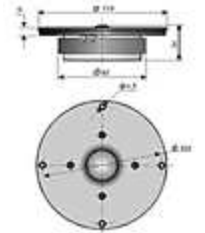


CLASSE
www.classeaudio.com

Music Maestro Please

Okay, okay. If you're like me, you've probably gotten to that point in this little treatise of mine where you're saying "yada, yada, yada. Blah, blah, blah. Okay Daveyboy, what the heck do these things sound like?" Well, in a word, an Italian word, bellissimo!

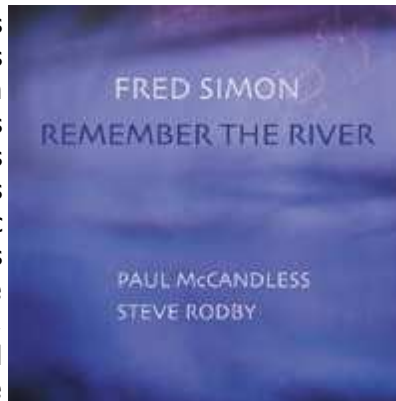
As a redbook only CD player the Maestro is wonderfully musical and presents one of the most balanced soundstages I've heard from a digital source. The width, height, and depth of the performance space is very realistic making it easy to delineate the location of the musicians.



If you've read my reviews over the years, you'll know that I like to reference many of the recordings engineered for Naim Audio by Ken Christianson, a fellow Chicagoan and co-owner of my favorite audio shoppe, Pro Musica. It's not just because Ken is a brilliant engineer with a wonderful ear – his "True Stereo" recording technique (which uses a single pair of AKG 414EB mics that record directly to a Nagra IV-S analogue recorder) puts you extremely close to the live event – but because he often includes a photograph of the venue in which the performance takes place.

AUDES

A great example of this is wonderful pianist Fred Simon's *Remember the River* [naim cd081]. This recording features Simon on piano, Paul McCandless on brass and wind instruments and Steve Rodby on acoustic bass. In the photo, Simon is centerstage with Rodby on the left and McCandless on the right, both on slightly elevated platforms. Being able to see where the performers are located in relation to the microphones adds to the enjoyment of listening to the music.

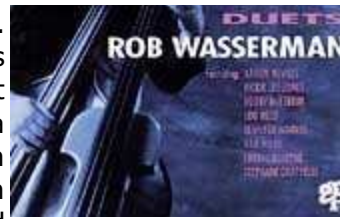


The Maestro CD player recreates sonically what you can see visually. The performers are placed in realistic space. The piano and horn are prominent on tracks like "Time Will Tell" and "Revolver," and you can see in the photo that Simon and McCandless are closer to the mikes than Rodby's bass.

The Duecento amp also had a significant impact on the presentation of the sound. The power output was effortless, and thanks again to the photo, the immensity of the venue can be seen as well as heard. This recording takes place in Northwestern University's beautiful Pick-Staiger Concert Hall. The Duecento recreates the size and presence of the stage within the hall and helps bring the performances to life. Rodby's bass is nicely defined and deep. The amp got the best out of the dual 12" woofers in my reference Escalante Design Fremonts but it wasn't overblown, nor did it add



any bloom to create faux deep bass. Instead the bass maintained its natural acoustic character. Bassist Rob Wasserman's *Duets* [MCA], is a great example of this. Wasserman performed a duet with Bobby McFerrin called "Brothers." It featured McFerrin's brilliant vocals but still brought out the best of Wasserman's performance. The vibration of the strummed string and the quickness of his fingers gliding up and down the bass strings were rendered wonderfully through the Duecento.



Treble performance was quite good as well. I really enjoyed the mellifluous sounds of Rickie Lee Jones' *Pop-Pop* [Geffen] through the Audio Analogue system. Track one, "My One and Only Love," was the perfect tune for my late night listening sessions. Jones' voice seemed to have a delicate texture that was rendered sweetly, particularly by the Maestro CD player, even at low volumes. Sitting close to the Fremonts, it was as if Jones' moist mouth was right in front of me allowing me to hear every deep breath and lick of her lips. It was a long night.

Feeling this vibe for female voice, I threw on Eliane Elias' *Dreamer* [Bluebird]. Baby! Talk about a voice that just pours out of your speakers. The Maestro/Duecento system gave this disc resolution, life and three-dimensional presence in spades. And this was already a very good sounding disc to begin with. I had just listened to it on the wonderful and très cheap Oppo Digital DV-980H universal disc player. The Oppo is a nice little player for under two hundred bucks, but I was quickly reminded of why you would need to pay more to get the level of sound that you get from the Maestro. The Maestro revealed nuances and energy in Elias' voice that the Oppo couldn't and probably shouldn't, especially on tracks like Call Me. So it was immediately apparent that a fairer fight would have to be between the Maestro and the Classé CDP-502.



Like the Oppo, the Classé is also a universal disc player. But for the purposes of this discussion I am only considering its redbook disc performance. Like the Maestro, the Classé is gorgeously built, internally and externally, and performs wonderfully with the Duecento amplifier. The Classé is a touch more neutral throughout the musical range than the Maestro, meaning that mediocre recordings are going to sound ... mediocre. The Maestro on the other hand is a bit more forgiving. For instance, on Al Di Meola's *Kiss My Axe* [Tomato R2 79751] the title track has very tight and fairly deep bass through the Classé, but through the Maestro it seemed to go even deeper, maybe even a little deeper than it should. The treble performance is the same way. Through the Maestro the upper frequency music sounded a bit more "exciting" though at times a little towards the bright side of neutral compared to the Classé. I didn't know why, but I found myself tapping my toes a

little bit more listening to the Maestro and listening more intently listening to the Classé. But don't read anything into that last statement. Just know that I enjoyed both units a lot.

The only amp I could compare the Duecento to would be the Vitus Audio SS-010 integrated amp. Physically, the Vitus, though smaller, is even more stunning than the Duecento. And though the Vitus' power rating is only 50wpc (about a quarter of the Duecento), it sounds almost as powerful as the Duecento. But musically, they are very similar, both possessing the ability to recreate realistic space, instrument scale and musicality. But consider this; the Duecento and Maestro CD player together cost less than the Vitus SS-010 alone.

The Audio Analogue Maestro CD player and Maestro Duecento integrated amp are musically spectacular performers that are as lovely to look at as they are to listen to. Couple that with the fact that they are (forgive the cliché) "built like a tank." One good glance will reveal their timeless appeal just like European art and architecture. Considering their price, performance and competition, these will definitely be "Most Wanted Components."

Dave Thomas



Technical Specifications:

Maestro Upsampling CD Player

Channels: - 2

Maximum output voltage: Unbalanced outs

Balanced outs

Frequency response +0/-1dB 2Hz-22kHz

Noise level: Band Limits 0Hz-20kHz

Signal/noise ratio: 22Hz-22kHz

Power requirements: - 230V 50-60Hz oppure 115V 50-60Hz

Power consumption: - 60VA

Dimensions: - 5'.31"(H)17'.52"(W)15'.55"(D)

Weight: - 30,87lbs

Aluminum chassis

Stainless steel details

Remote control

Price: \$3,400.00

Maestro Duecento Integrated Stereo Amplifier

Power:

8 Ω @ 1%THD

4 Ω @ 1%THD

2 Ω @ 1%THD 200 W

400 W

800 W

Total Harmonic Distortion: 1W, 8 Ω 1kHz 0.03%

Sensitivity: For 200W @ 8 Ω - Attenuation 0db

Unbalanced input

Balanced input

0.6Vms

1.2Vms

Rise time: Full Power 2.2 μ s

Slew rate: Full power bandwidth limited 50V/ μ s
Frequency Response: Attenuation -0db
Attenuation -6db 1Hz - 160kHz -3dB
1Hz - 160kHz -3dB
Signal/noise ratio: 600 Ω input termination A-weighted referred to 200W
Better than 100 dB
Power requirements: - See rear label
Power consumption: Normal
Maximum 200W
2600W
Weight: - 60 Kg

Price: \$10,000.00

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