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Audio PHILE

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PERFECT FORM

Sonus Faber Aida: The elegant sculpture with acoustical room adaption

THE WORLD OF TUBES

- Tube rolling: Measurably better sound
- T+A: Triodes with solid state power
- OTL-Principle: Strong without transformer





By: Wolfgang Tunze



Size doesn't matter

How small can you get in high end? Restek's M Series is a David among hi-fi Goliaths – one that grows beyond its size in the listening room.



The start-up chronicles for the year 1975 recorded two new businesses with lasting impact: In Albuquerque, New Mexico, a certain Bill Gates and his fellow student Paul Allen teamed up to establish a company called Microsoft. In the vicinity of Kassel, Adrianus Elschot – also joined by a fellow student – laid the foundation stone for Restek, a high-end manufacturer. While one of the partnerships later made it big, the other have stayed in their cosy, little niche until today.

And yet, there are interesting similarities between the two initiatives: On the eve of digital revolution, it was more or less in the air to be intensely concerned with microprocessors, the hottest of achievements in semiconductor electronics at that time. Gates and his buddy got to work with the first Intel chips in order to program software for computer applications, while Elschot and his colleague, on the other side of the big pond, taught the Intel Type 8048 to control the entire display and operation of a tuner called the Restek D1 – a pioneering achievement at the time of its introduction in 1978.

Even when looking at Restek's components today, you will notice that Elschot had already mastered the basics of digital control devices at a time when, elsewhere, wire ropes were still used for moving the segments of rotary capacitors. This also applies to the latest creations of the company, the MINT power amplifier and matching CD player

named MPLA+: Both can be calibrated in subtle and varied ways for adapting to the preferences of hyper-sensitive ears. Yet, either device sports a single knob on the front panel: Push, left-hand and right-hand rotation – that's all it takes in the ergonomic repertoire to navigate through the menu structures of the two components, each supported by a row of dimmable displays in burgundy, blue or green.

If we had the tricky task of defining the concept behind high-end, this combination of mechanical minimalism and hidden sophistication would certainly figure high in the list of criteria. An imposing iPhone-sized panel (finished in varieties of acrylic glass, aluminium or chromium in the case of the two new Restek models) should also be among the key features, not forgetting the electrical energy supply via sufficiently thick power cables and IEC connectors. To avoid confusion: It's not always the heavy, expensive devices that earn themselves a seal of approval. Often enough, the true high-end baby camouflages with a mini-casing and a reasonable price tag. The two Resteks are just about 28.5cm wide, the amplifier priced around 1,895 euros, the CD player around 1,445.

But let's not dwell on secondary virtues.

What is it that distinguishes the sound-related ingredients of the two delicate devices? In the case of the CD player, this includes a generously dimensioned power supply inclu-

ding a toroidal transformer – the latter identifiable by its weight – but above all an exquisite 24-bit digital-analogue converter from Burr Brown, whose talents are revealed in different ways by the player: If you wish, you can have the data format of the CD extrapolated before conversion to five different sampling rates up to 192 kilohertz, and resolution can be refined to 18, 20 or 24 bits. In addition, the anti-aliasing filter can be set to a lower selectivity. At least in theory, the combination of upsampling and a flatter filter characteristic is attractive: In this constellation, the harmonic spectrum has a better chance of emerging out of digital signal processing without impairments.

The sound-relevant features of the amplifier include a combination of one analogue preamplifier with four high-level inputs and a switch-mode power amplifier, operating on the principle of pulse width modulation. Components

and concepts sounding good enough to introduce this energy-efficient technology to high-end components haven't been available until recently, says Elscho. This piece of information makes you sit up, since pulse width modulation is actually old hat: In 1978, as Elscho should still remember, Sony introduced their legendary TA-N88, a power amplifier based on this principle and later available under the German Wega brand as part of the famous Zero-Lab system.

A number of useful features in the small MINT power station also deserve mention. Each input can be identified on the display by its own programmable name, and input sensitivity can be set between -6dB and 6dB in order to compensate for level differences in the connected sources. In addition, the amp can be switched to mono operation – in case it should work as a bridged mono-block with double power. In this mode, it is recommended to turn off the volume

control. The CD player can handle this job as a substitute.

Now, how does this compact team get on in the listening room? Don't be misled by the delicate, lightweight power amp; if you expect a meek performance, then you'll be in for a surprise: The small Resteks really put their backs into it; they play firmly and with considerable dynamic, conjuring up enough energy – even with speakers of average efficiency – to effortlessly cover large living spaces.

Of course, there are electronic circuits, allowing such large-scale symphonic onslaughts as the staccatos of the wind and string sections in Stravinsky's „Le Sacre du Printemps“ (Karajan, DG) to be hurled into the listening room with even greater force. Yet: Even here, the Restek combination preserve style and, above all, a commanding overview of the firework of unique tone colours. And if super guitarists Al Di Meola, John McLaughlin and Paco De Lucia chase their fingers across

the fretboards at breakneck speed on „Friday Night in San Francisco“ (Philips), the Resteks are entirely in their element: They make the chords and guitar lines sparkle and glisten. In general: Freshness, precision, speed, and rich lustre in the high range are among the most obvious fortes of the small Restek duo, even if we sometimes had the impression that a shot of upsampling is utilised for adding some breathing space to the sound textures.

Thus, even the first listening session with the small Restek duo could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship, which may later be joined into by others: After all, Restek's Mini series also includes such promising components as a digital satellite radio receiver, a separate digital analogue transformer and a phono preamp. But that's material for another review. <



No metal: The plastic casing of the Restek Minis' joint remote control appears slightly less valuable than the two high-end components.



Test-CD

Friday Night In San Francisco

Al Di Meola, John McLaughlin and Paco De Lucia, three of the best guitarists of our time, outbid each other in this live concert with veritable cascades of sound - sparkling, brilliant, breathtaking.

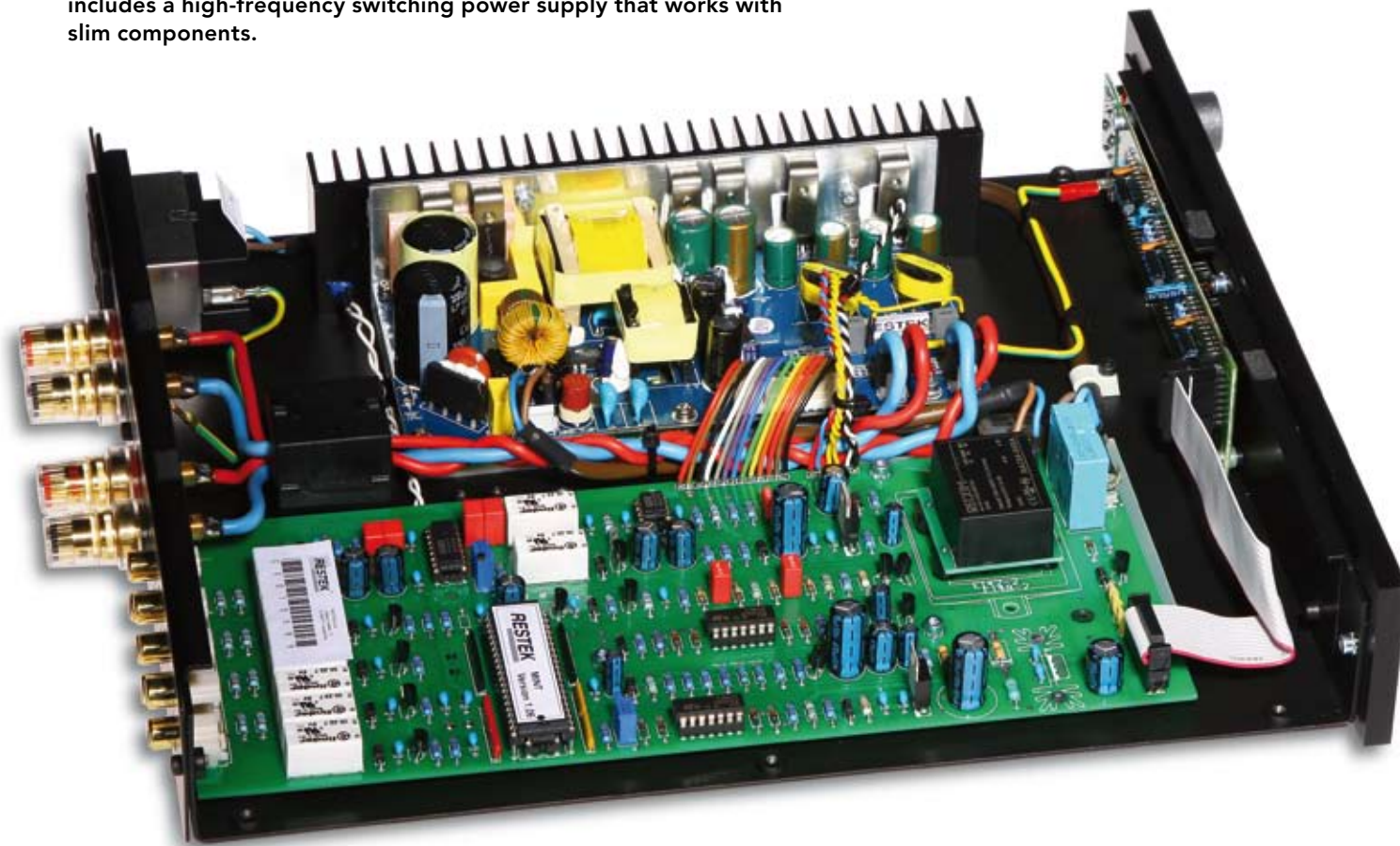


The Author

Wolfgang Tunze

For the last few weeks, Swabian-by-choice Tunze has been working in Hamburg – where he discovered there an Eldorado for fans of Sinatra, Satchmo, and all the other film score heroes. Also available on the Web: www.playitagainsam.de

No huge power transformer or massive electrolytic capacitors in sight: The power amp concept of pulse width modulation also includes a high-frequency switching power supply that works with slim components.

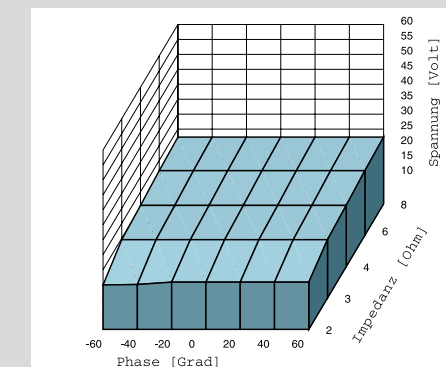


Restek

MPLA+ CD player and MINT power amplifier

List Price: MPLA+ from 1,445 euros, MINT from 1,895 euros
 Warranty: 3 years
 Weight: MPLA+ 4.1kg, MINT 3.6kg
 Dimensions (W x H x D): 28.5 x 6.4 x 33 cm (MPLA+ and MINT)
 Front panels: Black Acrylic, Black Aluminium, Champagne or Silver Satin, Brass-plated, or special designs.
 Distribution:
 Restek AG,
 Untere Feldstraße 13,
 D-34277 Fuldabrück, Germany
 Telephone: +49-561-42089
 Internet: www.restek.de

Stability diagram

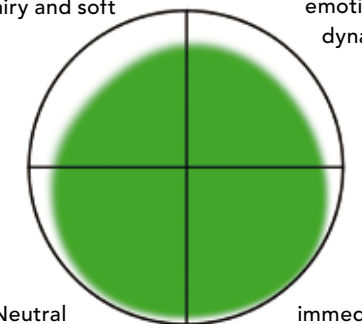


Apart from an inaudible drop in the high range, frequency response is straight as if drawn by a ruler (not shown). The voltage diagram of the MINT attests impressive stability to the power amps: Even at low impedances and complex loads the output voltages drop only slightly.

AUDIophile character

Effortless airy and soft

grippingly emotional dynamic



AUDIophile potential



AUDIophile recommendation

The little MINT works best with speakers of medium to high efficiency: Then it scores with lush dynamics.