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»Analogue Masterpiece«:

Thales Simplicity

BRINKMANN
O A S I S

At least since the onset of stereophonic LP tracking, there have been attempts from time to time to reproduce the path of the cutting stylus which is lead on a straight line. Some manufacturers experimented with rotating tonarms where they adjusted the pickup system on its circular path by means of mechanical solutions like e.g. parallelogram leverages or wire rope hoists to emulate quasi the straight line of the cutting process by superimposing two gyrations or to approximate it at least. But only Garrard Zero 100 and Van Eps have stuck in our memories. However, they all failed in the end due to mechanical shortcomings, irrespective of the fact that the sonic gain was noticeable. But at that time the production capabilities were still far, very far away from modern standards in terms of precision, tolerances and durability – you know, not all things were better in the »good old days«.

Some years ago Micha Huber from Switzerland once again took up the idea to mechanically adjust the pickup system in a rotating tonearm in such a way that the tracking error is almost equalised. The geometric basis for this constitutes the Thales' circle, and consequently he called his tonearm »Thales«. This is a very complex construction with a towering guide cantilever that makes high demands both on its design and handling. As a further stage the »Thales Simplicity« was then developed – now up for an exclusive review.

Although its name might suggest so, this tonearm is anything but simple. This is only true of the installation on the drive and its operation – but the construction is rather complex and reveals a deep understanding for geometrical relations and the changes in the distribution of mass during the tracking process that go with it. In order to implement this into a perfectly and permanently

functional tonearm, it takes a very profound know-how in micromechanics.

The length of the tonearm is determined by the Thales' circle which passes through the turntable pivot. To prevent the pickup cartridge from deviating off its required path, the arm's cradle must be installed precisely in keeping with the mounting template. Upon closer examination one will notice that the Simplicity is actually two tonearms which are connected in a common bearing ring and at the pivoted pickup seating. The two arm tubes are damped in different ways to minimise or suppress resonances.

The bearing is a two-part gimbaled system whose outer bearing ring provides the vertical guide through a bearing pair. Inside the bearing ring each arm tube has its own bearing pair for the horizontal rotation. Since both bearings are mounted in a fixed position, the change in the pickup position is forced by the arm tubes of unequal length. The force for the horizontal movement is transmitted via the pickup system, as is always the case with rotating tonearms. The force which needs to be exerted for the pivoting movement is certainly far lower here than the force required by tangential tonearms for the displacement of the complete device of arm plus counterweight.

Behind the bearing unit each arm tube has its permanently mounted counterweight for a basic compensation. The counterweight (three sizes are included) for adjusting the tracking force is inserted into the inner weight on two sliding pins. It has a staggered shape so as not to interfere with the varying rotating paths. At the far end a flat weight with a symmetrical recess is slipped on which, through its rotation, compensates the fluctuating tracking force between inner and outer groove, caused by the relative movement of the weights. Since in the outer section of the record the pickup is placed orthogonally to the groove, but angled to the arm tubes, the result is a skating force which is compensated by two hidden magnets in the counterweights. The further

Review: Thales Simplicity tonearm

»Tangential tracking« by a rotating tonearm,
thought through to the end: the Thales
Simplicity convinces with a clever design
that's sophisticated in every detail.

Masterpiece

the arm moves inward, the smaller the angle becomes and finally is virtually zero. The skating force behaves in an analogous way to it.

A nice detail is the hump on the lift bank which fits between the two arm tubes and precisely establishes the rest position of the arm. The internal wiring of the Thales leads to a screw-on junction box. The customer decides whether the cable is passed on from there without a junction or terminated via socket(s) – and thus also the price of the tonearm.

The pickup cartridge is installed in a mounting piece which the manual refers to as headshell and which is fixed with an Allen screw on the front side in the tonearm guide. For the precise alignment of the system in the headshell the adjustment template is an indispensable aid, its application is explained in the very well made operating manual. I'll say it again: the exact positioning of both the tonearm and the pickup is imperative! Only then a tangential tracking error of

0.008 degrees at the maximum can be achieved – a value beyond good and evil.

The purely geometric aspect that the stylus is always perfectly aligned to the groove also entails that the generator system works permanently in its ideal range and not in a slanted position. Now



many a user may wonder if these minor deviations are relevant.

Yes, they are indeed, as was impressively confirmed time and again by the listening results. Everything you need for the installation and adjustment is found inside the well-conceived box.

I mounted the Simplicity onto the Brinkmann Oasis and the Audiolabor

Konstant. Owing to two arm-bases the changeover passed off fast and revealed interesting differences, which I will explain later in connection with the Brinkmann valve power supply. As phono preamps the Omtec Antares and Vioelectric PPA V 600 were used. The first pickup candidate was the Brinkmann EMT-ti MC system, a high-class version of the classic EMT. High-class must be understood literally, for the other EMT derivatives can't touch the EMT-ti, neither the Grasshoppers from van den Hul nor the Roksan Shiraz. Helmut Brinkmann is going to great lengths here – and the outcome makes perfectly happy, not only in the Thales Simplicity, as was



The Thales Simplicity in all its splendour (right), a detailed view on the bearing (left) and the Brinkmann valve power supply for the Oasis (top).

proven by a detour to the Schröder Referenz. And with a price of 3,000 euros it's not even located in the »out of reach« category. It fascinates with an almost incredible contouring of voices and instruments that creates a precise and rock-solid representation of the virtual stage.

A well-known touchstone is Jennifer Warnes' »Way Down Deep« from the LP »The Hunter«. The ultra deep drum beats at the beginning of the song always tend to fray a bit, appearing slightly blurred as a habit. Not so with this combination that reads it out with clear contours. The stage representation also remains the same from the beginning of the LP right to the end – an effect of the non-existent tracking error. This is a subtle effect, not salient, but well audible. A discussion about timbres or the reach at both ends of the frequency spectrum is academic, each takes place on an undisputed top level. A remarkable aspect is the dynamic behaviour of the EMT-ti/Simplicity combination, notably in terms of fine and microdynamics, as is demonstrated by the »West Side Story Symphonic Dances« featuring the Labèque Sisters and percussions: besides the almost explosive coarse dynamics, one thing is particularly striking, viz how precisely the sustained decay of very deep piano keystrokes can be traced until the note dies completely away. All in all this is an absolutely sovereign performance which simply leaves nothing more to be desired. But I won't call it quits at that point. For this report SWS Audio, the Dynavector distributor, placed a Te Kaitora Rua at my disposal, which at 2,700 euros is close to the EMT-ti pricewise and which I remember very well since the review in the 4/2005 issue. This was an excellent choice, for the combination is soaring to an almost comparable level. In distinction from the Brinkmann EMT-ti the Te Kaitora plays somewhat more authoritatively, reproducing the contours not quite as razor-sharp and sketching a slightly slimmer image. And it's also considerably lower in volume than the EMT-ti.

An amazing performance was then delivered by the EMT HSD 6 on the Simplicity, which I've never perceived so well-behaved, yet at the same time so staggering, too. Supple, accurate and with clear dynamic shades, it still proved to be a high-class contender. And the van den Hul Grasshopper III GMA also made friends with the Simplicity instantly, playing off its love for details in a neatly arranged sound image.

With its detailed, nicely balanced and dynamically fresh reproduction the Goldnote Verona once more gave proof that on the basis of the Denon DL 103 generator high-class derivatives are also possible. Of course, I couldn't refrain from checking out the oldtimer Shure Ultra 500. A quick retrospect: this was the high flyer with which Shure had demonstrated how far one could push the moving magnet design and which cost a small fortune then. It's a thousand pities that such a thing is longer made, because this MM can stand any comparison, provided you hook it up to a high-grade phono stage whose MM amplification is more than just tokenism. The overall impression first appears somewhat noncommittal, but only until one realises that it puts the focus more on the musical entity and perfectly embeds the lush wealth of details into it.

Now for the listening impressions that the Thales Simplicity, teamed with the Dynavector Te Kaitora Rua and the Goldenote Verona, was communicating on the Audiolabor Konstant. They don't differ significantly in single parameters from those gathered on the Brinkmann, but compared to the Oasis, the overall sound image appears grumpy, a little less controlled and sensitive. However, this is actually no miracle; the two drives are quite a few years and several thousand euros apart after all.

This superiority is largely due to the Brinkmann valve power supply





A gorgeous combination: Brinkmann Oasis and Thales Simplicity. Below: The solid and precise Thales adjustment template.

The Thales Simplicity is the best tonearm I've come across so far. Its construction, sophisticated down to the last detail, the super high precision bearing technology, the fascinating micromechanics and a flawless workmanship make its price comprehensible. And I can only recommend the valve-driven power supply, too, the gain in sound quality is certainly worth the cost.

RöNt for the Oasis, which we are going to deal with in the final section of this review. Meanwhile it has probably become an analogistic platitude that the power supply of a turntable has a considerable impact on the sonic results. How clearly this may turn out, was shown to me emphatically by the RöNt (3,300 euros). The impressions depicted above were exclusively gathered with it. Switching back to the standard power supply – one could also speak of a step backwards,

which it is indeed – happens fast and so does the verdict. Yet in doing so I didn't ignore that not long ago I had certified the Oasis excellent acoustic qualities in this very configuration (hifi & records 3/2011). But with the standard power supply the sound image dwindles away, it literally flattens out and thus becomes almost casual. Now back to the valve power supply – and the performance is right again. Brinkmann argues the improvement is due to the vacuum inside the rectifier valves. I'm simply going to accept this as is, indulging in a sound image of no equal.

Without a trace of elation I need to declare: the Brinkmann Oasis in combination with RöNt and Thales Simplicity sets an analogue benchmark which can easily meet the highest of demands and demonstrates en passant how well modern pickup systems below the 3,000 EUR limit can perform. I'd love to grow old with this turntable. But since this is beyond my means, I can but rejoice over each day where I can still enjoy this combo.

Conclusion

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* with different internal wiring up to 8,100 euros