ASR
Emitter II Exclusive

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Michael Fremer

DESCRIPTION Solid-state, multi-chassis, integrated amplifier with remote control. Maximum output power: 280Wpc into 8 ohms (24.5dBW), 500Wpc into 4 ohms (24dBW), 900Wpc into 2 ohms (23.5dBW), 1400Wpc into 1 ohm (22.4dBW). Frequency response: 0.2Hz–500kHz, –3dB. Distortion: <0.02%, 50mW to1dB under maximum RMS output at 1kHz; <0.1%, 20Hz–20kHz. Input impedance: 10k ohms. Input sensitivity (for 150W into 8 ohms): level "61," 2.0V' level "76," 400mV. Voltage Gain: up to 28dB in position 1, up to 43dB in position 2, depending on volume setting. Signal/Noise Ratio: >90dB ref. 1W/8 ohms.
DIMENSIONS Amplifier: 22.4" (570mm) W by 9.1" (230mm) H by 17.3" (440mm) D. Weight: 103 lbs (47kg). Two power supplies (each): 16.9" (430mm) W by 5.9" (150mm) H by 15.6" (400mm) D. Weight: 70.6 lbs (32kg). Battery pack: weight, dimensions not specified.
SERIAL NUMBER OF UNIT REVIEWED USFE11X02.
PRICE $24,900; battery supply, $2900. Approximate number of dealers: {To Come from Stephen}.
MANUFACTURER ASR Audio Systeme, Hohe Strasse 700, House 5A, D-35 745 Herborn, Germany. Tel: (49) 27-72-649-880. Fax: (49) 27-72-40-488. Web: www.ASRAudio.com. US distributor: Fanfare International, Inc., 500 East 77th St. Suite 2923, New York, NY 10162. Tel: (212) 734-1041. Fax: (212) 734-7735. Web: www.fanfareintl.com.

cutline

As you read this, are you listening to your stereo? Whatever the music, what you're actually hearing is your public utility's AC as modulated by your power amplifier. No matter how good the gear, the final result can be only as pure as the power feeding your components. Unfortunately, plenty of sonic schmutz usually comes along for the ride.

The purveyors of line conditioners, power regenerators, isolation transformers, and the like have been bombarding us with that message for years now, and it seems to have taken hold. Though the message comes larded with multiple helpings of BS, its basic truth is no longer in doubt.

Cleaning up the AC is good, but getting off the grid altogether and powering one's stereo system with batteries is even better. In the early 1980s, the inexpensive and surprisingly quiet Marcoff PPA-1 MC head amp, powered by a 9V battery, effectively made the case for many audiophiles. More recent products include Sutherland's PhD phono preamp, powered by 16 Alkaline D cells; and ASR's Basis Exclusive phono preamp (which I reviewed in my October 2003 "Analog Corner" column), tethered to a boat anchor of a rechargeable battery. Battery options are also available for phono preamps from Trigon and Phonomena, among others.

But none of those components requires all that much power. ASR's Emitter II Exclusive is a battery-powered *amplifier*. Sort of. Its rechargeable battery powers only the amplifier's driver stage, which the designer feels is the most critical. What's more, the

battery supply is a plug-in option. Housed in its own heavy case, the battery supply contains six 6V, 12 ampere-hour batteries and a total of 400,000µF of capacitance. Once fully charged, the battery can power the driver stage for approximately 100 hours. The instructions recommend that you turn the Emitter II to Standby overnight after approximately two days of playing in order to limit the discharge level and keep the battery well conditioned. All battery operations, including charging, and auto-switching to AC power when the batteries are low, are controlled by optical digital logic circuits.

In practical terms, the ASR's battery power supply was transparent, never requiring my attention. The Emitter II costs $24,900, the battery supply $2900, for a total of $27,800.

Even minus its battery, the Emitter II is an unusual and intriguing product. It consists of a large, heatsink-capped main chassis and two massive outboard power supplies that connect to the amplifier via fist-sized multipin connectors attached to silver cables the diameter of garden hoses. Designer Friedrich Schäfer doesn't like metal chassis, so, like his Basis Exclusive phono preamp, the Emitter II is made of deeply tinted acrylic (the power supplies and battery pack *are* encased in metal chassis, however). Because you can peer inside, Schäfer has fitted the Emitter II's circuit boards with a light show's worth of colored LEDs indicating the amp's various states of operation.

A power amplifier with a volume control?

Friedrich Schäfer made clear to me that he does *not* regard the Emitter II as an integrated amplifier—although the instruction manual calls it just that, and

MEASUREMENTS

The ASR Emitter II Exclusive's battery power supply was fully charged when I began my testing. After I'd preconditioned the amplifier with both channels running for an hour at one-third maximum power into 8 ohms, the heatsinks were only just too hot to touch (around 65°C), and the THD+noise percentage was 0.0164%—not significantly different from the figure of 0.0137% with the amplifier cold. The voltage gain into 8 ohms with the volume control set to "61," the normal highest level in "Energy Saving Mode", was 27.2dB. Setting the volume control to its maximum of "76" in full-power mode resulted in a voltage gain of 41.9dB. This was for singled-ended drive. For balanced drive, the maximum gain was 6dB lower, which suggests that only pin 2 of the XLR jack is connected, the input not being truly balanced. The ASR was noninverting through all of its inputs, and its unbalanced input impedance was 10k ohms at all frequencies, including via the Direkt jack.

The ASR's output impedance was very low: <0.08 ohm across the audioband (including the series impedance of 6' of multistrand speaker cable). As a result, the modification of the Emitter II's frequency response due to the Ohm's Law interaction between this impedance and that of the speaker was also very low (fig.1, top solid trace at 2kHz). Fig.1 also reveals that the ASR has a very wide small-signal bandwidth—the –3dB point lies at almost 200kHz—though this decreases into lower impedances. Also shown is a residual peak at around 130kHz, perhaps an indication of a parasitic resonance somewhere in the circuit, which adds a very small overshoot to the shape of a 10kHz squarewave (fig.2). Channel separation (not shown) was good rather than great, at 70dB at 1kHz.

The Emitter II's unweighted, wideband S/N Ratio, taken with the volume control at "76" but with the input shorted, was 78.2dB ref. 1W into 8 ohms. Reducing the measure-

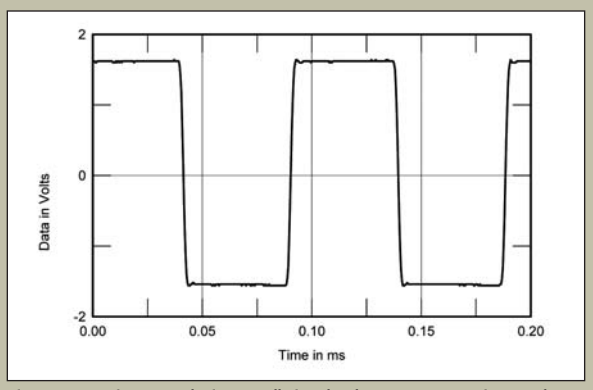


Fig.2 ASR Emitter II Exclusive, small-signal 10kHz squarewave into 8 ohms.

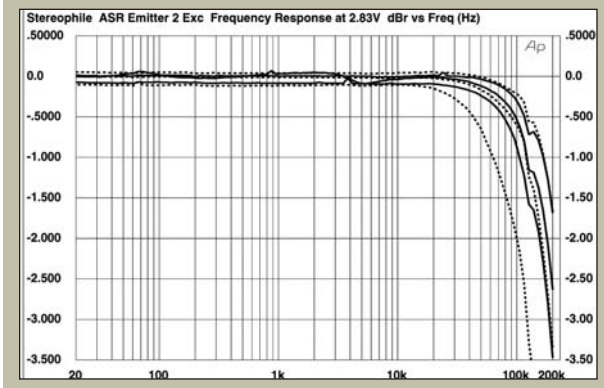


Fig.1 ASR Emitter II Exclusive, frequency response at 2.83V into (from top to bottom at 2kHz): simulated loudspeaker load, 8, 4, 2 ohms (0.5dB/vertical div., right channel dashed).

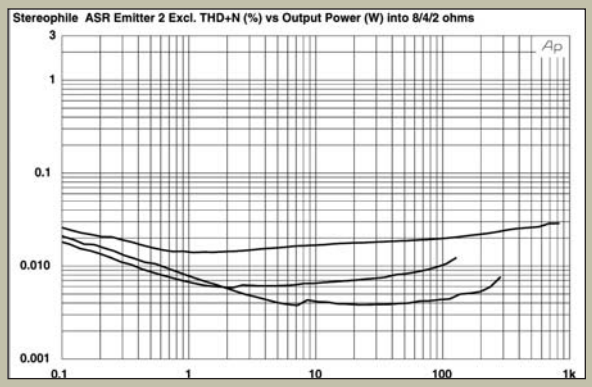


Fig.3 ASR Emitter II Exclusive, distortion (%) *vs* 1kHz continuous output power into (from bottom to top at 10W): 8, 4, 2 ohms.

although it includes a volume control and input switching. Instead, he told me, it's a 250Wpc or 500Wpc (into 8 or 4 ohms, respectively) multi-input power amplifier with relay-based switching facilities and volume control. [*This is exactly what* Stereophile *defines as an integrated amplifier—Ed.*] The volume is adjusted via a rotary pulse encoder controlling 32 precision stepped relays. The input signal is attenuated up to volume level "50." At "51", the signal does not pass through the volume control, he assured me. From "52" up to the maximum setting of "76" is gain, but, accompanied by ultralow noise. During our conversation, Schäfer told me that there is approximately 20dB of gain at "51", but the instructions claim that the signal passes through the amplifier "unchanged." Hopefully, John Atkinson's measurements will clear all this up.

The Emitter II provided for review included five mirror-imaged sets of line-level, unbalanced RCA inputs, one set of balanced inputs (the signal is converted internally to unbalanced), and two RCA Tape Out jacks (other input options are possible). One of the RCA inputs, labeled Direkt, bypasses the switching relays and connects directly to the volume-control relays with silver wire. This input features separate ground paths. Though the Direkt input offers the purest and, potentially, the best-sounding, lowest-noise signal path, it can be used only in a single-source system: Switching to another input will not remove the Direkt input's signal from reaching the amplifier, and two signals will be heard simultaneously.

The Emitter II can be custom-built to offer two sets of speaker terminals, a front- or rear-mounted headphone jack, and a tape monitor switch. The

ment bandwidth to 22Hz–22kHz improved the figure to 89.9dB, while A-weighting improved it further, to 92.4dB.

Testing the Emitter II Exclusive's power-delivery at clipping was an exercise in frustration, as the amplifier's protection circuitry would turn the amplifier off before it actually clipped, and flash a red warning light on the front panel. The protection circuitry had to be reset by turning the amplifier fully off. There also appeared to be some kind of "history" effect, in that once the amplifier had shut itself off, it would not allow as much power to be delivered to the test load the next time I tried to clip it. So bear all of that in mind when you look at the traces in fig.3, which plots the ASR's THD+N percentage against output power into loads ranging from 8 ohms down to 2 ohms. The bottom trace was taken with both channels driven into 8 ohms; it stops at 285W (24.5dBW), which is where the amplifier shut down, not where it clipped. Subsequently tested with both channels driven into 4 ohms (middle trace), the ASR shut off at 128W. But with one channel driven into 2 ohms (top trace), the Emitter II didn't shut itself off until it was putting out 830W (23.2dBW).

The shape of the traces in fig.3 suggests that the Emitter II's distortion lies under the noise below output powers of 10W or so. I therefore examined how the THD+N percentage changed with frequency at 11.5V output, equivalent to 16.5W into 8 ohms. The results are shown in fig.4, which shows that while the THD is very low at low and midrange frequencies, it does rise with both increasing frequency and decreasing load impedance, though not to any level that might be thought to be subjectively significant.

Fig.5 suggests that the distortion's harmonic content is predominantly low-order, although a peculiar discontinuity in the distortion waveform at the start of each sinewave cycle is more pronounced into low than into high imped-

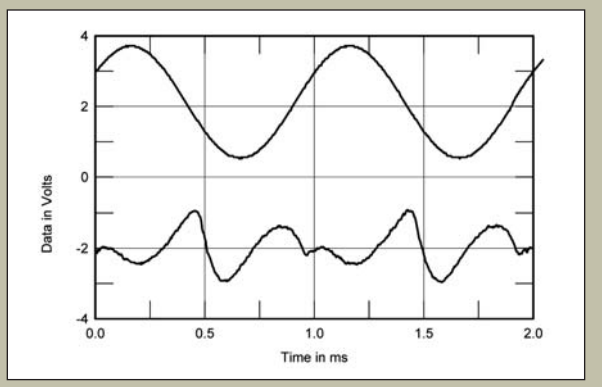


Fig.5 ASR Emitter II Exclusive, 1kHz waveform at 32.5W into 4 ohms (top), 0.0078% THD+N; distortion and noise waveform with fundamental notched out (bottom, not to scale).

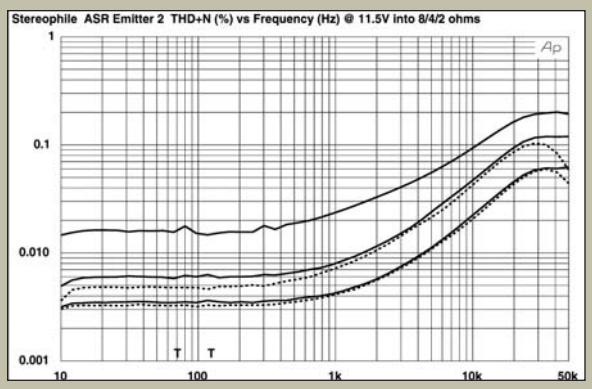


Fig.4 ASR Emitter II Exclusive, THD+N (%) *vs* frequency at 11.5V into (from bottom to top): 8, 4, 2 ohms (right channel dashed).

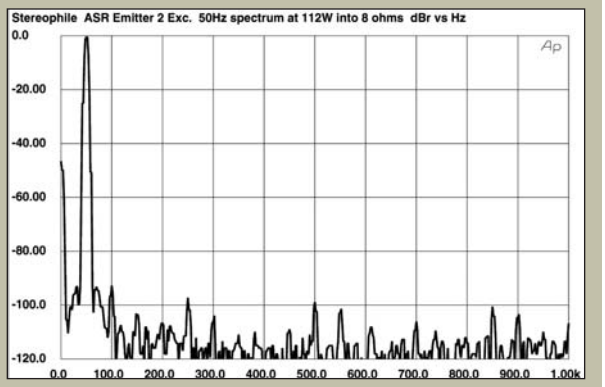


Fig.6 ASR Emitter II Exclusive, spectrum of 50Hz sinewave, DC–1kHz, at 112W into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).

review sample had none of those, which was fine with me.

The building blocks of the Emitter II include a FET op-amp IC input stage, a "very fast" MOSFET driver stage, and five high-power audio MOSFETs per channel in the output, with separate power supplies for each channel. ASR claims that the amplifier operates "mostly" in class-A, and with no capacitors in the signal path, for full direct-coupled operation with offset regulation. Each outboard power supply, containing a pair of massive transformers, produces separate voltages that are individually rectified and pre-buffered, to separately supply the input, driver (if the optional battery supply is not used), output, and microprocessor-control circuits.

All amplifier operations are controlled by microprocessors. In the superb-sounding Basis Exclusive phono preamp, Schäfer used a seemingly unlikely microphone preamp op-amp. Here he's chosen a video op-amp for the input stage. He told me that it sounds better, less "mechanical" than the audio op-amps he tried, thanks in part to low open-loop gain (*ie*, less negative feedback required).

Setup and use

The Emitter II's main chassis alone is rather large. Because it can also have two—or, with the battery option, *three*—large boxes tethered to it, placement can be problematic. The racks fill up quickly.

In systems like mine, with sources and preamp located on one sidewall and amplifiers placed between the speakers, the choice is either to run very long lengths of speaker cables, or multiple long lengths of interconnects from source components to amp. The latter proved to be the best option for me, though most buyers will probably place the Emitter II and all source components on racks between the speakers. I also tried the Manley Skipjack, a passive, relay-controlled, programmable switch box that permits, among other things, switching among four inputs. Using it, I needed only a single long run of interconnect from all of my source components to the ASR.

The ASR's big, beefy terminals made speaker connection easy and secure. Though the amplifier incorpo-

measurements, *continued*

ances. This is examined somewhat differently in figs.6 and 7, which show the spectra of the ASR's output while it drives a 50Hz tone at high levels into 8 and 4 ohms, respectively. The difference made by doubling the output current at low frequencies appears mainly to be the introduction of third-harmonic distortion to accompany the second harmonic, though the levels of both harmonics are still very low, at –86dB (0.005%). But at higher frequencies at high powers, the fifth, seventh, and ninth harmonics all make more of an appearance (fig.8).

Intermodulation distortion was very low, even at very high powers into 4 ohms (fig.9). This graph, incidentally, was taken with one channel driven about an hour after the THD-*vs*-power curves were taken. You can see that the Emitter II's protection circuitry had now allowed me to drive the amplifier at a higher level into 4 ohms than it had before (555W *vs* 128W).

With its three separate power supplies and its tethered power cables, the ASR Emitter II Exclusive was awkward to set up in my test lab. But its measured performance is, overall, beyond reproach, and when I auditioned it in Michael Fremer's system prior to taking it home with me, the sound of his big Wilson speakers had an ease and a dynamic sweep that I had not experienced before from his system. This unusual amplifier is definitely a high-end contender! *—John Atkinson*

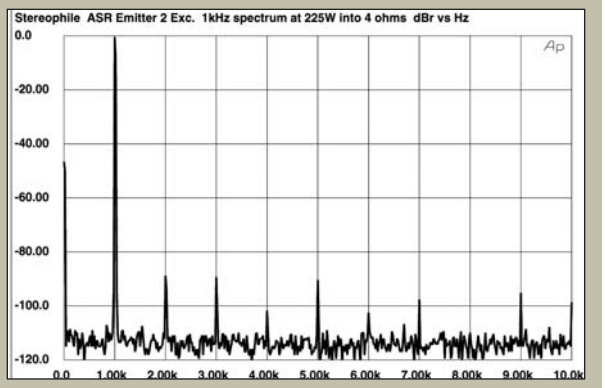


Fig.8 ASR Emitter II Exclusive, spectrum of 1kHz sinewave, DC–10kHz, at 225W into 4 ohms (linear frequency scale).

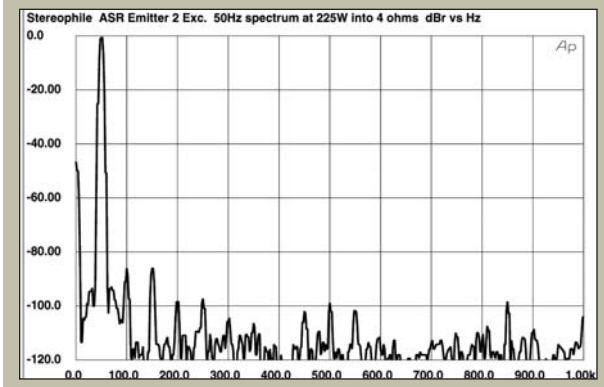


Fig.7ASR Emitter II Exclusive, spectrum of 50Hz sinewave, DC–1kHz, at 225W into 4 ohms (linear frequency scale).

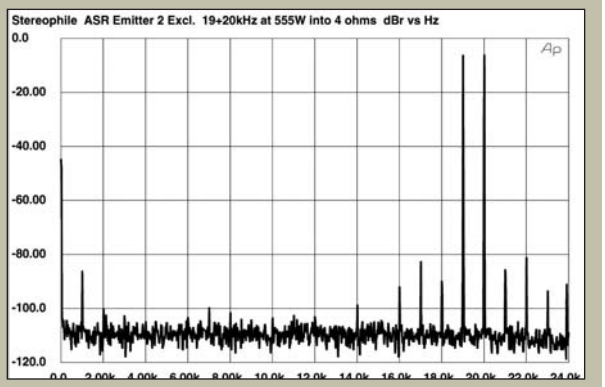


Fig.9 ASR Emitter II Exclusive, HF intermodulation spectrum, DC–24kHz, 19+20kHz at 555W peak into 4 ohms (linear frequency scale).

rates various kinds of protective circuitry, the instructions warn that because the single-speaker-per-channel version features a direct, relay-free connection between the output transistors and the speaker terminals, speaker cables should be checked for "shortcuts" before the unit is turned on. (The informative and laudably complete instructions, translated from the German, need to be rewritten by someone whose primary language is English.)

The Emitter II Exclusive requires three AC jacks: one for each power supply and one for the battery pack (my battery supply arrived precharged). Once everything's connected and plugged in, you switch from Off to position "1" or "2" or Standby, and you're in business. Position 1 turns the amp on and puts it in its Energy Saving mode, which allows a volume range of 0–61dB. Position 2 deactivates Energy Saving and permits 0–76dB output. (I never got above the 55dB position.) From Standby, the Emitter II can be operated using its compact remote control.

When turned on, the Emitter II first goes through an automated checklist, after which it's ready to play music. Pressing the remote's Mode button repeatedly cycles you through a variety of adjustments, indicated by flashing LEDs. You can match input levels, adjust balance, set the volume level at which the amp switches from Energy Saving to full-power mode (anywhere from 01 to 51), control the brightness of the amp's display, and even choose which of the display LEDs light up in a given operating mode. The remote also lets you adjust volume, toggle through inputs, adjust operating mode, and select Mute. The last is a "soft" mute that ramps up and down.

In terms of operation, the ASR Emitter II Exclusive proved to be a thoroughly modern product that was convenient to use.

Deep sound

Your New York–based *Stereophile* flight crew was invited to hear a pair of Emitter II Exclusives in action at Lyric HiFi recently, driving the four-tower Nola Grand Reference loudspeaker system. In-store demos are notoriously tricky, unpredictable, and often unsatisfactory, but usually the experienced listener can come away with at least a general sense of a product's quality. Lyric's combo of Nolas and Emitter II Exclusives was bass-heavy, and produced Godzilla-sized images on a sweepingly large soundstage. I'm not big on 25'-long harpsichords. However, there was an effortlessness to the overall presentation that made me want to hear an Emitter II at home and review it here.

My curiosity was rewarded with the best overall musical performance I've heard yet from my Wilson Audio MAXX2 loudspeakers. Though the Wilsons' production of depth had always been *good*, from the first note I heard with the ASR there was an immediate sense of unlimited depth that I'd not previously experienced from the Wilsons in my listening room. A vast, expansive soundstage opened up that no previous amplifier had managed to create with a pair of speakers that had nonetheless always delivered big, dramatic pictures, even when driven by undernourished electronics.

Disc after disc, the Emitter II produced a tube-like sense of open space "way back there" and, at the same time, a floor-to-ceiling expanse of sound that helped produce an sensation of almost being outdoors—the walls, floor, and ceiling seemed to drop away. This spaciousness was accompanied by image solidity without hardness or unnatural edge definition, and an uncanny three-dimensionality. The sonic pictures produced by the Emitter II Exclusive were immediately and continually stupefying throughout the month and a half it was in my system.

That's what I noticed right away. It was followed by the remarkable floating sensation of effortlessness and ease that had been apparent during the otherwise less-than-stellar demo at Lyric HiFi. That sense of inviting ease, along with its remarkable transparency, were the Emitter II Exclusive's greatest achievements. They help explain why I listened more intently, more often, and longer into the night than during any other month and a half of *my life*. That's how much listening I did.

The Emitter II Exclusive was as free of "electronica" as many of the tube amps I've heard, but it also had an upper-octave expansiveness, clarity—and, especially, transparency—that no tube amp I've heard has managed to produce. Its midband performance was as lush and rich as a tube amp's, but without euphonic colorations. And the Emitter II's control of the MAXX2s' woofer bins was iron-fisted without being overdamped. This can probably be partially explained by the amp's remarkably low (subjectively, at least) noise floor. I thought the mbl 9007 monoblocks that I reviewed in September were silent, and they are, but the ASR took the noise floor down more than a few stories.

Shortly after the ASR was installed, I was listening to *The Essential Hollywood*, a film-music compilation (2 CDs, Sony Classical 82876-77086-2), in preparation for reviewing it for my website, www.musicangle.com. I was startled by the superb sound of the main title music for *Gone With the Wind*. When I checked the meager annotation and saw that the conductor was Charles Gerhardt, I realized that this track had been culled from a wonderful series of film-score recordings engineered by Kenneth Wilkinson and issued by RCA Red Seal on Dynaflex vinyl in 1974. I had the whole set, so I put on the original LP (ARL 1-0452). The sound was absolutely aston-

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

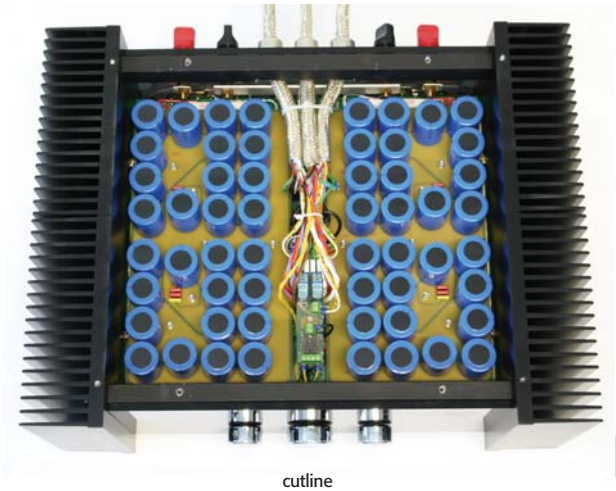
ANALOG SOURCES Continuum Caliburn turntable; Graham Phantom, Continuum Cobra tonearms; Lyra Titan (stereo, mono), Miyabi/47 Labs, Clearaudio Goldfinger cartridges.
DIGITAL SOURCES Musical Fidelity kW DM25 CD transport, kW DM25 DAC; Alesis Masterlink BPT-modified hard-disk recorder.
PREAMPLIFICATION Manley Steelhead, Oracle Temple phono preamps; Musical Fidelity kWP preamplifier; Manley Skipjack switcher.
POWER AMPLIFIERS Musical Fidelity kW monoblocks.
LOUDSPEAKERS Wilson Audio Specialties MAXX2.
CABLES Phono: CrystalConnect Piccolo. Interconnect: Acrolink 6100, Shunyata Research Antares Helix, Transparent Audio Reference. Speaker: Shunyata Research Orion Helix. AC: Shunyata Research Anaconda Helix, JPS AC.
ACCESSORIES Continuum Castellon magnetic isolation stand, Finite Elemente Pagode equipment stands; Audiodharma Cable Cooker; Shunyata Research Hydra 2 & Hydra 8 power conditioners; Oyaide AC wall jacks; ASC Tube Traps, RPG BAD & Abffusor panels; VPI HW-17F, Loricraft PRC4 Deluxe record-cleaning machines. *—Michael Fremer*

ishing, Dynaflex notwithstanding. The lushness of the strings, the bite and tone of the brass, the sheer physicality of the orchestra, the scale of the presentation—all were well beyond any listening experience I'd had sitting in this chair.

This led me to pull another disc in the series, *Sunset Boulevard: The Classic Film Scores of Franz Waxman* (ARL 1-0708), which includes music from *Prince Valiant*, *A Place in the Sun*, *Sunset Boulevard*, and the Theremin-enriched *Bride of Frankenstein*. For sheer orchestral bombast, *Prince Valiant* can't be beat, but the sultry suite from *A Place in the Sun* (which starred Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Clift, who, I've just read, was once the lover of the original Jimmy Olsen, Jack Larson), with its distant, boozy, lone saxophone, tinkly cocktail piano, lush strings, glistening harps, and heartbreaking horns, put my enthusiasm for this amplifier over the top—way over the top. The lushness of the massed strings, the reediness of the sax (placed way back stage left), the piano's uncanny, woody clarity, and the horns' sleek edge, produced a perfectly ripe, almost overwhelming sonic picture that never sounded canned or electronic.

The majesty of this recording was such that I insisted that JA pay a visit to hear it, then take the amps with him, instead of me shipping them to him for measurements. I wanted him to hear what I was hearing to give me some measure of cover, should the measurements indicate some mesmerizing coloration, à la the Harmonic Technology CyberLight cable (see my review in the August 2005 *Stereophile*), that somehow escaped my attention. If there is one of more measurable colorations, I didn't detect it; I found the Emitter II Exclusive to be the most colorless (in the best sense of the word) piece of electronics I've heard.

I tried everything to find the chinks in this amp's armor. MOSFETs can sound soft—maybe the Emitter II Exclusive sounded too soft for rock? So I started pulling stuff, including, for some reason, an original pink-label pressing of Jethro Tull's *Stand Up* (Island ILPS 9103). But instead of finding "soft," I found the brash cymbals on "A New Day Yesterday" perfectly sorted out, with just the right attack: sharp transients intact, plenty of shimmer, and organized with astonishing clarity. Ian Anderson's edgy, breathy flute had a wonderful balance of air and metal, and convincingly stood center stage forward.



cutline

Night after night, I found myself pulling out familiar records and rediscovering old favorites in a vain attempt to find the Emitter II's weak suit. I tried LPs of female vocals: Nanci Griffith's *Storms* (MCA 6319), Janis Ian's *Breaking Silence* (Analogue Productions APP027), an original pressing of Canteloube's *Songs of the Auvergne* (Vanguard VSD2090), and Marti Jones's wonderful, underappreciated *Used Guitars* (A&M SP 5208). All confirmed that the incredible depth produced by the ASR was *not* due to a lower-midbass heaviness that can show up as a chestiness in vocals.

I taxed the Emitter II's bass-producing abilities with Telarc's old D2D recording of *Michael Murray Playing the Great Organ in the Methuen Memorial Music Hall* (LP, 5036 DD-2), which I hadn't played for more than a decade. The amp produced prodigious amounts of muscular, well-textured organ bass from the MAXX2s. (I also noticed in the credits that the recording was made at the suggestion of Aerial Acoustics' Michael Kelly, who then worked for a/d/s/, whose speakers were used by Telarc's Jack Renner for monitoring.) Then I tried Jon Hassell's *City: Works of Fiction* (LP, Opal 26153-1), on which my friend Dan Schwartz plays *monster* bass. Neither LP not bass were shortchanged by the amp, or by the MAXX2s.

Trying to find recordings that might overwhelm the Emitter II's dynamic capabilities, I dug into some of the thousands of classical LPs I was given last year, and found some astonishing, obscure (at least to me!) recordings—including Vincent d'Indy's *Istar*, conducted by Pierre Dervaux (EMI-Pathé Marconi C069-14043)—that confirmed both the ASR's spatial prowess and its prodigious dynamic capabilities.

I pulled originals and reissues of some favorite Roy Orbison albums to hear how well the amp distinguished each one's particular sonic signature, and the Emitter II was impressively neutral and revealing. Recordings of electronic music were equally satisfying, including *Everything Ecstatic, Part 2* (Domino WigLp 173), the latest LP of pleasing bleeps, blops, and squiggles from Four Tet. Finally, I played some recordings that just plain suck, that make my ears bleed or can turn an expensive audio rig into a Bose Acoustimass system. Guess what? They still sucked.

Mostly, though, rather than searching for recordings to trip up the Emitter II, I just stayed up every night happily spinning discs, delving into dark corners of my record collection (and, thanks to the amp's low noise floor and high resolution, the dark corners of my favorite recordings) in which I hadn't set foot in years or, in some cases, *decades*, enjoying and marveling at the supple, tactile, harmonically complete, rhythmically persuasive, spatially convincing, utterly effortless presentation of this impressive performer.

Conclusions

The four-box ASR Emitter II Exclusive proved to be among the most neutral-sounding pieces of audio gear I have ever heard. It bridged the gap between tubes and solid-state as has no other piece of electronics in my experience. It sounded neither tube-like nor transistory. The usual solid-state negatives at the extremes—dryness, etch, edge, overdamped bass, muted, uninvolving—simply didn't apply to the Emitter II Exclusive. From solo violins and harpsichords to full orchestral climaxes, the amp produced the most natural and realistic sonic pictures I've yet heard in my listening room. In doing so, it took itself *out* of those pictures, and dragged the

speakers out of the way along with it. Other listeners, experienced and novice alike, heard it do this too.

Aside from the high cost—though remember that it doesn't need a preamp—the biggest problems presented by the Emitter II are those of space and complexity raised by having to find somewhere to put its four big boxes. Audiophiles with source racks on the side and power amplifiers between their speakers will have a hard time finding somewhere to put the Emitter II. If its four boxes end up between the speakers, it will either require a total system reconfiguration or lengths of expensive interconnect running from each source. The other option is to use a passive switcher like the Manley Skipjack, but for some reason I found putting even a carefully designed, relay-driven device like the Skipjack between sources and the Emitter II's direct input added a trace of grain and edge and detracted from the transparency and purity the amp is capable of delivering. So even if you've got $27,800 to drop, first consider the logistics.

Postscript

After an experience such as that provided by the Emitter II Exclusive, the real test is when I reinsert my reference into my system. After they'd warmed up, I was still impressed by my reference Musical Fidelity kWP preamplifier and kW power amp. They are prodigious performers in their own rights, and believe me, the ASR has not suddenly rendered them amusical or sonically unsatisfactory. On the plus side, the kW's huge power reserves produce an equally effortless presentation, if not more so. The MF combo's dynamic capabilities remain unsurpassed, including by the Emitter II Exclusive, good as it is dynamically.

However, as demonstrated to me by the kW's baby brother, the powerful and bargain-priced ($10,000!) kW750 that I reviewed in December 2005, the kW sounds slightly forward and a bit cool. But with that slight chill come a clarity and a transient authority that tend to compensate to some degree.

So yes, sitting in my chair now writing this, listening to that Franz Waxman disc that so wowed me through the ASR, I hear it a bit cooler and a bit more forward through the MF combo—but also, perhaps, with slightly more air, dynamic authority, and solidity—factors that *almost* compensate for what, now that the ASR is gone, I'm no longer getting. I'm tempted . . .

measurements, *continued*