



DIAPASON No. 737 Oct 2024 (TRANSLATION)

ENSEMBLE MASSIMO FUOCO

Vincent Cousin

You have to experience the demonstration of an Ensemble system to grasp its musical dimensions and underlying concept. A typical system consists of a modified EAT turntable, followed by a Massimo Fonobrio phono stage, then the Massimo Fuoco integrated amplifier, followed by the two-way Ondiva loudspeakers on their amazing, flexing stands. The conductive masses are routed to one potential, which extends to the loudspeaker chassis, connected to the outside via a separate socket.

Behind Ensemble is a holistic vision, to use a big word, based on the idea that the ear and brain perceive even the smallest differences that defy measurement and that music is energy that generates multiple physical and acoustic interactions that influence our perception. Thus, "interactive interference, shielding, isolation, decoupling, resonance control, power correction, memory effects, conductivity ..." are fundamental to Ensemble and the Massimo Fuoco. This is why Urs Wagner considers each device as a whole and selects the components according to both their specified performance as well as their dynamic behavior. The Massimo Fuoco is a hybrid integrated amplifier equipped with ECC81 double triode tubes. They are fitted with Tubesox tube dampers whose shielding is connected to ground. The power stage delivers 2x100 W at 8 ohms through paired bipolar transistors in encapsulated TO-3 housing. The five 'line' inputs and the monitor loop are fitted with Ensemble Synergia RCA sockets, made of copper plated in silver and gold. The same applies to the special speaker terminals (6 mm).

Listening

There would be much more to add to the description, as the list of highlights is so long. The thick metal sheet housing is extremely complex and consists of decoupled parts for the power supply and speaker terminals, and the input sockets with the main circuit board. The massive, equally decoupled transformer with three shields galvanically separates the primary from the secondary, and so on. The whole thing is of course handmade in Switzerland. Dr. Urs Wagner, who started Ensemble in 1986, explains the reason for this very far-reaching perfection for each individual element quite simply: the aim is to "create a space dynamized by the music, whereby the musicians are projected in their original size into a space that is as wide and deep as the recorded space". That's easily said, but here it proves to be true, not only in terms of the lively release of energy and the disappearance of spatial boundaries, but also in terms of the feeling that everything is in its place and that the brain is not constantly challenged to put things in the right order. The singing of soprano Cassandra Wright (sound example D) thus benefits fully from this embedding in an open, breathing, boundless space that is both calm and serene. The piano is there without restriction, majestic, grounded as rarely before, in full osmosis with the voice. Even taken individually, this integrated amplifier radiates wholeness. And musical grace freed from gravity.

+ Ensemble also solo. Extraordinary.

- Painstakingly thought-out design (+)

Example D: Samuel Barber : Knoxville : Summer of 1915. Cassandra Wright (soprano), Harry Rylance (piano). Linn Records