



# Ensemble Massimo Fonobrio

**HIGHLY COMMENDED**  
ANALOGUE – PHONO STAGE OVER £5K



**C**an a single-box phono stage design that is still priced in the four-figure range truly be considered the ultimate statement device? After going twelve rounds with the Ensemble Massimo Fonobrio, reviewer Eric van Spelde can answer that with a resounding “yes”. Urs Wagner, the driving force behind the Swiss company, has maxed out his Fonobrio design to a point at which he cannot think of anything to improve further, and the result is a component that Eric believes, without doubt or reservation, is reference-grade.

The Ensemble Massimo Fonobrio’s technical highlights include double-laminated, dual mono circuit boards with dielectric properties supposedly six times better than those typically used even in highly expensive devices, direct-coupled (capacitor-free) outputs, fourfold optimisation of the circuits to achieve the best possible operating point, and a mechanically isolated and extensively shielded

design throughout. Ensemble states that RIAA correction is accurate to within  $\pm 0.2$  dB between 100Hz and 16kHz, with the signal-to-noise ratio further enhanced to 80 dB. Those are impressive figures that indeed yield an impressive performance.

### Invisibly transparent

“The Ensemble is a precision instrument, as you would expect from a highly developed, transistor-based amplifier designed and manufactured in Switzerland,” says Eric. “However, it is far from being an antiseptic, dull, mere reproduction device. It is [also] emotionally intense.” Ultimately, the Massimo Fonobrio, with its sheer levels of transparency, serves as a blank canvas for any music played through it, to the point that “it almost feels as if it isn’t there at all”. It’s little wonder Eric signs off his review calling the phono stage a “must listen”.

Reviewed in Issue **249**

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