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VINCENT COUSIN

## ENSEMBLE MASSIMO FONOBRIO

In a note soberly entitled 'Technical Points' discussing his MM/MC phono stage, Urs Wagner points out that although the phonographic industry accepts a tolerance of 2dB between the master tape and the pressed record, the Fonobrio's equalisation follows the RIAA curve with an accuracy of  $\pm 0.2$  dB from 100 Hz to 16 kHz. Thanks to custom-made cabling using double-shielded/double-insulated cables and a special ground path, the signal-to-noise ratio reaches a record value of -80 dB in MC mode, with a gain of 24 dB, bearing in mind that a 30 dB setting is also available. But let's return to the architecture of this phono stage, designed to 'unlock a level of information otherwise hidden, manifesting itself in the reproduction of the finest musical nuances and variations as well as atmospheric details' (sic). An understated, grey chassis pierced with vents, echoing the design of the logo of the brand based in Aesch (Switzerland). Heavy (8.5kg) and resting on four Sorbothane feet, it comprises mechanically isolated compartments for the power supply and preamplifier stages. On one side, the power supply features an ultra-low output impedance (16 m $\Omega$ ) and a ripple-output noise below 1 $\mu$ V with a medical-grade isolation transformer. On the other, two preamp boards stacked in a dual-mono configuration, comprising three gain stages with ultra-linear Class A output stages. The design features high-end components, including military-grade, ultra-low-noise transistors and resistors, and silver-wire capacitors. On the rear panel, two toggle switches allow you to choose between MM or MC RCA inputs and to set the MC gain (24 or 30 dB). Two sets of four dip switches adjust the MC load impedance from 53  $\Omega$  to 1000  $\Omega$  in sixteen steps. The circuits incorporate a subsonic filter designed to protect the woofers (10 Hz, 12 dB/octave), and a capacitor can be activated at the output to prevent the passage of direct current.

### Listening

*Listening to it leaves no doubt as to the validity of the technological choices made in the service of a sonic truth that strives to make the music tangible. How can one describe this sensation, or rather this perception? Transparency? Absolute. The tonal response? A straight line. The Massimo Fonobrio dispels the haze and acts as a revealer; our records seem to have been cleansed, even enhanced. The dynamics are meticulously traced, background noise becomes inaudible, and sounds in the background are magnified to the point where one rediscovers - and the phrase is not overused - one's recordings, in the manner of a test pressing - those discs produced at the start of a production run to check the quality of the pressing. Hype or reality? The best thing is to try it for yourself. But be warned: once you've been bitten, there's no antidote.*

**Pros: This truth transcends listening**

**Cons: Understated outward appearance (+)**