

# AUDIOMAT RÉCITAL INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

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You can find the original review, with all the pictures,   
in the French site corresponding section ("Bancs d'essai").

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## DISTINCTLY ABOVE AVERAGE

Here is a product that inflames desire. With some impatience, we've been awaiting the arrival of this latest product from the celebrated French company Audiomat who have built themselves such a notable reputation over the past twenty years, especially in Europe. Although not so well-known here, nevertheless the company's renowned Phono 1.5 preamp and Arpège, Prélude, Solfège and Opéra integrated amps have enjoyed lavish praise in the Canadian audio press. It's important to understand that Audiomat is an "artisanal" company that does not brook compromise; the company steadfastly upholds its commitment to deliver products that are not only impeccable but which, in most cases, are superior to competing designs that cost two, three or even four times as much. The production and availability of Audiomat equipment is quite limited, even today.

Audiomat is not a very marketing-oriented outfit. In this sense, you might even think of them as going *against* the flow. Reluctance to allow product reviews, zero presence at audio shows, extremely limited distribution. On the other hand, Audiomat favors a slow and meticulous gestation period in the creation of new products, with dogged opposition to any compromises. And all of this guided by a concern for musicality and perfection above all else.

Denis and Norbert Clarisse created Audiomat in 1986. The former a computer engineer, and the latter a music lover with degrees in political science and sociology. These two artisans are probably the two most stubborn manufacturers in all of high-end audio. Every piece of equipment conceived and put into production by them is subjected to a multitude of listening sessions that serve to bring every detail of the unit to perfection, no matter how small the adjustment. Tube selection, wire length, etc. And nothing leaves the factory without these goals having been met 100%.

The new Récital integrated amplifier is proof of this, benefiting from Audiomat's experience acquired over the past ten years. It went into production only after the development of six different prototypes. With the clear objective of leaving the already renowned Opéra integrated amp in the dust, the Récital provides 90 watts in contrast to the 30 watts of its kid brother, thus offering substantially more power while also improving musicality and delicacy. And to achieve such a result, every detail of conception and construction was continually verified, examined, optimized.

Without plunging into technical jargon, let's say that this pure-Class-A tube amplifier owes its power to eight Svetlana 6550C tubes, selected and matched with the greatest care. The internal wiring is made by Esprit. Most of the Récital's weight comes from the transformers, oversized and of the highest quality. These are sourced from the same manufacturer that supplies the French aerospace program, recognized for their advanced technology. The Audiomat is built like an assault tank. The main printed circuit is double-sided epoxy. As for technical specs, the manufacturer rates the bandwidth at 10 Hz to 50 kHz +/- 3 dB and a sensitivity of 900 mV for 90 watts.

This pure Class A power colossus really tips the scales. At 35 kg (77 lbs) there's no question of cradling it into your arm to position it. Its dimensions are just as imposing: 51 x 43 x 20 cm (20 x 17 x 9 inches). The aluminum chassis rests on three massive cones made from nickel-plated brass. The faceplate includes a slab of smoked Altuglas that allows a view of the interior. Two enormous knobs control the volume level and source selection. There are also switches for power on-off and for mute. Interesting detail: when power is switched on, the volume control automatically rotates itself down to zero.

At the rear one finds high-quality gold-plated RCA connectors with Teflon insulation. The two sets of massive loudspeaker binding posts are solid brass.

## FIRST LISTENING SESSION

My first introduction to the Récital was at Mutine in Montreal -- the North American distributor. Before transporting the “baby” to my place, it seemed sensible for me to hear the amp in combination with the equipment Mutine feels should be associated with it. The speakers were Equation 35s, the cables Actinote, and the CD transport by C.E.C. The only weakness of the system was that the listening room had a floor of ceramic tile. I was ready, in fact very excited, to hear this system that I would deem rare and mysterious.

The results were not long in coming. From the first notes of my first disk, I could feel how articulate this system was. Everything was nimble, airy, quick, dynamic and completely transparent. As if it were suddenly possible to combine all the best qualities of electrostatic and dynamic speakers. I don't know how many times I must have said “wow” over the next four hours. I remember the huge force with which the orchestral masses were expressed. The Récital seemed unstoppable. What grabbed my attention more than anything else was the extension at the two frequency extremes. I could never remember hearing such deep bass or such extended highs.

Above all, the Récital is a very expressive component. You cannot say that it leaves you indifferent. And for good reason.

As the listening session continued, the system displayed a harmonic structure that was both coherent and believable, a linearity without any deviations along the entire breadth of the spectrum. The midrange limpid and melodious. The treble was delicate and seemed to go on forever. And no overlapping confusion among all the soundstage layers.

## OTHER LISTENING SESSIONS

This first experience having so whetted my appetite, I was eager to hear the Récital in the context of my own system. This next phase was far more

involved and took place over an entire week. My biggest fear: would I be able to approach the quality of the experience I'd just witnessed at Mutine? For this reason, I borrowed the same interconnects and speaker cables and even used the same Vecteur equipment rack that the Récital had been sitting on in my first listening session.

I did my first listening with the Récital in my full system. Over the next two days and after various adjustments and tweaks, only the speaker cables were changed. I also removed the Symposium shelf and the Rollerblocks that had been supporting my CD transport, while retaining them under my own preamplifier. Everything seemed to have reached the point of equilibrium.

To be more precise, one could read the following in my pages of listening notes.

On the first track of *les Sept Paroles du Christ* by Theodore Dubois (Fidelio recording FACD008), the deepest notes of the organ at the Très-Saint-Nom-de-Jésus were reproduced in all their fullness and richness, but with a slight halo at the outer edges when compared to the sound of the master recording.

On the recording *Codex #4* of Santiago de Murcia, played by the Kapsberger Ensemble (Auvidis Naïve label E 8661), the multiple bass fundamentals are rendered better than ever before with no muddling or confusion. One can clearly discern the position that each instrument occupies in the three-dimensional space. And once again one clearly hears the reverberation of the instruments on the surrounding wall surfaces. Even though the recording is not closely miked, you can hear the musicians' fingers as they slide and put pressure on the strings. And how to describe this palpable and organic presence, this sonic realism that plunges you literally into the heart of the event. Majestic.

Recently Fidélío Audio recorded a new album called *Barbarossa*, with the mediaeval ensemble Les Jongleurs de la Mandragore. I had some samples of the master tape with me. Recorded in the chapel of the Grand Seminary of Montréal, in a huge acoustic space, these fragments were going to offer a tough challenge to the Récital. First of all, Ingrid Boussaroque's voice was "there," nuanced, sublime, occupying the same spot where she had stood during the recording. With my eyes closed, the soundstage extended

far behind the speakers and beyond the side walls. The percussive details filled and palpably defined the surrounding space. Bravo!

On the *Bach Vivaldi Marcello du Concerti Italiani* disk (Naïve OP 30301), the violins are silky, delicate, never acid. But most of all, and this is what I hear in disk after disk, one clearly perceives the walls and reverberations of the room. The first track as played through the Récital is disconcertingly abundant. The harmonic richness reveals the full extent and force of the Concerto in the upper reaches of the sonic spectrum.

I followed this with the beloved Four Seasons of Vivaldi, a 1972 Argo LP with Neville Marriner and the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, curious to observe the Récital's behavior with the orchestra in full flight. And what a celebration. The oomph is there in spades. Body, substance and speed. Once again, mission accomplished.

Let's move on to jazz with the Abdullah Ibrahim Trio. Cape Town Revisited, recorded live at the Spier Estate, Cape Town, South Africa on 13 December 1993 (Justin Time JTR 8483-2). In my opinion, one of the three best live recordings in my collection. In this case the Récital delivers the goods and I don't mean maybe. This disk reveals the living character of the whole presentation, its ability to transport you to the center of the room. The speakers disappear and you expect the waiter to come take your order at any moment. Thank you.

Finally, I put on Larry Carlton's *Sapphire Blue* (Bluebird Jazz 82876-57667-2). Another gem. And here one speaks no more of technique or performance; one lets go into the music and forgets everything. Wow! Say no more, emotion is right here with us.

## IN SUM

The Audiomat Récital is one of the best commercially produced integrated amps I have ever had the privilege to hear and to review. What's more, it is far and away the best in its price range and even surpasses equipment sold at double the price. Its linearity and its extended presentation of the whole musical spectrum, its homogeneity and verve transport us to the heart of the musical event. An absolute must audition.