



THE SPEAKER SHACK

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AVID HI-FI INTEGRA AMPLIFIER REVIEW

CONCLUSION

The Speaker Shack awards this amplifier with the Reference award and stamp of approval and puts it firmly up there as one of the finest Integrated amplifier designs to grace our music room.

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AVID HiFi Integra Amplifier Review

Last year I wrote an article titled Some of the Best HiFi in the World is made in the UK and up to that point I had never really listened seriously to any of the offerings from AVID HiFi, thankfully 2024 changed that and AVID HiFi certainly falls into this category as I have been listening extensively to what they offer for us HiFi enthusiasts. So far I have reviewed the stunning EVO Four speakers and just recently the Accent Integrated amplifier which picked up an Editor's Choice award as for the price it really is one of the best high end Integrated amplifiers on the market today offering stunning musicality from an integrated design at this price level under the £5k mark. In June I was then fortunate enough to listen to a full AVID HiFi Reference system at Studio AV in Surrey and this was simply one of the best HiFi experiences I have had and I have listened to a lot of systems in my time, with a full review of my visit and impressions on my listening experience on my website, it redefined and recalibrated my senses for what was capable from a full reference system.

I am slowly but surely working my way through their portfolio and trying to listen to and review as much of their equipment as possible as I really don't think AVID HiFi get the exposure that they fully deserve such is the stunning quality of their products. For review here I have the Integra Integrated amplifier which is one up from the incredible Accent and one down from their top of the range Sigsum integrated amplifier.

AVID HiFi was founded back in 1995 and focused mainly on turntables by Conrad Mas the CEO who is a highly motivated and passionate audiophile, he wanted to design and build the best turntable for people to enjoy and he has certainly achieved that goal, when I listened to the Acutus reference turntable it gave me one of the most musically engaging performances I have heard from any system spinning vinyl previously, it didn't just stop with turntables though as he went on to design and create one of the most complete portfolios of any high end audio manufacturer and now produces speakers, amplifiers, cables and accessories to cater at all price levels with his starting point the Reference range and working backwards, trickling his tech down to his lower end products but still keeping with his strict ethos of over engineering products to be the best at their given price points and offer the end user the best product available for your hard earned money.



Build Quality and Features

Similar in design to its smaller brother the Accent amplifier it once again features a beautifully crafted solid piece of aluminium for the front fascia with the AVID 'A' logo beautifully machined into the front of the Integra, two dials adorn the amplifier front panel one for the input select and the other being the ALPS controlled volume which is buttery smooth in its operation, there is also a Mono switch and Mute button as well as dedicated headphone output for discrete listening should you choose. The build quality is simply stunning and it really does exude a high end look and feel with a rather hefty weight at nearly 23Kg, it is also quite that bit larger than the smaller Accent and that is due to the massive 750VA mains transformer that powers the amplifier and bigger capacitors which have 88,000uF of storage capacity, the rating is a modest 90 watts of output into 8 ohms and I have to say it really does put other amps to shame with higher power ratings as this is one hell of a muscular sounding amplifier which has copious amounts of power on tap thanks to the high current that the Integra can muster to power almost any speaker you want to. It also features the mono amplifiers taken directly from the Sigsum amplifier and bespoke capacitors from the Reference range of products; this all translates into a much more refined and powerful sounding amplifier. The phono stage of the Integra is the beautiful AVID HiFi Pellar which I have to say offers superb performance as I found out in the Accent that I recently reviewed but with the added benefit of beefier PSU and electronics direct from the Sigsum and Reference range this will make sure that the performance is once again elevated for the Integra design, It also features a range of settings for varying types of cartridges in the form of DIP switches allowing for both MM and MC, high and low gain settings. On the rear of the Integra it has four main Inputs for connecting your devices as well as the phono stage input and features two sets of speaker binding posts.

Just like the Accent it comes with one of the most gorgeous remotes which is minimal but perfect in its operation as it just has volume up and down and mute function and that is it, there is no messing around with different settings just the important ones that are needed for the music to play !





Setting up is straightforward as I am connecting the Chord Electronics Hugo TT2 DAC and M Scaler for the digital front end with my Bluesound Node for streaming music and for CD playback I am using my Cyrus Audio CD8SE player, for vinyl playback I am also using the brilliant Denon DP400 turntable. Listening to a variety of music from my collection and also streaming music via Tidal and Spotify. Connecting I am using Chord Cables to tie the system together and their excellent noise suppression Power Array plug and the EE1 noise isolator between my Ethernet switch and Bluesound Node.

I have been using the Integra amplifier with a range of speakers from my ProAc D2R's to the recently reviewed Tannoy Stirling III LZ Special Edition speakers and now the AVID HiFi EVO Three speakers which I will be reviewing after the Integra review is finished.

Sound Quality and Performance

For my first album I am listening to a stunning Jazz compilation streaming via Tidal from the British Progressive Jazz label which is a great label if you love all things Jazz and has such a wide selection of music available on multiple formats, the album by Demolished Men with Matt Parker the drummer who is one of the band members just happens to also be the owner of the British Progressive Jazz label, it is not a group that I have listened to before but will make sure I follow them from now on as the title *In A Violent Way* features some beautiful Jazz music with psychedelic vibes and sounds amazing.

Track 1 *World On a Wire* is a stunning piece of music and immediately what strikes me is the inky black background from where the music emerges and shows the incredible level of transparency that the Integra amplifier has with such a low noise and silent background for the music to emerge from, instrument separation is sublime with a wide soundstage and excellent depth to the image that is cast out from the speakers. The Percussion instruments have a real immediacy to the sound with lightning fast transients and stunning impact but then the shimmering cymbals hang in the air with such delicacy, when the Saxophone comes in the power of this instrument is brought to life and takes centre stage, the electric guitar and the echoing reverb effects sound powerful and Pink Floydish which reverberates around my room and I absolutely love this as the Integra paints the perfect picture of the music being played, the power of the bass guitar is also on show with the underlying beat of the music, at 9 min 52 seconds long it is a masterpiece which the AVID Integra powers through and portrays brilliantly.

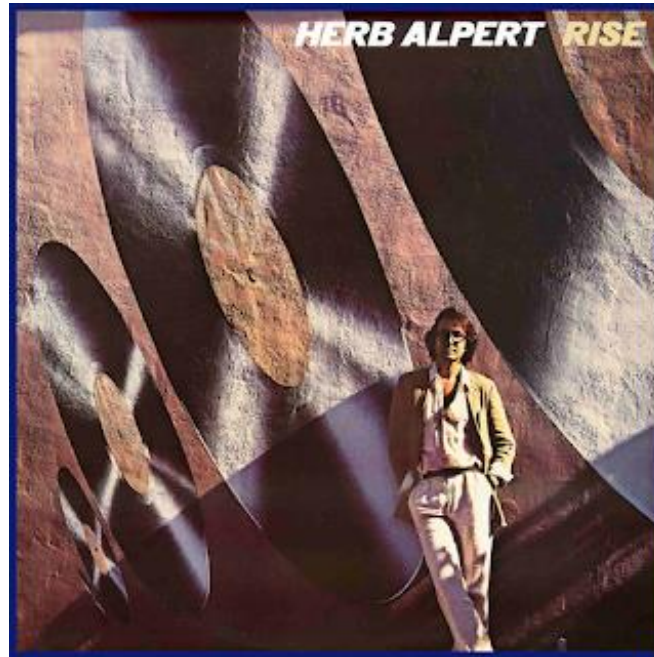


Track 2 A Day In The Afterlife is another superb piece and my favourite from this album with the beautiful electric guitar which starts off to the left of the soundstage while the shimmering cymbals sound fills my room until the Saxophone comes in, the instrument separation that the Integra is able to resolve is stunning and then the power and snap of the drums which is defined so well by the AVID HiFi EVO Three speakers shows how good the transient ability of the Integra is with a real grip on the speaker drivers allowing them to start and stop on a dime and allows the speakers to sound effortless in the delivery of the music. I've always been a huge fan of amps that have massive amounts of current on offer as they have a vice like grip on the speakers. This is what separates the men from the boys when it comes to an amplifiers design and AVID HiFi get this so right as their amplifiers can deliver the massive swings and shifts in dynamics which happen with live music, especially when trying to portray a live bands performance. It takes you closer to exactly what the artists intended and the musical experience that it gives to you from the music.

Track 3 Alpha 60 has such a powerful intro from the drums and then the raw power and feel of the bass guitar can be felt as the funky notes play out, the Integra amplifier has so much power on tap that it has surprised me on a number of occasions allowing the speakers to give a startling realisation of the music being played, there is also a stunning drum solo at about 1min 40sec into this track and it manages to fill my room with some incredible bass reproduction and continues for approx. 2 min in length with lightning fast transient shifts and pace and that kick drum has real depth and power which can really be felt as the EVO Three speakers give an explosive performance, which is quite an experience !

This is such a great album that I made sure I also bought a digital copy so that I have it permanently stored on my NAS drive.

On to my final album for this review and it is by the superb artist Herb Alpert who I have always loved and no matter how many times I listen to this album it's always like the first such is the quality and greatness of the music. On vinyl Rise is an absolute gem and recorded way back in 1979 it sounds like it was recorded yesterday such is the quality and the production of the album. I first started listening to Rise on the Tannoy Stirling III LZ Special Edition speakers with the Integra Integrated amplifier and it powered them with absolute ease and with stunning results and now listening with the AVID HiFi EVO Three speakers the synergy and musical enjoyment is heightened as they seem to thrive on bringing that music to life and in your room with stunning results.



Track 2 on side A, Rise is easily one of the most beautiful sounding pieces of music from this wonderful album and I never tire of listening to it with the beautiful sound of Herb Alpert's genius trumpet playing, this jazz funk infused track sounds fantastic through the AVID HiFi Integra with the intro of the electric piano sounding off to the left and the clap that accompanies the percussion having real snap and power which resonates out of the speakers before Herb Alpert's trumpet comes in centre stage sounding so smooth and mellow in how it is presented, the depth of the image created is just superb with the synthesised piano playing behind Alpert's trumpet playing meanwhile there is the random vocals which sound out from the sides creating a wonderful holographic image of the music, the Pellar phono stage in the Integra is sublime and the way in which it allows every tiny nuance to be heard revealing all of the music, I loved it on the Accent when I reviewed it and that performance is now taken further with the Integra and refined allowing for an even better musical experience. AVID HiFi clearly has its roots in the analogue domain and even with my modest Denon DP400 turntable its performance has been elevated and boosted by the quality of the Pellar phono stage built into the Integra.

The last track on Side A Rotation is another classic and one that I own on CD compilations and is another favourite with such a hypnotic sound and the Integra manages to produce a stunning image of the music with the percussion once again taking you into the music with the snap and rhythm of the bongo drums before the mellow trumpet sounds emerge centre stage and the vocals of Rotation echo around my room with the intended reverb and synthesised piano notes which have great definition and clarity.

On side B the first track Street Life is an instrumental version of the Crusaders hit with Joe Samples playing keyboards and the Integra really does power through this track with amazing results, Herb Alpert's trumpet is stepped up a gear in how it sounds projecting a powerful image centre stage, the drums also have more slam in the delivery of the music providing real funk and so reminiscent of this era and the disco sounds of that time. I love the way on the second track of Side B Love Is the bass guitar's power really can be felt as the strings are plucked. You can feel the notes of the music vibrate through you and the beautiful rhythm of the music.

If you don't own this record then I strongly urge you to pick up a copy as it's a masterpiece of how well it is produced and engineered, It sounds magnificent through the AVID HiFi Integra Integrated amplifier which really does bring this music to life and Herb Alpert's wonderful sounds of the trumpet playing into my room !This is one of those soundtracks that played such a crucial part in making the movie work so well and listening to it on the AVID HiFi EVO Four speakers have proved to be such an enjoyable experience as they have managed to capture the setting and tone of the movie perfectly.

It's clear from my time with the AVID HiFi Integra Integrated amplifier that it is one seriously talented amplifier which manages to produce music with startling clarity and realism to faithfully reproduce the music that you put through it, it is dynamic and plays to thunderous levels with incredible control and composure no matter what music is being played, it doesn't add nor take anything away from the music, the huge reservoirs of power on tap allows for the super-fast transients in the music to be fully appreciated no matter what speaker you connect, with the ability to drive difficult loads with ease.

Conclusions and Final Thoughts

I was bowled over by the performance of the Accent Integrated amplifier that I reviewed back in April this year and with the Integra it has blown me away by its performance and is certainly a worthy upgrade over the Accent with a more refined and powerful performance from this great British HiFi brand, it allows your music to be heard as it should be and manages to bring the music to life in your living room, the phono stage is one of the best I have heard from an integrated design and allows your vinyl collection to be appreciated in all its glory. It has an incredibly low noise floor which allows the music to emerge from the soundstage with stunning instrument separation and clarity showing its authority with any type of music played through it.

The Speaker Shack awards this amplifier with the Reference award and stamp of approval and puts it firmly up there as one of the finest Integrated amplifier designs to grace our music room.

