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"Magnat's unit reproduces a crisp and brilliant treble range, is exquisitely illuminated and prevents disruptive hardness."

Magnat

MA 1000/MCD 1050

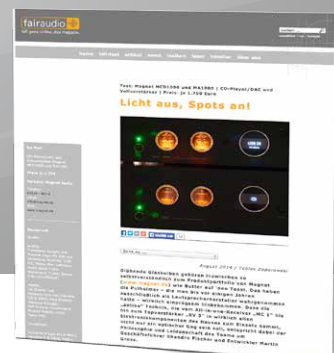


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Light off, spots on!

Glowing glass tubes go hand in hand with Magnat's product portfolio (www.magnat.de) like toast and butter. The sound character of the selected glowing tubes, which are of Soviet origin, is definitely intended as an audible fingerprint. Groove, dynamics, musicality – those of you who don't want to sit back in front of your system and simply let things wash over you will be delighted by the unit from the Rheinland. Magnat's MA 1000 integrated amplifier is based on a hybrid concept consisting of a tube preamplifier and a transistor output stage. One ECC-82 preamp tube is concealed behind each of the two circular portholes in the front panel. According to the manufacturer's declaration, the Russian glass tubes have been selected in pairs ("matched"), with each having been burned in for 60 hours. A discrete amplifier circuit with Toshiba power transistors is used in the output stage. The configuration leaves nothing to be desired and is conservative in a positive sense. Magnat's amp dispenses with modern "digital overkill" such as streaming modules or DACs, and instead boasts a fully-fledged tape loop, a pre-out and an exceptional, extensively equipped phono stage. This offers connections for both MM and MC systems. And, at the same time, there are also two other inputs available! Each of the double speaker terminals is, as expected and typical of the price class, very robust. Incidentally, these terminals are not intended for A/B wiring (i.e. parallel operation of two pairs of speakers). Instead, they provide the option of a "direct" bi-wiring configuration with suitably equipped speakers. To round-off the overall package, Magnat's MA 1000 is also equipped with a headphone jack. A detail that I wouldn't have paid much attention to as a general rule, if Magnat hadn't explicitly pointed it out, is the fact that a small, extremely high quality amp has been accommodated behind the 6.3 mm jack, which makes the need of an external device obsolete. Based on the product description provided by the manufacturer, its 1000 series unit features electronic components in an "enclosed system" that pursues a common goal: to satisfy "extremely high audiophile standards in every department". That's all well and good. "But they all want to do that!" thought our editor with some amusement. At this point we turned our attention to Magnat's MCD 1050. A "CD player plus", if you will.

This is the amplifying component in the series, which looks very similar and gives off the air of an – apparently intended – system concept. When the two components are stacked on top of one another, the three portholes on each unit are exactly aligned. You may now be asking yourself why, exactly? The fact is that the MCD 1050 also works with tubes. Logically in the output. One ECC 88 double triode is provided for each channel. The third window, like the amp, accommodates an OLED display, which provides information in a sharp font about the various states of the device that can also be dimmed if necessary. If the integrated MA 1000 is classed as a pure analogue unit, then Magnat has positioned its MCD 1050 as a digital data port, whose high quality "Burr-Brown" converter can also be used by external sources. These can be connected via Toslink, S/PDIF RCA or USB. A switchable upsampling function converts data streams from external source devices to a 192 kHz and 24 bit format when required. This is a nice feature that promises a decent sound boost depending on the material that's "delivered". SACD playback, which is still explicitly advertised for the more reasonably priced MCD 850 model, has been dispensed with by the Pulheim company for its flagship unit. The MCD 1050 is only capable of recognising CD audio. The drive unit, which is manufactured by Sanyo, doesn't want to know when it comes to MP3 or WMA formats. You may criticise this aspect, but to be honest I only know a handful of people who will seriously miss the SACD format, and even less who burn MP3 files to blank discs for playback via a stationary hi-fi system. In this respect, the absence of these features is bearable.

The sound of Magnat's MA 1000 integrated amp

As it features a similar structure, it's clear that Magnat's MA 1000 will need to measure up to its own RV 3 amplifier. After the first few notes it seemed to me as though the elaborate housing had been simply constructed around the relevant electronic components and that the power reserves had been slightly reduced in comparison to the flagship model. This is because of a "respectful distance", marketing and so on. Can you understand that? If this had been precisely the case, I would have decided not to waste any more of my time at this point and simply reverted to the tests that were conducted on Magnat's RV 3 earlier this year. Fortunately, while the two integrated amplifiers may look similar, they don't produce an identical sound.

Those of you that have read one or more of my tests will know that when I assess and evaluate hi-fi components I like to use live recordings of concerts that I have attended. In short: everything needs to come across when I listen to the recording. And it needs to be as lifelike as possible. The MA 1000 comes astoundingly close to achieving this. First, the amazingly accurate soundstage with which the dimensions of the Hanseatic sports hall are felt, neither adds nor takes anything away from the overall sound.

Now you simply cannot transport such dimensions 1:1 to another room, that's abundantly clear. But what the hybrid amplifier from Pulheim brings to my ears reminds me very much of the depth and breadth of the concert hall and the auditorium. But that's just a successful illusion, isn't it? The unit also succeeds in reproducing the on-stage action, with the localisation of the individual musicians and their instruments being particularly evident. Everything unfolds from my speakers in a realistically graduated and yet present, almost three-dimensional, manner. The sound is reproduced so fluidly that when I close my eyes I forget the speakers are even there after a while.

In "Frankfurt/Oder" – during the concert's climax before the encores – Bosse is supported by various guest musicians, who, together with the enthusiastic audience, produce real fireworks where the native electronics definitely come into their own. Amidst the complex, chaotic sounds of instruments, singing and cheering, it's not easy to ensure a clear "overview" or "internal order" while maintaining audibility at the same time. This is a stumbling block with which my Yamaha A-S 1000, for example, fails to cope. It may be slightly cheaper than Magnat's MA 1000 and, of course, it cannot be directly compared in terms of technology due to its pure transistor design, but I wouldn't have thought it possible for it not to succeed in breaking down "Frankfurt/Oder" into comprehensible individual elements without losing track of anything. The Japanese amp tries to deliver power and pressure where it's not required and "swamps" the complex part of the track. But it's all good for Magnat's unit, as it is able to cope with things a lot better. Its supremely airy performance is based on the company's own reference model, namely the RV 3. The same can be said when it comes to its bass response. The plucked bass guitar in "You goin' miss your Candyman" by Terry Callier reaches great depths and peppers the ear canal with a sharply structured sound pattern. A track like "1000 years" by The Gaslight Anthem (from the album *Get Hurt*) is a powerful percussive piece in classic four-four time which breathes life into the room! It has punch, it has pressure, it has verve. Magnat's amplifier has inherited its seamless, fluid transfer between the bass, mid and treble frequencies from its more expensive sibling. Its supple, natural, pleasant and "realistic" sounding midrange, which doesn't refrain from a slightly warm accentuation, provides vocals and instruments with a high degree of "tangibility". It was impressive to witness how tangible the track "Sarah" by Natasha Khan, aka Bat for Lashes (from the album "Fur and Gold") appeared from my listening position. Her slightly smoky vocals, which have been recorded with some reverb, really gave us goosebumps. A cross-check with my Yamaha unit and a Musical Fidelity m3i amp (priced at around €1300), which I currently also have access to, also turned out in favour of the hybrids from Pulheim. While the Japanese unit tended to reproduce Natasha Khan's vocals in a manner that was (too) warm and voluminous, the lively British amp tended to ensure more neutrality in the mid-range, however it produced a performance that was slightly too cold. To me, Magnat's MA 1000 is simply better, as its sound caresses my ear more pleasantly. To consider its more velvety intonation as an effect would be an exaggeration. At the upper end of the frequency range the "thousand" unit produces the right balance between a brilliant, finely detailed "crispness" and a restraint that ensures compressed music isn't reproduced in a harsh or annoying manner. Magnat's amp doesn't convey an irritating sharpness that would impair your listening pleasure over the long-term (even when used in a 256 kBit/s format), although it does naturally convey the general loss of quality.

The sound of Magnat's MCD 1050 CD player

Magnat's multifunctional MCD 1050 unit follows the company's audio philosophy without question. It ensures a sweeping, fluid and emotive reproduction with a powerful, unobtrusive bass range and a very natural impression in the mid-range. It also places a touch more emphasis on a clear and transparent diction from the upper bass range upwards in comparison to other amplifiers in its class. This is particularly audible when you use its upsampling function, which upscales the incoming signals – from the internal drive and external sources – to a 24 bit and 192 kHz format.

This ensures the whistling sounds that Axel Bosse's guest musicians from Deichkind use in "Frankfurt/Oder" to stoke the simmering atmosphere are even clearer and sharper contoured. Overall, the digital assistant ensures that all manner of complex passages are well-balanced and that the finest ramifications are reproduced. When it comes to Mighty Sam McClain's impulsive track "Sledgehammer Soul", as well as his wonderful interpretation of the soul classic "Long Train Runnin'", it provides more air around the individual musicians and imparts a bit more brilliance and attack to the brass sections. Not that it makes a whole world of difference. Depending on the style of music you're listening to (for example, mainstream pop) the influence of the upsampler is of less significance. But when it comes to individual details, you should leave this mode switched on.

Regardless of this, the player excels with tonal attributes that are not only similar to those of the MA 1000 amplifier, but which also seem to be part and parcel of Magnat's in-house philosophy. The extremely precise, agile and powerful bass range is worthy of mention here, as it is an ever-present foundation for everything that occurs above it; it never appears distracting or forces itself into the foreground. Admittedly, however, Magnat's MCD 1050 doesn't delve quite as deeply into the basement as my Yamaha CD-S 1000 – which revealed more volume at the first cross-check – but it comes up trumps in terms of precision and structure. While the Japanese unit sounds slightly sloppy when it comes to a hard-plucked double bass, as is the case with "Hello" by the John Butler Trio from the album "Sunrise over Sea", the amp from Pulheim makes the wiry and dry twang of the bass strings seem much more enjoyable. Well, there is a difference of around €700 between the units. Magnat's unit needs to look up for its "opponent". And it finds it. The "bass duel" with my optimally-coordinated Lua Appassionato – which is also equipped with a tube output stage and priced at around €3500 – narrowly falls in favour of the chrome unit from Bodensee. It gives the hearty double bass slightly more emphasis. However, the difference is so marginal that the difference in price is not justified. And that's saying something. As Magnat's MCD 1050 cannot be bettered in terms of flow, timing and homogeneity, and the fact that it generates a slightly more supple, silky and fine reproduction in the sensitive mid/treble range – particularly with the piano/vocals in Tori Amos' "I can't see New York" (from the album "Scarlet's Walk") – as well as the fact that it interprets the intro more fluidly than the aged Lua unit, I think it's simply exquisite for a device in the sub €2000 category. Taking the fact that it's "not only" a CD player into the equation, but also a high-quality D/A converter that can accommodate external sources via S/PDIF, Toslink and USB, I think the MCD 1050 is more than deserving of the "all-rounder award" in this test.

Test conclusion: Magnat MCD 1050/MA 1000

Magnat recommends its "thousand" series amp as a system solution. This is backed up by its aesthetics and technology. The exceptional porthole design of the otherwise plain black units ensures an elegant appearance when they are combined and, by purchasing both components, you will cover virtually all analogue (amplifier) and digital (CD player) connection issues. The system glides in terms of its sound reproduction yet it still has an emotionally-moving and rousing side. Excessive analysis is not a feature of the Rheinland company. Which is something I really like. As I said: Magnat "recommends" the connected approach. You can follow this advice, but you don't have to. Both the MA 1000 integrated amp and the MCD 1050 CD player are compelling when used on their own. Their audio tendency ensures they enrich and enhance "foreign systems" with their dynamic, rhythmic flow and sheer musicality. They tend to be slightly warm/silly around the mid-range, which is something you should try out before combining them with similar components. Although I wouldn't be worried about any "over-saturation" here. What really surprised me is how close the MA 1000 amp is to its big brother, the RV 3. If you can do without the mechanical appearance of the top of the range amp – or if you simply don't like it – and if the sometimes brutal power generated for dynamic attacks is something that you don't find necessary, then you really can't go wrong with the MA 1000. The MCD 1050 CD player will enhance any modern system as a digital receiving station – especially with its excellent D/A converter and effective upsampler. Tip: Always leave the MCD 1050's upsampling function switched on.