



SOUNDREBELS

BLOCK AUDIO Line & Power Block + Mono Blocks English ver.



Opinion 1

If we would try to write a short note about the commercial history of the brand presented today, then this would be a big, if not impossible to manage, problem. And I am not thinking about any exotic items, that do not visit Poland, but about the fact, that this is the first test ever that was undertaken by the engineers constructing this gear. You might have already noticed, that we often pioneer in reviewing absolute novelties, to which the hero of this test must be accounted to – the Czech company Block Audio. According to the information we gathered from the representatives coming from the land behind our southern borders, the process of designing and constructing the products we are going to test took a dozen years, and it turned out, that we are one of the few branch reviewers with enough experience, appropriate reference system and a room able to accommodate the monstrous monoblocks.

So the email exchange finally resulted in the pre-power set arriving at my home, so I will be able to write a few sentences about the competition between Czech Republic and Japan that took place, using a variety of discs representative to me. I would also like to thank the manufacturers, who came and installed the amplification weighing about a quarter ton, which was quite a logistic feat.





I will start the description of the tested devices with the very interesting, construction wise, preamplifier. Why is it so interesting? Theoretically there is nothing extraordinary about it, no rocket science was applied, however for many of us, battery operation is already the technical foundation for an interesting sonic effect. What is important, the preamplifier is playing of batteries even when they are charging, what separates it from the wall current completely. This approach requires however to use three separate power cables to feed the preamplifier, fortunately the connections between the main unit and the power supply are made using special multi-pin cables. But this is not everything – the main unit is also controlling the power amplifiers. It is enough to power on the preamplifier, and after a few seconds the power amps are coming out of standby mode. On one hand this might seem only a small feature, making the powering of the set easier, but it has a deeper meaning, as it allows the elements of the combination power up in a desired sequence, especially when it is required to make sure, our loudspeakers do not get damaged.

Now how does the system look like? The preamplifier is composed of two, quite flat elements; where the lower one is the power supply, and the upper the main unit. This requires some connections between the individual units, which, as I mentioned before, are made using dedicated multi-pin cables. The power supply is divided into three sections – two are for the left and right channel, while the third powers the preamplifier logic. The main unit is composed of four sections, where the front panel is processing power and also handling the power-amp control tasks, while two of the back sections, located on the left and right ends, handle the analog signals for the left and right channel, while the middle section is a MM/MC phono stage. Each of the Block components is placed on three anti-vibration feet. Finally there is a quite well readable display in the middle of the fascia, while to the right a multi-functional, round knob was placed. If you are negatively impacted by the finish being colourful, then I must assure you, this was done on purpose to show the possible versions you can order, and not because the manufacturing has run out of some components.

Finalizing the description paragraph, let me write a few words about the power amps. As you can see on the pictures, those are very big, and also very heavy, very unfortunate for my spine. The chassis is made from aluminium, where the middle houses the electronics, while the sides are used as heat sinks, and in fact get quite warm. The thin milled element is an interesting design feature, at least in my opinion. Regarding the connectors and manipulators – the monoblocks have a LED indicating their power on the front, a big logo on top and a set of connectors and switches on the back. How big is this set? Well, we have a XLR and RCA input, multi-pin control socket, a mode switch, allowing to change between A class and economy operation, a 20A power socket and finally some control LEDs, allowing to check the status of the amplifier. The main power switch is located on the bottom of the unit, near the front, this might be an important information for some users. But please do not get in panic seeing so many items on such a simple device as a power amplifier – once things were connected I have not looked at the back even once, as everything worked like a charm.

After initial connection I allowed the guests to adapt to my room and reference devices for some time and started listening after the accommodation took place. I am not sure if this was intended by the constructors, but the power amps were set to work in class A when connected, so I made most observation using that setting. How did it go? I must say, the amplifiers fared very well. The sound generated by the Czech set was very well founded, with some emphasis on the bass-midrange cliff. And please do not get upset, I mean everything was under complete control, it is just that all musical artefacts in this domain were absolutely not anorectic, but shown from their best angle. But what is happening in the rest of the sound spectrum? Sometimes betting on the timbre does have a negative impact on the breath and visibility of the sound stage. Even there can be an effect of “dimming the lights”, which would not be acceptable at this price level. Please rest assured, when I played with the [HIJIRI HGP-RCA “Million”](#) cables the sound seemed to be coming out too sweet, yet with the top [Tellurium Q Silver Diamond XLR](#) connections everything returned back to normal. Normal, meaning in this case beautiful timbre with at the same time lots of air in the musical spectacle. When I add to this the fact of building the sound stage with an almost masterful size in terms of width and depth, then it will turn out, that for two weeks I had an opportunity to witness a true feast for the music lover devoted to musicality. And what do you think I played? Of course old music. In this case from seventeenth century Italy. This was a wonderful time listening to historically inspired music, with instruments true to the century. It was so fantastic, that I really needed a lot of time and effort, to notice, that in pieces with lots of cymbals, those had sometimes a tad short decay due to the weight placed on them by the Czech amplifier. No, no, they were not dead, but I know how they should decay, and during listening to the Block, they could sometimes become silent too quickly. But I must also take into account, that the combination of the tested amps with my Austrian Isis speakers was quite random – as those speakers are part of my reference system – and despite the best intentions of the reviewer, we must live with what we have. And when we pass over such a difficult item, then we can fully enjoy the sacral music, with the fantastic sounding voices recorded in churches, the thing I admire most in this kind of music. But testing a system or device does not mean, that we can listen for pure enjoyment, so after some ethereal disks, time came for the ECM project signed by John Balke “Batagraf”. If you know this material, then I do not need to explain, that besides the resolution in the first piece, needed to show clearly the bell decaying, you need to have full control over the lower frequencies, as there are lots of them on this record. And

while before hitting the Play button I had some slight apprehension regarding the bass, after a few first notes it turned out that I was panicking. It was a bit denser than I am used to on a daily basis, but it was on the level of smartness of sound, and not extra mass added; as I mentioned before, Block just sounds like that. The music was massaging my innards, but I did not record too much of it, in contrary, it made me listen to the compilation from the start to the end, noticing a beautifully sounding saxophone. It was similar with the music from Yello, where the two gentlemen use a lot of lower frequencies, but at the same time not forgetting about shrieking whizzes and swishes, what sounded exceptionally well with the Czech amplifier. I must confess, that if my system would sound just like the tested one, then I would buy a complete discography of this uniquely energetic duo. But coming to the end of the test I just mention what happens, when you switch the power amplifiers into the economic mode. When the circuit stabilized, it turned out, that unfortunately – or fortunately, depending on your preferences – the sound drifted towards tonal balance, but lost a bit of the homogeneity it had, and what was more important to me, some of the momentum of the virtual stage. Maybe the musicians were not sitting on each other's knees, but you could feel them being closer together. But this is how it goes, you get one thing on the cost of another, but having two options to chose from, the problem exists only in theory, as you can always select the setting you want just before playing your favourite records.

Finally a few words about the phono stage. I assumed it to be just an addition to make the offering more attractive to the potential customer so I did not expect too much of it. And it showed me completely wrong, as I was absolutely satisfied with its performance. It turned out, that the built-in phono stage showed much more spectacular sound than the CD. This clearly shows, that this is not just an addition, superfluous from the analog lovers point of view, but a full-fledged unit, presenting lots of positive values. And with the good sound of the whole set, the constructors from Block should receive extra praise for the part amplifying the signal from the turntable cartridge, because it did not get dominated by the line preamplifier, as it often happens. Probably with my amplification, the Block phono would be too ethereal, but it is part of a bigger whole, and in this role it fares very well. Bravo!

I would define the encounter with the Czech products as a never ending streak of positive surprises. Dense, ethereal, and at the same time with lots of energy and control of what it generates. Practically there are no weak points I could notice. Of course, the spokesmen of orthodox neutrality might be complaining from the beginning, but this product was created to satisfy a demanding, and sure of him or herself, client. A client who loves music with a big "M", not losing the freedom of its spirit. If you are directed, at least somewhat, towards the organicity of the sound, then the Block system will possess you completely, and this is also the reason I recommend not to listen to it, if you do not have the money to buy it, as it can turn your world upside down completely.

Jacek Pazio

Opinion 2

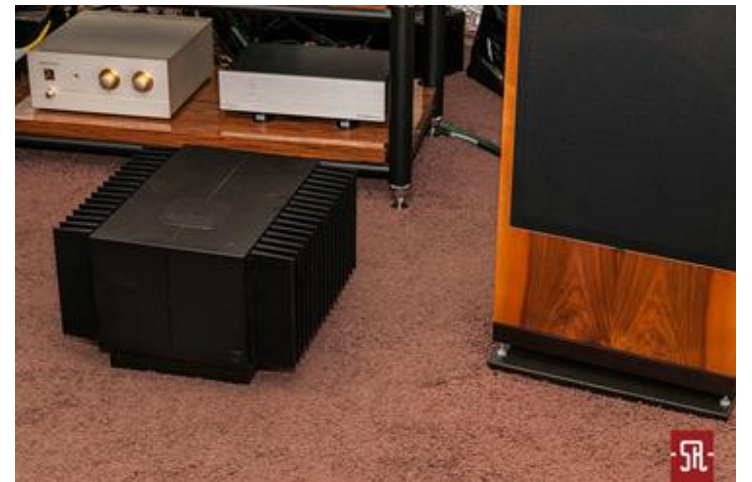
When I received an email, late August, asking if I would not like to test the separated amplification of a company completely unknown to me, named Block Audio, I opened the web browser, as usual, and... The name sounded a bit familiar, as I knew German products from Audioblock marked under that name, but it was not the Block in question. In the correspondence it was clear, that this time it was a Czech manufacture **Block Audio**, a maker of truly high-end amplifiers working in class A and a battery powered preamplifier. Big chassis, weights counted in tenths of kilograms (net weight!) and powers making the blood of audiophile people circulate quicker heralded a true feast. But my appetite needed to wait, as the finalization of the talks and physical appearance of the Blocks in our listening room took some time, but finally in the beginning of October they arrived. The test also was devoted from the pressure of time, as the suggested date of publication seemed far away. What date you may ask? Of course the November Audio Video Show. Now you are reading this text, so we did manage, albeit with some effort, and what did happen during the few weeks the devices were our guests you can read below.

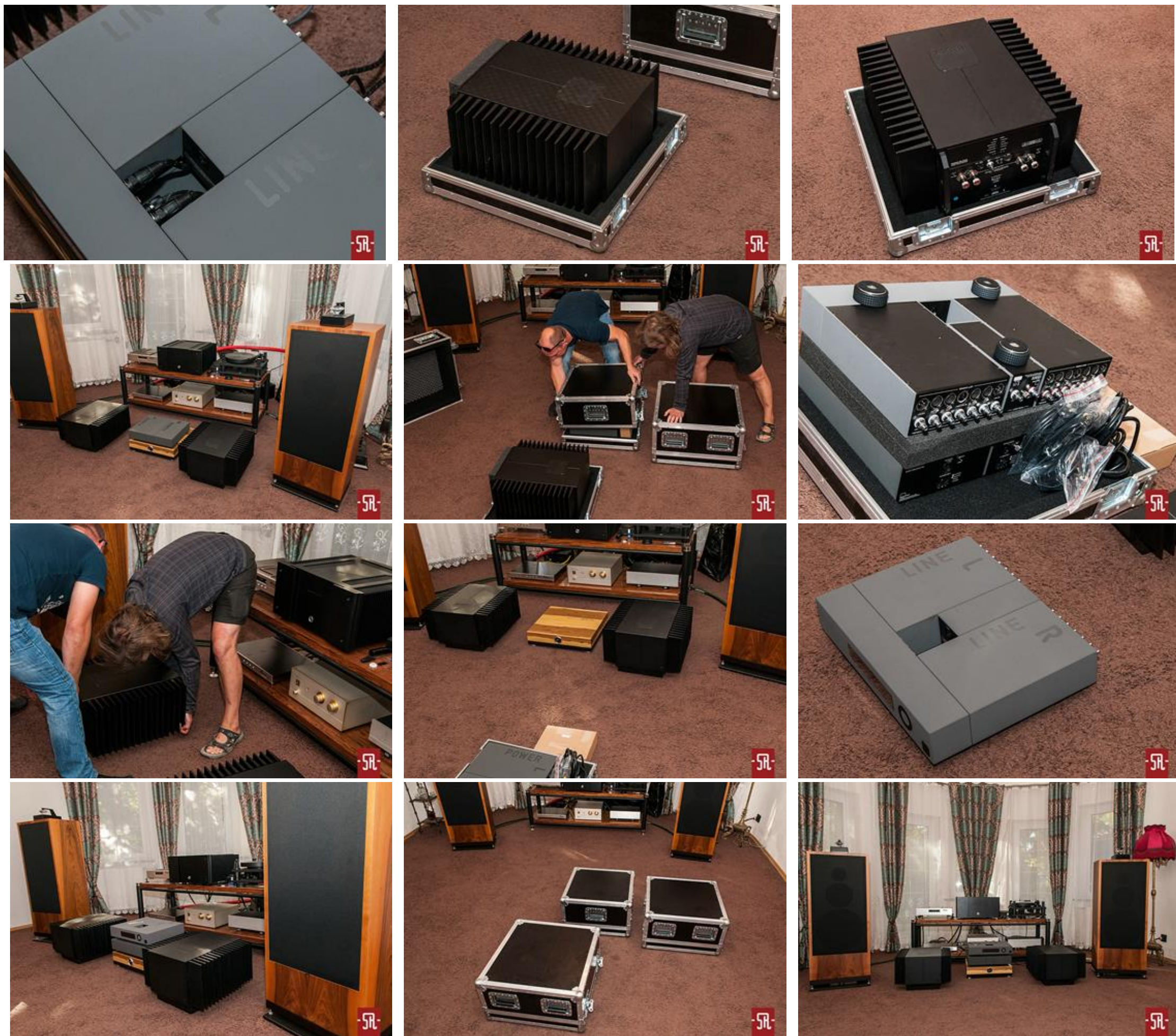
Because it happened, that we are the first zine, where the Blocks arrived for review, it would be good to write a few words about the brand itself. To have a better view of the situation we need to get back to 1989, when the search for the Czech version of the ideal, high-end amplifier started, followed by proprietary work related to uncompromised audio. This was a kind of DIY based on passion, but also on solid engineering background. The effect of this work must have been quite promising, as in the years 1997-2004 in the heads of a few friends the idea arose, to create their own construction, and their abilities were appreciated by first customers, who gave them their commercial gear for a tuning run. First prototypes were made during the following five years, while in 2010 they evolved into something, that could be marketed. But as it often happens, from the decision to formalize the company, gathering the required paperwork and finding a network of dealers took some time and only in June 2013 the company Block Audio s.r.o. was founded and the same year the public premiere of the first commercial Block devices happened, during the Vienna klangBilder show. Interestingly, since then, there was absolutely quiet about the company, and only during this year vacation time the company started preparations to exhibit during the Warsaw Audio Video Show. But before that happened, we will assess their performance in our system.





Despite Mr. Michal Sevcik from Block claiming, that the tested devices came to life from mainly from audiophile passion and the need, and wish, of building of something ideal – just to fulfill their own expectations, so they are closer to DIY than commercial solutions, already while unpacking we had a completely different opinion. We were aware, that with low number production, the economical aspect almost does not matter, and the external design is often limited due to lack of access to advanced machinery. Yet the Block already on pictures available in the internet seemed to be classy, full bred high-end devices, and that from the upper end of it. But let us start from the first impression, from the way the devices were supplied by the manufacturers (in person), starting from the dedicated transport cases and ending with the configuration and powering of the devices. Those seem to be minor things, but they allow to better know the creators of the electronics we are going to test, secondly, those do not leave anything to mess around by the transport companies. But the motto of the company from Olomouc is “There is no time for compromises...”, then we cannot expect, they would leave anything at risk. At this level of perfection they want to play things safe.





The process of unpacking fully earned its own gallery, because believe me, we can look at it without emotion, but the carrying around of the devices was absolutely not easy. It was different with the cabling, connecting and configuring – there were no surprises, and despite the worked out logics, the whole turned out to be very intuitive. This was especially crucial in this case, as in fact the preamplifier and two monoblocs constituted of four devices in total. This was due to the construction of the preamplifier, where the battery power supply had its own chassis. To make things even more interesting, the power supply and the signal part, were split into modules, separated visually on the outside as well as mechanically inside. Both channels, as well as the controller part, are almost separate items, using also separate batteries (2 x 120000 uF). This is the reason the power supply uses three power cords and the same amount of dedicated connections – cables terminated with multi-pin plugs – to connect to the main unit. The latter, besides segments responsible for the left and right channel, has also a module close to the back plate that is a phonostage, and in the front, by a headphone amplifier.

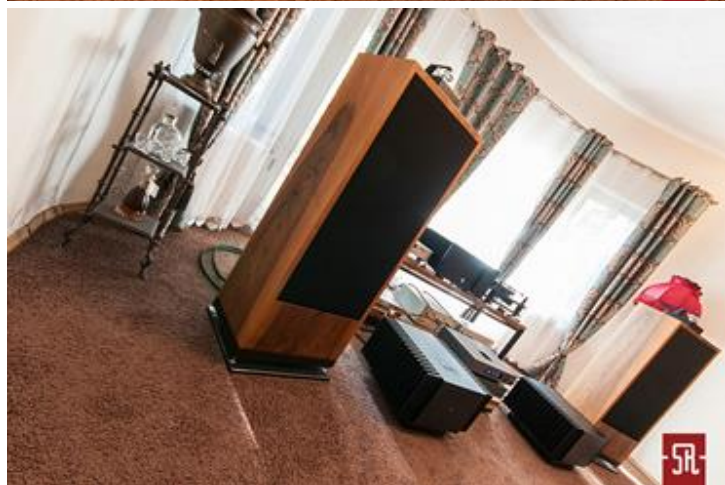
Due to the quite neutral color versions, you can choose from Nextel Black and Nextel Anthracite, the whole presents itself very minimalistic, but also very modern and elegant. The seemingly modest front plate, with the centrally placed display and a round selector, lights up after pressing the power button, providing a wealth of information, depending on the menu and chosen display mode. As an example, during daily usage, besides the obvious information about the chosen input and volume level, we can see the details about the battery power level, balance, offset for a given input, the mode of the power amplifiers and ... their temperature. But this is not all. No, it does not display a weather forecast, at least for now. But digging in the menu, one can come to the conclusion, that this is just a matter of time, and it will. Am I exaggerating? Even if, then only a little, as we can set individual sensitivity or gain for each of the inputs, switch them into bypass mode if needed, or disable the unused ones. Similar the built-in phonostage, where all necessary settings are done using the remote or the wheel on the front.

The back panel is adequate to the richness of the menu, as we have there four pairs of XLR and five RCA connectors. There are also RCA phono inputs and two pairs of XLR and RCA analog outputs. In addition there are sockets for the company bus used for controlling the power amplifier. Finally I will just mention, that there is an universal Apple remote and all modules are supported by three massive, anti-vibration feet.

The monophonic power amplifiers, with a very surprising name, Mono Block, look much more frugal, although not much less intriguing. Attention is drawn by massive heat sinks that make up the side walls, and in case of the Czech units are not just decorative, but are absolutely required. The reason for that is simple – the first 200 Watts is offered in pure class A, only above that we go into the AB class – up to 500W/4Ω, so the presence of massive heat sinks should not come as a surprise. The monolithic fronts are split by a single milled line, that houses a LED indicating operation of the unit. The power switch is hidden on the bottom of the device, near the right front end of the unit. The top cover carries the company logo and the continuation of the milled line originating on the front.

The minimalism ends on the back panel, as besides handles, necessary with the almost 100kg weight of the amplifier, we have double loudspeaker terminals from Furutech, mode switch (Class A/ Eco Mode), miniature selectors for the input (RCA/XLR), amplification (+20 and +26 dB) and the company control socket. This is not all, as besides the power socket, there is a worked out communication part, with four green LEDs informing about the status of the power amps, and four red ones, indicating errors. The whole is amended with some more switches allowing for automatic induction of the Eco mode, automatic switch-off and ground loop breakage (should it become necessary). In one word – technology used to improve ergonomics, and frankly speaking, already at this moment I had high esteem mixed with some small amount of envy, however free

from any negative feelings. This esteem came from a truly engineering and uncompromised approach to the audio business showed by our southern neighbors, and envy, that something similar did not yet come to life in Poland.





Starting the description of the sound, I will confess, that already starting with it, I had some expectations, awoken not only by the power declared by the manufacturer, but also some previous contacts with their Japanese competition – the [Accuphase A200](#). But as it often happens with such pre-listening prognoses, already after a few first notes, I could put them in my shoes. The album used as warm-up was “[Missa Criolla](#)” by Ramirez, which showed, that the Czech set does not only offer lots of power, but also

incredible resolution, allowing to look inside the recording even at culmination moments. The delicate lowering of the center of gravity, made the naturally low voice of Mercedes Sosa gain additional power and dignity, and every entrance of the choir accompanying her was absolutely spectacular. Worth mentioning is, that the Block turned out to be very graceful objects of experiments with optimal cabling, and while with the **Hijiri** interconnects, the contents of the sound approached the caramel stickiness of the mentioned Accuphase, while changing to **Tellurium Q** resulted in the upper registers become extra airy, extra lighted, while the contours of the virtual sources gained edge. The reproduction of the acoustics of the recordings could only be evaluated as very positive, although their decay time, in absolute terms, was a bit shorter, than what could be created with for example the top **Audio Tekne monoblocks**. But please look at this from the perspective of the price difference, as well as some obvious construction differences. But let us forget about the details, which I extract by force, to make this review something more than just an insipid congratulatory scroll, losing all traces of critical approach to the tested devices. In case of the Block, there is something completely different – we do not concentrate on the system, reproducing our beloved recordings, but we come into contact with the performers. While Mercedes Sosa kept us on a distance, constrained by the repertoire, Leonard Cohen on “**Old Ideas**” sounded in such a way, as if we would be sitting with him at the same table, listening to his low voiced singing. It was similar with the much more rustling Carla Bruni, who, on “**Quelqu’Un M’A Dit**” made us want to get closer to her. So close, that we would be feeling her breath. And I started dreaming... But what can we do, when each disk placed in the CD player or on the turntable, played till the last note, and already with the first, the world became limited with the walls of our listening room.

Upping the tempo and slowly leaving the nice and the spoiling land of smoothness, I took the “**Lento**” Youn Sun Nah, which showed, that the Czech amplification is also capable, although with its finesse, to reproduce the glassiness of the female vocals, as well as beautiful sound of silence, where the sound of the guitar string is slowly fading (“**Hurt**”). Here everything was just perfect – starting with the truly laser precision of the focusing of the virtual sources, to the absolutely dream-like saturation of the sound, maybe being a departure from ideal neutrality, however underlining the organic homogeneity of the midrange-bass turn.

Trying to define the tested combo in a few words, it would be easiest to tell, that it is very musical. The problem is, that such analysis would be as complete, as telling about Halle Berry or Monica Bellucci, that they are/were “not ugly”, and about Chicago Bulls from their best time – with Jordan, Pippen and Rodman – that they were not bad at playing basketball. This is why playing “**Shrine of New Generation Slaves**” Riverside we can tell, that they are rock beasts, that were only hiding behind a mask of meek lambs. Prog-rock complicated tempos, harsh, sharp and overdriven guitars with processed vocals created a true hell in our listening room, or at least some observers, who are not fully in the picture, might think so. No compression, no veiling, no problems in reaching truly concert-like volume levels. As it turn out this was only the prelude to what listening to “**Remedy Lane Re:mixed**” Pain Of Salvation created, during which I tried to make the tested electronic to capitulate, and each time I had enough, the Block did what they were designed to do – they sounded at such ease, as if the loudspeakers were playing piccolo flute and tambourine, and not a synthetic and metal shouting.

The Block Audio Line & Power Block, with dedicated power amplifiers Mono Blocks is an ideal example for dreams sometimes coming true. Those are the dreams of their constructors, who started from a search of what the market is offering and finally took things in their own hands constructing an amplifier, which is capable of making some other lovers of uncompromised high-end happy. Such sharing of your own happiness is worth to show to greater public, what we happily do right now. However please allow me to forego any discussion about if Block is for everyone, or not, because ... you see at first glance, that it is not. But it is big, top notch manufactured, well designed in terms of ergonomics and functionality (something that absolutely is not a standard, even in high-end) and sounds like a dream. I will not assess pricing, because everybody can do it for him or herself, but I have a warm request to you all. If you like how your audio system sounds, when you are happy with it and you do not want to make any changes, please do not try out the Block, because once you hear it, it would be very difficult to plug it out of your system and place aside. And I am not talking about its weight, am I?

Marcin Olszewski

Producer: **Blockaudio s.r.o**

Price: 70 000 €

Technical Details:

Line & Power Block

Distortion THD+N: < 0.0005%

Distortion IMD: < 0.0007% / 6 Vrms

Frequency Response: DC – 300 kHz -0.5 dB; DC – 20 kHz -0.01 dB

Signal/Noise Ratio: >130 dB A-weighted; >128 dB unweighted related to full output

Channel Separation: >130 dB

Max. Voltage Gain: +12 dB XLR; +18 dB RCA

Input Impedance: 40 kΩ XLR; 20 kΩ RCA

Output Impedance: 50 Ω XLR; 25 Ω RCA

Maximum Output Voltage: 20 Vrms XLR; 10 Vrms RCA

Inputs: 4 pairs XLR; 5 pairs RCA

Outputs: 2 pairs XLR; 2 pairs RCA

Battery Operation Time: >15 h

Power Consumption:

150 W max. at charging; 50 W at idle; <0.5 W in Standby

Dimensions (S x W x G):

Line: 460(w) × 105(h) × 360(d) mm

Power: 460(w) × 105(h) × 360(d) mm

Weight in total: 25 kg

Mono Block

Continuous RMS Output Power: 500 W / 4 Ω; 250 W / 8 Ω; do 200 W Class-A

Distortion THD+N: <0.015 %

Distortion IMD: <0.003 %

Frequency Response: DC – 300 kHz ±3 dB; DC – 20 kHz ±0,01 dB

Signal/Noise Ratio: 120 dB A-weighted; 117 dB unweighted

Damping Factor at 8 Ω: >5 000, DC – 20 kHz

Voltage Gain: +26 dB lub +20 dB user-selectable

Input Impedance: 20 kΩ XLR; 10 kΩ RCA

Inputs: 1 x XLR; 1 x RCA

Outputs: 2 pairs binding posts

Power Consumption: 1 200 W max.; 500 W at idle; 100 W at idle Eco mode; 0 W in Standby

Dimensions (S x W x G): 500 × 275 × 600 mm

Weight: 90 kg

System used in this test:

– CD: Reimyo CDT – 777 + Reimyo DAP – 999 EX Limited

– Preamplifier: Robert Koda Takumi K-15

– Power amplifier: ABYSSOUND ASX-2000

– Loudspeakers: TRENNER & FRIEDL “ISIS”

- Speaker Cables: Harmonix HS 101-EXQ (mid-high section); Harmonix HS-101 SLC (bass section)
- IC RCA: HIJIRI HGP-RCA “Million”
- IC XLR: Tellurium Q Silver Diamond
- Digital IC: Harmonix HS 102
- Power cables: Harmonix X-DC 350M2R Improved Version, X-DC SM Milion Maestro, Furutech NanoFlux – NCF
- Table: SOLID BASE VI
- Accessories: Harmonix Beauty Tone Milion Maestro, Harmonix TU 505EX MK II, Stillpoints „ULTRA SS”, Stillpoints ”ULTRA MINI”; antivibration platform by SOLID TECH; Harmonix AC Enacom Improved for 100-240V; Harmonix Room Tuning Mini Disk RFA-80i
- Power distribution board: POWER BASE HIGH END

Analog stage:

- Turntable:

Drive: SME 30/2

Arm: SME V

Cartridge: MIYAJIMA MADAKE

Phonostage: RCM THERIAA

Link do tekstu: [BLOCK AUDIO Line & Power Block + Mono Blocks English ver.](#)