

HP's WORKSHOP

The Means to the Music: A five Star Component...

Harry Pearson

A Sneak Preview First

The EMM CDS/D playback deck. If ever there were a five star component, it is this SACD two-channel and multi-channel playback deck from Ed Meitner, who could (but won't) rightly claim the title of the man who gets not just the most but also the best from DSD-encoded sounds. His encoding and decoding equipment is used by the record companies that produce the best SACD multi-channel discs.

Until now, I had been using a Philips 1000 player (long since discontinued) modified by Meitner as I searched to establish a reference system for multi-channel playback. And those who've kept pace with me know that I found the DSD sound, as I heard it, rolled off and soft on the high end, with an audible (but soft) grain structure.

No more. The Meitner unit, which is built with a sleek elegance that bespeaks great industrial design, has been long in the development stage and I think, worth the wait, although it is a bit embarrassing to find that DSD encoding is significantly better than I had given it credit for.

Putting it simply: The new Meitner deck, priced at just under \$7,000, is to the old Philips/Meitner mod as a new Corvette is to a Model T. The deck arrived at the height of my deadline for this issue, just as I was to construct the first definitive SACD multi-channel super-disc list. And for the first time in several years, I found myself up in the wee hours listening, anew, to snatches (and sometimes more) from the recordings listed below, partly in disbelief and partly to see if the relative merits I had assigned to the discs would change. All the discs sounded better with the new Meitner deck, and to an extent I wouldn't have believed had someone told me so in advance. (What I did not have time to check out from this edition of the Workshop was whether certain borderline SACDs would now make the grade.)

So what does the Meitner do that had me agog ?

It restores the top two octaves to their full glory. The difference is somewhat like going from the earliest stereo LPs (say from RCA) with their rolled-off top ends to the heights of fidelity they would later reach. The highs now blossom. The transient attack of the higher percussion instruments is now audible. The strings have an increased luster and lushness. The ambient

field is more expansive, and silkily quiet – no more of that soft grain. Because of this, the dynamics themselves sound not only wider, but more nuanced in terms of micro changes. And wonder of wonders, there seems to be greater depth of field on the soundstage itself. You could call this an order of magnitude improvement without violating the meaning of the phrase.

You simply don't get this kind of improvement in part of the component chain of anything in audio more than once in a decade or so. Now that day has arrived.

Issue # 152 February / March 2005 page 100