

Metaxas Ikarus integrated amplifier review

Posted on January 27, 2018 by Panagiotis Karavitis in Occasional // 3 Comments

This is an article that first appeared in our new online PDF, downloadable magazine *The Occasional* last fall in its inaugural edition. We'll be rolling out articles from it over the next week in anticipation of our upcoming second issue which is scheduled for publication February 3rd. We hope you enjoy this new, exclusive content, and that you'll check out the Winter Edition of *The Occasional* when it drops 140 pages of fresh high fidelity reviews, audiophile gear highlights, lifestyle stories, and editorial opinion.

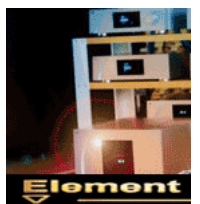
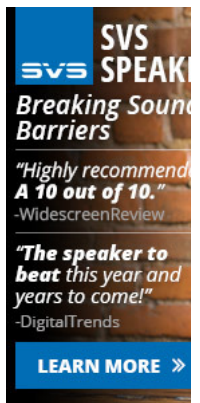
—Rafe Arnott



Metaxas Ikarus integrated amplifier.

By Dr. Panagiotis Karavitis

Over the last few years I was given the opportunity to audition and eventually review several pieces of equipment including some rather well finished ones, if not beautiful. The ENIGMAcoustics M1 Mythology speakers were absolutely gorgeous, same goes for the Pathos integrated amplifier. A special mention should go to the exterior design of the Devialet Expert amplifier, and the matching remote control, twenty-first century aesthetics from the French design masters. Then last year, audio legend Kostas Metaxas came up with a few renderings of what would be his new line of amplifiers, and eclipsed just about any given design that I had laid eyes on. These masterpieces were well beyond the sphere of different, beyond being simply interesting or innovative, putting them next to ordinary amplifiers is a bit like saying the Pagani Huyra is just another car.



A bit of almost useless background

Kostas Metaxas has been an audio engineer, electronics designer, and producer for a few decades now. He's worked on more than 300 recordings with artists ranging from Chick Corea to Sir Neville Marriner, most of which were done using good ol' analog-tape recorders from Stellavox. Speaking with Kostas about high-end audio is like watching a documentary on how this entire world evolved from the early, and rather innocent days up to today's frenetic business. His design philosophy, sound-wise, was to keep noise as low as possible in order to be able to use his equipment during recordings for capturing the finest nuances while keeping an ear close to timbre, as natural as possible. You see where this is heading?

What is this Ikarus thing?

The Ikarus integrated amplifier, at least on paper, is nothing more than a moderately powered amp, boasting just 50 Watts at eight Ohms per channel coming from a low noise, high speed voltage regulator design that dates back something like three decades. In fact, the circuit topology is not new as Metaxas first designed the original Ikarus in the early '80s, and what we have here is more of a refined version rather than an all new one. Some interesting points are the ultra-short signal path with no wires used (meaning no wire connections between the various modules, he uses pins, and each board is directly attached to the next one in a solid manner). High-speed, diode-rectified power supplies, and carefully matched output transistors compliment the circuit topology.

The fascia sports a pair of VU meters, and two round knobs for selecting input, and volume. The rear houses a series of RCA inputs, a pair of XLR inputs, and WBT silver speaker binding posts. The IEC inlet sits underneath the chassis, next to the pair of toroidal transformers that occupy the centre part of the amplifier's belly. A pair of square covers keeps the biasing modules safe but can be easily opened in order to swap in a new pair of modules if, and when a revision design is available.



Amplifier as art.

But really, what is this thing?

Certainly not just an amplifier. Sure, it does amplify sound, and when I connected it to my phono stage, and DAC the speakers made great music. But the Ikarus is more than that, it classifies as work of art.

I heard friends describing it as an "alien" or a "cosmic bug." I've witnessed my wife's girlfriends touching it as if it was a sacred reliquary, and others trying to make sense of it, only to miserably fail. Like a modern art sculpture, the Ikarus projected different emotions to each encounter.

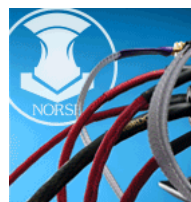
A Crowning Achievement

From M

Coming to a place near

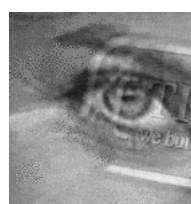
MERRILL

Endorsed by ca



"With a good DAC
narrows the gap
high-resolution dig

- Lee Sco



Art: the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.

This is the definition of Ikarus. And how do you review a work of art?



Top view of Ikarus.

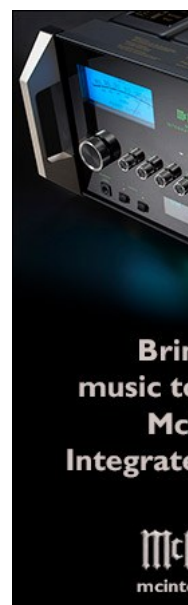
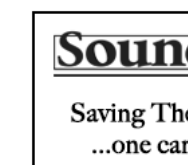
Well you don't. You surely don't review a sculpture by Boccioni, and you most certainly don't try to put down in words a pointless description of a Metaxas design.

All I can offer is a few notes on the sound qualities of the Ikarus. I used it extensively with both my sources: The Rockna Wavedream DAC (1st series with MSB Platinum modules), and the Garrard 401 turntable fitted with Kuzma 4Point tonearm, and ZYX 1000 Airy3 MC cartridge amplified by the ASR Basis Exclusive phono stage. Tonearm cables, speaker cables and power cords all came from [Signal Projects](#), interconnects from [Black Cat Cables](#) while the USB cable connecting my Odroid C2 streamer running Archphile OS with the Rockna DAC came from [Das Klang](#).

Speakers were – as always – the [ATC SCM 100SL](#). Not the perfect match for any amplifier declaring anything less than a kilowatt, and this was my major concern when I accepted the Ikarus in for review. I remember insisting on this point, asking Kostas again, and again if the entry-level integrated would manage to “move” my notoriously hard to push speakers. The resident amplifier is an ASR Emiiter with two external power supplies that boasts something like three times the power output of the Ikarus, and more importantly packs humongous power reserves thanks to One Farad of filtering capacitance, big transformers, and the like. I have witnessed my ATC literally swallow 400-watt Class D amplifiers, then spit them out with the seeds.

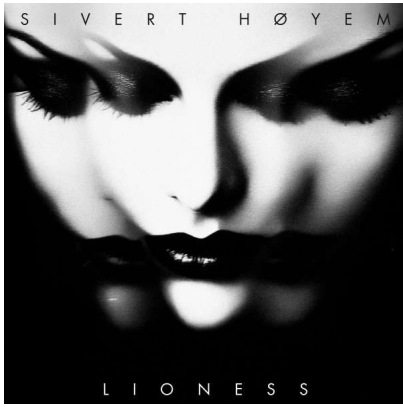
Metaxas was adamant, “you won't have any problems at all, it will be more than adequate,” he said. I hate it when I have mismatching issues, but it wasn't the case.

The Ikarus was indeed able to drive the ATCs to rather loud levels, not juice them out like the ASR but there was nothing missing in terms of sheer volume, not unless your point would be to become deaf in the first place.



the
occa

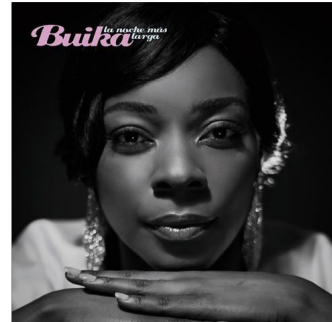




While listening to Sivert Hoyem's latest album, "Lioness," a masterwork, and easily my favourite non-classical music album for 2016, the feeling was that the amp had something more than 50 Watts under the bonnet. Electric guitars, and drums sounded solid, and bold so if your speakers are even a tad more efficient than mine then chances are you will need no more than the Ikarus for sufficient levels. For those who want or need more there are bigger models in the lineup including a pre/power combo. Just make sure your wallet is up to the task, these don't come cheap.

Having ticked-off the box concerning power demand, I was finally able to focus on what counts the most: The sound. Make that the sublime sound. The Ikarus is a clearly sonically-balanced sounding amplifier that manages the toughest aspect of recorded playback – natural

timbre – like few others. With both high-resolution files, and LPs it never failed to deliver the most lifelike timbre on voices, and acoustical instruments alike. Concha Buika, who I recently had the chance to listen to live, was present in the room, singing with her distinctive visceral, and dark voice, transporting me into French, and Spanish melodies. For those unaware of this rare talent, do give a spin to her "La Noche Mas Larga," and see for yourself if there is a more touching cover of *Ne Me Quitte Pas* since the days of Nina Simone. It's that sublime sensation that the Metaxas Ikarus amplifier managed to pull out, and it sure ain't an easy task when feeding some ATC behemoths who are transparent like few other speakers.



I got the same magic from both chamber music, and jazz. The late Esbjörn Svensson tops my pics for modern jazz, and his "Viaticum" holds all the most intimate elements of European jazz, blended with a touch of contemporary classic music. The very first key strikes on the piano came out timid, introductory, no rush, and only there to open a path for the double bass. Only the drums started to shake up the space, and offered a glimpse of what was to come. While the composition was evolving it was clear that the Ikarus had it all, the finesse, and the emotion, the ability to convey so deep, and articulated music.

But the Ikarus was also about tides, and waves, proving to be able to grasp a powerful experience like the "Minimalist Dream House" by sisters Katia, and Marielle Lebeque. That first movement for two pianos by Philip Glass goes beyond the idea of employing minimal

instruments or ideas, and frankly, who needs more than those two pianos? A modern equivalent of Vivaldi's "Summer Storm," a windy composition slashing through the speakers. The Ikarus has verve.

MINIMALIST DREAM HOUSE

KATIA & MARIELLE LABÈQUE



Accumulations "Big Parade."

Not sure how many of you are familiar with Arman, the French-born artist who gave us a new concept on what art is, how materials should or could be used composing his "Accumulations" next to the Poubelles, breathing new life in the postindustrial art movement. For me Metaxas is a bit like Arman. He is giving life to something old, and rather boring; electric circuits dedicated to the amplification of sound. There is nothing new or revolutionary in the components per se, I took a long sneak peak of what's inside the Ikarus, and it ain't different from what's inside just about every other well-made amplifier out there. Toroidal transformers, and a few caps, resistors, and rectifiers. It's all the same, except for one thing, the final form.



Not your average black box.

Form doesn't follow function, form is pure beauty here.

It's an object of art, this Ikarus sculpture is a limited series work of beauty, you can find more copies of an "original" Arman Accumulation than that of the Ikarus amplifier. You don't appreciate the looks of it? Feel free to move along, after all art is not for everyone, and not all appreciate Arman as much as I do. Not your cup of tea? Maybe such a bold design will grow on you with time, maybe it will never do it for you. There is a good chance that you will laugh with those willing to spend more than \$30.000 USD but then, *de gustibus non est disputandum*.

From a strictly audiophile point of view the Ikarus has merits that are noteworthy: It sounds intimate, detailed, and despite the moderate output will pack a punch when provoked. Are there better sounding amplifiers for this kind of money out there? Sure, I can name half-a-dozen beefier, more capable amps, but not a single one of them will pass in the history as a work of art, a unique piece of gear that says something about who you are, and what you cherish the most. You want an Arman? A Metaxas? Or do you want just another box?

Specifications

FREQUENCY RESPONSE : DC – 5.0MHz (-3dB)

POWER OUTPUT: 50WRMS per channel into 8 Ohms with no more than 0.05% T.H.D.

DAMPING FACTOR : Greater than 500 wide band

SLEW RATE : Greater than 1000V/us small and large signal

T.H.D. : Less than 0.05% 20Hz-20KHz

I.M.D.(S.M.P.T.E.) : Less than 0.05%

SIGNAL/NOISE : -117DBV unweighted input shorted

SENSITIVITY: 0.5VRMS in for 50WRMS out (35dB)

INPUT IMPEDANCE : 100kOhms in parallel with 11pF

Share this:



Related



High End 2016: A glorious return from Metaxas

May 19, 2016
In "Munich 2016"



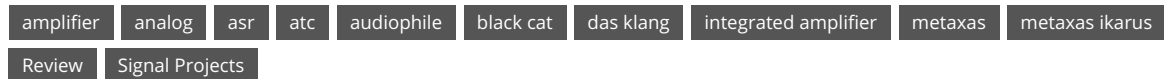
Doctor's Orders: Analog recordings by Metaxas

September 29, 2016
In "Music"



High End 2016: Here we go

May 4, 2016
In "Munich 2016"



introducing:
the occasional
get your copy today

the occasional
podcast



Now on
iTunes

About Panagiotis Karavitis (184 Articles)

Doctor and Editor @ Part-Time Audiophile Publisher @ Audiohub.gr

← Previous article

Next article →

3 Comments on Metaxas Ikarus integrated amplifier review

MadMex // January 27, 2018 at 9:06 PM // Reply

Right, Al. Tone bailed on me without warning on that second issue. Their website is pretty ho-hum. But that web mag is tip-top.

★ Like

JUNUS TRISNO // January 27, 2018 at 8:27 PM // Reply

Very appreciate of your product ,please go to DAC configuration

★ Like

Al Leibbrand // January 27, 2018 at 1:44 PM // Reply