

AUDIO REVIEWS

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REDPOINT



TESTA ROSSA XS

Reviewer: Jules Coleman**Source:** Well Tempered Reference w. Roksan Shiraz; *Brinkmann Balance/Brinkmann-modified ETM cartridge* [in for review]; *Accustic Arts CD player* [on loan]; *Denon/Exemplar DVD-2900* [on review]**Preamp/Integrated:** Shindo Monbrison [full-function]; Shindo Catherine dual mono preamplifier**Amp:** Shindo Sinhonia monos; Mark Pearson-built Mullard EL-34; Cr Development Artemis Gold**Speakers:** *Hørning Hybrid Agathon Ultimate* [in for review]; *DeVore Fidelity Gibbon 8* [on long-term loan]; *Audiopax Ref100* [on review]; *Combak/Harmonix Bravo* [for review]**Cables:** Stealth Indra interconnect; Stealth M-21, M-7, PGS interconnects; Audience Au24 interconnects; Harmonix interconnects; Stealth, Harmonix Studio Master and Van den Hul Mainstream power cords**Powerline conditioning:** BPT BP-3.5 Signature; *Reimyo ALS-777* [in for review]**Stand:** HRS M-3 isolation bases; *HRS MR1 rack* [in for review]**Sundry accessories:** Harmonix feet; Black Diamond Racing and Poly Crystal cones; Vibrapods; ERAudio Space Harmonizers**Room size:** 30' x 18' x 9'**Review component retail:** \$15,000

To be Big, Bold, Beautiful and Red

I was introduced to Peter Clark, designer of Redpoint turntables, a year or so ago at *In Living Stereo* in NYC. Redpoint is located in Scottsdale, Arizona and Peter was in town delivering a table to Wes Bender, National Sales Manager of InnerSound. Apparently, Wes had fallen hard for Peter's turntable and ordered one with little or no hesitation. When I ran into Peter, Wes was at the store setting up a pair of InnerSound's wonderful electrostatic hybrid loudspeakers and he had brought Peter along for the ride.

I liked Peter immediately. We shared an appreciation of classic tables like the EMT and the Garrards, 12-inch arms and cartridges from the EMT/Ortofon SPU family trees. In the world of modern arms, we were more likely to find ourselves setting up a cartridge on a Triplanar than on a Graham and we both admired the Well Tempered turntable. Neither of us shared a particular fondness for acrylic platters or bases. Indeed, neither of us would be likely to choose acrylic for any audio purpose.

We met again at CES where two of his tables were on display with InnerSound gear. It was my first chance to listen to his table and I really liked what I heard. I asked Peter if he had an interest in having me review one. He was agreeable and we spent a couple of months after the Show settling on the model, tone arm and cartridge combination I would review.

Executing our plan proved considerably more difficult than devising it. Originally, Peter was to set up the table after the Montreal Show. During the Montreal Show, I received a phone call from him in Montreal sans turntable. Apparently, his table was somewhere in North America, though its actual whereabouts were unknown even -- or should I say, *especially* -- to UPS. Don't ask Peter what Brown can do for him? Apparently, one thing they cannot do is deliver a turntable from Arizona to Montreal. UPS has a funny way with drawing a curious distinction between *location* and *destination*.

We revised the plan and Peter was to set up his table at my home in Connecticut just after the HE/Stereophile Show. I stopped by his room at the NY Show to make sure that both he *and* his table had arrived and to give him (and Wes, the man with the wheels and, as it happens, the sarcastic sense of humor) driving instructions to my home.

We were set for Monday, the day after the Show was to close. Wes and Peter arrived while I was out picking up my friend, the poet and philosopher John Koethe. John was in town attending his son's graduation from Yale Medical School. More than anything else, he had the look of a parent relieved that his child was no longer on the payroll. As many parents can attest -- including me -- graduation no longer provides any such guarantee.



I brought John back to my place where he was staying. I adore him because aside from being ridiculously talented, his favorite album is Lou Reed's *Metal Machine Music*. This is not a standard choice. I admire him even more because he was insightful enough early on to voice a dissenting view of Bruce Springsteen. When asked whether he, like other American poets, was enamored of Springsteen's then recently released *Born to Run*, John allowed that he was suspicious of apocalyptic visions of the Boardwalk.

John and I had spent countless hours together when we taught philosophy in the same department. We had listened to

music on a variety of turntables in what seems in retrospect like a million different rigs while our wives indulged our ranting about the relative prowess of the Psychedelic Furs and our children looked to stir up trouble.

This was probably the first time we would be listening together in at least twenty years. I looked forward to it.

Within an hour, the table was set up atop a special base made for Peter by Mike Latvis of Harmonic Resolution Systems. That base was in turn sitting on the HRS rack that I conveniently but coincidentally had in for review. We sat down to spin a few records, enjoy some music and make some final adjustments to the setup.

The Redpoint replaced the Well Tempered Reference, which to me constitutes the baseline for HighEnd turntables. The Well Tempered is an underappreciated and undervalued table - but *not* by other table designers. In its latest incarnation at roughly 6.5K including arm, it defines *best buy* in HighEnd analogue - review of the latest incarnation to follow soon. This is not to say that there is no distance between the base line set by the Well Tempered and the state of the art. Indeed there is. One of my goals in undertaking a series of turntable reviews is to see whether I can determine just how great that distance is, what it consists of and how much in travelers checks it will cost to take it. One thing of which I am quite certain? There are many turntables (and you, dear reader, know many of them and like most of us, may well have owned one or two as well) that come in at higher prices than the Well Tempered but offer considerably less engineering excellence while presenting analogue playback in a far less persuasive manner.



The rest of my system remained unchanged for most of the review process. All interconnects were Stealth Indra which continues to impress with its utter disappearance from the chain. Speaker cable was the Stealth Hybrid MLT.

Electronics were the Shindo Monbrison preamplifier and Shindo Sinhonia monoblock amplifiers. A Stealth power cord powered the Monbrison, the Sinhonia employs captured cords. The extraordinary Reimyo handled CD playback, speakers were the Hørning Hybrid Agathon Ultimates as I await the arrival of their more massive siblings, the Alkibiades. The Redpoint was fitted with my reference Shiraz cartridge feeding the Monbrison's internal step-up transformer.

The setup was a bit rushed but our initial take on the sound was quite favorable. It was all I could do to get John to bed after Peter and Wes left. Unbeknownst to me, Peter left for his return to first NY, then Arizona, less than completely satisfied. He had unfinished business on the East coast which proved fortuitous as this enabled him to return within the week to calibrate the table in a more relaxed, unhurried fashion.

He showed up again with Wes (whom he was beginning to refer to as his 'driver') and I took the occasion to invite friends over for a day of vinyl listening. The crew included some of the usual suspects and Lawrence Borden, reviewer from Dagogo.com. We listened to the table with the Shiraz and then with an SPU Royal N (for nude). We settled on the SPU, listened to LPs for a few hours, broke for dinner and eventually went our separate ways.

This is the system I listened to but for one change late in the review cycle when I replaced the Monbrison with the Shindo Catherine dual-mono preamplifier that has since become my reference. Most of the reviewing was done with the Monbrison in place, largely because the Catherine was not yet broken in. Thus none of my remarks about the Redpoint table are drawn from my experience of it with the Catherine in the chain.

There are two basic Redpoint turntables – the Testa Rossa, which comes in at \$7,500, and the Testa Rossa XS, which tops out at around \$15,000. There are custom options for each and so the actual number of different but related tables available from Redpoint is staggering. All Redpoint turntables are high-mass damped designs. One major design goal is to turn as much unwanted resonance and vibration into heat as possible to maximize accurate analog reproduction.



All models are suspension-less modular designs. They begin with a massive base and bearing on which rests a massive platter. Both the base and the platter can be configured with a smooth or faceted edge. The review table was faceted. To one side sits an arm pod that can be customized for different arms, to the other the motor pod. The table can spin records at 33 and 45rpm. Speed is set by a switch on the motor pod and easily adjusted with knobs, one for the 33, one for the 45rpm setting. The motor itself can be battery-powered and Peter is convinced it sounds better that way. I agree but the difference is subtle.

Peter also prefers magnetic tape to other ways of keeping the platter moving at the desired speed. With the platter in motion, the tape made an audible and somewhat disconcerting sound as it traversed the faceted edges of the platter. While this noise had no discernible impact on the table's sonic performance I could detect, the presence of a fluttering sound from this tape/belt is, in principle if not in practice, a bit inconsistent with the aim of reducing extraneous noise.

When the table was in motion, the faceted surface reminded some visitors (and my wife and children as well) of a disco ball. Some visitors complained that it made it hard to look at the table. I liked the look in principle but found it a bit distracting as well. If the Redpoint is what you are looking for, I recommend the conventional smooth-edged platter option.

From a dead stop, it takes this table a bit of time to get up to speed. This suggests relatively low torque. Low torque motors tend to be quieter but can sound a bit less lively. I personally prefer higher torque motors. They tend to be a bit noisier but are more dynamic. The classic example of a high torque motor would be the idler designs of the Garrard 301 and the very interesting dps table designed by Willie Bauer in Germany [dps = der Plattenspieler, 'the record player' in German - *Ed.*]. I currently have the Brinkmann Balance in for review that, like the Redpoint, is a high mass turntable but unlike the Redpoint, gets to speed very quickly to indicate a high-torque engine.

Redpoint tables are *not* fitted with integral arms. Peter has tried many arms and is particularly fond of the Ikeda and the Triplanar. Because the former is likely not well known among readers of 6moons, Peter and I settled on a Triplanar. The Triplanar is a beautiful arm, very easy to work with and compatible with most cartridges. It is neutral, detailed and full-bodied. I prefer its sound to the Graham with which it is often compared. The latter is too lean and analytical for my taste while the Redpoint and Triplanar constitute a sympathetic pairing.

Whatever your arm preference, Peter will build an optimized arm pod for it. This does not mean that he will build an arm pod that will optimize the arm's sonic performance. Rather, he will build one to the appropriate size and shape. Whether your chosen arm works well with his table will depend, among other factors, on the way in which the sonic characteristics of the table and arm mesh. If you design a table without an integrated arm, you are going to have to listen to a lot of arms along the way, as much to figure out what your table sounds like as to figure out what it works well (and poorly) with. It is no surprise then that in choosing an arm for the Redpoint, Peter stands prepared to help you in a way that I could not possibly.



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