

AYON BLACKARROW-S & SPIRIT III “Stereo” Magazine – Hifi Analog Spezial, No. 3, February 2016, Germany;

Operation „Heebie-Jeebies“

Sparkling conciseness and an aura whirring of finesse are significant properties of the components of Ayon audio. With the tube amp Spirit III and the brand-new speakers BlackArrow-S we played “hunter of the lost details”. And the set did not miss the effect.

Do you want to know which speaker during my 25 years as a reviewer was one with the highest heebie-jeebie-factor? The GyrFalcon of Ayon audio which the Austrian manufacturer with the audiophile reputation has replaced in the meantime. But the recollection of this 14,000 Euro/pair speaker still has an effect in me. Could this be refreshed with the actual equally priced BlackArrow-S that is said to produce even more prickling? It came to us with the integrated amp Spirit III. And Ayon’s CD-player/DAC CD-07s also was in on it. Per definition the latter is not really part of the STEREO magazine “HiFi analog”-world, but as it also works with tubes and stems from this ambitious Ayon-corner we granted asylum.

Uninhibited vividness and a directness enthusing even hard-bitten listeners are the Ayon credo so to speak. What we had to expect here, was foreshadowed already when after day-long hearing with our reference amps Acoustic Arts on B&Ws 802 D3 replaced the former by the freshly unpacked 32 kg integrated amp Spirit III; its appearance with the top-mounted tubes and the chrome-coated glossy transformers of the power supply and the transducers already gave us a chill of high-end audio equipment.

Although not come to rest yet the sound pattern of the Briton immediately showed a delicate enwrought liveliness that before at least was not in the focus of attention. And the BlackArrow-S with its elliptical design avoiding standing waves already jumped up so directly on Musical Fidelity’s small amp M3i keeping her chassis moving over the weekend for shakedown, that this too stoked our anticipation.

No wonder that the Ayons come that loose. Wherever you look they are bred for raciness. The curved cabinet without corners and edges does not only look good. It is absolutely indispensable because there are internal stiffeners but almost no possibility to retard resonances. In the interest of uninhibited joy of play and impulsiveness the BlackArrow-S almost completely does without inner attenuation.

What it means practically we experienced with “Summer Wind” an impressively fresh live recording of the Ray Brown Trio from the “The Loa” club in Santa Barbara, CA. Very rarely you can hear the bass of Ray Brown flickering so tight and full of relish and on top of that you get the side noise of the whirring strings without the reproduction becoming thin and superficial. On the contrary: presenting deep tone attacks substantially and to the point is one of the assets of the – besides very efficient – BlackArrow-S, which the amp therefore can manage easily.

Instead of the ceramic chassis used in the GyrFalcon Ayon uses one of her favourites, the proven Audax Aerogel mid-range speaker said to combine dynamics with lowest distortions. It takes over at ca. 300 Hz from a Seas-Woofer. Quasi as a secret weapon for excellence in the high range in the recent past emerged the sophisticated AMT (“Air Motion Transformers”) by Mundorf, Cologne. Because of their folded foil diaphragm they combine a large surface with least weight and the

resultant speed. On the one hand they offer energy and total resplendence going along with this impressive facility resulting from a smallest slew rate. The Ayon offers even two AMTs; a big one takes over at 2800 Hz. For frequencies above 10 kHz a tiny counterpart is added to realize the ultimate subtleties in this range.

The particular capability of resolution of the speakers certainly also is due to the multi-layer cabinet of instrumental wood replacing the usual MDF called "the resonance killer" by Ayon boss Gerhard Hirt because of its high attenuation factor. And he also paid attention to a feature often ignored: the connection terminals. After a tedious proofing he finally made the decision for the expensive but superbly sounding "Nextgen" by WBT for the bi-wiring terminal (optional) of the BlackArrow-S. Whoever has experienced in how much these parts influence the tonality and spatial reproduction easily accepts a potential additional charge, especially as the 121 cm high speakers seemed to us absolutely reasonably priced considering the driven effort and the quality of sound.

This applies even more for the Spirit III integrated amp also being equipped with WBTs. Certainly 5,700 Euro is not peanuts, but what you already get as technology is extraordinary. Thereby we do not only mean the precise volume control via an analogue circuitry of resistors or the highly-priced Russian KT 150 power tubes applied by Hirt as one of the first, because besides their reliability the sound "more powerful than they are already." Also the metal remote-control, the direct-in input to circumvent the pre-amp-section, or the RCA-plugs, gold-plated and screwed firmly into the thick-walled aluminium rear panel, are features that you would expect at this price level.

Rather a particularity is the possibility to select between the powerful pentode- and the triode-mode operating in a more "pleasant" sounding distortion spectrum. Therefore the amp shuts down in about 2 minutes lasting procedure. Only thereafter the relevant button on the back panel makes an impact when the amp restarts while the tubes are restarted gently significantly prolonging their life-time.

However, a real highlight is the "Auto-Fixed-Bias"-circuitry designed to provide each tube with the optimum voltage and according to Ayon must not be mistaken for a normal standard auto-bias-adjustment-system which is considered by the Austrians to deteriorate the sound. Generally speaking, the Spirit III always "pays attention" to the status of its KT 150 tubes and informs via a tiny display close to the mains socket. In case of changing a tube a test program of 12 minutes can be activated checking the tubes extensively and only then activates the amp.

Logically, there were no problems with the enclosed tubes each of which being allocated to a defined socket. It's fascinating to watch the count-down in the mini-display during the start-up procedure. It also occurs when switching off the amp with the ok-status of the power-tubes being confirmed. Apropos: how precise the Ayon BlackArrow-S is on the point you notice last but not least when positioning it (attention: tighten the spikes!). In the end you move them by millimetres and the final alignment with a rule is absolutely obligatory when you don't want to "lose" parts of her edge-sharp precision.

A toggle-switch between the terminals is supposed to provide optimum operational conditions for tube and solid state amps with "tube" doing without a filter circuitry easing the work for the amp and providing a bit more bass-volume. This way voices get a bit more sonority, seem slightly rounded. However, we liked "Solid State" better even connected to the Ayon Spirit III amp. This way the Ayon

sounds more linear more even, but this point touches question of taste and the requirements of the respective room acoustics.

There should not be two different opinions about the impressive musicality of the duo. It was a pleasure to bunk off in the evening into the listening room for a couple of hours to the Ayon-stereo with a pile of favourite CDs and records. The tender and light-footedly woven but at the same time substantially caught titles of the "Faithful" album of the Marcin-Wasilewski-Trio showed grace, three-dimensional spatiality as well as a sensible timing that never left the listener in doubt when the musicians slightly accelerated or decelerated the tempo to lend expression to their playing. The Ayons precisely carved out these finesses that sometimes disappear easily, even when the jazzmen really let it go.

However, depending upon the operating mode there were certain particularities showing up. The pentode mode enhanced fire and drive whereas in the triode-mode the sound characteristics are quieter, glaring more from the root note. What a hefty dose of intimacy the set can convey, Trisha O'Brian got across with her version of the Jobim-classical "Dindi" in which she is accompanied by a guitar only. In the dark room you almost meant to feel her presence. The powerful rolling bass of Jane Dubocs "Lady Jane" also from the XRCD-sampler "Best Audiophile Voices IV" had contour and pressure. Cannot be put off by the scarcely present attenuation factor: the Spirit III is not lacking colour or conciseness. This is also valid for operation on speakers from other manufacturers i.e. the Dali Epicon 6 that we operated alternatively.

And the BlackArrow-S is the second strophe in Ayon's high-end poem: bell-like, but closed and authoritative, with unbroken dynamics as well as an attentive responding behaviour educating rather to low-level listening than to power-play. Performance and power would be available but Ayon's duo rather approaches the sensible side but without drifting-off into euphony. Instead it underlines the brisance of tonal, rhythmical, and dynamic oscillation as if it would like to retain the listener's "audiophile attention". And if this has one or another heebie-jeebie effect this is an absolutely desired side-effect.