

## Audio Analogue Rossini

Let's get this over with. Looks beautiful, sounds amazing. Cheque please, Editor.

No? Oh, very well...

### 1000 words-worth of picture

Scrutinise, if you will, the photographs accompanying the article. Witness the circular arrangement of control buttons, the white-on-blue display window, and the very line of the thing. The price tells us this is not a high-end player, but it just reeks of Italian design flair, and it's not built anything like my old Alfa Romeo, which was not so much 'built' as 'arranged in an untidy pile'. While clearly the standard boxy form-factor, the look and construction of this player marks it as something out of the ordinary from first glance.

But, as is so often the case, the outside is not nearly so important as the inside. As our eyes wander around the interior of the Rossini's casework, we notice it contains a high quality transport, a great deal of air, and a fat little toroidal transformer that is clearly over-specified for the job at hand. But there is something amiss amid the contemporary electronica. It is, in a word, a tube. This little light bulb, a 6922 double triode, laid out

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on its side, plays a central role in the player's output stage, adding amplitude to the output signal and helping to filter the high frequency unpleasantness that plagues CD.

Valves are not common in the output stages of CD players, but neither are they unheard of. Some might grind their teeth at the news that the Rossini is infested with a tube, and suppose that this can only mean a mushy, weak, and over-warm sound. My previous experience with hybrid players suggests this isn't a problem, and that an argument for valves can be made based on sound quality. However, I side with those who view the use of valves as a second-best solution to the unwanted artifacts of



digital to analogue conversion. I think Audio Analogue might agree with me, hence the Rossini's big brother, the Paganini.

### And now for the sound

Let me begin at the bottom: this machine has an astonishing feel for bass. Geophysicists have recently discovered that the Earth emits a constant low frequency hum. If they need a CD player to reproduce it for sceptical audiences at academic conventions, this is their candidate. Holy moly. But the show's not over. At the other end the Rossini just astounds with its fluidity and lack of grain. There's no screechy downside to cranking the amplifier knob around to 11 and letting the growly bits dismantle your room. As I write this the Chemical Brothers are unscrewing my light fixtures.

And then – the speed. This creature snaps, crackles, and pops like it was intended as a nutritious start to your day. Soundstaging is nice and deep, and very precise from left to right. Though the sonic image is not vastly wide there's an almost surround-sound effect in the way music can sweep past and around the listening position.

But, as ever, the acid test is the human voice. I pondered long on the programme material I'd use to trip up the Rossini. I decided on Stina Nordens-tam, a singer who's *Dynamite* album is

recorded very sparsely and with great intimacy, but who's breathy-little-girl voice can become monotonous when heard on systems that don't capture the subtle changes in style and emotion in her singing. The results were very convincing. My only caution would be that a system set up for maximum detail retrieval might find the Rossini takes no prisoners with second-rate recordings. Any hardness laid into the voice tracks on a CD will be exposed without pity. Any fears that the valve-enhanced Rossini might be soft or cuddly should now be laid to rest.

### Since sliced bread?

Perhaps you're wondering how the Rossini, which has clearly made a positive impression on me, stacks up against the Cambridge Audio Azur 840C, a rival that also earned my unqualified admiration? My answer is that the Rossini is equally accomplished, but it will suit a different sort of listener than the 840C. Where the Cambridge is an unbiased presenter of the musical arts, the Audio Analogue wants you to love what you're hearing and infuses what it plays with an extra half-teaspoon of awesomeness. It is, on reflection, the more Italian player.

Overall, I can do no more than have you re-read the first line of the review. Now, Mr Editor, about that cheque... —Brent Burmester

