



# REVIEWS

## hardware

# e.a.r.

## Disk Master turntable

as reviewed by Robert H. Levi

The SECRET !  
live open  
sound  
analog & digital  
**AQVOX**



I consider myself the luckiest reviewer on earth. With every scribe from here to lower Mongolia begging for the E.A.R. Disk Master, I have it "up and running." Am I in fat city or what? Yes, it's beautiful! Yes, it's a joy to use! Yes, it's a precision instrument! Yes, it's the best turntable yet in my system! After countless VPI designs, Thorens, Linn Sondeks, and more, this magnetic drive masterpiece is a welcome music maker of the highest order!

## LOUDSPEAKERS

Avalon Eidolon and REL Stadium III subwoofer.

## ELECTRONICS

E.A.R. 324 phono preamplifier, E.A.R. 890 amplifiers (ran as monos), E.A.R. 534 stereo amplifier, NuForce Reference 9 SE V2 amplifiers, E.A.R. 912 preamplifier, and an E.A.R. 834L Tube Line Stage.

## SOURCES

VPI Scout/JMW 9 tonearm, VPI SDS Controller, VPI Heavy Weight Super Platter, ZYX R-1000 Airy 3-XSB phono cartridge, E.A.R. Acute CD player, **ModWright Sony 9100 Player with tube power supply.** ModWright Sony 9100ES with Signature Truth Modifications, Mod/Bybee Filters and Revelation Cryo Silver Umbilical. Alesis Masterlink 24/96 Recorder/Playback Deck, and the Benchmark DAC 1 revised. Grado Statement Phono Cartridge. Pioneer DVL 919 LD/DVD Player, and a Marantz DV8400 DVD/SACD/CD player. Magnum Dynalab MD-108 Reference Tuner, Marantz 10B FM Tuner, Day Sequerra Reference FM1 Tuner, and Scott 350B FM Stereo Tuner, AQ 7500 FM Antenna, Stax 71 Electrostatic headphones, Grado Reference 1 headphones, and a Grado headphone amplifier.

## CABLES

Kubala-Sosna Emotion, Harmonic Technology CyberLight, **Harmonic Technology Magic 2**, Dual-Connect interconnects, **Dynamic Design THB Nebula**, Soundstring, Kimber Select balanced, Kimber TAK phono AG, Kimber Hero balanced and single ended interconnects, and Acoustic Zen Interference II balanced interconnects. Kimber D-60 Digital Interconnects. Kimber Select 3038 Silver, **Kubala-Sosna Emotion**, and **Harmonic Technology Magic Reference Silver** speaker cables. Kimber Palladian, Tara RSC and Decade, Tice, Soundstring, and **Kubala-Sosna Emotion** AC power cords.

## ACCESSORIES

Monster Reference 350 Mark II v2 Power Conditioner, World Power Power Wing, Tice Clock, and Audio Prism Quiet Line IIs. Cable Cooker 2.5, Winds Stylus Pressure Gage, Bedini Ultra Clarifier, VPI Record Cleaning Machine 16.5. Audio Magic's Quantum Physics Noise Disrupters.

I'll get this out of the way first. The suspension on this table actually works. I have never had a table in 45 years of *audiophiledom* with built in suspension that was really worth anything. The E.A.R. comes fully loaded with a terrific suspension that will allow it to ride on any steady, fairly level shelf well isolated from vibration. Even so, I put it on a Seismic Sink, and it was like gilding the lily! At \$17k, it comes with what other tables costing way more just leave off. I remember when I had a Linn, I adjusted the suspension weekly, not that it ever isolated the table from vibration. What a pain. The Disk Master is adjusted only once when leveling... end of story.

It supports two arms quite elegantly and has SME and Helius cutouts on board. I used two Helius Omega arms designed for this table. I mounted one arm with my ZYX Airy 3x cart, but never did mount my Grado Reference, maybe later. The power supply and speed control is a slick chrome and aluminum box that allows fine adjustment and speeds for 33, 45, and 78 with the turn of a knob. I used a new Argentum Power Cord for the table power supply

## Amazing to See

The Disk Master with magnetic drive brings the platter to speed in ONE revolution. It does not even slow very much when using the static brush. It is the best application of high tech engineering precision I've ever seen in audio. There is a space between the drive belt / motor wheel and the parallel wheel that runs the LP platter that's a full ¼ of an inch wide. The magnets must be robust. Plus, the top platter starts almost as quickly as the motor spins below. It's magic!

Here's what the manufacturer says:

Tim de Paravicini began contemplating a radical new design for a turntable several decades ago, but the advent of digital audio put the project on hold. Now, with interest in analog not only continuing, but growing, he has finalized his design, and introduced the Disc Master turntable. While many turntables have appeared on the market in recent years, few offer as many novel features as the Disc Master, but this is not novelty for its own sake. The Disc Master represents a new standard for LP playback.

Most striking is the no-contact drive system. The need to transfer power to the platter of a turntable has always been problematic, as any system with the capacity to transfer power can, by the same means, transfer vibration. Flexible rubber belts have proved a satisfactory solution, but suffer problems of slippage—hence, uncertain speed—and they pull the platter sideways, which can result in stability problems. Tim de Paravicini has arrived at an ingenious solution that solves these problems. A low-noise motor, controlled by a carefully optimized servo loop, drives a subplatter via a geared belt that ensures absolute speed control. The subplatter drives the platter via an arrangement of opposing magnets. This method not only eliminates slippage, but allows enough compliance to filter out any remaining vibration from the motor and belt, while applying a fully symmetric driving force.

Bearings are another problem for a turntable designer, one that Tim de Paravicini has solved by the use of Swiss-made, precision angular contact bearings, which are as quiet as the more common point-contact types, but wear much more slowly, so that their performance after years of use will be as good as on initial purchase.

The platter is made of an ultra-low-resonance composite of resin and inorganic filler, accurately machined and supported on an instrument-grade aluminum chassis. Adjustable, damped feet support the assembly. Three speeds—33, 45, and 78—are offered, with a continuous speed control for 78 to accommodate discs cut at non-standard speeds.

All common tonearms can be mounted and adjusted with ease. The

Disc Master is also available with a special E.A.R. version of the Helius Omega tonearm. The Omega arm is as radical a rethinking of tonearm design as the Disc Master is a reconsideration of turntable design, and the two work superbly together.

## **The Sound of Silence**

I have no idea what the E.A.R. may sound like as I do not detect any obvious or even subtle sonic signature. It's not warm or cool. It's not vivid or reserved. The ZYX just performed about 40-50% better overall on this table and with this arm than on my current VPI setup. I also noticed a much lower noise floor with the Disk Master along with consistently quieter LP surfaces.

The table is quite compact at under 50 lbs ...no 700 lbs. here and no double hernias either. It also looks like a turntable should look and is super sturdy made of very thick metal bits. There are no crystal or glass sections, no carbon fiber pillars or retro juke box look a likes. Its adjustments are intuitive and it has small bubble levels built into key pieces to guide you as you set it up. If it sold for \$30k or \$40K, I'd not be surprised based on the top flight construction and engineering. At under \$20k, it's a fabulous bargain and a lifetime keeper for anyone that loves LPs.

I like the idea that the Disk Master is not some giant beast of a contraption. Unless you put the table in another room which few of us do, the bigger the turntable, the bigger the sonic sail to catch air born vibration and to communicate floor born vibration to the platter. In the case of turntables, smaller is generally better and a hell of a lot easier to accommodate.

From Beethoven to Ellington, the E.A.R. was unflappable. The Corian platter covered in cork is very pretty and quite dead to the touch. All forms of vibration are less a factor with the Disk Master than any other table I've ever seen or heard. LPs just play like never before. This is one innately musical turntable. No clamps or vacuum suction here. The LP just rests beautifully flat on the generous platter.

I played several of my cherished RCA lacquers and heard truly glorious music. Inner definition and depth are enhanced. Individual musical lines are easier to hear. Distortion is very noticeably lower. Dynamics are bigger, both macro and micro. LPs consistently sound clearer and with less distortion at all frequencies.

## **The Bass**

The bass is bold, deep, clear, and dramatic. LPs with particularly big drum thwacks and beep bass fiddle bowing were reproduced with state of the art excellence. I listened to the E.A.R. on both the AudioMachina Maestros and Avalon Eidolons + REL Sub and heard the best LP bass of my life. I completely disagree with any criticism laid at the feet of the Disk Master regarding a supposed lack of superior bass reproduction. Utilizing the E.A.R. 324 phonostage, I got extraordinary bass definition to the lowest frequencies [16Hz on the Maestro's] with all the bass grunt in North America.

## **Stability**

The Disk Master never so much as said peep while I played it. It's absolutely set and forget. After one initial speed control tweak in setup, you are on your way. Turn it on and off...that's it folks. It works like the old Timex...first time, every time. Well done Tim!

## **Good News**

I spoke with Tim at *RMAF* and E.A.R. is ramping up production on the Disk Master in January. It's still a special order item I'm told, but at least your wait will be reasonable. It's worth the wait if you want perfect LP sound forever!

## In Conclusion

The E.A.R. Disk Master turntable is all you've heard about and more. It plays your favorite LP's with significantly less distortion and noise than any other table in its price range or substantially more. It is solidly built and needs little adjustment. It has no sonic signature to report. It is a bass champ! It will be available beginning in January in higher quantities for LP lovers. It has a suspension that really isolates and needs little adjustment. To own it is to love it. The E.A.R. Disk Master receives my highest recommendation for LP collectors who want and demand only the best.

**Robert H. Levi**

### Disk Master

Retail: \$17,000

### E.A.R. Yoshino

web address: <http://www.ear-yoshino.com/>

### E.A.R. USA

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