



Clearaudio Performance DC

A RECORD PLAYER FOR CREATURES OF COMFORT

By Hans von Draminski. Photography: Ingo Schulz



I shouldn't really be doing this. After all, the whole thing was really meant to be done differently: Set it up, turn it on, enjoy. But this analog equipment has ignited my urge to play. And for that, I ask your forgiveness right up front.



———The CD player made us lazy. And comfortable. And sometimes a little dumb. Because these machines and all their successors that have completely done away with physical data carriers simply no longer demand anything of us. Set them up more or less horizontally then plug in the power and signal cables — done. There's no comparison with the care, the expertise, and the fine motor skills one actually needs to have and invest in a proper record player. Generally speaking, at least. Because even among those precisely engineered units designed to sample black vinyl discs, there are a few plug-and-play versions out there.

One particularly appealing device is the Performance DC from Clearaudio, the longtime manufacturer based in Erlangen, Germany. And not just because it's delivered to the customer as a preconfigured complete package with tonearm and system; it also looks like a very normal record player and not like a miniaturized oil rig or a repurposed boomerang. It has a simple, rectangular body, whose sandwich design provides for a greater number of color variations and combinations. Reigning from above is a turntable, which admittedly is somewhat thicker than other standard tables. A coronet of four buttons illuminated in blue and marked 78, 45, 33, and Off make it easy to select the speed — standard with higher-class Clearaudio models, by the way; manual switching of the drive belt appears to be something best not left to premium customers. When it comes to the tonearm, customers can make their selection when they place their order. The model Clarify (with MM system Virtuoso V2) ships as standard with the Performance DC; our test device came with the formidable new tonearm Tracer, which our colleague Boris Fust already certified as having outstanding sound supremacy in FIDELITY No. 36 — and not without good reason, we point out here. Because the performance turntable basically represents a clever downsized version ►

A dream partner: The tracer arm and performance DC complement each other excellently.



of the larger Innovation line and I'm in the lucky position to have access to various tonearms from the Clearaudio portfolio, I put on my innocent look and asked at the editorial meeting if I might be able to "play around a little" with the Performance DC. "Tinker" or "mess" around with it would have been a more fitting description. The manufacturer itself makes it clear with its package options that the combination of the Performance DC–Tracer doesn't have to be the end of the road.

Even those who prefer to order the Performance DC as a ready-to-play end product may continue to read at this juncture: After all, they can by all means use the results of my testing as purchasing advice.

Luckily, the tonearm pickups at Clearaudio are a rock solid and, most of all, a standardized matter; they can be exchanged relatively quickly with average screwdriver skills, a set of precision tools, and steady hands.

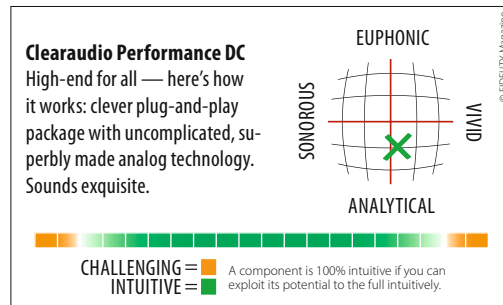
First test: Performance DC with the "small" tangential tonearm TT5, which I will use in combination with the MC pickup Concerto V2 for sampling with the Innovation Basic and which does an excellent job. Because the Performance DC is in many ways a moderately slimmed-down innovation — from the turntable mentioned above to the drive maximized for optimal synchronization through to



patented magnetic bearings — the tonal differences compared with the turntable's larger sibling are kept within reasonable limits. And when it's all about spatial precision, cleanliness in the bass range, and sheer low-frequency pressure, I always go back to the MFSL discs of jazz and fusion expert Madeleine Peyroux — LP reissues that, drawing on experience, sound better than the original releases thanks to meticulous remastering. With the Performance DC, the voice of the chanteuse, who has reached fascinating maturity over the years, retains its immediacy, its compelling presence, and its rawness. If anything, the “expanse” seems just a few centimeters narrower and somewhat flatter than with the Innovation Basic–TT5 combination.

A tendency that continues when listening to major symphonies. Just recently, a rerelease happened to land on my desk, and it gives me great joy every time I listen to it: The recording of violin concerts from the pen of Wolfgang Amadé Mozart and Max Bruchs with the legendary Hungarian violinist Tibor Varga (1921–2003) — the virtuoso with the unmistakable big violin sound who once played the pieces with his own chamber orchestra and in the process produced great moments in recording history. The reissue on Philharmonia (PA 451 V2N002) delights with its largely flawless pressing and a tremendously airy, pleasantly brilliant, but never shrill or overly high-frequency sound. Varga's instrument, a Guarneri del Gesù from 1733, has body and

substance; its proportion to the orchestra sounds well balanced, and the issue published in France is also completely on the safe side when it comes to tone. In short: a fine LP for a listening test, one that lets the turntable-arm combination run optimally on the needle. The Performance DC with the TT5 completes this mandatory test so well that there seems to be nothing missing and I can relax as I'm pulled into the music — and catch myself wondering where such charismatic violinists in the mold of a Varga might be found today. An LP with a suspiciously pitch-black cover has been left leaning against the rack in the listening room by a colleague. How exciting! May I see this as an invitation, as suggested listening? Or was it simply “forgotten” ▶



on purpose? The five-member rock band Souls Revival recorded a selection of its driving, powerful, guitar-heavy songs that head straight to your stomach and toes with “Straight2Tape,” the same name as the series from the Swiss label 2inchrecords. Anyone suspecting the Swiss don’t get their hard rock from the Gotthard Massif mountain range alone will find their corroboration here: The recording singer Giovanni Pontillo, guitarists Stefan Schroff, and Sandro Pellegrini, bassist Tevfik Kuyas, and drummer Marc Friedrich were able to create with the Trident-80b mixing console and a Studer tape machine from 1971 is alive with authoritative sound that’s as transparent as it’s forceful. And the Performance DC doesn’t have the slightest

problem with it. The noble Clearaudio comes through like a souped-up sports car powered by a V12 engine.

Now I really want to know, so for a few hours I switch off my Innovation Compact with two mounted Magnify tonearms to perform a comparison test. The specimen, which holds a carefully adjusted Clearaudio Da Vinci, journeys over to the Performance DC — and the sun rises: It’s remarkable how this combination excels when it comes to resolution and homogeneity. Admittedly, some of the deep background is missing. This has to do with the size of the turntable on the larger Innovation models. In exchange, the attention to detail and responsive dynamics of the Da Vinci

harmonizes beautifully with the fleet-footed performance of the Performance DC. After Souls Revival had turned my ear canals inside out and given them a good flush, I turned to a somewhat softer selection: Singer Régine Crespin, accompanied by the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, performing the *Nuits d’Été* from Hector Berlioz. A brilliant cycle of songs carried by great emotion that grew into a gripping self-reflection and vocal tour de force in the hands of the exceptional artist Crespin. A soprano who can reach stratospheric heights while still floating with total ease above all things. And Crespin’s presentation seems much more weightless than the newer interpretation of “Summer Nights” by Hildegard Behrens, also released by Decca.



Well-balanced.
The Virtuoso V2
MM system is
pre-calibrated upon
order as the perfect
addition to your
setup.

Subtle differences that the Performance DC with Magnify plus Da Vinci depicts with confidence.

Yes, you are right: It is a little absurd to combine an upper-middle-class turntable with an arm and pickup belonging to such a higher price range than the base itself. But the fact the experiment works speaks to the quality of the rock solid design and validates the high standard Clearaudio places on even its “smaller” products. Customers can purchase a complete performance package with preconfigured components for under €3,500, thereby more or less checking off the item of record player for even high-end systems. It's no accident the Clearaudio Performance DC,

particularly in its very elegant rose-gold finish, goes perfectly with those champagne-hued systems that proudly bear the high-end label thanks only to their shiny housings. It doesn't have to hide behind the top-class components in terms of its sound quality, either. And it has the potential to grow with its owner's steadily rising aspirations for better arms and systems. What more could you want? ■

Record player | Clearaudio Performance DC

Operating principle: belt-driven turntable | **Speeds:** 33, 45, 78 r/min. | **Special features:** Plug-and-play package in various versions, electronically controlled synchronization, turntable with magnetic bearings | **Finishes:** Aluminum top and base plate in black, silver or rose-gold; body in silver, black, or wood (rose-gold: dark red wood) |

Dimensions of turntable without tonearm (W/H/D): 42/33/12.5 cm | **Weight:** 11 kg | **Warranty period:** Two years | **Package price turntable for the Performance DC with tonearm Clarify and MM system Virtuoso V2:** starting at €3,400

clearaudio electronic GmbH | Spardorfer Str. 150 | 91054 Erlangen | Germany | Telephone +49 9131 40300100 | www.clearaudio.de

ACCOMPANYING EQUIPMENT

Preamplifier: Mark Levinson No. 38s, Musical Fidelity M1 CLIC, Pass XP-12 | **Power amplifiers:** Audio Note P2SE, Mark Levinson No. 27, Musical Fidelity M1 PWR, Pass XA25 | **Integrated amplifier:** Hegel H360, Marantz PM-10, and HD-AMP1, NAD M32, Vincent SV-238 MK | **Loudspeakers:** Audio Note “E” Spe HE; Bowers & Wilkins 800 D3; Burmester B18; Dynaudio Special Forty, Infinity Kappa 7.2 Mk II; KEF LS50, R900, and Reference 3; MartinLogan Expression ESL 13A, Phono Veritas 10p, Wilson Audio Yvette | **Cables:** Audio Note, AudioQuest, HMS, in-akustik, Vovox | **Accessories:** Harmonix, Subbase Audio