

was more evident when this previously VPI 16.5-cleaned album was recleaned with the Audio Desk. The performance became more engaging, sounding like one was on stage or perhaps just behind it, and when the audience applauded, they sounded as though they were in front of you.

This apparent extension on the top end, great realism in the soundstage, and reduction in the noise level was evident in all of the many albums I cleaned. Also, when there was profound bass energy in an album, it was cleaner and deeper than before. I should say something about one last record, Dave Brubeck's *Time Out* (Columbia CS 8192). "Blue Rondo A La Turk" and "Strange Meadow Lark," were just awesome. On these recordings, Brubeck's piano has always seemed poorly captured and off to the right, and as much as I enjoyed the music, I could not hear a well-defined soundstage. This was true on several vinyl releases of this album that I own. Not after this Audio Desk cleaning, however. I was transfixed and enjoyed the piano for the first time and heard a soundstage that I could really grasp.

Further observations

The Audio Desk's designer, Reiner Gfäss, says, "The Vinyl Cleaner is a disc-cleaning machine that follows a different path: the cleaning process is fully automatic, simultaneously for both sides, ultrasonically, and by means of counter-rotating microfiber cleaning barrels, with subsequent drying. This form of cleaning is not only quieter and more convenient, it is above all highly effective and extremely gentle on the disc's surfaces." I can take no exception to any of these claims. But it is a complex piece of equipment and a good deal more expensive than my reference record cleaner, the VPI 16.5 with the Walker Delrin tube. Certainly, the VPI is much less convenient but is it less effective? This question troubled me greatly.

Early on I found that the sound of a previously VPI-cleaned record improved after a further cleaning with the Audio Desk. Does this prove the Audio Desk is more effective? I thought so initially but somewhat accidentally I found this was not necessarily true. The earlier mentioned *Ella Fitzgerald Sings the George and Ira Gershwin Song Book* led to an interesting finding. I had not cleaned this album earlier with the VPI. Having cleaned one of the four records in this album with the Audio Desk and being quite happy with the improvements I noted above, I thought why not see if the VPI adds anything. I took this record and further cleaned it with all four steps in the Walker Prelude cleaner on the VPI.

Much to my dismay, listening after further cleaning with the VPI, I heard greater transparency, more detail, a noticeably more delineated soundstage and more detail. I took another record and first cleaned it with the VPI. I found it was much improved. Obviously, the next test was to clean it with the Audio Desk, and yes this was again a major improvement. Many further tests of the hypothesis that cleaning with both machines was better than with one, confirmed it. What an unsatisfying conclusion! Who is going to own two record cleaners, and what does this mean anyway? Does each machine clean up what the other leaves? Does the Walker enzyme better remove the molding compound, or does it leave something on the record that improves its sound? Does the Audio Desk's cavitation remove deep dirt in the grooves and keep both sides from contaminating each other, as each is face down on the VPI platter while the other is being cleaned? And would another combo of cleaners outperform these excellent units? Life is too short for me to entertain these further questions. All that I can say is that cleaning with both of these cleaners gives a more satisfying vinyl sound.

As I noted above this is a very convenient automatic machine, but it is very complex. Water has to be filtered and brought to the tank where the cleaning takes place. The thickness of the record must be assessed and the drive posts engaged on the record. The brushes then have to be engaged for one minute per press of the On button as the record is rotated. Once this is completed, the water has to be drained into the lower tank before two fans turn on in order to dry the record's surface as it spins through a cycle of three different speeds.

At the end of my test of the Audio Desk, I did have a problem: The records stopped rotating. I reported this to Ultra Systems, the US importer, who examined the unit when I returned it and reported that "one of the drive rollers attached to a spindle had worked loose from the spindle. [We] had not seen this problem before, but apparently Germany has, because they had already changed the adhesive used to secure this roller in the next production run." I therefore expect this resolved the problem.

Conclusion

I will sorely miss the convenience of the Audio Desk Systeme Vinyl Cleaner, as the VPI with the Walker Prelude that I own takes about four times as long and you have to be constantly present while cleaning a record. The Audio Desk Vinyl Cleaner is very convenient and effective. I would certainly recommend it to anyone.

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Audio Desk Systeme Vinyl Cleaner
Price: \$3495 USD.
Warranty: Three years parts and labor.

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