

Turntable + 2 tonearms + 2 cartridges + phonostage

Brinkmann
BARDO | 10.0/Π | 12.1/EMT-ti + EDISON

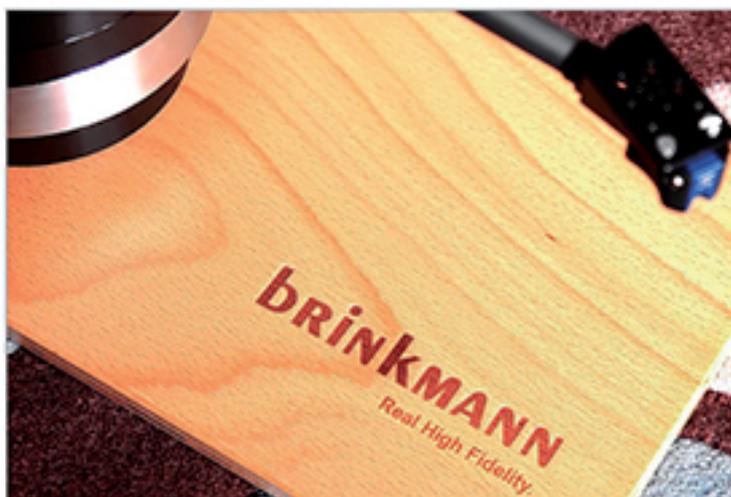
Manufacturer: Brinkmann Audio GmbH

Price (in Poland): (24 000 PLN + 11 000 PLN + 7000 PLN + 19 000 PLN + 11 500 PLN + 39 000 PLN)

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Country of Origin: Germany

Product provided courtesy of: Soundclub



REVIEW

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BRINKMANN

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I should start with a short explanation. My plan for this month was a review of Nagra system but, as it happens from time to time, even if you plan something meticulously some things just happen and... you need to change your plans. Hopefully Nagra review is just postponed, not canceled. I didn't have much time to find a replacement and I want to use this opportunity to thank Mr Maciej Chodorowski from Soundclub for his prompt response to my request. We talked already during last AudioShow about future test of some Brinkmann products but it wasn't yet exactly planned for particular month. So once more – thank you for helping me out even though the time was really scarce.



As a great vinyl fan I am particularly happy each time when a new turntable/tonearm/cartridge brand arrives to our Polish market. It doesn't really matter whether this is something affordable from my point of view, or not. What matters is the performance, not the price. Over last few years we've seen many brands finally appearing on our market simply because the growing popularity of vinyl and vinyl playback forced almost each „respectful” distributor to comply with growing demand. That has given vinyl fans a wider choice and us, reviewers more chances to get familiar with different devices and to gain experience while reviewing different types and makes of devices. Last Audio Show gave exhibitors another opportunity to present some new brands/models, and one of the distributors who took this chance up was Soundclub. Not only did they surprise most visitors with Cessaro speakers presentation, but also with having a top model of turntable by the renown German manufacturer, Brinkmann. From the moment I entered Soundclub's room I knew that sooner or later I would have to get my hands on at least one of these beautiful turntables. I always try to plan my reviews months ahead and as I had already had several tests planned I couldn't at this particular moment agree either object nor

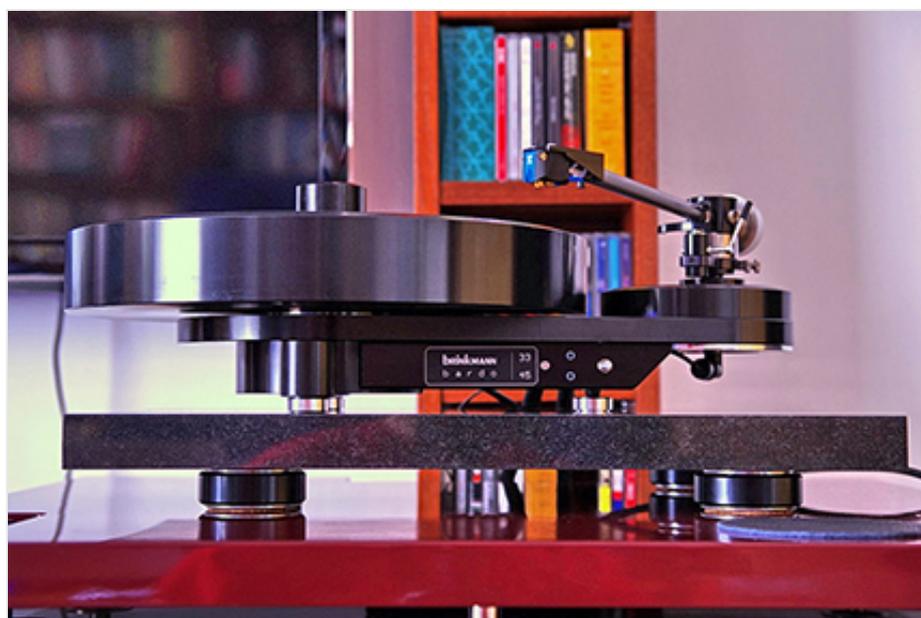
Right after I dropped stylus into the groove Bardo took me to Koeln to Keith Jarret's concert and it did it in such a convincing way that when it came to flipping the record to the other side I did it as quickly as I only could to get back to the wonderful world of piano improvisation without any unnecessary delay. What a piano that was! A wonderful and powerful instrument, vibrant, colorful, intense sounding, and its 3D image thrown in the middle of large space just a few meters from where I sat. All those small sounds and noises Jarret produced himself were clearly audible being an inseparable part of the whole spectacle, as well as a lot of coughing coming from the audience. Piano is a great test for wow&flutter – you can easily hear that the sound becomes not so clear, bit wobbly if only anything is wrong with platter's speed. Nothing like that happened – that was a very clear, transparent, precise sound.

Next in line was a wonderful *Flamenco Puro Live* by Paco Pena and his group. That's a highly energetic spectacle with guitars, singers and dancers exchanging the lead. I have to admit that flamenco is like a drug to me – I know that it never ends with one recording at least if playback system is capable enough. There is so much emotion, expression, such an extremely high level of energy and beauty that once you start listening to this music you simply can't or don't want to stop. Brinkmann's system turned out to be very capable and delivered a mesmerizing performance. On one hand all indications of a mass-loader were there – speed, accuracy, definition, precision, transparency and explosive dynamics, on the other there was this natural softness of acoustic sound, wonderfully conveyed timbre, amazingly deep, soul-touching vocals, fast attack, long sustain and wonderful decay of guitar sound – these are usually advantages of suspended decks. Bardo combined the best elements of both design types, while being a non-suspended mass-loader. The very best systems I heard so far, including this one, were capable of delivering not only the music and singing in the very impressive way, but also the dancing. Yes, you can't see dancers while listening to music recording but in flamenco you can clearly hear them stamping their feet on a wooden floor with unbelievable speed. I've seen that couple of times live and I couldn't believe what I saw, so having this experience I when listening to flamenco on my system I usually close my eyes and try to imagine them dancing. Bardo brilliantly conveyed the amazingly fast and powerful stamping. I could not only “see” feet hitting the floor, but also hear the floor hitting back with equal power. Robust and fast action and reaction followed by wooden reverberation – wonderful! All that induced an emotional response that really came close to my reaction to the very first live flamenco performance I'd seen. From my point of view that was a clear confirmation of Mr Brinkmann's success in his pursuit of almost live-like sound reproduction.

High Fidelity



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Not only Soundclub acted on my request immediately but they decided to equip me extremely generously. They brought Bardo turntable, two tonearms: 10.0 and 12.1, each of them fitted with a cartridge (respectively): Π and EMT-ti. Additionally they gave me also Brinkmann's top tube phonostage called Edison, and like that wasn't already much more than I'd asked they brought three (!) different power supplies for a turntable, including the top of the line, tube one called RÖNt II (13 kPLN). The latter was sort of „overkill” - after all Bardo is an „entry level” turntable for this brand, and this particular power supply was created for a top model, Balance. But what the hell! I said to myself – that would be a lot of fun to try it all out! The only thing that really bothered me was a limited time I had to perform my test.

Before I get to the reviewed equipment let me bring up some information about the man behind this brand, Mr Helmut Brinkmann. Or about his philosophy of creating the best possible „illusion” of live music. I've read everything there was on company's website, I suggest you do the same, or read translation on Soundclub's page – you will find a lot of interesting information about Mr Brinkmann that will help you to understand his vision of the sound. He doesn't deny what all of us know – no matter how good audio system is it always struggles to deliver performance comparable with live music. Let me quote Mr Brinkmann from his webpage:

Some say that perfect music playback is an illusion. Helmut Brinkmann however, leaves nothing to chance as he works on perfecting this illusion, thus making music playback as real as possible.

Are you familiar with the term “High Fidelity”? We are strictly referencing the ideal of perfect music playback, in essence making it indistinguishable from the original. For Brinkmann, “High Fidelity” stands as the ultimate pinnacle of achievable sound reproduction. Simply put, there is nothing better than “High Fidelity”: after all, a facsimile can never sound better than the original. Having said that, we caution you not to be

confused by the use of such marketing terms as “High-End”; “State of the Art” or “Ultra-Fi”: these terms simply stand only for what is currently technically feasible. Actually, you will be surprised to hear that one of the more funny oxymoron’s in music playback history is the so called “Hi-Fi Norm, DIN 45500 (German industry standard term)” standard. This “standard” which dates back decades is the ultimate proof that it has nothing in common with what is technically possible.

So, let’s examine true “High Fidelity”: placing your favorite recording of say “Ella and Louis” on your turntable, you lean back in the comfort of your chair and close your eyes. Suddenly, Ella and Louis appear before you, in full Technicolor 3D sound. When the duet of “Potatoes” and “Potatos” comes along, you not only hear all its nuances and marvels, you quite literally see Ella and Louis perform before you, even though you know that this is only an illusion as both Ella and Louis have long since passed away. When you open your eyes, however, all you see are your loudspeakers. “High Fidelity” is a perfect illusion and High Fidelity remains our ultimate goal, even though we know that we will never reach it, as illusions aren’t real. Fortunately for us then, we appear to be pretty close to that goal, as professionals in the audio industry tell us on a regular basis. At Brinkmann, we leave nothing untried, no detail overlooked in our quest to keep improving music playback, therefore making it that much more real.

I thought the above would be worth quoting as it showed on one hand German designer's constant drive for perfection, but on the other it also proved that he realized that achieving perfection actually would never be possible, but still worth trying. Music playback will never be as good as live music but true aficionados will focus they efforts to get as close to perfection as humanly possible. Let me use another quote:

We have come to the conclusion that everything has an influence on sound. And we have to accept that these influences are real – even if (for the moment at least) we have no scientific explanation.

Each device, no matter whether a turntable or an amplifier, has a well defined function. Good design is the reduction of the ingredients to their most essential; ideally there is nothing to be found inside or elsewhere on a device that is not directly related to the device's function. Hence we conclude that each single part of the device, no matter how trivial, has an influence on sound. Yes, even the smallest screw.

One day, as Helmut Brinkmann was looking through his microscope, he noticed that the three tiny screws which serve to adjust the cantilever on an EMT cartridge are made of

steel. He then asked himself whether a magnetizable material so closely surrounded by powerful magnets was really that clever of a design idea. One by one, he replaced these tiny steel screws with ones made of aluminum, brass, nylon, titanium, and many other even more exotic materials. Next, he spent countless weeks performing critical listening tests. As the listening sessions progressed, he became more and more astounded by just how much the sound quality changed as he replaced such a seemingly trivial element. After all, these very tiny screws measure just a mere 1mm in diameter! At the end of his exhaustive research, he concluded that the sound resembled the original most closely when only one of three screws were replaced by a model manufactured of titanium. (By no means is this example a one-off experience: in the end, perfect music playback is a careful optimization process that involves 0.1% inspiration and 99.9% perspiration. As they say, for High Fidelity to truly shine, you need patience, diligence, more patience, a dash of tenacity and of course even more patience – not to mention many tiny screws made of exotic materials).

To be honest I was already „bought” after reading just these two sentences: „We have come to the conclusion that everything has an influence on sound. And we have to accept that these influences are real – even if (for the moment at least) we have no scientific explanation.” This philosophy reminded me of what I read in one of the interviews with Peter Qvortrup ([Audio Note UK](#)) – another true engineer, who's ultimate goal is to find a scientific way to measure sonic differences that he can hear. According to him a fact that we can't measure something today doesn't mean it doesn't exist – we still might find a way to measure it, or maybe first figure out what it is that we should actually measure. An engineer saying something like that – I like him already even though I've never met him personally.

Brinkmann's products are surely not „mass-manufactured” ones. They are hand made – not literally as most parts are manufactured using machines - *premium* class products, with top class make and finish. Quality check of each manufactured items is done by the designer himself – if you read about his philosophy as I did you most likely saw that coming. Many parts of turntables and tonearms have to be manufactured with the utmost precision that can be guaranteed only by machines. But still the final product's quality check has to be performed by a man and who's better qualified than Mr Brinkmann himself?

Helmut Brinkmann is convinced that a vinyl record is the best music carrier and that's why his company focused its efforts on the vinyl playback devices. As of now he offers three

turntables, three tonearms, two cartridges, two phonostages plus external power supplies for his devices. You will find also power amplifiers and preamplifiers in his portfolio which might not be directly involved in vinyl playback but first of all are necessary elements of stereo system, and secondly Mr Brinkmann started his carrier in audio industry building amplifiers, not turntables. As he says on his webpage vinyl record playback is an exceedingly delicate and massively complex undertaking and they all have to come together to result in a final result that is truly satisfactory. Brinkmann defined four of these elements indispensable to achieve proper vinyl playback. These elements according to him are:

- Accurate and consistent speed.
- Gentle groove tracing.
- High level of immunity from external and internal vibrations.
- Ultimate quietness and low friction of platter and tonearm bearings.

To fulfill those criteria German manufacturer offers complete solutions where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It's customer's choice whether he buys the whole package from Brinkmann or just part of it but a complete solution should result in synergy which might not be a case if you fit, for example, their deck with some other arm or cartridge. Considering how much attention Mr Brinkmann pays even to the smallest details of his designs I'm inclined to take his word for it.

Lets have a closer look at all the Brinkmann's products I got my hands on. The deck, called Bardo is an entry level one in company's portfolio. In some way it reminded me two other entry level decks I reviewed recently – the Avid Ingenium and [Kuzma Stabi S](#). In both cases these decks sport a simple, non-suspended, „T-shaped” (at least if you have enough imagination) chassis with platter installed at one end and tonearm at the other. In Bardo's case you'd have to have even more creative imagination to say that its chassis is „T-shaped” as both end are round and one of them (the one under the platter) is bit wider than the other end (so it's more like a tear, or water drop, I guess).

Bardo's chassis is made of duraluminum (Avid's of aluminum, Kuzma's of brass). Unlike the other two, Bardo sports three adjustable, metal feet, plus a granite plate to be put under is also a part of a package. To spare my rack from scratching I used additionally Slim Discs from Franc Audio Accessories under the granite slate. Not only did they keep gloss surface of my rack safe, but provided Bardo with additionally resonance isolation – that's a thing they excel in placed under any audio equipment. The granite slate almost doubles the total weight of turntable - chassis weights roughly 15 kg, aluminum platter with polished

crystal glass surface adds another 10 kg, and the slate – that's at least another 15 kg.

An interesting solution, highly acclaimed when firstly used in Oasis table, is a direct drive. Yup, that's right – this is a direct drive deck. Fact that most manufacturers use belt drive in their designs doesn't mean that this is the only „proper” solution. The platter is driven (via subplatter) by a Sinus motor, designed and manufactured in Brinkmann's factory, that is placed underneath platter. The other interesting solution is a circular platform that accepts machined-aluminum armboard (and you may order armboards for different arms) inserts that can be rotated to achieve the proper pivot-to-spindle distance with a wide variety of tonearms. After proper distance is set armboard is secured with three locking bolts. There is one more interesting choice manufacturer made – he doesn't use any of most popular tonearm alignments like Lofgren, Baerwald, or Stevenson. Brinkmann decided to use Dennesenn alignment protractor and he offers a nice looking, precisely machined, metal one. It makes user's life easier as all you have to do is to check alignment in just one spot, not two like with other protractors. On the front of chassis you will find a switch that allows you to chose between 33 or 45 r.p.m. – it takes several seconds before speed stabilizes at proper value so you might want to wait a while before dropping stylus into the groove. At the back of chassis there are RCA output sockets and a ground pin.

The Edison phonostage is probably offered rather with Brinkmann's more expensive tables – at least I assume that considering its price. It's a tube based devices with three (!) fully adjustable inputs, which means you could use up to three arms. Additional interesting feature is that two out of three inputs accept both RCA and XLR cables, only the third one accepts only RCA. There is only one output and its sports only XLR sockets. Edison works with both, MM and MC cartridges. Input impedance can be adjusted using small trim pots placed next to each input (so you can set different impedance for each input), and the gain can be adjusted with a knob placed on the front of the device. Present value is presented on a display. That's a very smart and handy solution allowing user to easily find the best balance between phonostage's gain and preamplifier's gain. Bardo is equipped with a small, solid power supply in a nicely finished metal case. One of the upgrades one might use for Bardo is a more advanced power supply – a standard one used for top model, Balance (with this one what you get is called Bardo Performance). I received such a PS too. For most demanding Balance users Mr Brinkmann created another power supply – a tube based one (also delivered for this test). Unless customer wishes otherwise Bardo is delivered with 10.0 tonearm with Brinkmann's own MC cartridge called Π. Our Polish generous distributor supplied me also with Brinkmann's top arm, 12.1 with modified EMT

MC cartridge.



Records used during test (a selection):

- Patricia Barber, *Companion*, Premonition/Mobile Fidelity MFSL 2-45003, 180 g LP.
- Lou Donaldson, *LD+3*, Blue Note Stereo MMBST-84012, LP.
- Muddy Waters, *Folk Singer*, Mobile Fidelity MFSL-1-201, 180 g LP.
- The Ray Brown Trio, *Soular energy*, Pure Audiophile PA-002 (2), LP.
- Vivaldi, *Le Quattro Stagioni*, Divox/Cisco CLP7057, LP.
- Dead Can Dance, *Spiritchaser*, 4AD/Mobile Fidelity MOFI 2-002, 180 g LP.
- Keith Jarrett, *The Koeln Concert*, ECM 1064/65 ST, LP.
- Rodrigo y Gabriela, *11:11*, Music on Vinyl MOVLP924, LP.
- Paco Pena & His Group, *Flamenco puro „Live“*, DECCA PSF 4237, “Phase 4 Stereo”, LP.
- Inga Rumpf, *White horses*, AAA 0208574CTT, “Triple A series”, 180 g LP.
- Miles Davis, *Kind of blue*, Columbia CS 8163, LP.
- Albert King with Stevie Ray Vaughan, *In session*, STX-7501-1, LP.
- Moždzer Danielsson Fresco, *The Time*, outside music OM LP002, LP.
- Jacintha, *The best of*, Groove Note GRV 1041-1, LP.
- Tsuyoshi Yamamoto Trio, *Midnight sugar*, CISCO TBM-23-45, LP.
- Metallica, *Metallica*, Vertigo 511831-1, 180 g 45 rpm, 4 x LP.
- Cannonball Adderly, *Somethin' else*, Classic Records, BST 1595-45, LP.

Japanese editions of CDs and SACDs are available from





I was very happy about the generosity of Brinkmann's distributor but on the other a limited time I had at my disposal forced me to limit numerous possible combinations, to simplify my work somehow. So I started with quick deck's power supplies comparison. I was trying to find out whether I could hear differences between them (with 10.0 arm and Π cartridge). To be honest whatever differences I heard were not significant (remember I had to do it quickly). Yes, each more expensive PS added some more stability to the sound, possibly bit more authority to the bass and darker background (although already with the basic PS I'd thought it was pitch black). I guess the more expensive, more sophisticated turntable, the higher overall transparency of the whole system the more obvious, more distinct the improvements would be and the more reasonable would buying the top PS be. I'm not saying that buying RönT II for Bardo is pointless. Somebody said once that (it's not an exact quote) „even the slightest improvement of sound quality that allows us to enjoy listening to the music even more is worth spending any amount of money” - and while I agree in general, but in this particular case I believe that replacing 10.0 arm with Π with 12.1 with EMT-ti while causing similar damage to one's bank account will offer a greater impact on sound quality. I was able to benefit from having all three power supplies at my disposal and after spending some time with basic model, than basic model for Balance, I finally settled on the most expensive tube PS, why wouldn't I? :) When it came to tonearms it was much simpler. Installing them both at the same time wasn't an option so I started with 10.0 and than, after couple of days, it was replaced with 12.1. Comparison between arms was difficult since each arm was fitted with different cartridge – respectively with Π and EMT-ti – both moving coil types. Let me start with my impressions on 10.0 with Π (I will not go into details concerning small differences between power supplies).

It took me a while before I was able to write the first sentence. For a long time the only

thing that came to mind was that Bardo sounded... accurate, exactly accurate. Just that. But do you actually need more? Yes, I know – one word as the whole review, that doesn't work. But it described exactly what I felt after spinning some of my favorite vinyls. Usually each turntable I start to audition offers some distinct sound quality, something that makes it different than competitors, creates so important first impression and that (at least) initially describes its sonic qualities. This time the only „first impression” was one of some sort of wobbling sound – this deck simply needs several seconds to get the heavy platter to spin with proper speed. Once the speed stabilized I couldn't really detect any wow&flutter anymore, or any other signs suggesting that this direct drive could be in any way inferior to belt drive. Obviously this particular direct drive was very well-thought-out and refined. Many inexpensive turntable use high torque motor that drive very light platters which leads often to rather poor sound. Brinkmann's motor, called Sinus is a low torque one and it drives a 10kg heavy platter. The main bearing is almost friction-less so once the proper speed is achieved it can be easily sustained (you can check how good the bearing is after you turn the power off – you can witness how long will the platter rotate). Another interesting choice Mr Brinkmann made was an analogue speed control, as he believed that radio-frequency interference from digital system could negatively impact sound quality.

OK, let's get back to how it sounds. Accurate. I mentioned that already more than once. As I am more of a music lover than audio equipment junky I always hope when starting an audition of some new item that it will take me into some wonderful music voyage and will make me forget about sound quality assessment. And while the percentage of turntables that do just that is surely higher than of any other type of audio equipment it still doesn't mean that all of them do just that. Luckily this was one of those good times.

Right after I dropped stylus into the groove Bardo took me to Koeln to Keith Jarret's concert and it did it in such a convincing way that when it came to flipping the record to the other side I did it as quickly as I only could to get back to the wonderful world of piano improvisation without any unnecessary delay. What a piano that was! A wonderful and powerful instrument, vibrant, colorful, intense sounding, and its 3D image thrown in the middle of large space just a few meters from where I sat. All those small sounds and noises Jarret produced himself were clearly audible being an inseparable part of the whole spectacle, as well as a lot of coughing coming from the audience. Piano is a great test for wow&flutter – you can easily hear that the sound becomes not so clear, bit wobbly if only anything is wrong with platter's speed. Nothing like that happened – that was a very clear, transparent, precise sound.

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Mobile Fidelity's issue of Patricia Barber “Companion” offers not only a wonderful music but also an amazing sound quality. This record itself is sufficient to assess performance of almost any piece of audio equipment and it allows to evaluate all aspects of sound. Treble: crisp, sparking, vibrant cymbals and other metal percussion elements precisely placed in the large, three-dimensional space – check; midrange – low, dark voice with its wonderful timbre and texture presented in a very convincing, involving way, the unmistakable sound of Hammonds, energetic, slightly dark sounding electric guitar – all check; low end – firm, mighty, colorful double bass, agile, fast, kicking drums – well... mighty, yes, colorful, yes, but isn't double bass supposed to go even deeper with even more “weight” and shouldn't the drums while fast, agile carry also bit more weight to them? To be honest I wasn't sure of that. It wasn't like I thought that there was something wrong with this presentation, like I missed something. It was more like there was something telling me that there was still a little space for improvement in this area.

So the next album had to be the one with one of the best recordings of double bass I knew – Ray Brown's *Soular energy*. I'd listened to this album dozens of times before using different tables/arms/cartridges, some sounded better some bit worse but comparing it to the best ones I thought again that there actually was some space for improvement even though it already sounded damn good. Bardo conveyed in the most astounding way how much of a genius, master of double bass Ray Brown was. This mighty instrument seemed to be a wild, agile beast in his hands, delivering an amazing variety of sounds across the whole range, fast attack, long, “wooden” decay but... there were moments when I expected to deliver lowest notes with even more authority. Was I right? I couldn't be sure. All I could do was to wait until 10.0 arm was replaced with 12.1 with EMT cartridge. So when this moment finally came I played Patricia Barber first with 10.0 and Π, and right after the change, several minutes later again with 12.1 and EMT-ti already installed on Bardo. There was a clear gain in the overall stability of the presentation (not that I'd thought before that there was anything to improve), even better imaging, more precision in placing in element in space, treble seemed even more sparing, more lively and... nothing was bothering me regarding bass performance any more. Now it was as accurate as the rest of the range.

But another thing started to bother me – the feeling, I bet, most of you know very well. You work hard for a long time to build and then to optimize your system until you think you've squeezed every bit of performance out of it, and you can't really imagine it offering you even more. And you believe that until *audiofilia nervosa* takes over, or a friend of yours drops in unexpectedly to show you his new CD Player/amplifier/DAC/cable/phonostage/cartridge/whatever and that forces you to replace a single element in your (obviously!) perfect system with something else and suddenly you realize that your system reached a new level. In this particular case there was a turntable with tonearm, cartridge, phonostage, tube power supply and it sounded great! Yes, there was this one small glitch (lowest bass) but it was so small, that I wasn't even sure whether the issue was actually there or it was just me desperately trying to find something I could complain about. And now with longer, more advanced arm and more expensive cartridge it seemed that Bardo was able to dig out even

more information from the groove and present them in even more convincing way. Was it actually so or that was just an impression created by even better clarity and transparency of the sound – honestly, I couldn't tell. Changing to elements (arm and cartridge) at the same time was not the best possible way to evaluate what each of them actually brought to the table. But as I said before – time was strictly limited so I had to simplify test in some ways. One thing I was absolutely sure about was that Bardo with 12.1 and EMT-ti gave me even more enjoyable, satisfactory presentation of my favorite records. I was spinning more and more discs out of curiosity, choosing also those I hadn't listened to for quite some time.

I couldn't pass the opportunity that presented itself in form of box of three albums that just arrived. First of them was the new reissued of Rodrigo y Gabriela's *II:II*. I mentioned already many times in my text how much fire could these two fabulous (former) heavy metal musicians create with their acoustic guitars. And as hard to believe as it was Bardo digging into the groove proved that there was even more to it than digital version ever presented – speed, variety of dynamic shades, selectivity, precision in detail reproduction – everything I'd already known from z CD version and than some. Sound was even more impressive and more like what I remembered from a tremendous show these two gave last years in Warsaw.

Two other new discs that had just arrived before this test were limited vinyl issues of Leszek Mozdzer's albums. While *Piano*, issued on a beautiful blue vinyl, might not be the sounding record I know (I mean it doesn't sound bad, but it's surely not perfect), the *Time* (with Danielsson and Fresco), issued on double vinyl sounds fabulous. Bardo proved very capable beautifully conveying mastery of each of three musicians but for me it was equally important that it delivered this amazing vibes of that album, how involving, soul-touching experience listening to *Time* via Bardo was. By the way, as I mentioned, both albums are limited editions so I suggest all Mozdzer's fans to hurry and buy your copies while the supply still lasts (yes, even *Piano* is worth having).

Summary

I could keep on writing about this Brinkmann system for a long time because it delivered amazing performance and made listening to

many of my records an exceptional, unique experience. The simplest possible assessment of it can be described with the one word I'd already used couple of times - accurate. You might think that's not much but trust me it's more than a lot. It is really difficult to point out its strong a weak points. Replacing 10.0 tonearm with 12.1 (which included also a better cartridge) proved that there were still reserves in Bardo's performance, and Michael Framer during his test tried also still much more expensive tonearm on Bardo and described even further improvement showing clearly how good this deck was (see [HERE](#)). With this deck it doesn't really matter what genre of music is your favorite – flamenco, jazz, blues, electronic music, but also rock, and even heavy metal and large symphonic music sounded equally convincing and realistic. Acoustic recordings offered huge amounts of information on details, timbre, texture, electric music involved drive, gigantic amount of energy, and thunderous dynamics if only stylus could find these information in the groove.

Bardo with both arms and cartridges seemed to be quite resilient to all these pops and cracks that usually accompany us when listening to the music from vinyl. Yes, you have to keep your records clean to limit the amount of pops&cracks but since I could listen to the same records in the same condition on Bardo and other deck I could tell that for whatever reason there were fewer of them when I used Brinkmann. This German turntable on one hand was able to dig deeper into the groove and extract more information – that's why even these not so great records sounded better then ever, and on the other hand what it did with true audiophile editions was simply magic. Listening to fabulous, Classic Records one-side, 45 r.p.m., clear vinyl issue of Cannonball Adderly *Somethin' else* was a mesmerizing, jaw-dropping experience. Instruments were so palpable, their sound so real that I felt shivers going down my spine. That's exactly what I listen to the music for – I want it to induce that kind of emotions, that degree of involvement. I can't really say that Mr Brinkmann's entry level turntable is inexpensive but still even with the 12.1 tonearm, when compared to competitors, Bardo is surely not the most expensive one either. And the fact is that even many more expensive decks won't be able to offer this level of performance. If you can afford to spend a lot, but not a “crazy” lot, on a turntable Bardo seems to offer a great value for its price. For many it could be the one and only table they will ever need. I know I could

enjoy it for for many, many years. Strong recommendation from my side!

DESIGN

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Brinkmann Bardo is a non-suspended mass-loader sporting with a substantial, resonance-optimized chassis of duraluminum combined with a direct drive. It shares many elements with more expensive model Oasis, and the main difference between them is lack of a plinth in Bardo's case (Oasis is the only Brinkmann with a plinth). Tear-shaped chassis rests on three metal adjustable feet. Its wider end accommodates a magnetic direct drive motor, called Sinus, that was developed by Helmut Brinkmann and is produced in Brinkmann's factory. It drives an aluminum subplatter with a 10 kg heavy steel platter sitting on top of it. The platter sports an integral mat of precision-ground crystal glass. An additional element is a screw-on record clamp. Manufacturer offers optional polished granite slab as a base for the table.

The narrow end of chassis holds a circular platform that accepts machined-aluminum armboard inserts that can be easily rotated to achieve the proper pivot-to-spindle distance with a wide variety of tonearms, before being secured with three locking bolts. Since manufacturer decided to relay on not so common Dennesen alignment protractor for setting up its arms it is only reasonable of him to offer such a protractor to his customers. The one he actually offers is nicely machined and finished and easy to use too.

The front of chassis sports a speed selector switch – user can chose between 33 and 45 r.p.m. And small trim pots that allow to precisely adjust speed if needed. The back hold a pair of RCA sockets for connection with phonostage and power inlet for connection with external power supply. RCA sockets are used with 10.0 tonearm but the 12.1 uses a wiring terminated with RCA connectors. The deck is delivered with solid, heavy though not so big in size solid-state power supply connected to the chassis via umbilical. One might order it with a more advanced power supply model (with larger transformer) that is a standard one for top model Balance, and hardcore user might even decide to purchase the most expensive option – a tube power supply called RÖNt II. Another option is a base for the deck in form of a

polished granite slab that will set you back another 1,5 kPLN. By design Bardo is delivered with a 10.0 tonearm with a MC cartridge called Π. For this test I received also the top arm – 12.1 with modified MC EMT-ti cartridge.



The last element of the whole system was a tube phonostage (the best one Brinkmann offers) named Edison. EDISON sports three inputs. Two of them use both RCA and XLR sockets, and the third only RCA. Each input sports independent adjustments that allow them to be used at the same time with different cartridges. There are 16 gain settings (max 66 dB) selected via a pot placed on the front panel of the device, and 12 loadings (from 50 Ω to 47 k Ω) selected via small pots placed next to each input. Using the XFMR input transformer is also user selectable for each input independently (via push button on the front panel). All settings for each input are saved in EPRON

memory.

The Edison's innovative circuitry uses bipolar transistors and selected NOS Telefunken tubes. The EQ is switchable from RIAA to IEC and is implemented partially as plate load and partially as feedback loop. The phase inversion for the balanced outputs is handled by a third tube stage. Due to different demands from different customers, there are two different models of the Edison available. The version "mono" has a switch for the selection between stereo and mono. The version "phase" features a phase selection that can be switched between 0° and 180°. Edison sports also a handy remote control allowing user to control all the functions.

Technical specification (according to manufacturer)

BARDO turntable

Drive: Platter driven directly by magnetic field; soft proportional control

Power supply: External power supply in solid state technology

Bearing: Lubricated precision (hydrodynamic) journal bearing, quiet and maintenance-free

Platter: Resonance-optimized special aluminum alloy; surface planar polished crystal glass

Chassis: 15 mm Duralumin with resonance-optimized geometry

Arm board: Movable (rotating) without play for simple and precise tonearm adjustment, with quick release. Accepts all tonearms between 9 and 12" as well as several linear tracking tonearms

Connectors: RCA, XLR or feed-through for tonearms with 5-pin DIN connectors; DIN connector (3 pin) for umbilical cord of external power supply; 2 mm connector for ground wire

RPM: 33 1/3 and 45, selectable by a switch; LED indicator for speed (33 1/3 = green, 45 = red)

Deviation from nominal speed: 0.0% (adjustable)

Fine adjustment of speed: ± 10% with trim pot

Wow&flutter: 0.07% linear, 0.035% weighted DIN 45507

Speed up time: 12 / 16 seconds (33 1/3 / 45 rpm)

Rumble: -64 dB (test record DIN 45544); -68 dB (measuring adapter)

Dimensions: 520x400x125mm [W/D/H]

Weight: deck – 26 kg [chassis 15 kg, platter 10 kg, power supply 1kg]

Accessories [optional]: tube power supply R2Nt II HRS platform

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granite platform

PI cartridge

Type: Moving coil

Weight: 14g

Stylus: Micro Ridge, radius 3 μm

Compliance: 15 $\mu\text{m}/\text{mN}$

Tracking force: 1,8 g

Vertical tracking angle: 23°

Output voltage: 0,15 mV [1cm/s]

Output impedance: 20 Ω

Recommended load: 600 Ω

Frequency response: 20 Hz – 30 kHz

Frequency intermodulation: <0,5%

Crosstalk: >25 dB [1 kHz]

Body: three-piece resonance optimized aluminum body

Brinkmann 10.0 tonearm

Distance platter center to tonearm bearing center: 243 mm

Effective length: 258 mm

Overhang: 15 mm

Dynamic mass: ca. 12 g

Total weight: ca. 400 g

Brinkmann EMT-ti cartridge

Type: Moving coil

Weight: 11 g

Stylus: vdH

Compliance: 15 $\mu\text{m}/\text{mN}$

Tracking force: 1,8-2 g

Vertical tracking angle: 23°

Output voltage: 0,21 mV [1cm/s]

Output impedance: 25 Ω

Recommended load: 600 Ω

Brinkmann 12.1 tonearm

Distance platter center to tonearm bearing center: 292 mm

Effective length : 305,6 mm

Overhang: 13,6 mm

Dynamic mass: ca. 14 g
Total weight: ca. 350 g
Cartridge weight: min. 4, max. 16 g

Phonostage EDISON

THD/IM: 0,01%/0,05%

S/N ratio (MM/MC): 80/78 dBA

Frequency response: DC-250 kHz

Gain: adjustable, max 66 dB

Output voltage: maximum +/- 12 V symmetrical

Output impedance: symmetrical +/- <1 k Ω

Input impedance MC: 47 Ω -47 k Ω

Input capacitance MM: 50 pF

Dimensions 420 x 65 x 310 mm [W/H/D]

Power supply: 120 x 80 x 160 mm

Weight: 12 kg; granite base 12 kg; power supply 3,2 kg

Polish distributor

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