

MONO STEREO

REVIEWING THE WORLD'S FINEST AUDIO PRODUCTS

ENGSTRÖM



MSB
TECHNOLOGY

MONO STEREO
"BEST OF 2018"

The Select DAC



VIVA

Egoista 845



CH

When Swiss Precision Meets
Exquisite Refinement



LIVING VOICE



NAGRA

totaldac | MUSIC SERVER, DACS
& MORE...
new d1-direct
new USB GIGAFILTER

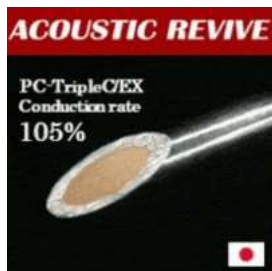


".. perfect union of the power of the Lion
with the grace of the Eagle"

THE
GRYPHON



Clinamen Audio triple gain 99.99 Ag MC step up review



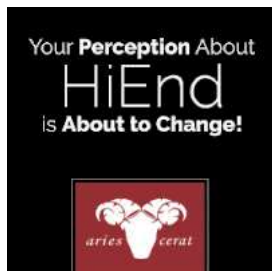
Following up the recent review products incomings, there is no doubt about the importance of the analog side of our industry. Based on the recent product incoming and interest there is an ongoing revival of the MC step-up transformers.

There are still (at least) two strong opposite camps when it comes to the very first interaction and dealing with the most fragile analog signal. Usually, both sides have quite a strong opinion about what is the most optimum way of amplifying the cartridge's output.



It's not a calling of yours truly to take sides but to perform the reporting duties. I can clearly understand both sides. Anyone that lurk at my reference system product list will hardly miss The Bespoke Audio Company Ultimate Silver and consequently a hint...

Clinamen Audio strongly believes that the best way to process the weak signal of the moving coil cartridges is through completely passive step-up units and that performance of active step is hardly comparable. Especially in terms of signal/noise ratio and micro and macro dynamics.



Clinamen Audio manufactures two lines of a step up transformer. The Copper-line and the Silver Line. In every line there are two models, making it all together four MC models.

Stefano Buttafoco strongly believes that their flagship series (Silver Line) is among the best, if not the best MC step-up transformer available on the market with the reasonable price tag. When compared to the similar products out there this certainly doesn't feel like far fetch exaggeration.



Following the initial quest the goal was to create the best sounding, best looking and most ergonomic step-up transform in its class and as you'll read on Stefano did a splendid job.

There are two models in the Silver Line:

- the single gain 99.99 Ag
- triple Gain 99.99 Ag

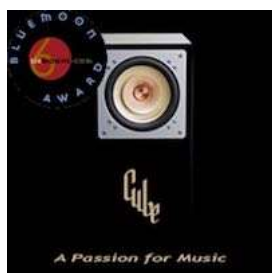


Common Silver line characteristics:

- stylistic beautiful
- ergonomic
- unique

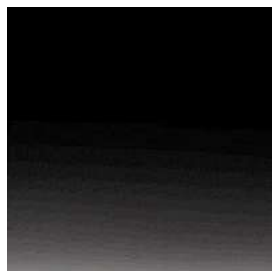


- functional
- CNC ERGAL chassis
- insensitive to vibration (11 mm thick chassis)
- excellent degree of shielding
- Shark wire top model RCA connectors SCY 700 with rhodium center
- custom Clinamen Audio anodized ergal CNC machined feet



The rear panel with the connectors is inclined for an easy connection from the front (for this reason the serigraphs are upside down).

Secondary windings coils are made from 99,99 % purity Ag. (Only this purity grade ensures a better conductivity of the copper.). Stefano thinks out loud. "When you read about "Silver windings" in any products, please ask the manufacturer about the purity grade."



Only the secondary windings are made out of silver with one clear goal in mind. Better tone quality! Many listening tests were conducted to validate this particular decision. In the step-up transformer, up to 70-80% of the windings are "secondary windings" and in the Clinamen Silver Line, the bigger sections of primary windings are made out of copper wire.

Clinamen single gain model offers only one step up ratio (to keep the cost down) and was designed to offer the best solution for the audiophiles that use a particular cartridge or use the cartridge with similar loading. One can choose between 1:12 1:15 1:24 1:30 gain option upon the purchase.

TRIPLE GAIN 99.99 AG

The Triple gain 99.99 Ag flagship model under the review offers three different gains, without any loss in quality sound. The secret?



Stefano believes how any switch/selector that commutate primary will lower the sound quality and cause unwanted decay. This is why three different and independent primary windings are connected to the dedicated RCA connectors.

Clinamen Audio triple gain 99.99 Ag provide three following gain ratios:

- 1:12
- 1:22
- 1:34

EXTRAS

The flagship model under the review sports bronze feet instead of (450 g per feet). Bronze is considered as reference material for damping the unwanted vibration. The cores of the transformer ultra large and made out of "Vacoperm" Nickel alloy. The windings are completely balanced, and the transformer is protected by the mu-metal shield housing.



Another unique and shared feature of all Clinamen Audio step-up transformer is the dedicated "harmonizing network" connector. This optimizes the electrical interfacing between the step up and the audio chain where it's inserted. (MC cartridge + step-up + pre-phono are the variables that occur to design the networks in question).



"These fine calibration elements (that sell as optional at 120 euro for pair) are unjustly overlooked by the manufacturers: in fact both the electrical response and the timbral restitution of any transformer step-up are influenced by the source impedance with which is driven (cartridge impedance + resistance of the signal cable upstream) and the impedance it must control (resistance and capacity of the downstream signal cable + resistance and input capacity of the phono stage)."

THE MUSIC

There are numerous sonic challenges to be addressed, especially with such delicate high-end audio devices as a step-up transformer. Below are just a few transcriptions from my listening notes pointing at some of the Clinamen Audio triple gain 99.99 Ag highlights.



The ethereal realms are more than finely explored by *The Chick Corea + Steve Gadd Band - Chinese Butterfly*. *Return To Forever* somehow looks back to the iconic album with the same name. Fast forward into the 21st century and the vibe is still there. I've wanted to explore the Clinamen Audio MC spatial ability as well as ability to hold together more complex rendering. As the track expands this becomes quite a dynamic challenge that allows no mediocrity and Clinamen Audio

Audio triple gain step-up didn't disappoint. The three-dimensional spatial cues were distributed deep into the space allowing the music to expand way beyond speakers (as needed) and the sharp attacks were not smitten.

The same goes for the reverb, decay and delay tails, that usually too quickly become the "victims" of non-proper gain distribution. *Frank Sinatra - Sings For Only The Lonely (Deluxe)*. *One For My Baby* exhibits this spot on. If the above-mentioned timing triad is not of proper potency the piano and voice are not separated properly. Clinamen Audio MC didn't simply glue them together. The needed distinction and sense of relief positioning pin-pointed the well-balanced nature of this Italian step-up transform.

The dynamic impact was further challenged with the *Rachmaninov* / Dohnanyi - Julius Katchen With The London Philharmonic Orchestra Conducted By Sir Adrian Boult – Rhapsody On A Theme Of Paganini / Variations On A Nursery Song*. There is a certain correlation between dynamic ability and wholesomeness effect, especially with the classical, orchestral music. Pairs of these variables are related much more intimately than causal observing might show. This is where a particular high-end product makes it or break it. Clinamen Audio step up surprisingly hold both of the variables with far greater gravity I've expected. The live orchestra sound travels with particular momentum, that can be greatly experienced even with the mono record. Sometimes the reflection of reality is even more believable than with stereo. This is why some of the ultra-exotic audiophiles immerse themselves purely into the monaural realms. Anyhow that's a topic for another time.



CONCLUSION

I'm sure you've deciphered so far how the Clinamen Audio MC step up is quite a remarkable analog product. A lot of right decisions were made from the ground up that results in a balanced sound delivery, that is nowhere nearly expected at this price point.

In the current universe of exotic high prices, the Clinamen Audio delivers a heck a lot of performance for the money. Actually, I cannot recall anything that would match the sonic ability at around 3K. With a product like this someone else would easily double or triple the price, but Ing. Stefano Buttafoco wanted to create something special and beautiful sounding, with the stand out performance and with the real world price tag.



Clinamen Audio triple gain 99.99 Ag MC step-up transformer offers an engaging listening factor of higher degree. The sonic performance is never drawn back and most importantly, the speed is never slowed down. It goes the same for energy transmission.

Products like this are without a doubt the result labor of love for the music and high-performance audio reproduction. With Clinamen Audio triple gain 99.99 Ag MC step-up transformer this is evident on every step.

I'm really overwhelmed with work these days, but I'm more than happy, that I've accepted Stefano's proposal to audition his proud analog creation. It proves the point, that if the product concept is intriguing enough and if it's presented in the proper way I'm always interested to discover something new and noteworthy and share it with you all.

PRICE

- *including beautiful wood box 3200 EUR.*
- *additional 100 EUR for custom paint*

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

- *Gain: 1:12 ; 1:22 ; 1:34*
- *Secondary windings 99.99% Ag*
- *Primary impedance: 25 Ω (gain 1:12) . 7 Ω (gain 1:22) . 3 Ω (gain 1:34)*
- *Secondary impedance: 3600 Ω*
- *Secondary winding resistivity: 180 Ω at 20 °C*
- *Balanced windings, Clinamen Audio Vacoperm ultra size custom cores*
- *Ergal CNC chassis, 12 mm thickness*
- *Clinamen Audio bronze feet CNC*
- *RCA Shark Wire rodiate SCY 700*
- *Welding with WBT 4% Ag*
- *Net weight 3,7 Kg*

CONTACT

Clinamen Audio Audio

Indirizzo: Cd.a Barattelli 3/A
63074 San Benedetto del Tronto (AP)
Italy

Tel: +39.0735.782043 mobile: +39.340.8756612

Web: www.clinamenaudioaudio.com

Email: info@clinamenaudioaudio.com



The World's Finest



MONO & STEREO Matej Isak s. p. testiranje in svetovanje
Pod gradom 79
2370 Dravograd
Slovenija
Davčna št: SI 56343604
Matična št: 666364800

Mono and Stereo is a magazine for our readers. The ideas expressed here are our own (and therefore subject to amendment rights) and therefore they are not contractual. No original content or illustrations are non-contractual.