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Phono preamplifier

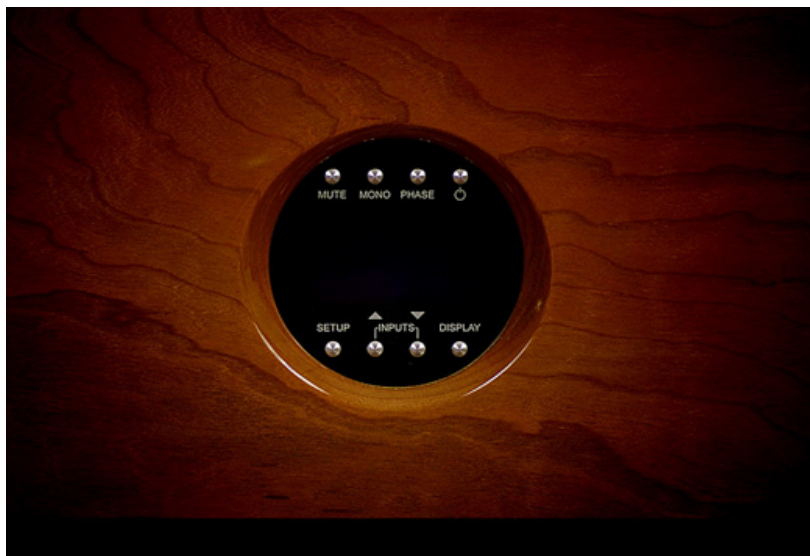
Tenor Audio
PHONO 1 ULTIMATE REFERENCE PHONO
STAGE

Producer: [TENOR AUDIO](#)
Price (during the test): 185 000 PLN

Contact:
17 Willow Bay Drive Midhurst, ON
L0L 1X1 Canada
tenoraudio.com

MADE IN CANADA

The test was provided by the company:
[SOUNDCLUB](#)



rem audio MM/MC PHONO PREAMPLIFIER
SENSOR 2
JUŻ DOSTĘPNY

SoundSmith

Dzięki precyzji, dynamice i czystości osiągnięto wspaniałą muzykalność i naturalność dźwięku.

Hi-Fi i Muzyka 11/2015



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Najlepszy transport sieciowy na świecie?

—Test—

Tekst: Marek Dyba

Zdjęcia: Marek Dyba

No 158

16 czerwca 2017

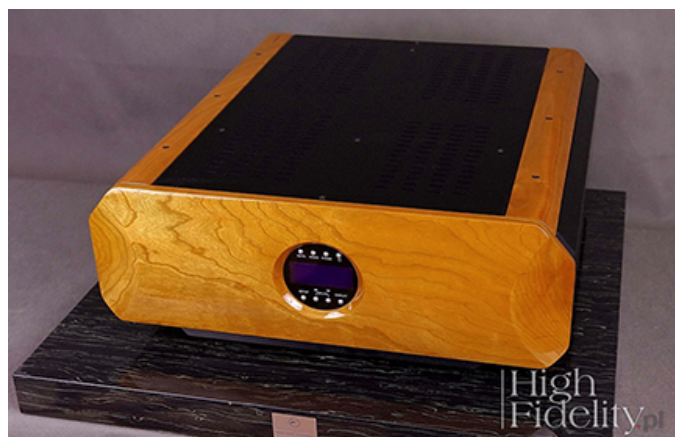
Tenor

K When nice years ago, Mr. Maciej Chodorowski from [Soundclub](#) informed me that he was about to distribute the products of the Canadian Tenor Audio brand, in my head the "OTL" (Output Transformer Less) signal immediately popped out. There are not many such devices on the market, they are legendary, but few people actually had the opportunity to listen to them. Although the Tenor brand was not and still is not somehow well-known in Europe, at the time it was clearly associated with this type of construction.

And finally the sound. Everyone who listened to bass or live piano knows perfectly well that the power of their sound is not only heard but also feels whole. Tenor could build a sound that had the right mass without losing anything of the natural "agility" of these instruments. On the one hand, when Ray Brown reached for the sounds from the bottom of the scale, I felt the size of the resonance box, which sent a powerful impulse towards me, and the other equally convincing fragments with quick jerks of strings, sometimes quickly suppressed. The same thing happened with the piano - on the one hand, the mass and power of the lower octaves made an impression, on the other I was delighted with the speed, agility and unbelievable voicing of the upper ones. And all this combined in a coherent, evoking expression of bliss on my face, as I heard several times from the household, the whole.

The power of the orchestra with Mussorgsky music performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Leibowitz did not give me the least impression. On this two-disc album were *Pictures from the exhibition* and *Noc na Łysej Górze*. I have written many times about the unusual atmosphere of these recordings. Phono 1 is not enough to create (almost) a terrible, and certainly very disturbing, atmosphere of the witches' coven, and in addition

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Only that my information was out of date, as Tenor in 2006 withdrew its limited OTLs from the offer replacing them with specific hybrid designs connecting lamps and transistors. I had the opportunity to test the [Tenor Audio 175S](#) stereo power amplifier and it was one of those unforgettable experiences that only few devices from the absolute top shelf provide. I listened to the split set several times at exhibitions and in the distributor's showroom and I do not need to add that they offer another step towards audiophile nirvana. By definition, these are uncompromising devices, the best that Canadians can build and (unfortunately, from my point of view) are priced accordingly. So they remain in a similar sphere of unattainable dreams, such as the genius, though different, Kondo devices.

There is a small number of companies in the audio industry, which, instead of creating extensive offers, trying to match them to the needs (or financial possibilities) of as many potential clients as possible, focus on creating the best devices of a given type. Such an uncompromising approach is not common, because it does not facilitate success. Usually, though not only (see eg AudioByte) means that such devices end up in the high-end category, or even ultra high-end. Uncompromisingness means huge costs, from the best, having the knowledge and talent of professionals, through materials, technologies, to huge amounts of time and money required by the process of developing such exceptional devices. With this approach, however, arise absolutely unique devices, aspiring to be the best on the market.

Tenor Audio is such a brand. The current offer includes the aforementioned 175S stereo power amplifier, 350M monoblocks and a [Line 1](#) linear preamplifier with a separate Power 1 power supply. The latest addition to the offer is the phono preamplifier we tested for MC, Phono 1 cartridges. As you can see, a wealthy fan of the brand must only decide if it's enough for a stereo amplifier, or it goes into a full split set. And if he uses a turntable, he has no choice but to use MM cartridges. The latter can not be supported by the Canadian phono.

Why? Chief engineer Michel Vanden Broeck and head of Jim Fairhead in one of the interviews made it clear - Phono 1 is another uncompromising design in Tenor's offer. Additional circuits or switches could have a negative effect on the sound. And this "could" is enough reason not to do it. So we get a phono MC with a characteristic brand, beautiful appearance with a thick cherry wood front, slats of the same wood on the upper edges of the casing, and wooden legs (with rubber elements). The device is also as big as all the others on offer, and weighs more than many amplifiers (about 26 kg!).

There are three inputs available - two unbalanced (RCA) and one balanced (XLR) inputs and the same number and type of outputs. According to the producer, the Canadian phono can be connected to the preamplifier with cables with a length of up to 15 (RCA) or

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interpreted the title of this album for me again. *The power of the orchestra*, because that is the title to be translated, was simply overwhelming with Tenor.

The selection of songs for this album was dictated by the main theme, but Phono 1 is not only a brilliant dynamics on the macro scale, but also excellent at the micro scale. It could be heard on this record as well as, for example, on a solo concert by Jarreta from Cologne, or on the album *Tube only violin* published by Taceta with phenomenal recordings of the violin. I have heard perfectly even the smallest changes in both dynamics and color regardless of the volume level. This is also possible due to the fact that the tested phono preamplifier is an absolutely silent device - the noise level is extremely low, even though the amplification of the signal takes place in a tube stage. To put it another way - this device offers an almost perfect black background, leaving the listener alone with nothing undisturbed music.



Only if the device with such phenomenal bass and dynamics maintains the proper balance of the entire band, the entire presentation? The question, of course, I am asking for some strength, because it is clear that at this price level, in the case of a reference device there can be no obvious weaknesses. The top of the band is probably not (after all, listening to these devices for several months) so ethereal, so "tube" in the best sense of the word, as with Audio Tekne. It does not mean, however, that it is worse, only that it is a bit different. Slightly more emphatic, more precise, a bit less euphonic, crystal clear, brilliantly sonorous, without any rounding at the very top. Differentiation in this respect is also an absolute peak - drums, different types of obstacles, bells, gongs - their tracking was pure pleasure. It came without any effort, and the presentation was not only precise, it was also extremely plastic. It was enough to close the eyes to see the sticks wandering around the mentioned obstacles, for example on the disc of Patricia Barber, or the dummies dancing on the plates on the disc of Ray Brown.

In the case of the mentioned Audio Tekne preamplifiers, the three-dimensionality of the apparent sources was based primarily on their mass and filling, while the Tenor can more accurately outline each instrument in space. Are any of these ways better? In my opinion no. Both give equally convincing, tangible message, both make contact with music and musicians genius close, intimate, engaging. The more that Tenor can create a huge stage with above-average width and exceptional depth. It distributes these accurately traced sources on it, faithfully presents all the spatial relations between them, gives the room acoustics (if properly captured in the recording) in a way that simply moves the listener to a given place. That was even on the brilliant album prepared by Sommelier Du Son *Live in Noirlac*. The recordings were made in the medieval French abbey, and the acoustics of the courtyard were captured by Dirk Sommer in an absolutely unique way. This album sounds sensational, for example with my Grandinote Celio

61 (XLR) meters without compromising the characteristics of the transmitted signal! Tenor Audio has developed its own method for testing lamps that go to their devices. They are first heated for several hundred hours and then tested, among others, to eliminate the art they microphone. Over 60% of lamps are rejected! When such carefully selected vacuum bubbles reach the devices, everything should be done to ensure that they function optimally as long as possible. Phono 1 was therefore equipped with a system that lengthens the life of these lamps.

At the back there is a main switch of the device (which should remain in the "ON" position at all times) while in the front of the "window" with the display there are several buttons to operate the device, also a switch. After pressing it, the initialization / stabilization sequence of the device starts, which lasts 1 minute and 40 seconds, and only then you can start listening. These 100 seconds are 5 less than the start of the company preamplifier, which in turn starts 15 seconds faster than Tenor amplifiers. In this way, not only is the life of the lamps extended, if the devices are connected through triggers, they will start in the right order: source → pre → amplifier. All for the longevity of each of these devices and the highest sound quality.

The manufacturer cares for many ways in terms of longevity. For example, internal cabling is done in a special process that guarantees that the material will not oxidize for a minimum of 20 years, and if that is not enough, Teflon insulation is used, which additionally protects the cables. The Canadian company's engineers are well aware that creating uncompromising constructions have to take care of even the smallest details.

If you have read my report from the trip to the Kondo headquarters, you can remember the picture of custom-made screws for the needs of Japanese devices (more [HERE](#)). Tenor Audio does the same. It orders special, three times more expensive than standard screws with perfectly flat heads and precision thread, which provide better coupling with the fastening element. Special washers are also used, whose task is to prevent the coupling from deteriorating over time. Of course, torque screwdrivers are used for screwing in order to screw in each screw first with adequate strength and secondly to ensure its repeatability.

During the test, I used my turntable J. Sikora Basic in the Max version. Two arms were installed - my Schroeder CB with an Air Tight PC-3 insert and Acoustical Systems Aquilar with Phasemation PP-1000 insert. During the part of the test, I used the Oyaide MJ-12 and [STB HWX mat](#) and [clamps](#) and a similar set from the even higher shelf from Mr. Kiuchi, i.e. Harmonix TU800M and [TU812MX](#) . In addition to my ModWright set, the test also included amplifiers such as "NuVista 600, [Kondo Overture II](#) , or MBL N51, all driving my Ubiqi Audio Model One Duelund Edition.

TENOR AUDIO in "High Fidelity"

- Odsłuch _____

Discs used in the listening session (selection)

- Moździer Danielsson Fresco, *The Time* , Outside Music OM LP 002, LP
- Cannonball Adderly, *Somethin 'else* , Blue Note / Classic Records BST 1595-45, LP
- Isaac Albéniz, *Suite española* , Op. 47, King Japan KIJC 9144, 180 g LP
- Kate Bush, *The sensual world* , Audio Fidelity AFZLP 082, 180 g LP
- Keith Jarrett, *The Köln Concert* , ECM 1064/65 ST, LP

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IV, but Tenor brought out more layers of spatial aspects from it, taking me [HERE](#).

The midrange is just as unique as both edges of the band. What definitions, which graduation I would not use, will not fully reflect how instruments (both acoustic and electric) and human voices sound with Tenor. Clean, organic, colorful, with brilliant color and texture. The apparent sources were large, dense, the proportions between them, and also in relation to the environment simply correct. Just how engaging the show really depended only on how much information and how it was recorded on the disc and how many of them the needle, arm, deck and cable could deliver to Phono 1. Differentiation was outstanding, but even though Tenor was not the type of absolute a couple of weaker recordings. If only there was such a chance, he tried to put the music above the technical aspect of the recordings and that's why I listened to most CDs, even those stamped by Polish "lejbels" 30 years ago, not sinning with extraordinary quality. Old, fully analog Japanese and American releases were definitely the best. In their case, the organics of the sound reached an exorbitant level.

Summary

Expressions like: "the best in the world" I do not use, because I can not, even if I wanted to, know all the devices of a given type produced in the world. I can, however, allow myself to say that the Tenor Audio Phono 1 is the best phono preamplifier I have ever heard at home and certainly one of the few best that I can buy. I can not point to his weaknesses. And yes, as a fan of lamps, I could wonder if the more ethereal, slightly sweeter top of the range offered by the top Audio Tekne did not please me even more. Or whether building the palpability of virtual sources based on their filling and weighting did not appeal to me even more than precisely showing contours in the Tenor edition. Both, however, concerned my private preferences, not the advantage of AT.

On the other hand, the whole Tenor due to the genius bass and the fabulous, explosive, if necessary, dynamics, however, I would put a hair higher. Without financial limitations, I would have decided on Tenor. It's just an absolutely complete player. This brilliant bass never dominates the transmission, crystal clear, voiced, air-filled mountain never sounds aggressive, and both extremes of the band perfectly fuse into a very coherent whole with a colorful, saturated, expressive and tangible diameter. The better the recording, the illusion of close contact with music is more convincing.

This is one of those dangerous devices that you always want to reach for the next album in order to stay in a world of extremely intense, beautiful experiences, for which we listen to music and build audio systems for often huge sums. Having him means so many short, if not sleepless nights spent in the company of favorite musicians. Just like Kondo or Audio Tekne devices, I would treat Tenora more as a work of art than a device. Thoughtful, refined in the smallest details and guaranteeing for many, many years a wealth of exceptional experiences. This is a phenomenal *phonostage* for a lifetime, and that available for very few? - Well, such a life

- Budowa _____

Tenor Audio Phono 1 is a phono preamplifier for movable coil cartridges (MC) equipped with three inputs (2 x RCA and 1 x XLR) and the same number of outputs. The device is delivered in a powerful, padded travel crate, thanks to which it will probably survive any journey. Only that together with this chest it weighs over 46 kg! The device itself is almost as powerful as any other Canadian company. It measures almost 50 x 53 cm, 24 cm high

- Lou Donaldson, *LD + 3* , Blue Note MMBST-84012, LP
- Miles Davis, *Kind of blue* , Columbia CS 8163, LP
- Muddy Waters & The Rolling Stones, *Live At The Checkerboard Lounge. Chicago 1981* , Eagle Rock Entertainment B0085KGI6, LP
- Patricia Barber, *Companion* , Premonition / Mobile Fidelity MFSL 2-45003, 180 g LP
- Pink Floyd, *The Endless River* , Parlophone Records 825646215478, 180 g LP
- Rodrigo y Gabriela, *11:11* , EMI Music Poland, LP
- The Ben Webster Quintet, *Soulville* , Verve Records M GV-8274, LP
- Vivaldi, *Le Quattro Stagioni* , Divox / Cisco CLP7057, LP
- Georges Bizet, *Carmen* , RCA Red Seal SPA 25 064-R / 1-3, LP
- Mozart, *Così fan tutte* , conductor Teodor Currentzis, MusicAeterna Orchestra, Sony Classical B00O1AZGD6, LP
- Led Zeppelin, *Led Zeppelin II* , Atlantic 8122796438, LP
- Tsuyoshi Yamamoto Trio, *Midnight sugar* , Three Blind Mice / CISCO TBM-23-45, LP
- Dire Straits, *Love over gold* , VERTIGO 25PP-60, LP
- *Chopin Recital* , performed by Maurizio Pollini, Toshiba-EMI EAC-55137, LP

Japanese versions of the discs available on



This is one of those reviews I was missing when writing. After describing many other audio products over the years, I've certainly used every possible expression expressing my admiration with this or other aspect of the sound. So what to use to describe the phono preamplifier, which all the others just leave behind? Brilliant? Unique? Unique? Breathtaking? Addictive? Changing perspective? Each of them fits him like a glove, but none, even all together, do not give up the "Canadians" class. The first dozen or so days (because the phono spent a lot of time with me) I used to enjoy the music, leaving a review for "someday there when I have to".

At the beginning, Tenor played in a set with the excellent, although coming from a completely different price platform, the Musical Fidelity NuVista amplifier, but the combination with the Kondo amplifier was definitely the best, so most of the description is really about this combination. The first thing that could be noticed immediately is the absolutely brilliant, unique bass. The thing both in his descent - such low-playing Ubiqu speakers, I have not heard before - and the quality of virtually every aspect of the sound of this part of the band. Please, understand me well - the bass did not dominate the message, it did not impose itself, it was not better than the rest of the band. While listening to Tenor, I was able to see that all other gramophone preamplifiers I knew had at the bottom of the band smaller or larger limits.

The low Phono 1 tones were saturated, energetic, perfectly conducted and controlled. The latter elements translated into an unusual diversification of the bass. After listening to several dozen albums from various periods and musical genres, prepared in various ways, coming from both the analogue era and contemporary pressed from digital mothers, I can say without a doubt that I have not heard such a good low level differentiation yet. All these features are supported by explosive dynamics, panache, freedom, weight loss, power of impact (when necessary), but also exceptional refinement, as required by the recorded recording.

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and 26.5 kg weight. The housing is a typical Tenor, that's how I say it. The front was made of cherry wood and covered with 16 layers of lacquer, resulting in a high gloss effect. Slats from the same material finish the longitudinal upper edge of the housing. The main part of the extremely solid, rigid, vibration-resistant casing was made of aluminum. A large number of ventilation openings have been placed in the cover of the device to keep the internal temperature at an optimum level. The whole set on wooden legs finished with rubber elements.

In the middle of the front wall, a round window was cut out, in which the display was placed, and above and below four buttons. During operation, the display informs about the selected input, gain, operating mode (stereo / mono), phase and RIAA curve. The main switch of the device is placed on the back panel, but for everyday use, the device is operated by a button located above the display (right, upper). Next to the same row there are three more, giving easy access to such functions as: phase, mono or mute. Below the display there is a Setup button that gives you access to the menu, two Inputs buttons that allow you to select inputs, but also navigate the menu, and a Display button (allowing you to disable, among others). In the back there are three sets of inputs and outputs - 2 x RCA and 1 x XLR. We also have two ground terminals,

All settings for inserts are made electronically, using the buttons located under the display. After starting the device, the sequence of initialization / stabilization of the circuits takes 100 seconds. Only after this time you can choose the settings or start the listening session. Phono 1 offers four gain settings, from 55 to 70 dB in steps of 5 dB. You can choose between two correction curves, classic RIAA or IEC, and one of seven input load settings from 100, 200, 300, 400 and 500 Ω plus one of the two additional High and Custom. An interesting thing about the menu is the device's hour counter. Used, carefully selected lamps have a life span of 10,000. hours, but as I mentioned it is a device for life, so in any case better control their "course".



Tenor Audio Phono 1 is a hybrid design with four signal amplification stages. The signal from the input first goes to the Jensen transformer 4 times amplifying the signal. Next there are two further, symmetrical, transistor amplifying stages, which add another 36 dB of amplification. Then the high frequency signal is subjected to RIAA correction (according to the selected curve), and then the signal goes to the next amplifying stage, this time with the tube, using the selected lamps (NOS) 8416 Amperex. Only then in the next tube system with Russian military 6n6P lamps RIAA correction is made in the low frequency range. The output stage operates in pure class A with no feedback.



I spent the first few days so constantly picking up the proverbial jaw from the floor. It is worth recalling here that this is not the most expensive phono I tested at home. The middle and highest model of the Japanese [Audio Tekne](#) , which I tested for "High Fidelity", cost even more, and although they are also brilliant devices offering the highest quality sound, in the bass range of Tenor they give way. I will go in my statement about Tenor's superiority over the competition even further and say that in this respect it is the absolute best source - taking into account all digital and analog - that I had at home. His [Audionet Planck](#), tested in parallel, was not enough in this respect. Ampere powered amplifier, one of the best, and perhaps the best CD player I've ever had. Not much, but still. Tenor Phono 1 sounded not only that even more powerful, without even a trace of losing control even with the great orchestra tutti, and in addition more organic.

Examples? Let's take my favorite Ray Brown raving on the bass with Monty Alexandra and Herb Ellis on the album Concord Records *Overseas special* . The disc has been many years old, I bought it from the second (at least) hand, besides Herb's autograph, and on every turntable it sounded very well so far, although the quality of recording and stamping is replaced by, for example, *Soular energy* . With Tenor Phono 1, this album sounded like the other one, and maybe even better. The sizes of the double bass and the piano were simply natural, so they did not fit between the speakers. Each of these instruments also had a Mass - yes, I especially use a large M. It was set in a specific place on the stage, and the image of the latter was absolutely clear and stable.

Technical data (according to the manufacturer)

Dual Mono circuit.
 Correction curves: passive RIAA and IEC
 RIAA correction (20 Hz - 20 kHz): +/- 0.1 dB.
 Voltage amplification: 55 dB - 70 dB (selected in steps of 5 dB)
 S / N: <- 87 dBA for amplification 70 dB
 Channel separation: <-90 dBA
 Frequency response: 2-100 kHz
 THD + Noise: <0.02%
 Output loads: 100Ω, 200Ω, 300Ω, 400Ω, 500Ω, HIGH, CUSTOM
 Output impedance (RCA XLR): 10 Ω | 100 Ω
 Global feedback: zero
 Lamps per channel: 2 x NOS 8416 and 2 x 6N6Π
 Soft Start: 1 minute 40 seconds
 Maximum power consumption during operation: 75 W
 Maximum power consumption in Standby mode: <1 W
 Device weight: 26.5 kg
 Dimensions (W x S x G): 495 x 533 x 241 mm

Distribution in Poland

SOUNDCLUB

SoundClub Sp. z o

.o . Skrzetuski 42
 02-726 Warsaw Poland

soundclub.pl



System odniesienia

- Multiformat player (BR, CD, SACD, DVD-A) [Oppo BDP-83SE](#) with tube tube modification, including a new analog stage and a separate tube power, modified by [Dan Wright](#)
 - [ArtAudio Symphony II](#) integrated amplifier with an upgrade in the form of output transformers with Diavolo model,

- Turntable: [TransFi Salvation](#) with [TransFi T3PRO Tomahawk](#) arm and inserts [AT33PTG \(MC\)](#) , [Koetsu Black Gold Line \(MC\)](#) , [Goldring 2100 \(MM\)](#)
 - Phono preamplifier: [ESELabs Nibiru MC](#), [iPhono MM / MC](#)
 - Columns: [Bastanis Matterhorn](#)
 - Headphone amplifier : [Schiit Lyr](#)

- Digital cables: [AudioQuest Carbon](#) USB cable , coaxial cables and [BNC Audiomica Flint Consequence](#)
 - Power supply: passive molding: [Gigawatt PF-2 MK2](#) and [Furutech TP-609e](#) ; dedicated line from box with [Gigawatt LC-Y](#) cable ; [Gigawatt G-044](#) wall sockets [Schuko](#) and [Furutech FT-](#)

made by Tom Willis

- power amplifier [ModWright KWA100SE](#)
- preamp tube [ModWright LS100](#)
- digital to analog converter: [TeddyDAC](#) ,
and [Hegel HD11](#)
- USB converter: [Berkeley Audio Design
Alpha USB](#) , [Lampizator](#)

- Headphones: [Audeze LCD3](#)
- Interconnects - [LessLoss Anchorwave](#) ;
[Gabriel Gold Extreme mk2](#), [Antipodes
Komako](#)
- Speaker cord - [LessLoss Anchorwave](#)
- Power cords - [LessLoss DFPC Signature](#);
[Gigawatt LC-3](#)

[SWS-D \(R\)](#)

- Table: [Horn Audio 4SB2N](#)
- Anti-vibration accessories: [ROGOZ-
AUDIO SMO40 platform](#) ; platform
[Rogóż-AUDIO CPPB16](#) ; anti-vibration
legs [ROGOZ AUDIO BW40MKII](#) and
[Franc Accessories Ceramic Disc Slim Foot](#)

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