

JASON VICTOR SERINUS

JMF Audio HQS 7001

MONOBLOCK POWER AMPLIFIER



For some, it takes the likes of Scheherazade to seduce; for me, simple sound will suffice. But not just any sound. If I'm going to enter into a relationship with an audio component, I want it to last.

I don't know anyone who, having heard the JMF Audio system at AXPONA 2023—the HQS¹ 6002 dual-mono power amplifier (\$40,000) and PRS 1.5 dual-mono line stage preamplifier (\$36,000)

with Harbeth M40.3 XD speakers—did not rave about the sound. In my show report, I credited the system, assembled by Fidelis Distribution and Audio Skies, with delivering “some of the finest-sounding music” I heard at the show. “This is the perfect sound for mellow music,” I proclaimed. “Bliss.”

¹ HQS is JMF's acronym for “high quality sound.”

SPECIFICATIONS

Description Solid state class-AB mono power amplifier, direct-coupled with hand-calibrated, precision balanced input stage. Inputs: 1 balanced (XLR). Outputs: JMF Audio's proprietary gold-plated, 120A-rated, 6mm-diameter LSS terminals (female) and WBT modular gold-plated terminals (male) for spades, wire, and 4mm-diameter banana plugs. Rated output power: 300W into 8 ohms (24.8dBW), 500W into 4 ohms (24dBW), 850W into 2 ohms (23.3dBW). Maxi-

mum output current: 112A. Minimum load impedance: 1.5 ohms recommended, tested down to 1 ohm; intentionally limited for amplifier and loudspeaker protection. Input impedance: 20k ohms. Interference rejection: 100dB typical, based on psychoacoustic criteria. Monitoring: Input offset, overload, over temperature, level metering (-15dB-+3dB), deactivatable. Frequency response: 3Hz-20kHz for 250W into 4 ohms, ±0.1dB; -1dB at 100kHz for small signals.

THD+N: <0.01% at 250W into 4 ohms, 1kHz; 0.001% typ. unloaded. S/N ratio: 110dB typ., unweighted, 20Hz-20kHz. Damping factor: >1200 wide-band with an 8 ohm load. **Dimensions** 19" (482mm) W × 5.9" (149mm) H × 21.2" (539mm) D. Weight: 75lb (34kg). **Finish** Rose-gold engraved, silver or black anodized aluminum enclosures in Orose Silver or Black. **Serial numbers of units reviewed** 311732, 311733.

Designed and built in France. **Price** \$77,000/pair. Approximate number of US dealers: 9. Warranty: 5 years parts and labor. **Manufacturer** JMF Audio, 228 Voie des Chartons, 88650 Anould, France. Web: jmf-audio.com. North America and UK distributor: Audio Skies, Los Angeles, CA. Tel: (310) 975-7099. Email: info@audioskies.com. Web: audioskies.com.

Only the need to write umpteen show reports in a short span prevented me from saying more. Completely won over and hoping that JMF Audio's amplifiers would sound as good with my Wilson Audio Alexia V loudspeakers as they did with Harbeth 40.3 XD's, this serial reviewer of mono amps immediately asked Michael Vamos of Audio Skies, the US distributor of JMF Audio, if he (I) could review a pair of JMF monoblocks. The \$77,000/pair JMF HQS 7001, which, according to their specifications, output 300W into 8 ohms, 500W into 4 ohms, and 850W into 2 ohms, were the best JMF Audio amps Michael could offer at the time.² Given their power and price, they promised a near-ideal comparison with my reference D'Agostino Momentum M400 MxV monoblocks, which cost \$79,500/pair and are specified to output 400W into 8 ohms, 800W into 4 ohms, and 1600W into 2 ohms.³

Background and technology

JMF Audio's website is among the most informative I've encountered. Its extensive "History" section⁴ tells the company's story, explaining that the late Jean-Marie Fusilier (JMF) founded a company in 1974 to produce systems for industrial, defense, and nuclear-plant applications. Jean-Marie designed his first audio product in 1982 and began delivery as JMF Audio in 1985.

JMF Audio's early adopters included René Zingg's Soundville Studios in Lucerne, Switzerland, and Glenn Meadows's Masterfonics Studios in Nashville. Both studios were designed by Tom Hidley. More recently, Morten Lindberg of Grammy-winning label 2L began using JMF Audio's PCD 302 mains filter and power cords to make his recordings. JMF's consumer distribution was limited to Asia until Vamos's Audio Skies introduced JMF Audio electronics to North America at AXPONA 2022.

"Since the beginning, we have used a large power supply, many bipolar output transistors, high voltage for high headroom and precision, bespoke components, and unusual components such as radio-frequency semiconductors," explained Jean-Marie's son, Laurent Fusilier, at the start of a Zoom chat that Vamos also participated in. Laurent now runs the business with his brother, Arnaud.

JMF Audio's website explains in copious detail how the company's technology is implemented in the HQS 7001. Seeking to sort it all out, I asked Fusilier what he considered most important.

"The amplifiers feature a huge reserve of energy, since the large capacitors are charged to high voltages, and that energy depends on the square of the voltage. Our designs are not based on bridged mode. We make symmetrical linear power amplifiers that include a high-current output stage that drives the load. We believe that the reaction of the speakers and their counterforce is usually underestimated. In our opinion, most designers do not consider this. If the power amp cannot adequately drive this load, you don't have a high-fidelity system."

To ensure that the HQS 7001 meets the ambitious specifications the company touts, even with noisy power, a filtered, hard-wired power cable is included. One filter is inside the plug; the other sits at the entrance to the amplifier. "Our experience is that an ordinary IEC connector is too weak for the task," Fusilier said. "When you have connectors inside the amp, outside the amp, and on the cable, current must run through three different connectors. Connectors are always the weakest link. By hard-wiring the power cable, the weak points are eliminated."

Beyond the power cord, the amps are designed to reject noise. "Our balanced interfaces are hand-calibrated for great interference rejection. This results in a common-mode rejection as high as 100dB, while professional interfaces usually show less than 65dB."

Music, Fusilier emphasized, is not steady state. "This is why we give our amplifiers a huge reservoir of energy. The mains are used to charge the [power supply], which contains high-capacity, bespoke capacitors. When there are transients in the music, we don't rely on the mains. Instead, the necessary energy comes from the capacitors, which are located very close to the output; this produces tremendous instantaneous power. After the transient has been delivered, the capacitors are recharged by the mains.

2 JMF Audio's midlevel monoblocks, they sit between the HQS 6002 dual-mono power amplifier and the topline HQS 9001 monoblocks. The HQS 9001 should be available in the US by the time you read this.

3 One notable difference between the JMF Audio HQS 7001 and the D'Agostino M400 MxV is that the JMF includes a proprietary hard-wired power cord that the company recommends be plugged either directly into the wall or via a JMF Audio power line filter. Given the cost of the top-level power cables I use, this increases the price differential. But since different power cables sound different, the D'Agostinos offer more opportunities to tune the sound—for a price.

4 See jmf-audio.com/history.

MEASUREMENTS

I performed a complete set of measurements on one of the JMF HQS 7001s (serial number 311732) with my Audio Precision SYS2722 system,¹ then repeated some of the testing with the magazine's APx500 analyzer. I preconditioned the HQS 7001 by following the CEA's recommendation of running it at one-eighth the specified power into 8 ohms for 30 minutes. At the end of that time, the temperature of the top panel was 101.8°F (38.8°C) and that of the heatsink on the rear panel was much higher, at 173.5°F (78.6.1°C). The JMF amplifier has just enough thermal capacity for its rated power.

The JMF amplifier's balanced input preserved absolute polarity, ie, the XLR jack was wired with pin 2 positive. The HQS 7001's input impedance is specified as 20k

ohms. I measured 6.8k ohms from 20Hz to 20kHz. Though this is lower than the specified impedance, modern solid state preamplifiers will have no problems driving the JMF. The voltage gain at 1kHz was higher than usual, at 34.4dB into 8 ohms.

The output impedance, including the series impedance of 6' of spaced-pair cable, was a relatively low 0.15 ohms at 20Hz and 1kHz, rising to 0.23 ohms at 20kHz. As a result, the variation in the frequency response with our standard simulated loudspeaker² (fig.1, gray trace) was minimal, at ± 0.15 dB. The response into resistive loads was flat in the audioband, not reaching -3 dB until 180kHz into 8 ohms (blue trace) and 123kHz into 4 ohms (magenta). The rise in output impedance with increasing frequency means that into 2 ohms, the output was down by 3dB at 70kHz. With

1 See stereophile.com/content/measurements-maps-precision.

2 See stereophile.com/content/real-life-measurements-page-2.

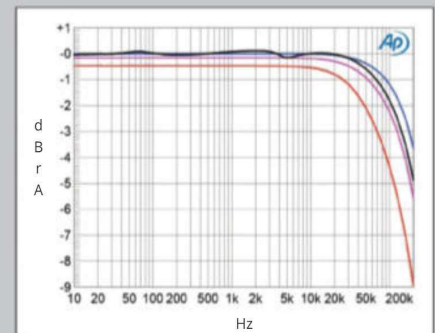


Fig.1 JMF HQS 7001, frequency response at 2.83V into: simulated loudspeaker load (gray), 8 ohms (blue), 4 ohms (magenta), and 2 ohms (red) (1dB/vertical div.).

“The signal path is very short, and the slew rate is high. This prevents any masking effect of the large signals on the small signals. When JMF’s newly designed amplifiers were tested in Nashville, the engineers were surprised to measure no delay between input and output at 10kHz. We don’t rely on a feedback loop for stability; the amplifiers are stable by design. Solid state designs normally require the addition of inductance between the output transistors and the output terminals, for stability. We don’t use any. The output stages are directly linked to the output terminal through bolts and large-diameter wires; there is no connector.”

Vamos: “From day one, over 40 years ago, JMF Audio has only made reference components. They’re not trying to hit a price point. They only focus on making them the best. ... Unlike other companies, they spend all their energy, time, money, and research and development trying to create ultimate amplifiers to serve the music.”

Apart from the technical concepts, is there an overarching principle to JMF’s design? “My father’s dream was universality: to play all kinds of music with fullness and faithfulness for the enjoyment of the music lovers in a broad sense,” Laurent Fusilier replied. “To us, our setup was not satisfying in the early 2000s. But now I’m proud to say that my father’s goal has been reached: Listeners are drawn into music as an art and forget about the technique.

“We perfect our designs mostly by auditioning classical recordings that are usually made with just a few microphones, so the soundstage is true, and the acoustic is natural. This allows us to evaluate the decay and the dynamics. With most other music, except some acoustic jazz, the soundstage is created artificially in a studio. We have found out that when a design sounds truly



honest with classical music and jazz, then it works for everything. We have a partnership with Morten Lindberg’s 2L, which enables us to offer a sampler of his recordings with each JMF Audio power amplifier.”

JMF Audio’s analog printed circuit boards feature proprietary 24K gold plating on both sides. JMF considers gold-plating optimal for natural rendering and better reproduction of nuance, so they apply the same process to connectors. In addition to the output terminals for spades and wires, the amplifiers include proprietary, 6mm-diameter JMF Audio connectors. The company says that by volume, 90% or more of the components and parts in JMF Audio products are manufactured by JMF Audio or made to the company’s specifications.

Gold-plating calls for proprietary solder, which is applied by hand and requires higher temperatures. “To avoid damage, after soldering one pin we must wait for the component to cool down before continuing,” Fusilier said. “It is a lengthy process.”

Designs are modular to ensure maintainability and upgradabil-

measurements, continued

its wide small-signal bandwidth, the JMF’s reproduction of a 10kHz squarewave into 8 ohms featured short risetimes in both modes (fig.2), with no overshoot or ringing.

The unweighted, wideband signal/noise ratio (ref. 1W into 8 ohms), taken with the input shorted to ground, was a good 64.6dB. This ratio improved to 80.8dB when the measurement bandwidth was

restricted to 22Hz–22kHz, and to 82.7dB when A-weighted. Spectral analysis of the low-frequency noise floor while the JMF drove a 1kHz tone at 1W into 8 ohms (fig.3) revealed a low level of random noise, but spurious were present at 60Hz and its odd-order harmonics, each close to –90dB ref. 1W. These will be due to magnetic interference from the power transformer.

JMF specifies the HQS 7001’s maximum power as 300W into 8 ohms (24.77dBW), 500W into 4 ohms (24.0dBW), and 850W into 2 ohms (23.27dBW). *Stereophile* defines an amplifier’s clipping power as being when the THD+noise reaches 1%. With that criterion, the HQS 7001 slightly exceeded its specified powers into 8 ohms (310W, 24.91dBW, fig.4), and into 4 ohms (515W,

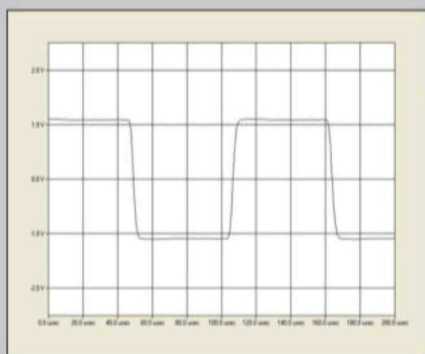


Fig.2 JMF HQS 7001, small-signal 10kHz squarewave into 8 ohms.

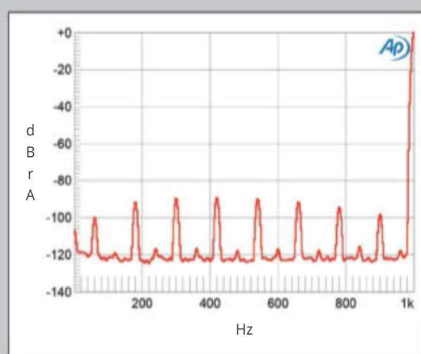


Fig.3 JMF HQS 7001, spectrum of 1kHz sinewave, DC-1kHz, at 1W into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).

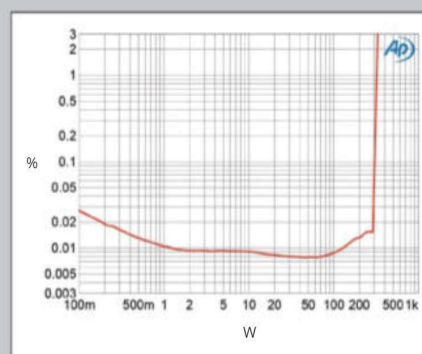


Fig.4 JMF HQS 7001, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 8 ohms.

ity. Class-AB ensures efficiency; class-A is reserved for smaller signals that convey nuance and reverberation. “The transition from pure class-A operation is defined by the load, but pure class-A operation extends up to approximately 10W into 4 ohms,” Fusilier said.⁵

What you see/What I did

The visual design of JMF amps is simple. Product identifiers and lettering are engraved on the HQS 7001’s front panel, top left and bottom right, and filled with rose gold. The front panel also contains a stainless steel Power button, topped by a small white LED that illumines when the amplifier is on and a small VU-meter toggle, topped by a small red LED that lights when the VU meter is engaged. Above these buttons reside two vertical rows of small LEDs. The three LEDs in the left row indicate protection status and only light up in cases of overload, DC offset, or excessively high heatsink temperatures. (They never lit up while I used the amps, and the heatsinks never felt hot.) The seven LEDs in the right row indicate input signal magnitude, in increments of three decibels: -15dB, -12dB, -9dB, and so on, up to +3dB. 0dB indicates an input voltage necessary for full output voltage. Even while playing Shostakovich and Mahler symphonies at top volume in my 16’ x 20’ x 9.4’ room, the -12dB LEDs lit only briefly. The top five meter LEDs never lit.

The rear panel is dominated by large, vertical heatsink fins. To their left, top-to-bottom, are the XLR input, JMF Audio’s proprietary gold-plated, 120A-rated, 6mm-diameter LSS output terminals designed for JMF speaker cables, then WBT modular gold-plated output terminals for spades, wire, or 4mm-diameter banana plugs. JMF Audio recommends their own speaker cables, but to keep



things as simple as possible, I used my usual cabling.

Below the outputs sits a ground connection that may be used to link the loudspeaker’s shield to the amplifier’s case—I didn’t need it—and the connection point for the captive power cord. Everything is positioned quite close together, making cable separation a surmountable challenge.

I placed the HQS 7001s on Grand Prix Monza amp stands with the same Wilson Audio Specialties Pedestal supports I usually use with amplifiers. I plugged the amps directly into my dedicated AC line. All other components were powered by a Stromtank S 2500

⁵ For more information—a lot more—see jmf-audio.com/amphome.

measurements, continued

24.1dBW, fig.5). The HQS 7001 clipped at 760W into 2 ohms (22.8dBW, fig.6), which is lower than the specified maximum power. However, the wall voltage had dropped from 121.4V AC with the amplifier idling to 118.7V AC with it clipping into 2 ohms; this drop was responsible for the shortfall in clipping power.

I examined how the THD+N percentage varied with frequency at 20V, which is equivalent to 50W into 8 ohms, 100W into 4 ohms, and 200W into 2 ohms. The THD+N percentage was low into 8 ohms (fig.7, blue trace) but rose into 4 ohms (magenta trace) and 2 ohms (red trace). The rise in THD+N in the top three audio octaves will

be due to the amplifier having relatively limited open-loop gain, which means that less distortion-reducing feedback is available as the frequency rises.³

The distortion waveform was predominantly the third harmonic (fig.8), though

³ See fig.3 at stereophile.com/content/future-without-feedback-page-4.

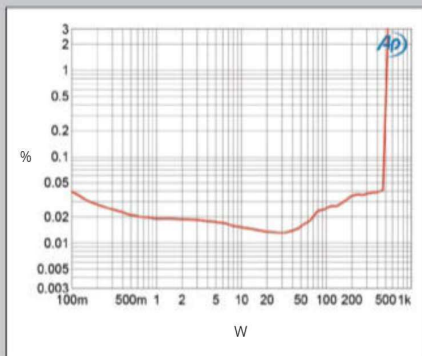


Fig.5 JMF HQS 7001, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 4 ohms.

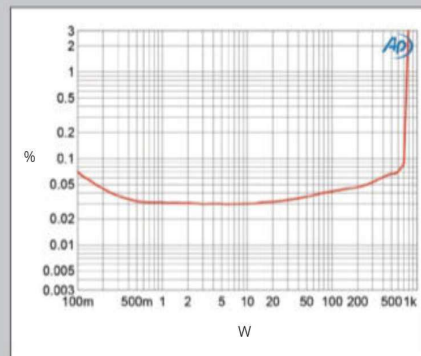


Fig.6 JMF HQS 7001, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 2 ohms.

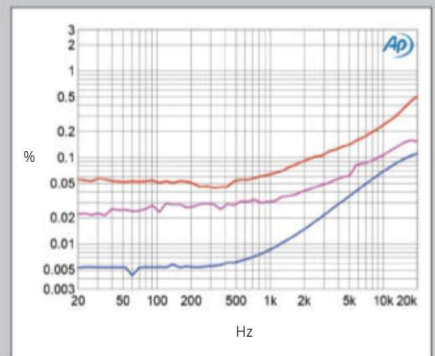


Fig.7 JMF HQS 7001, THD+N (%) vs frequency at 20V into: 8 ohms (blue), 4 ohms (magenta), and 2 ohms (red).

Quantum MK II battery-source AC generator.

I took JMF Audio at its word when it recommended allowing its HQS power amplifiers “to warm up for at least four hours at room temperature. For this, the power amplifier should be fully powered on.” I left the amps on 24/7.

Time to enjoy

During my first days of listening, I was convinced these amps had a slight sepia finish—that they delivered an entirely satisfying if somewhat toned-down full-range listening experience. Then the sepia finish vanished. In its place, I discovered extremely colorful and neutral sound that made me want to listen more and more. As I type these words on deadline day, I find myself drawn back to the music room for one more listen.

I didn’t give the HQS 7001 monos an easy time. Rather than feed them a simple ballad, I challenged them with a recent Recording of the Month that has also become one of my Records to Live For: Shostakovich Symphonies No.2, 3, 12, and 13 performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Andris Nelsons (24/96 WAV, DG 4864965).

Percussion was downright fabulous in the Second Symphony. In the Third and Twelfth, Shostakovich’s all-stops assaults of militant optimism were breathtaking. When the Twelfth grew tender and lyrical (albeit not for long), the JMF monos softened with them. And in the monumental Thirteenth, when the magnificent Matthias Goerne gave voice to the rage, sadness, repulsion, irony, stoicism, fear, and resistance transmitted by the five Yevtushenko poems

Shostakovich set, the music and sound moved me beyond words.

To pull myself back together, I turned to the infinitely beautiful *Adagietto* from Mahler’s Symphony No.5, performed by the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal under Rafael Payare (24/96 FLAC, Pentatone). The sound was gorgeous, warm and filled with color. I enjoyed the presentation’s delicacy, grace, and beauty so much that I went on to investigate portions of the symphony’s first and final movements. Woodwinds stood out for their warm beauty, and bass was so impressively of a piece that I felt impelled to audition a new percussion recording.

That turned out to be Steven Schick’s *Soundlines: Weather Systems II* (24/96 WAV, Islandia Music Records). As fascinating as Xenakis’s percussive tour de force, *Psappha*, was, and as realistically and convincingly a huge drum resounded with the HQS 7001—I could feel the visceral hits to the drum’s head—I found myself wishing that I could locate the even more awesome 24/352.8 rendition of the piece on 2L’s *Utopias* album, which I auditioned over five years ago. That’s how vividly aural memory lingers when



measurements, continued

there are crossover distortion spikes visible at the waveform’s zero-crossing points. These correlate with the fifth and seventh harmonics in the output spectrum (fig.9), but these are much lower in level than the magnetic interference from the power transformer. With the reduction in corrective feedback at high

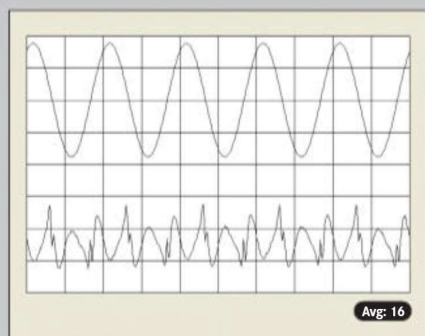


Fig.8 JMF HQS 7001, 1kHz waveform at 50W into 8 ohms, 0.009% THD+N (top); distortion and noise waveform with fundamental notched out (bottom, not to scale).

frequencies, high-order intermodulation products with an equal mix of 19 and 20kHz tones at 50W into 8 ohms were present, though they all lay at or below -72dB (fig.10). Commendably, the second-order difference product at 1kHz also lay below the level of the power supply-related spurious.

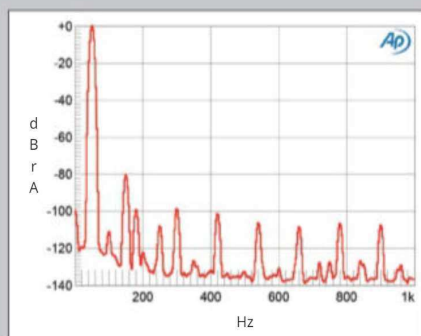


Fig.9 JMF HQS 7001, spectrum of 50Hz sine wave, DC–1kHz, at 50W into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).

The JMF HQS 7001’s measured performance is typical of a high-power, solid state design with a class-AB output stage. Distortion will be lowest into 8 ohms, but the amplifier should not have had any problems driving JVS’s Wilson Alexia V speakers to acceptably loud levels.

—John Atkinson

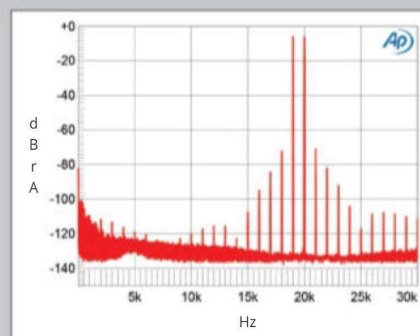


Fig.10 JMF HQS 7001, HF intermodulation spectrum, DC–30kHz, 19+20kHz at 50W peak into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).

you get high solely on sound, color, and force.

Sticking with Schick, the unique sounds on his rendition of Vivian Fung's *The Ice Is Talking* intrigued me no end. Sounds of ice cracking and timbral contrasts were totally convincing. Powerful music brought home by powerful amps.

Continuing to heed the call of the untried and unfamiliar, I turned to Lutoslawski's Partita for Violin and Orchestra performed by Christian Tetzlaff and Nicholas Collon on the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra's new recording, *Witold Lutoslawski: Concerto for Orchestra, Partita for Violin and Orchestra, Novelette* (24/96 WAV, Ondine ODE 1444-2). Color saturation was superb, and the sound was open and compelling.

I was on a roll. Time for a journey down memory lane, with two of my longtime soprano favorites: Leontyne Price's radiant rendition of Marc-Antoine Charpentier's "Depuis le jour" from the opera, *Louise*, recorded at Price's peak in 1965 on her marvelous recital *Prima Donna Vol. 1* (16/44.1 MQA, RCA Red Seal/Tidal), and Eileen Farrell and Leonard Bernstein's awe-inspiring Immolation Scene from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, performed by the New York Philharmonic on what sounds like the biggest soundstage in the whole wide world (24/192 FLAC, Columbia/Qobuz).

For days after—a week—I kept hearing the end of the Immolation Scene in my head. I could hardly believe how well these amps captured the maximal openness and volume of Farrell's voice on high. Every inch of the soundstage was consumed by the collapse of Valhalla, Kingdom of the Gods. As Wagner's curious mix of superhuman powers, soap opera intrigue, and hopeless, fatal romanticism crashed and burned on the operatic stage, another God rose in its place: the God of hi-fi.

Time to investigate some other genres. For this task, I welcomed my friend Scott, who picked two very different tracks, Talk Talk's "Life's What You Make It" from *The Colour of Spring* (24/96 FLAC, Parlophone UK/Qobuz) and The Police's "Spirits in the Material World," from *Ghost in the Machine*, 2003 remaster (16/44.1 FLAC, Polydor/Qobuz). Both sounded vital.

For one of my last few listens, I asked Fusilier to send a few of the tracks JMF Audio uses to evaluate its electronics. One was Morten Lindberg's recording of the title track from his acoustic jazz album, *Polarity* (24/352.8 FLAC, 2L-145), with Jan Gunnar Hoff, the Hoff Ensemble, Audun Kleive, and Anders Jormin. This track sounded open and alive; I finished the album and played it again. As with everything else I played, the music sounded so right that questions of slam, speed, color, vibrancy, and so on never crossed my mind.

Given JMF's French provenance, I ended my formal listening with Susan Graham singing Reynaldo Hahn's "À Chloris," from her reputation-defining recital, *La Belle Époque* (16/44.1 MQA, Erato/Tidal). I was transported back 25 years to the first row of UC Berkeley's Hertz Hall, where I once sat mesmerized by Graham's mezzo as she sang this song. If I am fortunate enough to be surrounded by such beauty as I take my last breath, I will die a lucky man.

Comparison

I tried to compare resolution and detail between my reference D'Agostino Momentum M400 MxV monoblocks and the JMF HQS 7001s during the extremely complex final three minutes of Payare's Mahler Symphony No.5. I found the two presentations equally satisfying—indeed, equally overwhelming. Air and depth seemed more or less equal. At times I felt that the JMFs delivered more bass; other times, I thought the D'Agostino's bass seemed a mite tighter and tidier.

Which is to say

As I contemplate the monoblocks that have moved me most over the past year or so—the Accuphase A-300, Octave Jubilee Mono

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Digital sources dCS Vivaldi Apex DAC, Vivaldi Upsampler Plus, Vivaldi Master Clock, and Rossini Transport; EMM Labs DV2 Integrated DAC, Meitner MA3 Integrated DAC; Innuos Statement Next-Gen Music Server; Small Green Computer Sonore Deluxe opticalModule; Uptone Audio EtherRegen with SOTM sCLK-OCX10 Master Clock and sPS-500 power supply; Nordost QNet switch and QSource linear power supplies (2); HDPLEX 300 linear power supply; Synology 5-bay 1019+ NAS with Ferrum Hyposos linear/switching hybrid power supply; Linksys MR9000 mesh router and Arris modem; Apple 2023 iPad Pro and 2017 MacBook Pro laptop with 2.8GHz Intel i7, SSD, 16GB RAM.

Preamplifier Dan D'Agostino Momentum HD.

Power amplifiers Dan D'Agostino Momentum M400 MxV monoblocks.

Loudspeakers Wilson Audio Specialties Alexia V with Löke subwoofers.

Cables Digital: Nordost Odin 1, Odin 2, and Valhalla 2 (USB and Ethernet), Frey 2 (USB adapter); AudioQuest WEL Signature; Wireworld Platinum Starlight Cat8 (Ethernet), OM1 62.5/125 multimode duplex (fiber optic). Interconnect (XLR): Nordost Odin 2 and Blue Heaven subwoofer, AudioQuest Dragon, Canare (subwoofers). Speaker: Nordost Odin 2, AudioQuest Dragon. AC: Nordost Odin 2, Valhalla 2, Valhalla 1; AudioQuest Dragon and Firebird. Umbilical cords: Ghent Audio Canare on HDPLEX 300 LPS and NAS; QSource Premium DC cables with Lemo terminations for QSources; SOTM sPS-500 umbilical cable for SOTM Master clock.

Accessories Grand Prix Monza 8-shelf double rack and amp stands, 1.5" Formula platform; Symposium Ultra Platform; Nordost 20A QB8 Mark III, 15A QB9 Mark II, QKore 1 and 6; Titanium and Bronze Sort Kones, Sort Lifts; Stromtank S 2500 Quantum MK II power generator; AudioQuest Niagara 7000 and 5000 power conditioners, NRG Edison outlets, JitterBugs; Environmental Potentials EP2050EE surge protector/filter; Wilson Audio Pedestals; A/V RoomService Polyflex Diffusers; Resolution Acoustics room treatment; Stillpoints Clouds (8); HRS DPX-14545 Damping Plates; Marigo Aida CD mat.

Dedicated listening room 20' L × 16' W × 9'4" H.

—Jason Victor Serinus

SE, Infigo Method 3, D'Agostino Momentum M400 MxV, and the JMF Audio HQS 7001 that is the subject of this review—I realize how unique each of them is. Each has a sound as memorable as Aretha's "Respect," Joni Mitchell's two very different recordings of "Both Sides Now," Dylan's definitive "Like a Rolling Stone," or Lotte Lehmann's irrepressible ecstasy on Wagner's "Dich, teure Halle" and "Du bist der Lenz."

The JMF Audio HQS 7001, however, is especially adept at putting music front and center without injecting commentary. It's not Aretha through Accuphase or Dylan through D'Agostino, as memorable and satisfying as those artistic marriages are; it's Joni front and center with only a microphone between you and her soul. The HQS 7001 is a bit like the fine wine whose bouquet you can't describe other than to say that your meal was divine in part because you sipped it.

If you've got the bucks to make a pair of these amplifiers your own, I urge you to check them out. Compare them with your reference and see if they are right for you. I believe that the more you listen, the more you'll want to listen. The JMF Audio HQS 7001s are that good. ■