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VPI

Prime 21+

Turntable £6650



The Prime 21+ aims to build on the solid foundation laid by 2015's Prime turntable with well-considered changes aimed at improving performance, ease of use and cosmetics.

VPI's changes have resulted in a smarter but more conventional deck. The tonearm is a 27cm, 3D-printed gimbal-bearing design that feels less fussy in use than its uni-pivot predecessor. It's easy to set up and the bearings feel smooth, though we can detect a small amount of play in its fore/aft movement. The 43mm-thick curvy plinth is made up of a 3mm aluminium top plate on an MDF base - the metal is intended to add rigidity and damping to the structure.

The detached AC motor unit has also been tweaked. It still has the same substantial high-mass aluminium casework to control resonances, but the internal control circuit has been updated to help speed stability. The speed change from 33½ to 45rpm is done manually by moving the belt from one step on the motor pulley to the next. Another obvious generational change is to the Prime's feet, which are now the same isolating designs used on the £20,000 VPI HW40 deck. These should make this deck less susceptible to external vibrations.

This deck isn't a particularly large unit by high-end standards. Measuring 52cm wide and 40cm deep, it should fit on the top shelf of most supports. Despite VPI's attempts to design in isolation, it still pays to use a rigid, low-resonance platform for the best results.

The Prime 21+ is designed to be easy to set up, and not only does the company provide a manual on a USB stick, it also includes a handy video. We are pleased to find that VPI supplies an electronic stylus scale in the box to help set the tracking force accurately, as well as a nifty alignment gauge for getting the cartridge in exactly the right position. The Shyla moving coil works without issue into our usual Cyrus Phono Signature/PSX-R2

Isolating design of the feet should minimise external vibrations

phono stage. Adjusting input loading to the recommended 100 ohms and setting the cartridge's tracking weight to 1.9g, it all works well.

THRILLING POWER

This is an immensely confident record player. While sounding big and bold, its presentation is pleasingly underpinned with heaps of subtlety when the music demands. We start with Orff's *Carmina Burana* and are impressed with the VPI's sonic scale and authority. It's rare to find a deck at this level that sounds so composed and controlled. Detail (there's plenty of it) is organised in a musically cohesive way.

We love how this record player renders large-scale dynamic shifts and backs them up with a thrilling sense of power. There's plenty of punch when the music demands, but also an ability to track low-level instrumental strands, even when the music becomes complex.

Tonally, there's little to complain about here either. The Prime 21+ package sounds

even, open and convincing. This is an impressively balanced performer that handles the balance between bite, body and refinement well. Stereo imaging is good too, with an open and expansive soundstage layered with carefully placed instruments and voices. Importantly, things don't become jumbled when the music erupts - those familiar with *Carmina Burana* will know that there's no shortage of dynamic excesses and dense instrumentation in this piece.

On Bob Marley's *Kinky Reggae*, the bass is firm and deep, anchoring the rest of the presentation impressively. Meanwhile, Marley's voice comes through with clarity and passion and is nicely separated from the instrumental backdrop.

The 21+'s punch, sense of power and degree of insight put it among the class leaders. This is a hugely capable package with a wide range of sonic talents that work across musical genres. If you're looking for a record-playing package at this level, this one has to be considered.

WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



FOR

- Bold and controlled presentation
- Dynamic expression and insight
- Solid build

AGAINST

- Tough competition at this level
- Manual speed change

VERDICT

The Prime 21+ builds on its impressive predecessor to become one of the class leaders at this level



"We love how this record player renders large-scale dynamic shifts and backs them with a thrilling sense of power"