



Matured

Owing to its universal usability, reliability and sound quality, the Linear pre- and headphone amp from Lehmannaudio has become a constant in our review equipment. By no means had I therefore expected a clear leap upward from the revised Linear USB II, but already at my first listening check it taught me better. What on earth did Norbert Lehmann work out here?

Let's first take a closer look into the enclosure. The 28-VA transformer now has two layers of wrapped mu-metal, supposed to provide a more consistent shielding. Next we have high-grade components from Mundorf, followed by costly mica caps and the two 1/4" Neutrik studio sockets on the front. No compromises here, either: when the left output is used, the preamp output is disabled; with the right output it is run in parallel. The volume level can be adjusted very precisely by the massive aluminium rotary control.

Talking about level: on the underside the output gain can be matched to the headphone impedance in two steps of 10 decibels each to enable an optimum control range irrespective of the impedance. The rear side features RCA inputs for analogue sources, the preamp output and the USB interface. For the latter Lehmann uses the »Xcore-Audio Hi-Res 2« USB converter which, in view of its 384 kilohertz/32 bit upper sampling limit, leaves nothing to be desired. Last, but not least the Linear USB II rests on three SSC feet which absorb annoying vibrations.

Lehmannaudio has revised the Linear USB – with a surprising outcome.

The sonic step upward is truly amazing. The USB II reveals its magic independently of the heard track and its sampling rate. For instance, it generates perceivably more information from internet radio stations, offers the tightness that's otherwise missing, and tops off the sound image with an enhanced resolution. This is audible over an active loudspeaker connected to the preamp output or the Denon AH-D9200 headphone. As the sampling rate rises, so does the quality level of the acoustic reproduction.

Just with how much passion Bryn Terfel and Danielle de Niese perform »Amazing Grace«, leaves a lasting impression on me. The exciting moment arrives when the two solo voices, care-

fully embedded into the orchestra, unite for the duet and the Linear USB II keeps track of everything, distinguishing the various sound sources way more clearly than e.g. the Marantz HD Amp 1. Is there still room for improvement? Yes, it is. With the HMS Suprema power cord utmost satisfaction sets in, for now the bass range is more focused by that decisive hair's breadth, the tonal colours of the instruments come into their own more articulately, measure and rhythm are more involving.

The Lehmannaudio Linear USB II is a phantastic sounding pre and headphone amplifier. It adds resolution, timbres and spatial imaging to a convincing sound picture – so well that I couldn't wait until Christmas to buy it. *Olaf Sturm* ■

Lehmannaudio Linear USB II

| | |
|--------------|--|
| WxHxD | 11 x 5,5 x 28 cm |
| Warranty | 2 years |
| Price | 1.899 euros |
| Distribution | Lehmannaudio Waltherstraße 49 - 51 Geb. 4 51069 Köln |
| Web | lehmannaudio.com |

