



turntable noise and rumble which the plinth is supposed to be damping. The Architecture passed this test with ease, a creditable midrange giving a pleasant fullness to guitar and mandolin, although the overall sound lacked sparkle (this was due as much to the recording as the plinth, though). 'Buked and Scorned', one of the Bluesier tracks, features some emphatic slap/strum effects: these were a fraction slow dynamically, but not enough to detract significantly from the emotion of the music.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Decca's hallowed Best Of Parsifal provided more dynamic elbow-room and more opportunity to catch out a noisy plinth with cartridge mis-tracking. Transmitted motor vibrations can lead to tracking problems, because the stylus tip must continually reverse its lateral direction as it tracks the groove; an additional 'shove' by a coincident vibration will degrade the sound and cause groove damage in the long term.

As far as the Architecture was concerned, there were no serious grounds for complaint here with the Micra ploughing on through the glories of Christa Ludwig and Co with very little evidence of discomfort. The sharp, high-frequency spikes of the brass over a continuum of slow string chords were reproduced cleanly, albeit with an occasional touch of sizzle to show how close to the wind the needle was sailing.

Arturo Delmoni's well-modulated solo violin playing offers front ends a lot of opportunity for failure. Mis-tracked violin is one of hi-fi's nastier sounds, and to its credit the Aphelion gave the cartridge no grounds to loosen its grip on the groove, the inherent smoothness of the soloist's Bachian bowings untainted.

PIECES OF EIGHT

Next plinth on the bill was Classique Sounds' Octavia. Made to order from slabs of inch-thick MDF, Octavia can be had in the raw or cabinet-finished in any veneer of your choice. Certainly nothing has been left to chance as regards mass; although it's not in the Slate Audio weight range, prospective buyers should beware of hernia, otherwise they'll have their hands full in more ways than one. The top board is undrilled, so the choice of tone-arm fixing method lies with the user. One of the styling peculiarities of the Garrard 401 lies in the size of its chassis, which butts into the area where any sensible person would want to mount a 9in. arm. With a bit of applied fiddling and the odd curse though, we got our Rega fitted and Reson aligned.

With the return of Arturo Delmoni performing Bach's solo violin sonatas, I wondered whether things were a bit over-smooth, so I turned the wick up to check. No, everything was fine and dandy, with not an ounce of Arturo's creamy midrange or any of the essential bow-kick

transients lost. The reason for my concern is a good example of just how 'undramatic' and natural good hi-fi can be - it doesn't draw attention to itself, rather to the music.

Considering the enormous variety of dynamics and textures which have to be reproduced in Decca's Parsifal, the Octavia retained commendable control and dug deep for the accompanying 'cello and double-bass parts. Layered above was the full range of voices on this Wagnerian feast, the Germanic speech patterns retaining their expressive sibilance while the glories of full-blown operatic soprano floated out of the loudspeakers.

Turning back to Eric Bibb, I was once again surprised by the sonic differences which separate the Architecture and Octavia. The slap/strum guitar was kicked right into my lap this time, and the slight lack of presence noted with the Aphelion disappeared - the arrival of subtle finger-on-strings sounds meant a much more 'live' sensation to the performance.

A touch of the wild and wonderful was contributed by Santana's Abraxas. Its plethora of odd phase effects enabled me to be certain that what was weird stayed weird, and that the smoothness which was a notable feature of the Garrard/Octavia combination was not an unwanted extra overlying music.

CHALK AND CHEESE

Aphelion's Architecture does a fine job at an attractive price. With its Frank Lloyd Wright looks and the convenient armboard interchangeability, this may well be the goods for vinylphiles who care as much for style as outright sound. On the other hand, the use of non-rigid material between the MDF layers doesn't quite seem to hit the spot. The motor of a Garrard deck has considerable mass, and while 'the sandwich' does damp things fairly effectively, it allows through more vibration than is ideal, particularly if the motor unit happens to be well worn.

Classique's Octavia aims at preventing vibration in the first place, and does a good job of it. In fairness, this plinth is not only bigger and heavier than the Architecture, in its cabinet-finished form it is also dearer. Be that as it may, the Octavia is not unduly expensive and, coupled with a well-kept motor unit and suitable pick-up, would be a welcome, if weighty, companion on life's vinyl odyssey.

Classique Sounds' Octavia, with its MDF sheets glued into a heavy block, is a more 'traditional' plinth than the Architecture.

Aphelion Architecture
£200

Aphelion
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Classique Sounds
Octavia
£200 (plain MDF)
£299 (veneered)

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WORLD VERDICT



ARCHITECTURE

A fair price and distinctive styling make for a good buy.



OCTAVIA

A massive attack on vibration. Lets the Garrard's inherent quality show through.