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|--------------------|--------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|
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|--------------------|--------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|

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Text by Dai Tiankai

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If Baroque hadn't excitedly introduced it to me at the Taipei Audio Show last December, I would have long forgotten about this brand, let alone this new integrated amplifier. This almost forgotten brand is from Italy's Eam Lab; and this integrated amplifier is the Classic 202i.



Eam Lab, which started out in the professional audio field,


was officially established in 2010, which is considered a relatively recent company. However, before the Eam Lab brand was born, the person in charge, Emanuele Pizzi, had already been in the professional audio field for many years under the TCE brand and had achieved many achievements that were considered remarkable in the industry. They have been exploring the possibility of small size and high power



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New Update

[Eam Lab Classic 202i integrated amplifier](#)



The new Classic series launched by Eam Lab this time has a significant change in appearance. In terms of integrated amplifiers alone, both the Classic 102i and 202i are not bad in appearance. The front panel of the Classic 202i is quite simple, without too many buttons and knobs, but there is a color touch screen... [《 Full text 》](#)

[Montaudio Wairakei P-Ultra Power Cord](#)



How did Montaudio's flagship power cord, the Wairakei P-Ultra, get its name? This is the name of a geothermal power plant located in the Taupo volcanic area in New Zealand. The power plant was put into use in 1958 and is a precedent in the world for the use of geothermal power generation and sustainable energy. Wairakei P-Ultra is looking forward to... [《 Full text 》](#)

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output for the professional audio field, including 800W and 500W power amplifiers with 75% energy conversion efficiency. In 2010, they changed their career path and founded Eam Lab, focusing on the home audio field. In the field of home audio, their design philosophy remains unchanged: to provide sufficient driving force, fully reproduce the dynamics of music, and also to provide reliable quality and durability. (I can tell about the sound performance and the driving force of the speakers through auditioning, but I can't say anything about the durability.)

Eam Lab's products are currently divided into only two levels. The flagship is the Signature series, which currently only has one mono and one stereo power amplifier. The most representative one is the Classic series, which includes power amplifier, preamplifier and integrated amplifier. Among them, there are two integrated amplifiers. The entry-level one is the Classic 102i, which is a 100W integrated amplifier per channel. The other one is the protagonist of this audition, the Classic 202i, which has a higher power, with 200W per channel. The designs of these two integrated amplifiers are basically the same, and both have built-in phono amplifiers and DACs.



The color touch screen makes settings simple.

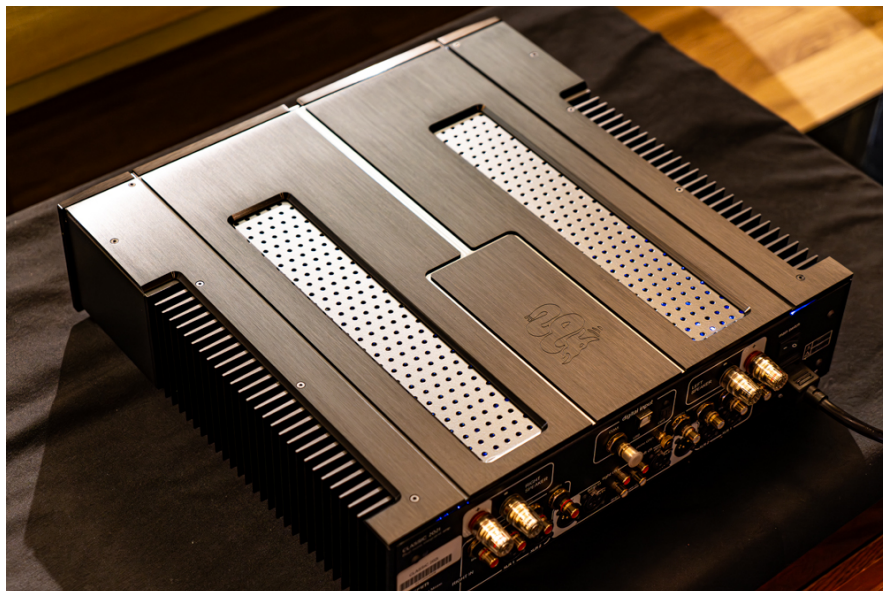
The new Classic series launched by Eam Lab has undergone significant changes in appearance. In terms of overall appearance, both Classic 102i and 202i are not bad in appearance. The front panel of the Classic 202i is simple, without too many buttons and knobs, but there is a color touch screen, and many functions can be operated by touch. There is no power switch on the panel. After the machine is connected to the power supply, you can turn it on by simply pressing the volume knob. On the main menu screen, each level of input can be switched instantly via touch.

There is a "Settings" box at the bottom. Press it to enter the sound settings page. There are two sets of slide-type digital adjustments in the upper part, one for the left and right channel balance, and the other for volume control. There are two boxes at the bottom. The left one is the digital filtering type of the DAC, and the right one is the management of the analog input, which determines whether to fix the volume or use an external preamplifier. All of the above operations are adjusted through touch, while the balance and volume can be controlled by the remote control. There are two more pages of screens, which are two forms of output power meter headers. To switch to these two screens, you need to press the SET button on the remote control. Overall, the arrangement of functions through page layers is very logical and

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intuitive to use.



Basic Philosophy - Fully Balanced, Dual Mono Architecture

Regarding the design and architecture of the Classic 202i, we look at it from a comparative and digital perspective. To start with the analogy, the Classic 202i adopts a fully balanced, dual-mono architecture. With fully balanced common mode rejection, the sound signal is cleaner. Don't forget, Eam Lab started out as a professional equipment manufacturer. In the professional and PA fields, long-distance transmission is often required, and balanced lines are the best solution. Even when it comes to home equipment, Eam Lab insists on fully balanced design. Because it is fully balanced, it is recommended that users give priority to connecting other signal sources with XLR balanced cables.

The dual-mono architecture is also very thorough. Starting from the power supply, it is a left-right symmetrical design. If you see the circuit layout inside the machine, the sense of symmetry is really pleasing to the eye. Because it uses dual mono, the left and right channels are independent, which greatly reduces the problem of crosstalk. This gives the Classic 202i a clear high separation in a wide sound field. The crisp and clear sound and image are also fully utilized under the fully balanced, dual mono architecture. This will be explained later in the section on listening experience.



Rich input and output terminals make the application more flexible.

It has 2 sets of XLR balanced inputs, 3 sets of RCA single-ended inputs; a total of five sets of high-level analog inputs, which is quite sufficient. In addition, it also has a built-in MM phono amplifier. Although it uses RCA single-ended input to match most turntables, the signal will be converted to balanced as soon as it enters. In addition, it can also be connected to other pre-amplifiers or post-amplifiers, and no matter it is the pre-amplifier output or post-amplifier input, there are a set of XLR and RCA terminals. Such a rich set of analog terminals makes the application flexibility of Classic 202i very wide. If you want to start with it, you can buy a power stage to play with bi-amp later. If you want to buy it to listen to pure music and integrate it into a theater system, that's fine too. The pre-stage output can be used to connect an active subwoofer to form a 2.1 or 2.2 system.



Special Volume Control Design - Digitally Controlled MOSFET Gain Adjustment

Eam Lab also uses a special volume control. Generally speaking, the sound control design on amplifiers at this price point either uses variable resistors or R2R resistor arrays. Variable resistors are low-cost and easy to maintain, but not only will they break down over time, but defective contacts may also transmit noise. They also have an inherent problem in that their response is not linear over the full volume range. Theoretically, R2R stepped volume control will not have this problem, but the accuracy of the resistor is relatively important; therefore, the cost of the latter is also relatively high. Eam Lab does not use variable resistors, R2R stepped volume control, or digital volume attenuation. They use two MOSFETs for each left and right channel and digitally control the gain. In this way, two potential problems of common sound control are avoided and the goal of high sound transparency can be achieved.





DAC can be updated and upgraded in the future.

After talking about analogies, let's take a look at digital. This DAC module has four sets of digital inputs, including one set each of USB type B, coaxial, optical, and AES/EBU. The latter three can be used for common digital sources, while USB is obviously for expanding streaming playback. The core of this DAC uses the Sabre ESS 9038 Q2M chip, which supports up to PCM 384kHz and DSD 512 (native) decoding. The manufacturer also stated that this DAC module can be upgraded through updates in the future, so it should not be underestimated.



Powerful enough to beat monsters above their level

I listened to it in U-Audio's listening room with Wilson Audio Alexia V. The signal source is NuPrime Evolution Stream as Roon Server and Cambridge ENX100 as streaming player, which are output to Classic 202i via XLR analog output and directly input to Classic 202i's USB digital input via Evolution Stream's USB digital output. For better streaming playback, NuPrime's SW Ultimate switch is also added to the streaming path.





Although the Eam Lab Classic 202i is just an integrated amplifier, its price is not high. The agent set a nice price of 185,000 yuan, which was not only close to the euro price, but even cheaper than the local European price in mid-April when the euro was appreciating. The important thing is that its sound performance is not only worthy of its price, but even exceeds my expectations. An integrated amplifier that costs less than 200,000 yuan has the sound of a high-end machine. Whether it is driving power or controlling power, when driving Wilson Audio Alexia V and Dynaudio Contour 60, it is calm and composed even when playing orchestral music, piano performances, movie soundtracks, and rock music at high volume. Is the bass of the piano very deep? Are the drums beating hard? Is the orchestra scene huge? Does the stacked soundtrack sound full? Yes, it is difficult to replay this music. Even so, it is not a problem to play it on Classic 202i.



The piano has a strong impact and the chords have rich reverberation.

Take Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1, with Alice Sara Ott as pianist and Thomas Hengelbrock conducting the Munich Philharmonic. The first movement begins with the majestic playing of brass instruments, and a highly recognizable four-note descending motive leads to the support of piano and orchestra. This solemn and majestic opening seemed grand and elegant when replayed by Alexia V. Although the price of Classic 202i is much higher than that of Alexia V speaker, it is not difficult to play the first movement of Tchaikovsky's concerto by driving Alexia 2. As the layers



KALO
Sound in Soul



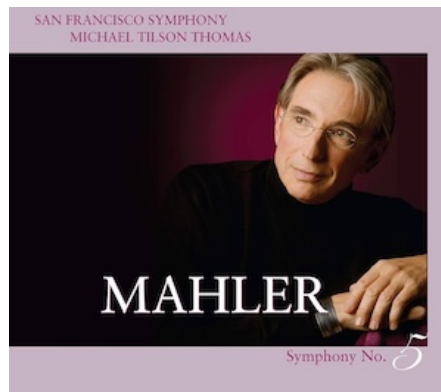


are stacked and strengthened, the music becomes more powerful and full of energy. The Classic 202i is not very big, and its 330W driving force is not fake, corresponding to the 4-ohm Alexia V. Even if I turned up the volume quite high, it still couldn't produce 330W. It drove the Alexia V to play the first movement of Tchaikovsky's concerto, and the ups and downs and rich emotions were very convincing. As for the piano, it also performs well in every aspect, whether it is the impact of forte,

the rich reverberation of heavy chords, or the solid or round notes in the mid- and high-pitched sounds when the speed is slowed down and the force is reduced. The diverse and complex composition of those sounds is not a difficult task for Classic 202i.

Listening to Mahler is not a problem either, the thrust and resolution are good enough!

Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 is already very imposing, but what if Mahler's symphony is introduced? Does the Eam Lab Classic 202i leak? Taking the performance of Mahler's Fifth Symphony conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra as an example, I have heard that the Alexia V can play better comprehensive amplifiers, but if the price is less than 200,000, the Eam Lab Classic 202i is probably the most comprehensive in the U-Audio editorial department to play this song.



An amplifier at this price range is not too difficult to use with bookshelf or small to medium-sized floor-standing speakers, but it will be a real challenge if you use large speakers and want to listen at high volume. Most people don't pair it this way. I use Alexia V with Eam Lab Classic 202i just to see what it can do. The truth can be seen once you play Mahler's Fifth. The first movement opens with the trumpet's "three short and one long" motive, leading to the funeral theme. The deployment of voices is clear, the depth of the sound field can be pushed out, and the organization of the multi-part ensemble can also be heard clearly. The Classic 202i has plenty of thickness to its sound, which allows it to provide clarity when expressing subtle sounds. For example, when the strings are laying out a melodic theme, the cymbals are tapped lightly in the background or the bassoon is played, and these accompaniments may be obscured. Or when Mahler is good at creating a chorus of orchestras and multiple overlapping and entangled parts in his music, the structure and organization of the music may be unclear. Thank you Classic 202i, it did not make me regret it.

If I insert

two consecutive large-scale orchestral pieces, the Classic 202i can deliver a satisfying performance. I also divided this test into two parts. On one hand, I use the YBA CDT450 with Merging NADAC to output to the Classic 202i via XLR balanced



rega



output; on the other hand, I use NuPrime Evolution Stream to directly output USB digital output to the Classic 202i for decoding and playing music on Tidal; on the other hand, I use the Cambridge EXN100 streaming player to directly decode and output to the integrated amplifier via balanced output. I am not comparing the pros and cons of other equipment outside the subject of this article, but just want to propose possible usage scenarios when using this built-in DAC integrated amplifier. I might have a CD playback system, or a CD turntable; I might have a purely digital turntable, or just a computer that plays music; I might also use a streaming player with analog output. When playing the same album tracks, the sound performance will certainly be different through different playback paths, but I can grasp the content of the music itself. This is enough to show that as an integrated amplifier, the Classic 202i performs really well. However, after this comparison, I also feel that its built-in DAC is not ordinary. The sound when playing CDs is the thickest, most solid, and most dynamic; the sound under the analog output of a streaming machine depends on the quality of the streaming machine; and the sound of the digital output of a NuPrime turntable is the most transparent. When you own the Classic 202i, you can also use it in many different ways.

Reflecting the delicacy and harmony of chamber music



When playing music with a simple configuration, you can better appreciate the sound texture presented by the Classic 202i. Because the speakers are driven properly and the control is sufficient, you can feel the accuracy of the sound when listening to chamber music, and the lines are smooth without any rough edges. Listening to the Franck Violin Sonata performed by Arabella Steinbacher and Robert Kulek, the first movement is full of drama. The piano peacefully brings out the violin's theme

with chords, and the theme develops gradually to a higher level. The simple theme stirs up abundant emotions through repetition. Listening to the violin here, the sound is rich and the lines are clear. When the melody reaches a higher level, the high-pitched sound rushes out but it does not make people feel irritating and unbearable. Compared to a concerto, the piano in chamber music sounds larger and more subjective. The impact of the forte is direct, the smooth theme presentation is graceful, and the mellow piano sound is matched with a rich sense of resonance. The Classic 202i's sound is warm, rich, and full of passion. The sound is clean and crisp, showing the texture of the instrument while also showing a sense of three-dimensionality and layering.

The sound is direct and clear, the power level is clear, and the details are sufficient

When playing Bertrand Renaudin and Olivier Cahours' "Douo" album, the Classic 202i was able to demonstrate its excellent control and driving force over the speakers, which was reflected in the speed and impact of the guitar and drums. The sound of this recording is direct, whether it is the drums or the guitar, it is very straightforward and impactful. Driven by Classic 202i, this sense of impact was not only performed well by Alexia V, but also by Dali Epikore 7 that I recently auditioned. Compared with Alexia V, Epikore 7's sound is more refined and not as loud; but it can give a more condensed and thick guitar sound. Alexia V's sound is relatively grand, but not loose. Renaudin's drum beats are crisp and clear without

any drag. Not only that, the clarity of details is also excellent, whether it is the details of the guitar or the drums, they can be fully restored; the transparent and clear performance picture alone is fascinating enough.

Hear all the thoughtful singing details

When playing vocal performances, with



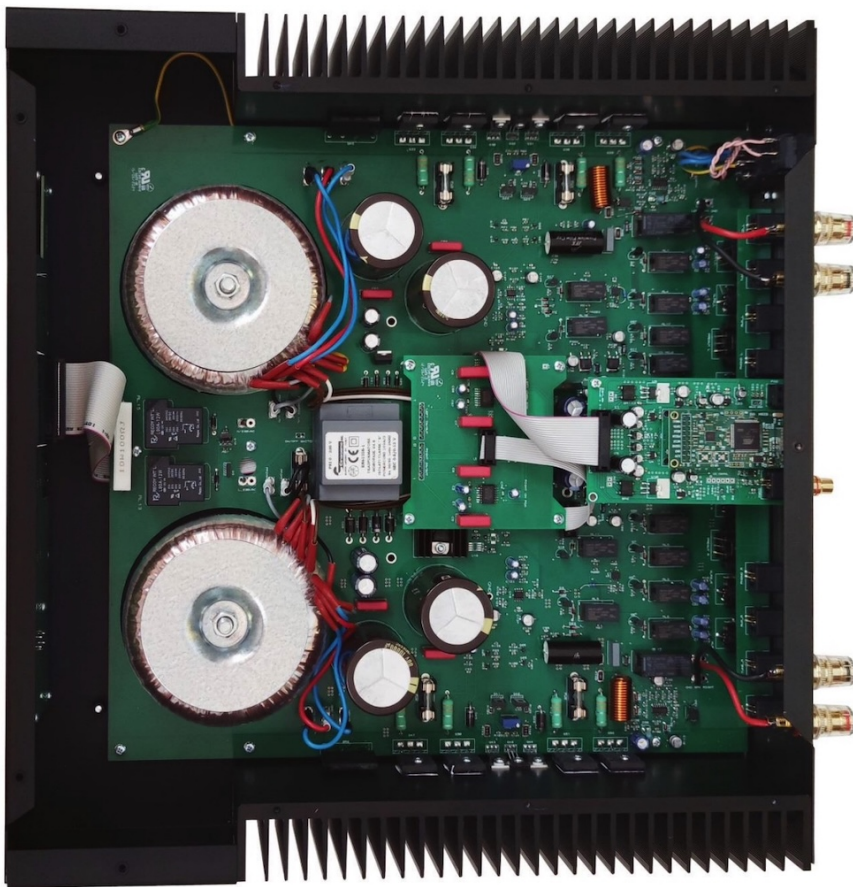
sufficient information, appropriate thickness and mellow tone, plus a transparent and bright picture, how can it not sound good? Take Diana Krall's album "The Girl in the Other Room" as an example. In the song "Stop This World", the rich and full notes of the piano, coupled with the rustling sound of the cymbals, bring out Diana Krall's thick voice, with the rhythm implied by the bass and guitar behind it. This song just clicked for me from the moment it started. What flavor? The taste of jazz!

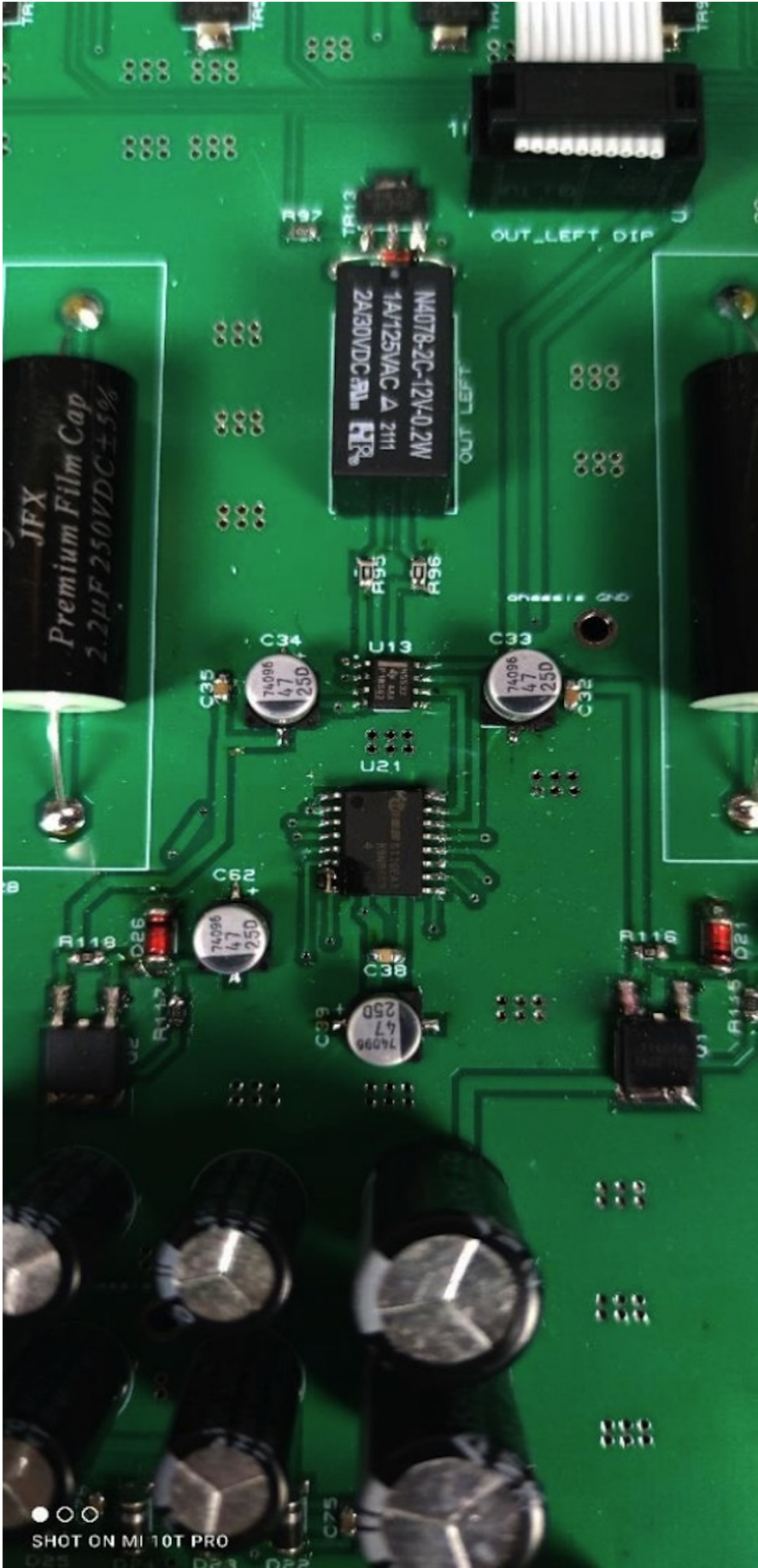
In the song of the same name "The Girl in the Other Room", Diana Krall sings with a breathy voice, and the piano has more melodies, and all these layers can be heard clearly. And I have to say: the colorful sound created by the drum set and the piano is truly wonderful! The bass in the song "Temptation" has clear grains, full but not bloated. The bass of Classic 202i is sufficient and deep, but not too full or heavy. Diana Krall has a rich and powerful alto voice and excellent singing skills, allowing her to use different singing styles and vocalizations to match the context and mood of the song. The artists' careful consideration in performing these various performances can be heard on the Classic 202i.

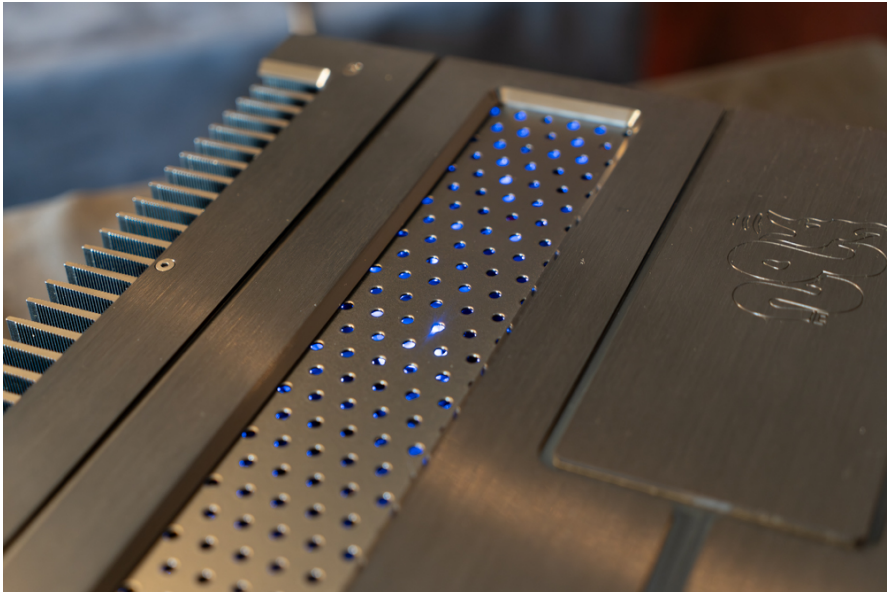
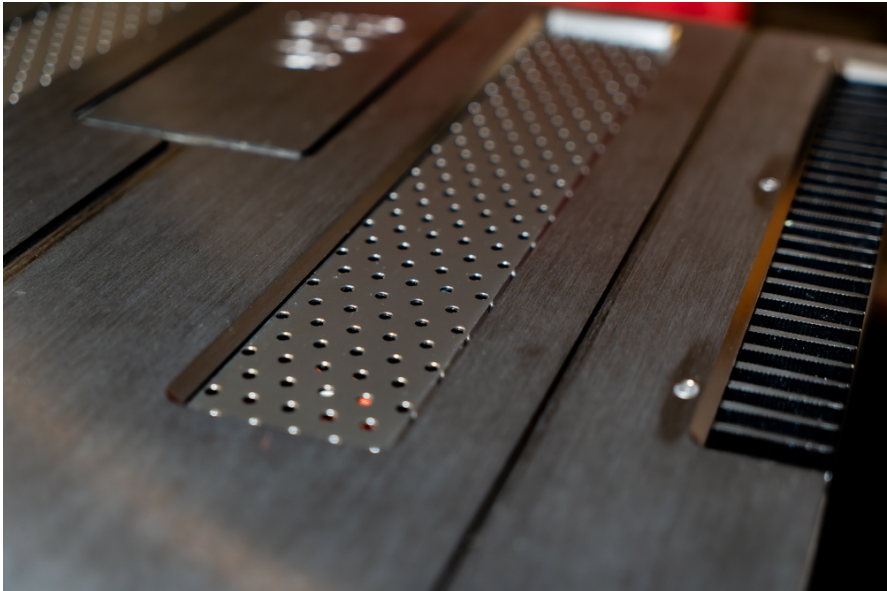
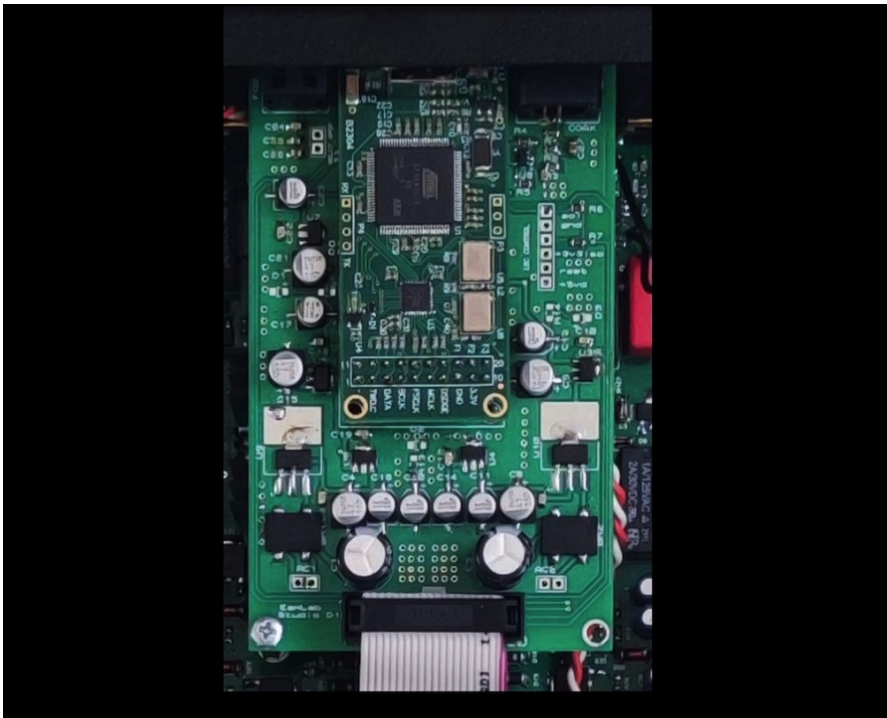
Devil Summon is

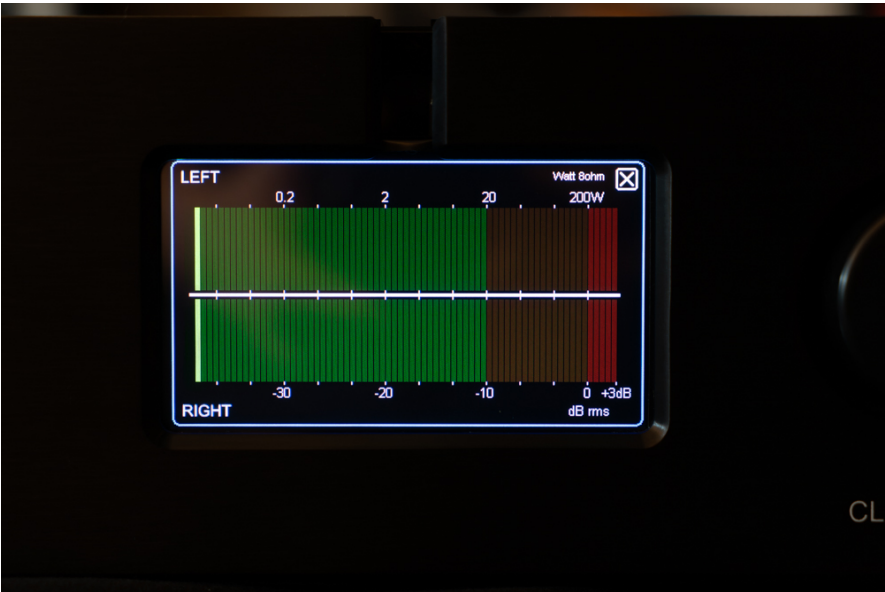
a brand that I almost forgot about. But after I got in touch with it, not only was it deeply impressed, but during the listening process, the voice of the Devil appeared in my heart from time to time (you know what I mean). There are many products with reasonable designs, there are also many amplifiers with good sound, there are also a large number of integrated amplifiers with complete functions, and you can also find integrated amplifiers with 200W power. When all these conditions are added together, the price can be controlled below 200,000, which reduces the choices by more than half. Considering that it is made in Europe rather than Asia, many of the remaining items on the list have to be crossed off.

If you are considering using an integrated amplifier with speakers to complete a simple system, this integrated amplifier should not only have sufficient thrust, but also have built-in DAC and phono circuits to facilitate you to match it with various signal sources. Then you should listen to the Eam Lab Classic 202i. I believe that the moment you listen to it, you will hear the call of the little devil.











Equipment Specifications

Eam Lab Classic 202i

Type: Integrated amplifier

Output power: 200W @ 8 ohms, 330W @ 4 ohms

Frequency response: 20Hz~90kHz (+/-0.2dB)

Total harmonic distortion:

Analog input: XLR x2, RCA x3, MM phono x1, XLR power input x1, RCA power input x1

Phono input (MM): 47Kohm / 41 db gain

Analog output: XLR pre-amplifier output x1, RCA pre-amplifier output x1

Input impedance: 47k ohms @ XLR, 22k ohms @ RCA

Slew rate: 35 V/uS

Channel separation: > 80dB

Signal-to-noise ratio (A-weighted): >104dB

Digital input: Optical x1, Coaxial x1, USB x1

DAC supported sampling rate: Up to PCM 784kHz, DSD256 (DoP)

Dimensions: 460 x 420 x 130 mm (WxDxH)

Weight: 20kg

Actual price: \$185,000

Import agent: Baroque

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The Classic 102i integrated amplifier is Eam Lab's entry-level integrated amplifier, but its workmanship and design are not simple at all. The chassis is assembled from solid aluminum alloy plates and has a solid structure. There are heat dissipation holes on the top cover and the giant snake logo of Eam Lab. A display is set on the front panel... [Full text](#) >