

CD PLAYER**PATHOS
ENDORPHIN**

WOJCIECH PACUŁA

PATHOS



When in the September issue of the British magazine [Hi-Fi News](#) (Vol. 51, Nr 9) the [Pathos Endorphin](#) player appeared on the cover there was nothing special in it. The uncommon shape of the device, its sculptural presence authorize such moves - see the cover of this issue of [HIGH Fidelity OnLine](#). The test appeared quite quickly after the player was available for sale (this happened in April), what is also understandable, as this is the first device of that kind in history of this renowned Italian company. My interest in this device was increased dramatically, when I saw who is testing the player - Ken Kessler. There is something like credibility of the writer. In Polish press, that - at least in comparison to the UK and US: the magazine [Hi-Fi News](#) had its 50-st anniversary last year - is still in diapers, the value of the name is not yet as important as the value of the magazine itself. One says rather that [Audio](#) has published something, or that something appeared at another publisher, than that a journalist has written something. This is a regularity in the development of the press, and everything is OK. In the UK, as in all developed countries, the name of the writer means much. Very much. It means also almost everything to me. However the first impulse for me is the esteem for the title (finally I do live in Poland...), but there are exceptions of the rule.

The most important printed magazines (English language) are for me the British [Hi-Fi Plus](#) and the US [Stereophile](#), but for long time also the mentioned [Hi-Fi News](#) was also part of the pack. I do still find some interesting articles, lately even more than before, but not much remained from the strength from 4-5 years ago. The only magnet, that pulls me to it, are three names: Martin Colloms, Andrew Harrison and Ken Kessler. The latter is an US citizen, that came to England especially for this magazine, recommended by the former editor in chief, John Atkinson, who on his turn, moved behind the Atlantic, to become editor in chief of the [Stereophile](#)... An incredible exchange, unthinkable today (it happened many years ago), in times that a journalist is a wolf to another journalist and



an editor in chief is a werewolf to another editor. But some time ago it was not like that. But let us return to the point: Ken Kessler tests the Pathos. The review was ravishing - as always witty, a bit sarcastic, as typical by Kessler, with a surprising conclusion - this was the best CD player Ken has listened to. An incredible thing, because the price of the device is not sky high, and Kessler does not change his preferences often. Until then, the leader of his list was, the Marantz CD-7, not in production for years, probably the best device of that kind in the history of that company. And here - bang! There is a change - verbatim and even more verbatim: in the next issue we learn that Kessler does not work for the Hi-Fi News anymore. Without a word of explanation from the editor in chief. Something bad is happening there, but for our story one thing is important: Endorphin made such a big impression on one of the top journalists of the audio world, that he did not fear to say it loud and clear. Anyway - we wish him all the best! For sure we will see his name in another title.



So please imagine my curiosity and excitement, when I learned, that this device is available in Poland: I jumped to grab it like - for example - a fifty year old woman jumps for a free seat in a tram. And the player looks superb: big, blacked acrylic plate, located on three spikes, with two big cylinders in front in the role of pillars and made from the same material "bridge" locking and stiffening the upper cover, making some kind of volcano, in the crater of which we place the CD and put a large aluminum cover on it (this is not a clamp!). The construction is very low, in what it resembles

the devices of **Ancient Audio**, especially the model Prime (test [HERE](#)). This is not the only resemblance, there are more. First of all, in the output stage we will find tubes, the same in both devices - large double triodes from Sovtek 6H30, for years reserved only for the US company **BAT**, working in class A without feedback. Also the aesthetics, regardless the differences has some common elements, like the metal buttons used to access drive functions. And only the way of displaying information is different - here we have a nice looking retractable display, unfortunately much less readable.

LISTENING EXPERIENCE

Not incidentally the looks and the make of the Pathos are in many resemblant to Ancient Audio players - this is the same phenomenal, plastic, truly analog, but in the best meaning sound. In an unusual way the Italian device reproduces the atmosphere of the recordings, really fantastic! The first sounds of the piece "I'm a Fool to Want You" from the sampler disc FIM Super Sound! First Impression Music (FIM XR24 066, Limited Edition XRCD24) and we are transported inside the recording: in one moment the noise of the master tape (this is an analog recording from the seventies) sets some kind of timbre - delicate, a bit warm, with depth and velvet just under the surface. The tonal balance looks superb, maybe with a little boost on the lower midrange, just like the Nagra MPA power amplifier did (the review can be found [HERE](#)), but with greater freedom, without a kind of fluid around the instruments, and even if, then with a minimum amount - just enough to have everything acquire a noble shine. Jacintha's voice from the piece "A Song for You" (from the mentioned sampler), recorded with tube warmth and stronger midrange bass joint was a tad more "tubed". This is no coloring, because earlier the piano, very clean, dynamic and resonant showed that from that side the Pathos is covered. It is more about the choice of the way of presentation: quite big drawing, with outstanding depth and "filling".

A few discs later another thesis could be formed about the Pathos as ... antithesis of the **Gryphon** Mikado - a player I tested for **Audio**. To not to leave any doubts - it is the same class, I still think, that the Danish engineers led by Fleming E. Rasmussen achieved something extraordinary, but for me, the path chosen by the Italian player (what is interesting both devices share the similar, "outer space" looks) is closer to my taste and preferences, and in consequence my idea of the "natural" sound. There is however no such detailed drawing and insight into the smallest details of the recording as with the Gryphon or for example the **dcs** P8i, but, frankly speaking, I did not miss anything in its sound. It was similar with the many times more expensive, splendid player **EMM Labs** CDS SE/DCC2 SE - the same full and coherent vision of the reproduced music, the same sensitivity to the emotional contents of the disc and a really sufficient amount of details. And in addition the Pathos does not have that slight withdrawal and warming of the treble - like in my AA Prime nothing in the sound resembles the stereotypical idea of the tube. The sound was quick, rhythmical and dynamic, because the explosive drums and percussion solo in the piece JK Drum Improvisation from the disc First Impression Music sounded incredibly fast and dynamic. Only the slightly stronger, and the bit more fleshy than usual junction of the bass and midrange brought the percussion set closer to the listener.



With the most commercial recordings, like from the disc Geometry of Love Project by Jarre (Warner Music 60693, CD) the sound was equally dense, dynamic and full as before. Achieved here is something, that exists endemically only in the top hi-end, meaning the sound was not sharpened, the commercial realization was not underscored or distorted - because the treble seemed to be quite warm - on the other hand the recording sounded in an incredibly open, full way, without the feeling that anything is missing, or that something was simplified. Even earlier the shades of the cymbal timbres could have been heard, maybe with a little sweetness, but here this was confirmed fully.



For a Compact Disc, Pathos presents a very good sound stage. As I mentioned, it is quite close with its first plane, but - and this is another characteristic of the hi-end - you do not pay attention to it. Nothing is missing in the projection of the instruments and there is no exaggeration in the presentation of details. Until now I have met something like this only in players from Ancient Audio and Emm Labs, maybe in some extent in **Audio Research** CD3. In

those devices, as in Endorphin, everything is like it should be, and is so natural, that we look at music and instrument timbres THROUGH it. The space only draws our attention when the sound engineer wanted that, like in the pieces "Quague" and "Active" from the disc Mutru of Piotr Żaczek (ARMS Records, ZP 140770 02, gold-CD; review [HERE](#)), where the sounds, that were prepared out of phase, surrounding, running over the listener, were given as something extra. Their touchability was lower than from Gryphon or Ancient Audio, but it was really nice. With classical music and with the use of classical instruments it can be heard, that the lower bass sometimes slips out of control, because the double bass in "Ser Tudo ou nada" from the beautiful disc of Katia Guerreiro (Tudo ou nada, Som Livre 274 1420, CD) with fado music, was somewhat stronger than usual and was sustained longer than I am used to. In this aspect the Gryphon and dCS set standards, and in my experience nobody was able to beat them.

Listening to the Pathos it can be heard, that in front of us still hangs a thin, muslin veil hangs, separating us from the performers, but it is so fragile, that only the most expensive and best digital players allow us a step closer. In general - this is a beautiful, musically perfect player, which only flaw worth mentioning (except for the ergonomic ones - the lack of the description of the buttons - how nice would backlit symbols look on acrylic - or problems with proper closure of the lid) is the bass, not as perfect as from the Mikado. Maybe the lack of variable output could be added to the list (integrated preamplifier), but "nobody is perfect". I did not enjoy myself like that for long time, as during this test.

THE MAKE

The CD player from [Pathos Acoustics](#) is a classic top-loader. Although at first glance it looks as if the disc is rotating freely on top like in Ancient Audio, actually it is manually closed by a aluminum lid, in which a standard plastic clamp is mounted, exactly the same as in drives with a drawer. The metal plate is not a clamp, like in gramophones, but just a stylish lid. As we mentioned in the beginning the device is very low. The enclosure consists of three main parts: a metal chassis below, a thick, blacked acrylic plate in the role of the top cover, and a cast aluminum element stiffening the construction and allowing us to put the disc directly on the drive spindle. In the role of the drive the Philips Pro-2. A part of the "kit" sold with the drive is a characteristic blue display, that was located adroitly in a retractable element. The size and contrast of the digits leaves much to be desired, and one should not count a such a comfortable readout as from [Simaudio](#) or [EMM Labs](#). The device is supported by three spikes, two in front and one in the back (this setup is promoted among others by the French company [YBA](#)). The front spikes are being screwed into massive aluminum cylinders, that serve as feet and some kind of pillars for the whole device. As the spikes can be unscrewed, it is recommended to level out the player. The drive functions are accessed by small, chromed buttons, that are not described. Also on the remote, a nice, made from blacked acrylic, we will not find any symbols or writing, and although everything is described in the user manual, the user will get lost for long time - I was unable to learn them until the end of the usage of the device. On the back we find very nice XLR and RCA sockets (Endorphin is a balanced device) for the analog section, and an evenly nice (usually this element is neglected) digital coaxial output socket (the TOSLINK output is to the side of that). The power cable is detachable.



The whole circuitry of the player is mounted on one board. The drive is located in the middle, the springs that Philips uses for decoupling the drive from the support were kept. However those are not screwed to the board, as usual, but to four massive, aluminum cylinders, mounted on the bottom plate. Below the drive there is also a metal plate, that is to protect from the located centrally under the Philips drive toroidal transformer. Also on the transformer a metal plate is screwed, but such placement of it rises some concerns - in the end on the toroidal transformer axis the maximum density of the electromagnetic field is observed. Anyway, from the transformer twelve separate secondary windings are led, and we have twelve separate power supplies - for every section another one: for the drive, converter, separate for each channel in the analog section, for the tubes, for the heating, and so on. In the audio circuit we find the Cirrus Logic CS4396 converter and the

Russian Sovtek 6H30 tubes. The Cirrus converter is a quite old 24/192 construction, multibit sigma-delta, from 1998, but with very good parameters, like dynamics on the level of 120dB, meaning a real resolution of 20bits. The resistors are mostly precise, metalized, and near the tubes we find small cubes of polypropylene capacitors (without a logo). The device comes packed in a tasteful wooden box, with etched, but convex, company logo and device name.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS (according to manufacturer):

D/A converter	24/192 Cirrus Logic, balanced
Analog stage balanced,	tube type - Sovtek 6H30 - class A, without feedback
Dynamics	120 dB
THD	+ N -100 dB
Analog output	RCA i XLR; digital output: coaxial and optical (TOSLINK)
Maximum output level	2V (RCA), fixed

Dimensions	480 x 400 x 100mm
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PATHOS ENDORPHIN

Price: 29 460 zł

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