





Right into the heart of the music

Audio Note UK's philosophy is very simple. 'What you get is what you pay for'. This can get exceptionally expensive at the higher levels. But the good thing is that the affordable entry-level models don't break the bank. So can you live happily with an AN J/D for a long time, even if you know that there is a lot of room for improvement?

Let's start with the simple exterior. Despite all the enthusiasm that developed in the course of this speaker test for the sound philosophy of the British company, there is no design prize for the 13 kg lightweight, but all in all the Audio Note UK AN J/D is rather clunky. The higher-priced AN-E looks much slimmer and more elegant thanks to its higher cabinet. However, it must be said that the workmanship of the plain black entry-level model is also of the very best quality. In the wood workshop working for the British company not far from Salzburg, which the author knows very well from private experience, work is carried out with a high level of expertise and great attention to detail. Veneers are not simply joined together, but carefully matched in pairs. And not just for the fantastic high-gloss cabinets for the higher speaker levels from Audio Note UK, but also for the simple entry-level model. Audio Note UK also offers metal stands that are aesthetically and sonically optimised. These are powder-coated in matt or high-gloss black and even give the speaker positioned on them a light and airy appearance. These original stands from the manufacturer's accessories shop can be filled with sand or lead pellets to improve stability and sound. So the first conclusion is clear: Audio Note UK is not building its entry-level model to win a beauty prize. The sole aim is to offer as much as possible of the sound culture of the more expensive models at a comparatively favourable pair price of 4865 euros - plus a very reasonable 822 euros for the highly recommended stands.

Audio Note UK's sound culture is based on ingredients that have been tried and tested over many years of developing and optimising drivers, crossovers and cabinets. For example, the slightly wide front. This is responsible for the cabinet looking slightly antiquated in contrast to 'modern' loudspeaker designs with their narrow and elegant shapes. The decisive factor, however, is that the 33 cm width is intended to ensure better dispersion. That alone counts for the British. The cabinet walls themselves are modelled on instrument making principles, specifically the violin case. This means that the cabinet is not maximally damped, but maximally undamped. As with a violin, the walls resonate. But it wouldn't be Audio Note UK if anything were left to chance. A cor-



rection element with coil, capacitor and power resistor (baffle step correction) is built into the crossover in series with the low-pass filter for the bass/-midrange driver. It is designed to largely eliminate unwanted influences from the cabinet on the radiation of the low frequencies. The tweeter is also kept in check by a correction element consisting of a coil, capacitor and resistor. For the cone of the bass-midrange driver, the British insist on using paper, which is not exactly 'modern' (hemp material is reserved for the higher levels). On the other hand, they claim that the 'old fashioned paper' harmonises best with the tweeter, which is also made of traditional silk. However, connoisseurs know that some extremely expensive high-sensitivity chassis from individual handcrafted production also work with very light and, with the right choice of material, stiff paper cones for good reasons.

High-tech cones made of beryllium, diamond or ceramic, which are often favoured for tweeters, may excel in some individual criteria such as speed or resolution. At the same time, how-

Low-damped housing made of 19 mm high-density wood-based panel. Lightweight construction with a weight of only 13 kg according to the violin case principle. Bass reflex tube at the rear, installation close to the wall recommended to support bass reproduction. 33 cm wide cabinet front for improved radiation to the front. Stand made of powder-coated steel tubes that can be filled with sand or lead pellets. With a responsive sensitivity of 93 dB, the recommended amplifier power is 7 to 150 watts

ever, they would impair the sound due to the specific character of their materials. According to the manufacturer, this makes homogeneous tuning with a suitable bass-midrange driver more difficult. For the British company, however, homogeneity is the be-all and end-all of loudspeaker construction. For most instruments, both chassis are in action. Their interaction is therefore the basis for the seamless reproduction of the entire spectrum, including the particularly critical crossover frequency range. The goal of optimised cooperation between the two drivers is not only served by the selection of the chassis materials paper and silk, but also by the exact matching of the specific partners in the specific speaker cabinet. The crossover for the silk dome tweeter and the bass-midrange driver is carefully fine-tuned for each pair of speakers and measured against the reference model.

After spending many eventful hours with the AN J/D, it is not difficult to confirm that the British have remained absolutely true to their basic principles with their entry-level model. The first surprising thing is the spatialisation. This begins with the fact that the speakers were positioned close to the corners of the listening room, as recommended. On the one hand, this created a large, three-dimensional space in the centre and, on the other, there was never

a single sound that got stuck on the drivers or the cabinet. The loudspeakers are completely invisible behind the large platform, which is always set up on a line slightly behind the front. It was a stroke of

Partnering equipment

Turntable: Kuzma Stabi Reference, Transrotor Connoisseur **Tone-arm:** Kuzma Stogi Reference, Graham Ceramic 2.2, tonArt Stöger TA1-1-2 9" **Cartridge:** Burmester MC B1, Benz Micro Benz LP, Audio Technica AT Art 9, DS Audio DS 003 **CD drive:** Theta Data Basic (Philips CDM9 Pro) **D/A converter:** Theta DSPro Generation III **HiRes formats:** MacBook Pro with Audirvana player software **Phono stage:** Jeff Rowland Cadence, DS Audio 003 **Preamplifier:** Jeff Rowland Synergy II **Power amplifier:** Jeff Rowland Model 12 **Speakers:** Trenner & Friedl Parker 95 (update beryllium tweeter 2017) **Cables:** Cardas Golden Reference, Cardas Neutral Reference, Cardas Clear (phono and line); Brodmann Acoustics, Audiodata LS CU4 (speakers); Hijiri Sound Matter 2M2R-Limited Power Cord, Einstein (mains), Einstein power strip **Accessories:** SteinMusic H2 room acoustic system, Eiconaudio PWR 3000 power manager/mains filter, Eiconaudio absorber feet, bFly-audio Power-Base, Dereneville Magic Mat, SID Analogue (sound improvement disc 'A'), SIC (sound improvement coupler), Clearlight Audio RDC cone, Audioplan Sicomin Antispikes SIAS, ART dampers



luck for this test that a historic Carmen under Herbert von Karajan with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra was placed on the solid platter of the Kuzma Stabi Reference (RCA Victor Read Seal, LDS 6164, US 1964, 3-LP box). Not only the 64-page booklet and the voices of Leontyne Price as Carmen, Mirella Freni as Michaela, Franco Corelli as Don José and Robert Merrill as Escamillo are magnificent.

The spatial representation of the recording from the 700 square metre Sofiensaal in Vienna is particularly impressive. It is unbelievable how much movement was captured, for example, in the short dialogue between Don José and Michaela on side 2 of the record. And it's unbelievable how precisely the AN J/D trace each of the characters' occasionally abrupt activities. An excited confusion and a loud scream from the right herald Carmen's entrance. A wide variety of expectations and moods spread across the entire stage, which are presented by the British loudspeakers with every nuance. The listener is irresistibly drawn into the drama of this love drama with its contradictory facets of tender affection and brazen lies. In the second act, in the tavern, Carmen can initially be heard far in the background with her first 'Tralalala', until she increasingly comes to the forefront of the stage. Karajan has his Carmen perform a brilliantly fast dance - and the AN J/D dance and dance and dance along. This RCA recording is brimming with spatiality and dynamics. The speakers made in Sussex reproduce both with great precision and drama, with speed, presence and intensity.

Because this was so convincing I tried RCA Victor once again, this time with the mono version of Finlandia (RCA Victor, LM 2666, US 1963, LP). In this stereo Dynagroove recording from the Manhattan Center in New York, the music also builds up powerfully in the centre with the AN J/D, completely independent and detached from the two loudspeakers in the corners of the room. In his Hymn to Freedom from 1899, Sibelius was guided by 'pure inspiration', as he himself said. The composer's far-sightedness struck a chord with Finland, which was part of Russia at the time and today has this horror before its

eyes again. Tracing such inspiration and its atmospheric expression is one of AN J/D's specialities. This continues with the second track on this LP, 'The Swan of Tuonela'. It is captivating how mystically the swan floats through the realm of the dead. The way the waltz rhythm is combined with an oppressive dreariness in the third piece, 'Valse triste', is gripping.

A change of genre to a solo female voice. As a reminiscence, not Another Time, Another Place, the album by the mature Jennifer Warnes from 2019, but her famous interpretations of Leonhard Cohen's songs on Famous Blue Raincoat (Ariola 208418, EU 1987, LP). This album reveals another of AN J/D's specialities from the very first grooves of the record: the reproduction of voices. The newsreader at the start of 'First We Take Manhattan' comes out of the speakers with a very intelligible, pronounced voice. Or rather: not from the speakers, but exactly from the centre between them. Even the short announcement at the end of this number, which often sounds very muffled, is easy to understand with the Audio Note UK speakers. 'Bird On A Wire' then shows how far the imaging can go to the left and right with the individual strokes of Lenny Castro's percussion.

In the chorus starting with 'Like a bird', it is the background vocals that again confirm the excellent reproduction of voices. The percussion emerges far left and far right, the snare drum is enthroned in the centre and the saxophone comes into play from the very back. On the title track "Famous Blue Raincoat", the singer stands in the listening area with great authority and an intense vibrato. In this number, AN J/D's sensitivity to moods, emotions and tonal nuances is once again striking. You can clearly feel that the then young singer did not yet have the maturity of the Jennifer Warnes of 2019.

By contrast the Audio Note UK speakers lack nothing in terms of maturity. The way they fill the room is highly remarkable. The voice and each instrument have their clearly localised place. That said they are not solitary and isolated in the room, but are to a certain extent extended by an aura that

connects them to their surroundings and integrates them into these surroundings. The space between the individual sound sources, whether voice or instrument, does not feel empty, but somehow “filled up”. Or perhaps it would be better to say ‘filled’. Simply filled with music.

This was inspired not only by the spatially turbulent Carmen, but also by Mozart's Double Concerto with Friedrich Gulda and Chick Corea (Teldec, 6.42 961, DMM, EU 1984, LP). In this recording, the AN J/D were first and foremost convincing with their moving, emotionally appealing reproduction. The spatial imaging was equally convincing, clearly distinguishing the two concert pianos from each other at all times, but at the same time bringing them into an intensive dialogue with each other. The “aura” of the two instruments filled the room, so that despite the localisation of the individual sound sources, a homogeneous whole was created, which is characteristic of these Audio Note UK speakers across all musical genres. In this respect the second movement with its fine, calm tones was impressive. Unlike the fast-paced first movement, in which one or two details can be “overplayed”, every slight pause or minimal increase in tempo in the second movement's Andante requires the full mutual attention of the two pianists, an attentive, concentrated interplay

on an equal level. The high tension can be easily sensed and surmised with the AN J/D. The same applies to the ‘Fantasy for two pianos’, a composition by Chick Corea, in which Friedrich Gulda is asked to repeatedly react to Corea's instructions with echoes. Its powerful chords in the left hand also emphasised another feature of the AN J/D that I have not mentioned enough here: the enormous substance that this simple two-way design can convey in the bass. Audio Note UK specifies the lower cut-off frequency as an impressive 25 Hz at -6 dB. Of course, the recommended positioning in the corners of the room plays a supporting role here. But one thing is beyond doubt: if there's anything missing at the frequency ends of these speakers it might be a little of the bite in the treble that tweeters made from the hardest materials like beryllium and diamond can offer. But it's hard to imagine anyone missing anything at the bottom end. What the AN J/D can do in the bass was repeatedly cause for a spontaneous: ‘Wow, is that possible?’ After all, the volume of a loudspeaker measuring 58.5 x 33 x 23.5 cm is not infinite. With your eyes closed, you could have easily heard a medium-sized floorstanding speaker in front of you.

And the treble? Thanks to the bi-wiring terminals, it is very easy to demonstrate how precisely all the details are harmonised. For example, the filigree



In Audio Note UK's entry-level speaker range, the cone of the bass-midrange driver is made of high-density paper. The bass-midrange driver is manufactured by the Norwegian specialist SEAS according to British specifications. As an entry-level model, the AN J/D is equipped with the standard copper voice coil, copper internal wiring and a ferrite magnet. The lower cut-off frequency is specified as 25 Hz at -6 dB and depends on the positioning



Silk dome tweeter made in the Far East with a cut-off frequency of 22 kHz at -3 dB. The two drivers and the crossover are carefully matched to each other for each pair of speakers and measured on the reference model



Audio Note UK relies exclusively on air-core coils for the three coils. The coil on the right in series with the large red capacitor and the resistor on the right is a correction element for the tweeter. The coil in the centre and two red capacitors on the left form the 12 dB low-pass filter for the bass/midrange driver. The coil on the left is used in parallel with the blue capacitor and a power resistor as a correction element for the radiation at the front of the cabinet (baffle step correction)



bridges for when the speaker is single-wiring operated. At Famous Blue Raincoat, these thin needles were briefly replaced with other commercially available bridges. The result was strikingly clear. The original connectors simply brought more life and presence to the treble reproduction. With the replacement, Jennifer Warnes' voice lacked radiance and lustre. Strikes on the cymbals and hi-hat had less emphasis.

With the return to the original bridges, the voice was given more space and more agility. The background vocals on 'her only pride' were simply more present. This little experiment gave a hint of what individual upgrades would bring to the next level. 'What you get is what you pay for'. Thankfully, the Austrian distributor made such a comparison possible. The benchmark was the AN-E/LX, which was admittedly a tough comparison with the AN J/D at more than twice the price. This could also be heard in the excellent historical discs. The larger cabinet of the E series naturally created more volume. Luciano Pavarotti's voice in 'Nessun Dorma' on the recording of Turandot under Zubin Mehta (Decca, SET 561-3, UK 1973, 3-LP) was even more expressive and intense.

The greater spatiality depicted the choir on the stage extremely far to the rear right. The chorus accompanying Escamillo on Nicolai Ghiaurov's Russian &

French Arias, a 'full frequency range recording' (London Records, OS 25911, UK 1965, LP), also sounded very lively and spacious. In comparison, the reproduction on the smaller AN J/D did not seem quite as wide and deep. But, and this is the decisive factor: The AN J/D represents Audio Note UK's characteristic sound philosophy just as authentically and credibly as its much more expensive sister model.

This answers the question of whether passionate music listeners will be happy with the AN J/D, knowing full well that there are almost infinite levels upwards at Audio Note UK - both in terms of sound and price. The answer is a resounding yes. Where Audio Note UK is written on the label, Audio Note UK is inside. The entry-level model is characterised precisely by the striking homogeneity, authentic voice reproduction and great spatiality that are the key features of the speakers made in Sussex. Anyone who decides in favour of the AN J/D based on sensible price considerations is not making a mistake. The thought that it could be even better at a higher AN level may crop up from time to time. But with Audio Note UK, the apple really doesn't fall far from the tree. The AN J/D are not just a slimmed-down entry-level model, but top speakers at a special price. They are worth every cent and hit the heart of the music with their seamless, homogeneous, highly emotional reproduction. □

Audio Note UK speakers are 'Made in Austria' at the factory in Frankenmarkt, Upper Austria. Copper wires are included as standard as a bridge for the bi-wiring terminal. The original stands in high-gloss black or matt black powder-coated are available as accessories. The picture in the centre right shows the 'mini spikes' that hold the speaker cabinet in place at the four corners of the top plate of the stand. As an alternative, permanent fixing with Blu Tack, which is included in the scope of delivery, is recommended. The metal spikes for connecting the stand to the floor are fixed with one nut at the top and one at the bottom

Loudspeakers Audio Note UK AN J/D

Principle: Two-way loudspeakers with a bass reflex tube at the rear **Equipment:** an 8 inch bass-midrange driver with paper cone, 1 inch silk dome tweeter **Frequency response:** 25 Hz - 23 kHz (-6 dB bass, -3 dB treble) **Crossover frequency:** 2200 kHz **Sensitivity:** 93 dB **Impedance:** 6 Ohm **Finish:** Black ash **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 33/58.5/23.5 cm **Weight:** 13 kg **Guarantee:** 5 years **Pair price:** 4865 Euro (stands: 822 Euro)

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