

Review: Constellation Audio Inspiration Integrated 1.0

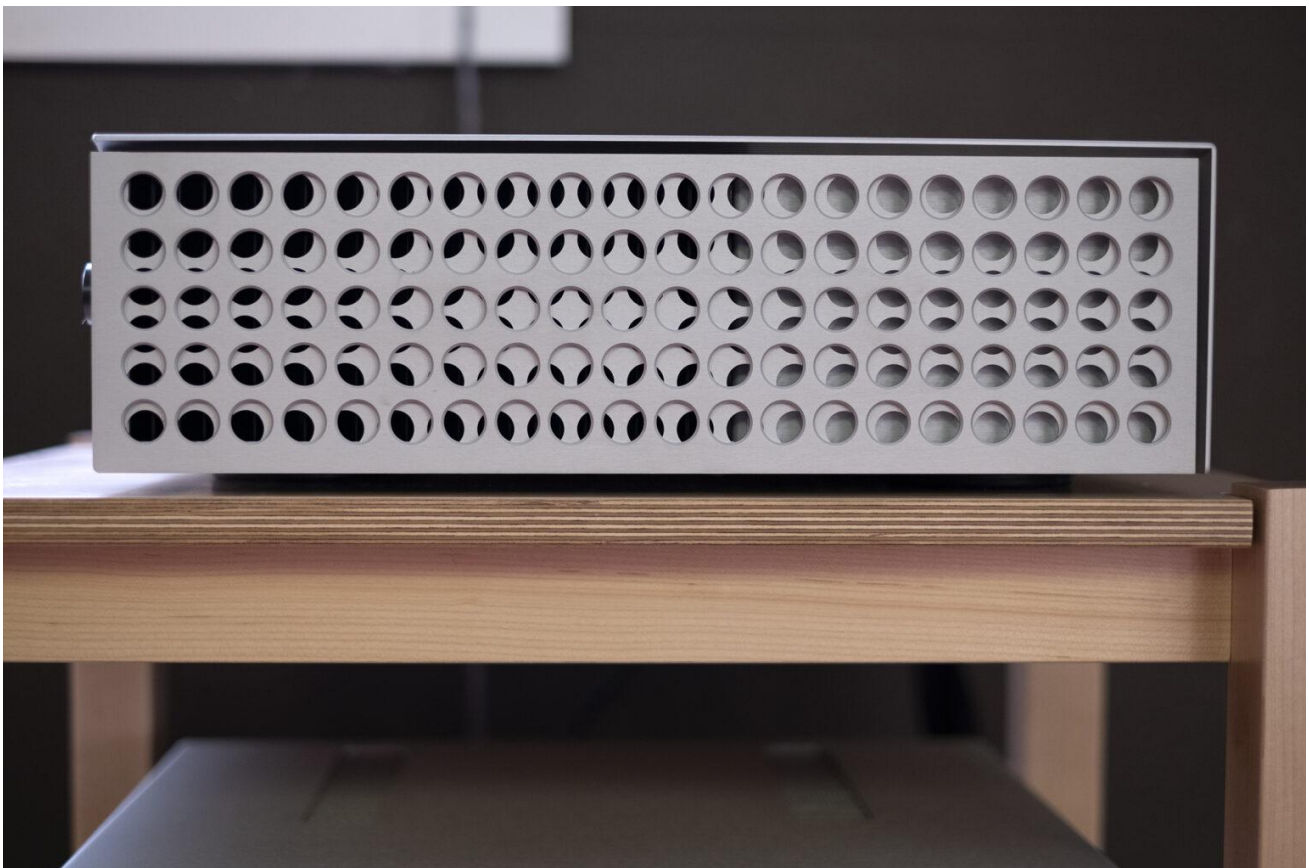
January 11, 2022 Michael Lavorgna



Have you ever had a day where you feel as if every move you make is in sync with movements greater than you? As if you're in step with something larger than the span of a step or day or lifetime?

Then there are days when every move seems to stub a toe, every step a misstep. As a kid nursing fresh stitches in my bottom lip, a playground accident, friends came over to cheer me up and we decided to throw a football around. The first pass hit that freshly stitched lip. Pain lit up my head like a lightning bolt.

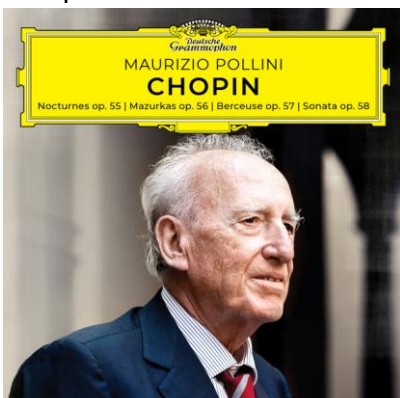
I've had hifi systems like that. No matter what I'd listen to, regardless of mood, time of day, or music, everything felt off. As if the speed of replay wasn't in sync with the music, with sounds bumping around like drunken sailors on shore leave wandering around unfamiliar alleys.



phases of the moon?

My best guess is in these cases our expectations get ahead of us. They get ahead of what's right there, so we lose sight of the moment, unable to enjoy what is because of what should be. In hifi, there have been times when the system in front of me appears to be responsible for my discomfort, for my inability to concentrate on the music at hand, so my mind wanders away from the moment, away from the music, to other concerns. Clearly, this is the wrong direction, a misstep, that typically leads to Frustration Row.

The Constellation Audio Inspiration Integrated 1.0 graced my system with a sense of universal time with music sounding perfectly in step, in control, and able to communicate the intricate mysteries of whatever I decided to run through it. This was the case no matter the speaker. I paired the Integrated 1.0 with the stunning Perlisten S7t Speakers ([review](#)), the punchy EgglestonWorks Oso ([review](#)), and the graceful DeVore Fidelity O/96 and in every case music sounded perfectly served, albeit with different forms of focus depending on the speaker in use.

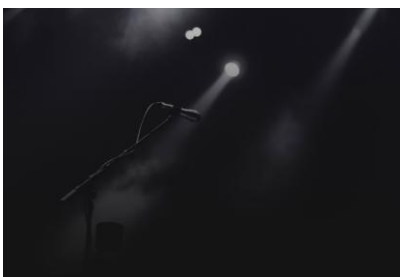


When a hifi sounds calm, cool, collected, and able to control and deliver the musical message regardless of its simplicity or complexity, we are able to relax and enjoy the ride. With the Constellation integrated amp in charge, there was a keen sense of control coupled with a vivid portrayal of music's rich tonal palette, perfectly sculpted time and scale, with every sound coming from a well defined place that lacked any sense of obfuscation.



the raised detail on the chassis mirrors the Constellation logo. Nice.

I listened to and loved the Inspiration Integrated 1.0 with each of the speakers in Barn for weeks on end. This process did not result in a winner, not even a favorite partner. Rather, I found myself enjoying the varied voices that came along with each speaker pairing, feeling as if the Constellation Integrated was bringing out the best in each speaker. As such, the listening experience was pure joy, pure energy, pure emotion unhindered by any sense of unfulfilled expectations. When this happens, I feel completely in tune with the musical moment, able to lose myself in the endless flow of creative energy to be found, and cherished, in recorded music.



When we talk about the technical specifics of the thing under review, we can suggest, either explicitly or implicitly, that the minutiae of makeup, of parts choice, of topology are directly responsible for what we hear. Is it Class A? A/B? *Well that doesn't sound like a switching amp!* I would suggest that the only people who really know these things — how design choices correlate to sound quality — are the people who design and built the things.

We, us listeners, can hardly understand the scale of significance embodied in every design choice, in every last detail, because we have not been privy to the process. We have not listened to choices and corresponding outcomes. So the best we can do is accept the fact that we are listening to an end result in toto. The worst we can do is pretend we know why an integrated amplifier like the Constellation Integrated 1.0 sounds the way it does based on parts, e.g. *must be the power supplies.*



The Inspiration Integrated 1.0, which is manufactured in the USA as is the case with all of Constellation's products, is part of the company's least expensive line, and combines the Inspiration Preamplifier 1.0 with half of an Inspiration Stereo Amplifier 1.0. That's two, two components in one. The Inspiration Integrated's 100 Watts per channel (into 8 Ohms, doubling down into 4), which employs a minimum-feedback, class A/B, *Balanced Bridged* amplifier circuit, had an easy time controlling the Perlisten S7t Speakers, EgglestonWorks Oso, and the DeVore Fidelity O/96. No sweat, no matter how complex the music and regardless of how loud my mood turned up its silky smooth volume control.



The majority of my listening time was spent using the totaldac d1-tube DAC/Streamer as source ([review](#)) with the [review](#) Auralic ALTAIR G1 Digital Audio Streamer also taking a turn or two. Moving between these digital sources showed how well the Constellation Integrated allows

the voice of the accompanying source to come through loud and clear. This suggests that the Constellation does not stamp any particular sound print on music that would otherwise blur the differences between these two fine digital sources.

My enjoyment was heightened by the Inspiration Integrated's beautiful case work and impeccable build quality. The sandblasted aluminum chassis appears to drink in light and does not bear the mark of every time I touched it. I don't know about you, but I find hifi components that show every touch with a smudge and every spec of dust in high contrast to be kinda annoying.



The protruding front panel houses a sexy monochrome LCD touch screen display (that font!) offering access to input selection and a number of useful features including input minimum and maximum output levels. There are five control buttons hidden away under that protruding panel that provide screen navigation, screen display options, menu navigation, and standby/on/off (for more details, see the Integrated 1.0 [manual](#)). The finishing touches include two nicely contoured control knobs, one for balance (left) one for volume and that eye catching variously aligned hole over hole pattern running up and down each side providing heat dissipation. Fun form meet function.

Even the Integrated 1.0's remote offered tactile pleasures beyond the norm with its partially embossed back, reassuring heft, and a satisfying *click* response from the buttons.





When the Constellation first arrived in Barn, I was listening to the Technics Stereo Integrated Amplifier SU-R1000 driving the Perlisten S7t speakers. If you read that [review](#), you'll see that I enjoyed the Technics and then some. Keeping in mind the Technics \$9499 price, when I swapped the Inspiration 1.0 in its place, it was immediately obvious that I was now hearing more of the recorded event. Bass became richer and fuller, the sound image grew in every dimension, and there was simply more nuance, detail, and delicacy in the music's presentation. Sometimes more is more.

I have written that I like 'full-function' integrated amps, amps that also include a DAC, streamer, and/or a phono stage. While I'm not going to walk back that position, I have to say that I also have an enormous sweet spot for an integrated amplifier that's just an integrated amplifier, especially when we get to the Constellation's price point. The reason being, I prefer to add my own sources to further flavor my hifi's sound, budget permitting. After all, every single piece of hifi kit flavors the sound, which makes system building a kind of art.



the Perlisten S7t speakers

Regular readers know of my affinity for the Riviera Labs Levante integrated amplifier ([review](#)). The Levante happens to cost \$16,500 which is also the price of the Constellation, and I was able to get the Levante review sample back in Barn for a few weeks so I could compare it here, for an apples to apples comparison if ever there was one. Regular readers also know that I'm not a fan of picking a

Best. To my mind, hifi is not a competitive sport with winners and losers which strikes me as a case of *transference*. If you want winners and losers, watch a football game. As a NY Giant fan, I am all too familiar with losing...



The Riviera Levante offers up a richer sound palette when it comes to timbre and dimensionality. Compared to the Constellation, I would also say the Levante sounds a bit wetter, as if music has blood coursing through its veins. Fleshy. This makes the Levante an exceptional partner, according to my preferences, for the DeVore O/96 where the Levante's 30 Watts of single-ended power, it can also run in Class A/B for more power, is more than enough juice to squeeze sweet sweet music from the easy to drive O/96. While I also loved the Levante with the Perslisten S7t and



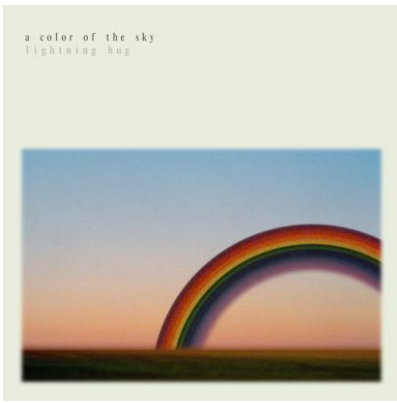
EgglestonWorks Oso, some may find that same 30 Watts running out of steam in musical situations looking for concert-level volume. In such instances you can certainly switch the Levante into Class A/B mode, but to my ears Class A is where the real magic happens with the Levante.

EgglestonWorks Osso



Using the AudioQuest NightOwl 'phones, I spent some time, not a lot mind you because headphones are not my bag, enjoying the silky smooth sound of this combo. I find rear-panel-mounted headphone jacks a bit of a drag, convenience wise, but from a sound quality perspective I can't imagine anyone finding any real fault with the Constellation's headphone amp.





If I were to list every piece of music I listened to through the Inspiration Integrated 1.0, that list would be as long as this review. That's because I spent about 6 weeks with the Constellation in my system and I listen to music all day most days. So I'm going to skip the play-by-play performance commentary based on single tracks because there's no limit, no restrictions on the kinds of music the Integrated 1.0 can handle. If there were, I wouldn't have enjoyed it. That being said, I've peppered this piece with music I listened to during the review period in the hopes that you find something new

and/or that you like too.

This was my first time spending Barn-time with a product from Constellation Audio. While I've had the pleasure of listening at shows, I did not expect to become so enamored with the Inspiration Integrated 1.0's way with reproduction. In its 2-month residency, I've come to crave its control and clarity which offer deep insight into any music you send its way.

Constellation Audio Inspiration Integrated 1.0

Price: \$16,500

Specifications

Inputs: 2 XLR stereo, 2 RCA stereo, USB (for control)

Outputs: 2 XLR stereo, 12-volt trigger

THD+N: <0.001%, 20 Hz – 20 kHz @ 2V out | <0.1%, 20 Hz – 20 kHz @ 10V out

Frequency response: 10 Hz to 100 kHz, +/- 0.5 dB

Signal-to-noise ratio: >-105 dB, A-weighted

Input impedance (balanced): 20K ohm

Input impedance (single-ended): 10K ohm

Output impedance: < 50 ohm

Volume control resolution: 0.5dB from 0dB to -90 dBFS

Weight: 25 lbs | 11.3 kg

Dimensions (W x H x D): 17 inches x 5.5 inches x 19 inches | 43.2cm x 14cm x 48.3cm

Company Website: [Constellation Audio](http://www.constellationaudio.com)