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Acoustic System

Resonance Technology

 made in France

Liveline Preamplifier
Specifications: ● Inputs: 3 balanced, 3 single-ended ● Outputs: 2 balanced ● Frequency Response: DC - 600kHz (0/-3 dB) ● THD: < 0.001% ● SN ratio: > 120dBA / >130dBA (A weighted) ● Channel Separation: >120dB ● Input Impedance: 30k Ω ● Output Impedance: 30 Ω ● Power Consumption: 60W ● Weight: 12 kg (preamp) / 13kg (power supply) ● Dimension (W/D/H): 505 \times 360 \times 120 mm (preamp) / 505 \times 330 \times 120 (power supply)

Grand Stereo Dual Mono Power Amplifier
Specifications: ● Inputs: 1 balanced, 1 single-ended ● Output Power: 650W @ 8 Ω / 1000W @ 4 Ω / 1800W @ 2 Ω ● Maximum Current: 120A ● Frequency Response: DC - 500kHz (0/ -3 dB) ● THD: < 0.0003% ● SN ratio: > 120dB / >130dB (A weighted) ● Input Impedance: 30 k Ω ● Damping Factor: 10000 (20 Hz - 20 kHz) ● Weight: 90 kg ● Dimension (W/D/H): 505 \times 630 \times 270 mm



The Best Interpretation in Audio Contradictions

ASI
(Acoustic System International)

Liveline
Preamplifier with Separate Power Supply Unit

&

Grand Stereo
Dual Mono Power Amplifiers

If you are looking for a set of pre and power amplifier with very high analytical power, yet mellow and captivating; with basses fast as wind, yet sturdy and powerful; with a wide sound field yet focused; with high dynamics yet refined; and with the additional condition that they are compatible with most cables. These sound contradicting, but they are the requirements of many audiophiles when coming to the choice of Hi End pre and power amplifiers. The Liveline Preamplifier with Separate Power Supply Unit and the Grand Stereo Dual Mono Power Amplifiers by ASI (Acoustic System International) may be an answer to these requirements.

All begin with friendships

ASI are not so familiar to some people, but if you are our reader, you should have read about our report on 'Acoustic System Resonators', they are products of the ASI. The Director and Designer of the Resonators is Franck Tchang. Based on the theory of hydromechanics, Franck makes use of the small Resonators to minimize disturbance of the environment to sound reproduction. The improvement from these tiny accessories is quite obvious. I have met Franck for a number of times, and he has come to my place two times to demonstrate the setting up of the Resonators. I find Franck very sensitive to sound, and since he plays the guitar, he is quite demanding on real sound. For this reason, he has designed a series of accessories such as the Resonators and the 'Sugar Cubes' for space treatments.

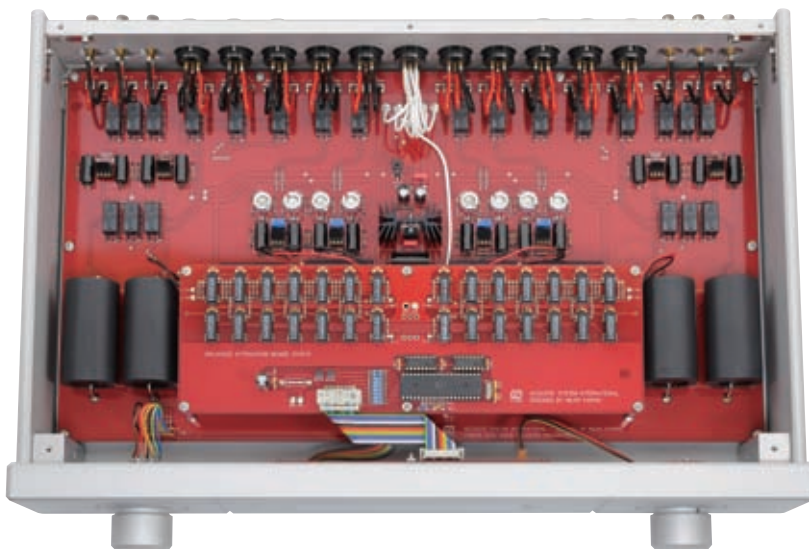
But why amplifiers? It is because Milan Karan of Karan Acoustics from the Serbian and Franck are good friends, for this reason they work together on the ASI amplifiers. Another reason is, Franck is looking for a set of reference amplifiers to monitor and improve the Resonators. So now we have this set of products.

Milan is an engineer; his father is Serbian and his mother German. Originally he worked on high tech medical equipment. Later, because of his enthusiasm in music, he turned to high end audio and established the Karan Acoustics. For this set of Liveline preamplifier and the Grand Stereo Power Amplifier, Franck is like an orchestra conductor, with his highly sensitive ears, requesting the musicians to play the music to his requirements. Milan is the orchestra leader, adjusting the tone of each section to the requirements of the director. So, Milan, with his knowledge in electronics design and manufacture, searched for the best components, designed the optimal circuits, and produced a set of amplifiers in accordance with Franck's demand. The process

was not easy, involving numerous listening, modifying and view exchanging; and finally we have the result of what we hear in our audition room.

Amplifier set that pursuits super high speed and dark silence

The ASI Liveline preamplifier has a separate power supply unit. Both chassis of the power supply and the amplifier are made of white thick aluminium boards. These aluminium boards are





from Germany and are machined and polished in Switzerland. That is why they have the same simplicity look as high end Swiss-made gears. Both use Ceraball from Finite Elemente to increase their resistance against vibration. There are three transformers in the power unit to supply power separately to the right and left channel, and the control circuits, further minimizing interference and increasing the quietness. The power switch is located at the back of the power unit. When it is turned on, the ASI logo on the front will glow in blue.

On the left of the faceplate of the preamplifier is the input selector buttons, on the right is the volume control; pressing it down will mute the output. In the middle there is a big screen, showing clearly the volume and the input selected. These can also be adjusted with the metallic remote control.

The Liveline has 6 pairs of input sockets, 3 balanced, 3 unbalanced; and 2 pairs of balanced outputs. In the middle at the back is the socket that connects the power unit. It comes with a Cardas cable for the connection. Franck has tried

different cables and finally he found Cardas had the most balanced performance with the Liveline. The ASI Liveline is a dual mono balanced design; the components are arranged in a very orderly manner, and that would reduce the interference between components to a great extent. In the middle inside the Liveline, there is a circuit board which is composed of relays and metal film non-magnetic resistors. This is the stepped volume control. Right and left channels are independent, with 64, 1dB steps. About 10 seconds every time after adjusting the volume, the volume digit will flash once, indicating the volume is memorized. The next time when the preamplifier is turned on, the volume will resume to this value. However, for safety's sake, if the memory volume exceeds 32, the volume will only jump to 32 when the preamplifier is turned off and on again.

All the capacitors are custom-made to Milan's specification and are made in Germany. Milan wants them to have very low inductance and that they can provide enough current in a very short time. There are also many Vishay-Dale resistors. Milan claims that these resistors are quite uncommon, and can't be readily available in the market. The design concept of the Liveline is super high speed and a super wide sound spectrum. According to the specifications of the Liveline, its frequency response is from DC to 600 kHz (+0/-3 dB), which is quite a stunning figure. No negative feedback is employed, it is direct-coupled, there is not any capacitor in the signal path; and the purpose is to increase its speed.

The ASI Grand Stereo Power amplifier is huge, and weighs to 90 kg. The chassis is made from high quality aluminium and machined to the same high grade as the Liveline. To minimize resonance, it is also supported by Finite Elemente Ceraball. The Grand Stereo is actually 2 amplifiers built into a single chassis, therefore it needs 2 power cords and there are 2 power switches. It has 1 balanced and 1 unbalanced input. Care must be taken when using the unbalanced input, you must first short-circuit the balanced input by plugging in a specially-made XLR plug (included), and this must be done with the amplifier turned off. There are 2 sets of speaker outputs at the back, which can provide convenience when bi-wiring the speakers. Opening the chassis reveals another aluminium box in which contains the power supply. Such arrangement is of course to shield the supply, reducing its interference to other sensitive components. Putting the supply in the middle also helps to balance the weight of the amplifier,



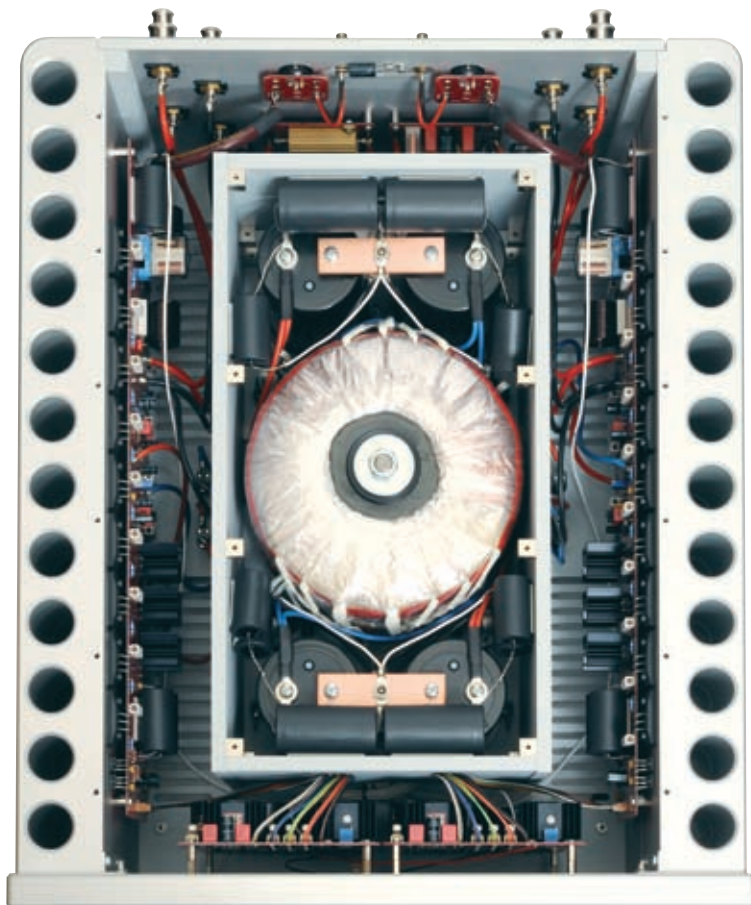
so that it sits steadily. This also contributes to a better sound effect. The power supply is comprised of 2 toroidal transformers, 1600 VA each. They are wound with a triple enameled copper wire, further increasing its stability. When turned on, I can't hear any noise or vibration even when I put my ear close to transformers. The total capacitance of the supply is 132,000 μF , providing uninterrupted power. Each output stage of the amplifier employs 9 pairs of Sanken 2SA125 power transistors, yielding an output of



650 W at 8Ω , with a maximum current of 120A and a damping factor of 10,000! Furthermore, one feature of the Grand Stereo is that it employs a continuous floating bias. When the input signal level increases, the Grand Stereo will also increase its bias at once, maintaining its Class A mode. The advantage is it will not generate too much heat even it is Class A; the disadvantage is the response speed of the components must be very high, otherwise there will be ringing effect. The Grand Stereo is the same as its preamplifier: that there is no negative feedback and employs direct coupling. Finally, if you think the 640W of the Grand Stereo cannot satisfy your luxurious listening area, you can consider the Mono Block version which will give you 2400W at 8Ω .

Working with cables also from ASI

The audition took place at the Audiotechnique audition room. Of course, we had the ASI Resonators and "Sugar Cubes" installed in the room. CD player was our reference system: Wadia 971/922/931, with Dynaudio Confidence C4 Signature Speakers. The power cord for Liveline was Siltech Ruby Hill II, and for the Grand Stereo was ASI Liveline power cables. From DAC to preamp and from preamp to power amp were also ASI Liveline interconnects. Speaker cables too were using ASI Liveline. I had tried other cables to replace the ASI Liveline cables, but found the latter were most matching; the sound was neutral, natural and very vivid. That proved Franck had





used ASI cables to tune the sound of the Liveline preamp and the Grand Stereo amplifier. I have mentioned at the beginning of this review, when using this set of amplifiers, you don't need to spend a lot of time to try different cables, ASI cables can do a great job and they do not cost you a fortune, very good value for money.

Meticulous and focused

I first chose 2 violin CD for testing. I'd like

to see how delicate and musical the Liveline and Grand Stereo Amplifiers were. The first one was "Heartbreak" from Dorian. The first piece was Chopin's Nocturne arranged by Milstein for violin. The sound when the bow touched the strings, or when the bow left the strings was very weak, you could hear it if you were sitting within the first 10 rows of the concert hall. Liveline and Grand Stereo showed them clearly without reservation. When the piece reached its half way, both



the sound and the emotion were very strong. If the amplifier only concentrated in high power, it could never reveal the emotion of the music. I had listened to this Chopin piece a hundred times, this time might not be the best, but must be one of the best.

The second CD, "Songs My Mother Taught Me" from "JMR One" was familiar to most audiophiles. "Meditation" was one of the most expressive pieces. In a good system, you would experience what was meant by "scent of resin". Driven by the Liveline and Grand Stereo, the C4 Signature gave a very focused violin sound box, especially in the lower register, and a strong scent of resin. The music was so affectionate, a passionate person might find his eyes wet. The outlook of the Liveline and Grand Stereo might be muscular, but when coming to passionate pieces, they were delicate and meticulous.

First Rate Life-like Guitar

Franck loved guitar music, and he played the guitar, too. I was eager to know how good the Liveline and Grand Stereo with Liveline cables were for guitar music. So I got a "Love Over Gold" by Dire Straits, US version (Warner 9 23728-2). At the beginning, the relatively soft prelude showed the very high S/N ratio of the amplifiers. The guitar sound, from pp to ff, flew out of the speakers with very strong vividness. When it came to half way of the song, I closed my eyes, and the spaciousness was so real that the walls in the audition room disappeared, revealing an extremely deep and wide effect. The sudden sound of keys falling on the ground flew out of the room, and it still took me by surprise. The drums were robust with a rock-steady position and very fine lines; the bass was swift as wind, deep and powerful; the cymbals were brilliant with very high fidelity. The dynamics reproduced by the Grand Stereo through C4 Signature from very soft to very strong was absolutely effortless.

Mellow and charming vocals

In the past few weeks when I listened many times to the super fine performance of the Liveline and Grand Stereo, I found this combination gave me many details that I was not aware of before. I purposely chose track 11 of the CD "Manger" to test its analytical power. It was because in this track there were a few bass beats accompanying the guitar at the beginning. I had visited some friends and listened to this track at their homes; and I could not hear these beats most of the time. In order to be able to reproduce these beats, the whole system must be very analytical, and the ASI combination had no problem in doing that. Besides this strong analytical power, it was also quite warm, especially when playing female vocals. When playing Jacintha's "Autumn Leaves" AQCD (AM6007AQ), the vocal had a warm and sweet sound similar to tube amplifiers, very intoxicating! On the other hand, the piano and other instrumentals had very clear images, without any feeling of blur. This was what I mentioned at the beginning, "high analytical power, yet mellow and captivating". To be able to reach such a state proved that Franck had a very accurate concept about sound.

On hearing the news of the outstanding performance of the ASI combination, my friend 《Big Hero》 joined me in an audition session. We were listening to a brand new CD set, "Tam's Collection Back to Black" by Alan Tam. We were so excited about the performance, 《Big Hero》 couldn't help writing a report to express how satisfied he was.

Lastly, Lincoln brought in a new glass CD, "Teddy goes to the Movies". This was absolutely a super disc! Kick drums were solid as rock, fast as lightning; every guitar string plucked was clearly 'seen', extremely real! The most unforgettable thing was Teddy's singing; he was just standing there, a few meters right in front of me, in a 1:1 scale! Lively but not exactly noisy band sound, really unforgettable!



Epilogue

I always say, "Sound goes with Man". This ASI amplifier set has such super performance, giving the best interpretation in audio contradictions, is all because of Franck's most sensitive feeling about sound. Although not designed by him, with the help of his good friend Milan, Liveline and Grand Stereo are the dream come true for Franck's pursuit of ideal sound. Don't miss it!

Long-term Regrets

I didn't know if it was good luck or bad, not long ago when I went to Audiotechnique's audition room, I met Patrick and the staff of ASI listening to a set of newly designed ASI amplifiers, the Liveline Preamp and the Grand Stereo dual mono Power Amplifier. I sat in one corner listening with them. Had I not sat there, I couldn't have been so surprised. Suddenly I heard much more sounds; suddenly the instruments were much more detailed (much more!); suddenly there was a distinctive sound from the triangle; and suddenly I realized the analytical power of Wadia had not been fully exerted. Originally there were so many details recorded in the disc, but couldn't be heard because of other gears. Now this amplifier set not only let me hear all the details, it also made me feel all gears from the source to the speaker had move a few steps forward. Yes, not just one step, but a few steps! That included analytical power, depth and width of the sound stage; the back wall disappeared, the images of the instruments, the accuracy of the mouth size, the details of the bows and strings, the texture of the double bass, the metallic echoes of the brasses, especially the vibration of the drums and reverbs, every detail was distinctively radiated from the speakers. The more I listened, the more I sweated and the more I wanted to listen. I listened to some familiar CDs and each disc gave me something new as if I had never listened to them before. I was like a child with a new toy and just wanted to play it again and again.

Having just received Alan Tam's new CD box set, "Tam's Collection Back to Black", I immediately played a couple of them and very soon I found

my eyes wet. Scenes of my childhood emerged before my eyes: sometimes it was in the corridor of the public housing estate, listening to the neighbours 'bombing' their gears; sometimes it was me in a hot summer beach, wearing sun glasses, 'bombing' my giant cassette tape recorder supplied from car batteries. These scenes had long been forgotten, and they all came back to the audition room.

Why can these original sounds bring us such big impact? Because these old songs bring back old feelings and memories. We all have childhood, and there always are unforgettable memories and regrets. Audiophiles are common people, and there are things we were unable to accomplish in those days. And that is why reissue LPs can still be sold out very quickly. When we were young with limited financial support, we always stared at our beloved toys, LPs, posters, cassette tapes, etc. All we did was just window shopping. Now we have earned some money by sacrificing our time, strength and health, we would like to compensate for our lost dreams. When we are holding a newly bought vinyl, extracting the 4-fold poster inside, the satisfaction is beyond words; and the feeling can hardly be realized by post-90 new generation.

The impact from this listening experience comes not only from the new amplifier, but also from the original sounds reproduced by them. I have always listened to expensive Hi End gears, but none of them could give me such a great impact as the ASI. Borrowing Patrick's words, "There is no best gear; there is always a better one!"



Unexpected Great Surprise

Super Good Sound from

ASI Pre and Power Amplifiers



Since I have experienced the effects of various accessories from 'Acoustic System Resonators', and have attended the demonstrations by Franck in different locations (including our audition room and my place) to show the outstanding effect of the Resonators, I can only admire that Franck has very sensitive hearing, that his unflinching research in the physical characteristics of metal and wood, and making use of them to improve room acoustics. But when I heard that his ASI had begun to manufacture audio gears, and had implemented their collaboration with the Serbian Hi End manufacturer, Karan Acoustics to launch Hi End amplifiers, I was quite shocked, and with a question mark ---- the design of audio accessories and amplifiers were of completely different scopes! But when I had seen the actual amplifier last year in the Munich Hi End Show, I was completely convinced. What I saw was a set of pre and power amplifier in silver white colour. From its appearance to its build, to the materials used, to the operation and to sound performance, I couldn't pick anything to criticize. Of course, you could say the brand name was not famous enough, or the price was very high!

If you have read Patrick's review, or what 《Big Hero》 felt about it, you'd understand how much they were impressed. Actually, all our fellow reviewer, after listening to them, admitted they are one of the best transistor amplifier combinations. My comment is: high speed, fast transient, very delicate and transparent sound. High frequency extension is excellent and penetrating, and the amount is just right. The mids are clear and bright, slightly warm, very good texture, giving a rational and pleasing sound. Basses are under very good control; they are abundantly rich, admirably deep, come and go freely, and with refined layers. Our reference speakers C4 Signature have outstanding performance when driven by the ASI amplifiers. When playing a melancholy melody, it is very affecting; vocal are 3-dimensional; it is very powerful even in the most demanding passages. If there'd be a Hall of Fame for Hi End equipment, the Liveline and Grand Stereo were sure to be listed in the foremost position. 音