

REVIEW

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Dan
D'Agostino

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Integrated amplifier

Dan D'Agostino
PROGRESSION INTEGRATED

Manufacturer:

[DAN D'AGOSTINO MASTER AUDIO SYSTEMS](http://www.dandagostino.com)

Price (when reviewed): **97 420 PLN**

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[DAN D'AGOSTINO MASTER AUDIO SYSTEMS is a company founded in 2011 based on an initiative of one of the most experienced designers of the audio world, DANA D'AGOSTINO. In 1979, together with his wife Ronda, he founded KRELL INDUSTRIES, a company known primarily for class A amplifiers. Today, DDMAS is one of the most important high-end manufacturers.]

ALREADY THE FIRST KRELL INDUSTRIES PRODUCT, the KSA-100, has established the position of this new venture. It was a class A amplifier, delivering 100 W @ 8 Ω (KSA = Krell Stereo Amplifier). It rarely happens, but Dan D'Agostino managed this play twice - for the second time with DAN D'Agostino MASTER AUDIO SYSTEMS. This time, **this initial and the most important device were the MOMENTUM MONO** monoblocks. They were powerful, weighing 40 kg (one channel) devices with an output of 300 W @ 8 Ω, 600 W @ 4 Ω and as much as 1200 W @ 2 Ω, characterized by a wide frequency range and low distortion.

In an interview for the monograph titled *Illustrated History of High-End Audio. Volume 2: Electronics* he said that he **achieved everything he expected and done it with one small device**. And next:



“ When the customers saw the Momentum amplifier for the first time at the show, standing on its small stand on the floor, they asked, “Is this a mockup? It's not a real amplifier after all, is it? ” - because the amplifier was so small. Everyone was expecting a giant.

Interestingly, it was not the technical performance of the Momentum Mono that aroused interest, but the dimensions. And rightly so - the amplifier looked as if it was made of a single block of aluminum with invisibly attached copper heat sinks, and the whole was extremely compact. An element the „stole the show” was the central power meter located in a large, round window illuminated in green. **Workmanship and**

finish were at the highest level. All this made the Dan D'Agostino brand very quickly become a brand recognizable all over the world.

| PROGRESSION INTEGRATED

TODAY, IN THE MOMENTUM SERIES, THERE IS a whole group of devices. Moreover, with time it was joined by the even more expensive RELENTLESS series and the cheaper - which does not mean cheap - PROGRESSION series. The integrated amplifier tested by us is its **latest addition.**

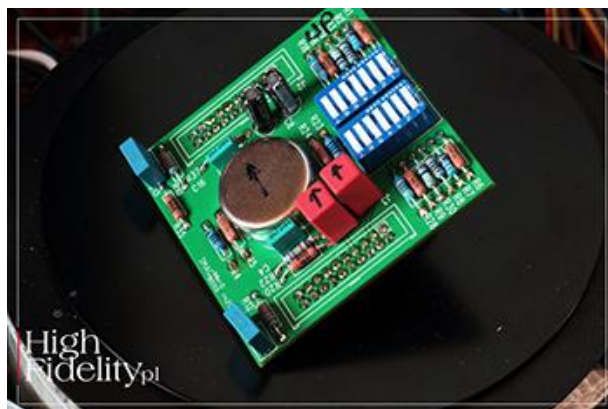
THE LOOK Progression Integrated retains the look of the higher series, because its chassis is made of aluminum plates and blocks, but **instead of copper heat sinks, there are aluminum ones.** In the front there is a large volume knob of a slightly steampunk design. It resembles the knobs used by Musical Fidelity in its amplifiers, starting with the 1998 A3 integrated amplifier. On the left side there are input selection buttons with accompanying LEDs of various colors, and on the right side there are small green VU-meter indicators with an arm reminiscent of a those used in high-class watches. The indicators are also used when adjusting the balance between the channels.

The device offers high output, because at 8 Ω we get 200 W, and at 4 Ω as much as 400, which informs us about a high-class power supply. The manufacturer indicates that it was possible, among others, thanks to the use of a power transformer with a "special" winding technique, used for the first time in the Momentum M400 amplifiers. Attention is also paid to the very wide frequency response, the same as in the Ayon Audio Spheris III preamplifier I use: from 0.1 Hz to 1 MHz with a decrease of 3 dB and from 20 Hz to 80 kHz with a tolerance of ± 0.5 dB. **This is an exceptionally good achievement.**

FUNCTIONALITY The amplifier is already richly equipped and **with some financial effort it can become an all-in-one** system. The discrete preamplifier's section is balanced, therefore the device in its basic version offers three balanced XLR inputs and one input of this type, which allows users to integrate the amplifier with a home theater system. There are also two RCA inputs, unbalanced, and a headphone output,

unfortunately located on the back.

For Progression Integrated **one can buy two additional "cards" extending its functionality.** The first is a PHONO PREAMPLIFIER. It will allow users to connect a turntable with a phono cartridge directly to the amplifier. The card offers a variety of cartridge loadings, from 50 Ω to 47 k Ω , in eight steps, and has a gain of 60 dB. To change the load, however, you need to unscrew the top cover and change of the DIP switches. This card costs PLN 10,820.



The second card adds DIGITAL INPUTS to the functionality of the device and one of an AUDIO FILE PLAYER. It is a card that is plugged in from the outside (the phono stage is plugged in), which offers three digital inputs for the audio signal - RCA, Toslink and USB - and one digital input for audio files - LAN (RJ45). RCA and Toslink inputs accept PCM signal up to 24/192, and the **USB adds support for DSD signal from DSD64 to DSD256 (11.4 MHz).**



The digital inputs for the audio signal are part of a D/A converter. On the other hand, the **LAN port is an input of a files transport,** which together with

the aforementioned "DAC" forms a complete audio file player. It allows you to play PCM files up to 24/192 and DSD files up to DSD256 from NAS disks. In addition, the device offers playback from streaming services such as Tidal, Qobuz and Spotify; in the case of Tidal with MQA signal decoding. The digital module costs PLN 27 060.

CONTROL Progression Integrated is controlled by a specially designed, aluminum remote control that connects to the device via Bluetooth - hence the appropriate antenna on the rear panel of the amplifier; the second, similar, is for Wi-Fi communication with the router.

However, the amplifier can also be operated **using a proprietary application**, very similar to the MControl application that controls the file player in the MYTEK BROOKLYN BRIDGE. This is where you can access streaming services and NAS drives, as well as adjust the volume. Soon the device will receive ROON certification, then we will be able to control it using this application, which will be much more pleasant.

The amplifier is available in silver or black.

| SOUND

HOW WE LISTENED The amplifier was placed on the top shelf of the Finite Elemente Master Reference Pagode Edition rack and was powered by the Siltech Triple Crown cable. I connected the Harbeth M40.1 speakers to it with a cable of the same brand. As the Ayon Audio CD-35 HF Edition SACD player was placed in the front, I couldn't use the rigid Siltech interconnects - instead I used Acoustic Revive Absolute XLR cables. The amplifier stood on its own feet.

Recordings used for the test | a selection

→ FILES

JOE LOVANO, *Garden of Expression*, ECM Records/Tidal Master, MQA 24/96 (2021)

JONI MITCHELL, *Joni Mitchell Archives – Vol. 1: The Early Years (1963-1967)*, Rhino Records/Tidal Master, MQA 24/44,1 (2020)

MILES DAVIS, *Kind of Blue*, Columbia/Legacy/Sony Music Entertainment, local FLAC 24/192 (1959/2013)

TAYLOR SWIFT, *Evermore*, Republic Records/Tidal Master, MQA 24/88,2, (2021)

CHARLIE HADEN & ANTONIO FORCIONE, *Heartplay*, Naim Label, local FLAC 24/96 (2006)

→ SUPER AUDIO CD/COMPACT DISC

ALAN PARSONS PROJECT, *I Robot*, Arista/Sony Music Japan SICIP 30168, 2 x BSCD2 CD (1977/2013)

COUNT BASIE, *Count Basie Live at the Sands (before Frank)*, Warner Bros. Records/Mobile Fidelity MOFI UDSACD 2113, „Special Limited Edition No. 00197” SACD/CD (1998/2013)

ISAO SUZUKI QUARTET, *Blow Up*, Three Blind Mice/Impex Records IMP8307, Gold HDCD (1973/2004)

RIVAL SONS, *Great Western Valkyrie*, Erache Records/Hydrant Music QIHC-10059, CD (2014)

WES MONTGOMERY & WYNTON KELLY TRIO, *Smokin' At The Half Note*, Verve/Analogue Productions CVRJ 8633 SA, SACD/CD (1965/2013)

→ LONG PLAY

BENNY CARTER, *Jazz Giant*, Contemporary Records/Analogue Productions AJAZ 7555, „45 RPM Limited Edition | #0404”, 2 x 180 g LP (1957/2009)

BILL EVANS, *Selections from Live at Art D'Lugoff's Top Of The Gate*, Resonance Records HLT-8012, „Limited Edition #270, Blue Vax 10” LP (2012)

DEPECHE MODE, *Speak & Spell*, Mute Records/Intercord Ton INT 146.801, DMM LP (1981)

SKALPEL, *Transit Extended*, PlugAudio/No Paper Records R128LP, 2 x 180 g RED WAX LP (2014/2020)



I divided the LISTENING SESSIONS OF THE AMERICAN AMPLIFIER **into three parts**. I started out atypically, because with the files player. This is because these are, in my opinion, the least precise and the least reliable source of audio signal, especially when we are talking about files downloaded from streaming services. For this reason it is **the hardest to achieve with them something like a realistic presentation**.

THE SOUND I GOT THIS WAY **puzzled me with its "continuity"**. This is a thing that I am notoriously lacking in home-played files, and what I know from mastering studios, when they are played in a native form from DAW workstations. Here I got it easily, it was a realistically rendered sound, really nice one.



I am not saying that this is the eighth wonder of the world, it is not, and free-standing, expensive file players can add more drama to it, mainly due to higher resolution and better differentiation.

I am saying that regardless of whether I listened to JOHNNIE MITCHELL from demo recordings on Tidal, highly noisy, but incredibly credible, or TAYLOR SWIFT from the album *Evermore* (MQA 24 / 88.2), a modern production, though stylized vintage, or finally files played from NAS, both ANTONIO FORCIONE and CHARLI HADEN (FLAC 24/96), as well as the monophonic version of the *Kind of Blue* by MILES DAVIS (WAV 24/192), **it was a really good, nice sound each time**.

The amplifier prefers a strong mid-bass, so **the presentation has a large volume and momentum**. It is also a silky sound, with smooth edges - for better and for worse - though not as warm as I remember it from devices belonging to the Momentum series. Here the treble was stronger, clearer, although, as I say, silky. The space was set up well, although the file player section of this device is not special in this respect - it is just fine and **the timbre is what counts**.



WITH HIGH-CLASS SIGNAL SOURCES reproduced through the analog inputs of the amplifier, the sound is slightly different. I am not saying that it is completely different, but still different enough so that it must be treated as the basic source. This is because the amplifier with CDs and SACDs played from the Ayon Audio player **sounded extremely dynamic** - something that was averaged and unified with the files.

It turned out especially well on the *Blow Up* by ISAO SUZUKI QUARTET disc, played from the Impex remaster released on a gold CD. It was an **open, dense, incredibly dynamic performance**. And again - dynamics is something that is also great in the Momentum series. There, however, it is covered with warmth and density, and here it is an equivalent component of the sound.

Yeah - the timbre ... All Dan D'Agostino amplifiers seem to have a common feature of this **silky treatment of sound attack** - this is also the case here. Regardless of the music played, format and class of recording, the tested device built a large presentation with highly saturated colors. However, when saturating it, it remains vigilant, does not pour "syrup" on everything, and leaves a considerable margin for surprises, as with the COUNT BASIE's orchestra album, playing a concert before Frank Sinatra's performance at The Sands club in Las Vegas, which was presented with a panache and very a good "opening".

I noticed that **the more information there is in the signal, the more this sound opens up** and the stronger the upper midrange sounds. It is always very cultural, nice sound, but with SACDs, either

recorded in DSD, or ripped in DSD from analog master tapes, it was a stronger, more dynamic sound. It does not mean that the CDs sounded bad, God forbid! - I just praised the sound of the album from the Three Blind Mice label. But when I listened to files first, then CDs and finally SACD, I had just such an impression.

Therefore, **it is worth buying the best album releases available for this amplifier**, because the increase in sound quality is doubled here - once everything sounds better, and two - the sound is better differentiated. Which tells us about the high resolution of this device. The sound is not as selective as with SET amplifiers, nor as low and dense as with the reference amplifier, but it is somewhere between these two.

In addition, **the Progressive Integrated is very versatile**, because whether it was Basie's big band, or intimate playing of the WES MONTGOMERY with the WYNTON KELLY trio in the Half Note club, or finally a rock classic, *I Robot* by THE ALAN PARSONS PROJECT, each time the sound had an internal energy and drive and it told a story.

What makes this presentation different from what the high quality SET tube amplifiers propose boils down mainly to imaging and micro-details, such as the texture of the sound. The Dan D'Agostino amplifier **shows the events in their entirety**. It is a detailed sound, but these details are not separate entities, that is, they do not differentiate the instruments in an equally unambiguous way. It is similar with space. Momentum, breath, fullness - these are terms that fit Progressive Integrated perfectly, but are not the same as "insight" and holography, especially within a given instrument, its body.

| LONG PLAY

I HAVE TO SAY THOUGH, THAT I LIKED BEST how the amplifier sounded with LPs. The internal phono preamplifier is not as resolving and as vivid as the expensive external preamplifiers, let's be honest. On the other hand, it is so good and cool, and it is **so well matched with the sound of the amplifier itself** that together they offer a homogeneous, dense sound.

We get something at between what I heard from the files, i.e. warmth, silkiness, density, and the sound of the CD and SACD, i.e. dynamics, openness and tangibility. Oh... how beautifully the BENNY CARTER's *Jazz Giant* sounded! It was a **moving performance, delivered with a full scale of both timbre and dynamics**. Already with John Mitchell I heard at the beginning that the amplifier perfectly "extinguishes" unpleasant sibilants and noises. I thought it was about it warming the treble up - but it is not. With LPs I heard something similar, i.e. crackles and noises were immediately suppressed and an open, strong sound remained.

So at the end of the listening session I played the DEPECHE MODE debut album from 1981 and the reissue on red vinyl of the *Transit* album by the Skalpel duo. The DM disc was pressed in Germany by Intercord, then a representative of the Mute label in that country, using the DMM technique. It sounded a bit bright, clearly, but without underlined high tones - in a word, it sounded as it should. The same was true for the Skalpel album, which added a very low bass and impact to that. Because the tested amplifier, despite its own character, which sets us up with dense timbres, it can also sound exceptionally accurately.

| SUMMARY

The PROGRESSIVE INTEGRATED IS AN EXTREMELY INTERESTING EXAMPLE of the convergence of various elements of the sound, in terms of timbre, dynamics, detail and focus, of different sound sources. It is **an amplifier that plays everything in a strong way, with momentum, with saturated timbres** and with high dynamics. Depending on the source, it opens the sound or warms it up. With LPs I had both. That's why I spent the most time with them. But not because one has to choose this music carrier, because both CDs and files sounded equally well, and SACDs even better. In your case, this hierarchy may be different. It is important that there is a lot to choose from, and **each of these sources presents a high level of musicality** and the need to buy new albums increases significantly for this amp's users. And that's probably what music is all about - listening to as much of it as possible. The Progressive Integrated as a "key" to it? - Why not, it's a great choice.

| DESIGN

The PROGRESSION INTEGRATED IS AN INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER made by the American company Dan D'Agostino Master Audio Systems. This is their latest product and the next member of the Progression series. We are talking about a **solid-state, transistor** amplifier working in class AB (power amplifiers) with a preamplifier working in class A.

The device features an extremely solid aluminum chassis, the core of which is made up of custom-milled heat sinks. Copper heat sinks in higher series were produced in Taiwan, but this time it may not be the case, because **Western companies are returning to their home countries with more and more production.**

FRONT AND REAR There is a large knob with a gold-plated insert on the front panel - this knob controls the volume. The attenuator is built using **surface mounted (SMD) resistors and mechanical relays.** On the left side of the knob there are buttons for selecting the active source - the buttons are illuminated with LEDs.

The operation of the device is easy, except for the digital inputs and the files player - I had to put some effort several times to choose one or the other. Let me add that on the right side you can see, characteristic for this manufacturer, illuminated output power indicators with **characteristic arms resembling the arms of a watch.**

All connection sockets are located on the back. There are two unbalanced RCA inputs and four balanced XLR inputs - the **preamplifier section is balanced**, so it is worth trying the latter first. There is also a preamplifier output (XLR). One of the RCA inputs, after plugging in the appropriate module, is converted into a phono input. In turn, one of the XLR inputs can be configured to work in a home theater - Progression Integrated then works as a power amplifier for the front speakers. Below the analog inputs in the tested unit you can see the input module of the DAC and the files player. There are three digital inputs for the audio SIGNAL - RCA, optical and USB - as well as two

connections for audio FILES: Ethernet (RJ45) and wireless Wi-Fi with a small antenna. The set also includes sockets for remote control of the device, individual speaker sockets and an IEC power socket.

INSIDE The device is a **modular design**, which is characteristic of this manufacturer. In the past, individual modules in his devices were connected with computer flat cables - in Progression these are nice shielded cables terminated with high-class REAN plugs, resembling - more well-known - LEMO plugs.

An input board is a screwed to the rear panel, to which, through gold-plated multi-pins, the discrete attenuator and phono preamplifier boards are connected; in the latter, the amplifying elements (transistors, integrated circuits?) are shielded with a metal "box". This is where the micro-switches are located, which allow user to choose the load for a cartridge. To do this, one has to unscrew the top cover.

The file transport module and the DAC are placed on a separate PCB screwed to the bottom panel through long distances. It is based on the XMOS Altera chips for streaming and USB input as well as the D/A converter chip by ESS Technology. The current / voltage conversion and amplification are handled by eight IT OPA1612 integrated circuits.



The preamplifier has separate PCBs for the left and right channels, just like the power amplifiers. **It was built using SMD transistors** and high quality Nichicon Gold capacitors and Dale resistors. Its PCB is connected to the larger PCB of the power amplifiers. These were assembled using a classic,

through-hole method, using very nice components. In each channel there are six complementary pairs of NJW0281 + NJW0302 transistors - **bipolar transistors, let's add.**

On the power amplifier boards you can see complete power supplies - **we are talking about dual-mono power supply.** It is based on a powerful toroidal transformer from [KEAN OCEAN](#), a Hong Kong-based company that is a serious player among the manufacturers of transformers for medical applications.

The device is extremely solid, well-thought-out, it also utilizes high-class components. The only thing you should pay attention to are the feet - they would need to be replaced with some specialized ones. ■

Technical specifications (according to the manufacturer)

Nominal output: 200W/8 Ω | 400W/4 Ω

Frequency range:

0.1Hz-1MHz / -3dB | 20Hz-80kHz / ± 0.5 dB

THD (@ max output): <0.1%, 20Hz-20kHz

S/N: -95dB

Power consumption (standby): 20W

Input impedance: 100k Ω

Output impedance: 0.10 Ω

Dimensions (H x W x D): 178 x 432 x 432 mm

Weight: 26 kg