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Brand: Primare/Dynaudio/ /Nordost
Model: CD21 (CD Player)
 I21 (Integrated Amp)
 Focus 220 (Loudspeakers)
Price: Rs 86,000 (CD21)
 Rs 78,100 (I21)
 Rs 1,70,000 (Focus 220)
 Rs 9,020 (Blue Haven Int)
 Rs 29,700 (Blue Haven Spk Cbl)
Warranty: 1 Year (Electronics)
 5 Years (Speakers)

Category: Xtreme-End Stereo System

Aesthetics: 
Build: 
Sound: 
Ease Of Use: 
VFM: 



They say that high-end stereo is a dying breed and that it is being poached by multichannel, multinational brands.

Moving attention to any of the small states in Europe will probably provide some respite to this otherwise sad situation. There are more esoteric, specialist manufacturers in Europe than anywhere else in the world put together and that gives us audiophiles a reason to live on. Having such a rich heritage of music behind them, it is no surprise then that the fish and chip-eating community loves correct reproduction of music. The Scandinavians are great at design and as it has turned out over the past few decades, great at making quality audio equipment too.

Dynaudio, for instance, is a better-known studio monitor brand than probably any other and a great deal of Bollywood studios are patrons of the Danes. Their tag line "Danes Don't Lie" is extremely effective at making honest Hindi soundtracks (I wonder why our recordings sound the way they do then!) and Dynaudio even customises their designs to cater to a lot of exclusive clients. Primare is another Viking from the other end of Scandinavia, Sweden to be precise and they specialise in merging high-class engineering with top-notch design. Soundsmiths, based in Mumbai are importers of these rarefied components and we couldn't resist the offer to review some of the latest models from both these sexy, Scandinavian outfits.

Scandinavian Serenade

When you're dealing with something so high profile, you would be excused to expect anything but the best - and this premier offering from Primare/Dynaudio does just that.

Technology And Design

Talking about a Swedish product and not talking about design could be considered sacrilege. Renowned for their minimalist chic, the Swedes can make even a toaster look like something you would want to save up for and we're talking about an audiophile integrated amplifier and CD player here! The CD21 and I21 combo are aesthetically matched but there are some interesting

“As far as LCD technology is concerned, the Yes Visualax shows that it has come a long way since the previous generation.”

observations to be made. If the two components were designed to complement each other, why are their displays at different locations on the front panel? That apart, the design of the Primare amp/CD combo is typically Scandinavian with a minimum number of buttons fighting for starring role on the front panel and extensive use of brushed aluminium.

Three different firms were handed the task to come up with the form factor of the Primare system; the in-house design team based in Vaxjo, Sweden, a celebrated Danish designer called Bent Nielson and the Bladelius Design Group from Sweden. With so much talent going into a modest range of amplifiers and disc spinners, Primare hasn't forgotten the engineering bit. When Bo Chistensen formed Primare in the 1980's, he was

clear in his head what the firm should be like and he wanted the internal elegance to come through on the outside. Using a simple design path consisting of JFET input and bipolar output devices, the I21 uses a design page right out of classic Primare designs. Being the "budget" range from Primare, the amp/CD combo are not too high on features but certainly high on quality. The CD21 features a low-noise mechanism that can actually highlight the low noise-floor of the I21 amp design. Using Burr Brown DACs and a balanced output, the CD21 can also be used with the higher end Primare models with good results.

Bringing to life all these pure signals is an equally reputed loudspeaker manufacturer, Dynaudio and its latest range of speakers-the Focus. Filtering traditional Dynaudio ethics into a more affordable range of speakers is what the Focus is all about and it promises to give you 100% of the Dynaudio sound at 50% of the cost. Now that sounds like a good deal to me! The Focus 220, which we have for review is the biggest model in the range and the floorstander consists of two MSP (Magnesium Silicate Polymer) bass/mid drivers and a newly designed Esotec+ soft dome tweeter. Both these drivers are a result of many years of evolution and Dynaudio has almost built its brand image on the distinctive looking bass/mid driver and the silk dome tweeter.

One look at the Focus 220 and you know that this is a no-compromise Dynaudio design. Familiar drivers, tough cabinet construction and exquisite woodworking are all hallmarks of this Dane and it is manifested here in all its nuances. As with all Dynaudio designs, everything about the Focus 220 is made



by Dynaudio themselves, giving them total control over the tolerance of each component and there are some serious components inside the making of a Focus 220 speaker. Double magnet motor system, large diameter voice coils, neodymium magnets and non-parallel surfaces, all constitute to make for a

loudspeaker that can qualify as a wolf in a sheep's clothing.

Some audiophiles might also rejoice that the Focus 220 retains the 1st order crossover design that is employed in higher-end Dynaudios and this really helps in achieving that sharp transient response that they are known for. Using non-parallel sides reduces the effects of standing waves and additional damping and bracing takes care of any form of internal vibration or resonance. To accentuate this beautiful cabinet in your listening room, 4 different veneers are available as an option, ours being in the popular cherrywood finish. Of course, linking this fine-looking system would be a cable that is of equally high calibre and Nordost came to the rescue with their Flatline series of speaker cable and interconnects. Hooking up a stereo system seemed surprisingly simple after going through the pains of doing up a complete 5.1 or 7.1 rig but it did take a while to get the power to the components and only

after a few hours of head scratching did we realise that there is another rocker switch on the bottom panel of the Primare components for the main power. Lesson learnt: nowadays, read the owners manual even before you switch the component on!

Performance

When a potent combination like this is staring at you in the eye, you get a strange feeling that a rainbow is in order even before it begins to rain. The Primare + Dynaudio + Nordost trio is one of those systems that instantly stand out as an extension to your personality. It's like how you would judge a person by his car. This system will be most comfortable in the home of a jazz loving, Skoda Octavia-driving individual. That's not to say that it won't satiate the needs of other audiophiles, but it exudes a certain sense of class that is very much upper crust. Setting up this system will be a no-brainer even for novices but it's finding the perfect balance that will take some experience. Although the Focus 220 was rear-port-



ed, they were fairly room-friendly and did not act tough with the décor. Blending in comes naturally to them with their beautiful wood veneer and the Primare was not too far behind.

Using the supplied Nordost cables, we settled in for some long-term listening and fired up the I21. We started with Sting and a live recording of his classic cut, "Fields Of Gold". Sting's peculiar acoustic guitar sound was instantly recognisable as smooth and seductive through this system. The I21 and the CD21 churned out the rhythm section like they were a single component and kept the musicality at an all time high. Keeping it all perfectly synced for delivery were the Focus 220s, which although not very imposing, sounded like they could bring the house down with their low-frequency response. This wasn't a good thing in this case, since all the Dynaudio's heavy-duty motor structure couldn't keep the bass drivers from letting their hair down and overloading our studio with more bass than required.

Playing around with positioning improved things and we settled in for a location where we had just the right mix of "exciting" bass and accurate mid-bass, which was so essential to reproduce Stings electric bass. The I21's damping factor could also have a role to play in this but otherwise, the timbre and tonal quality of this amplifier had nothing but praises going for it. Its lucid nature was perfectly suited to the Focus speakers

and can have you glued on your listening chair for hours without ever feeling fatigued. To illustrate, when I played the new CD from Brit-rock band Starsailor, the chiming guitars and compressed recording, which could have prompted me to eject the CD within the first five minutes from any other system, actually had my feet tapping to the music! This is a radical departure from many other Dynaudio-based systems that I have heard since they are usually unforgiving to the recordings, but in this case the Primare front end was acting like a pair of sunglasses that filtered out any harmful ultra-high or ultra-compressed rays.

It might not exactly be "affordable", but given the insane amount of money that some audiophiles spend on cables and interconnects, this system can be called a bargain. The electronics here were super smooth and despite some small niggles like a slow-CD transport and really cheap remote control; there was nothing that can put you off musically. Taking it through a wide range of music from jazz to classical to specific drum tracks, the Primare/Dynaudio system delivered music that connected straight to the heart and had the perfect mix of deep bass, sweet highs and those crystal clear mids that Danes are known for. The depth that was obtained from every recording was staggering and that accounted for a large part of the enjoyment value. Sometimes, the amplifier sounded like it was trying too hard to

drive the speakers, but that is a general trait of Dynaudios - they don't make friends with amps very easily. This is not a serious problem in any case as simply lowering the volume a few notches takes care of it and what you hear is a vast soundstage that is neither forward nor too distant, just the right scale and height to make the performance palpable and utterly believable. What was most impressive is the fact that this system possesses a true Jekyll and Hyde personality. When you want to sit back and relax, it will deliver the music in a totally non-fussy and respectable manner but when you want to bogey, the twin woofers will remind you who's the boss of the house!

Conclusion

The Dynaudios cannot be bi-wired, the CD player cannot be upgraded nor the amp can be used for vinyl but for what it does, it does a fantastic job at it. The sonic signature of this system is something that no audiophile can deny and is instantly pleasing. You will need to give it plenty of break in to loosen up and we spent more than 100 hours doing just that, but then again we were suitably rewarded. Danes don't lie and we won't either; if you are into music and you need a recommendation for a "soothing" system, your road to nirvana just got a new shortcut.

NISHANT PADHIAR

