

Pro-Ject 175 Vienna Philharmonic Recordplayer

Limited to just 175 pieces, this luxuriously-appointed version of Pro-Ject's 'The Classic' turntable is offered in celebration of the VPO. Is this gilding the lily or musical gold?
 Review: **Nick Tate** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Forget concept albums, for this is a 'concept turntable' – a striking looking record player that, at first sight, might seem rather 'Trump Tower', and perhaps aesthetically overpowering for conservative European eyes. Put your sunglasses on however, and all becomes clear as the VPO logo engraved into the lower right hand corner of the top plate is revealed. For this is a special commemorative product, a plush limited edition version of Pro-Ject's The Classic turntable [*HFN* Aug '16], made to celebrate one-and-three-quarter centuries of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra [see boxout, facing page].

DOUBLE DECOUPLED

Its wooden plinth and lacquer is said to correspond to that of a violin, while the gilded metal top plate signifies the brass instruments of the orchestra. The tonearm's finger lift comes from a clarinet flap, and the speed changer from a flute button. The 175 Vienna Philharmonic Recordplayer (for that is its official appellation, even though Pro-Ject's Heinz Lichtenegger has offered shorter alternatives) costs £6500 including tonearm and cartridge. Be quick though, classical music fans, because only 175 pieces are being made!

It is fitting that Pro-Ject chose The Classic for the base of this limited edition. This is – as the name suggests – an homage to the old Thorens-style belt-drive decks that powered hi-fi systems of yore, some 40 or so years ago. It's not a fancy 'high tech' exoskeleton design, and instead relies on a modern makeover of an old idea. The Classic's plinth is (as noted) wood, to which damped adjustable feet are affixed

RIGHT: The polished gold-coloured top plate and lacquered chassis are inspired by musical instruments. No arm securing clip is required, due to the rest's inbuilt magnetic restraint

to the underside. The top plate sits inside this plinth, resting on six Thermo Plastic Elastomer (TPE) balls that take the place of springs used in older decks. The top plate, which also holds the bearing and arm mount, is effectively 'double-decoupled' from whatever the turntable is sitting on.

Pro-Ject has garnished The Classic with all sorts of delights for the 175 Vienna including two plinth colour options, Dark Cello or Bright Violin. At the back of the turntable is a plaque with the serial number and the name of the owner. Every deck is produced by hand over a two-month period and ships in premium wood boxes; the accessories are also delivered in an exclusive wood casket.

The top plate is a sandwich of MDF and 3mm polished brass protected by a high gloss transparent paint. The platter is the

same as the Classic's, but the subplatter is made out of aluminium instead of plastic, cut on CNC machines with diamond heads. The bearing has been beefed up to accommodate the heavier platter, as you would expect.

BESPOKE PICK-UP

The tonearm is an arresting-looking device – both large and shiny, it has a very high effective mass that precludes its use with high compliance MMs [see PM's Lab Report, p43]. Audiophiles hankering to use their old Shure V15s again should look elsewhere... Made from hand-polished aluminium, the arm sports rugged cardan bearings and includes an Amati brass headshell with white brass fingerlift. The supplied cartridge is bespoke, crafted together with Ortofon's chief engineer





Leif Johannsen, using various components from the Cadenza line. Heinz says it uses a unique alloy body, with the aim of getting a very smooth performance 'which represents the famously soft sound of the Vienna Philharmonic strings', no less.

The 175 Vienna's arm feels silky smooth to use (when you get used to hand-cueing with part of a clarinet!), and there's a quality feel to the 13kg motor unit. Still, there are some details that let the side down. For example, the surfacing of the top plate on our review sample was less than flawless and the lacquer on the plinth was far from musical instrument-quality. This adds to the sense that this turntable is quaintly hand-made, rather than an immaculate product from a highly automated factory – eg, the latest Technics SL-1200GR [*HFN* Nov '17].

Unless a deck is deployed floating in a vacuum, the performance of most turntables is ultimately limited by the

quality of its isolation from external vibrations. Perhaps the 175 Vienna will not achieve the isolation offered by an independently-sprung subchassis design but it is surely better than most non-sprung types. You'll still need to position it on a good equipment rack or table to help it resist the 'vibes' that colour the sound, but the upside is that with no wobbly

subchassis the deck feels stable and is easy to hand-cue, and also easier to set up too. The 175 Vienna is nicely presented, coming complete with a record clamp, leather pad, dust cover, high-end phono cable and precision

scale. You can have it out of the crate and running in mere minutes.

SPACE AND PACE

While the 175 Vienna's shiny bits may visually hark back to the 'good old days', in practice it sounds bang up-to-date. I was surprised by the obvious stability,

'No quaint blast from the past, nor sounds like a golden oldie'

ABOVE: Electronic speed switching has been added to the 175 along with a brightly polished S-shaped tonearm that comes fitted with an Ortofon Cadenza-derived MC pickup

clarity and sense of confidence, for this is not some quaint blast from the past that sounds like a golden oldie. Instead it proved an incisive, balanced and enjoyable music-making companion that keeps the nostalgia trip confined to its appearance. This isn't to say it is faultless, but few turntables are perfect even at this price.

One of my favourite modern jazz tracks is 'Bronstein' by Fractals [*Fractals*; Surface Records SUR 001], from 1986, and it is beautifully captured by the standards of its day. The 175 Vienna communicated this fact in no uncertain terms, serving up a large recorded acoustic that went wide and deep. Inside this, there was a surprising degree of detail and really rather good focus too.

It wasn't quite achieved with the laser precision of an SME 10, admittedly, but still sounded revealing in a smooth sort of way. There was great space to the sound, with some beautifully etched acoustic guitar work located smartly in the centre. At the same time, the distinctive (and now rather dated) fretless bass guitar was powerfully carried, strongly underpinning the track. This bass was taut and supple too, while never becoming overblown.

AND FUNKY TOO...

A quick sashay over to some classic jazz funk, and it was clear to hear that the 175 Vienna is quite an animated music maker. Light Of The World's 'Time' [*Round Trip*; Ensign ENVY 14] came over in an engagingly propulsive way. True, I have heard this track carried more convincingly, yet still this deck went hard to work conveying the subtle counterpoint between the bass guitar, rhythm guitar and percussion. It's a pacy-sounding player, ☺

VIENNA PHILHARMONIC

As 2018 starts, many *HFN* readers will be settling down to watch the televised New Year Day Concert from the splendid Musikverein Golden Hall (built 1870) and the Vienna Philharmonic in its festive programme – mainly Strauss family related pieces nowadays. This year, Riccardo Muti will conduct. It's a tradition that dates back to the time of Clemens Krauss in the 1930s, who later simulated these concerts on early Decca LPs.

The history of the VPO itself, though, dates back to 1842 when a group of four men, one the composer Nicolai, determined that an independent symphony orchestra drawn from players at the Vienna Hotoper should be formed. Its first permanent conductor Otto Dessoff was ultimately forced out by intrigue – the VPO has long been a hotbed of dissent, as Gustav Mahler soon discovered, when appointed in 1898. However, since 1933 the VPO has developed, without any conventional 'principal conductor' appointment, into one of Europe's finest orchestras. Until 2003 women were excluded from being VPO members (before that a female harpist appeared uncredited) and recruits have to undergo a probationary period with the Vienna State Opera before taking auditions to join. It runs under a system of Democratic Self-Administration. CB

LAB REPORT

175 VIENNA PHILHARMONIC



ABOVE: The 175 Vienna Philharmonic tonearm's leads terminate in a connection box at the rear of the unit with an earthing post between. The supplied lid fits over the hinges shown – these are friction types that will keep it open at any desired angle

far less sedate-sounding than looks suggest, and the taut yet supple low end is allied to loads of detail in the midband. So rather than giving a nostalgic, opaque, rose-tinted rendition of the music, this turntable digs down into the detail and hammers out an enjoyably catchy rendition. True, there is a hint of warmth, but who wants vinyl to sound so devoid of character that it might as well be 'bad digital'?

TACTILE SAX

There's something special about hearing jazz music on vinyl – many folk still don't think digital can do it justice, and you remember why when you hear the genre on a serious analogue source. Cannonball Adderly's 'Autumn Leaves' [Somethin' Else; Blue Note 1595] is a seminal slice of early-'60s musicianship, and here the 175 Vienna proved to be in its element. Despite its issues, the tonearm tracked securely with its matching special-edition cartridge, indeed, rather flattering the latter.

This tuned-Cadenza MC was well able to show off this sublime recording, with a pleasing vibrancy to the instruments. Adderly's alto sax was delightfully raspy, sounding eerily tactile in a world where we're often used to rather two-dimensional facsimiles. Amidst a torrent of harmonics, it gave a delightfully live and vibrant feel. Miles Davis' trumpet was a treat too – lustrous and sparkling, yet 'earthy' and organic, it gave the feel of a live instrument being played. Behind this the stable, secure drum work kept pace efficiently and in an orderly way. Cymbal playing was another highlight – sparkling and glistening like real ringing, metallic objects in the room.

I ran the gamut of my record collection, including the classic rock of Fleetwood Mac's 'Don't Stop' [Rumours; Warner Bros P-10233W] which was delivered in a fast yet

expansive sounding manner, the turntable capturing the nuances of this classic recording without a care in the world. Kraftwerk's 'Techno Pop' [Electric Café; 064-24 06541] is a seminal slice of '80s electronica and sounded taut and tight with fine detail rendition.

However, the real treat was with classical music – which absolutely flies on a serious vinyl-spinner. Elgar's Cello Concerto [Jacqueline du Pré, Philadelphia Orch/Daniel Barenboim; CBS Masterworks 76529] was a delight. The turntable told me that while this is no hi-fi demo recording, du Pré is still a prodigious talent.

IS IT LIVE?

It really locked into the emotional force of the music, showing her beautiful dynamic accenting and nuanced playing. The cello was pleasingly expressive, while here the 175 Vienna also pulled off the 'hi-fi' aspects too where there was a deep, inviting timbre to stringed instruments, and they were placed perfectly in space. It was fascinating to be able to hear right to the back of the recorded acoustic too, right down to the sound of incidental coughing. Just as you might experience hearing the VPO live... ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

One never tires of the Pro-Ject 175 Vienna's crisp, detailed and engaging nature – and the fact that it's so even-handed regardless of the music you play. It is a distinctive and modern-sounding turntable solution with one simple mission in life: to have fun. Yes, there are some question marks about its finish and the high mass of the tonearm, but the package breezily exceeds the sum of its parts.

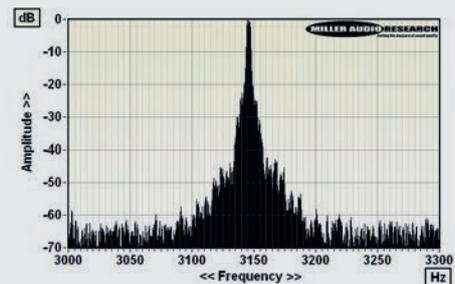
Sound Quality: 85%



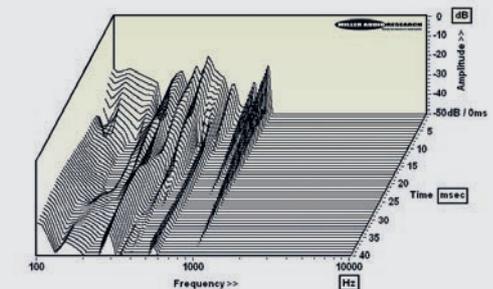
While the bare bones of this limited edition deck are culled from Pro-Ject's 'The Classic' turntable [HFN Aug '16], the wooden chassis, alloy platter and – particularly – the stainless steel/bronze bearing look to have been enhanced. For example, while the same AC motor drives the platter up to speed over a slightly longer 5secs, and the absolute speed is still an imperceptible –0.16% slow, its wow and flutter – its *dynamic* speed stability – is markedly improved at 0.02% and 0.03%, respectively [see Graph 1, below]. Through-bearing rumble is also 2dB improved at –73.0dB (DIN-B wtd) with the Vienna deck, although this model did betray a discrete mode at 41Hz in its rumble spectrum.

The partnering S-shaped 9in tonearm is heavily chromed and features a magnetic insert halfway along its length, plus a polished brass headshell with a 'clarinet flap' fingerlift. So perhaps the whopping 25g effective mass should come as no great surprise... What this does suggest, however, is that only low compliance MCs are really suited to this tonearm – even the supplied 11g Cadenza-derived MC, with its 16cu dynamic compliance, realised a low 6.5Hz arm/cartridge resonance. An Audio Note lo would make a better, if costlier, partner!

Otherwise, S-shaped arm tubes typically exhibit a complex series of bending and torsional modes and Pro-Ject's heavyweight is no different. There is a diffuse main bending mode at 65Hz followed by a series of other modes, possibly harmonics, at 260Hz, 330Hz and 410Hz [see Graph 2]. The high-Q modes at 800Hz/1kHz look to be associated with that fingerlift but it'll be passing footfall and rippled LPs that must be guarded against to avoid exciting the arm/cartridge resonance. PM



ABOVE: Wow and flutter re. 3150Hz tone at 5cm/sec (plotted ±150Hz, 5Hz per minor division)



ABOVE: Cumulative tonearm resonant decay spectrum, illustrating various bearing, pillar and 'tube' vibration modes spanning 100Hz-10kHz over 40msec

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Turntable speed error at 33.33rpm	33.28rpm (–0.16%)
Time to audible stabilisation	5sec
Peak Wow/Flutter	0.02% / 0.03%
Rumble (silent groove, DIN B wtd)	–68.4dB
Rumble (through bearing, DIN B wtd)	–73.0dB
Hum & Noise (unwtd, rel. to 5cm/sec)	–62.2dB
Power Consumption	2-3W
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	462x131x351mm / 13kg