



AMR audio; *Ecce Homo!* (Latin: *Behold the man*)

AMR Audio

CD-777_CD player

I am amazed time and again by Sonoris, the distributor for AMR Audio, whose knack for selecting the best products in the audio industry is quite unparalleled in all my years of reviewing. AMR's CD-777 is the latest addition to a series of exceptionally pleasant listening experiences brought to me by this company.

AMR Audio is still quite new to customers in this part of the world. Until Sonoris introduced AMR's fuses and integrated amplifier, the company was virtually unheard of. In fact, the abbreviated title of Abbingdon Music Research was so obscure to me that two years ago, I almost mistook it as the acronym for one of Intel's interfaces, with which I was decidedly more familiar at the time.

Based in the opulent Notting Hill area of London, the company has been offering a rather diverse array of high-end products. This includes the 77-series phonostage, CD-player, amplifiers, and loudspeakers and the 777-series CD-player, amplifiers, the now-familiar Gold Fuse, and power cables.

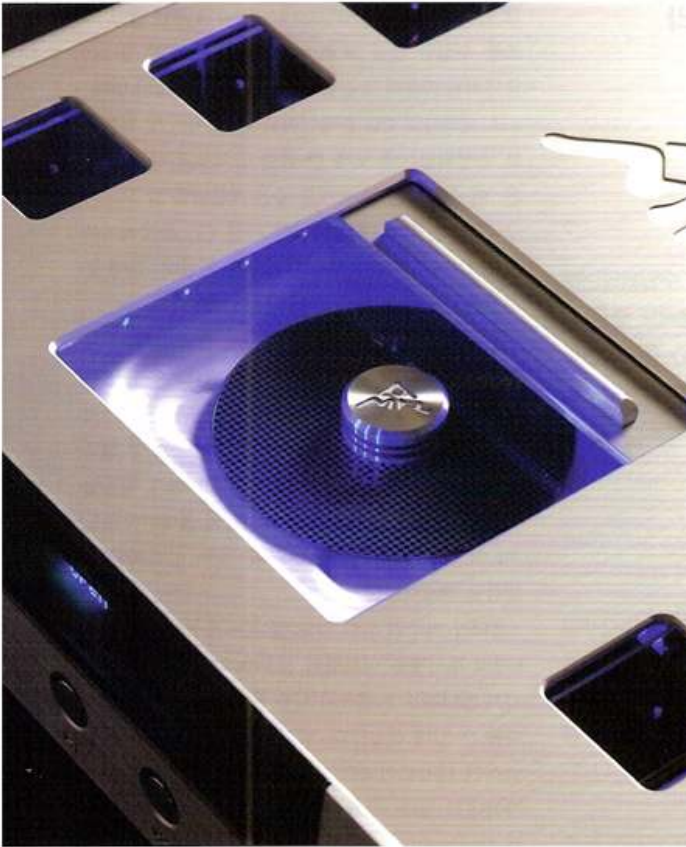
I did not realize the true importance of fuses in an audio system until an engineer friend of mine put forth an interesting opinion; which had a grain of truth to it. He said that despite all

the money and effort lavished upon optimising the signal path of a system, little attention is paid to the fuses; far less than they actually deserve as the system's initial circuitry, the signal always passes through. There would be no sense, he said, in laying out the obscene amounts of money many enthusiasts normally commit on cables if the fuses, which are usually as thin as a hair, could not live up to the same standards as the cables and interconnectors. I could detect he was after the obsequiousness of those who are willing to drop tens of thousands of dollars on cables, but this did not change the fact that he was basically right about fuses, as are, interestingly, the British engineers at AMR. Without shock or serendipity, I realised that my next investment was going to be in some fuses.

Having been a fan of its fuses for a while, I finally had the opportunity to be introduced to the CD-777 when Mr. Kim, the president of Sonoris, gave me a phone call one misty morning. Upon hearing the news, I ran down to their showroom to get a look. In many regards, the CD-777 is a product that has changed the way I think about high-end products. The most striking facet of this "enlightenment" is that when it came to audio products, seeing is not believing. Unlike a number of probably better-known manufacturers who embellish their products with glittering buttons, colour screens, and exotic finishes, this AMR comes strikingly austere, particularly on the inside. Although the product is far from the effrontery of the LAMMs, which make you believe that you've just been swindled as you unbox them, the AMR looked modest, if in a dignified way. This top-loading CD player did not look especially luxurious on the inside, either.



Focus



In fact, there was little need for me to open up the machine, for it came with six transparent windows that let you peer inside to see capacitors, transformers and the two tubes that gently glow as you turn on the power. This design decision probably had little to do with the heat, but aesthetically, it worked well in my view. The CD-777 weighs 11 kilos, which also is quite unremarkable.

Another unremarkable aspect of the CD-777 is that it employs the widely-used Philips mechanism. However, if one considers the fact that almost all audio manufacturers use precisely the same mechanism and that, besides some changes, the Pro 2 remains the industry standard, AMR's choice of mechanism is only a rational one, based on the reliability of the mechanism proven by time and popularity. The company seems to be proud of having the UDA1305AT chipset onboard, but I neither recommend nor be critical of this inclusion; to say a chipset is the "best" depends on many variables, including the overall circuit design and its elements. At the time when the

mention of 24x oversampling and 192kHz rate no longer invites applause, AMR's choice does not seem especially ingenious. One interesting feature, however, is that the CD-777 comes with a USB input, which has long since, become standard in the mainstream audio market.

Nevertheless, the CD-777 seems to be the result of quite extensive technological research and know-how. It makes use of many features developed by the company, one of them being the OptiGain circuit. The OptiGain circuit is a single-ended tube amplification stage without any feedback, making it a pure buffer stage. AMR has also developed its USB DAC section from the ground-up, making it an attractive choice for listeners who use their PC as a signal source. The OptiBus digital stage is also an ambitious feature of the product, and the technology that went into it, as much as it is sophisticated, is beyond what I can explain here. However, it is advertised as guaranteeing the highest level of signal preservation, and the transformer is a custom-designed tube stage operating at 32VA.

The chassis that I thought was "austere" is, in fact, not as simple-minded a decision as my initial cursory look led me to believe. It is custom-designed and painstakingly manufactured for the purpose of heat dissipation optimised for the product's heat emissions. Its internal structure is made of pure copper, which accomplishes low resonance while achieving the optimum electrical and mechanical (heat) characteristics. Furthermore, after repeated listening tests, it came as no surprise that some premium parts have been chosen for the product, such as military-grade German capacitors, a Sony laser pick-up, and the Philips CD-18 servo system. These names are unfamiliar to even the most discerning manufacturers and enthusiasts.

The CD-777's sound is rather simple to describe, as is for all great sounding equipment:

Where the hell did Mr. Kim find this product!

It is clear to me: a hero is born. The CD-777 is a product that will say once and for all something truly definitive, settling all the ongoing debates in the CD-player market, which is crowded,

volatile, and, for many manufacturers, miserable to be in. And, personally, I am totally enamored with the USB feature, which allows me to play any music from my laptop computer at the tap of my fingertips. Ah, the comfort of being in my sofa, never having to scurry around with discs and cases with the worry of toppling something over and yet, enjoying the sound quality reproduced is music to one's ears – it is heaven brought down on earth. **A**

