

## CD PROCESSOR AND INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

**Abbingdon Music Research was founded in 2001 by three dedicated electronics and music enthusiasts. Finally, their machines have landed on our Gallic shores. The aim of the 777 range is to offer devices that are a technical tour de force at a sensible price. This review sheds light on the eccentricity behind this young enterprise.**

**A**MR, to-date has eighteen employees, three people including two electronics engineers; a financial expert form a team that can analyse and dissect atoms when it comes to audio and music. Their conceptual approach is unusual and unlike any other. Their products all have the same sonic excellence without the madness of an exorbitant selling price. At the outset, it was decided that the design would be British while their production would be Asian. However, AMR with its own premises, has permanent control over the production process to maintain and guarantee quality and reliability. Moreover, it is a quest for the perfect sound and high aesthetics that exudes class. One needs only look elsewhere at other electronic brands to fully understand the intentions announced by this company. The real take-off happened in 2003 when...



Abbingdon Music Research  
CD 777 & AM 777

# The electronic «Opti» onions...





**SPECIFICATIONS**

Origin : United Kingdom

Price : 3 600 euros (CD 777),

3 600 euros (AM 777)

Dimensions :

450 x 120 x 370 mm (each unit)

Weight : 11,5 kg (CD 777), 14 kg (AM 777)

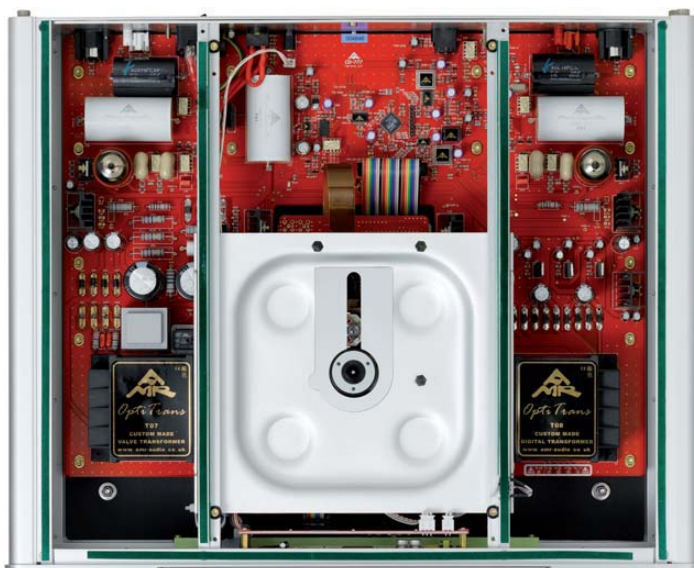
## Abbingdon Music Research CD 777 & AM 777

...the founding team was approached and invested in by a group of investors completely seduced by its unusual and innovative vision. Suddenly, this widened the scope for designing high-fidelity electronics; its aim is to manufacture units that hark back to the golden age of hi-fi, epitomised by AMR's own approach through its patented 'Opti' circuits. To-date, the range is comprised of two series, the Reference Series Class 77 and Premier Series Class 777.

The first series consists of a phono stage, a CD player, an integrated dual-mono amplifier and a two-way speaker. The second series consists of two units which are the subject of this review, mid-priced variations of the 77 but with the same, highly technical implementation.

### CD777

One is presented by an integrated, identical chassis design. Exclusive use of brushed aluminum from the aviation industry brings a very professional finish to these products available in either silver or black. The front has a central LED display in blue beneath which are five dedicated buttons that offer the common commands starting with standby on the left. The rear audio connectors provide two analog RCA line outputs and XLR outputs and a digital SPDIF RCA. Two digital inputs, an SPDIF and a USB2.0 connection allow an external transport or computer to take advantage of the DAC section which has been integrated to a very high-standard. Open the sliding top-loading door and you see where the aluminum puck should be located on the upper face of the laser. The 'Optidrive' transport is a Philips CD-18 servo, remote control and software developed by AMR, along with a Sony K-series optical laser head and their own aluminium puck. Furthermore, the machined rectangular holes on the left and right sides in addition to offering nice aesthetics through the plexiglass, reveals the insides of the product. It rests on four multi-contact rubber feet like an upturned ashtray. The RC-777 remote control is a highly original combination of keys and touch screen



*Components that have resulted from studies or a specific choice by AMR, bear the golden AMR label. The layout and implementation is perfection.*

which not only duplicates the player's controls but allows for other selections such as the digital inputs for example. The CD777 Premier Class series compared to the company's high-end model CD77 Reference Class series which costs twice as much, is half the weight and has a much less imposing frame. The CD777 has many technical solutions proprietary to AMR including a Multibit DAC, amplification and output buffer tube stages in particular. In contrast to other machines, the CD777 also offers RCA digital inputs and outputs. The converter chip used by AMR is its own implementation with a CCMD circuit (Continuous Calibration Multibit DAC) using a Philips UDA1305AT, a real collector's item, the nearest in musicality to the famous TDA1541A used in the CD77 and seems to have been curiously neglected by manufacturers for the more well-known TDA 1543 and TDA 1545, which AMR rates sonically as not as

high-performing. The converter includes a DSP filter that allows 'OptiSample' which provides the user with a choice of six filtering modes (Master Digital 1, Digital Master 2 Recommended by AMR and retained for plays, and x2 Oversampling Oversampling x4, Upsampling Upsampling 96 and 192). The most sensitive changes detected by the listener are in terms of bandwidth, resolution and neutrality. OptiUSB subjects the signal USB clock from the source to jitter reduction. The output signal of the DAC passes through the 'OptiValve' stage which uses the 6H1n-EV double triode where one half amplifies the signal while the second half adapts to low impedance. Finally, the passive components have been selected after critical listening, including the polypropylene film capacitors made by AMR. The AMR transformers are manufactured to their own specifications.



#### CD 777 Processor

Inputs : 2 (coaxial RCA and USB2.0)

Outputs : 1 output RCA, 1 output XLR, 1 Digital RCA

Frequency response : 20 Hz - 20 kHz at +0/-0,5 dB

Sampling : up to 192 kHz

Signal-to-noise ratio : > 100 dB

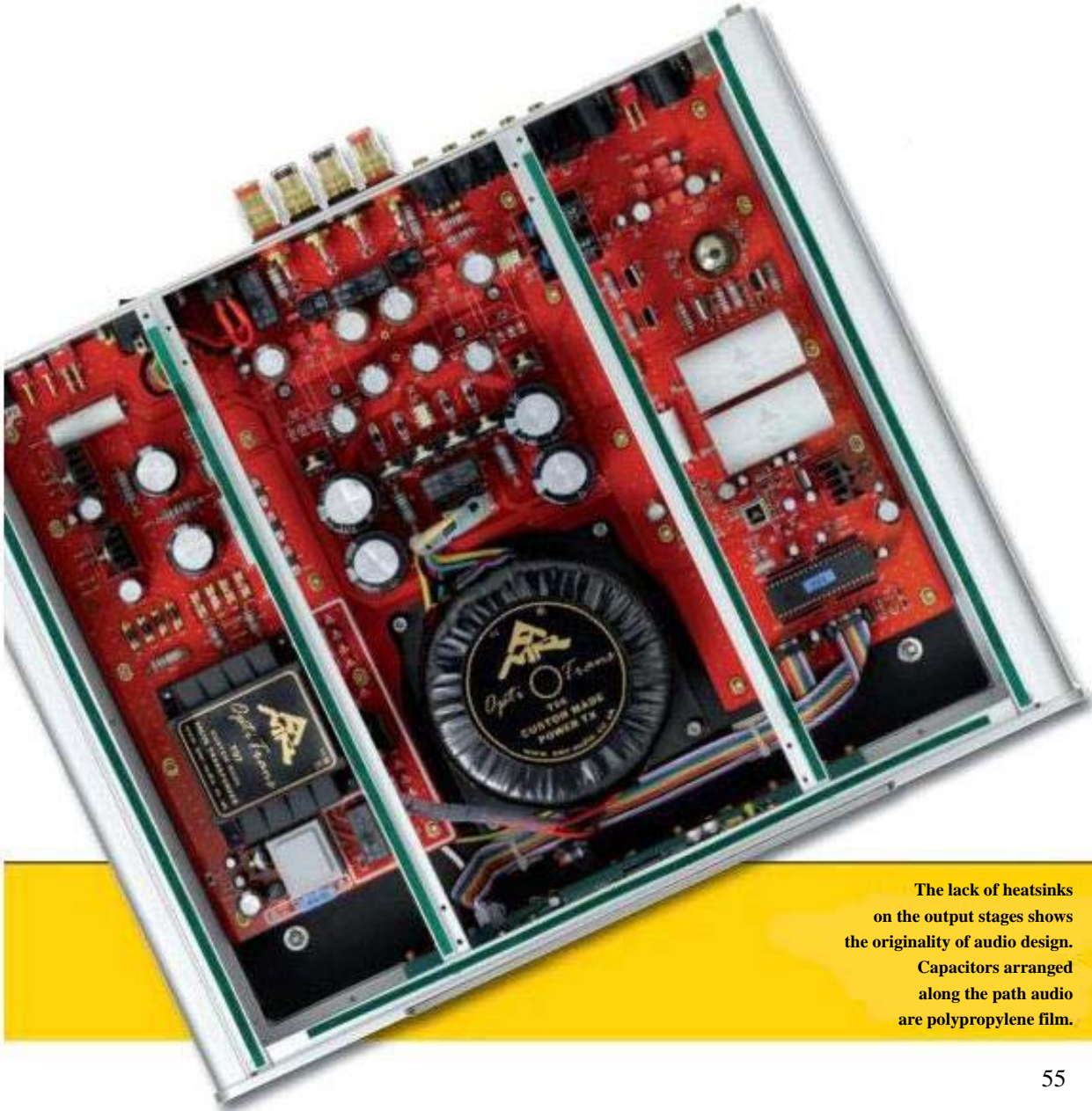
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### AM777

The design and casework of the integrated amplifier is an identical twin, apart from top-loading hatch of the CD777. One can see the central display and the five buttons starting with standby on the left, the selection of one of six inputs, including a digital USB with the final two keys for adjusting volume last on the right. All these commands are also available via the RC-777 remote control provided which also controls the player. The

rear panel has all the necessary connectors, but there are additional slide switches never encountered elsewhere. First, the XLR input is shared with the RCA input 1, a button "Pro / Stereo" position allows Pro to accept a source with a balanced output. Another "mode" switches the integrated unit from operating in stereo mode as we have used for the majority of listening to be changed to mono or bi-amplification mode. A third switch allows the amplifier to function as a power amplifier, and the last "4R/8R" switch allows one to

select the ideal impedance to match the speakers. The 'OptiGain' audio scheme implemented uses only two stages, the first OptiValve gain is based on a triode assembly single-ended section without negative feedback, followed by a buffer for the current amplification of the bipolar transistor stage. The preamp modulates the signal level through a dedicated Volume Control 'OptiLevel' using switched relays all driven by AMR-written software. The power transformer includes an 'OptiTrans' toroidal



**The lack of heatsinks on the output stages shows the originality of audio design. Capacitors arranged along the path audio are polypropylene film.**

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of 380 VA needed for the 60 W available per channel and a second transformer is dedicated to feeding the tube stage. After this is a Schottky diodes low noise stage, filtering is provided by Elna Silmic capacitors at key stages.

#### Summary of Listening

**Timbre:** The devices were delivered new and they were left on repeat for some time. Initial listening first, showed that they lacked balance for the first 24 hours of playing time. It is then characterized by a very pleasant and open soundstage. The technical solutions on both components, including the 'Opti-Valve' triode stage without feedback on the signal path, contributed to a wide, tonal variety with an emphasis on quality that was quite delicious. The piano playing of Glenn Gould (Sonata No. 6 Haydn) retains the texture (all modulations and variations in the harmonic scale) and characteristics of this recording which was pressed to a very high standard (Sony Blu Spec CD).

**Dynamics:** Realism is a word that comes to mind when you hear this extremely consistent set. The dynamic performance of both AMRs is amazing and incredible. Astonishing, as one is surprised by the energy and subjective tempo changes of the 'measly' integrated 60W per channel. The openness and speed of touch of the keyboard by this Canadian pianist are fully transcribed over the entire pianissimo to fortissimo range. Incredibly because the AMR does not seem to 'cheat' with the audio signal in terms of instantaneous power -with the correct swings from the very delicate to the most powerful crescendos - the structure and timing of each note seems to be well-established, as each note unfolds very naturally (such as the sound of pedals of the piano in particular).



*The connection possibilities are numerous. There is a USB input on both devices. the CD processor has digital inputs and outputs.*

**Soundstage Imaging:** The 777 undoubtedly painted a most unbridled soundstage. The degree of analysis and presentation was easily enough to satisfy the most needy for background details and interpretation thereof. The placement is accurate (musicians around Patricia Barber, Modern Love CD) with a wide soundstage and a comprehensive overall presentation when listening to our usual references. The complexity of the score did not cause any weaknesses to show (choirs Mozart's Requiem) even at high listening levels, all were within the reasonable limits of power of the AM777. But it is clear that the conductor seems ultimately closer to the listener, not by any effect of presence but by the thorough and careful playback of the AMR.

**Transparency:** Together or separately (we tried various combinations some eclectic but always seeing a successful result with the AMR), these electronics demonstrate a remarkable transparency of layering, without a hint of a specific tonal signature. Evidence suggests the amplifier's treble shows a slight tendency to be more pronounced without unduly destabilizing the very consistent tonal balance. The ability of the 777s to analyze in depth yet still present a broad overview means they may easily be part of any system. Despite using different combinations, they were all consistently musical, which itself is very positive.

**Verdict:** The majority of products not from these shores have failed to deliver for audiophile connoisseurs. That is, until now. These AMR products from across the Channel thanks to Aphrodite's Melody, are so much better than the norm. Your reviewer can see that the CD777 and integrated AM777 reflect a development and a realization that was implemented by and for music lovers enamored with the technique of reproducing music. The production is flawless down to the minute detail. As for their technological content, its ubiquitous originality demonstrates a quality of restitution that harks back to classic era products which is unheard of in this price category. Taking care not to jump to conclusions with their other products (including speakers and cables), these AMR components constitute the core of a truly unique system that makes music in the truest sense of the word 'delicious'.

BUILD	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
TIMBRE	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
DYNAMICS	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
IMAGING	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
TRANSPARENCY	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
QUALITY/PRICE	■ ■ ■ ■ ■

#### INTEGRATED AM 777

Nominal power : 2 x 60 W (4 et 8 ohms), 70 W (8 ohms) and 120 W (4 ohms) in mono mode

Frequency response : 10 Hz - 30 kHz at -1 dB

Sensitivity : 0,05 V (20 K and 2,83 V at output)

Inputs : 4 inputs RCA, 1 input XLR shared with 1 RCA, 1 USB2.0 input

Outputs : 1 output RCA «Pre Out», 2 pairs speaker terminals

