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recreating the original sound

the Stereo Times

The Complete Audiophile Magazine



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Chapter Précis Integrated
A Rebirth of Cool...

October 2006



**Associated
Equipment:**

**Analog
Front End**

Fanfare FT-1A
Digital/Analog
FM Monitor

Digital Front End

Marantz
SA8260/high
frequency
digital filter for
SACD turned
off
iRiver iHP-140
(upgraded hard
drive from 40 to
60 Gigabytes)
Toshiba
Gigabeat S60
(WMA Lossless
files only)

Amplification

Monolithic
Sound PA-1
Line Stage/HC-
1 Power Supply
Nuforce



A new Chapter in our lives

“It just keeps getting better and man, do I love this crazy world of music-playback.” That’s what I’ve been saying to myself in the afterglow of my experiences with Chapter’s Précis Class D integrated Amp. Once again I’ve had the pleasure of listening to a piece of equipment that served the music in the way I passionately need and like.

I had spent several wonderful months more than ever enjoying reproduced music via a pair of Nuforce Reference 8 monoblocks. So

Stock gear
sounds
Flat and Dull.



THE Upgrade
Company

Reference 8
paired
Monoblocks
Nuforce
Reference 9
paired
Monoblocks

Loudspeakers

Thiel 2.2

Cabling

Straightwire
Crescendo
Interconnects
Straightwire
Black Silc
Speaker Cables
PS Audio Mini
Lab Power
Cables
Analysis Plus
Power Oval
Cable
Soundstring
Cable
Technologies
Power Cable (on
each NuForce
monoblock)

Power Conditioning

PS Audio
P300/Multiwave
Upgrade – for
front end
components
including
preamp
PS Audio
Ultimate Outlet
(15 Amp
Standard) – for
Amp only

Accessories

you might imagine how distressed I, being challenged-of-wallet, was to receive that inevitable call from Stereo Times' editor stating "Yo Al, I need the review loaners back. The manufacturer would like to do some upgrades to the units you have" Damn... Inspect bank account... Damn again... Oh well...

I performed my usual ritual of procrastination getting the NuForces back since it was the best my system had ever sounded and several of my musician friends could attest to that. Fortunately upon my relinquishing the Reference 8's Perry handed over a Class D integrated amp from a British audio company, Chapter, whom I had never before known. Perry instructed me to give their US distributor a call but I chose not to call them until after finishing this review for fear of tainting my impressions of the review sample. (It may sound silly but I'm not fond of chatting with a manufacturer or even a distributor during the review process unless I feel a product is damaged or operating in a manner that might need professional repair.)

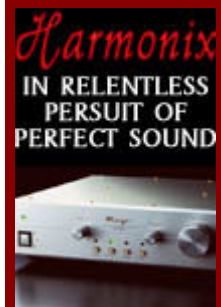
Fit, Finish & Design Elements

The chassis is made from bead blasted aluminum alloy that sits upon its own integral base vibration control system. The metalwork is machined by an ISO 9002 quality assured firm local to Chapter's offices. On top are 8 wire-mesh covered circular air vents and a single, larger convex circular looking glass which impart an almost art-deco industrial feeling that is striking while at the same time not overwhelming in its design. The looking glass allows a clear and magnified view of the Précis' meticulously placed innards.

On the front is a wide, clear, and well lit graphical display for device information. Just below the display resides a single rotary knob that controls all of the Précis' functions. To the left of this knob is 3.5 mm auxiliary input or as Chapter puts it an "Ipod input". (Note to Chapter, we don't ALL use only Ipod's – more on this later.) To the right of the knob is the infra-red sensor.

For the Précis, Chapter chose to use their very own custom designed volume control potentiometer.

According to Chapter's literature "The Chapter Précis uses a very low noise, linear power supply to deliver power to the pre and power sections of the amplifier. Using an 800VA custom made screened transformer and 300,000uF of capacitance, allows the Précis to deliver unmatched deep bass performance, with a deft and delicate touch." Long after it was gone I was taking great pleasure enjoying photos of it



Musicalizer ML 206
Bright Star Big Rock Three - under
SACD/CD player
Room Tunes Junior Justarack - main components
Lovan Classic HiFi Rack - for PS Audio p300
Vibrapods - for HC1 power supply only
DIY line filters made by a friend placed in 1 empty wall socket next to PS Audio P300 Room Treatments

Strategically placed curtains directly behind system covering windows
Corner Busters (4)

in my system. (Yes, that might sound pathetic but this is one fascinating piece of equipment!) In some ways it looked even more stunning in my well lit photos than in person.

The remote is a very substantial feeling unit apparently built from the same alloy as that of the Précis chassis. It feels good in the hand and indicates fine quality. Chapter was thoughtful enough to attach 4 translucent rubber or maybe silicone grommets to the underside of the remote as to avoid damaging one's furniture.

The manual that accompanied the Précis was thorough, clear and very informative of not only operating it but also of its features, design elements, and machining. Chapter has put a strong foot forward in its manual that gives the user not only a clear understating of the operation of the Précis but also a healthy dose of information about the build, and technology of what they've purchased.

For an even more detailed explanation of the Précis' parts build I refer you to its impressive online manual in PDF format [here](#).

Setup

Getting the Précis up and running proved frustratingly difficult in my setup with my large, unwieldy speaker cables. Unfortunately the power mains input is directly to the left of the speaker posts when looking at the rear of the integrated.



Subsequently, connecting the power cable required a tiresome amount of gerrymandering. This forced my stiff Straightwire Blac Silc spade-terminated speaker cable to protrude directly from the side of the amp just over the Mains input jack and switch. (This probably would have been a non-issue if I had used the banana pin terminated cables more prevalent with British audiophiles.)

I could barely stuff one finger between the positive and negative leads of the speaker cable to turn on the rear AC Mains switch. Granted my speaker cable is bulky but this is a serious design shortcoming that



ELCO
Hi-End
Audio
Cables



doesn't maximize the ease of connecting to all speaker cables.

Transit had also shown its mark on the Précis – a rear panel Torx head screw was loose, noticeably protruding out from the rear. This was remedied with a Swiss Army Knife Torx wrench. The RCA terminals on input 1 were loose. They twisted when installing and removing the interconnects but tightening up the RCA's securing nuts solved that problem.

User interface

One of the Précis' most intriguing and pleasing to use design features was its top located, touch sensitive standby mode switch. While the actual power is controlled by a mains switch on the back of the device, switching between on and standby mode is achieved by placing one's hand on a circular touch pad featuring Chapter's logo on top of the device for 2 seconds at which point a halo of blue light around the pad turns to blue, indicating on, or to red indicating the Précis is in standby mode. When the device is on the front rotary knob is lit blue also. The level of light intensity is selectable and may be turned if preferred.

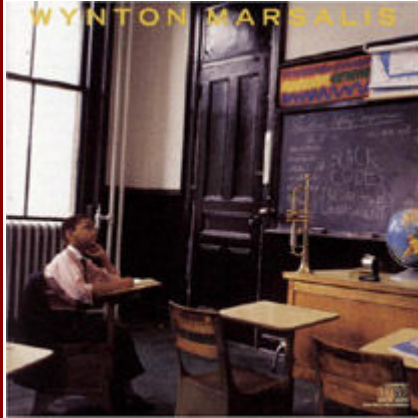
The only drawback was that the 2 second wait was a bit long for my taste. However the tactile involvement with the equipment was satisfying in a nostalgic way while at the same time incorporating modern technology. This is a wonderfully elegant executed design that is commensurate with the price paid for such a high end piece of equipment.

A press of the single front knob

Sound – the beauty is in the details

After a long burn in of about a week of random music the Précis was ready for a thorough inspection. After trying Soundstring and Electraglide power cables for several days I found a simple PS Audio Mini Lab allowed the best performance from the integrated amp. I'm saying this up front because the Précis' timing, resolution and perceived levels of distortion were vastly affected by cable choice so





tapping excitement and groove until I put the best matched power cable at my disposal on the integrated. By all means, and if possible be sure to experiment with cables when auditioning this integrated.

The Précis resolved Wynton Marsalis' title track "*Black Codes*" (Columbia CK 40009) with the best inner dynamics I've ever heard making all the subtleties and technical prowess of

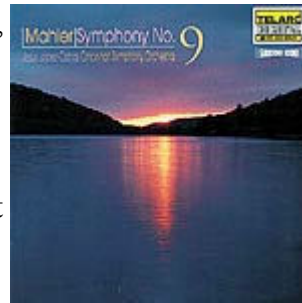
Wynton's solo shine more than ever before in my system. All throughout there was an effortless dynamic and harmonic shading that conveyed the little variations of articulation and texture in each soloist's story. I heard the most realistic and delicate cymbals ever with gobs of realistic (not euphonic) harmonic bloom. So much so that the cymbal's showered the room, - no I stand corrected – showered my house with sound without a hint of veil. From his Sabian cymbals to his dark sounding snare down through his fat sounding resonant toms, and down to his meaty rounded bass drum Jeff 'Tain' Watts' drum kit had a weight and expansiveness to it on this recording like I've never before heard in the 20(!) years I've been listening to this recording. (I'm not that old but my god, I just realized I've been listening to this recording since I was 16!) I suspect the Chapter amp's nimble timing aided in rendering such convincing realism.

The threshold of volume capabilities before inducing glare and distortion of this amp were fairly astonishing too. At one point on a sunny day I came home and opened the windows and let the system rip on *Black Codes*. My neighbors across the street, both father and son, have separately remarked weeks later on how beautiful, clean and clear my system sounded. The son even said "I heard you pumping it through the house!" without realizing it was just two speakers. Hearing how this man, who is not an audiophile, spoke of how much he loved the sound and declaring with emphasis it to be "beautiful" was an unbiased testament to how musical and powerful this integrated was.

Bass reproduction was considerably more balanced, and nuanced from

don't render the upper bass as convincingly well as this Chapter unit does.

The first movement of *Mahler's Symphonie #9*, conducted by Jesús López-Cobas (Telarc 2CD-804261) as played back through the Chapter Précis was supremely delicate and more harmonically lifelike than any other setup in my system to date. With the volume level set at "00.0" on the Précis' graphical display I missed the slightest bit of the low end bloom and low end extension of the NuForce



Reference 8/Channel Islands combo but based on how sensitive this integrated was to my power cable swaps I'm confident that this could have been fixed by a higher quality and beefier power cord had I had one available at the time. Still further as I listened to a great many recordings I've come to the conclusion that the Précis is more accurate in the bass and the entirety of the musical spectrum than anything I've ever had in my system and ranks as a first class piece of equipment.



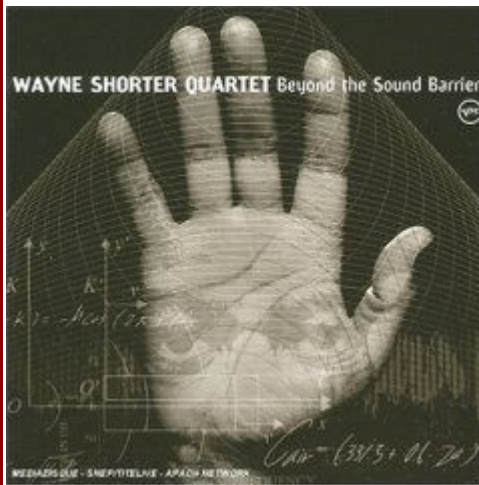
The nuances of detail, harmonics, and micro-dynamics achieved by the Précis trumped the NuForce's sound to no small degree. At the same time, I had to keep in mind I was getting this remarkably wonderful sound with the inexpensive PS Audio Mini Lab power cable.

One of the most welcome changes I had with the Précis was regaining the ability to listen to the radio again. (Yes!) My previous review samples, the NuForce Reference 8's put out so much RFI that my Fanfare FT-1A Digital/Analog FM Monitor was rendered useless. Fortunately for me I was able to once again listen to my favorites of WBGO, WNYC and WQXR broadcast here in the NY City area. I realized how much I was missing by not exploring all the new music or at least music I hadn't heard before on the airwaves at the house. Listening at home and listening in the car are two vastly different experiences and I was once again able to take up the habit of occasionally emailing one of my favorite DJ's, Brian Delp, while he was on air at 2 or 3 AM in celebratory response or just inquiring about music he was playing that I had never heard before.

On *It's Impossible* from Freddie Cole's "Merry Go Round" SACD (Telarc-83493-SA) the song reproduction of the instruments was lovingly detailed. The saxophone, sounded natural, full-bodied and rich. The cymbals were appropriately bright. The Précis effortlessly

conveyed the drummer's variety of subtle touch and differentiated the harmonic qualities of his various cymbals to a captivating degree. I could even recognize the engineer's mic placement and varied recording techniques without it ever sounding cold, sterile or analytic. The most appreciable aspect was how natural, fleshed-out and rich Freddie Coles' voice sounded. It had that right kind of weight without bloat that can be so hard to find in audio.

Herbert von Karajan's interpretation of the 2nd movement of Beethoven's *Symphonie no 5* (Deutsche Grammophon 474 603-2), at the helm of the Berlin Philharmoniker was a display of effortlessly reproduced extremes in dynamics. All the orchestra's crescendos and diminuendos were beguilingly conveyed without ever sacrificing truthfulness to the tonal makeup to the orchestra. I never perceived any kind of congestion or distortion of harmonics that would have



detracted from my enjoyment of the piece. Set at unity gain, the Précis drove the Thiels like it owned 'em and never broke a sweat as it manhandled those 4 ohms speakers.

Soundstaging was appropriately layered with excellent Précis ion of detail both laterally and front to back.

Wayne Shorter's "Smilin' Through" from *Beyond the Sound Barrier* (Verve B0004518-02) was the most shockingly dramatic display of the Précis' simultaneously terrific control and seemingly inexhaustible power reserves. John Pattituci's bass was sumptuously portrayed with gobs of texture. Through out the first part of the track Brian Blades colorations with his entire kit were clear crisp and superbly realistic. Cymbal reproduction had Blade's signature warm and earthy sparkle.

Ok, I have to really speak as a drummer here – the drums sounded RIDICULOUSLY awesome with Blade's dramatic reemergence at 6:28!!!! That first Bass drum hit and the subsequent groove was realized via the Précis with such authority, weight, and timing that it gave me that “goosebump factor” that says “now this sounds real”. At the same time all the complexity of Wayne's Quartet being sparked to new levels of interplay was spot-on transparent, engaging and beguiling. The velocity with which the Précis revealed the musical

intent of that moment was jaw dropping and I literally had to scream and toss up a few expletives. (Sorry mom). No, I didn't have to reach for the volume control even though I'm sure the dB levels weren't something to wallow in for a long time, but I knew those moments would come and go with out any very long moments so I just sat back and enjoyed the rollercoaster ride.



The reproduction of Piano was extremely faithful. At 10:52', the slightest intonations suggested by the sustain pedal and Danilo's damping technique were resoundingly depicted via the Précis in a way I had never heard before.

With the Précis in place I was able to listen with both my left AND right brain. The dynamics, tonal and harmonic colors being reproduced gave me tons of right brain enjoyment but then at the same time the speed, timing and effortlessness of the amp gave me more than enough information for my left brain to digest. I have to figure the Précis' apparent very low levels of distortion allowed more detail and musical information to make it along those wires to my transducers. This was very, very nearly a real world musical event and I'm still basking in the afterglow of it weeks later.

Turning to "Bei Mir Bist du Schon" as performed by Regina Carter on *I'll be seeing you: a sentimental journey* (Verve B0006226-02) with her special guest of Dee Dee bridgewater, I heard a better job of representing Dee Dee's voice than any other amp I've used with a more faithful midrange and, once again, a truly palpable tonality. Unfortunately the bass was not rendered with as much impact as I'm used to hearing so it didn't swing quite as hard as I've heard before. To my ears the voice stood out more because of the slightly reticent bass.

My cymbals on this recording had more distinction between them but not as much euphonic sparkle. For some this might be the exact ticket but for me it didn't invite me into the recording as much as I have with my older amp/preamp combo but then again my perception of my cymbals might be skewed since I spend more time listening to them at a closer range than the mics were placed in the studio. The only real problem was at times I heard the slightest bit of stridency from

Regina's recorded violin sound that I don't recall ever hearing before.

Hopefully more Chapters to come...

The Chapter Précis offers up a pride of ownership for its physical beauty, exemplary parts build and, most importantly its exceptional sound. It did give me a different perspective of several of my favorite recordings and accordingly I shifted my listening preferences. It seems to favor more modern bass heavier recordings in my system but I must qualify that statement by noting that to get the best tonal balance with it in my system I had to use one of my smaller power cables. At the same time, said power cable is made by one of the most esteemed companies in high end audio power delivery, PS Audio, which more than likely speaks more towards the capabilities of the power cables I had on hand for this review than any kind of shortcoming in the amp. The Précis does not romanticize while at the same time it's clear to my ears that the designers took great care in voicing this integrated amp for maximum musical enjoyment. It relays well recorded music with the least amount of damage I've ever witnessed in my system. I tried a few pop and R&B recordings from prominent artists and those recordings' lack of attention to recording quality shown through loud and clear whereas good recordings sounded good and great ones sounded great. There wasn't any of what I now realized was a slight sonic homogenization I got from my earlier setups.

Sadly for me at a price of \$6500, this integrated is currently not in my budget. Taking it back to Perry was excruciatingly painful but I will remember my good times with the pages of this Chapter for a very long time to come. Who knows, maybe I'll be able to check a book out two out of the library in the future?

Alvester Garnett

Specifications:

Output Power: 130 Watts into 8 ohms, 260 watts into 4 ohms
RMS both channels driven
THD + N Less than 0.01% at 1KHz. 22Hz to 22KHz bandwidth
IM Distortion Better than -90dB (19+20KHz dual tone test - 1
KHz product at 50W output into 4 ohms
Signal to Noise Better than -120dB (22Hz to 22KHz bandwidth).
Frequency response DC to 75KHz +0 - 3dB

Cross talk (channel to channel) -100dBv below 50KHz
Cross talk (Pre amp stage) -100dB at 1KHz, -90dB at 20KHz, -90dB at 100KHz 1V RMS Input
Common mode rejection ratio Less than -90dB (1kHz @ 0dBV)
Gain range Minimum to maximum -86dB to +12dB (Pre-amp output)
-86dB to +38dB (Amplifier output)
Audio inputs
Impedance (unbalanced) 47K Ohms
Impedance (balanced) 94K Ohms
Audio outputs
Pre amplifier stage - Balanced Less than 20 Ohms.
Power amplifier stage Less than 0.04 ohms.
Mechanical
Input sockets One pair of XLR for balanced line operation
4 pairs of RCA Phono for single ended operation
Output sockets 1 Pair of XLR for Balanced Line operation.
1 pair of RCA for Unbalanced Tape Loop operation.
1 Pair of WBT speaker binding posts per channel
Finish Fully bead blasted, anodised aluminium alloy casework.
Metalwork machined by a local ISO 9002 quality assured firm.
Power on/off Switch and indicator. IEC mains input socket .
Weight Approx. 22 Kg
Size 437 x100 x300 mm (WxHxD) approx.

Price: \$6500.00

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