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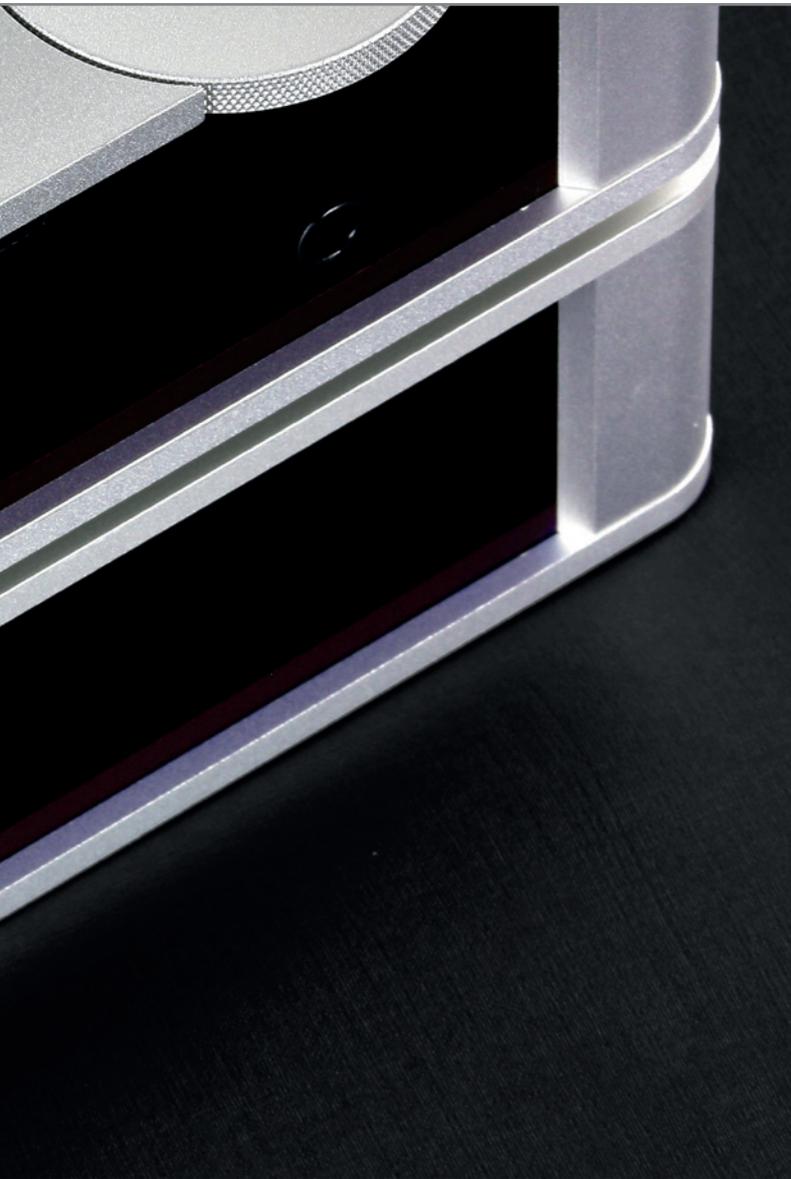
musicbook i25
network music player

Audio books for demanding listeners

LINDEMANN MUSICBOOK 25/MUSICBOOK 50
TEXT: STEFAN.GAWLICK@FIDELITY-MAGAZIN.DE; PHOTOS: IS

Everybody's calling for innovative products that will breathe new life into the market.

Norbert Lindemann's Musicbook 25 and Musicbook 50 are the perfect answer.



DIGITAL PLAYER/POWER AMPLIFIER

What I can do, however, is keep track of what's going on. And what I've noticed is that some of my friends are tending to downgrade. After what can be regarded as conventional hifi "careers" involving increasingly more complex installations, they've lost their appetite for over-complicated devices that require continuous pampering in order to deliver the desired performance. Nevertheless, they still want to hear top-class sound. So they comb the market for suitable equipment, don't find anything suitable, and end up buying some kind of lifestyle gadget that looks good in the living room, but doesn't come up to scratch on the sound side.

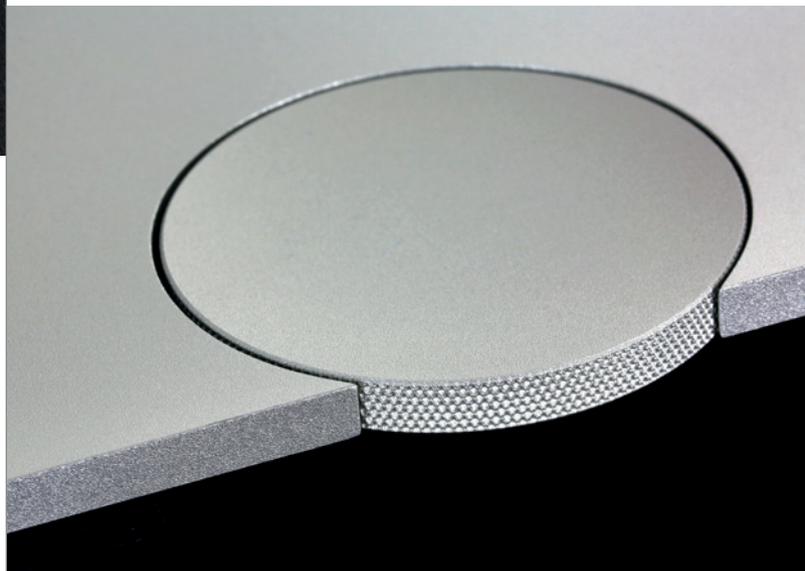
Norbert Lindemann is another person who has observed this trend. He has drawn his conclusions from it and launched a new series of MIDI devices onto the market. Something of a surprise, you might think. This is a developer who has never been suspected of making compromises in sound! An amplifier maker who constructed the device that impressed even our jaded colleague Ingo Schulz in FIDELITY No. 5! Such a dyed-in-the-wool audiophile is now pushing the trendy MIDI format?

Norbert Lindemann is certain he has taken the right step, but claims to be still making no compromises on the sound front. While accepting that the devices are attractive and easy to use, he insists that the Music-

For many years now people have been suggesting, not always openly, that the market is satiated, that manufacturers have lost touch with their customers, and that sales are not what they should be

In other words, there's a crisis!

I don't pretend to be a messiah who's going to step in, analyze the situation from the comfort of his chair, and come up with solutions to all the problems. Nobody can do that, regardless of the claims they make. If anyone had a patent solution, they'd already be a very rich person by now.





book series definitely needs to be taken seriously from the performance perspective as well. He uses the CD player in Musicbook 25 as an example, stating repeatedly that he couldn't possibly have built a better device.

Made in Europe

I remain skeptical, however. Not least because both these conveniently-sized devices look simply too good to be true. How, you might ask, did things in this scene get so crazy that I begin to get suspicious whenever a new device doesn't look like it's just come from the development lab? The Musicbook housings are truly superbly finished. Massive 6.5 mm aluminum, gentle curves, no visible screws, a flawless anodized coating – I wasn't the only one to initially place these devices in a much higher price bracket. It's also a welcome surprise that they're manufactured in Austria and

not the Far East. There's cause for further praise on the rear of the Musicbook 25, with a wide range of top-quality connections (two analog and four digital inputs, preamp outputs, network and USB).

The Musicbook 25's display is a feature Norbert Lindemann is justly proud of. The LED field is vacuum-bonded with the front panel, ensuring excellent legibility from all angles. This is something we are all familiar with from mobile phones, but is a first for audio components where unit numbers are much smaller. It's a pleasant innovation, and I'm able to read details on the display when sitting in my chair, although the device is located on a side wall.

Musicbook 25 can be operated using a remote control, a free app on your smart phone or tablet (indispensable for streaming), or via a multifunction dial integrated into the top of the unit. This dial lets you adjust the volume (turn), choose a source (press and turn), mute the device (short press), or eject the CD (long press). Although I have to admit that's pretty



cool, I don't really use this dial very often as I prefer to stay in my chair while listening to music.

In general, I don't like it when some functions can only be controlled using an app. But with an elegant and button-free design like this one, I have to admit that the idea works – and simply accept that the world has passed me by!

The full program

The elegance continues into the interior of the device. The CD drive is Lindemann's preferred music source, and a quality component. It's not simply a PC or DVD unit that's had a few functions removed - it's one of the few pure CD drives still available on the market.

It's made by TEAC and uses lots of metal parts to ensure stability and a long operational life.

Unlike in legendary drive mechanisms such as the Philips Pro, the CD is not played back in real time - the data is buffered before output as a clocked stream. This slight delay allows difficult passages to be repeatedly retrieved before a final version is stored. The result is that these drives are not so sensitive with regard to set-up. The manufacturer's (somewhat flip-pant) claim is that the device can be played standing on its head. I decided to take this seriously, however, and can report that it's true.

Transport is followed by oversampling, in this case operating purely using binary multiples of the input data, and then comes the converter, of which Lindemann is particularly proud. 352 or 384 kHz and a 32-bit depth are pretty impressive figures. Because converters tend to produce interference when idle, both of the symmetrical circuit components are put continuously to work dealing with artificially produced noise. This enables them to work better, and the music sounds subtler and more relaxed. As mentioned above, it's a fully balanced circuit. Because of this, both opposing noise signals simply cancel each other out in the operational amplifier that follows the converter. It's a simple yet elegant solution.

Only then is the preamp stage reached. Something that should reassure analog fans is that analog input signals (and there are two asymmetrical inputs) remain analog until they leave the output jacks. A resis-



tor network controls the volume in 1 decibel steps, and the microcontrollers are kept fully separate from the signal path. The amplifier functions themselves can be easily controlled using the proprietary remote control unit supplied as standard equipment with the device.

An exciting book

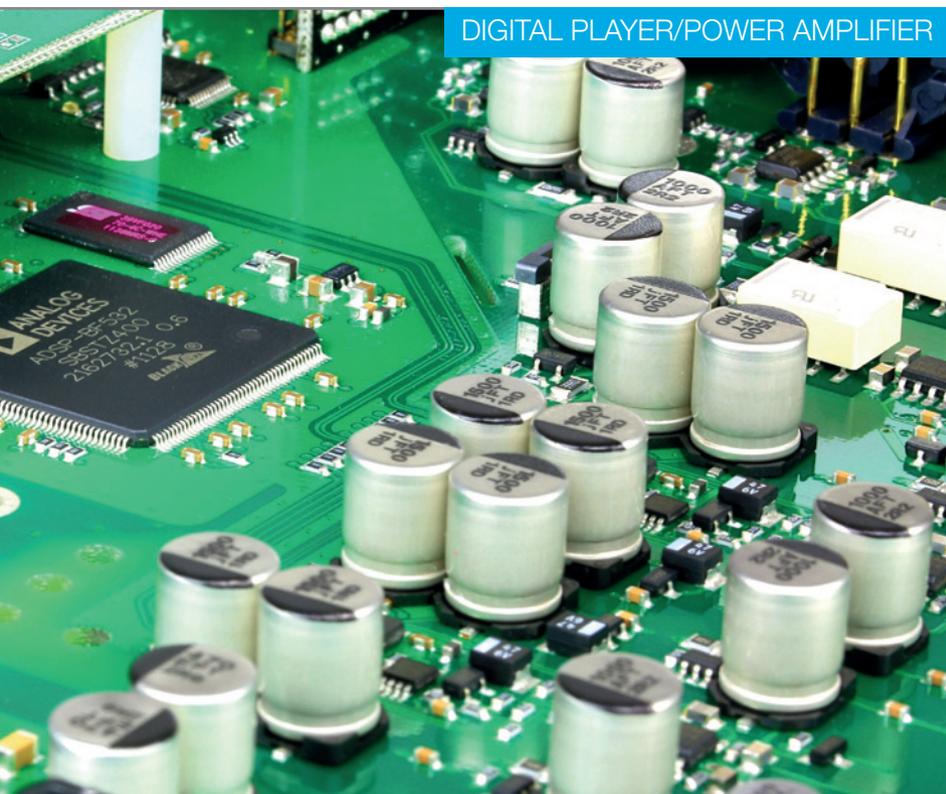
The equally ingenious power amplifier - the company's first class D amplifier with switched-mode power supply - represents new ground for Lindemann. The Musicbook 50 cuts a small, attractive and cool figure in the rack, powering small and demanding Spondors with such swing that it's a joy to hear. Lindemann Audiotechnik has adapted the third-party amplifier module, usually employed in recording studios, in a number of ways. For example, all the ceramic capacitors have been removed from the input side. And the wires have all been directly soldered to the circuit board to eliminate the usual connectors. This is the sort of fine-tuning you do to circuitry when you are so convinced that re-inventing the wheel is definitely not necessary. On paper, however, the power amplifier is not that powerful. Norbert Lindemann has talked about a pro-

ductive circuit that can kick in when high volumes meet low speaker impedances. I immediately tried this out, of course. But I wasn't able to silence the Musicbook 50 with the loudspeakers I had available (Spendor, Chario, B&W 804). Was the device in the red zone though? Hard to tell. The manufacturer claims that the power amp continues to increase the volume level without any tell-tale signs right up the point where the protective circuit kicks in. Whatever - it all sounded pretty smooth to me, and I do tend to turn up the volume in my well-soundproofed 30 sqm room. A further point I should mention is that the Musicbook 50 switches itself on automatically when it detects an incoming signal, and switches to standby mode again after a reasonable period of time without any music. I would prefer an extra button for this, but that's a matter of personal taste.

Nimble and powerful

Let's move on to the real listening experience. I didn't make any notes at all over the first few days. The Musicbooks are so easy on the ear that you forget all about critical listening. Norbert Lindemann himself

DIGITAL PLAYER/POWER AMPLIFIER



has had similar experiences. He concedes that his large amplifiers have more power and authority, but he can also imagine that the devices in the new series convey a nimbleness and involvement that many listeners actually prefer.

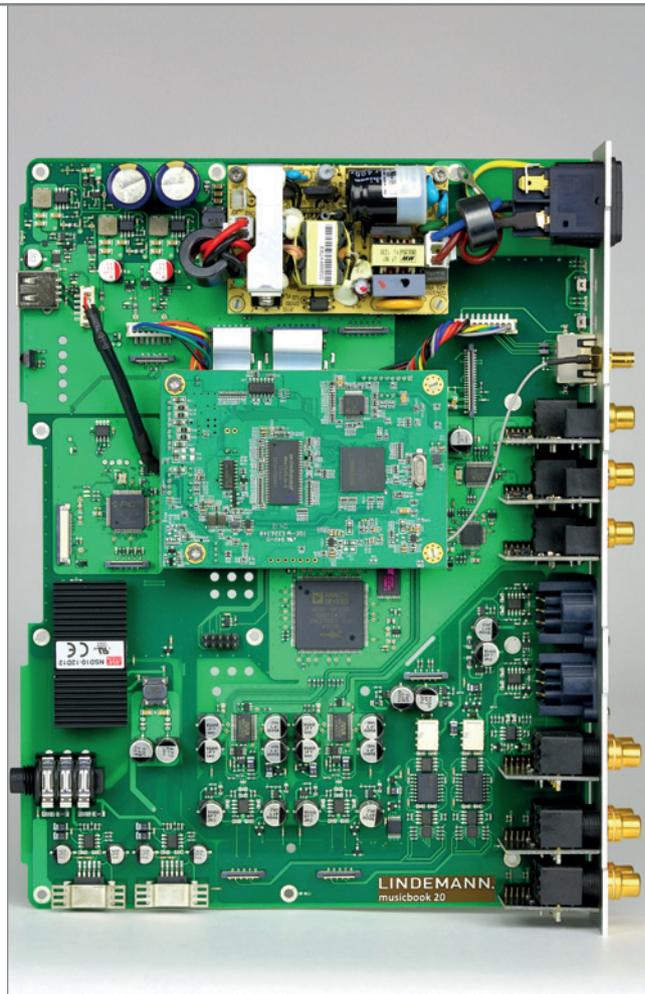
That's an opinion I can fully subscribe to. My normally reserved Spondors form a wonderful partnership with the Musicbooks and repudiate all prejudices about soft membranes. Lively and light-hearted, the little Brit whizzes around the corners. But - and that's what's really special - it combines this vibrancy with an unusually emphatic bass. I've heard a bass like this before on this speaker, but mostly in combination with big amplifiers, and even then you didn't get this really laid-back sound as well. It's the first time I've experienced such an amalgamation of both these capabilities on my Spondors. That's why I can really recommend you go for suitably priced speakers from Spondor, Harbeth (P3ESR or Super HL5) or Dynaudio (Focus 260) to use with the Musicbooks. You'll then have a system in your living room that's really hard to beat for sound - not to mention design.

The CD player and streamer deliver outstanding detail without any hardness at all. They seem to pick their way smoothly through scores of all kinds without losing the musical thread. Although the transport appears to have a little more substance and texture than the streamer, you can hear a faint running noise - but I have to admit this is only audible when the volume is very low. The spatial

reproduction is excellent: really broad and deep, and created for the most part *before* the speaker stage. On the newest Winter & Winter production from Aarón Zapico and his group, a curious mixture of arrangements of well-know opera music for a small historic ensemble, the cornet soloist appears to be standing in the middle of the room during Handel's *Lascia ch'io pianga*, and the listener seems to have a great view of the mouthpiece and finger work. And the lutes reveal a further trend in the sound: Some other amplifiers appear to emphasize the "sinews" of a piece, and place the strings in the foreground. The Musicbooks, however, accentuate the body of the music more. That this is the work of the preamp becomes clear when I connect up the small iPhone to one of the analog inputs.

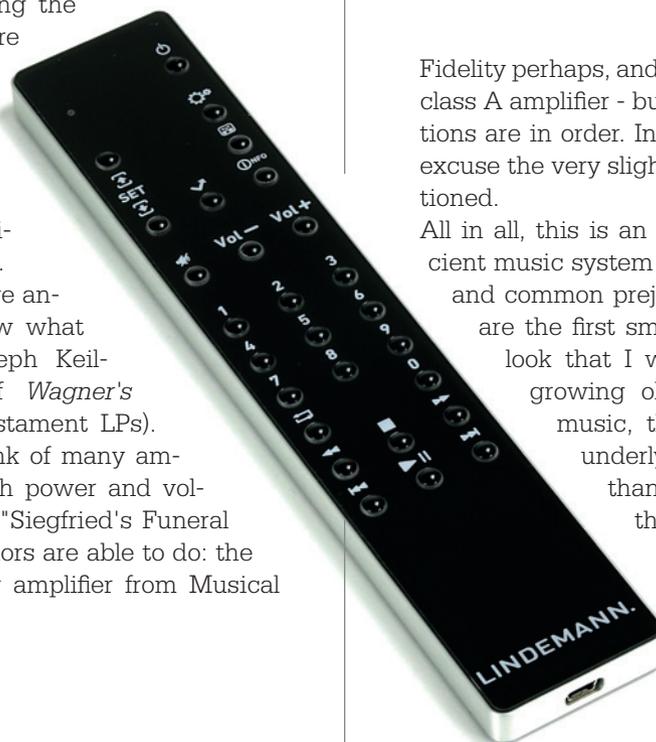
Being there

Everyone needs to commit a small sin now and again. Some time ago, and after approval by my domestic finance minister, I indulged myself by purchasing Mosaic's first-class edition of John Coltrane's *Sun Ship Sessions*. Wonderful music that the Musicbooks fill the room with in a lively yet delicate manner. Once again, it sounds like the musicians are playing just in front of the speakers, or seem to be approaching the listener. The atmosphere is almost as electric as actually being there. Those "high-enders" among you who prefer more detachment and distance may not appreciate this as much as others. The little Lindemanns have another opportunity to show what they're made of in Joseph Keilberth's interpretation of *Wagner's Twilight of the Gods* (Testament LPs). Looking back, I can't think of many amplifiers that elicit so much power and volume from the timpani in "Siegfried's Funeral March" as the little Spendors are able to do: the massive 1000-watt power amplifier from Musical



Fidelity perhaps, and maybe Pass Labs' wonderful class A amplifier - but that's about it. Congratulations are in order. In the light of this, it's easy to excuse the very slight rounding I've already mentioned.

All in all, this is an elegant and extremely proficient music system that belies both its price tag and common prejudices. In my opinion, these are the first small devices with a "lifestyle" look that I would have no hesitation in growing old with. When listening to music, they've made me forget the underlying technology more often than any "design product" before them. More frequently in fact than only a handful of "fully-fledged" audio systems. ■





Lindemann Musicbook 25

Network player with CD drive

(UPnP music renderer with remote control app)

Digital inputs: S/PDIF (2 x optical, 2 x coaxial), Ethernet (RJ45), WiFi antenna, USB (front)

Analog inputs: 2 x asymmetrical (cinch)

Digital outputs: S/PDIF (coaxial)

Analog outputs: Symmetrical (XLR), asymmetrical (cinch)

Supported digital formats: Music files up to 24bit/192 kHz, all known codecs including ALAC, vTuner Internet radio

Special features: Dual differential DAC with 352.8 or 384 kHz sample rate and 32-bit resolution; zero jitter architecture; gapless playback; fully balanced analog pre-amplifier with analog volume control, class A headphone amplifier, slot-in CD player, all CD functions also control-

DIGITAL PLAYER/POWER AMPLIFIER

lable via app; remote control unit supplied; matrix display with wide viewing angle

Casing: Aluminum

Dimensions (W/H/D): 28.5/6.5/22.5 cm

Weight: 3.5 kg

Warranty period: 2 years

Lindemann Musicbook 50

Stereo power amplifier

Output power (8 Ω): 2x 100 W

Inputs: Symmetrical (XLR), asymmetrical (cinch)

Outputs: 1 speaker pair (safety sockets)

Special features: Class D circuit with switched-mode power supply, signal-controlled power-on/off

Casing: Aluminum

Dimensions (W/H/D): 28.5/6.5/22.5 cm

Weight: 3.1 kg

Warranty period: 2 years

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