



MARCH 2010



# TSAKIRIDIS DEVICES ALEXANDER & ORPHEUS

**Reviewer:** Chris Redmond

**Financial Interests:** click [here](#)

**Source:** AMR CD771

**Preamp:** Music First silver TVC

**Amplifier:** E.A.R. 509 monos, Border Patrol WE300B

**Speakers:** Audio Note AN/E Silver Sig, Dynaudio Contour 1.3Mk2s

**Cables:** Kimber Select KS-1030 silver, Kimber Select KS-3035 silver/copper, Artisan Silver Dream, Kimber High Current, JPS Kaptovator

**Stands:** Single sand-filled column Atacama for Dynaudios, Finite Elemente Spider Rack for components, Townsend isolation platform for AMR CD77, Targer wall shelves for AN/E outboard crossovers

**Power delivery:** PS Audio P600 multi-wave, separate Kimber High Current mains spur

**Sundry accessories:** Acoustic System Resonators and sugar cubes

**Room size:** 70 cubic meters

**Review Component Retail:** Tsakiridis devices: £3,295/pr for the Orpheus mono blocks, £1,560 for Alexander Preamplifier

**Summary results:** I'd rate the Alexander a very good preamp for the price regardless of power amplification used though it is obviously an excellent match for the stable mate Orpheus both sonically and on cosmetics.

I can't help but rate the Orpheus amps very highly for their fluid musicality and their ability to make all genres of music sound natural, unforced and involving.



Despite Tsakiridis Devices having apparently over fifteen years experience in the home audio business, I'd never actually heard of this Greek company until receiving the review solicitation. I had absolutely no idea what to expect for quality or performance. This of course made the review proposition impossible to turn down.

Attempting a little research beforehand proved slightly frustrating. On the net there is very little information aside from the odd brief show report and passing forum comment. Visiting the Tsakiridis website to find the usual links to product details and reviews was a bit of a cul-de-sac. Apart from the introduction, the component descriptions are primarily in Greek and much of the website is still under construction. This only served to increase the intrigue however and from a list of nine amplifiers subsequently provided by UK importer **Ikon Audio Consultants**, the Orpheus monoblocks were recommended along with the matching Alexander line stage preamplifier.



Rated at 25 watts, the class A zero feedback 845 Orpheus SET Orpheus runs three valves each, one 845 output valve, one 6SN7 and one 6SL7. The Tsakiridis product catalogue thankfully provided in English by Ikon Audio consultants lists further details such as gold-plated WBT i/o connectors, low-tolerance 1% metal film resistors, high-grade polypropylene signal capacitors, porcelain tube bases, United Chemicon power supply capacitors and hand-wired construction.

Of particular note are the hand-made highly linear output transformers with multi-layer construction. The quality of the transformers has a major influence on the sound of valve gear but good transformers certainly don't come cheap. Rolling your own is one way to ensure quality and keep prices down.

As it turned out, the preconceived midrange hierarchy wasn't far off and the first thing that strikes one about the Orpheus monos is their beautifully balanced smooth and grainless midrange. Sometimes you hear a certain product and immediately know that whoever designed and conceived it must really love music and appreciate great sound - or at least agree with our take. While the mids were instantly recognizable as being virtually flawless and lacking harshness or grain, this was more because I tend to tune into this aspect. I think most of us do instinctively. We all know what a voice sounds like to become a default reference point. The Orpheus' class A pedigree shone and romped through the vocal test like a thoroughbred yet no single sonic aspect jumped out and impressed in isolation. When you are impressed by a certain characteristic, it's

often because other aspects are somewhat lacking. Then the sound isn't as balanced as it should be. With its 'get up and boogie' factor, Naim is an obvious example in my opinion. Many devotees would argue that the Naim sound is more authentic than any other. It's the unmistakable though undoubtedly entertaining character of the Naim sound which turned me away from it many years ago.

Their sound favoured certain musical genres yet detracted from others. The Orpheus amps now were proving immensely entertaining on whatever discs I threw at them. Transients were razor sharp, leading edges crisp and the whole experience extremely natural. Without being able to compare playback to an actual recording session, 'natural' is of course impossible to determine with certainty but the Orpheus pulled off the trick to convince me that they were natural. That's the important thing.

As it turned out, apparently not just 300Bs. The 845s of the Tsakiridis monos proved just as adept as the Western Electrics and no less magical. Listening further revealed only the merest advantage for the Border Patrol in terms of finest resolution but this was nothing worth writing home about and certainly not noticeable unless one were a most critical anal-retentive listener struggling to find differences between two very similar amps.



The midrange had that unforced class A SET liquidity stamped on its core but there were also improved dynamics and drive to remind us that we were outside 8wpc territory of 300Bs paired with speakers of the highest efficiency.

While in a direct comparison the Orpheus were only slightly less resolving than the Border Patrol though endowed with an equally convincingly natural midrange, their more ballsy bottom end should increase appeal for those who don't want to restrict themselves to the relatively narrow choices of speakers usually paired with 300B SETs.

The Orpheus captured Hansard's emotion and intensity perfectly and his harmony with Irglova was as tender as the performers were trying to convey. Yet when the guitar was strummed more forcefully and stronger emphasis was placed on certain words for effect, everything was communicated perfectly. This is an album about pain, regret, anger and confusion. While any decent system will play the recording and make the song sound good, the best systems add that extra dimension which makes you cling to each word and care.

I'd expected at this stage to be suggesting that anyone taken with the sound of the Orpheus driving their 88dB speakers could confidently move to speakers designed specifically for lower-powered amps and perhaps audition 'proper' 300B amps. Yet such was the quality of the Orpheus that I had to re-evaluate and concede that they could be the last amp even the most discerning listener would ever want or need. Ever since the AMR AM-77 integrated amp had leaned hard on

my Border Patrol last year, I've been on a mission to upgrade to an even better SET and redress my domestic imbalance of power. The Tsakiridis amps now hammered home this necessity even further.

My own AN-E Silver Signature speakers are perfect for my tastes and offer qualities I now couldn't live without. Their £20,000+ price new means I'll never be able to replace them. They'll have to last a lifetime – my lifetime at any rate. Along with the highly resolving components in the external crossovers and silver-wired individually matched drivers, they also are 95dB+ sensitive to benefit from single-ended single-tube 300B amplification and its subtle improvements in tonality. While being superbly musical devices, they are outstanding reviewing tools too. Besides cheer-leading my own choice of speaker, I'd suggest that the vast majority of transducers will find the differences between the Border Patrol and Orpheus more difficult to discern still. **Most listeners should in fact find the Orpheus amps to possess virtually all of the qualities they could possibly wish for in a 300B SET - without the one very real drawback of power.**

**On sound, the Orpheus thus gets my unreserved recommendation.** If the rest of the Tsakiridis range sounds as good, I can see the company developing an enthusiastic fan base outside their native Greece. **The price too is attractive when judging the Orpheus on performance.** Though build quality is not of the highest standard, it is sturdy enough for something meant only to sit on a shelf looking pretty most of its life. One minor criticism is that the amps are identical rather than mirror imaged. Placed cheek to cheek on a rack, they don't look as neat and symmetrical as they could. The chrome chassis is a finger print magnet so once positioned, I'd be inclined to carefully wipe them clean with a suitable liquid to remove handling grease and prevent any possibility of tarnishing.

At a UK retail of £1,560 the Alexander is a pure class A line preamplifier with 6 inputs, a recording output, stabilized power supply and 2 x 12AT7 valves. Weighing in at 6kg and measuring 42 x 32 x 14cm, it certainly was nice being able to position a component in the rack without any grunting for a change. Ratings provided by Tsakiridis Devices state 0.1% THD @ 1kHz, maximum output voltage of 50 volts, frequency response of 5Hz to 100kHz, S/N ratio of 95dB, input impedance of 47ohm and output impedance of 100 ohms. The Alps volume control and input selection can be operated with the basic remote but if you wish to change inputs manually, you must operate two toggle switches, one to flick up through the inputs, the other to flick back down. Causing a moment's head scratching since the manual isn't very informative, this works fine in practice and is likely the best way to switch between the high-grade relays Tsakiridis employs.

A quick run through the rest of the specs lists four independent DC power supplies, two independent power transformers, optional balanced inputs & outputs, United Chemicon power supply capacitors, porcelain tube bases, double-sided circuit boards with separate signal and power paths, hand-made power transformer, high-grade polypropylene signal capacitors, 1% tolerance metal film resistors, a low-feedback design, gold-plated Ultimex input connectors and Nickel-plated Ultimex output connectors. The black Perspex fascia is an aesthetic match for the Orpheus amps and the gold of the brass cap nuts makes for a quite attractive appearance. The two toggle switches and volume control are straightforward enough and the LCD window is easy to read from a typical seating position.

Flicking the 'up' toggle once moved the selected input to 'DVD' and moving the Kimber Select KS 1030 interconnects to the next set of RCAs produced continuity. It was finally time to sit down and listen. The first impression was one of pleasant surprise. **The loss of resolution I'd expected vis-à-vis my passive was nowhere near as obvious, this due again to the even-handed supremely musical presentation the Tsakiridis family had instilled in their product.** Granted, there was a loss of the magical incisiveness and rawness which make the TVC so special but this had held true also for the outstanding Audio Note M3 preamp at twice the cost of the Alexander although the M3 was undoubtedly a level above the Alexander's resolving power. On involvement and midrange fluidity, the M3 and Alexander were very similar however. **I'd rate the Alexander a very good preamp for**

the price regardless of power amplification used though it is obviously an excellent match for the stable mate Orpheus both sonically and on cosmetics.

There's of course a generous 5-year. As is, I can't help but rate the Orpheus amps very highly for their fluid musicality and their ability to make all genres of music sound natural, unforced and involving.



Inserting the Alexander didn't detract from the qualities of the monos and of course it was designed and tuned to compliment these and other Tsakiridis amps. Unless one had considerably more cash for a preamp, I'd be inclined to seriously consider the Alexander for a tubed proposition. While at twice the price the Music First—and to a lesser extent the Audio Note M3—demonstrate that the Orpheus monos are capable of more yet, the Alexander/Orpheus combo remains a thoroughly engaging package that should enchant and delight many a music lover around the globe.

#### Summary

**Quality of packing:** Personal pickup, hence not applicable.

**Reusability of packing:** Ditto.

**Ease of unpacking/repacking:** Ditto.

**Condition of component received:** Orpheus okay, Alexander was missing four screws and labeling on the back.

**Human interactions:** Professional and friendly.

**Warranty:** 5 years.

**Pricing:** For the sound quality on offer, very good. ....this is affordable high end.

March 2010

The reviewed products are hand crafted in Greece by:

### Tsakiridis Devices



Web: [www.tsakiridis-devices.com](http://www.tsakiridis-devices.com)

Email: [info@tsakiridis-devices.com](mailto:info@tsakiridis-devices.com)

Distribution in UK & Ireland:

### ikon audio consultants



Web: [www.ikonaudioconsultants.com](http://www.ikonaudioconsultants.com)

Email: [info@ikonaudioconsultants.com](mailto:info@ikonaudioconsultants.com)