



DS Audio ION-001 Vinyl Ioniser

by Roy Gregory

Static on the surface of vinyl discs and optical media is an all-pervasive problem that significantly undermines audio performance, eroding musical quality. It's an easily demonstrable phenomenon and once demonstrated, one that's difficult to ignore. So much so that I've become a dedicated user (and advocate) of the various different Furutech De Stat devices: It's hard to argue with their results, even if the ergonomics leave something to be desired, increasing the risk of handling errors as you balance the vulnerable discs in one hand and wave the De Stat with the other. A recent clash of vinyl surface and 'hairdryer' left a (thankfully replaceable) vinyl record savagely scarred and unplayable, an event that made the arrival of DS Audio's ION-001 anti-static device all the more welcome.

Weighing in at €1,700 (including sales tax), or around four times the price of the Furutech De Stat III, the DS Audio is going to have to offer some serious performance advantages to make it worth considering. It does and it definitely is!

Essentially, the ION-001 works in exactly the same way as the Furutech devices, bathing the disc to be treated in a wash of positive and negative ions that act to dissipate any surface charge. But the major difference is operational. Not only is the DS Audio device both free-standing and mains powered - so no more balancing acts with cherished records and no more running out of batteries or waning performance at just the wrong moment - but where the Furutech treats the disc before playing, the DS Audio operates throughout the vinyl replay process. The ION-001 houses two pairs of ion emitters in a tall, square section and slightly tapered black tower that you stand beside your record player's platter - preferably within 5cm of the records edge and the closer the better. It's heavy enough to stay put but not so heavy as to cause problems - although more on that later. A pair of 'letter-box' slots look down on the platter, while all of the connections and controls are located out of sight on the rear face of the unit, keeping things neat and tidy. The emitter slots illuminate with a slightly garish ▶▶

▶▶ green light (it IS a DS Audio product!) although its brightness is adjustable and you can even turn it off completely. I resisted the temptation to kill the lights purely on the basis that it reminds me when the unit is switched on.



Each ION-001 has a finite lifespan. DS Audio suggest that should stretch to 10-years if the unit is used for three hours every day, but clearly, leaving it permanently powered, either on purpose or by mistake is to be avoided. Other than switching it on and off, that's it. The ION-001 simply sits next to your record player, continuously discharging accumulating static.

Although the DS Audio ioniser is clearly (and not surprisingly) intended for use with LPs, like the Furutech it also works on optical discs. Simply place the disc in the area between the emitter slots and the platter of your record player, turn on the ION-001 for about ten seconds and residual static will be banished. Of course, this means it's operating in 'treat then play' mode, which nullifies at least one of the product's potential advantages, but don't let that put you off.

Does it work? And how! Direct, ABA comparison is of course problematic. You can't 're-charge' the static on a record after the ION-001 has done its stuff. But any comparison of playing a disc straight

from its sleeve and then replaying it with the ION-001 switched on leaves no room for doubt. The improvement in presence, focus, texture and immediacy is immediately apparent. Playing Barbirolli's

English String Music (EMI ASD521) with the ION-001 engaged generates a more palpable acoustic space, peopled with a more believable orchestra. The fragile, quivering strings on the *Tallis Fantasia* have more texture, a greater sense of those hovering bows, while the brooding, building tension that makes this performance the go-to recording is far more apparent. Space between and around instruments is better defined and the delayed. The double bass section is elevated on hollow wooden risers, and

the delayed thuds that echo the opening pizzicato phrases are more distinct and more precisely located, both in time and space. On the one hand, ▶▶



The DS Audio ION-001 from behind, showing the ioniser indicator lights, power switch and brightness control, ground post and socket for the plug-top supply.

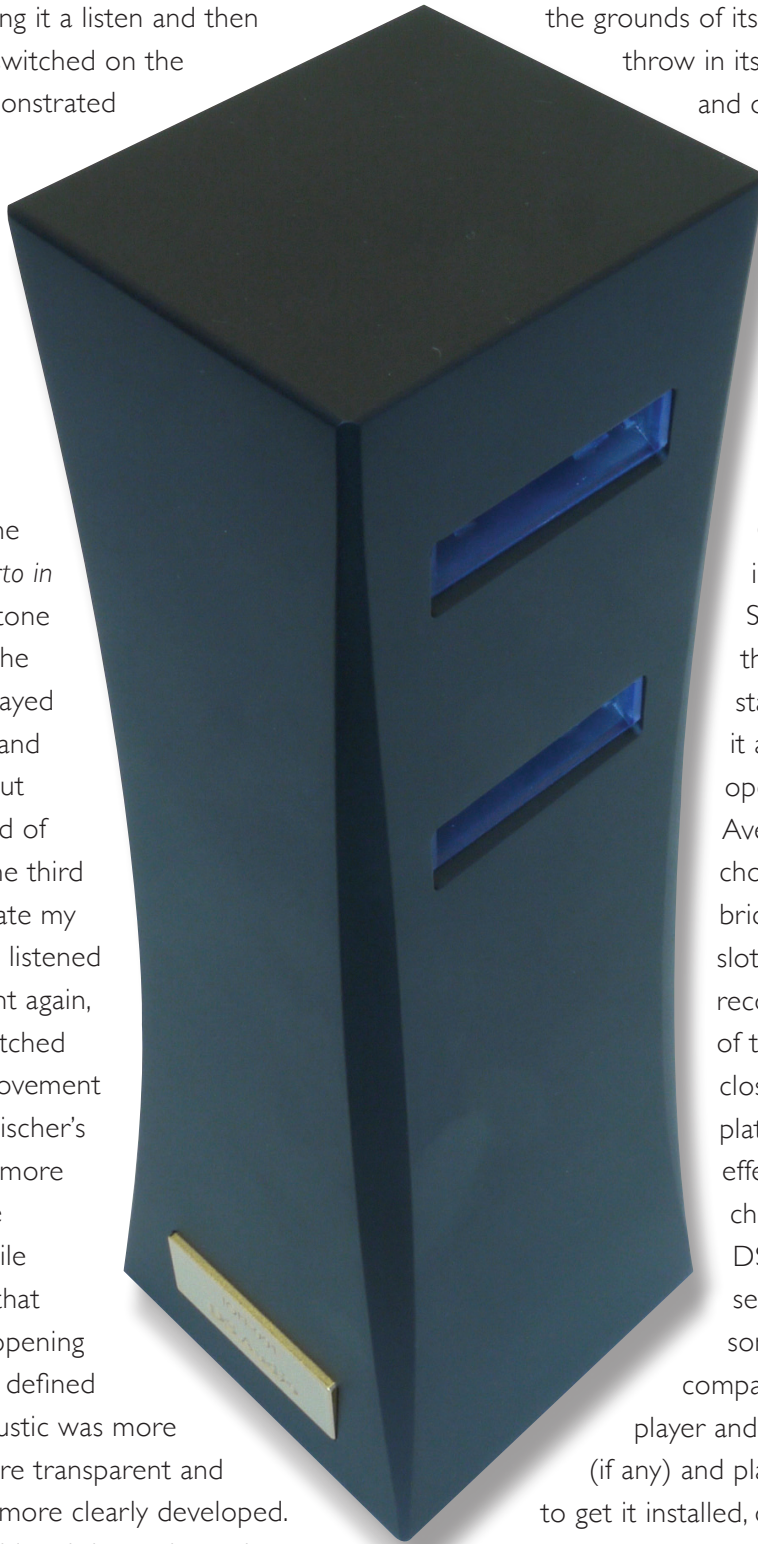
▶▶ that's everything I've come to expect from the De Stat III: on the other, the ION-001 is noticeably more effective, generating far better spatial definition and low-level resolution. Certainly, treating a record with the Furutech, giving it a listen and then listening again having switched on the DS Audio ioniser, demonstrated a consistent and worthwhile further improvement. Once again, really precise comparisons are difficult, but one experiment did prove interesting...

I treated the Julia Fischer recording of the Glazunov *Violin Concerto in A minor Op. 82* (Pentatone PTC 5186 728) with the De Stat III and then played the complete work – and very nice it was too. But having reached the end of the disc I re-started the third movement to recalibrate my expectations and then listened to that third movement again, with the ION-001 switched on. This time the improvement was really significant. Fischer's fiddle sounded richer, more vibrant and with more layered harmonics, while the murmur of timps that mutters beneath the opening bars was more clearly defined and textured. The acoustic was more clearly defined, far more transparent and the orchestral spread more clearly developed. Images were more solid and the orchestral contrasts more emphatic. The greater presence and purpose made the music that much more convincing, the performance more engaging.

All of which suggests that as effective as the De Stat is, its influence wears off over the space

of a record being played. In stark contrast, the DS Audio ION-001 isn't just more powerful, it operates constantly, maintaining its effect throughout record replay. I would consider the ION-001 purely on the grounds of its ergonomic superiority, but throw in its improved performance and operational consistency and there really is no argument that disqualifies it from Essential status, short of mechanical incompatibility. If the ION-001 has an Achilles Heal, it's the free-standing design, an approach that works brilliantly with the GPA Monaco, but less so in other circumstances. The Stabi M's lid means moving the ioniser into place at the start of each session, while it also makes playing with an open lid mandatory. The VPI Avenger demands the use of a chock (actually, a couple of VPI bricks) to hoist the letter-box slots sufficiently high above the record surface while the notion of trying to get the ION-001 close enough to an LPI2's platter to work at its most effective definitely presents a challenge. Whether or not the DS Audio vinyl ioniser makes sense for you will depend to some extent on its physical compatibility with your record player and the arrangement of plinth (if any) and platter. It might be a fiddle to get it installed, or impose its own practical constraints, but believe me, in musical terms it is going to be well worth the effort.


Used with optical disc, the ION-001 offered a similar performance advantage over the Furutech De Stat III, although in this instance the long-term benefits are harder to gauge. It might be possible to



▶▶ devise a test regime – one involving identical players and discs – but honestly, life's too short. I'm just happy to get on with enjoying the DS Audio's musical benefits, regardless of media or format. The results on LP are sufficiently impressive to brook no dispute, while the initial performance lift on CD or SACD is nearly as impressive.

At €1,700 the DS Audio isn't cheap but it is so effective that it has quickly become just another part of my record replay process. You might question how it stacks up in terms of value when compared to, for instance, sinking the same funds into a new or better cartridge? That's actually to misunderstand its contribution. What the ION-001 does is different and complementary to the other elements in the disc replay chain. It isn't an either/or decision. It's not a case of a vinyl ioniser or a better cartridge. You really need both. This is no mere 'accessory'. Instead think of it as a free-standing De Stat on steroids, a bit like a record cleaning machine for invisible static pollution – and arguably even more important than a good RCM to

audio and musical performance. That better cartridge (or CD player) still makes sense – even if you have to wait a little longer to get it.

Anybody who uses discs, vinyl or optical, as a primary source should seek out and listen to this DS Audio device. It won't revolutionise your disc replay: it will just make each and every disc you have sound much, much better! The De Stat III is good. The ION-001 is considerably better. It's worth every penny of its not inconsiderable price. 

Prices:

€1,700 / £1,500 GBP including 20% sales tax.
\$1,800 USD plus sales tax.

Manufacturer:

DS Audio, Japan
www.ds-audio-w.biz

