

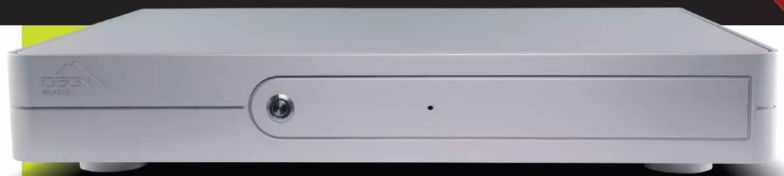
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JASON VICTOR SERINUS

Ideon Absolute Stream meta edition (2024)

SERVER/STREAMER



Is audio reviewing a futile pursuit? As much as we reviewers may strive, through subjective observation and objective measurement, to accurately describe how a component looks, sounds, and performs, we frequently find words and numbers inadequate to communicate the mysteries that abound in the transcendent realm of music. How can we fully share what we feel when a component allows us to experience, sometimes afresh, often in a new way, sounds that elicit joy, sorrow, terror, or more subtle emotions? How do we encapsulate in words and measurements the sonic equivalent of the wide-eyed wonder that shines through a baby's eyes as she discovers something new?

Such emotions—hence such questions—can arise when we move from one music server to another, or even between different software running on the same server. They are particularly

intense in the case of this review of the Ideon Absolute Stream meta edition (2024) (\$24,000) and its optional add-on, the Ideon Alpha Wave LAN Optimizer (\$6900), considering that the review lacks measurements.¹

Even the need for a component like this—a dedicated music streamer-server that runs its own software—is controversial. Some people use an all-purpose computer, one intended to serve

¹ *Stereophile* does not routinely measure servers and other digital-only devices. Why? Technical Editor John Atkinson explains: "My tests have shown that streamer digital outputs are bit perfect. I could examine the jitter and eye pattern with the S/PDIF and AES3 outputs, but all the streamers I have tested do well on this test. As long as the DAC's USB input operates in the isochronous asynchronous mode—and almost all do these days—there is no point in testing that output. And an Ethernet output is impossible to test without extremely expensive test gear." Apparently our measurements fail to capture changes that, although sometimes subtle, are quite easy to hear.

SPECIFICATIONS

IDEON ABSOLUTE STREAM META EDITION (2024)

Description Dedicated Music Server/Streamer with Qobuz integration and Roon Core/Server. Input: Ethernet (RJ45), two USB 3.0 for external HD music libraries or USB audio input/output. Digital audio output: two USB with proprietary femto-level reclocking (one with 5V rail, one without). Supported formats: Up to 32/384 PCM or 8×DSD native. Internal storage: standard 4TB SSD (8TB SSD optional). Power supplies: Four discrete,

ultralow-noise linear (for different voltage needs). Rectification: FET-based, proprietary, upgradable, active bridging rectification technology.

Dimensions 19.2" (490mm) × 3.5" (90mm) × 13.8" (350mm). Weight 48.5lb (22kg).

Finish Anodized silver (natural) or anodized black. CNC milled, single-block aluminum chassis.

Serial number of unit reviewed STR 220481. Designed and assembled in Greece.

Price \$24,000. Approximate number of dealers: 20 US, 22

North America. Warranty: 7 years.

ALPHA WAVE LAN OPTIMIZER

Description LAN optimizer (LAN to USB) with femto-level reclocking, designed for streamers and music servers. Can serve as a LAN switch between router and PC if PC can accept USB. Input: Ethernet (RJ45). Output: Gigabit USB.

Finish Silver (natural) or black anodized.

Serial number of unit reviewed AW 220492. Designed and assembled in Greece.

Dimensions 18.1" (460mm) W

× 2.7" (70mm) H × 11.6" (295 mm) D. Weight: 22lb (10kg).

Price \$6900. Warranty: 7 years.

Manufacturer

Ideon Audio, Parren 6, Neo Psychiko, 11525 Athens, Greece. Email: info@ideonaudio.com. Tel: +30 210 6199887. Web: ideonaudio.com. North American distributor: Audio Skies, Los Angeles, CA. Email: info@audioskies.com. Tel: (310)975-7099. Web: audioskies.com.

a variety of functions and filled with programs that run nonstop in the background—quite successfully. Some use such a computer with specialized software such as Roon or Audirvana. Some even insist, often on the basis of some theoretical commitment (rarely on the basis of careful auditions), that all digital sources sound the same and that those of us who insist otherwise (on the basis of careful auditions) are fooling ourselves.

Somewhere out there a reader is thinking, “Serinus is treading on quicksand. All he needs to do to ensure that he never makes it through this review alive is to mention MQA.” Rest assured, a mention of MQA² lies ahead. So if, soon after reading this, you receive notice of my demise and wish to honor my memory, in lieu of flowers, please send a donation to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to MQA Lovers. Nonetheless, while I still live and without further hyperbole, I proceed.

The ideas behind Ideon

Nothing obvious and external greatly distinguishes the Ideon Absolute Stream meta edition (2024) from other dedicated music servers. Its cleanly designed front faceplate holds three items of importance: the company logo, an On/Off button, and a small blue LED that lights up after the On/Off button is depressed and the unit is ready to go.³ The back panel is similarly unremarkable, containing two “femto”-reclocked USB audio connections, one of which provides 5V; a LAN input; two USB ports for connecting external hard drives or USB sticks (or for audio input or output); company and model information; and a combination toggle switch/fuse holder/15A, three-pronged IEC input.

The Absolute Stream meta edition (2024) can render music files stored on its new, internal 4TB SSD⁴ or on USB- or network-connected external storage. It can natively stream internet radio, Spotify, and Qobuz; native Qobuz integration is new. The meta edition also adds an embedded Roon core, allowing it to do everything any other Roon server can do. The 2024 meta edition boasts more memory than before—“new and faster enhanced memory”—and a “revamped, simplified interface for Ideon Audio’s native playback software application” to deliver real-time “core” playback. More on that in a moment.

There’s more going on under the proverbial hood. Ideon’s website cites a “massively over-engineered power supply, abundant ultra-low noise power, discreet power lines to critical points of the circuit, circuit stability and isolation, constant phase / timing correction”; a CPU that’s “highly prioritized for audio playback only, ensuring highly optimized sound quality”; a specially designed reclocking circuit that includes “no-compromise femto clock architecture embedded as standard” on an upgradable platform that eliminates jitter and provides “future-proof phase correction”; a “very large” main linear power bank composed of low-ESR (equivalent series resistance) silk capacitors and a hand-made, high-wattage audiophile transformer; “proprietary, upgradable, zero-noise rectification active bridging technology” to eliminate diode-rectification noise; four separate, discrete power lines with

“ultra-low noise linear power ... providing the different voltage levels the device requires”; a “proprietary, ultra-low ESR bypass power filter” to improve transient current quality because “we discovered that the quality of transient current going to the CPU affected sound”; short signal paths without wiring; no switching power supplies; and the reduction of internal noise-inducing peripheral circuits “as much as possible.” All this, which I managed to compress into a single, very long sentence, weighs 49lb and resides in a CNC-milled chassis that takes 15 hours to fabricate.

To gain further insight into the product, I Zoomed with Athens-based Ideon co-owner and CEO/software architect/product optimizer George Ligerakis, US distributor Audio Skies’ Michael Vamos, and Ideon Network Engineer Emiliios Ermidis. Language barriers prevented the participation of the chief designer and co-owner, electrical engineer Vassilis Tounas.

Ligerakis, whose degree in information management and mathematics led to work in the IT industry, software marketing management, and psychology, explained that Ideon has a group of eight people, including the longtime chief audio engineer for the local philharmonic and other members of the music industry, who join Ideon’s team to evaluate the sonics of Ideon products. Multiple listening sessions transpire before everyone signs off on the final product’s sound.

Vamos emphasized that Ideon uses a “very high-quality CPU optimized to only play music, with extremely low latency. ... It plays live with no other processes running in parallel. As far as we know, unlike any other streamer on the market, the Ideon CPU plays directly and live from the kernel without any processing or lag. Ideon also uses totally overpowered, very quiet linear power supplies to achieve optimal sound quality.”

A bit more about that “directly and live from the kernel” bit. One thing that means is that the track is buffered and played from memory, but there’s more to it than that. Apparently, the native Linux recently—within the last few years—added “real-time” capability. This functionality is intended for mission-critical applications in which a computer must respond promptly—without significant latency—to an external event. It’s especially helpful when the computer interacts with some real-world device, like a car or a medical device. Emiliios told me that as far as he knows, Ideon is the first hi-fi manufacturer to utilize this native Linux “real-time” capability. He emphasized the Absolute’s use of Linux’s own core, not a home-built substitute, ensuring, he said, more reliable, efficient operation.

“Our big goal was to create a device very similar to our Absolute

2 Justifiably, some declared MQA dead after MQA Ltd. was liquidated and Tidal abandoned the format. But then Lenbrook, parent company of NAD, Bluesound, and PSB, bought MQA’s residual assets and have announced plans, with HDTTracks, to initiate a service that streams “a novel application of the AIRIA by MQA Lab codec.” AIRIA is one of the trademarked technologies Lenbrook spun off from MQA. Rumors of MQA’s death might be premature.

3 It is unnecessary to leave the Absolute Stream fully powered up 24/7; it will perform optimally after an hour of playback. From standby, turn it on in front and run signal through it for an hour before commencing serious listening.

4 An 8TB SSD is also available.



DAC⁵ that, first of all, is so musical, with sound so organic, that it makes you enjoy your music above everything else,” Ligerakis said. “We strive to find the right balance between the power needed for the CPU to perform optimally and the noise it creates. Some other companies use high-end CPUs that require a lot of power, but their power requirements make them impossible to power with pure, ultralow-noise linear power supplies. You have to power three or four different parts of a streamer’s circuit with different voltages, which is hard to do with linear power supplies, so they resort to switching power supplies and then use other techniques to remove the noise those switching power supplies create. It becomes very complicated and requires a big chassis with a lot of different circuits. It took us two years to design a streamer that only uses pure linear power.”

The Absolute Stream meta edition uses nine extremely low noise, industrial-grade voltage regulators. It also employs noise-reducing active-bridging rectification accomplished with FETs rather than noise-inducing active diodes that switch on and off—an implementation borrowed from fighter plane technology.

The Absolute Stream offers numerous software choices: their own software (which during the review period had only one streaming option, Qobuz); Roon; and other players that use the UPnP protocol, including JRiver. As you might expect, Ideon prefers the sound of its own software. How can different software sound different, even when it’s serving up the same digital data? By running quieter. “Ideon did a test with a downloaded track,” Vamos said. “Their software’s CPU was using around 5% of its total capacity to play it, but Roon required between 30% to 60% of CPU capacity to play the same track. That’s because Roon is working continuously while playing, searching for every single version of the track, including cover versions and live versions.” More CPU means more electronic noise. “Roon has all these processes running in the background that do not help the sound. If you play Qobuz without going through Roon, the sound quality goes up quite a bit.”

And if you prefer Roon’s convenience and information-rich environment? “As far as I know, Ideon’s is the only streamer that powers the internal Roon core with an ultralow-noise, internal linear power supply.⁶ Usually when you have Roon inside, you need to power it with a switch-mode power supply. Ideon’s solution gives you better quality and eliminates the need for an external Roon core. We play Qobuz directly from the kernel of the operating system. The whole device plays one song directly from RAM.”

Ideon reclocks signals with “perfect phase” using its own software and chips designed in collaboration with the chip manufacturer. The only Chinese part in the server is one pushbutton; everything else is sourced from the US, Japan, France, and Germany and assembled in Greece.

Ligerakis said, “Ideon deploys a CPU in a very unique way.

We have designed the Absolute Stream’s associated boards and reclocking modules to work with the CPU differently than other companies. We go to every little point where there is noise and bypass it using high-grade capacitors that bypass the normal CPU capacitors.

“Where rectification normally induces noise, we use FET-based noise elimination technology, linear power supplies, and extremely low-noise regulators. It’s a chain of things in which we supply the right power for a processor to operate. Our construction is modular so that if we come up with a better part or board, you can install it. Our software is also self-updating, which makes the server future-proof. If we find a better way to do things, you don’t have to sell the Absolute Stream and start over.”

In short, the Ideon streamer does what other high-end server/streamer manufacturers do, each in their own way and, importantly, not necessarily with equal success: sends a clean, optimally reclocked signal out to the DAC from an electronically quiet environment.

Enter the Alpha Wave

I first learned about the Ideon Alpha Wave at Munich High End 2024. Without the Alpha Wave, which is optional, the Absolute Stream meta edition (2024) accepts audio data via Ethernet. Ideon, however, considers USB less prone to noise. The Alpha Wave LAN optimizer takes in an Ethernet signal, converts it to USB, reclocks it, and outputs the music data over USB at a speed of up to 1GB. This data can be fed into the Absolute Streamer via one of the USB 3.0 ports normally used for external storage.

Among its other advantages, this approach makes a fancy network switch unnecessary. Vamos: “Ethernet switches are kind of a band-aid because they still output LAN, and LAN is the actual noise problem. Ideon gets rid of LAN noise by converting LAN to USB 3.0 which is cleaner with less noise and distortion.

“It is not mandatory to use the Alpha Wave with our Absolute Stream, and we do not require customers to do so. The Alpha Wave is a separate, optional product, designed for all network audio configurations, that improves the sound of the Absolute Stream just as it would improve the sound of any similar streamer device. The Absolute Stream performs extremely well on its own, without the Alpha Wave.”

By email, Ligerakis reinforced Vamos’s commentary. “The Alpha Wave is designed to be used with any streamer on any LAN network. It will enhance the performance of any streamer. It functions like an external LAN card, replacing a streamer’s internal

⁵ Review forthcoming.

⁶ This is challenging because the power requirements are high, and power must be delivered quickly, with a low output impedance—which is harder with a linear power supply. Ideon, though, apparently is not alone in using linear power supplies with the Roon core. Innuos claims this, and there may be others still.



LAN card with an efficient, reclocked version powered by an ultra-low noise linear power supply. Since we believe that USB signal transfer is superior to LAN, the Alpha Wave provides USB output” to any USB-equipped DAC.

After two weeks of listening to the Absolute Stream, I asked Ligerakis and Vamos if they could provide an Alpha Wave for the review. When the Alpha Wave arrived, I let it settle in before comparing the sound of the Absolute Stream + Alpha Wave to the sound of the Absolute Stream solo.

Setup and software challenges

I placed the Absolute Stream on the top shelf of my Grand Prix Monza double rack, on the same Wilson Audio Pedestals I use under my reference streamer. Streaming data was delivered to the Absolute Stream from a Small Green Computer/Sosno opticalModule Deluxe via the Innuos PhoenixNet reclocking network switch. Output from the Absolute Stream was delivered to the dCS Vivaldi Upsampler Plus via the Absolute Stream’s USB audio output.

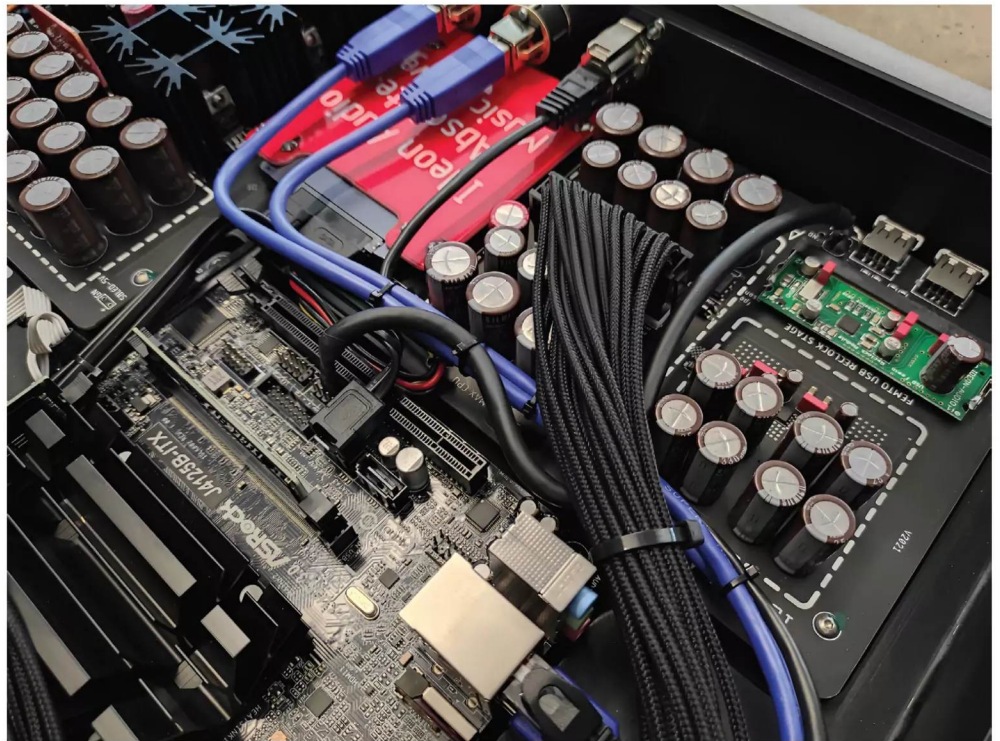
The Absolute Stream has two USB outputs intended for audio, one of which supplies 5V to the receiving device and one that doesn’t. I started with what I considered the obvious choice for use with the Vivaldi system, the one without 5V, but with that choice, the connection dropped repeatedly. After consultation and some experimentation, I ended up using the 5V output. With this output, the connection remained stable.

It took me all of 30 seconds to conclude that Ideon’s software yielded sound that was more transparent, color-saturated, and involving than the sound produced with the Absolute Stream running Roon. Roon may allow me to stream Tidal and Qobuz and to search more efficiently and expeditiously, but this audiophile/critic chose better sonics over convenience and bid Roon and Tidal a temporary adieu.

Ideon’s software has numerous idiosyncrasies. Its interface is in the visual style widely known as Utilitarian Clunky, and it lacks the aesthetic appeal and navigational ease of other systems, especially Roon. It also greatly prefers FLAC files over WAV, presumably due to the former’s metadata-storage capabilities.

I receive much music in for review in WAV format. The Ideon often choked on WAV files; it did much better with FLAC. For WAV to display properly, the “Album Artist” and “Album” tags must be stipulated in a prescribed, consistent manner, on all album tracks. Ermidis proposed I use the metadata capabilities of either mp3Tag or Foobar to enter the required metadata by hand. That’s doable if the number of such albums is relatively small, or if you have a great deal of time on your hands.

As a test, I sent prerelease WAV files for Rodgers & Hammerstein’s two-disc album *Carousel* and an enticing single-disc Stravinsky compilation to Ermidis for metadata massage; neither was listed yet in MusicBrainz, etc. When Ermidis returned the



files, he assured me they would display correctly, but in the context of my system the Ideon software broke *Carousel* into perhaps 20 folders, none displaying cover art, and the Stravinsky into three; all three Stravinsky folders displayed the correct cover art. I don’t know why WAV fields that displayed perfectly in Greece would not pass the sniff test in Port Townsend. In any case, when I used XLD to convert these files to FLAC—I also renamed the cover art “Cover.jpg” and the booklet “booklet.jpg”—the albums displayed perfectly.⁷

Thankfully, Ideon’s software offers an alternative to the standard view: You can view your library using the “File System” method, which lists all tracks within a folder, even when they’re WAV. There was however one glitch: For reasons unknown, the WAV files on the Isotek break-in disc I customarily play at the start of listening sessions—files ripped from CD eons ago—would not play at all.

Ideon’s software lacks an app, relying instead on a web-based tool. On my iMac, I opened my browser and typed “Ideon.local.” When I used Qobuz, Ideon’s album display did not indicate the resolution of Qobuz albums. To find that out, I had to open folders one at a time, click on a track, and examine the readout—hardly user-friendly.

Liner notes had to be in pdf format and labeled “booklet.pdf”; otherwise, they would not display. If booklets display in Qobuz, I could not find them. Covers displayed only if named “Cover.jpg”. (Vamos said other names work including cover, folder, Folder, Front, and front.)

Ideon software only allows you to add one volume of a multi-volume NAS, and it will not pass MQA. I was eager to hear Peter McGrath’s MQA-encoded files of his live recording of Emanuel Ax playing Beethoven and Schönberg, which, through a CH Precision

⁷ There are many apps, including some that are excellent and free, that allow you to bulk-convert WAV files to FLAC. If you are concerned about paying a sonic penalty—opinions differ on this—you can choose FLAC compression level 0. Even those who insist that different lossless digital files can sound different (presumably due to different levels of electronic noise generated during decompression) generally agree that FLAC 0 is indistinguishable from WAV.—**Jim Austin**

and Wilson system at High End Munich 2024, delivered the most convincing reproduction of a grand piano's timbres I'd ever heard. I couldn't play those files with the Ideon server/streamer.

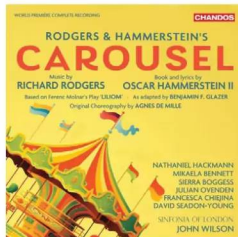
Like some other server manufacturers, Ideon has some software work to do. It wasn't as antediluvian as other proprietary software I've tried, on a server I refused to review. Yet its interface pales before Roon and some others. I stuck with it for one reason: With the Ideon Absolute Stream meta edition (2024), Ideon's software provided the best sound.

The good stuff

Software limitations aside, the Ideon Absolute Stream meta edition (2024), running its own software, delivered clearer, more involving sound than any other music server or streamer I've heard in my reference system. Especially with vocals and acoustic instruments, it let me hear emphases, nuances, shading, and spatial information that previously had remained hidden. Time and time again, I sat spellbound, mesmerized by the depth of musical genius it shared.

The Absolute Stream delivered sound that was transparent, fresh, and alive. I began listening with a recording I soon chose to review for the October issue, *Mozart Symphonies Nos. 29 & 33; Clarinet Concerto*, performed by Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin and their bass clarinetist, Ernst Schlader, under concertmaster Bernhard Forck (24/96 FLAC download, Pentatone). I loved how the Absolute Stream meta edition (2024) showcased period instrument timbres, and how its superb depiction of depth drew me deep into the glories of Mozart's music.

The midrange and bass were warm and full, more than I'd ever heard through a music server. Timbres were more fully fleshed out, and the bottom line of the music—its foundation, from which all else springs alive and free—was clearer and firmer. As I marveled at every sound Forck produced from his period authentic



basset clarinet, I discovered the Clarinet Concerto's *Adagio* so beautiful, heartfelt, and limpidly rendered that I could not stop listening.

Soprano Jodie Devos was in her mid-30s when she died from breast cancer. As many times as I've listened to her very personal rendition of Freddie Mercury's "You Take My Breath Away," the last track on her 2021 solo recital, *And Love Said* (24/96 FLAC download, Alpha), it had never seemed as personal and intimate as it did through the Ideon Absolute Stream. When I switched gears and cued up Rafael Payare and the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal's recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 5 (24/96 FLAC download, Pentatone), I realized it had never sounded as full and rich as it did

through the Ideon Absolute Stream.

The only disruptions to my musical bliss were software-related. In Roon, I could easily conduct a Qobuz search to meet a friend's request to hear, of all things, Rudy Vallee's famed recording of "Winchester Cathedral." No such luck with Ideon's own software despite various search strategies; Ideon's search function seems to replicate the weakness of Qobuz's own. On another occasion, I tried to find a live recital by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf on Qobuz; Ideon's software provided some 15 Schwarzkopf folders to search inside. Some contained a single album, and some were empty. I never found the recital, which displayed immediately when I searched for "Elisabeth Schwarzkopf" in Roon.

Absolute Stream + Alpha Wave = excellence

No matter how many times the Ideon folks told me that the Alpha Wave was optional, their clear conviction that USB in as well as out of the Absolute Stream would provide the best sound compelled me to try it. I also knew that if I used it instead of the Innuos PhoenixNet, I'd be able to send signal to the Absolute Stream at the 1GB speed it seemed to prefer.⁸

With the Alpha Wave outputting USB, Devos's voice seemed more present—more realistically reproduced, with utmost clarity and focus of line. It felt more like I was present in the recording venue, listening in real time, and less like I was listening to a recording. As trite as it may sound, her performance really did take my breath away. The excitement with which she opened the song, the convincing depiction of voice and piano in space, and the deep impact of the silences between notes held me in rapt attention. When Devos sang, "I could give up all my life for just one kiss," the Absolute Stream + Alpha Wave's reproduction of the midrange core of her voice transported me to that too rarely encountered sacred place where heart, sound, and truth meld as one. I could hear how, in some phrases, she intentionally opened into this midrange core, while in others she emphasized the higher overtones of her clear instrument. Each choice of emphasis corresponded to what music and words expressed in that moment. What a privilege to hear and feel artistry like this, and to move so close to it.

What, I wondered, would Elisabeth Schwarzkopf's justly celebrated performance of "Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit" ("You who are now sorrowful, grieve not"), the soprano solo from Brahms's *A German Requiem* on the celebrated recording by Otto Klemperer and the Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus (24/192 FLAC download, Warner), sound like through the Absolute Stream and Alpha Wave? Within the first few bars, I felt as though I'd moved so close



to her that I was listening through the aural equivalent of a magnifying glass. I'd always considered Schwarzkopf's performance a model of control, but now the seeming absence of electronically erected barriers rendered her performance even more inspiring. Schwarzkopf's absolute ease as she transitioned between registers without the slightest break, and the supreme mastery with which she voiced vowels with a technique that allowed the vocal line to flow unimpeded, were allied to a unity of emotion that conveyed the essence of consolation. What a marvelous performance! I am still searching for another recording of "Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit" that seems as ideal as hers.

Just as some people follow rock stars around the globe or line up days in advance for tickets to their favorite artists on tour, so am I one of those opera queens who would metaphorically prostrate themselves before the feet of great vocalists. In such a spirit did I turn to Julia Bullock's award-winning 2022 recital with Christian Reif, *Walking in the Dark* (24/192 download, Nonesuch), and play her sparsely accompanied performance of Oscar Brown Jr.'s "Brown Baby." From the soulful profundity of her lower range, I transitioned to "Memorial de Tlatelolco," from John Adams's *El Niño*, and listened to her sing out full over multiple octaves. Days later, I continue to hear this music in my head as I write these words. The impact of the opening orchestral exclamation and Bullock's subsequent octave leaps courses on repeat through my brain and body.⁹

I recall specifically how special Isabelle Faust's violin and the orchestra supporting it sounded in Britten's Violin Concerto (24/96 WAV, Harmonia Mundi). Ditto for every solo on the jazz recordings I played. But when I look at my notes, time and again I find myself marveling at what I wrote about the Ideon pairing's way with the human voice. "Never before have I understood how deep Maggie Teyte went when, in her 1936 recording of Debussy's *Trois Chansons de Bilitis* (16/44.1 FLAC, rip from a Naxos CD), she opened the chilling core of her lower voice to imitate the voice of her male lover declaring, matter of factly, "The satyrs are dead. The satyrs and the nymphs as well. For thirty years there has not been so harsh a winter." If you want to hear an intentionally hollowed-out voice chillingly express finality, listen to this recording through the Absolute Stream + Alpha Wave.

Would you like to hear how different Alexander Melnikov's seven different historic pianos sound on his landmark recording, *Fantasia: Seven Composers, Seven Keyboards* (24/96 FLAC download, Harmonia Mundi), or how magnificently John Atkinson captured the Portland State Chamber Choir's warm bath of sound on *Translations* (24/96 FLAC, Naxos/Qobuz), their recording of choral music by Ēriks Ešēvalds? If you want to groove like never before to the delightful sounds of Yusef Lateef most likely singing "doo, doo, doo" into his flute on "The Plum Blossom," the opening track on his wonderful album, *Eastern Sounds* (24/192 FLAC, Craft Recordings/Qobuz, remastered in 2023), you now know which server may serve you best.

Summing up

Never before have I reviewed a stand-alone streamer/server so accomplished in the hardware department, yet so behind the best in software implementation. True, my review collection has been limited to five or six server/streamers from Innuos, Aurender, Antipodes, and Roon, many of whose initial software releases also cried out for improvement. But as the years have progressed, each of those companies has made great strides in software design while also upgrading their hardware.

Nonetheless, as much as Ideon has some catching up to do software-wise, some other companies could learn a thing or two from Ideon's technological achievements. I fully believe you will

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Digital sources dCS Vivaldi Apex DAC, Vivaldi Upsampler Plus, Vivaldi Master Clock, and Rossini Transport; EMM Labs DV2 Integrated DAC, Meitner MA3 Integrated DAC; Innuos Statement Next-Gen Music Server and PhoenixNET network switch; Small Green Computer Sonore opticalModule Deluxe (2); Broadcom/Avago AFBR-5718PZ 1GB SX-SFP, Gen 5 Fiber Optic modules; Nordost QNet switch and QSource linear power supply (2); Sonore Audiophile Linear Power Supply; Synology 5-bay 1019+ NAS with Ferrum Hypsos linear/switching hybrid power supply; Linksys MR9000 mesh router and Arris modem; Apple 2023 iPad Pro and 2017 MacBook Pro laptop with 2.8GHz Intel i7, SSD, 16GB RAM.

Power amplifiers Dan D'Agostino Momentum M400 MxV monoblocks, Accuphase A-300 monoblocks.

Preamplifier Dan D'Agostino Relentless.

Loudspeakers Wilson Audio Specialties Alexia V with Löke subwoofers.

Cables Digital: Nordost Odin 1, Odin 2, and Valhalla 2 (USB and Ethernet), Frey 2 (USB adapter); AudioQuest WEL Signature; Wireworld Platinum Starlight Cat8 (Ethernet), OM1 62.5/125 multimode duplex (fiber optic). Interconnect (XLR): Nordost Odin 2 and Blue Heaven subwoofer, AudioQuest Dragon, Canare (subwoofers). Speaker: Nordost Odin 2, AudioQuest Dragon. AC: Nordost Odin 2, Valhalla 2, Valhalla 1; AudioQuest Dragon and Firebird; Kimber PK10 Palladian. Umbilical cords: Ghent Audio Canare on NAS; QSource Premium DC cables with Lemo terminations for QSources; SOTM sPS-500 umbilical cable for SOTM Master clock.

Accessories Grand Prix Monza 8-shelf double rack and amp stands, 1.5" Formula platform; Symposium Ultra Platform; Nordost 20-amp QB8 Mark III, QKore 1 and 6; Titanium and Bronze Sort Kones, Sort Lifts; Stromtank S-4000 MK II XT power generator, SEQ-5 Audio Distribution Bar; AudioQuest Niagara 7000 and 5000 power conditioners, NRG Edison outlets; Environmental Potentials EP2050EE surge protector/filter; Wilson Audio Pedestals; A/V RoomService Polyflex Diffusers; Resolution Acoustics room treatment; Stillpoints Clouds (8); HRS DPX-14545 Damping Plates; Marigo Aida CD mat.

Dedicated music room 20' L × 16'4" W × flattens at 9'4" H.

—Jason Victor Serinus

hear the music you love to listen to via file playback or streaming better and sink deeper into its power and mystery if you listen through the Ideon Absolute Stream meta edition (2024). Your satisfaction will increase if you feed the Absolute Stream with a network switch that reclocks data and outputs via LAN (Ethernet). Your joy will increase even more if you feed it with the Ideon Alpha Wave, which reclocks data and outputs via USB. In fact, you may love this combo's sound so much that you'll stick with FLAC files, which the Absolute Stream's proprietary software processes very well, or embrace the Absolute Stream's easy-peasy option of Roon playback.

One way or another, you've got to give Ideon's Absolute Stream meta edition (2024) and Alpha Wave a spin. It won't take long for you to hear why I love their sound so much. The more revealing your system, the more you'll appreciate Ideon's excellence. ■

⁸ I recall Ermidis telling me during one of our WhatsApp sessions that while 100Mbps will work with PCM, it may not be fast enough to transmit DSD512 files.

⁹ Heartfelt thanks to Irv Gross of Constellation Audio, who played this exact sequence for me on CD at High End Munich.