

BASSOCONTINUO AEON

The lightness of this object confronted to other more heavy creations might led you to think that it is not of value if the designer was not the esteemed expert that he is. Well, we are talking about Aeon by Bassocontinuo that is part of Bassocontinuo's "Revolution" line.

We can call it hi-fi table or electronics rack but in any case we are dealing with that accessory/component that Bassocontinuo has redefined few years ago. Things began to change in 2009 when Bassocontinuo entered the Hi-Fi world. Lorenzo Belloli, the owner of the brand, was present at every Hi-Fi show and kept on telling the story of his creations, stressing his attention on the importance of isolation, dumping and so on.

For example, many of you surely remember that modular project of hi-fi table that had two winged shelves, very beautiful but also effective and practical. It is one of the 2000 and odd combinations of Accordeon, the electronics racks of the Reference line by Bassocontinuo. Accordeon is suspended between past and present while Aeon represents the new era, it is the gate into Bassocontinuo's phase 2.0; It reminds me of the myth of Shiva that created two worlds with her cosmic dance and then destroyed them. Aeon is evolved in its design, it's an extremely technical product and one of the few that uses carbon fibre. The inspiring principle is simple and rational at the same time: why should an audiophile choose a system having the space limits set by the rack he possesses? The answer that Bassocontinuo provides is that of a technological Meccano that allows you to customize the rack according to the needs of each customer substituting just few single pieces, uniting excellence of design and performance.

EMPATHY

Consider also the empathy of the person writing. In the hi-fi world there are products that sound good even to those that have never listened to them - the magic of marketing! But Bassocontinuo stands out for its marketing that is not massive and for the quality of its products. This is the reason why I like it.

It's an Italian brand - from Bergamo to be precise - and it is also a respectful integralist of the Made in Italy. It is also very honest and straight, it has never declared that a system that costs 1.000,00 euros once put on their racks will play just like one that costs 5.000,00.

Prices are important, 4 digit numbers, but these remain accessory components.

The value of Aeon comes out from modularity, design and performance. As for modularity, we have already touched on the subject and we'll discuss about it later

on. As for the design these pictures give an idea of how much this product is refined and successful. But what about performances? This is an international and very thorny issue. If we reason with the mind of an audiophile, very or little audible as they may be, the performances of an electronics rack are measured in its ability to isolate the components of the system from the vibrations that the loudspeakers generate that cause a feedback, with a specific attention on those that are generated by the floor and are conducted through solid bodies. The energy of a vibration that comes from the floor is not the same as a vibration that comes via ether. Now we know our enemy, even if it's an enemy that is hard to define as it is customary with engineering issues. Mr Belloli tells us that after a very demanding phase of design he has conducted many tests. He began with static tests to understand if the structure could stand its maximum weight capacity in the long term. Then he performed dynamic tests to simulate what happens both with the vibrations of a music program and with the extreme vibrations of a seism. Then he developed the initial idea of a very innovative rack and chose materials, elaborated the shape and refined the details.

DESCRIPTION

What comes out from this development procedure is the Aeon. We receive it disassembled in three separate boxes since three are the main parts of this rack. There are the four legs that are divided into small columns that allow the adjustment of the height between the shelves, there is the X Skeleton - that the producer calls CFRP endoskeleton - and the shelf. Obviously the quantities have to be multiplied according to the number of shelves.

The overall weight of this Aeon is very light, in fact it is the lightest of the Bassocontinuo's catalogue. Anyway not every component is so light, it is more a mix of different masses: solid inox steel for the legs while skeleton and shelves are in carbon fibre. As for the lightness of skeleton and shelf - a nice surprise for me - it is certainly a choice that goes against the tide in the hi-fi world where everything has to be heavy. Here once again it is a matter of marketing, some people state that the more a component is heavy the less it vibrates. It is not true, it only vibrates in a different way. The endoskeleton is the centre of the project and the most technological part: bi-directional carbon, monoshell, empty core, that is to say one of the structures that has the highest rigidity/mass ratio possible. The beautiful shelves are up to the situation. They have a futuristic section that is narrower in the lower part and are built with two composite shells that are glued on the perimeter and that have inside an epoxy resin. Unlike other Bassocontinuo's racks in the Aeon there is no coupling with conic spikes. The legs support in contact with the floor is soft, and also the fastening between the legs, the endoskeleton and the shelves is dumped. The fastening between the small column sections that form the legs is done through a M12 thread (and every small column has both a threaded hole and a threaded tang). And here I would like to point out that these tangs that are only 18 mm and seem to be fit only for the connection of two columns with nothing in the middle. But

when it comes to connecting them with the endoskeleton, well the tangs seem to be too short to do the job. I asked Bassocontinuo the reason and they told me that this happens only for the pre-series production - like the one I received for my review - and that the current output has longer tangs.

PRACTICAL TEST

The dramatic question are on their way! And the: “ How is it?” “Does it work?” “ Is it worth its price?” Are here. To give an answer to these questions I think that a comparison in the American way - with a single witness - is the best. I promise I'll be careful and honest and I will not hear differences that do not exist.

I will compare this Aeon with my Mapuro rack. I will put on each rack alternatively my analog turntable (rigid chassis) with its relative phono stage (solid stage). These two racks -the Aeon and the Mapuro - have a completely different concept behind them and are both top of the line. Solid wood, 3 cm armoured glass, decoupling through graphite and an unlimited weight charge. This is the Mapuro that I see like a solid and strong block, while the Aeon is more like a highly technological platform. In this comparison the Mapuro has an advantage: it has been customised and optimized by me during the years. In fact the turntable does not stand on the glass shelf but on a sub-base made of slate rock that has been decoupled with o-rings. As for the Aeon I'd use it the way it is, without tweak. But I want to be nice and give it a head start to balance the situation; I'd use it without the top shelf that is the one that is most likely to suffer vibrations. So, phono stage on shelf number zero and and turntable on shelf one.

Let's start with a practical test. The music is quite loud and I put my index finger on the top shelves of both racks to feel the vibrations. In this first test the Aeon vibrates less than the Mapuro (and I stop here, do not ask me for other technical data ...)

Now it's the time for another test. I put the turntable and the phono stage on both racks alternatively, the phono stage is at its max, the needle is on the vinyl with the turntable switched off - therefore all around there is only silence - and I slowly turn the volume knob until I hear the feedback noise. This time the Mapuro wins, at the photo finish we might say. With the analog sources on the Mapuro the feedback is triggered at a volume just a bit higher. (Do not ask me for dB levels please...)

But as it is customary for Audio Club we will perform another test, that we will consider the real test. It is a test with music, and I will play on both racks, one of the most disregarded audiophile LP's the “Little Concert” performed by the Wien Art Orchestra (original edition, double hat Art LP).

After praying God for ears able to hear even the tiniest differences, I hear a small difference. But before I start describing the differences let me tell you that I have optimized the analog front-end using as a reference my DAC-Sabre inside (yes it's a cartridge that is “forced” to play as conversion electronic chip) To tell it in other and more intelligible words, on the Mapuro sound there is more micro contrast, there is a slight emphasis on the extremes of the bandwidth: the ultrabass vibration is more

deep and the highest sounds are more present. A slight difference, I repeat! The Aeon perspective is more “third eye like”: that is to say with a more relaxed attitude, more flat, more Hi-Fi, more able to reveal the small details.

So what? Our Audioguida had an entire section for accessories and few years ago, there was another section in AUDIOreview dedicated to accessories. This means that accessories in hi-fi have their importance and technical relevance (other than exhibitionistic).

The glossy finishing of its shelves in carbon fibre has its importance with Aeon. So important that it's hard to separate in its price the percentage for luxury, that for R&D and that for performance. These are all present, that's for sure. Add to all this modularity that will make Aeon your definitive rack. As for the sound, I would like to avoid all those exaggerations that since the 80's are quoted while speaking about hi-fi accessories such as: it unveils the sound, enhances the dynamic contrast, there's more black space among the keys and what a terrific improvement ...

I am convinced that the influence of a rack on the sound of a system that already performs well is non-existent. And Aeon is no exception. These are differences that are placed in a refining zone and not in a zone that builds the sound of the system itself. There are differences that may enhance the sound but not even a crackerjack like the Aeon can transform a sound that you do not like in a sound that you like.