

JASON VICTOR SERINUS

Simaudio Moon 860A v2

POWER AMPLIFIER

We've all been in similar situations. We approach an undertaking with the highest of expectations. Then reality intervenes, expectations change radically, and we have another story to tell, post on social media, or use to begin a review.

This tale of altered expectations began a few years after my birth, at AXPONA 2022, where I covered several stellar-sounding rooms that included Simaudio Moon electronics. By the third such room, I'd resolved to contact Simaudio, check in with Jim Austin, and see if there was a product that made sense to review in my system.

Simaudio co-owner Costa Koulisakis proposed I review two Moon 860A v2 power amplifiers (\$20,000 each), which can be used as monoblocks. I agreed. Jim approved. Then, when Costa arrived to help install them in my music room, he told me they'd received only 200 of the 400 hours of requisite break-in time. On top of that, they'd arrived cold and needed three days of continual run-in to come up to speed—or, rather, temperature.

I heard his words, but I didn't know how they would translate into sound. And because *Stereophile* reviewers never share their listening impressions with manufacturers or their representatives while a product is under review (unless something is obviously broken), I kept a straight face when I heard a shallow, undistinguished midrange and harsh, disturbing top end that portended a month of misery.

Twelve hours after I'd begun playing files on repeat—and after



Ease, flow, and beauty are their bottom line.

Costa had departed—friend Scott arrived for a listen. As we entered the music room, François-Xavier Roth and Les Siècles' unique instruments-of-the-period recording of Mahler's Symphony No.4 (24/96 WAV, files supplied by Harmonia Mundi) was filling the space. I engaged the Stromtank S 1000 battery power source, which powers everything but the amps, and we sat down to listen to the third-movement adagio.

Rarely have I transitioned so quickly from "Play" to meditative silence. As my body relaxed, an alternative universe unfolded before and around me, and I was transported into the heart of Mahler through the lens of Roth's intentions. Every instrument seemed to sing in summer's light. Every line, note, and transition conveyed beauty and wonder. I felt like a child discovering for the first time the miracle of dew on blades of grass glowing under the morning sun, or butterflies whirling in the sky above. I could

SPECIFICATIONS

Description Solid state, class-AB power amplifier, bridgeable as monoblock. Inputs: 1 balanced (XLR), 1 single-ended (RCA). Outputs: 2 pair binding posts. Output power: In monophonic mode (as auditioned), 750W into 8 ohms (28.75dBW), 1500W into 4 ohms (28.75dBW). In stereo mode, 225Wpc into 8 ohms

(23.5dBW), 450Wpc into 4 ohms (23.5dBW); Input impedance: 47.5k ohms. Voltage gain: 31dB. Frequency response (full range): 10Hz-55kHz (+0/-3dB). Crosstalk @ 1kHz: -110dB. THD (20Hz-20kHz @ 1W): 0.005%. THD (20Hz-20kHz at 200W): 0.03%. Intermodulation distortion: <0.006%. Power supply capaci-

tance: 240,000µF.

Dimensions 18.75" (476mm) W x 7.5" (192mm) H x 18.25" (445mm) D. Weight: 92lb (42kg).

Finish Black, silver, or two-tone black & silver.

Serial numbers of units reviewed U4543247-B, W4548862-B. Manufactured in Québec, Canada.

Price \$20,000/each. Approximate number of US dealers: 70. Warranty: 10 years, parts and labor.

Manufacturer Simaudio Ltd., 1345 Newton Rd., Boucherville, Quebec, J4B 5H2, Canada. Tel: 450 449-2212. Web: simaudio.com.

scarcely believe all this beauty was mine to enjoy and cherish. To say I was high on sound would be an understatement. Was this what my next month of listening would be like?

Listening to what, by whom?

Moon by Simaudio, Ltd., of Québec, Canada, was founded in 1980 by Victor Sima as Sima Electronique. In the 1990s, the Sima brand morphed into the Celeste brand until, in 1997, the Moon brand prevailed.¹

When Sima employee Jean Poulin bought the small company in 1993, there was only one engineer, Thierry Dufour. Upon Poulin's retirement in 2013, Dufour, now chief engineer, bought the company with two partners, Costa Koulisakis (the self-described "face" of Simaudio and their director of training) and electrical engineer Louis Lemire.

Today, Simaudio has 62 employees including 10 engineers. The company sells its products in 42 countries: Its most active markets are the US, Canada, mainland China, Hong Kong, the UK, Germany, and France. Everything is manufactured at the factory in Boucherville, Québec.

Despite the amplifier's "v2" designation, only its case resembles its predecessor's. On the inside, the 860A v2 is transformed, a trickle-down relative of the top-line statement 888 monoblocks (approx. \$120,000/pair).

"We made the 888 to show the world what we can do," Costa explained as he sat in my music room. "The 860A v2 borrows technology from the larger amp and has virtually nothing in common with the original 860A.

"When operated in monaural mode, the amp has a fully dual-monaural power supply with one power supply per phase. You cannot get more separate than that." In stereo mode, it outputs 225Wpc into 8 ohms and doubles its power with every halving of impedance down to 2 ohms. If used as a monoblock (as I used it), each amp outputs 750W into 8 ohms, 1500W into 4 ohms. The 860A v2 isn't rated into 2 ohms—household-current limitations keep it from doubling into 2 ohms—but it is "more than up to the task" of driving a 2 ohm load, Costa said. Mono or stereo,

this class-AB design runs class-A for the first 5W, presumably into 8 ohms.

The 860A v2's transformer design is new, employing design elements borrowed from the medical field. The large power supply contains caps made to Simaudio's specifications. "We use ultralow ESR capacitors² and proprietary high-current bipolar output transistors, very tightly matched, that are custom manufactured for us by Onsemi," Costa said. "In each amplifier, there are 24 hand-matched 250W output transistors in parallel. The amp's enormous power supply"—or should that be plural?—"can support unrestricted power into lower impedances. Combined with

the huge energy storage of over 275,000µF in total per amplifier, you have massive power reserves available. Every output transistor is accompanied by additional power supply storage; this enables the amp to

It was the intimacy and mellow beauty of the performance—the exquisite focus of two musicians listening carefully to each other—that inspired reverie.

amplify high-frequency transients with greater snappiness and detail. You'll never use all that power, but the huge headroom it supplies contributes to greater clarity and instrumental focus."

The 860A v2 does not use a global feedback loop. "In a theoretically perfect amplifier, which obviously does not exist, the only difference in the audio signal at the input and output should be its amplitude," Costa said. "But as the signal is processed and gets amplified little by little as it goes through the gain stages—as every device imparts its sonic character on the signal and influences it—it gets distorted a bit.

"A global feedback loop takes the signal at the output, feeds it all the way back to the input, and does a comparison. Doing so inverts the signal and cancels out distortion. The more feedback you apply, the more you can reduce distortion. But constantly looping the

¹ If you're scratching your head, wondering why this company seems to have two names—Simaudio and Moon—well, so was I. Costa Koulisakis explained it very clearly. "Simaudio" is like General Motors. "Moon" is like Chevrolet. So when talking about a product, usually you don't need to mention Simaudio; "Moon 860A v2" is just fine.

² Low-ESR capacitors have less internal resistance, so less power is wasted as heat.

MEASUREMENTS

I performed the measurements of the Simaudio Moon 860A v2 with my Audio Precision SYS2722 system.¹ I initially preconditioned the amplifier by operating it at 1/8 power into 8 ohms for 30 minutes. At the end of that time, the top panel's temperature was 106.4°F/41.4°C and that of the heatsinks 132.3°F/55.8°C. I ran the amplifier for another 30 minutes at 1/3 power into 8 ohms, a level that results in the maximum heat dissipation in the output devices. The top panel's temperature had risen to 113.4°F/45.3°C and the heatsinks were now too hot to touch, at 144.0°F/62.3°C. The Simaudio has an appropriate heatsink capability for its power rating, but it should be given sufficient ventilation.

The Moon 860A v2 preserved absolute polarity, ie, was noninverting, from both

its balanced and unbalanced inputs in stereo mode and from the balanced input in bridged-mono mode. The voltage gain at 1kHz into 8 ohms was 31.4dB for both input types in stereo mode, 6dB higher in bridged-mono mode. The input impedance is specified as 47k ohms. I measured 24k ohms at 20Hz and 1kHz, dropping to 9k ohms at 20kHz for the single-ended inputs and twice those values for the balanced inputs.

The source impedance in stereo mode, including the series resistance of 6' of speaker cable, was a low 0.05 ohms at low and midrange frequencies, rising to 0.135 ohms at the top of the audioband. The variation in the Simaudio amplifier's small-signal frequency response with our standard simulated loudspeaker² (fig.1, gray trace) was a negligible ±0.05dB. Into 8

¹ See stereophile.com/content/measurements-maps-precision.

² See stereophile.com/content/real-life-measurements-page-2.

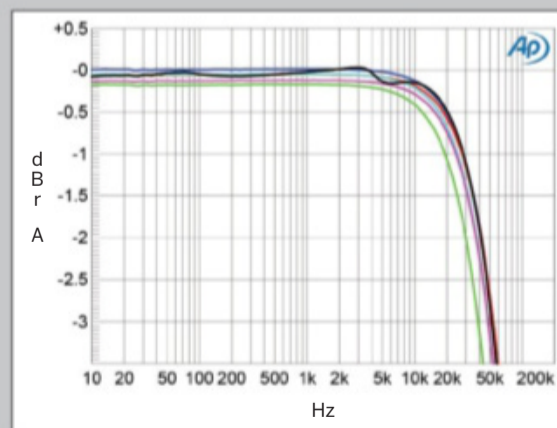


Fig.1 Simaudio Moon 860A v2, frequency response at 2.83V into: simulated loudspeaker load (gray), 8 ohms (left channel blue, right red), 4 ohms (left cyan, right magenta), and 2 ohms (green) (0.5dB/vertical div.).

signal back also subjectively slows down the amplifier. It creates a coloration that can alter detail and speed, masking fine, low-level information that is critical to recreating a sense of space in music. A global feedback loop usually produces a thicker sound and, sometimes, even a punchier sound—it usually provides better distortion figures on paper—but you may lose a bit of detail.

“When you remove the global feedback loop, the amplifier no longer has a way of reducing distortion levels that can affect stability. Only a handful of companies have eliminated global feedback, and each implementation is different. We’ve continually refined our implementation of zero global feedback since we launched a preamp of this design in 1986.

“With no global feedback, we amplify high frequencies snappily

and quickly. Our amplifier design produces a cleaner signal and you get more musical detail. We have local feedback loops, but they are not harmful to sound quality.”

In previous Moon amplifiers, two boards sat back to back, one atop the other, with signal paths kept short. The 888 and the 860A v2 place one densely packed, four-layer board on each side of the amp, pressed against heatsinks composed of aircraft-grade aluminum. Signal paths are even shorter. Thermal stability, which enables semiconductors to perform optimally, is maintained within a narrow temperature range by proximity to the heatsinks. “Parts matching goes for naught if semiconductors operate at very different temperatures,” Costa declared.

When the 860A v2 performs as a monoblock, it employs a



measurements, continued

ohms (fig.1, blue and red traces), the Moon 860A v2 started to gently roll off in the top octave, reaching -3dB at the specified 55kHz . As expected, given that there are now two output stages in series, the source impedance in bridged mode was higher, at 0.19 ohm at 20Hz and 1kHz , 0.38 ohm at 20kHz , more than doubling the variations in response with the simulated loudspeaker

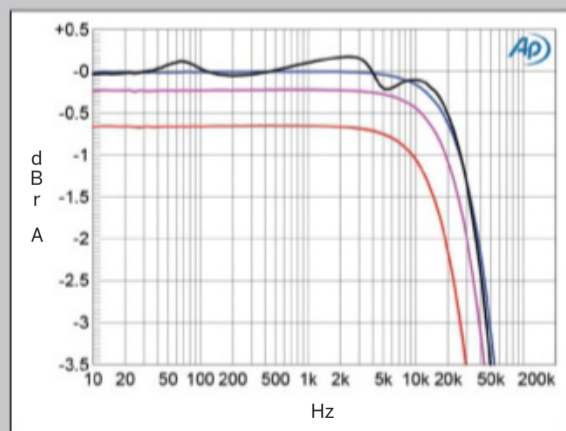


Fig.2 Simaudio Moon 860A v2, bridged mode, frequency response at 2.83V into: simulated loudspeaker load (gray), 8 ohms (blue), 4 ohms (magenta), and 2 ohms (red) ($0.5\text{dB/vertical div.}$).

(fig.2, gray trace), which however are still negligible at $\pm 0.1\text{dB}$. The traces in figs.1 and 2 were taken in DC mode. Switching to AC mode gently rolled off the very low frequencies, reaching -1dB at 10Hz (not shown). In all modes, the Moon 860A v2’s reproduction of a 10kHz squarewave (fig.3) was commendably free from overshoot and ringing.

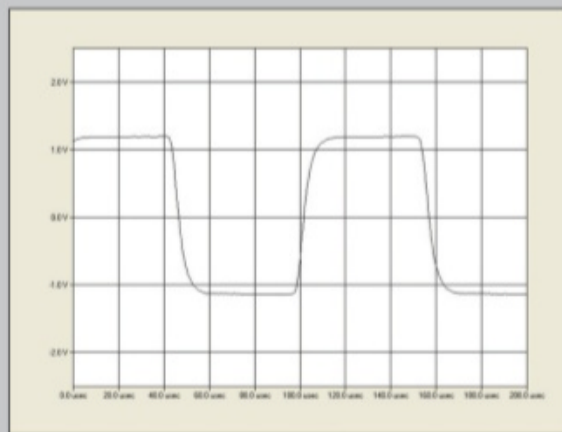


Fig.3 Simaudio Moon 860A v2, small-signal 10kHz squarewave into 8 ohms .

The Moon 860A v2’s channel separation (not shown) was $>100\text{dB}$ in both directions below 2kHz and still 80dB at the top of the audioband. The unweighted, wideband signal/noise ratio in stereo mode (ref. 1W into 8 ohms , measured with the unbalanced inputs shorted to ground) was a very good 83.3dB (average of the two channels). This ratio improved to 93.1dB , left, and 91.5dB ,

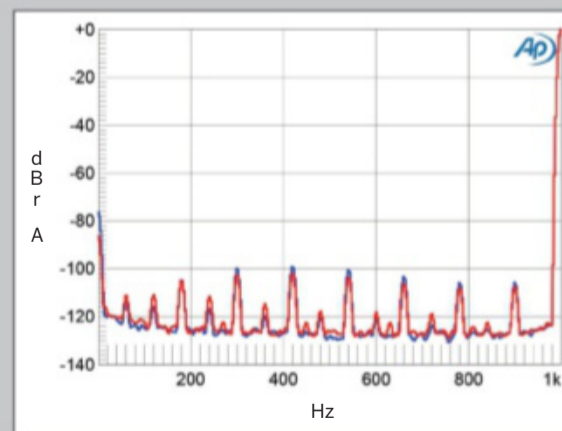


Fig.4 Simaudio Moon 860A v2, spectrum of 1kHz sine wave, DC- 1kHz , at 1Wpc into 8 ohms (left channel blue, right red) (linear frequency scale).

unique, passive bridging circuit designed to maintain sonic accuracy. “To bridge an amplifier into mono and get it to sound better, you must have a power supply adequate to support it,” Costa said. “Otherwise, power will sag. In theory, if your implementation is correct, you should get 6dB more gain. That equals four times more power. But in practice, it is impossible to realize that much power due to inefficiencies and losses. Our circuit implementation and power supply together deliver near the theoretical additional 6dB of power with all the extra dynamics and no loss in sound quality.”

In a follow-up summary, Costa wrote, “Many audiophiles believe, and correctly so, that bridging an amplifier brings about more power at the expense of sound quality. This is true for most stereo amplifiers that have power supply and bridging-circuit limitations. It is not true for the 860A v2; it gives you even better, fully balanced performance in monaural mode than in stereo.

“When you run an amp into mono, you traditionally use the left-channel input. That input has to go through a differential circuit that is often destructive to sound quality. Since most stereo amps are never bridged, the quality of this input circuitry is often an afterthought. But because we begin with a larger power supply and balanced circuits, we succeed. Listening tests reveal that mono mode increases dynamics and fine detail retrieval and delivers a smoother, more effortless character at all volume levels.”

The 860A v2 is DC-coupled, with no capacitors or other filtering in the signal path. Theoretically, this allows frequency response to descend almost to 0Hz. According to Costa, “The sonic benefits of DC coupling include less phase shift at all frequencies, particularly lower ones, permitting a finer focus of instruments

and vocals, as well as more neutrality and harmonically accurate bass reproduction.”

AC coupling, which places a capacitor in the signal path—a capacitor Costa claims will induce a phase shift and truncate bass extension—prevents any possibility of amplifying DC offset, which could cause a loudspeaker to blow.

To protect against the DC offset that sometimes occurs with



measurements, continued

right, when the measurement bandwidth was restricted to 22Hz–22kHz, and to 95.3dB, left, and 93.6dB, right, when A-weighted. Spectral analysis of the low-frequency noise floor while the Simaudio drove a 1kHz tone at 1Wpc into 8 ohms (fig.4, blue and red traces) revealed a low level of random noise. AC-related spurious at 60Hz and its odd- and even-order harmonics lay at or below -100dB.

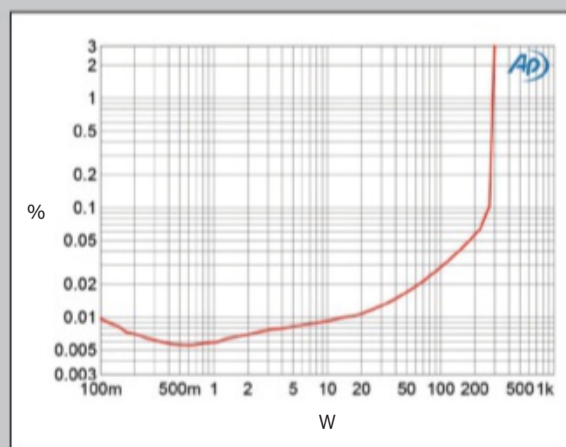


Fig.5 Simaudio Moon 860A v2, left channel, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 8 ohms.

Simaudio specifies the Moon 860A v2's maximum power in stereo mode as 225Wpc into 8 ohms and 450Wpc into 4 ohms, both powers equivalent to 23.5dBW. With our usual definition of clipping—when the THD+noise reaches 1%—the Simaudio amplifier exceeded its specified powers. With both channels driven, it clipped at 295Wpc into 8 ohms (24.7dBW, fig.5) and 490Wpc into 4 ohms (23.9dBW, fig.6). In bridged

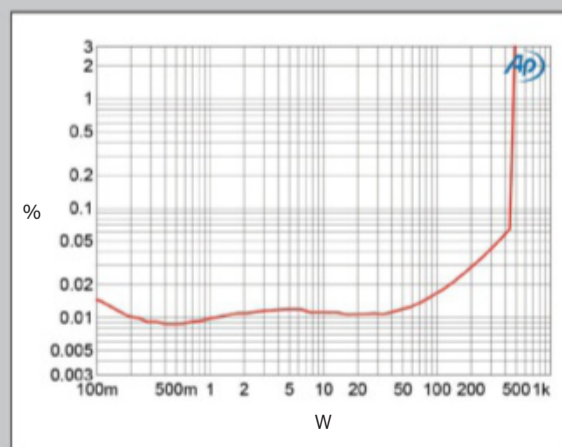


Fig.6 Simaudio Moon 860A v2, left channel, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 4 ohms.

mode, the Moon 860A v2 clipped at 880W into 8 ohms (29.4dBW, fig.7) rather than the specified 750W (28.75dBW), even though the wall voltage had dropped from 118.2V to 114.4V at the clipping power. However, when I tried to measure the clipping power into 4 ohms in bridged mode, the 10A rear-panel fuse blew at 1.2kW, when the THD+N was just 0.06%. Fortunately, I had performed all the testing by that time, other

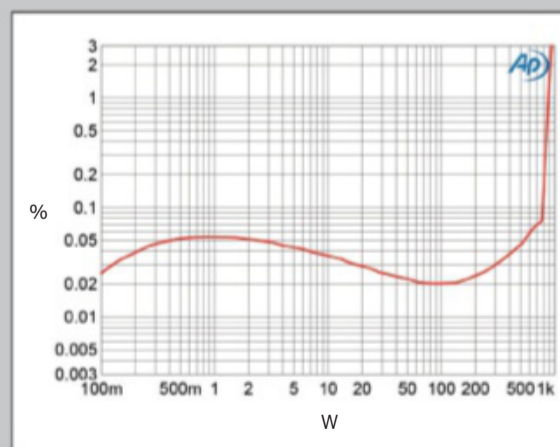


Fig.7 Simaudio Moon 860A v2, bridged mode, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 8 ohms.

older preamps, the 860A v2 employs a servo monitoring circuit. If DC is below a certain threshold, the servo circuit pads it to zero; if it's above the threshold, a microcontroller places the amp into protection mode and shuts it down. Flashing LEDs indicate if the problem is excess DC or excess heat. If the amp keeps shutting down, users can flick a rear panel switch and shift from the default DC setting to AC. Additional diagnostic tools can help isolate the problem.

Costa touted the 860A v2's high damping factor—1000—and its low output impedance.³ “This increases the amplifier's ability to grab hold of and control the motion of speaker diaphragms and makes it sonically more compatible with long cable runs. High damping factor plus zero global feedback produces very tight bass that is quick and accurate.”

I asked Costa what he and his designers hoped to achieve with the 860A v2. He replied, “The least coloration possible. It's like a ride in a Ferrari: Any low-level information we can retrieve, we let you hear. Some other amps are more like a ride in a Rolls-Royce that masks the irregularities in the surface you're driving on. Whether the recording is good or not, it always sounds enjoyable. But that's not Moon. We do not mask anything. We aim for revealing.”

And then

Given such a long technical explanation, the last thing anyone needs is an exhausting accounting of every switch on the 860A v2's front and rear panels. If you want to know more than is obvious from the photos provided with this review, cruise on over to the Simaudio website; there's even the manual online.⁴

The 860A v2s arrived one day after the last in a monthlong series of system changes. First, the dCS Rossini Apex raised the sound bar (not soundbar) to an entirely new level. Then more Wilson Audio Pedestals helped improve tonal balance, air, and control. Next, the Nordost QNet Ethernet switch and QSource

linear power supply allowed me to radically simplify and improve streaming/file playback. Relocating several pieces of equipment further blackened backgrounds, and a second QSource expanded my soundstage—icing on an already rich cake.

I'd barely had time to breathe it all in before the Moon 860A v2s began to sing. Once they did, I felt a bit as I did in the summer of '67 when I discovered inhaling deeply and ingesting Owsley.

The two amps were shipped on separate pallets, in not very sturdy mediumweight cardboard boxes strapped down and covered in layers of plastic film. I placed the 860A v2s on the same Grand Prix Audio Monza amp stands and Wilson Audio Pedestals I use for the reference D'Agostino Progression M550 monoblocks. Cables were my usual Nordost Odin 2s.

Because Costa stressed the balanced nature of the 860A v2's design and the importance of a balanced connection, I never tried the RCA inputs. “With balanced, you'll hear the more organic midrange that's associated with a true balanced circuit, lower noise, greater dynamics, and a little more gain,” he said. “We include a high-quality differential circuit for bridging in RCA, but it's mainly there for compatibility reasons.” So, in a bridged 860A v2, don't use the RCA inputs for actual listening.

While the 860A v2's feet are adjustable leveling cones, Costa gave me the okay to use aftermarket footers. Ditto for power conditioning. “I have experience with the AudioQuest Niagara 7000, and there shouldn't be a problem with current limiting,” he said.⁵

Finally, I was advised to keep the amps on 24/7. “Once an

³ Simaudio doesn't specify the output impedance, but if the damping factor is determined relative to a nominal 8 ohms, then it must be 0.008 ohm.

⁴ See simaudio.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/20210413_860A_v2_Manual_EN.pdf.

⁵ The Niagara 5000 I currently use in my music room has the same High Current amplifier implementation as the 7000. Because implementation of the 7000's eight front-end component outlets is superior to the 5000's, I've moved the 7000 to my office, where signals flow from my modem, router, NAS, and optical converter to the detached music room. Even if you can't visualize this setup, it makes sense and is far more streamlined than before.

measurements, continued

than how the THD+N varied with frequency in bridged mode into 2 ohms.

Fig.8 shows how the percentage of THD+N varied with frequency in stereo mode at 12.67V, which is equivalent to 20W into 8 ohms (blue and red traces), 40W into 4 ohms (cyan, magenta), and 80W into 2 ohms (green, gray). The THD+N was very low in the bass and midrange, particularly and peculiarly into 2 ohms, but rose in

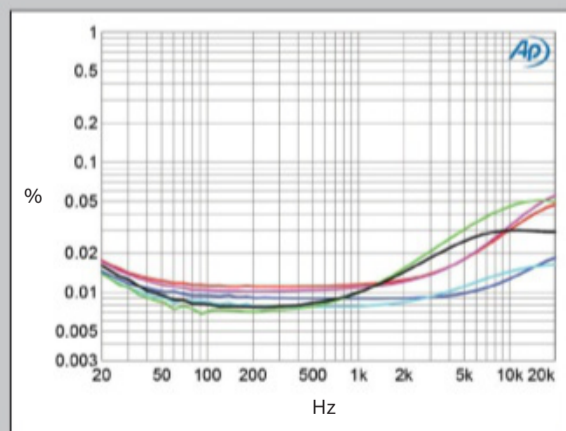


Fig.8 Simaudio Moon 860A v2, THD+N (%) vs frequency at 12.67V into: 8 ohms (left channel blue, right red), 4 ohms (left cyan, right magenta), and 2 ohms (left green, right gray).

the top audio octaves, especially into the lower impedances. The manner in which the THD+N percentage changed with frequency at a higher voltage in bridged mode into 8 and 4 ohms (fig.9) was similar to how it had been in stereo mode.

The distortion waveform with a 1kHz sine wave (fig.10) suggests that the third harmonic is dominant, though at low frequencies, the second harmonic was

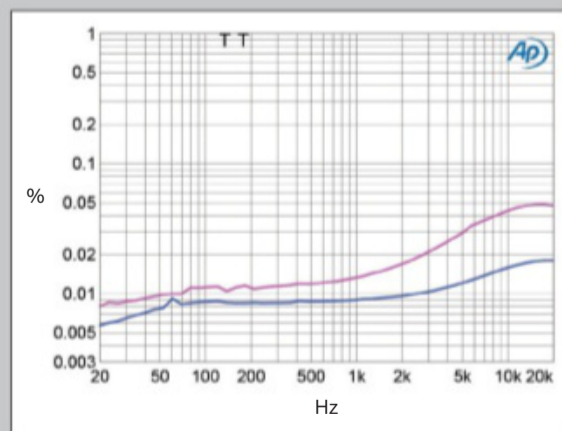


Fig.9 Simaudio Moon 860A v2, bridged mode, THD+N (%) vs frequency at 20V into: 8 ohms (blue) and 4 ohms (magenta).

almost as high (fig.11). The higher-order harmonics all lay at -100dB (0.001%) or lower. I repeated this spectral analysis after replacing the blown fuse. While the second and third harmonics were at the same level as they were in fig.11, the higher-order harmonics were now all between 6dB and 18dB higher in level. It appears that the fuse hadn't fully protected the amplifier's internal components.

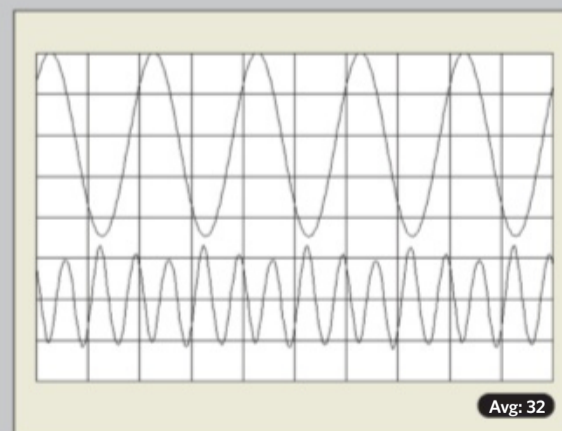


Fig.10 Simaudio Moon 860A v2, left channel, 1kHz waveform at 20W into 8 ohms, 0.0096% THD+N (top); distortion and noise waveform with fundamental notched out (bottom, not to scale).

amplifier is fully run in, for every week it stays off, it takes about a day of break-in to get it back to optimal performance levels,” Costa said. “At idle, they consume approximately 50W each.”

Enjoying

“Organic” is a descriptor *Stereophile* founder J. Gordon Holt missed when he wrote his invaluable 1993 reference “Sounds Like? An Audio Glossary.”⁶ That word played on repeat in my brain as I began listening to the 860A v2s. Here’s the part of Merriam-Webster’s definition that describes my experience to a T:⁷ “Organic: having systematic coordination of parts: organized; forming an integral element of a whole: fundamental; having the characteristics of an organism: developing in the manner of a living plant or animal.”

No matter what genre or piece of music the 860A v2s amplified, it sounded *right*, perfectly stitched together, all of a piece. Nothing stood out, nothing drew my attention away from the whole; I just wanted music to keep flowing, singing, rocking, shouting, sighing, as the composers, musicians, and engineers intended. I felt neither desire nor need to take notes. To reference Ram Dass’s seminal book of the 1960s, I just wanted to *Be Here Now*.

Eventually, I had to force myself to scribble something down.



Charlie Haden and Kenny Barron’s live recording of “Twilight Song,” from *Night and the City* (16/44.1 FLAC, Verve/Qobuz), seduced me totally. Bass may have been firm and well-pitched, highs perfectly articulated, but it was the intimacy and mellow

⁶ See stereophile.com/reference/50/index.html.

⁷ See merriam-webster.com/dictionary/organic.

measurements, continued

Before the fuse blew, I examined the distortion spectrum in bridged mode at the same level into 8 ohms that I had used to create fig.11. The third harmonic is still the highest in level, at the same -76dB (0.015%, fig.12), but the even-order harmonics are now all significantly lower. (In a bridged circuit with perfectly matched output stages, the even-order distortion components in those stages will cancel.)

Intermodulation distortion was low in level. With the Moon 860A v2 driving an equal mix of 19 and 20kHz tones at 100Wpc peak into 4 ohms in stereo mode (fig.13) or in bridged-mono mode (not shown), the 1kHz difference product lay just below -90dB (0.003%), and while the higher-order products at 18 and 21kHz were 10dB higher in level, this is still low in absolute terms.

The Simaudio Moon 860A v2’s mea-

asured performance is not dissimilar to that of the original Moon Evolution 860A, which Fred Kaplan reviewed in August 2015.³ However, the new version offers more power into low impedances and is less fazed by driving 2 ohms. In bridged-mono mode, it offers extremely high maximum power into higher impedances. — John Atkinson

³ See stereophile.com/content/simaudio-moon-evolution-860a-power-amplifier-measurements.

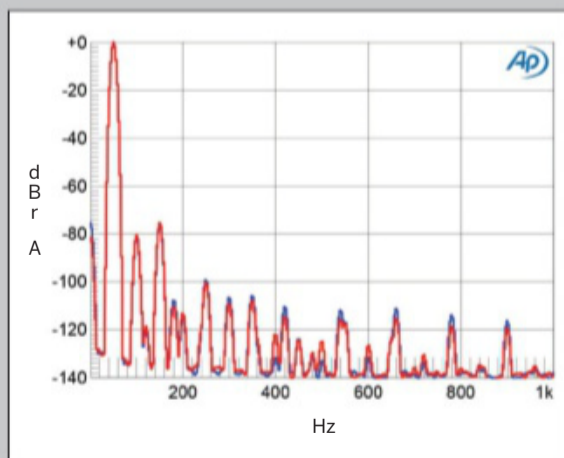


Fig.11 Simaudio Moon 860A v2, spectrum of 50Hz sine wave, DC-1kHz, at 50Wpc into 8 ohms (left channel blue, right red; linear frequency scale).

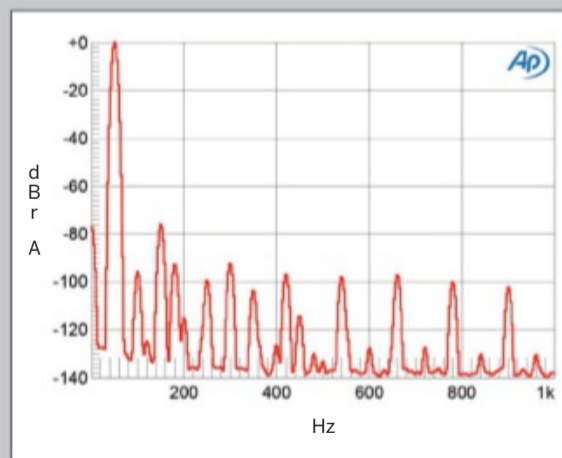


Fig.12 Simaudio Moon 860A v2, bridged mode, spectrum of 1kHz sine wave, DC-1kHz, at 50W into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).

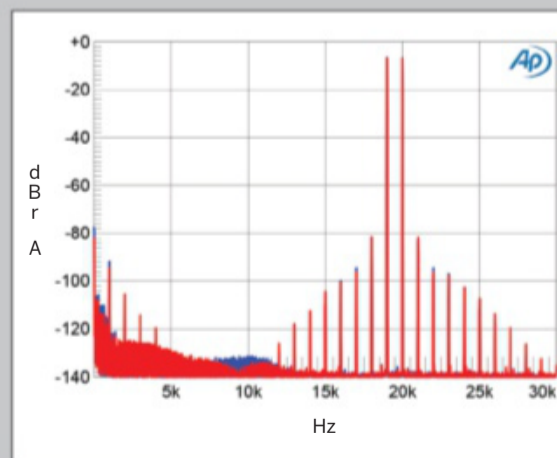


Fig.13 Simaudio Moon 860A v2, HF intermodulation spectrum, DC-30kHz, 19+20kHz at 100Wpc peak into 4 ohms (left channel blue, right red; linear frequency scale).

beauty of the performance—the exquisite focus of two musicians listening carefully to each other—that inspired reverie. Above the “Jazz at the Pawnshop” experience of tinkling glasses and whispering patrons rose a piano whose high notes sparkled naturally and a bass with a warm, clear, perfectly pitched core. There’s an intermittent beep in the right channel of this recording that goes on for a minute or so, but, while I found it distracting, it never stopped me from loving every note.

My friend Steve Zettel often references “The Saga of Harrison Crabfeathers” from Brian Bromberg’s *Wood* (24/96 FLAC, Artistry Music/Qobuz). When I put it on, the clarity and warmth of instruments, the perfect sense of pitch and integration, the flow and impact of the music left me feeling that I was hearing all that I want or need to hear.

I upped the ante with that *2001: A Space Odyssey* classic, the start of Richard Strauss’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, as performed by Andris Nelsons and the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig (26/96 WAV, DG). Beyond the strength and firmness of the deep bass (which I quickly came to expect from the 860A v2s), the impact of horns blasting away in a huge space captured my attention and carried me along.

“The heartfelt warmth of her voice makes me want to cry,” I wrote as the marvelous mezzo-soprano Marianne Crebassa sang Fauré’s lovely “Cygne sur l’eau” (Swan on the water), accompanied by Fazil Say, on her recital album *Secrets* (24/96 MQA, Warner Classics/Tidal). Next, Crebassa’s performance of a track oft referenced by me, “La Flute de Pan” from Debussy’s *Trois Chansons de Bilitis*, confirmed how well these amps depict space, depth, and atmosphere.

At that point, I could not resist turning to Kathleen Battle and Lorin Maazel’s irreplaceable performance of the final movement of the Mahler Symphony No.4 (16/44.1 MQA, CBS Masterworks/Tidal). As the soprano described a child’s view of paradise, that the Moon monos had opened heaven’s gates wide.

When I switched to the D’Agostino Progression M550s, the difference in sound was so marked, I realized that only by listening to closely match output levels would I be able to characterize the differences with any accuracy. So, I matched levels.

On the Haden/Barron and Bromberg tracks, the Progressions’ bass sounded louder, but the background was not as silent or pristine. The Progressions sounded a bit warmer than the Moons and just as beautiful. On the Strauss, the orchestra sounded louder, as though it had been beefed up a bit; violins, in turn, sounded better. Kathleen Battle’s voice glowed more with the Moons. But the Moons’ overtones fared less well.

When I told friend Scott about these differences, he wanted to hear them for himself. We added two tracks to the playlist: Bill Evans’s “Waltz for Debby (Take 2),” from the OJC remaster of the album by that name (16/44.1, Riverside/Qobuz), and the first movement (“Pastorale – Lento, dolce rubato”) of Debussy’s *Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp*, from the Erato recording, *Debussy: Sonates et Trio* (Warner Classics, 24/96 MQA, Tidal).

When Scott heard Bill Evans with the Moon 860A v2 monoblocks, he was in heaven. As during my solo listening sessions, every note and its timbre seemed spot on—just as Evans and his engineer intended. The background was silent, and the beauty transportive.

When we switched amps, we agreed that the piano sounded fuller and more sonorous with the Progressions, drums more impactful, and the midrange fuller. But neither of us was convinced by the extra sparkle the Progressions brought to the piano’s top octaves. On the tracks with Crebassa and Say, the Progressions brought more richness to piano and voice but with additional penetrating edge. The Strauss confirmed the Progressions’ extra bass weight and authority in their moving depiction of orchestral swell in the sunrise movement. But there wasn’t as much silence

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Digital sources dCS Rossini Apex DAC, Clock; Synology 5-bay 1019+ NAS; Uptone Audio EtherRegen with AfterDark Giesemann Emperor Double Crown Master Clock, Roon Nucleus+ music server, and Nordost QNET Ethernet Switch, all powered by Nordost QSource linear power supplies (2); Small Green Computer Sonore Deluxe opticalModule, Linksys mesh router and Arris modem, all powered by HDPLEX 300 linear power supply; Apple 2017 iPad Pro and 2017 MacBook Pro laptop with 2.8GHz Intel i7, SSD, 16GB RAM.

Preamplifier Dan D’Agostino Momentum HD.

Power amplifiers Dan D’Agostino Progression M550 monoblocks.

Loudspeakers Wilson Audio Specialties Alexia 2 with Acoustic Diode supports.

Cables Digital: Nordost Odin 1, Odin 2, and Valhalla 2 (USB and Ethernet); Frey 2 (USB adapter); Wireworld Platinum Starlight Cat8 (Ethernet), OM1 62.5/125 multimode duplex (fiber optic). Interconnect: Nordost Odin 2. Speaker: Nordost Odin 2. AC: Nordost Odin 2, Valhalla 2; AudioQuest Dragon and Dragon HC. Umbilical cords: Ghent Audio Canare for HDPLEX 300 LPS and NAS; QSource Premium DC cables with Lemo terminations for QSource LPSs.

Accessories Grand Prix Monza 8-shelf double rack and amp stands, 1.5” Formula platform; Symposium Ultra Platform; Nordost QB8, QX4 (2), QK1, and QV2 AC power accessories, QKore 1, 3, and 6 with QKore Wires, Titanium and Bronze Sort Kones, QFTs; Stromtank S 1000 power generator; AudioQuest Niagara 7000 and 5000 power conditioners, NRG Edison outlets, NRGs; Wilson Audio Pedestals; A/V RoomService Polyflex room dividers; Resolution Acoustics room treatment; Stillpoints S (8) and Aperture 1 (2) and 2 (2) acoustic treatments; PX-14545 Damping Plates; Stein Music Blue Suns, Blue Buds, and Quantum Organizer; Bybee Room Neutralizers; Absolute Stabilians; Marigo Aida CD mat.

Listening room 20’ L x 16’ W x 9’4” H. —Jason Victor Serinus

And...
If I could keep listening to the Moon 860A v2s in monoblock configuration—instead of

And...
If I could keep listening to the Moon 860A v2s in monoblock configuration—instead of

between notes.

I may have initially been tempted to say, “You win some, you lose some,” but the Moon 860A v2s deliver so much inherent beauty and beauty that any descriptor that’s less than positive does them justice.

I’d keep listening to the Moon 860A v2s in monoblock configuration—instead of packing them up to be measured and returned to Simaudio—I’d plopp down \$40,000, rejoice at the tax-free dividends from my Bezos-worthy retirement fund, and spend weeks listening to all the new music I never have time to audition. But the ability to separate fantasy from reality is an essential analytical trait, so back go the 860A v2s.

The 860A v2s do not sound like amplifiers hard at work. Ease, flow, and beauty are their bottom line. They can rock, groove, and serenade with the best. Their sound feels complete and of one piece; it’s a sound that honors composers, artists, and engineers to the fullest.

As with everything in life, there’s always more to be had, always more to want. But when amplifiers already deliver all you need ... ■

9 My sincere thanks to David James Bellecci, Scott Campbell, and visiting industry members Peter Hansen and Nuno Vitorino of Innuos, who assisted me with moving monoblocks around. Hey, even our dog walker and neighbors have been called upon occasionally for assistance.