

REVIEW

Moon by Simaudio 240i

**A Frank, Dapper,
Moon Unit.**

By Gautam Raja

“Oh, the volume goes in point-five increments!”

Anyone whose spouse is not a fellow audiophile will recognize the terrifying unpredictability of what will appeal and what will repulse about a new product. My household follows the gendered trope of audiophilia: the husband is the equipment nut, the wife the long-suffering innocent, but secretly nearly as emotionally invested in the gear, and blessed with superior, and far more unbiased hearing.

After 13 years of marriage everything is subtext, so I knew it wasn't literally the half-stop jumps of the gain display; I understood that my wife was enjoying interacting with new MOON by Simaudio

product in our living room. It had passed the hardest test of all.

It's fashionable now for high-end products to have large, clear front displays that are readable from across the room, a reversal of the self-dug branding grave of arcaneness and inaccessibility. Guess what, it works. Those big numbers on the OLED display of the 240i integrated amplifier appeal to non-enthusiasts, as well as to enthusiasts in denial about needing reading glasses.

The inputs have helpful little icons as you switch, whether an image of a TOSLINK connector for Optical, or an RCA pair for Analog. Like its full-chassis siblings from Simaudio, the fascia is bookended by two chunky metal corners like biceps, with a big silver MOON logo on the smooth metal front plate. This is a product that's ruggedly handsome without giving you the sense that its Instagram feed is full of selfies.

(The remote, though, follows that other recurring audiophile theme of being good-looking and well built, but totally unintuitive—asking you to peer at the buttons every time you use it. This first-world problem is of course the fault of television manufacturers whose remotes fall to hand so easily that you can use them blind the first time you pick one up.)



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As you play with the inputs, a neat little turntable icon appears, and behold, it's Phono! The 240i is very much a product of Today, with a phono stage, a mini-RCA front input for personal audio players, and a phalanx of digital inputs. My vinyl-only buddy shook his head and laughed in a "we've come full circle" manner when I told him that more and more integrated amps come with phono on board. Of no interest to him, but certainly noteworthy to me was that this product has an on-board DAC, presented with so little fanfare. It's instructive to watch the definitions of "preamplifier" and "integrated amplifier" get blurrier as we see units that go well beyond pure line stages with some even able to stream music, wired or wirelessly.

With two optical digital inputs, two RCA S/PDIF, two USB, and an HT bypass, the 240i would be as at home in an entertainment console, as in a stripped down two-channel set up. When I first unpacked it, I connected just my Rega P3-24 turntable, a clean two-unit system happily playing vinyl, while leaving room around it to put down a laptop to play via USB. Once I located an RCA digital cable, I served the 240i a digital stream from a Naim Audio Unitiqute using Tidal Hi-Fi, Radio Paradise (this internet station plays so much at home it's like the soundtrack to our lives), and music on my NAS which includes Red Book rips and high-resolution PCM files, up to 192-24.

The 240i's DAC can handle a maximum of 24-bit, 192 kHz on all inputs except USB which can process up to 32-bit, 352.8 and 384 kHz. The USB input handles all the bitstream formats, DSD64, 128, and 256. There's no streamer on board, so you can't connect a NAS or hard disk.

As I let the system settle in, I remembered how someone in the car industry once said to me, "There are no more bad cars—just pick the one that talks to you."

Similarly, when dealing with true audio companies such as Simaudio, founded in 1980 in Canada (where it still does all manufacturing), and run by audiophile engineers, there are no bad products. It's really all about "who" the product is, and whether you and the unit in question can be friends.

I hope this doesn't sound like damning with faint praise, because that's not the intention, but the 240i is an utterly inoffensive amplifier to bring home. I suspect Simaudio must be tired of seeing the word "laidback" in reviews, but that is how it presents itself initially. After a while it's clear that the amp is not any less detailed or fast or musical for it. It's just that it has an ease and balance that lets it come in and find a home for itself, like the houseguest whose stories are just risqué enough to be hugely entertaining, but won't cause Grandma June to choke on her dumplings. During early listening sessions it's tempting to plan jokes about "polite Canadians", but on deeper acquaintance with the 240i, a reviewer can't, in good conscience, continue with this line of thought.

And so, music with the 240i is easy to listen to, with the space, detail, and low-end depth and control expected from a high-end product, but also with the energy and propulsiveness so many of us enjoy about good hi-fi. The highs especially have a beguiling, liquid quality without being overly warm. Long-time Simaudio fans describe the brand's sound as "lightning fast", and it's amazing how the 240i carries that legacy without the music sounding like it's being rushed along on a knife edge, as many "fast" entry-level electronics do. It's the sort of system you can leave playing all day—it works beautifully in the background—and is more than capable of serving up the involvement needed for critical listening.

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In a two-channel home theatre set up, I found it easy to forget about the sound, and become immersed in the action—this is good, solid work with no showboating. The source was a cheap Sony Blu-ray player, with two old Naim Intro 2 floorstanders. When I did something I haven't done in a long time, which is pull out my storage folders and put on some CDs, I was pleasantly surprised enough to keep this set-up playing for a few evenings. It delivered enough PRaT for even older Naim fans.

For more critical listening on the main system, I've become used to the 170W or so my T+A Elektroakustik power amp can swing (rated very conservatively), and how well it plays with my T+A TCD 210 S loudspeakers. So while the 240i's 50 W into 8 Ohms sounds a little light with these largish floorstanders, this "Little Integrated That Could" left me with a keen desire to listen to its bigger relatives, notably Simaudio's power amps from its Evolution series, ideally the 860A, but more realistically, the 760A.

Having said that, I know so many people who would find the 240i more than amplifier enough. It's for convivial living rooms that are designed for human beings first, and draped cables, audio treatments, and racks a distant tenth. I can picture exactly which friends I would unhesitatingly recommend this product to.

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We all have them—the music fans who would love a good system, but seem to never get round to graduating from a dock, or who keep switching their way through generations of big-brand multi-channel receivers.

I'd be especially interested to see this amp in a crowded space with a turntable, TV, gaming console, video disc player, streaming media player, laptop with USB, and occasional houseguests' phones or portable players. This is the kind of family-room hustle the MOON seems to be designed to fit into, and then hold its own with "proper" sound. The 240i may be no-nonsense and easy to use, but you could never bestow upon it that damning audiophile adjective: "lifestyle."

The MOON by Simaudio 240i offers you the sense that instead of merely whittling away at more expensive products in the line to descend to entry level, Simaudio has made "entry level" a design goal to aspire to.

The MOON By Simaudio 240i

MSRP: \$2,100

www.simaudio.com

