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Simaudio MOON 250i v2 Integrated Amplifier Review

An excellent value for music lovers.

Review By Tom Lyle



This review is about one of Simaudio's latest products, the MOON 250i v2, an integrated amplifier with a power output of 50 Watts per channel into 8 Ohms and includes an onboard Moving Magnet (MM) phono stage. Since this is the first Simaudio component I've ever reviewed, I had a question about whether MOON was a separate company from Simaudio or if MOON was simply a line of equipment brought to us from the company Simaudio.

Simaudio has been around since 1980 when this Canadian company was called Sima Electronics. Their first products were aimed at the professional market but were soon recognized by audiophiles. From that point on, not only were most of their components used by audiophiles in two-channel and home-theater systems, but the company also changed its name to Simaudio. After years of manufacturing

their successful line of audio products, they introduced their reference-grade products called the MOON series.

Classic

On Simaudio's website, they describe the MOON 250i v2 as "a classic analog design that delivers renowned MOON audio performance at an outstanding value." \$2400 might be a good chunk of money for a non-audiophile shopping for a component at a mass-market audio store, but for an audiophile, a high-end audio integrated amplifier that includes a MM phono stage at this price is usually placed in the "affordable" category.

The MOON 250i v2 might not be the most expensive integrated amplifier that I've used in my system of late, but it may be the most feature-rich. The MOON 250i v2 has six inputs, five single-ended inputs on its rear panel, plus a 1/8" mini-jack on its front panel, allowing one to connect to this integrated amp one's portable audio player.



The MOON 250i v2 also has a 1/4" headphone jack on its front panel. The remote control is a relatively weighty custom plastic item that replicates all the front panel functions.

I auditioned the MOON 250i v2 integrated amplifier in my second system, located in the dining room/living room area of our home's first floor. I usually use this system to review more affordable high-end audio equipment, although, over the years, this system has become populated with some very impressive sounding gear.

Looking

The Simaudio Moon 250i v2 is an awfully good-looking component. To me, it appeared as though the cabinet of the Simaudio MOON 250i v2 was not designed as an afterthought. Of course, the sound quality of a component is my most important concern, as it should be for any music lover. But as I mentioned above, everything is relative, so even though \$2400 might not seem like lots of money for

some audiophiles, it might be a stretch for other music lovers. So, when I removed the 250i v2 from its carton, I was taken aback when I saw its sleek, modern-looking design, its "fit & finish" was as good or better than I've seen in much more expensive components. It is remote, too, was impressive. Although made of plastic, it operated exceptionally smoothly, and its intuitive layout was a pleasure to use.

Connected

For most of the review period, connected to the rear panel gold-plated speaker binding posts of the 250i v2 was a pair of Vermouth Studio Monitors that I reviewed in the December 2022. These overachieving speakers are more than a cut above the monitors that most studio engineers use, as these "studio monitors" are not self-powered and quite large for stand-mounted speakers (plus, few studios are willing to pay \$20,000 for monitors this size). For most speakers I use in this system, I assist their low-end response with a small subwoofer, the SVS SB-2000. But the Vermouth speakers did not need a subwoofer to augment their low-end. They have usable bass down to the low 30 Hz range.



I also used a pair of larger speakers, the Danish five-driver floor-standing Scansonic MB5 B that first entered my system early last year. It was weird -- when I used the Vermouth speakers, they needed no subwoofer to support their deepest bass. Even though their specifications claim that the Scansonic speaker's bass goes much lower, and even though I kept the sub with its volume set at a minimum, with its low pass filter set at quite a low frequency, it sounded better with the subwoofer connected.



After living with it for the last two years, I have discovered that the Pro-Ject X2 turntable that I use in this system is a giant killer. Its simple design and \$1300 price tag might fool one into thinking it is hardly a good match for the rest of the system I paired it with. This is not at all true, although I did replace the \$300 Sumiko Moonstone phono cartridge it was originally packaged with. And so, with either a Lyra Kleos or an Ortofon MC Winfield Ti phono cartridge mounted on its integral tonearm, the resulting sound was very worthy, especially since I connected its interconnect to a Pass Laboratories XP-17 phono preamplifier.

The digital front end of this system included a BDP-83 Special Edition universal disc player, which I only occasionally used. More often, I'd use the streaming services of Tidal or Qobuz through either a Cambridge Audio streamer with its digital output connected to a digital-to-audio converter made by the Italian company Audio Analogue, their Enjoy the Music.com Blue Note Award-winning aaaDAC, which not only sounds fantastic but also has a killer aptX Bluetooth receiver that made streaming a sonic pleasure. It also made it much more convenient, as I would control Tidal or Qobuz from my iPhone or iPad.

Many may think I spent too much time describing the system I used while auditioning the MOON 250i v2. Still, as system matching might be as important as any other consideration when choosing an integrated amplifier for one's system, I'll use this spoiler alert to hopefully prevent one from skipping to the conclusion of this review. I was impressed with this integrated amp's excellent sound quality and ergonomic straightforwardness. Its output power rating of 50 Watts per channel into 8 Ohms, doubling its power rating when used with a 4 Ohm load, was more than enough power to drive the speakers I used for this review.



The Vermouth Studio Monitor speakers sounded even better than I remember when auditioning them for their review in December 2022. The Simaudio MOON 250i v2 brought out the best in the entire system!

Latest

I've been reveling in Blue Note Records' latest vinyl reissue series, both the more ambitious Tone Poem series and their slightly less expensive Classic Series. Kevin Grey mastered both and are "all-analog" pressings "whenever an analog master is available." Both of these series sound fantastic, and I dare anyone to be able to tell whether an analog source was used!

These reissues sound as good as the original Blue Note records, I've heard, although the originals often need to be in good shape when compared to these brand-new pressings, which isn't always possible.

The first album that tenor saxophonist Sam Rivers recorded as a leader, *Fuschia Song*, is right up my alley. Most consider Sam Rivers' compositions and playing leaning towards the avant-garde. Yet his style is still based on the hard bop that I love on these Blue Note Records recorded in the 1960s. Many remember Sam Rivers when he was a member of Miles Davis' Quintet just before he solidified his 1965 to 1968 line-up, where he eventually chose Wayne Shorter on tenor sax.

Sam Rivers was studying at the Boston Conservatory, where he met the teenage drummer Tony Williams. Williams recommended him for a position in the Miles Davis Quintet. That gig didn't last too long, but 1964 was still quite a year for him, including this short stay in Miles Davis' band, but also appearing on Tony Williams's *Life Time* album and Larry Young's *Into Somethin'*. A month later was offered a record deal with Blue Note, which he titled *Fuschia Song*. This album features an exceptionally talented quartet, with Jaki Byard on piano, Ron Carter on bass, Tony Williams on drums, and Sam Rivers on tenor saxophone.



Typical of reviews where I'm incredibly impressed with the component I'm auditioning; I end up discussing the music I'm playing through it as much as the component itself! This review is a typical example of this.

Sam Rivers' Fuchsia Song is an album I can repeatedly listen to, as new details are revealed in every play. Some jazz purists prefer the mono version of this album, as engineer Rudy Van Gelder liked to pan the instruments hard left and right, and so jazz lovers feel that it sounds more realistic when all the instruments are grouped together when played back on the mono version. I prefer the stereo version. When played on a more than a decent high-end audio system, which included the review system in which the MOON 250i v2 was included, I could hear the bleed from each instrument coming through to the other speaker. This sounded more like listening to a jazz ensemble up close, or at the very least, like hearing something akin to the mic feed when listening to the band play in the studio. This album did not disappoint when played through the Simaudio MOON 250i v2.

Playing this selection made it easy to get lost in the music, forgetting that I was supposed to be auditioning the component. The MOON 250i v2 integrated amplifier had an ultra-transparent sound and could defy its solid-state construction and ended up sounding like neither a typical solid-state nor vacuum tube component. The 250i v2 gave me the impression that it added no sound of its own to the sound of the recording it was playing, so I was able to bask in the sound of this typical early to mid-1960 Rudy Van Gelder-engineered session on a Blue Note pressing rather than bask in the sound of the MOON 250i v2 integrated amp.

The 250i v2's frequency extremes did not draw attention to themselves and gave me the impression that it simply reproduced those on the recording I was playing at the time. The same was true of every sonic parameter that an audiophile should care about, such as the drawn-to-scale soundstage, every macro and micro-dynamic cue, and to a greater extent the intentions of the musicians, engineers, and producers of the recording. This wasn't only true of this superb recording and performance captured on this Blue Note recording, but just about every track or album I played through the MOON 250i v2 during its audition period.

And so, the overall "sound" of the MOON 250i v2 was tough to pin down. However, I have to admit that its sound added a bit more "sweetness" than I was used to hearing from my more expensive reference, the Pass Laboratories INT-25, which has less power than the MOON 250i v2 but a more transparent, involving sound, which was not unexpected since this integrated amp costs more than three times as much as the MOON 250i v2. Still, the 250i v2 did not embarrass itself when directly compared to my reference. The MOON 250i v2 has many more modern conveniences than the Pass Labs amplifier, as it has more inputs, and also includes a preamplifier output.

Fantastic

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, despite CDs still being king, the perfectionist label Classic Records released a slew of fantastic vinyl reissues, including the RCA "Living Stereo" catalog. The original versions of these late 1950s/early 1960s American pressings that are still in good condition sound fabulous. Classic Records' reissues sound even better, as they were pressed more meticulously than the 40-year-old and older original pressings, using a better vinyl formula, and mastered with restored vintage equipment that was brought up to current specifications. Currently, Analogue Productions is reissuing the same RCA releases, and I highly recommend them.

Choosing a favorite Classic Records Living Stereo reissue is difficult for me, as I play so many of these records on a more than regular basis. Still, if I were forced to choose only one of them, the RCA Living

Stereo of Fritz Reiner conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's version of Bela Bartok's Music For Strings, Percussion, and Celesta would be a contender. Not only is the performance captured on tape in the late 1950s spectacular, but the sound quality on this record is second to none. Playing it through the Simaudio MOON 250i v2 was a blast. This recording is a good test for an audio system. I love the music on this record, so playing it multiple times was hardly a chore. The 250i v2 reproduced the vast dimensional sonic space this record has encoded into its grooves.

This composition is divided into four movements, the first opens slowly with varying time signatures. The MOON 250i v2 brought the muted strings that begin this movement into the room with a lifelike, reach-out-and-touch sound. As more instruments entered, the music became louder, and as it eventually reached its climax, it seemed as if the MOON 250i v2 could not only render a realistic string sound faithfully but also take advantage of this record's huge micro and macro-dynamic shifts.



Sonically behaving like a component that costs much more than the 250i v2's reasonable asking price. This integrated amplifier was able to reproduce not only the shifts in the volume of the orchestra but was able to faithfully reproduce the dynamic distance that was a hallmark of this recording, so instruments that were playing simultaneously never covered the other up, as it created a substantial sonic space between these instruments.

I love the music on this record. Because of its title, many might think it is a simple composition. This is not so, as the ensemble recorded on this slab of vinyl not only consists of a large string section made up of violins, cellos, and double basses, but also a harp, xylophone, snare drum, cymbals, tam-tam, and in addition, tympani, and celeste, which made themselves heard front and center.

When playing vinyl during the audition period, I used the Pass Labs phono stage. As I don't usually use a moving magnet phono cartridge, I feel embarrassed that I could not find the Sumiko cartridge that initially came with the Pro-Ject X2 turntable. One day I hope to get another chance to audition for this fine integrated amplifier. But if the phono stage of the MOON 250i v2 mimics the rest of the sound of this component, it would prove to be a very competent phono stage.

I connected a variety of different headphones to the 250i v2's front-panel headphone jack. I was impressed. Through the headphones I heard a sound that was remarkably like what was coming through its speaker outputs, which makes sense since the 250i v2 doesn't have an internal headphone amplifier per se, as the front panel jack is simply connected to an attenuated output of the main amplification section. Those with a serious headphone addiction will want to invest in an outboard headphone amplifier, if they don't already have one. But still, the headphone jack on its front panel was convenient and worked well. When I was using the Grado SR325e headphones, I spent quite a bit more


















time than I thought listening to a variety of musical genres. For any casual headphone user, the headphone output of the MOON 250i v2 is likely to be more than satisfactory.



In Conclusion

The Simaudio MOON 250i v2 is less expensive than most components I've been reviewing in Enjoy the Music.com for the last decade. Yet, there was no time in the review period that I was disappointed by its performance. It not only has a very transparent sound but a very musical one as well.

I felt a connection to the music that passed through this integrated amplifier, as it belied its very reasonable price. The Simaudio MOON 250i v2 was at home in my system, one that was made up of components that are a cut above those in the systems in which the 250i v2 will likely end up. The MOON 250i v2 is an excellent value, and I bet it will indeed end up in many audiophiles' systems, delighting its owners with its fine performance and sound quality. It is highly recommended.

Tonality	
Sub-bass (10Hz – 60Hz)	
Mid-bass (80Hz – 200Hz)	
Midrange (200Hz – 3,000Hz)	
High Frequencies (3,000Hz On Up)	
Attack	
Decay	
Inner Resolution	
Soundscape Width Front	
Soundscape Width Rear	
Soundscape Depth	
Soundscape Extension Into Room	
Imaging	
Fit And Finish	
Self Noise	
Emotionally Engaging	
Value For The Money	

Specifications

- Type: Solid-state integrated amplifier
- Frequency Response: 10 Hz to 100 kHz (+0/-3dB)
- Output Power: 50 Watts per channel @ 8 Ohms and 100 Watts @ 4 Ohms per channel
- Input Sensitivity: 370 mV – 3.0V RMS
- Input Impedance: 11 kOhm
- Phono Input Impedance: 47 kOhm
- Gain: 37 dB
- Phono Stage Gain: 40 dB
- Signal-To-Noise Ratio: 101 dB @ full power
- Crosstalk @ 1 kHz-78 dB
- THD: @ 1 Watt 0.015% and @ 50 Watts 0.02%
- Intermodulation Distortion: 0.05%
- Shipping Weight: 22 lbs.
- Dimensions 16.9" x 3.5" x 14.4" (WxHxD)