

Hands On with the Simaudio Moon 230 HAD Headphone Amplifier



After a long day at work, I sit down with my friends Charles Mingus, Miles Davis, and Dave Brubeck. I can't shake the feeling that I am sitting in the studio, enjoying the artistry of my favorite jazz musicians and their impeccable albums from 1959. The silence of the studio is pierced by Davis' masterful instrument control and the beautifully timed, smooth bass of Mingus filters through as clear as day. The piano of Dave Brubeck draws me in—flawless strike tones of the keys with accurate sonic decay. I feel the weight of the headphones on my head, and I see the sharp corners of the new Simaudio Moon 230 HAD sitting on my audio shelf. It's a beautiful piece of gear—a slim profile fronted by a brushed-black-metal panel. The 230 HAD is a headphone amplifier, digital-to-analog converter (DAC), and preamplifier all in one box, but that doesn't mean it performs any of these functions poorly. Rather, the reputable Moon brand has integrated the three functions marvelously in a simple package. The front panel has a volume knob, two buttons—one for input selection and one to turn the unit on and off—as well as a 1/4-inch headphone jack output and an analog input on a mini jack. The rear panel includes an analog input, four digital inputs on SPDIF (2), optical (1), and USB (1), and two pairs of analog outputs (fixed and variable).

Of greater importance than physical appearance is the question of sound quality. Everything you want from your earphones and more is delivered when powering them with the 230 HAD. It drives all of the frequencies on the audible spectrum with ease, but most notably it presents incredible separation of instruments. This separation means that the higher-frequency sounds of cymbals are not going to be covered up when the guitar rhythm comes in. It also means the vocals stand out near the front where they belong, rather than disappearing behind the instruments. It also allows one to

pick up some page turns and reed sounds when listening to classical compositions, such as Schubert's Symphony No. 4, or to potentially hear new details on old favorites. Some other notable sonic attributes are the controlled nature of bass frequencies, and a midrange that is properly textured in a way that allows the music to speak through it. That is not to say that the bass is not present, rather, the lower end of the music gains a certain punch and clarity that is very controlled.



The 230 HAD can drive even the most challenging headphones. It had no problem with my HiFiMan planar magnetic headphones, nor more challenging-to-drive dynamic models. Simaudio describes the piece as filling an important gap in the market where reference-quality sound meets the \$1,500 price point. I am inclined to agree. The 230 HAD is a truly unique piece of gear with a sophisticated presence on the audio rack. The component is available at Simaudio dealers worldwide, including online dealers in the United States.

