

# **SECRETS** of and Home Theater High Fidelity<sup>®</sup>

## **MOON by Simaudio 240i Integrated Amplifier Review**

From a consumer electronics point of view, and probably no other, things seem to be getting better. Easy setup and use, completely engaging sonics.



## **Highlights**

### **Simaudio 240i Amplifier**

- Trickle-down engineering
- As simple as possible
- Sounds so good, shouldn't there be a sacrifice at this price point?

## **Introduction**

In the case of hifi, you are more and more likely to find solidly built, high quality products, for less money, than when I was a kid (inflation adjusted of course). For instance, the MOON by Simaudio 240i is an integrated amp at the low end of a long list of integrated amps that this Canadian hifi company makes but it seems to have little to no shortcomings sonically or otherwise.

## **Design**

Of course, when I was a kid, electricity had just been invented so some progress is expected. The 240i is a nicely sized box, at just about 17 inches wide it will fill the standard sized shelf. As often seems to be the case, it feels heavier than the specified 24 pounds would lead me to expect. Yes, there is an obvious

conclusion here, but I already said I'm not a kid anymore, so we'll leave it at that, ok? The reason for the weight, real or perceived, is the sturdy steel case and inside, a substantial toroidal transformer which is visible through the mostly-vented top of the chassis.

For various reasons, I care most about the 'amplifier' part of an integrated amp. The 240i uses Simaudio's favorite class A/B amplification to create 50W into an 8 Ohm load. In the 'things are getting better' department, the frequency response is specified as 10Hz – 80kHz. Unheard of not that long ago. But, is it unheard now? That is, can we hear to 80kHz? No, but another way to look at that spec is that the amp will have a very high slew rate, the ability to quickly change what it is telling the speakers – a very desirable characteristic for an amp. That's what it's supposed to do after all.

Perhaps it's sign of the times that there are only two analog input pairs on the back panel, next to five digital input options (2 SPDIF, 2 Optical and one USB). The digital inputs are capable of handling very high sampling rates. Starting from the top, the USB input will process a PCM signal as high as 384kHz, the SPDIF's: 192kHz and the optical inputs: 96kHz. DSD is also supported, MQA is not but Simaudio does plan to implement that format in their streaming products starting next year.



I wondered if the DAC in the 240i was the same as in the rest of Simaudio's digital offerings (which mostly use ESS Tech) so I asked Costa Koullisakis (Vice-President Customer Experience): "Not all our DACs use the same chipsets. We generally stick with the ESS Tech chipsets, because of their high quality and intimate understanding on how to best implement them. However, with chipsets, implementation is just as important as what chipset is chosen. This is why for certain products, others were chosen (for example, our 260D player uses Burr-Brown). The chipset used in the 240i is indeed ESS Tech."

He went on to mention that the 240i is essentially a Bluetooth-and-streaming-free version of Simaudio's all-in-one player ACE. Otherwise they are identical. Given the cost savings (acquiring an ACE will cost you \$800 more) and the ability to add an external streaming device – supporting format-du jour – in the future, the 240i might be the better route. I have yet to hear MQA (I have a turntable) and I'm sure it raises both 1's and 0's to an entirely new level but I notice that there is another format supported by this DAC (and any other these days), DSD. But no one seems to care very much. Just sayin'.

Speaking of turntables, the 240i supports that, but in a starter-turntable kind of way. The owner's manual makes it clear that only a Moving Magnet cartridge is supported: "...for use with turntables equipped with a MM cartridge ONLY." Well, I'm here to make it a little less clear, a high-output moving coil is fine as well. I could see how Simaudio might want to keep things as simple as possible for newbies and themselves, but I would vote for making that extra statement in the manual.

Just a few more bits on the design: The headphone amp, taken straight from the amplifier output and routed to a 1/4" headphone jack which is right next to the personal-audio-player (1/8") input. I thought this was begging for some sort of headphone mishap but actually it is the opposite (I think). If someone had headphones with the smaller plug, they're standing there holding a 1/8" stereo-mini plug in their hand, having that 1/4" jack right next to the only 1/8" option, might serve to keep people from thinking that the smaller jack is an output rather than the input that it is. Of course, some people will not get that message but there shouldn't be any dire consequences other than no sound.



The display, an OLED type screen glows a lovely teal and gives away the fact that there is a processor inside. More on this later.

The remote (called CRM-3) is the third generation of Simaudio's lighter remote and my favorite of the bunch. There is an ornate and overly-heavy remote that ships certain of the Evolution line (higher end) and I have a CRM-2 that came with the 430HA (headphone amp). The CRM-3 feels very solid, has a bit of design to it and is easy to use (i.e., not a brick). Oh, and if you're not using the remote, the volume knob is hefty. It spins easily but it has a weight to it. The buttons are very solid and when you take the unit out of standby mode, the relays make the sort of sound that makes you feel this thing will last. Likely it will, all Simaudio components have a 10yr warranty.



## In Use

The owner's manual is excellent, clearly written with extensive instructions on using the setup menu. I didn't have to change anything from the defaults however, so I skipped straight to listening. Luckily this review unit had been out to other reviewers and so the recommended 400 hours break-in time had passed and I could get right to it. I started by substituting the 240i in the place of two other components in my home theater system (Arcam 888 pre-pro and Parasound Halo A51 5 channel amp). The Simaudio component didn't do all that those do (surround, Dolby, DTS) but it does about all I need because even if I'm watching a movie I generally stick to two channels. The two speakers in this setup are Aperion Intimus 5B's. The turntable is a Denon DP-60L (no, you can't have it!) with an Audio-Technica AT440ML.

Listening mostly to whatever was on television before starting any serious listening I still was able to note right away a powerful, articulate sound. Voices have a clarity with the 240i. If there was a characteristic to the

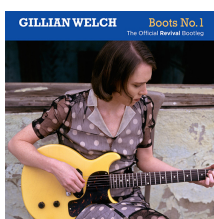
sound it would be what I call 'chunky' – distinct and pleasing edges. It goes especially well with rock and piano music. Anyway, there was a lot more listening to do.

Hooking up the Denon to the phono inputs gave me a clue as to what I was getting into – and it was good. It has been a while since I have reviewed an integrated, but I had expectations of limitations or colorations in the phono area. Those were quickly erased. I like to use Radiohead's Amnesiac for auditioning, lots of stuff going on at once including scratchy backgrounds that could make all else disappear if not handled right. They were handled right. The 240i had tight control on the two-way Aperions, the bass drum on Packt like Sardines in a Crushd Tin Box had both the snap and the depth that the recording delivers while Thom Yorke's tenor was clean and distinct. The piano on Pyramid Song was absolutely lovely, rich with harmonics. Also, the attack as the hammers hit the strings is something that only the best hifi can pull out. It wasn't all there with the 240i but it was there.

Ok let's jump ahead and compare the 240i to the best hifi. The best I have in-house is upstairs: Simaudio's P8 preamp, 430HA Headphone Amp and two W-6 monoblocks. Speakers are Daedalus 2.1's. A Parasound CD-1 is the only digital source. All are fed by a Furman IT-Reference 20i power conditioner (designed by Garth Powell before Audioquest stole him away). I can hear you: "It's ridiculous to compare a \$2100 dollar integrated to that mega-pricey stack of stuff!" But here's the thing, it isn't. In short, the 240i stacks up (sorry) quite well to my big rig. There is less of the black-background thing and the highs are not quite as high, lows not quite as low but a 240i could keep me happy for a long time.

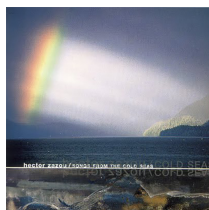
Now here's the ridiculous part, the power cords and interconnects I was using upstairs would add up to more than the 240i. But this is my new advice to people wanting to build a system: Get a good integrated (the MOON by Simaudio 240i would be the place to look first), spend as much as you can on good used speakers, and over time, spend the rest on wire. I was using a Shunyata King Cobra power cord which is usually plugged into my P8 preamp. Any notions I had about a characteristic chunkiness to the sound of the 240i, which I favor anyway, was gone. Replaced by the famous Simaudio neutral sound. The bane of audio reviewers, how to describe what is not there? Only after some time and switching back to the big rig could I identify the extra extension and black background that all those other boxes bring, the kind of sound that makes one stare at the speakers. Shelling out for crazy-expensive power cords for the 240i is not required however, the stock cord is no slouch and I also tried the very reasonably priced Pangea AC 9 Mk-II, not as smooth as the Shunyata but very nice.

I used a middle-ground, a Shunyata Venom-HC to improve the headphone sound a bit with the 240i. I was noticing that the hard-to-drive (600 Ohm) Beyerdynamic T1 v2 phones were sounding kind of closed-in unless I cranked the volume past the half-way point. With the hefty Venom-HC, they opened up at any volume. This also helped the soundstage migrate slightly forward and not be stuck in the middle of my brain.



### **Gillian Welch "Boots No. 1"**

Switching back to speaker-based listening, I tried the Gillian Welch compilation double CD, Boots No. 1, played by the Parasound through one of the SPDIF inputs of the 240i, I was not going anywhere. Gillian's and David Rowling's voices were blending in that weird way that they do but it was always easy to spot David in the background, distinct. I'm still having a fond memory of listening to that record as I type this.



### **Hector Zazou "Cold Seas"**

Another record I like to use for auditioning is Hector Zazou's Songs from the Cold Seas. Seek this one out. The first track is another two-singers-at-once affair and the 240i completely rocked it. The second track is a sought-after Bjork rarity "Visur Vatnsenda-Rósu", which doesn't rock, it haunts, and I was engrossed again – listening to music, not at all thinking about this review or analyzing the sound. Played the rest of the CD that way.

I pushed the 240i hard when listening to music, there was never a hint of any sort of over-taxing the amp, sound did not 'break up' or deteriorate with volume levels. In a similar vein the amp did not get overly warm, even in the confined space of my upstairs equipment rack I could still touch the sides easily. Best to not have a confined space though.



Oh, and yes there is a downside to aftermarket power cords, they are so big and heavy that as you might expect, they fall out the component. Happened when I was first trying to get the 240i going in my upstairs system. Took me a while to figure out what happened because there were no godawful pops or bangs through the speakers, the processor in there took care of creating an orderly shutdown. Things are indeed getting better for audiophiles.

## Conclusions

**The MOON by SIMAUDIO 240I is a 'starter' hifi component that will actually serve well into the future both in capabilities and sound.**

## Likes

– Ample power and an excellent built-in phono stage.

## Would Like To See

– Balanced Inputs  
– Phono stage loading adjustments

At the start of my time with the MOON by Simaudio 240i I was thinking of it as a starter component. Since it is at the bottom of the Simaudio offerings I would wager that they are hoping that it is the case, that is, that you think of this as a 'starter' and move up as time goes on. At this point though, I'd say that you could do that, or you could just stick with the 240i, building up around it if you felt the need, and just love your music. Highly recommended.