

## **amoenus audio** ASM 6-3 SP

**Origin : Switzerland**

**Headphone amplifier - Dac - Preamplifier**

- **Headphone output**

- **Output impedance: 0.13  $\Omega$  at 1 kHz**
- **Output power: 2.3 Watts at 10  $\Omega$**
- **Frequency response: 10 Hz - 35 kHz (< -1 dB)**
- **Linearity: 10 Hz to 25 kHz (<  $\pm 0.2$  dB)**
- **Distortion rate: < 0.005%.**
- **Crosstalk at 1 kHz: < -85 dB**
- **Unweighted signal-to-noise ratio (Vol. 8) : < -120 dB**



- **Unbalanced line output**

- **Output impedance: 54  $\Omega$  at 1 kHz**
- **Frequency response: 10 Hz - 35 kHz (< -1 dB)**
- **Linearity: 10 Hz to 25 kHz (<  $\pm 0.2$  dB)**
- **Distortion rate: < 0.01**
- **Crosstalk at 1 kHz: < -85 dB**
- **Unweighted signal-to-noise ratio: < -120 dB**

- **Balanced line output**

- **Output impedance: 160  $\Omega$  at 1 kHz**
- **Frequency response: 15 Hz to 35 kHz (< -1 dB)**
- **Linearity: 20 Hz - 25 kHz (<  $\pm 0.2$  dB)**
- **Distortion rate: < 0.005%.**
- **Crosstalk at 1 kHz: < -90 dB**
- **Unweighted signal-to-noise ratio: < -125 dB**

Exploring new brands and new products is an exciting exercise. It's even more so when the reference we're looking at doesn't yet have a reputation on the market.

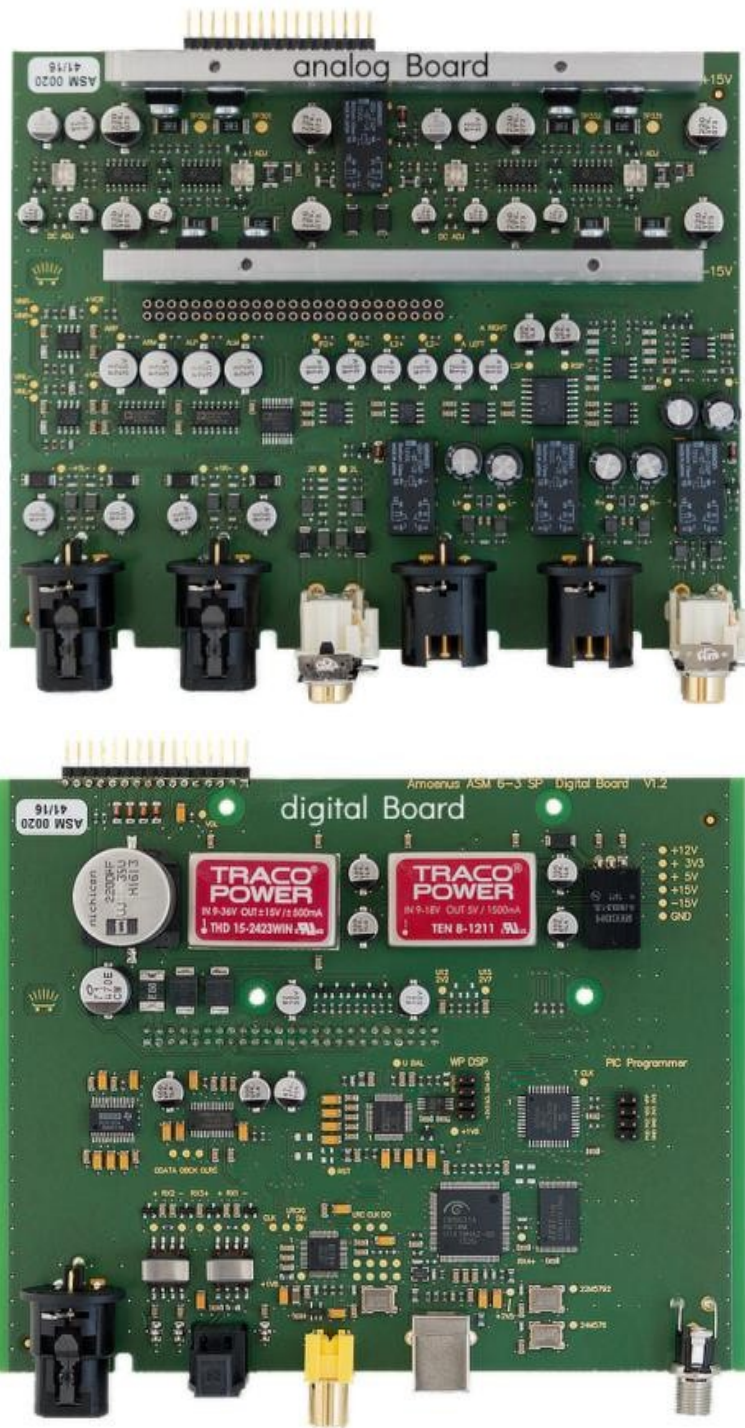
This is the case with the Swiss headphone amplifier **AMEONUS ASM 6.3 SP**.

On closer inspection, the ASM 6.3 SP is more than just a headphone amplifier. It incorporates a line preamplifier section as well as a D/A conversion section. Positioned at the top end of the market, the "little Swiss" is equipped with a proprietary algorithm that simulates a listening experience close to that of a classic hi-fi system with ideally placed loudspeakers. The designer's idea is to recreate a **three-dimensional** sound image, totally absent by the headphone outputs present on integrated amplifiers, some headphones themselves and, very often, approximated by many headphone amplifiers.



In a compact format, the front panel features a headphone output in 6.35 jack format only, manual volume control, and a special selector designed to turn off the effect.

A rotary selector allows **6** sources to be selected. **4** are for digital sources and **2** are for analogue sources. The cherry on the cake is the balance control, which is handy for 'unbalanced' recordings.



The manufacturer has taken care to design digital and analogue cards based on a drastic selection of components combined with its own schematics. The boards adopt a symmetrical typology. They include a Cirrus Logic CS4398 chip. Internal signal processing operates at 88.2 kS/s with 24-bit resolution to guarantee a frequency response well beyond the 20 kHz listening range.

There is no internal wiring: the printed circuits are directly connected to each other. This prevents any form of interference from polluting the sound signal.

The specificity of this device is based on a proprietary circuit called **Amoenus Externus**, the aim of which is to recreate the sound obtained by loudspeakers, without adding the artifice of certain very fashionable processes.



Although the designer has installed a volume potentiometer from Alps, he points out that in purely audio terms it has no function as such, as the audio volume is controlled electronically (PGA2320) after the D/A converter. He adds that the two analogue inputs offer analogue-to-digital conversion.



Digital connectivity is comprehensive enough to meet all requirements: **1** coaxial S/PDIF digital input, **1** optical input, **1** AES/EBU input, **1** USB-B input.

The analogue connectors include **2** line inputs: **1** balanced on an XLR connector, **1** unbalanced on an RCA connector. As the configuration is symmetrical, we won't be surprised to find a double pair of analogue outputs in both XLR and RCA format.

It should be noted that AMEONUS has been kind enough to equip its 'machine' with a totally separate power supply in order to immunise it against any form of electromagnetic or vibratory disturbance. The small separate box also has the advantage that the mains cable is not permanently connected. Thanks to an IEC plug, the user will have the choice of a high-quality mains cable.





I'd like to thank **Rhapsody Hifi** for making this model available to me for a period of four weeks to carry out this test bench and share my impressions with you.

***Listening and impressions :***

The listening tests were carried out at home with the following items:

- AUDIO-TECHNICA ATH-A2000Z headphones
- YBA Classic Player 2 CD player (*integrated mode & drive mode*)
- MOON 310 LP Mk2 phono preamplifier
- REGA RP 8 turntable & REGA MC Ania cell
- GOLD NOTE PH-5 phono preamplifier
- GOLD NOTE Valore 425 Plus turntable & GOLD NOTE MC Donatello Red cartridge
  
- Modulation cables ESPRIT Beta 8G, VAN DEN HUL the Orchid, PURIST AUDIO DESIGN Jade Diamond
- Digital coaxial cables LUNA Orange, ESPRIT Eterna

For mains power: FURUTECH F-TP 615 and ESPRIT Volta power strips, FURUTECH G-314Ag-18E mains head cables and FURUTECH FT-SWS-G wall socket. ESPRIT Celesta & Eterna mains cables.



• **Selected CDs:** *Prodiges ~ Camille Berthollet - Symphonie des Jouets - Léopold Mozart ~ direction: Jean-François Paillard & Sir Neville Marriner - The Last of the Mohicans ~ Trevor Jones B.O. of the film - Les Égarés ~ Ballaké Sissoko, Vincent Segal, Emile Parisien, Vincent Peirani - Jazz på svenska by Jan Johansson - 11:11 ~ Rodrigo y Gabriela - The Glory that was Gershwin ~ Frank Chacksfield - Legends ~ James Galway & Phil Coulter - Meddle ~ PinkFloyd - Quiet Nights ~ Diana Krall - Rive Droite - Rive Gauche ~ Swing Band meets Daniel Huck (Edition Passavant Music) - La Folia de la Spagna ~ Gregorio Paniagua - Barry Lindon ~ original film soundtrack - Mozart by the Zefiro Ensemble ~ conducted by Alfredo Bernardini - The Singing Clarinet ~ Giora Feidman - Les Géants du Jazz play Georges Brassens - Saint Kilda Wedding ~ Ossian - Naim CD test Sampler No. 6 - Sonatas Kk 87 by Domenico Scarlatti ~ piano : Mikhail Pletnev - Dance into Eternity ~ Omar Faruk Tekbilek - Les Marquises ~ Jacques Brel - Stereo Concert Series ~ Decca Phase 4 - Les Marquises ~ Jacques Brel - Epics: The History of World ~ Prague Philharmonic Orchestra & Choirs - Collaboration ~ The Modern Jazz Quartet with Laurindo Almeida - Le Vaisseau de Pierre ~ Tri Yann -, etc...*

• **Vinyl selections :** *La Folia de la Spagna ~ Gregorio Paniagua - "Jalousie" by Yehudi Menuhin and Stéphane Grappelli - Nameless ~ Dominique Fils-Aimé - All Time Favorite Melodies of Japan - Barry Lindon ~ film soundtrack - Le Vaisseau de Pierre ~ Tri Yann - Toccata et Fugue de Jean-Sébastien Bach performed on the great organs by Marie-Claire Alain - Contrastes ~ Pachacamac - Ted Heath salutes Benny Goodmann - Quiet Nights ~ Diana Krall - Brandenburg Concertos N° 1,2,3 by Johann Sebastian Bach ~ The English Chamber Orchestra ~ Conducted by Benjamin Britte , etc...*

## Terms and conditions of use



The ASM 6.3 SP was put through its paces using two distinct 'procedures'. Equipped with a Dac section, the CD player was alternately connected to the analogue inputs and to the S/PDIF coaxial input so as to be able to take full advantage of the characteristics of this D/A conversion function.

In addition, the listening tests were also carried out using vinyl records via the MOON and GOLD NOTE turntables and phono preamplifiers, so as to give as complete an overview as possible, since good vinyl records often hold some wonderful surprises in reserve.

## Tonal colours - nature of the stamps

### ↳ Treble-midrange registers

#### • Prodiges ~ Camille Berthollet (CD)



Once powered up, this preamplifier-dac-amplifier for headphones instantly shows its finesse at high and 'intermediate' frequencies. At the same time, its behaviour in these registers is immediately linear. This is reflected in an exemplary neutrality that does not favour any particular register. This is the first quality to be assimilated with the superb overall coherence.

What's more, the ASM 6.3 SP is distinguished by a high register that shoots very high while retaining its softness. This softness in no way masks the many details of *Camille Berthollet's* meticulous violin playing, when she makes her instrument sing and vibrate in *Vivaldi's Summer of the Four Seasons* or in *Johann Sebastian Bach's Concerto for Two Violins*.

This device pushes the resolution very far, as you are in direct contact with the solo instrument (and other stringed instruments). It is absolutely extraordinary to observe the way in which the artists make their fingers vibrate when the chords are placed on the neck of their respective instruments.

Furthermore, for those who might equate the upper end of the spectrum with dryness, I want to reassure them that there is no trace of caricature or highlighting to tarnish the silky thread of the violin or other string instruments. Quite the opposite, in fact: this electronics achieves a tour de force that allows the rising frequencies to emancipate themselves while preserving the creamy texture of good recordings.

### ↳ Analytical skills

#### • The Glory That Was Gershwin / Gershwin and his music ~ Frank Chacksfield and his Orchestra & Chorus (CD & vinyl)



There's no need to beat about the bush when it comes to transparency: this headphone amplifier - Dac is a champion in every category. Its signal resolution capabilities are pushed to the extreme. They are in line with the values noted and appreciated for the analysis of the treble and midrange registers.

The orchestral suite *Porgy and Bess* and other excerpts by *George Gershwin* published by *Decca* series

*Phase 4* presents us with an open, luminous, richly textured reproduction

harmonics and substances of all kinds. If the vinyl pressing already gives us a very convincing overview, the Compact Disc version brings an absolutely astonishing fruitiness. What's more, the use of the internal converter brings a significant 'plus' in terms of analysis, demonstrating that the Dac section has been thought through and realised with a care that cannot leave anyone indifferent.

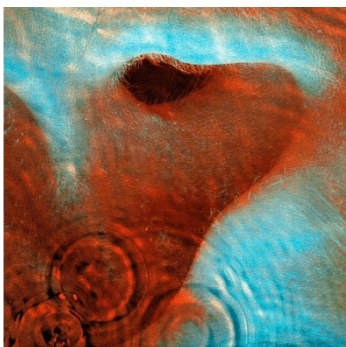
*Gershwin's* music has a dazzling, sparkling quality that really makes you want to discover or rediscover this composer's repertoire and these immaculately recorded arrangements. Listening to these different pieces demonstrates this desire to bring out the full content of these recordings. Each instrument stands out with a host of details that we enjoy savouring without moderation. This device knows perfectly well how to focus on each of them. Their perfect cropping leaves no room for approximation. There's not a thread out of place.

What a pleasure to hear the pearl-like sound of the harp, the airiness of the transverse flute, the light breath of its flutist, the gentle murmur of an oboe and the liveliness of the string section. A few percussion or cymbal strokes, finely "brought in", give the impression of a musicality of great purity, a message absolutely devoid of any form of veil.

And then there's the 'palpable', organic feel that shows precisely how each solo musician comes into contact with his or her musical instrument. As well as the precision, it's fabulous to note the 'touch' on violin strings, the harp, and the little cuts of the mallets on the cymbals.

## ↳ **Low register**

### • **Meddle ~ Pink Floyd (CD)**



The bass register is not outdone either. The 'orders of magnitude' expected are more than met. We can judge the behaviour of low frequencies by listening to *One of These Days* from *Pink Floyd's Meddle album*, in which Roger Waters' bass guitar displays a rather assertive presence. Don't worry, the AMEONUS doesn't overdo it, simply transcribing the bass playing with great depth and texture, in line with the expectations of aficionados of the band's music.

The resulting note tracking and precision are handled with a 'master's touch' and ease that confirms the full potential of this device to 'vibrate' the listener. In the same spirit, the impact of the hammer on the bass drum knows no subjective limits. These impacts are deep, frank and clean, and stand out for their materialized, full and organic character. This headphone amplifier - Dac avoids all the difficulties of a 'busy' and/or sometimes complex sound recording.



## Stage & sound

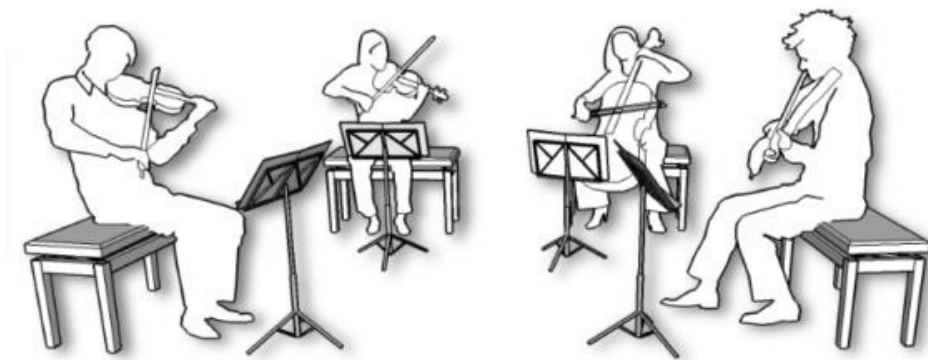
### • Rive Droite - Rive Gauche ~ Swing Band meets Daniel Huck (Edition Passavant Music) (CD)



We owe much of this to the structure of the soundstage, which is based on a proprietary algorithm that recreates the layout of the listening room using loudspeakers. When the recording is well done, this 'system' immerses the listener in the atmosphere of the recording studio. This is exactly what happens when we listen to *Rive Droite - Rive Gauche ~ Swing Band meets Daniel Huck (Edition Passavant Music)*. We're looking at a sound perspective that really does stretch out over a 180° angle.

In addition, the location of the instruments in the sound space and the various contrasts associated with them give us the benefit of a confounding three-dimensional reproduction, rarely achieved with the amp/headphone systems we usually encounter. It's worth pointing out that you don't need to turn up the volume very loudly to enjoy these effects. The ASM 6.3 SP is designed to arrange the sound space in such a way as to follow the melodic line of each of the musical instruments that make up this sextet down to the last note.

The listening experience is totally immersive, to the point where you imagine yourself plunged into the heart of a recording studio or concert hall, with that rare sensation of proximity to the performers.



with **AMOENUS** **VERUS**

• **Stereo Concert Series ~ Decca Phase 4 (CD)**



The main distinguishing feature that illustrates why this amplifier - Dac was designed and built is its extraordinarily wide-ranging reproduction. The positioning of the music stands allows us to discover the richness of the repertoires contained in this *Stereo Concert Series* box, where the sound recording was, at the time, particularly meticulous.

Among the wide-ranging musical themes covered is this rare recording of the *Toccata and Fugue*.

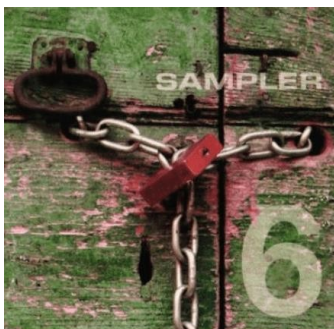
*in D Minor* by *Johann Sebastian Bach* transcribed for symphony orchestra by *Leopold Stokowski*, as well as other transcriptions by the "Master". The stereo effects are divinely staged by this product. The ASM 6.3 SP is unrivalled in its ability to deliver a holographic soundstage that lends panache to these various symphonic works.

We are never dealing with a compressed reproduction. It is totally free of any movement or constraint. In addition to the spaciousness mentioned above, each plane and each solo instrument is precisely positioned and well-organised within the soundstage. The ASM 6.3 SP also places great emphasis on the notion of aeration. In fact, thanks to the product's analytical philosophy, a host of subtly distilled micro-details emerge from the orchestral mass, and are above all obvious to hear. This is particularly noticeable on small percussion instruments such as the triangle, a harp stop or a series of violin pizzicati, each note of which is woven through the sound space with absolutely unimaginable agility.

The second distinctive feature that comes to mind is the much reduced 'acoustic pressure' on the ears. This encourages the listener to listen to and play disc after disc in a relaxed 'climate'. This is where the notion of acoustic comfort takes on its full meaning: unadulterated listening pleasure.

## **Flow and sequence of musical phrases**

• **Naim CD test Sampler N°6 (CD)**



Just like an integrated amplifier, a preamplifier or a power block, a headphone amplifier must have exemplary fluidity. When listening to headphones, you won't miss a single imperfection. In this respect, the ASM 6.3 SP is exemplary. I'd even go so far as to say that the fluidity is the antithesis of an integrated headphone output and far superior to that found on competing electronics.

The *Naim Sampler N°6* album brings together enough different styles and artists to judge a 'beneficial treatment' of musical phrases. *Antonio Forcione's Tears of Joy* and *Fred Simon's Remember the River* are just two examples. However, we are witnessing a sequence of phrases.

It's the kind of musicality that gives the impression that the "mechanics" are perfectly oiled. There's not a hitch, not a hesitation to disrupt the flow of the performances. On certain themes, you'll appreciate the precision of the piano attacks, the magnificent performance of the double bass and the cymbal strikes.

## Dynamics & reaction capabilities

### • *Le Vaisseau de Pierre* ~ Tri Yann (vinyl & CD)



As with all the lively musical themes covered in this test bed, our 'competitor' is eminently responsive. I'll give it credit for a well-controlled 'ramp-up', without any outrageous outbursts.

The folk-rock opera *Le Vaisseau de Pierre* by *Tri Yann* perfectly illustrates the dynamism of the ASM 6.3 SP. This device knows how to avoid all the pitfalls of a rhythm. No stress or hearing fatigue, this headphone amplifier tackles the subject with a brio that leaves no room for any form of imperfection. Electric guitar riffs are reproduced with undisguised ardour. The drums are straightforward, and the bass has a depth and melodic follow-through that are nothing short of praiseworthy.

What's more, if the reaction capabilities are there, the device is inflexible when faced with complex loads. There's no need to worry about confusion, even when the volume is turned up a little. The ASM 6.3 SP reacts with discernment. It is implacably rigorous, depending on the passage. It never lapses into 'demonstrative'. It strives to respect the rhythm imposed by the music. Its great reserve of dynamics is simply put at the service of the most faithful listening possible.

## Emotion sequence - sense of expression

### • *Les Égarés* ~ Ballaké Sissoko, Vincent Segal, Emile Parisien, Vincent Peirani (CD)

SISSOKO SEGAL PARISIEN PEIRANI



LES ÉGARÉS

In the company of this quartet made up of *Ballaké Sissoko* (*kora*), *Vincent Segal* (*cello*), *Vincent Peirani* (*accordion*) and *Emile Parisien* (*right soprano saxophone*) and their repertoire that embodies living music, we reach the pinnacle of intimate, close-up listening. The ASM 6.3 SP is a veritable 'bridge' between the art of music and the listener. If this CD is in itself a genuine discovery of a new genre, its sound recording contributes to making it a captivating listening experience.

But in the end, it's this headphone amplifier - Dac - that really adds the finishing touch, designed to appeal to the listener's sensibilities and provide the pleasure of relaxed, engaging and totally natural listening, without tiring. Contact with the musicians and their instruments is immediate. There is no barrier between the musical expression and the listener. Once again, there's no need to turn up the volume to enjoy these eventful recordings.

On the targeted extracts *Esperanza*, *la Chanson des Egarés* and *Dou*, the singing side is simply exquisite. The music is a joy to listen to, with the kora, accordion, soprano saxophone and cello soaring along with the notes with an utterly pleasurable agility. Each of them tells its own musical story, which the electronics do their utmost to reproduce as accurately as possible.

• **Les Marquises ~ Jacques Brel**



If the ASM 6.3 SP performs divinely on orchestral ensembles, on predominantly vocal themes, it rises to the top of the podium of products designed to move an audience sensitive to the repertoire of *Jacques Brel*.

From the outset, we are reminded of the location of the instruments in the recording studio, which is what makes this device so special, but we can't help but fall under the spell of the singer-songwriter's interpretation. His diction, expression and breathing leave nothing to be desired.

doubts about the 'relevance' of the Dac and analogue output sections. The degree of technological sophistication of the ASM 6.3 SP allows us to appreciate the orchestral accompaniment that is so often relegated to the background.

Each instrument has a special place and something special to communicate. An oboe, a few notes of harp and glockenspiel, a guitar accompaniment and a well-crafted violin pizzicato enrich a harmonically rich score. Every tonal hue is meticulously transcribed. Depending on the theme, the musical notes sometimes seem to fly around you as if by magic: the effects are simply prestigious!

- **"Jalousie" by Yehudi Menuhin and Stéphane Grappelli**
- **Nameless & Stay Tuned ~ Dominique Fils-Aimé**
- **All Time Favorite Melodies of Japan**
- **Barry Lyndon ~ film soundtrack**



Although listening to vinyl records is not the 'primary purpose' of this product, I couldn't resist trying it out with a few black discs.

Well, the first attempt has turned into a masterstroke. Don't hesitate to combine this amplifier with the best phono preamplifiers, turntables and cartridges.

With ASM 6.3 SP, you'll rediscover all the magic of the black disc. I'd even go so far as to say that it propels the vinyl recordings to very high musical heights. We find all the characteristics described in the previous paragraphs, with the addition of what makes the analogue medium so special.

The 'proprietary' Amoenus Externus technology fully plays its role as interface between the performers and the listener, with a staging in space that goes well beyond my expectations. All the charm of a good vinyl pressing is presented in a very natural and uncluttered way.



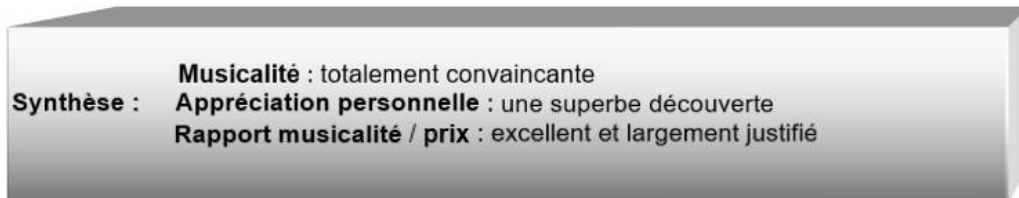
We benefit fully from the aforementioned three-dimensional reproduction. The placement of the performers is extremely precise and the stereo effects are grandiose.

## AMOENUS audio

### Conclusion:

It took the designer of this product 18 years of research, development and testing to perfect the Amoenus Externus technology for this device, which combines the functions of preamplifier, Dac and headphone amplifier. The musical result is clear: the ASM 6.3 SP is part of a revolution in individual listening. Recreating the 'physiognomy' of a concert hall or recording studio around you is no longer imaginary; it's real. So listening through headphones is invaluable, both acoustically and physically.

Highly recommendable, I can say that the ASM 6.3 SP changes your life!



**Summary :** **Musicality** : totally convincing  
**Personal assessment** : a superb discovery  
**Musicality/price ratio** : excellent and well justified

**Price: €5,600 (09/2023)**

*Test bench created by  
Lionel SCHMITT*

**audiophile** *fr*