

# Review: Struss Audio Ultimate

12.06.2020 // Bert Seidenstücker



## Struss Audio Ultimate

Are you looking for an amplifier that curls up tight thanks to its switching power supply and digital power amp section? Are you interested in an all-rounder that is receptive to all digital formats, regardless of whether the bits and bytes are fed in wirelessly or via cables? Then you are not going to find what you are looking for throughout the subsequent lines.

If, however, you are looking for a sensitive component that can assume the role of the musical (power) centre clad in a classic 43-centimetre outfit, then it's well worth reading on. With the Struss Audio Ultimate, the Polish specialist completes its small but fine amplifier range at the upper end of the scale. Nevertheless, first of all muscle strength is required to place Poland's contribution to the world of audiophile amplification in the heart of the test system. Its weight of just under 20 kilos already gives a fairly substantial indication on the expenditure of materials used. A glance through the cooling slots reveals

two generously sized toroidal transformers, of which each supplies one channel by together aspirating up to 1200 VA from the power grid. As aforementioned, old virtues are being cultivated here. Signals, if analogue, are mostly welcome to be processed through the comprehensive board of connections. In view of the unit's lavish dimensions, its five adjacent high-level inputs find sufficient space on the rear panel. A further input terminal, separately placed and equipped with high-quality WBT connectors, is explicitly entitled as CD/DAC connection.



*A solid front panel, forty-three centimeters wide - this is what amplifiers look like*

*There is no lack of analogue connectivity*



The two pairs of RCA sockets reserved for turntables fit in the classic picture as well. The first is intended for pickups that are designed to generate electricity using moving magnets (MM), the second provides amplification for the fine and particularly low signals of MC cartridges. At this point it's important to emphasize that a phono preamplifier not only equalizes, but also amplifies the signal, thus being a factor that cannot remain unmentioned within the overall conception of the component. But more of that later. With regard to the input impedances of both phono inputs, no customized solutions have been implemented. Most cartridges will feel comfortable with the impedances offered.

Below the gold-plated speaker terminals provenient from specialist WBT, located in the German city of Essen, the integrated power amplifier section can be directly addressed. Next to it, as

a counterpart, a pre-amplifier output is to be found. Electrically, this input terminal is on par with the other high-level inputs. Compared to the numerous RCA sockets, the two additional balanced XLR sockets rather stick out visually. My query to the extremely friendly team at Struss Audio, whether this type of contact is preferred, was answered in an undogmatical way: „That depends on the whole set-up. It's not clear from the outset what will work out better in the end". Whilst not wishing to anticipate what comes later on, I must say that within the environment of the test system this type of input convinced with a somewhat more catchy, more stable performance. However, a headphone output isn't to be found here at all. But, according to the Polish headquarters, an independent customized solution to feed any type of head-fitting transducers is going to be launched in the course of the year.



*The remote control knows no malfunction and is a real eye-catcher*



On the contrary, there is a remote control and it shows up as a real eye-catcher. It's round and rests rock-solid on any surface due to its own weight, while accommodating exactly two single keys: Volume up and volume down. That appears to be stingy, but is part of the sound-optimised concept. Within the Ultimate, Struss Audio completely dispenses with

any amplification in the pre-amplifier section. Incoming high level signals are thus treated solely in a passive manner. This significantly reduces the number of potentially sound-impairing components in the signal path. And so the Spartanic furnished remote control fits well into the overall picture as well.



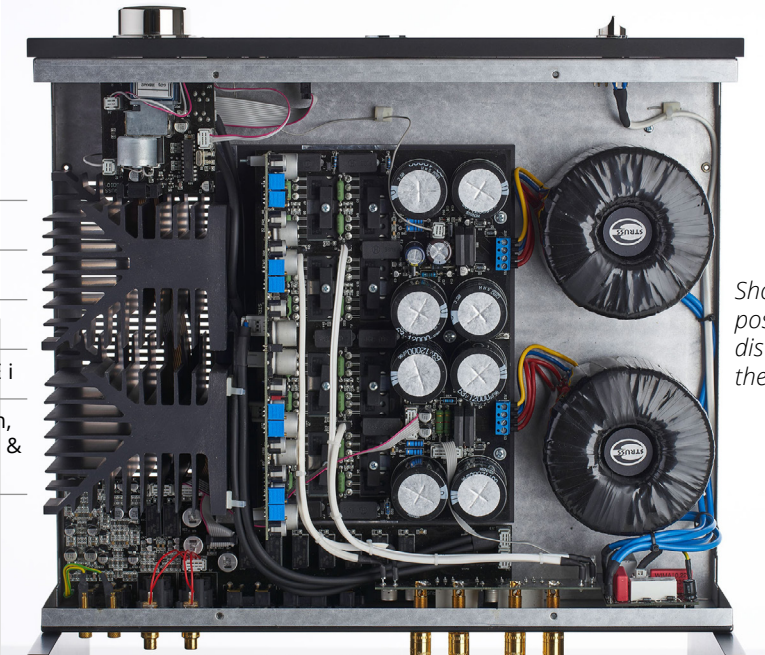
The function of the rotary switch is documented by a blue non-dimmable LED

Since features like source switching via remote control are not offered, the corresponding circuits on the board layout are obsolete. It's conceptionally not very surprising that there is no balance control or the possibility to equalize the sound. The overall minimalism is reflected in a nice looking, clearly structured front panel. The visually dominant volume control, which operates with excellent channel synchronisation, uses

a red LED to indicate the adjusted level. The engine bay presents itself accordingly tidy and cleaned up. The distances are short and the meticulously built discrete phono section is located sufficiently far away from the two transformers, which themselves are positioned directly adjacent to the power amplifier channels.

Listened with

Turntable	AMG inkl. AMG Teatro
Network player	Linn Akkurat DSM
D/A converter	Audiolab M-DAC
Loudspeaker	Manger Z 1
Mains power supply	Furman Elite-16 Power Factor E i
Cables	Cable LAN Supra, NF-Kabel Linn, Netzkabel Supra, LS-Kabel QED & Furutech
Furniture	Creaktiv

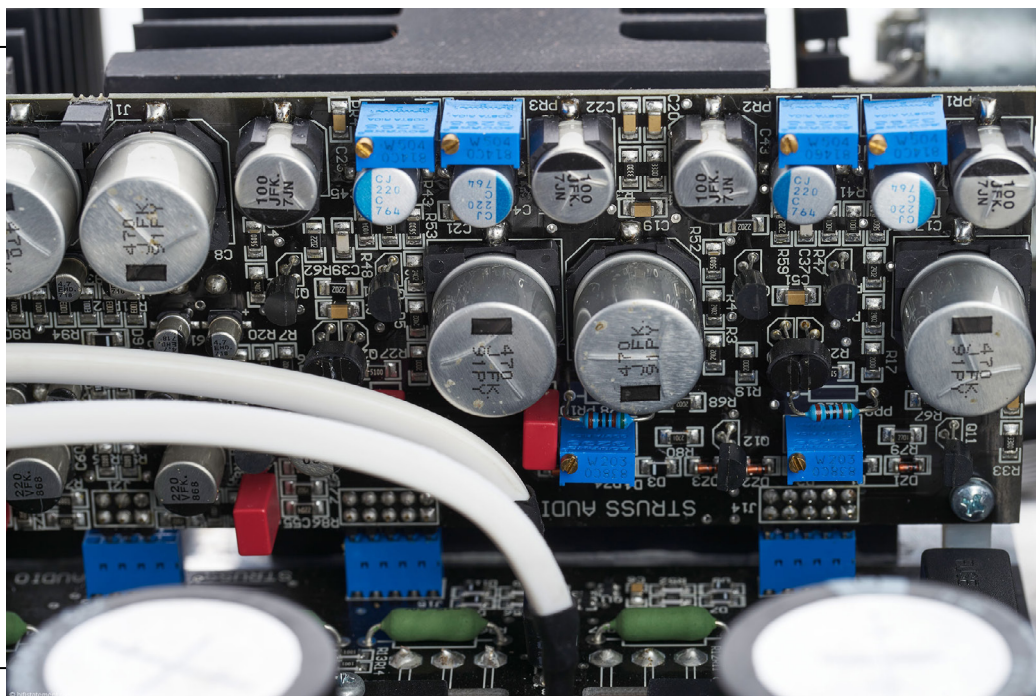


Shortest possible distances are the way to go

However, even if each component that has been declared to be superfluous delights the heart of every high end aficionado, the methodology of leaving the burden of amplification to the sources and the power amplifier section alone might lead through shallow waters. Negligently designed circuitries react sensitively to the cables used and their length respectively. If used incorrectly, even a volume control unit of the noble manufacturer Alps can, depending on its position, negatively influence the tonal balance. In addition to that, the output stages of the connected sources might get literally overcharged by this kind of unfamiliar task. Well, however, the mastermind behind the design is Zdzislaw Hryniewicz-Struss, a passionate music lover with a lot of technical expertise: a good blend in search of the perfect sound at home.

His career started way back in the seventies at the Polish Academy of Sciences. Employed there as a specialist in engineering and electronics, he narrowed his focus on

the amplification of weak signal currents in the field of measurement technology. For an avowed Rolling Stones fan who couldn't listen to his favourite band in due form, his background obviously paved the way to designing his own audio amplifier. However, a few more years were to pass before the first amplifier was produced under his name in 1995. In the meantime, he worked with Philips and the Studer AG for a few years, which gave him opportunity to further sharpen his profile. His own patents for a preamplifier circuit called Harmonics and Phase Conversion System (HPCS) bear witness thereof. The circuit is intended to combine the reproduction properties of amplifier tubes with the advantages of solid-state technology, such as control and dynamics. Should this already be a hint for the forthcoming listening test? The next few hours in the listening room will have to tell it. A blue LED and a soft click indicate the amplifier's readiness for operation, while the two power supplies have flooded the circuit electronically in the meantime.

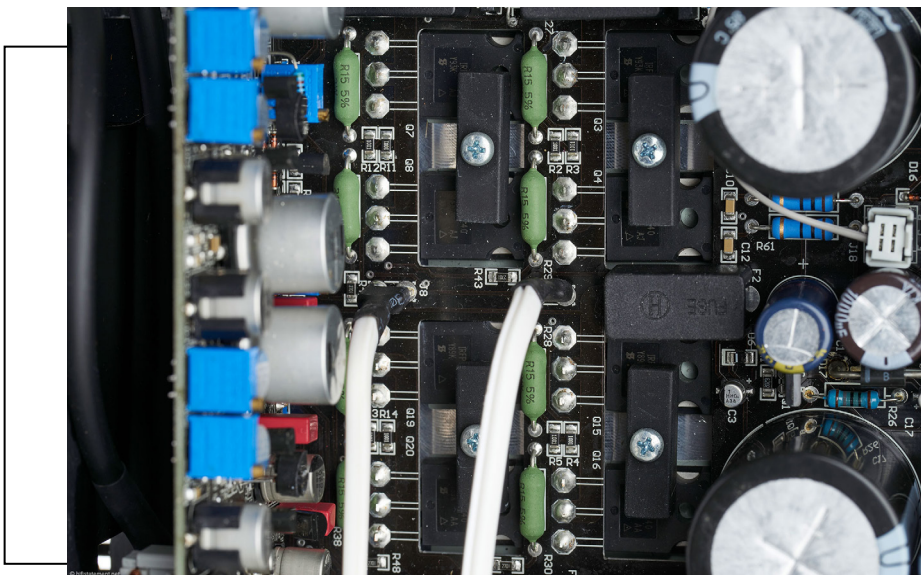


*A special circuit technology is used to implement the reproduction properties of amplifier tubes by means of transistors*

Many years ago, the Nits presented with Urk an excellent live recording, that documented the tour which followed their most successful studio album In The Dutch Mountains. But it's not the hit single of the same name staged by the Dutch musicians around Henk Hofstede that starts off as my opening track, but the charismatic „Two Skaters“ instead: A softly haunting song in which the kicks of the deliberately spectacularly recorded bass drum play an essential role. And the performance blows me away. The bass escapes the speaker cabinets in a powerful, unagitated and very controlled manner. And I play it just all over again, but now with significantly increased volume. I'd rather spoil the atmosphere here in the house before this amplifier even gets close to its performance limits! The space opens up widely and the recitative chant of the Dutchman is realistically projected between the speakers. The voice sounds voluminous and the hi-hat is rendered smoothly as silk.

The Grande Messe des Mortes by Hector Berlioz is always put to use when it becomes essential to find out how much overview is maintained when things get really intense. Lots of percussion and hundreds of singers are challenged by the musical score here. „Dies Irae“ unleashes an exceptional contest between the various choirs and the orchestra musicians, whereby the translation „Days of Wrath“ precisely discloses the spirit of the composition. Even within these elemental forces, the Ultimate keeps its countenance. The speech intelligibility of the innumerable voices is preserved, and the various groups of singers are also stably projected into the room, while the low-tuned timpani wave a sound carpet that creates the desired menace. Here the amplifier's potential also allows for the necessary calm throughout the performance.





*The expertise engenders a spotless design*

An epic work of jazz is without doubt The Köln Concert by Keith Jarrett. A lot of things went wrong in the run-up to this concert, but perhaps it was precisely these ailments that subsequently revealed the ingenuity. However, this contrasts with the performance. The grand piano is physically projected into the room, while not only the strings but also the resonating body of the instrument fill the room with sound. Moreover, here the perfect timing of the accented notes is veritably celebrated. And the rhythm in particular. The Ultimate appears to be one of those wonderful rocking animators: Just try it out!

After experiencing another wonderfully performed jazz classic, „You look good to me“ by Oscar Peterson, a highlight of the listening session followed: „Liberty“, intoned by the Norwegian artist Anette Askvik. With regard to this, here's a gentle hint: The recommendable album of the same name can now be mail-ordered on her website at a moderate price. Absolutely fantastic how beautiful the Struss Ultimate reproduces the vocals. The imaginary not infinitely deep soundstage makes the speakers almost disappear, while again the instruments are orchestrated in a natural way. It's the voices and the acoustic instruments that this amplifier is celebrating. Yes, Mr. Hryniewicz-Struss masters the technique of passive preamplification as well as the construction of high-performance power amplifiers. And now it's about time to put down the tablet computer and conquer the record rack.

In idle mode, the MC input produces a non-critical slight noise, and then only, if the potentiometer is properly turned up.

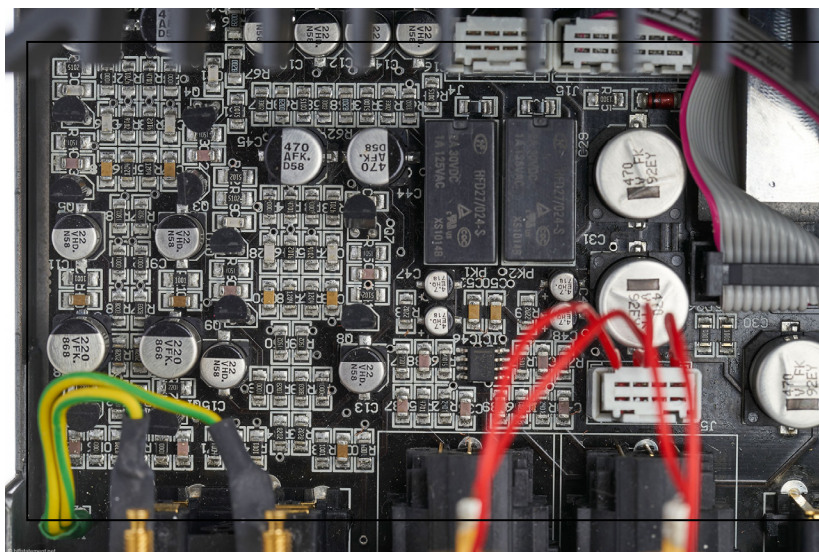
## Statement

Struss Audio's integrated amplifier reveals the expertise acquired over many years of experience with every note played. No matter whether the beat is set by a turntable or the binary digits of a converter, the Ultimate combines a fine, extremely

Steven Wilson regularly concludes his live concerts with the piece „The Raven that Refused to Sing“, a melancholic work, which had been recorded in a quite cool manner. But, when letting the AMG and the Struss Audio interplay, it gives the sound a more roundish appearance with an aesthetic high frequency range, while throughout the lower frequencies drive jointly with power complement the performance in a perfect way. Next one of my oldest records finds itself rotating on the turntable: Gregorianischer Choral Weihnachtsmesse (Gregorian Chants Christmas Mass), recorded in 1959 in the Benedictine Archabbey of St. Martin. What the then sound engineer Gerhard Henjes came up to produce more than sixty years

ago is more than admirable. Depicting choirs in a large room – for the Struss this is an easy task to perform. Substantially more demanding proves to be „The Embrace“ from Al Di Meola's double album Kiss My Axe. Again the rhythmic are nimble and to the point, whereby, however, the attack department keeps asking for a little more stimulation. Nevertheless, the phono input splendidly complements the high level section with its very similar strengths.

If you now have acquired a taste for it, then contact Struss Audio



*The Ultimate allows for both MC and MM cartridges to be operated*

in Poland to arrange an appointment to give it a listen. The respective contact details can be found at the end of the review. All other services can easily be arranged across the open European borders. In addition, the team around Hryniewicz-Struss is also happy to receive inquiries from German retailers.

natural performance with seemingly endless reserves of power. It's hard to imagine that any speaker model around could seriously bring its power amp into trouble.

*HiFiStatement // Bert Seidenstücker*



You can read the entire review at:

<https://www.hifistatement.net/tests/item/2799-struss-audio-ultimate>



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