



ARCUS

INCANTARE MusicStation

Reviewer: Srajan Ebaen

Financial Interests: click [here](#)

Source: April Music Stello CDT100 | DA100 Signature

Preamp/Integrated: Peachtree Audio Nova, Esoteric C-03

Amplifier: FirstWatt F5, Octave MRE-130SAT

Speakers: Era Design 5 SAT, ASI Tango R

Cables: AntiCables for desk top, complete ASI Liveline loom for big system

Stands: Ikea office desk in office, 4 x Ikea Molger with Ikea butcher block platforms and Acoustic System footers in big system

Powerline conditioning: 2 x Walker Audio Velocitor S in big system, Furutech e-TP 80 on desk top

Sundry accessories: Furutech RD-2 CD demagnetizer; Nanotech Nespa Pro; full-house installation of Acoustic System resonators, noise filters and phase inverters; Advanced Acoustics UK Orbis Wall and Corner

Room size: Sound platform 3 x 4.5m with 2-story slanted ceiling; four steps below continues into 8m long open kitchen, dining room and office which widen to 5.2m with 2.8m ceiling; sound platform space is open to 2nd story landing and 3rd-floor studio; concrete floor, concrete and brick walls, converted barn with no parallel walls nor perfect right angles; short-wall setup with speaker backs facing the 8-meter expanse

Review Component Retail: €1,500



It would be all Richard's fault if this dog was a toothless wonder that refused to hunt.

Kohlruss that is. Richard Kohlruss, freshly appointed Canadian —secret audiophile service—agent to German brand Arcus. He'd told their Wolfgang Rath about 6moons. Liking what he saw, Herr Rath had subsequently proposed a review. "I have to apologize for not getting in touch with you sooner. Perhaps it is because of our old-fashioned view over the last few years that was focused too much on print publications.

"To be honest, visiting your website and your philosophy really gave us the feeling that you still do your job because you love it. In many traditional paper magazines we feel that the reviews have lost their relationship to music and are more concerned with commerce." Was I getting buttered up? They say flattery gets you anywhere. Rath was definitely getting somewhere. I kept studying his introduction.

"Regarding arcus, we began as a 2-channel hifi company 30 years ago. Today our focus is on digital audio and video servers yet we always apply the same high audiophile standards. While some products may look like standard CD players and were in fact designed to work just like them, they incorporate the latest in digital server technology with all its advantages. We see huge benefits for a customer to have all their music at their finger tips with just a click on the remote rather than chasing the right CD in their collection for half an hour. Our goal has always been that our servers must sound better than a standard CD player for the same price. Also, we provide perfectly matched amplification.

"Two years ago we launched our DAR300 audio server, a unit with Internet radio, full access to the hard disc via Ethernet and external PC and many more features. It is quite a successful product. And, we learnt how there is still a huge group of consumers who don't want to use their computer for hifi, who don't have home-based networking

technology and who don't care to use internet radio. It's for that target group that we have developed the arcus incantare MusicStation. It's a simple product to use. It requires no network access, no internet radio and makes it extremely simple to rip CDs to hard disc. It's simply a unit where to store all your music while the inbuilt integrated amplifier allows connection to a pair of loudspeakers to start enjoying the music right away. This product has a European retail of €1,500."



Some giant bell began ringing my belfry with deafening powe. This had all the cost-effective makings of a true plug 'n' play PC audio product *without a PC or Internet router*. The Arcus MusicStation runs Wolfsson codecs for high-quality D-to-A conversion; an S/PDIF output to go serious and install the machine as just a server front end into an existing high-end system; and a line-out to retain its preamp functionality but not the inbuilt amplifier (or to subwoof with in the stock one-box context).

The MusicStation also has a very simple data backup provision to duplicate its files to external HD. For its kind of scratch including 30wpc/4-ohm digital amplification and a CD burner, one naturally cannot expect a big bad Sooloos screen or B&O's BeoSound 5 tactile industrial sculpture interface above. iTunes-type visual functionality would have to be scaled back. The MusicStation GUI had to run off a smaller display and on probably proprietary software. The chief question would be, how convenient had arcus been able to make their graphic user interface?

Anyone who's ever tried text messaging more than one sentence off an antique mobile's number buttons already knows the pain of being stuck with the wrong tool for the job. The N°.1 appeal of the music server proposition is *convenience*. A lack of convenience would be downright antithetical. Offline meta data recognition here relies on the preloaded FreeDB list. It can be updated via the arcus website from time to time, then transferred from PC to MusicStation by USB stick or cable. Albums newer than the latest version of the list will require manual inputting*. Otherwise one collects endless *unknown track 1* repetitions to badly fail at having one's music server actually *be* convenient. I envisioned tedious scrolling through multiple letter choices (see arcus remote above) to take 10 minutes for what would be over in seconds on a proper keyboard. How about accessing one's data base of hundreds of CDs with a minimum of fuss and at maximum speed? How good were these Germans really at writing intuitive software and not just constructing hardware?

* Upon uploading the newest version of this list, the MusicStation has the option of automatically updating older files and albums previously not recognized. If you refresh the preloaded list regularly, this likely makes manual entries less of an issue. Much will depend on how mainstream or not your music choices are and how completely FreeDB captures releases from small exotic labels.

Meanwhile Big Ben kept on tolling upstairs. There was that very attractive €1,500 sticker. It's Rotel or Arcam CD player territory, still the old-fashioned turf. It's also about half of what April Music wants for its Aura Note Premier CD/receiver with USB, a bridge product where any actual music serving still has to occur offboard. The stock 160GB capacity of the cheaper arcus (320 or 500 optional) for an averaged 320 (or 640 and 1000) uncompressed CDs appears sufficient for the intended target audience while the faster USB-2 port on the front panel is the much preferred PC input over USB-1. The digital output meanwhile becomes the road to Damascus and cost-no-object systems. On specs, the MusicStation claims a dynamic range of 105dB, damping factor of >400, channel separation of 89dB and input impedance of 47K. Vitally important, there's a heat-pipe cooling system to eliminate a noisy fan altogether. *Wunderbar!* Incidentally, arcus relies on FAT and FAT32 data support like most PCs and runs off a Linux platform. For the interior decorator, there are Titanium silver, black and white finish options. For value and brain power, all development, engineering, production and manufacturing of the arcus MusicStation took place in Germany. Hmm.



Did something here approach sounding too good to good to be true? My man Richard -with whom I routinely share notes on reviewables for me, sellables for him—had never yet let me down before with any recommendation. Was he finally going soft? Only one way to find out. I e-mailed Wolfgang Rath that I was game. On paper at least, everything promised a very exciting component that was not another \$24,000 Boulder 1021 component for the exclusionary golf club crowd. More in due course...

