

New: Akiko Audio's Phono Booster

A new product has sprung from the minds of Akiko Audio's Marc en Sander van Berlo. They have already provided us with GEM boxes, different types of Tuning Sticks, Stickers and Plates, the Triple AC Enhancer, the Power Conditioner Corelli and more. But now, Marc and Sander have developed a tweak especially for the vinyl fan.

Father Marc van Berlo and his son Sander run Akiko Audio together. They had informed me about the Phono Booster before it went on sale, asking me if I would be willing to put the Booster to the test. Of course, Marc knew about my passion for vinyl music as well as how my set is built up and how it sounds. Hence, we can assume he knew how representative my tests would be.

Akiko Phono Booster

The Phono Booster was delivered to my home recently. Excellent service! Akiko Audio's aluminium sheet housing is a familiar sight by now, but this device does things a little different: the case is made out of black enamelled cast aluminium. Marc explained to me that this type of aluminium suits the device better than the standard casings they use. As I believe a component's housing is just as important as its contents, I'm glad they made the extra effort. You



can tell how keen I am on proper fastenings from the review on the Transrotor motor on this site: <http://www.puresound.be/recensies/archive/2015/april/article/transrotor-motorsturingen>.

Providing a device with a proper casing means a huge improvement, something which Akiko Audio discovered years ago. This is why all their products are so reliable. Although it raises prices, it also improves the quality of the sound, enabling you to get the most out of your device.

The Phono Booster comes with a connection cable (in a little bag), which has a fork end and a banana end. This allows you to connect the Phono Booster to the phono stage or record player's earthing wire. Moreover, I also kindly received an Akiko Audio ballpoint pen and their business card.

Dilemma

However, I still faced a small dilemma. I was able to test the Phono Booster, but unfortunately not in my best set. My Transrotor Fatbob S has two tonearms, but because it is connected in balance the stage doesn't come with an earthing point.

I therefore tested the Booster on my other turntable set: a single point layered Levin Design Just Music tonearm, a Van den Hul DDT2 Special and a first generation Ifi iPhono with Breeze linear feed. Still a decent combination to try it out in of course.



Listening

To warm up, so to speak, I first enjoyed a couple of tracks listening to the standard set-up. Then I added the Phono Booster to the IFi iPhono earthing point and started the tracks again. To no surprise, Akiko Audio managed to book another success with their Booster.

I have an original *Grace* by Jeff Buckley, and *Hallelujah* simply sounds perfect on that record. It is one of the records I always use as a reference, because you can hear everything as it should sound: like the original. Jet's distance to the microphone, the sudden air movement when he produces a "p", small sounds and large sounds, and especially: silence. A completely "black background" when the music rests. Unfortunately, the remastered version of *Grace* lacks this: tracks are too loud, there's (a lot of) groove pollution, and the rests are loud instead of silent. It isn't dynamic, which is why I'm so incredibly happy with my original record.



The Phone Booster makes listening to music more relaxed and enjoyable. It simply 'becomes easier'. You're able to focus better on voices and instruments, and the music image becomes more precise. There's no more need to "imagine" a sound in the middle, because it's just there! The image also becomes more spacious because the rests have improved. It's narrower now, and a lot deeper which took some getting used to. I remember that effect from years back when my set wasn't as good as it is now. Music would sound as if it came from across the street. Since then, some necessary changes have taken place creating a rather realistic sound right in front of the listener (if I may say so myself). The Phono Booster brings back this effect slightly: music doesn't quite sound as if it comes from across the street, but it is out there on the pavement in front of the house.

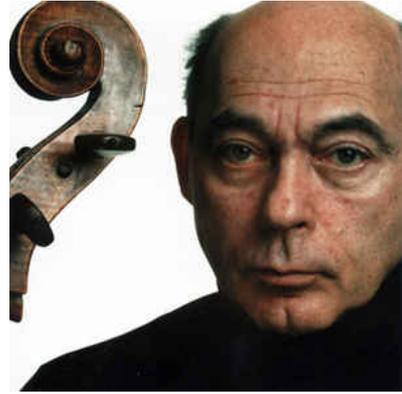
The Take Off and Landing of Everything by Elbow is another one of those precious records. I know it isn't everybody's favourite cup of tea, but I play the 45 RPM edition and love it. The recording quality is every good and again you simply ease into the music. No need to "imagine" where all the sounds come from. They're just there! Pinpoint precision, accurate to the millimetre. To tell the difference I removed the Phono Booster from the set, which brought the music closer to me, but also noticeably reduced the level of accuracy.



My third choice of records may also chase many audio fans away: Björk. I am a huge fan of her because she's always original and her music contains some enjoyable surprises. *Hyperballad* goes all the way into the abyss, which the Phono Booster is able to render even more impressively. The roundness of the "gongs" is smoothed out beyond belief as the sound flows elegantly into your ears.

Classical music then. A cello piece by Jonas Starker. The Phono Booster makes the cello livelier. No restless unravelling of sound any more. Instead, nothing but a beautiful wooden cello producing more of a richer and emotional sound. That's what you get with the Phono Booster.

Finally, a large symphony orchestra. Usually, something like this just turns into a hot pot. I put on the *Mathäus Passion* (Erato) – though it wasn't quite the time of year for it when I did my tests – to see whether the Phono Booster could improve such symphonies as well. As was to be expected, it did. The focus improved and the many individuals in the choir became individually recognisable, instead of them being a just a few individuals in a larger mess of sounds. The different sections in the orchestra also become distinctly audible.



Conclusion

I can happily conclude that the Phono Booster is another beautiful product. Applying it to your set results in a sound image with more rests and increased focus. It's an alternative to upgrading your cartridge. The effects from a higher-level cartridge can now be achieved by combing your own cartridge with the Phono Booster.

The only, tiny, remark I could make is that the resulting music does sound like it comes from further away. Compared to the increase in focus and silence, however, this is something you'll soon get used to.

The Akiko Audio Phono Booster can be bought for € 350,- directly from Akiko Audio themselves, or from one of their dealers.