

Accessories Test

Harmonix RF-999MT, TU-66ZX, TU-210ZX and X-DC

Prices: from 615, 820, 840 and 1160 euros

By Dirk Sommer, Photos: Rolf Winter

There is normally nothing complicated about testing accessories: All you have to do is change a couple of cables or tuning feet and you've got the results. Most of the time you're not stuck writing a lot of detailed technical descriptions, since there's not much physical material involved. And yet, things are a little different when it comes to Harmonix.

This has nothing to do with the vast amount of established physical facts that the author was inundated with, but is due instead – as Virgil Warren who distributes Harmonix products in Germany so eloquently explains – to these Far Eastern tuning devices having to be understood and experienced as a system, and one that demands a certain break-in period. I have to admit that there were some reservations to overcome before I agreed to set aside two days for us to try out some tuning feet and cables together – a practice I otherwise strictly refuse to be a party to. And there's no point in concealing that fact that I didn't harbor much hope of significantly improving my gear by simply adding various accessories. After all, I leave nothing to chance and have had ample opportunity over the years to induce my fine components to peak performance by using acclaimed connectors and supports.

Although Virgil Warren fully enjoyed the first songs from record and tape that this ex-drummer from New Orleans and I listened to on my as-yet-unmodified system, his faith and trust in the effectiveness of his own products remained totally unshaken. Before we got started he briefly explained why these attempts at optimization had to start with the speakers and then work their way to the sources: Once Harmonix has pushed the sound transducers as far as their potential will take them in terms of resolution and definition, it then becomes much easier to evaluate – favorably, of course – the effect produced by the tuning components inserted in the system later on.

For the LumenWhite, he then selected the best that Harmonix has to offer in spike bases: the RF-999MT with its striking sobriquet "RealFocus". The artful layers of turned cherry wood and metal parts, which replaced those abhorrent, everyday metal bases, quickly make their presence known – and in a downright positive way. No longer was there even a hint of the speakers' physical presence; the music unfurled freely and yet was still three-dimensional enough to almost touch. The image shines in a multitude of colors, emerges with vastly cleaner edges and is perfectly focused. And I'm not just writing about nuances here. The improvements are obvious and are a really good deal in relation to the not-so-inconsiderable investment involved. After all, that's 615 euros a box for three spikes and related bases.

The loudspeaker cables would logically be next in line. I didn't think that replacing them in my system would really make much sense, since even these cheaper Shunyata connectors can deliver a better performance than other manufacturers' top models. This has nothing to do with the quality of the others, but only with the fact that Shunyata is used for the internal wiring of all LumenWhites, which means it would be no simple task to surpass the quality of signal transmission by one and the same principle. Even though Virgil Warren fully stands behind his products, I am happy to report that he is pragmatic enough to skip the experiment of using Harmonix loudspeaker cables. The next thing is to improve how the Brinkmann Monos are positioned. These normally rest on three Finite Elemente Cerabases, which, thanks to their clear form and sumptuous workmanship, are a superb visual complement to the otherwise plain, black mono-block amplifiers.

Still, the Harmonix TU-66ZX Beau Tones just don't quite do that at the moment: The surface quality and the silky-smooth height adjustments are unquestionably luxurious and the impact they have on the sound, which will be described shortly, leaves no room for criticism. It's just

that the combination of ebony-finished cherry wood and bronze-colored metal parts appeals more the tastes of the Asiatic market and takes some getting used to underneath the Brinkmanns. Although we haven't documented their existence with photos here, there are completely black Beau Tones available to satisfy our local tastes in style. The German importer has convinced the manufacturer to make almost its entire range of Harmonix products in plain black. Now there is nothing, at least when it comes to aesthetics, to stand in the way of using such sound-enhancing equipment.

Let's get back to our tuning marathon. First we replaced the Cerabase with the TU-66ZX. Soundwise nothing changed and fortunately the dynamics stayed just the way they were. The recording venue – a place that really exists in the case of CDs from MA Recordings – appeared to have somewhat more space and airiness about it – something I found to be very compelling. But Virgil Warren was still not fully satisfied and explained that the Beau Tones manifest their resonance-reducing effect only when used under all four corners of a device. Thanks to the (already mentioned) feet having such a sensitive height adjustment it didn't take much time to provide a steady base on which the amplifier can rest. Not only that, you can notice it in the sound: The saxophone and trumpets now sound more supple, though not aggressive enough for my tastes – too tender to be really riveting. Nevertheless, it can definitely be said that Harmonix works exactly the way they said it would and you can achieve predictable results using them.

According to Virgil Warren, these resonance-absorbing products have a clearly recognizable break-in effect in combination with the devices placed on them. Having said that, we will leave it at four feet per mono-block and turn our attention to the power cable. Right now some rather thick cables that look as if they have not grown out of the prototype stage are bridging the gap between the Sun rack and the monos. Although there is a minimal increase in the liveliness of the performance when the Harmonix X-DCs take on this job, this positive effect regrettably comes at the price of a slight drop in impact in the bass range. Of course I should not fail to point out that all the changes, aside from those brought about by the spike bases, were rather marginal so that it is almost impossible to speak of better or worse, right or wrong. This issue has long since been a question of taste.

That's not the case, however, when an additional set of Beau Tones replaces the Topline series feet from Acoustic Systems located between the Brinkmann Marconi and a shelf of the Pagode Master Reference. The music is fully relaxed as it flows, but has too few sharp edges and corners to captivate the listener to the same extent it did before. And surprisingly even Virgil Warren totally agreed with me on this assessment. This could only be because the Marconi is one of those "highly sensitive" devices whose group includes Harmonix CD players, converters and tube amps. And with even a bit of imagination you could include the Brinkmann hybrid pre-amp among the latter. Tuning specialists recommend that you use the similarly expensive TU-210ZX Golden Toes instead of Beau Tones for these components. These do more than just leave the TU-66ZX far behind: They bring the Marconi fully up to speed and ensure an extremely solid bass.

Slowly we have reached the point where detecting the tiniest of changes demands more and more concentration and where progress and setbacks in the various disciplines are becoming more difficult to keep track of. And so we'll call it a day, give the system and Harmonix a few hours to get to know each other and relax for the rest of what has been a long evening.

By the next morning the system did in fact play in remarkable harmony. Even if some of this impression is attributable to the power of suggestion on the part of the Harmonix spokesman – such effects being one of the reasons why I usually decline offers to listen together with manufacturer or distributors – there are still enough positive aspects left over to put in some lasting good words for the various tuning elements and the power cable. Try as I might, I simply cannot claim to have found even the slightest thing to criticize in any of the disciplines. Since I know quite well that this expression of vague satisfaction simply won't be enough for you, Virgil and I will now begin to remove the Harmonix tuning devices one by one from the system and replace them with the feet and cables that I normally use.

It would be foolish to claim that after twelve hours you can still precisely recall how great the effect was when you replaced the bases, not to mention being able to measurably correlate this effect to the conditions once you put the original components back in. Since we can save ourselves having to take the long way around the set of Beau Tones under the pre-amp and only three TU66ZXs beneath the Mono power amps – and in light of the intensifying

harmonization effect from the break-in – a thought suddenly struck me: Taken as a whole, the Harmonix bases and cables are moving in the same direction as the conglomeration of select high-end accessories that I've been acquiring over the years. If you image the effect of the parts that I've been used up till now as a straight line, then the Harmonix properties would be a curved line that repeatedly intersects it. The Harmonix line and the straight line would have virtually identical starting and end points.

Perhaps it would be fairer to depict the Harmonix effects as the straight line and the impact produced by the various accessories I've collected as a line oscillating about it. After all, Harmonix is not only a coherent system in itself, but is superbly balanced in terms of the impact it makes. Harmonix definitely offers the right stuff for people who don't have access to a large inventory of the finest accessories or who just don't feel like spending years of trial and error picking out the right components for their system. What's more, it's not surprising that overall this system spoils you with more air than my – as the say in Bavaria – “wild as a bird” mixture of accessories. And I certainly don't need to mention the exceptional benefits provided by the RF-999MT spike bases. Suffice it to say that I won't be replacing them any time soon.

Test System Components	
Record Player:	Brinkmann LaGrange with tube power supply
Tonearm:	Brinkmann 10.5, Graham Phantom
Cartridge:	Lyra Olympas, Van den Hul Calibri XGW
Phono Pre-Amp:	Einstein the Turntable's Choice, symmetric
Tape Machine:	Studer A80
CD Drive:	Wadia WT 3200
D/A Converter:	Audiomeca Enkianthus
Pre-Amp:	Brinkmann Marconi
Power Amp:	Brinkmann Monos
Speakers:	LumenWhite Diamond-Light Monitors
Cables:	Precision Interface Technology, Nordost Valhalla, Shunyata, Audioplan Powercord S
Accessories:	Clearaudio Matrix, Sun rack, Audioplan Powerstar, HMS wall outlets, Acapella bases, Acoustic System feet and resonators, Finite Elemente Pagode Master Reference Heavy Duty and Cerabases

image x-tract	
What we liked:	
That the effect of the tuning devices can be predicted with relative precision and that they have a clearly positive influence on the sound.	
What was missing:	
A scientifically established explanation for how it works.	
What surprised us:	
That Harmonix works best as a system.	
What to do:	
Try out several Harmonix products at the same time – forget the “technology” and rely instead on your own ears.	

image infos	
RF-999MT Spike Bases	
Features:	Wood and metal design
Diameter:	77 mm
Price:	820 euros (set of four)
TU-66ZX Tuning Feet	
Diameter:	50 mm
Height:	33 mm
Price:	820 euros (set of four)
TU-210ZX Tuning Feet	
Diameter:	54 mm
Height:	30 mm (including spike base)
Price:	840 euros (set of four)
X-DC Studio Master 350 Power Cable	
Features:	WATTaGATE plug
Length:	150 cm
Price:	1,160 euros
Warranty:	24 months
image Contact	
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Photo Captions:

Page 123: TU-66ZX Beau Tones tuning feet
RF-999MT Real Focus spike bases
TU-210ZX Golden Toe tuning feet

Page: 124: X-DC Studio Master power cable