

AUDIO video

HI-FI • HIGH-END • TV SETS • HOME CINEMA

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MAGICO S1 MkII

The best two-way
in the world?



Headphones:

Audeze LCD-4
Denon AH-D7200



Reimyo

POWER AMPLIFIER
KAP-777

*Japanese
master*

REIMYO KAP-777.



NAD M32

Digital integrated amp



Ayon S-10

Vacuum-tube streamer



Chord 2Qute DAC

High-end in miniature?

Japanese precision

No tubes, no A-class, two ways in one chassis, a modest weight of 31.5 kg and...the sound that I wish I never had to part with. Here comes Reimyo power amplifier.

Text and pictures: Filip Kulpa

As a manufacturer, Combak Corporation is somewhat unusual. The company's headquarters is located in Kanagawa prefecture (central Japan), about 20 km south of Yokohama. The sign at the entrance to a small building reads: „The Science of Beautiful Sound and Vision“. Combak doesn't sell its products under one brand – there is several of them. A person that is not familiar with the branch might think that what we're dealing with is a corporation. But that's far from truth – Reimyo deals with electronics, they have just five devices: a CD drive, A/D converter, linear preamplifier (tube), power amplifier and a conditioner. Harmonix has a wider offer – cables and expensive accessories such as stands, bases or turntable mats. There are quite a lot of products. Recently, a new brand – Hijiri – has come to life (a bit cheaper cables; Hijiri HGP-10R interconnect won the Award of the Year 2016 in HighEnd cable category). It's worth mentioning that

there are also Enacom sets. What's the point of this division? It's hard to say. A great majority of audiophiles identify all these products with Kazuo Kiuchi, who has a "high" rank in Kendo martial art, who regularly visits Poland and has a devoted Polish distributor, and – I have to admit – is quite an enigmatic person. He comes from the family of musical instruments creators, it is a common knowledge that he cooperates with JVC mastering studio (he is one of the three engineers there) and that he had his part in inventing K2 and XRCD. His education, however, has nothing to do with engineering or electronics. When it comes to his musical preferences, he is keen on classical music. It was almost a decade ago when he invited three specialist to close cooperation. They were:

T. Kuwaoka – the creator of K2 technology (it is about preparation and mastering a material for CDs in 24-bit resolution), Michael Edinger – recording engineer;

and T. Iseki – the head audio engineer at Combak Corporation. According to the originator of this endeavor, it was a "High Tech Fusion", which aim was to create a transistor power amplifier of top quality. It received a name: KAP-777 – after another power amplifier, only this time a vacuum-tube type, PAT-777, with 300B triodes from Western Electric. Obviously, it was a single-ended amplifier. Kiuchi's goal was to create a transistor amplifier that would retain the characteristics of a tube, but with significantly improved versatility, dynamics and bass control. The fine tuning of the amp took 3 years. Finally, it arrived on the market at the beginning of 2011, so it's no novelty.

CONSTRUCTION

The manufacturer doesn't say very much about the construction of this beautifully crafted amplifier. You can learn a bit more by taking a look at the inside, with its quite surprising proportions. The power supply takes about 3/4 of the space. In the front part of the chassis, separated with a steel shield, there are two 400 VA toroidal transformers (full dual-mono), feeding power to bridge rectifiers "surrounded" by four RIFA 220 nF capacitors. From there, the current flows to a quartet of impressive RIFA PEH200 electrolytes with 30 k μ F/100 V capacity. Each of them is shunted with high-class film capacitors from the same brand (PME 271 M). All the connections are remarkably robust, screwed, and the cables have high cross-section. It's really nice to look at. The whole assembly is characterized by extreme attention to detail and robustness. On the current input, there is an integrated noise filter (LC) manufactured by TDK.

Voltage gain sections are located inside cages made of perforated steel, so it is almost impossible to see the circuit. But it is the output stage that constitutes the heart of the construction. It is built on the basis of a single pair (on each channel) of industrial MOSFETs marked TL9656 SP1005





Relamp

POWER AMPLIFIER
KAP-777

POWER



MUTE



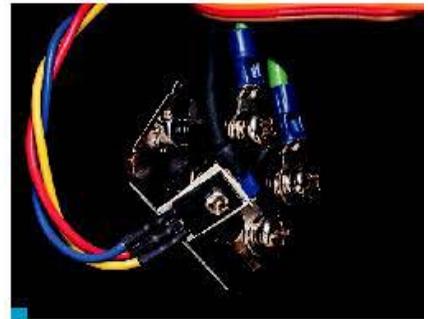


KAP-777 is a full dual-mono with perfectly manufactured power supply and neat assembly.



The manufacturer highlights that they used Harmonix internal cables and high-quality Mundorf TPCU870C binding posts, made of pure OFC, characterized by excellent conductivity. They come with “jewelry” custom design nuts. It’s worth mentioning that a pair of such (standard) terminals from Mundorf costs 150 euro (but for the price you only get plastic nuts). These are one of the best mechanical terminals that I’ve ever seen in an amp. The precision with which they turn is truly impressive. It should be a standard in power amplifiers that cost 100 k PLN. The good news, however, is that the KAP-777 price has been recently reduced to 95 k PLN. The classic-form, yet highly tasteful and elegant chassis is made of thick blocks of anodized aluminum (the golden top is as much as 7 mm thick, whereas the front is 10 mm thick). The heat sinks are made of the same material. As a whole, it looks very stylish – it can’t be denied that the amp’s price is clearly visible. The device isn’t very big – it is 20 cm high and less than 50 cm deep, which

in ISOTOP/SOT227B case, offering **200 W of power at 8 Ω and, reportedly, twice as much at 4 Ω**. According to the manufacturer, the amplifier remains stable already under load above 1.5 Ω, which makes this power amp even more outstanding. The transistors are attached directly to massive heat sinks made of aluminum, which constitute the amp’s sides. Two of the output transistors carry “passengers” – high-voltage transistors, MJE340G (ON SEMI), providing thermal stabilization of the quiescent current.



400 W per channel (at 4 Ω) from one pair of output transistors is possible – but they are not something you can normally see in audio sets.



Attention to detail is also visible when you look at the connectors – truly amazing. The copper terminals are from Mundorf.



The noise from the mains is suppressed at input.

allows to easily fit it in a high-class audio stand – such as our Rogoz Audio 4SPB/ BBS. Its weight of 31.5 kg also doesn’t pose any problems. KAP-777 features two important elements as standard equipment, one of them being a full set of anti-vibration feet from Harmonix. They are marked TU-505EXMkII and consist of a flat aluminum base and a top part, which is a bit narrower and made of hard wood. The manufacturer calls such elements “Tuning Feet”, and also uses terminology such as “resonance control”. As a physicist, I’m not sure what resonance control should consist in when it comes to a passive element made of two rigidly connected

DISTRIBUTOR Moje Audio, www.mojeaudio.pl
PRICE 95,000 PLN
 Available colors: silver

AV HIGH-END EVALUATION

TECHNICAL DATA

Inputs: RCA, XLR
Outputs: speakers (1 pair)
Output power:
 200 W per channel (at 8 Ω), 400 W per channel (at 4 Ω)
Frequency range: 5 Hz-100 kHz
Input sensitivity and impedance:
 0.77 V / 40 kΩ (XLR)
Permissible driving load: >1.5 Ω
Power consumption (at standby/idle):
 95 W (at idle)
Dimensions: 430 x 200 x 460 mm
 430 x 220 x 492 mm (incl. feet and terminals)
Actual weight: 31.5 kg

EQUIPMENT CLASS A



RCA and XLR inputs have no switches. If you use RCA inputs (which makes sense, because the amp is unbalanced), don't forget to use the supplied XLR plug with pins 1 and 3. The wing nuts are super convenient.

hard materials (which, admittedly, have considerably different characteristics). But let's leave this aside. What's important is that the feet are there and that they look great. As we all know, it's not uncommon to see solutions that shouldn't be working at all work miracles in high-end systems...

The other important element that comes as a standard is

jumpers for XLR inputs (including ground and "cold" pins), which are to be used every time when you use asymmetric outputs.

Otherwise the amplification level is reduced by half (6 dB). It is because pins 1 and 2 of XLR inputs are shorted to RCA inputs, whereas pin 3 ("cold") either has to receive signal from preamp, or has to be shorted to ground.

Finally, two more pieces of practical information. The manufacturer gives a 12-month warranty. The main power button is located at the bottom of the chassis, close to the lower front edge of the amp. It's easy to reach, so there is no need to put the KAP on a dedicated

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 AUDIO ELECTRONICS

TRENNER+FRIEDL

Harmonize Reimyo

Gradient

LUMIN

EXOGAL
 COMET PLUS DAC



platform, away from the main stand. And it's a blessing. Although those who like "altar-type" arrangement will probably put this amplifier on some expensive anti-vibration platform, making it a central point of the system. I'm sure it'd be a good idea. It is also worth mentioning the cables. It's no secret or surprise that the cables from Harmonix / Hijiri match KAP very well, creating a synergistic composition.

EVALUATION CONTEXT

In the manual, as well as on the manufacturer's website, you can find a brief description of amplifier's sound, in which emphasis is put on the notion of musicality (the adjective "musical" appears two times – almost one after another). On the one hand it might seem ridiculous (after all, the users will evaluate that themselves), on the other hand – it inspires a thought, that occurred to me after the first two hours of listening. The word "musical" is quite ambiguous, as it can have very different, and sometimes even contradictory meanings. It is somewhat paradoxical, because in general sense, "musical" refers to something that accentuates the quality of music being played, its beauty and emotions of the performers. However, when it comes to the particular, it often turns out that "musicality" is an artificially introduced quality of devices that stands for a particular audio manipulation. The most typical effects include edge smoothing, bass or mid range boost (or reduction), treble rounding, etc. Another expression of musicality is attaining an "extraordinary" level of rhythmical and motoric qualities. Such tuning always entails

some compromise. The price of good "musicality" is usually reduced precision and/or dynamics, or also resolution, smoothness and tone quality. Personally, I'm not a fan of such "tuning". What I value in a high-end equipment is realism, but not at the cost of inferior range, deprived of tone color or emotions. In line with this principle, I've built my own system, which gives me lot of satisfaction – both objective (technical), and purely musical. This configuration – which I haven't changed for years (except for recently replaced power and speaker cables) – is not based on contraries, the weaknesses of some elements aren't compensated with advantages of other elements. It's not how it should be – I think. At times I deal with expensive equipment, which, plugged into my system, has a negative effect on its quality, both objectively and subjectively. Most audiophiles would call this a mismatch. But in fact, a mismatch relates to situations where the negative qualities of devices overlap, producing an undesirable effect. Whereas a situation where a given amp "narrows" the soundstage, thins bass, distorts trebles (without changing their quality), softens transients, etc. is not a mismatch, but rather an expression of objective limitations of the amp.

SOUND

Fortunately, this problem doesn't apply to Reimyo's transistor power amplifier. I have to say that I'm not allured by hyper-resolution or extraordinary dynamics when they are not in tune with (or are achieved at the cost of) the remaining sound qualities. This is why, when someone talks about musicality of a high-end amplifier, pointing it as its advantage, I

become suspicious. As it turned out, this time it was completely unnecessary. KAP-777 is an amplifier, which I would never count as a "manipulator" – a device that fakes something in order to exert certain effect on a listener. **Reimyo presents musical excellence, it's a device that is**

exhaustive and fully harmonious in its nature. And at the same time, it's extremely sophisticated when it comes to all sound qualities. What can be observed here is a very desirable effect of absolute equilibration of individual sound qualities – and not on a good or even very good level, but rather excellent or phenomenal. At this point, I must eliminate potential guesswork: it is not the best amplifier I have heard or tested, but it is pretty close. Even though a lot of time has passed, the reference system remains the same, and this allows me to assume that KAP-777 doesn't reach the same level of sensational and euphonic quality as the stereophonic Momentum Dana D'Agostino (its first version). Nevertheless, I put this amp (I'm talking about Reimyo now) on the second place in my private ranking, equal to

Playback system

ROOM:

30 m², acoustically adapted, considerably insulated, columns placed far away from walls

SOURCES:

Auralic Aries (FW. 4.1.0) (USB audio out) + Meitner MA-1 DAC, Audionet Planck, T+A PDP-3000HV

PREAMPLIFIER:

Conrad-Johnson ET2

REFERENCE

AMPLIFIER:

Audionet AMPI V2

SPEAKER SETS:

Wilson Audio Yvette, Magico S1 Mk2, Zoller Temptation

INTERCONNECTS:

Stereovox HDSE, Albedo Metamorphosis, Hijiri HGP-15R, WireWorld Gold Eclipse 7

SPEAKER CABLES:

KBL Sound Red Eye Ultimate, Equilibrium Equilight / Sun Ray

ACCESSORIES:

stands: Rogoz Audio 4SPB/ BBS, StandART STO, platforms: PAB

POWER SUPPLY:

20 A dedicated power line, power strips: Furutech f-TP615, GigaWatt PF-2 (for switching power supplies), power cables: KBL Sound Red Eye Ultimate, Spectrum, Zodiac, Harmonix X-DC350M2R



Harmonix TU-505EX aluminum and wood feet are quite an expensive accessory. Here we get them for “free”.

the second version of Dana D’Agostino (Classic Stereo). I don’t want to judge here which of these different-sounding amps is better. I just want to set a level for further reference and consideration, so that it is clear to the reader. **It would be difficult for me to point the characteristics, or rather observations made while listening, which were dominant in the impressive whole. Here, everything contributes to a coherent, absolutely musical unity.** I guess it would be easier to point what KAP-777 doesn’t do, rather than what it actually does with audio signal. Well, to my surprise, I haven’t noticed any softening. Excessive warmth, in its stereotypical understanding, is also absent. I wouldn’t say the sound is anyhow artificially fattened – also it’s not flattened for sure. What’s more, in the Japanese power amp, you won’t find any aggression, hardness or error of omission. Not for one second did it occur to me that Reimyo might exaggerate some range of frequency, or that it might decrease anything. So are we dealing with a perfect amp? Not really, because I can imagine that everything that

Reimyo does excellent – so basically everything – theoretically can be done “even better”. Reaching back to the moment when I replaced Audioneta AMP1 V2 with Momentum Stereo, I can conclude that it was even a greater leap and unforgettable experience – especially when it comes to sound quality, soundstage and overall freedom. Yet I do have an impression that KAP-777 is better at controlling deep bass compared to the good old d’Agostino. But these are just memories, so let’s leave them aside in favor of the specifics deriving from the wonderful musical experience provided by the product of cooperation between four engineers.

The key to the boasted “musicality” of this amp is its broadly understood openness. Midrange, highs and bass combine into one continuum characterized by remarkably coherent quality. Details are retained everywhere, in every sub-range, and they are of very high quality. Yet, not even for one moment, does it turn into exaggerated directness, sharp edges or harshness. When it comes to sound quality, KAP-777 plays with astonishing ease. It seems to focus more, but only slightly, on the midrange, which has all the qualities you would expect from a prominent amplifier. It is by no means syrupy, overly warm or veiled. Instead, we get perfectly palpable singers and instruments, fully convincing harmonics, as well as – which is very important – impeccable speed and precision. The same applies to bass reproduction, which is most ingenious. It doesn’t overwhelm with power, it doesn’t want to surpass the size of the room or the speaker capabilities. It doses every impulse with precision, perfectly balancing the proportion between transient content and edges, showing really high level in both these aspects. Where it is necessary, basses can be really brief, tight, and at other times they are convincingly filled, perfectly reproducing the power and presenting their full length, which was audible in “The Martian” soundtrack. The attack and clarity, combined with brilliant sound reproduction in the low range were clearly audible in “Abie” song from Avishai Cohen’s album, “From Darkness”. By the way, this power amp can really effortlessly express the differences in the quality of the same material on the example of TIDAL’s Hi-Fi (16/44.1) vs. Hi-Res (Masters) streaming. The latter sounded a whole class better – despite the lack of MQA decoding (FLAC 24/48 data reading). Although it is undoubtedly very clear, KAP-777 is by no means a device that degrades technically imperfect songs. Sure, it makes

the best of the potential of purely audiophile records, including Hi-Res material, but it still provides much joy out of listening to ordinary music – like for instance the brilliantly performed song by Ania Rusowicz, “W co mam wierzyc” (from “Sztuka Kochania” soundtrack). The Japanese device faithfully reproduces the spirit of records from the 60s and 70s – also the Polish ones. The breakout hit, “Gdybys Kochal, Hej”, brings back nostalgic memories of the unique charm of Polish blues. With Reimyo, I could appreciate really good quality (in this case I was using TiDAL). Whereas when listening to 24-bit file edition of “Sogno Barocco” album by Anne Sophie Otter and Cappella Mediterranea, I could fully enjoy the master craft of the producers from Naïve. The lightness and openness of soundstage stemming directly from superior reproduction of the high range (there’s so much air!) in combination with live emotions expressed by the artists performing work pieces from early Italian opera (16th and 17th c.), impressed me so much that I just couldn’t stop listening, even though normally I don’t fancy such music. What’s more, I came back to these recordings several times! I could go on and on about how great the successive songs and albums sounded. Practically each of them was superior in the area of absolute quality of reproduction compared to what I normally come across. And this was all done solely by the tested amplifier, although the recently added KBL Sound (Red Eye Ultimate) speaker cable also made some contribution. By the way, it perfectly supplements Reimyo’s capabilities.

IN OUR OPINION

I don’t know to what extent this whole story of engineer collaboration under Kazuo Kiuchi’s lead is true, nevertheless, the effect of this collaboration is an amplifier that is truly outstanding. It is a very expensive device, which provokes a difficult question: is the sound worth spending 95 k PLN? Taking into consideration the fact that the only (slightly) better amplifier I know costs today almost twice as much, and none of the cheaper power amps I know of, excluding the ingenious D’Agostino Classica Stereo (73 k PLN), offers such musical nirvana, I have no choice, but to reply in the affirmative. At the same time, I’m giving the amp my formal recommendation. If you have the chance, try it out – without prejudice. You might be surprised of what semiconductors can do nowadays. ■