

hardware review



Exposure MCX

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Exposure makes four ranges of electronics but the MCX series stands apart from the rest for a number of reasons. For a start it's the most expensive and to follow it's made in England, two facts that are inextricably linked these days. It is also very distinctive, the CD player, pre-amplifier and monoblock power amps could not be mistaken for any other piece of electronics. Their black and silver livery with a column at each corner marks MCX as a token of Exposure's extreme.

I was interested in this system primarily because of the power amps, there aren't many high power monoblocks being made in the UK and even fewer of the MCX's bulk, so they have been on my must hear list for a while. They're not unduly powerful in spec terms, output into eight Ohms is 300 watts, but this doubles into four Ohms, which is a good sign of real power and not something you see in the spec of more affordable amps. Each amp achieves this with the aid of a 1400VA power transformer, which has separate windings for in- and output stages. Connection is via RCA or XLR and there are two pairs of cable sockets, 12 volt triggers enable auto on/off and RJ45 sockets cater for custom installation. Each amp weighs 35kg and you are encouraged to stack them, this I managed with a bit of cursing, in fact I put them both on a

Townshend Seismic speaker stand, which brought obvious sonic benefits and a nice sway when they were nudged.

The MCX preamplifier sits atop this stack and offers five line level inputs on RCA phonos, a single balanced input and an MM or MC phono stage. It has balanced and single ended outputs and the same control socketry as the power amps, it also has a remote handset that's a brute of a device. A blunt instrument that requires you to undo six screws to install the batteries, you'll be well armed if attacked by an assailant however.

The final part of this system is the MCX CD player, this fits in the same size chassis as the preamp but has a sliding cover over its transport mechanism. Which means a puck is necessary to keep the disc in place but ensures long term reliability in terms of accessing discs,



not having a flimsy tray inside probably helps the sound as well. It's unusually well furnished on the back panel, so much so that it passes as a full spec DAC albeit without USB. Inputs include two BNCs, an AES/EBU balanced and two Toslinks. Outputs are equally prolific with BNC, RCA coax and optical available. Inside the box there are four PCM1804 multibit DACs, discrete I/V and analogue filtering. The output stage feeds balanced and single ended socketry.

As it was the power amps that intrigued these were the first to take the floor, I plugged in a Townshend Allegri passive pre hooked up to a Naim NDS streamer and used PMC fact.12 loudspeakers, the latter being one reason why I was after more power. The result that this combination produces is very strong sense of the musicians being in the room, it's a massively atmospheric experience with a good recording thanks to decent immediacy and image scale. These amps are capable of scale and pace, which is a rare combination, very rare with big power amps in fact. They work particularly well with Chord Tuned ARAY cables, which are extremely well sorted and immediate sounding themselves. With Townshend Fractal interconnects you get more tonal depth and massive torque, in fact it's pretty dramatic in both cases. The amps bring out the qualities of the NDS in effortless fashion, allowing the life and expression in the music to shine in a way that other amps can mask. I particularly enjoy the huge soundstage it delivers with spatially manipulated recordings like Felix Laband's *Dark Days Exit*. I also enjoy Fred Simon's *Dreamhouse* (Naim Label), the latest 192kHz remaster of this bringing out the MCX's ability to deliver power where it's needed and without undermining fine detail.

As mentioned earlier I put the amps on a Seismic base after the initial session, this opens up and de-clutters the sound so that higher resolution can be produced. The engagement factor also rises and my notes indicate that the gas is turned on and we are cooking. ZZ

Top's *La Grange* is a great track under any circumstances but it's even more addictive with this system, the timing is bang on and the power gives everything a sense of grip.

Adding the MCX preamplifier produces a clear improvement in timing, it's not as effortless as the Allegri (very few are) but it does add a degree of drive to the proceedings that's very compelling. It also differentiates between recordings well, which can be less appealing if it's revealing shortcomings but this is the price you pay for fidelity. On Led Zeppelin's *Night Flight* (Physical Graffiti) for instance the organ is very clear but the sound could have more welly. Moving to a balanced connection between pre and power enhances dynamics and reinforces the bass which helps here and resolution remains strong with a number of sources. I had a lot of fun with Laurie Anderson's *Strange Angels* on vinyl which is revealed to be an excellent recording once more. The amps bringing out massive soundstage depth and the full, glorious scale of the cunningly crafted kick drum sound on this late eighties production. By that time a bit more sophistication had removed the excesses of the gated reverb drum sound and been replaced with a more natural though clearly amped up result that works very well with a system of this capability.

Incorporating the CD player into the system after the rather more expensive Naim NDS streamer results in a more forward, eager sound that seems a little small scale but is strong on PRT (pace, rhythm and timing). Low level resolution is good, with Keith Jarrett's Rio performance you can hear the creaks and knocks on the stage, which suggests that the noise floor is very low. The presentation of CD seems a bit in your face after a good streamer and this was apparent here but there is no escaping its ability to convey the musical message. Using the DAC side of the MCX player worked very nicely, it produces a large scale soundstage with reach out and grab it style presence. The imaging is strong enough to make the speakers disappear, leaving only the performance in the room, it's very exciting. I contrasted the CD player with a Leema Antila just to get some idea of its potential, this revealed that both have a different character through the mid which means that voices sound different, although it's hard to say which is right. With more warm up, two or three days in fact, the MCX CD player improved markedly, the sound getting more relaxed and easier to enjoy without letting go of its strengths in the timing department.

I got a great result with the MCX monoblocks and it wasn't just the mass that put me off packing them up for collection. I will miss their expansive yet timely power, it's great to find something with so much bulk that can also move when the signal says jump. The preamplifier and CD player are also fine examples of their breed and the whole stack looks mighty impressive, especially when its swaying gently on an springy isolation stand. And while the prices are high they are by no means extreme for a British built system with high end capabilities, if you want to move some air the power amps are very competitive indeed.



CD Player

Analogue outputs: 4V RMS (XLR balanced), 2V RMS (RCA unbalanced)

Digital inputs: 1 x AES, XLR 110 Ohms, 2 x BNC 75 Ohms, 2 x Optical 'Toslink'

Digital outputs: 1 x BNC, 1 x RCA, 1 x Optical

Communication: External remote control receiver input, RJ45 input 'exlink', RJ45 output 'exlink'

Power consumption: 35W with power on, 25W on stand-by

Size (W x D x H): 490 x 414 x 104mm

Weight: 20kg

Preamplifier

Inputs: Phono MM or MC by plug-in board (XLR or RCA input sockets), 5 x line level inputs, 250mV, 1 x CD input, XLR balanced connector

Outputs: 2 x XLR balanced pre-out, 1 x RCA pre-out, 1 x RCA tape output

Communication: External remote control receiver input, 12V trigger input, 12V trigger output, RJ45 input 'exlink', RJ45 output 'exlink'

Power consumption: 35W with power on, 25W on stand-by

Size (W x D x H): 490 x 414 x 104mm

Weight: 20kg

Power amplifier

Power: 300W into 8 Ohms @ 1kHz, 600W into 4 Ohms @ 1kHz

Gain: 24dB, unbalanced mode

Inputs (switchable): 1 x RCA unbalanced, 1 x XLR balanced

Outputs: 2 pairs of loudspeaker sockets for bi-wiring

Communication: 12V trigger input, 12V trigger output, RJ45 input 'exlink', RJ45 output 'exlink'

Power consumption: 500W @ full power into 8 Ohm load, <1W on stand-by

Size (W x D x H): 490 x 414 x 238mm

Weight: 35kg

