



main page



music



archive



contact

TEST

CD Player/preamplifier

Ancient Audio
LEKTOR AIR V-EDITION

Price: 48 000 zł (V-edition) | 40 000 zł (basic version)

Manufacturer: **Ancient Audio**

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Country of origin: Poland

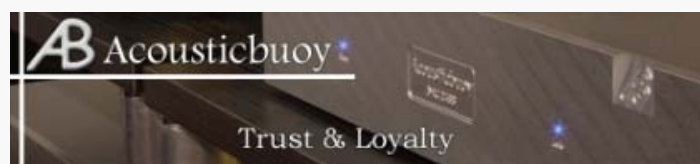
WWW: **Ancient Audio**

Text: Wojciech Pacuła

Pictures: Wojciech Pacuła



r e k l a m a



My acquaintance with Jarek Waszczyszyn is no secret to the public – we live in the same city, have had professional relation for years, we meet from time to time at Janusz place, who's one of the Krakow Sonic Society hosts. And recently, after at least 10 years of this acquaintance, we've finally quit calling each other „sir” - it just happened. So yes, we know each other very well. I've been using his CD Players for years. It was a conscious choice and I never regretted it. Over the years I enjoyed its appearance less and less, and I was pretty sure it should have been changed but... well, nobody and nothing is perfect.

On the other hand, I've never even tried to hide my reservations towards his loudspeakers and always honestly pointed out what I liked and what I disliked about his amplifiers and even CD Players. In my opinion only honesty can help the designer make better products.

Ancient Audio

Lektor Air's sound is quite soft but there is no softening of the attack, no warming up. It's more about extremely three-dimensional sound. The ability to show precise locations of all sound sources on the stage, spaces between them, acoustics, ambiance as well as wonderful timbre is truly unique, not only for a digital player (CD Player even) but for any sound source at all.

I think its secret lays in its sound's inner coherence. I mention that feature from time to time reviewing different devices but never before has 'coherence' described so precisely what I felt. It's the level of coherence that simply defines its very nature for audiophiles. Never before have I heard something like that from a digital player, maybe except for Grand SE and Soulution 745. The best turntables can surely achieve this level of coherence, but they are analogue devices so it should be their immanent feature, right? If it isn't, there must be something wrong with a particular turntable. When it comes to digital players this feature is scarce, only sometimes achieved with HD files or SACD, but even then not too often.



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The reviewed player is supposed to step up to take place in the company's portfolio between [Lektor Prime](#) and [Lektor Grand SE](#). By its looks it resembles the former, but many solutions were taken from the latter. It is still a top-loader with tube output and an integrated preamplifier. And a unique design that places a CD on top of the device and outside of it. This solution was originally used (simultaneously) by Ancient Audio and [Japanese 47 Laboratory](#). Later it was "copied" by [Musical Fidelity A1008](#) (not manufactured anymore), [ISEM](#) (check [HERE](#)), [Metronome Technologie](#) (model Kalista Reference – but in previous version) and so on. Air has been a part of my reference system for more than a year. I think I got to know it pretty well. I have had a chance to compare it with several other players, although it surprised me with something – but I'll come back to that in a minute. I haven't experienced any trouble with its operations during that whole period, and the remote control, although rather standard, turned out to be quite handy.

We've tested so far:

- Compact Disc Player Lektor Prime, test [HERE](#)
- Compact Lektor Grand SE, test [HERE](#)
- Compact Lektor V Player, test [HERE](#)
- Silver Grand Mono amplifier, test [HERE](#)

Other texts worth reading: :

- [Ancient Audio in USA \(reprise\)](#)
- [Antwerp – Silver Grand premiere](#)
- [ANCIENT AUDIO SILVER GRAND – premiere](#)
- [Smooth cooperation - Ancient Audio Harmony Loudspeakers](#)

SOUND

Recordings used in test (selection):

- Abba, *Gold. Complete Edition*, Polar Music International AB/Universal Music [Japan], UICY-91318/9, 2008, 2 x SHM-CD.
- Beck, *Sea Change*, Geefen Records/Mobile Fidelity, UDCD 780, No. 1837, 2009, gold-CD.
- Brian Eno, *Another Green World*, Virgin/Toshiba-EMI Limited, VJCP-68658, 2005, CD.
- Chet Baker, *Peace*, Enja/World, TKCW-32153, 2008, CD.
- Clan of Xymox, *Darkest Hour*, Trisol, TRI 419 CD, CD; review [HERE](#)
- Depeche Mode, *Everything Counts and Live Tracks*, Mute, INT 826.837, 1983, MP CD.
- Depeche Mode, *Personal Jesus*, Mute/Reprise, 921328-2, 1989, MP CD.
- Ella Fitzgerald, *Clap Your Hands, Here Comes Charlie!*, Verve/JVC, VICJ-011-4052, 2008, XRCD24.
- Eva Cassidy, *Imagine*, Hot Records, G2-10075, 2002, CD.
- Frank Sinatra, *Nice 'N' Easy*, Capitol/Mobile Fidelity, UDCD 790, gold-CD; review [HERE](#)
- Gerry Mulligan Quartet, *Gerry Mulligan Quartet*, Pacific Jazz/EMI Music Japan, TOCJ-90035, HQCD.
- JS Bach, *Six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello*, wyk. Yo-Yo Ma, Sony music Entertainment (UK) Ltd/Sony Classical, SM2K89754, 2001, 2 x CD.
- Madeleine Peyroux, *Standing On The Rooftop*, EmArcy/Pennywell Productions [Japan], UCCU-1335, CD; review [HERE](#)
- Mel Tormé, *Mel Tormé Sings Fred Astaire*, Bethlehem/JVC, VICJ-61457, K2HD CD.
- Porcupine Tree, *Deadwing*, Lava Records, 6793437, CD.
- The Modern Jazz Quartet, *Pyramid*, Atlantic/Warner Music Japan, WPCR-25125, 2007, CD.
- Thom Yorke, *The Eraser*, XL Records/Warner Music Japan, WPCB-10001, CD; review [HERE](#)

Japanese versions of the discs are available on [CD Japan](#).



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I'm not really sure how to describe the sound of this device as a whole as it seems to be very even throughout the whole frequency range. I could risk saying that midrange is a bit stronger than treble but I can't really tell for sure. Other devices with stronger treble seem too... annoying for my taste. But I might be right as the best turntables sound that way but those add even more details, more air and so on to the presentation. Grand SE can also reach even deeper into a recording, it's even more revealing. Having said that, I think that both are equally consistent about delivering most from any CD.

The dynamic range also seems simply right – there is no exaggeration and nothing is missing either, there is no scaling up or down. To give you some perspective I can say that both Accuphase DP-700 (which I reviewed for „Audio” magazine), and already mentioned Soudution 745 have slightly more averaged dynamics, sound more relaxed.

Air V-Edition most obvious advantage over almost any digital source is its amazing soundstage. It's really deep front to back. It is wide left to right, too, but that's much more common feature offered by a lot of good players. Air delivers incredibly deep soundstage which wouldn't be possible without remarkable resolution. Phantom images are shown very precisely but without "cutting them out" from the background, they never become a central element of the musical spectacle but rather attract attention to what's going on the stage.

What's most important, as I already mentioned before, is the sheer pleasure and comfort of listening to the player. I can't really say the same about too many other audio devices. Most of them, even the very good ones, attract listener's attention to themselves, to their technical aspects, distracting his attention from the most important thing – the music. And the latter must always come first otherwise it all doesn't make any sense. Lektor Air is not THE best player in the world, as I know some (although very few) that are even better in both digital and analogue world. But what its designer managed to achieve, how he put all elements together, is amazing and I think makes it a brilliant, finished product. Yes, I realize that audio business is about constant development, exploration of new possibilities, but here and now, at 11.12 a.m. I would say that this is a perfectly thought-through and carried out project. I realize that it will be enhanced again in the future but I hope no achievement of this present version has to be sacrificed in the name of a better performance. Not even if it finally offers a better sound, as I love it as it is now.

Another important thing about this player is that it plays every kind of music equally well. Its advantages always stay the same. Any flaws of the recording are always shown clearly as this very revealing device differentiates sounds amazingly well, but in the end it works as best turntables do – the sound is natural. We accept it as it is, realizing that there are some flaws but treating them as an element of a bigger picture, as natural as any other. Attack is always strong, fast, soundstage extremely precise, but sound seems to be on the soft side. How is it possible? To be honest, I don't know, nor do I really want to. I simply don't care – I'm just happy it is.

And so on. I really could go on and on, as I had a lot of time to listen to this player but enough is enough. What I want you to understand is that Air ensures comfortable listening to your favorite music. Comfortable in any sense of this word. It is a very revealing player that won't mask any flaws of the recording, but at the same time it always extracts MUSIC from each and every one of them. The sound is very coherent throughout the frequency range, maybe with a gentle emphasis on soft midrange. Bass is well extended and differentiated, reminding the best turntables. Sound images are still not so three-dimensional as from vinyl or Lektor Grand SE, but the difference is not so significant anymore. The integrated preamplifier is way better than the one in Prime. And even though the best preamps deliver bigger phantom images, with more body, the fact that we get it as a bonus is simply outstanding. It's a real shame that in this version there is still no digital input – it becomes almost a key feature for CD Players these days. But not all hope is lost – there is a strong possibility that such an input will soon be available as an option as each Air includes an internal connector for its digital input module. There is a huge demand for DACs

There is one problem with testing devices that are already a part of reference system as you can't reference it to your reference system... Each part of my reference system is supposed to be a "reference" device for all reviewed of its kind.

Same reason forced me to spend much more time than usually when I was preparing a review of Soulution 710 amplifier for „Audio“ magazine. I had to start with reviewing all the reviews with this amp as a reference to draw some universal conclusions. Exactly the same story goes with Lektor Air by Ancient Audio. As you all know I've been using this company's Players for last couple of years – previously it was Lektor Prime (reviewed in 2006 [HERE](#)), and now I use Lektor Air. Although I never claimed that Prime was the best player in the world, its very well balanced sound, its predictability, and finally its user-friendly approach – all that made it a great "reference player". Furthermore, I have listened only to three players that sounded clearly better – [Jadis JD1 MkII+JS1 MkIII](#), [Reimyo CDT-777+DAP-999EX](#) and last but not least [Lektor Grand SE](#) from the same Ancient Audio. There may have been a few more better sounding turntables.

Replacing Prime with the Air has been a huge step forward for me. The sonic signature still stays within certain boundaries Jarek Waszczyszyn created for all his products, but this time the new integrated CD Player from this amazing designer comes much closer to the twice more expensive, three-box Grand SE. Surely, it's not the same level but the leap forward is huge and the difference isn't that big anymore.

My own Air was a bit different from the very beginning. Previous experience with replacing capacitors in Prime and Grand for V-Caps told me to order my new Air already „V-Capped“. Ancient Audio had been using V-Cap TTFs (capacitors with teflon film and tin foil) for years. But Mr. Chris VenHaus from [VH Audio](#), a company that owns the V-Cap brand, prepared his newest hit – CuTF capacitors (Copper Foil Teflon Film) and these were a part of this project from the start. Another upgrade, comparing to standard version, also suggested by me, was replacing brass spikes with Cerapucs from [finite elemente](#). I also asked for rhodium-plated Furutech sockets that fitted better with my interconnects. Standard ones come from Neutrik and are not popular among some audiophiles, but highly regarded by others, Mr. Waszczyszyn included. And the last upgrade, that I had already used for Prime – instead of regular CD clamp I ordered a Spider by [Electrocompaniet](#) (please read [HERE](#)). That's how the new version was created and at first I thought to name it High Fidelity Edition, but as vanity was no virtue I decided to give credit to the key upgrade, the V-Caps, so the final name was V-Edition.



Let me repeat, it is not easy to review a device I have already been using for some time, because it became my reference for all other devices I have reviewed since I got my Air. Even if in some reviews, like those of [CD Loit Passeri](#), [SACD Player Soulution 540](#) and 745 (work in progress), but also of some turntables - [SME 20/3](#) and Scheu Analog Premier Mk2 + [Scheu Classic Mk2](#), I might have pointed out some weaknesses of Air I, these were rather exceptions.

If you read the above tests carefully, you will see that I did my best to be objective and I wasn't afraid to point out Air's weaknesses. In principle, my conclusion was that the best sources, both digital and analogue, were capable of delivering richer, deeper sound. Don't get me wrong – Ancient's player was great, outclassing all other players from its price level, but could not compete against more expensive ones (as Prime many times did). It proves that Jarek Waszczyszyn's competitors made a huge progress, and that there is still some room for improvement even among the top level CD Players.

So I was really surprised when I started to listen to this new Air, to be exact to its standard version that now would be delivered to customers. The player sounded different than my "first" Air. Surely, its sonic signature was similar but this time it sounded a class better, perhaps two classes better.

The sound of V-Edition Air is now (that's the upside of small manufacturers – designs are not "finished", as they might be improved after some time) extremely deep and smooth. What bothered me before – that sound wasn't

nowadays so lack of those in Ancient Audio's portfolio is somehow surprising.

DESCRIPTION

Jarek Waszczyszyn's new CD player has the same characteristic design and is made of the same materials – granite and metal plates. The whole device is in fact suspended under a granite slab with a longitudinal hole cut in it. Whole electronics is hidden inside a metal can bolted underneath the granite slab. The player is decoupled from the ground in two steps. First, there are rubber elements glued under the main granite board and then narrow pieces of granite (of the same thickness as the main board) glued to them. Then comes the second step – you need to mount cone/spikes to those decoupled pieces of granite – in my version they are Cerapucs from finite elemente (with ceramic balls inside). The player is quite heavy so I think it makes sense.

On the front there is a piece of black glass with a low noise red LED display hidden under it. It displays present track's number and time as well as volume setting – 0 dB level is displayed as '89'. You will also find there some dots that indicate currently used function – CD player, preamplifier or DAC (future option). The display is quite large although not as good as the one in SDMusA.

On the back plate there are high quality rhodium plated Furutech FP-901 RCA sockets, used for analogue output and input. Another RCA socket, unfortunately not as good as the Furutechs, serves as digital S/PDIF output. If you choose an optional digital input, the same RCA socket will serve as input and output, unlike in most devices where input and output are separated – not the best idea, as that makes the player less functional. XLR golden plated sockets (Lektor Air is a balanced device) come from Swiss Neutrik. IEC power inlet is also quite solid – it's another Furutech with rhodium plated pins. There are no fuses in the mains power path. There are two golden plates. The one on the top of the player includes the company's logo and, in case of my player, a note stating that it was custom made for "High Fidelity". The other plate on the back panel says that the device carries serial no. A001, so it's the first Air ever made. The push buttons are, as in previous version, chromium plated.

Air is a top-loader, so the disc is placed directly on the axis coming from the motor. There is no chamber that would enclose the disc, though.



After removing the bottom panel we can see that although the main structure known from Prime hasn't changed, it has been modified enough to talk about a "new design". Writing on the main board says: „Prime SE“ – in the beginning it was actually supposed to be an upgraded version of Prime. Over time, the project evolved so much that it became a new model. There is no possibility to upgrade the original Prime to this version, as there is for Lektor IV if you want to have version V.

Philips CD-Pro2 LF mechanism is bolted to the cabinet with long spacers. Underneath there is a controlling microchip soldered to the main PCB. A rather long digital cable carries the signal from the transport mechanism to the DAC stage. I don't know which chip is used, as it is soldered underneath the PCB. But next to it there is a fantastic ultra-low-jitter Tentlabs clock, with thermal and mechanical compensation – exactly the same as in Lektor Grand. I/U conversion seems to be passive as I couldn't spot any amplifying circuits. The first order analogue filter (a must for any D/A converter) is identical as the ones used in SACD players. There are four large V-Cap Elite Reference CuTF capacitors (with copper film) soldered above two volume control boards – those are PCBs with digitally controlled analogue resistor ladder. I was unable to read any markings on them.

The signal goes then from the PCB to output tubes. The output stage is made in point-to-point technique, with more V-Caps, this time Reference Grade OIMP oil capacitors. Signal from the tubes (but also from analogue inputs) goes via silver wires in Teflon insulation. Ground wire is a thick silver ribbon – Ancient Audio uses it in almost all its designs. The tubes are double triodes 6H30П-EB from Sovtek – same tubes are also used in Grand SE.

There are two small toroidal transformers, one of the main changes comparing to Prime that sports only one transformer. They are custom

rich, full enough, especially in lower midrange and that cymbals were not tangible enough (but only against the best turntables) – all that is gone. But those changes didn't make Air's sonic signature similar to, for example, the Loit.

Comparing it with this new Ancient Audio, the Passeri might now sound a bit... colored. Although midrange volume and timbre is similar, yet in fact Air delivers more natural sound, closer to what I know from my studio recording experience, closer to an analogue tape. I could call this sound "totally analogue" but what I mean is the sound you get from analogue tape rather than from vinyl. The latter, although in my opinion still the best medium for music, has its own problems that are not shared by tapes.

wound by a Polish company Trafber according to precise Ancient Audio specification. Both of them are sealed. Using two transformers allowed to totally separate power supply for transport mechanism from the rest of electronics. There are a lot of expensive Sanyo capacitors in the power supply circuit. And that's it.

g a l l e r y





ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

- CD player: Ancient Audio Lektor Air (previous it was Prime, tested [HERE](#))
- Phono preamplifier: RCM Audio Sensor Prelude IC (tested [HERE](#))
- Cartridges: Air Tight Supreme, tested [HERE](#), Miyajima Laboratory Waza, tested [HERE](#).
- Preamplifier: Ayon Audio Polaris III with Re-generator Power Supply; version II tested [HERE](#))
- Power amplifier: Tenor Audio 175S, tested [HERE](#) and Soulution 710
- Integrated amplifier/headphone amplifier: Leben CS300 XS Custom version (reviewed [HERE](#))
- Loudspeakers: Harpia Acoustics Dobermann (tested [HERE](#))
- Headphones: Sennheiser HD800, AKG K701, Ultrasone PROLine 2500, Beyerdynamic DT-990 Pro, 600 Ω version (reviewed [HERE](#), [HERE](#), and [HERE](#))
- Interconnect: CD-preamp: Acrolink Mexcel 7N-DA6300, article [HERE](#)), preamp-power amp: Wireworld Platinum Eclipse
- Speaker cable: Tara Labs Omega Onyx, tested [HERE](#)
- Power cables AC (all equipment): Acrolink Mexcel 7N-PC9300
- Power conditioning: Gigawatt PF-2 Filtering Power Strip (reviewed [HERE](#))
- Audio stand Base – under all components
- Resonance control: Finite Elemente Ceraball under the CD (article [HERE](#))
- Pro Audio Bono platform under CD