

MICHAEL FREMER

Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 800

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Nuvistors—miniature, small-signal, vacuum tubes made of metal and ceramic—were introduced by RCA in 1959, at the dawn of the transistor revolution. RCA used them throughout the 1960s in its New Vista line of television sets, mostly in the tuner section. But by the early 1970s, solid-state devices had all but replaced tubes, nuvistors included (with a few notable exceptions). Ampex based the electronics of its well-regarded, late-'60s MR-70 open-reel tape deck on nuvistors, which were also used in microphone preamplifiers—in both cases for their very low noise and reputation for reliability and long life. For a time, Conrad-Johnson used them as well. While nuvistors may seem exotic today, they're hardly rare. On eBay you can find for sale hundreds if not thousands of used and new-old stock (NOS) nuvistors, as well as nuvistors sockets, without which the tubes are less easy to implement. (But they can be, and often are, hard-wired into a circuit.)

Musical Fidelity, under the direction of owner and frustrated clarinetist Antony Michaelson, has for decades designed and manufactured its Nu-Vista line of nuvistors-based components: preamplifiers, power amplifiers, integrated amplifiers, and disc players. While MF hasn't cornered the market on the tiny tubes and sockets, it has amassed enough of them to continue designing and making new models based on the tube, and to support owners of their older models, should any nuvistors fail. In my experience, nuvistors rarely fail—they're said to provide 100,000 hours of use. I've owned numerous Nu-Vista models, including the curvaceous, dual-chassis 300 power amplifier and matching preamp, and no nuvistors in any of them has failed or gone noisy.

Musical Fidelity's new Nu-Vista 800 integrated amplifier (\$12,999) outputs 330Wpc into 8 ohms. It's hefty, solidly constructed, weighs 86 lbs, and is the first model from a new, young design team brought in after a company shake-

up. The 800 combines in one chassis a preamplifier with four 6CW4 nuvistors triodes—two per channel—in a buffer configuration, and a dual-mono solid-state power amplifier based on surface-mount printed circuit boards and five pairs of bipolar output transistors per channel. Like all MF products these days, the Nu-Vista 800 is built in Taiwan.

The Nu-Vista 800's exterior design extends from the cosmetics of Musical Fidelity's former flagship amplifier, the Titan monoblock (a pair of which I also owned). But from every angle and vantage point, the Nu-Vista 800 is by far MF's best-looking product, ever. And while the older products were usually never less than well turned out, the 800's fit'n'finish and attention to detail set new standards for the company.

Details

The Nu-Vista 800 has five line-level inputs: four single-ended (RCA)—labeled CD, Aux 1/HT, Aux 2, and Tuner—and one balanced (XLR), which is labeled Balanced. Associated with the Aux 1/HT input is a rear-panel switch that bypasses the volume control.

Though the Nu-Vista 800 is an integrated amplifier, it has two sets of line-level outputs: one fixed-level, for use in analog recording or with a headphone amplifier, and one variable, for use in biamping or with a powered subwoofer. There are also two pairs per channel of generously spaced speaker terminals that can act as banana jacks or binding posts. The extra terminals aren't for a second pair of loudspeakers, but are included to aid in bi-wiring.

On the left of the front panel is a large Source selector knob; on the right is a matching Volume knob. Between them is a green LED screen that displays the selected source and the volume level, and below that is the IR receiver window. Directly below the Source knob are a small On/

SPECIFICATIONS

Description Hybrid integrated amplifier using both nuvistors and bipolar transistors. Tube complement: 4 6CW4. Inputs: 4 pairs unbalanced (RCA), 1 pair balanced (XLR). Line-level outputs: 1 pair fixed (RCA), 1 pair variable (RCA). Speaker connections: 2 pairs 4mm banana plug/binding posts. Output power: 330Wpc into 8 ohms (25.2dBW). Output voltage:

52V RMS, 20Hz–20kHz; onset of clipping, 147V peak-peak. Damping factor: 200. THD+N (typical): <0.005%, 20Hz–20kHz. Signal/noise: >107dB, A-weighted. Input impedance: 40k ohms. Frequency response: 10Hz–30kHz, +0/–0.1dB. Power consumption: <0.5W (standby), 130W (on, idle), 900W (maximum).

Dimensions 18.8" (483mm)

W by 7.3" (187mm) H by 19.9" (510mm) D. Weight: 85.8 lbs (39kg) net, 103.4 lbs (47kg) shipping.

Finishes Silver, Black

Serial number of unit reviewed VU00119 (listening), VU00117 (measuring).

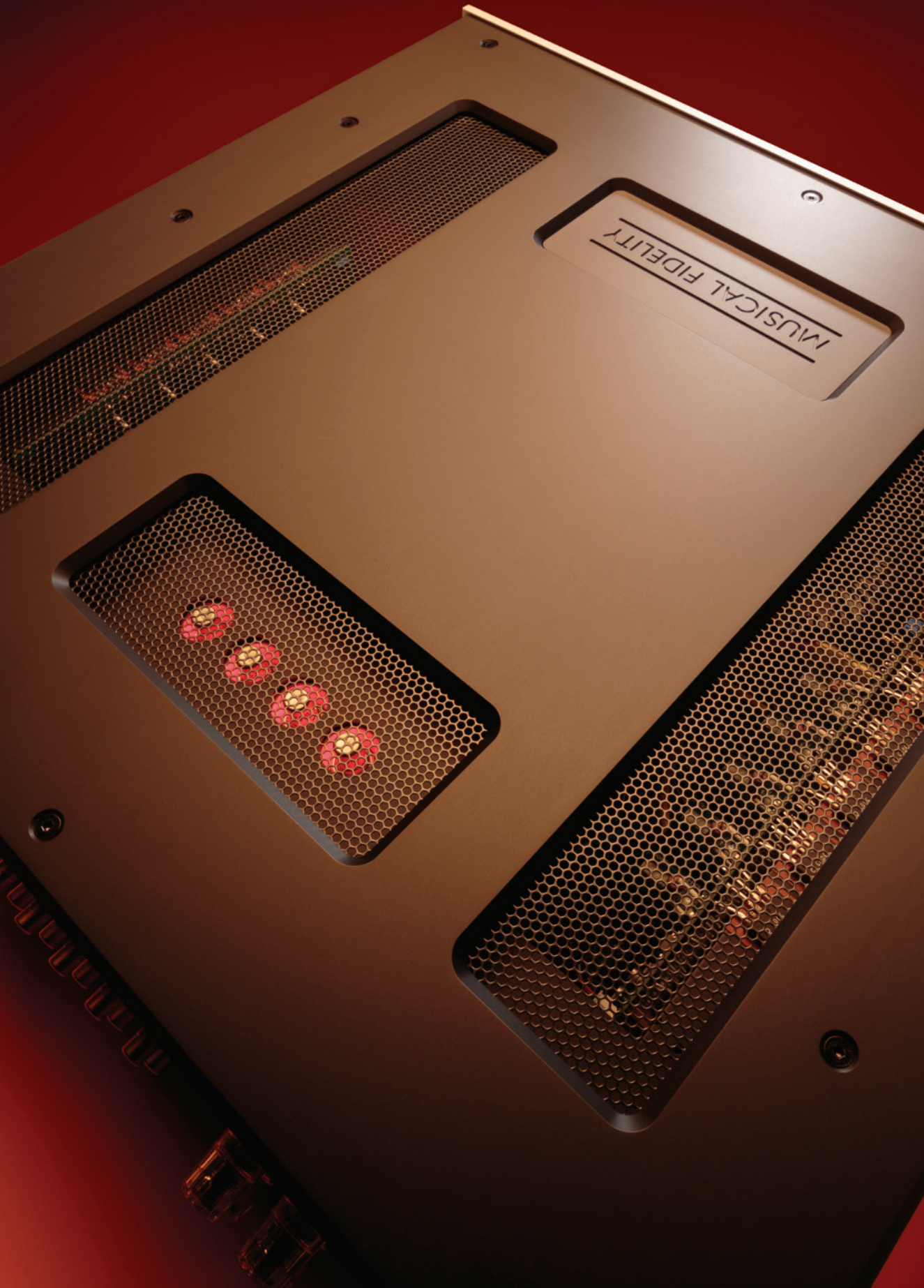
Price \$12,999. Approximate number of dealers: 8.

Warranty: 2 years.

Manufacturer Musical Fidelity Ltd., 15-17 Fulton Road,

Wembley, Middlesex HA9 0TF, England, UK.
Tel: (44) (0)181-900-2866.
Fax: (44) (0)20-8900-2983.
Web: www.musical-fidelity.co.uk.

US distributor:
Randy Bingham,
Musical Fidelity North America, PO Box 51206,
Phoenix, AZ 85076.
Tel: (480) 297 4053.



Standby button and two LEDs: blue for On, amber for Standby. Directly below the Volume knob is a small Display button.

Most users will no doubt operate the Nu-Vista 800 using its remote control. Milled from aluminum and finished with a satin sheen, it's heavy in the hand, with buttons for Source, Volume Up/Down, and Mute. There's also a Display button—which doubles the one on the amp's front panel—for cycling through eight modes of Illumination: a Musical Fidelity specialty. Not only the LED screen but also the Nu-Vista 800's cool undercariage lighting and its illuminated nuvistor sockets—the latter visible through an opening on the top of the amp—can be powered up or down in virtually any combination. The Nu-Vista 800 can also be run without Illumination.

Antony Michaelson visited me, bringing with him a set of graphs of the Nu-Vista 800's measured performance. If they match John Atkinson's measurements, they'll demonstrate an integrated amplifier of ultralow distortion and wide bandwidth. I was more interested in the sound.



The Nu-Vista 800 is by far MF's best-looking product, ever.

Setup

Reviewing an integrated amplifier in my system presents logistical difficulties: Putting it on the rack with my source components and preamp requires speaker cables of greater than 20' length, which is longer than ideal. So in my listening room, the Nu-Vista 800 sat on four Stillpoints Ultra feet, atop my Sunyata Hydra Triton AC distributor, which itself sat atop a Black Diamond Racing platform. For digital source material, I used an 18' balanced pair of Wireworld Eclipse Platinum 7 interconnects to go from my Simaudio Moon Evolution 650D DAC-transport to the Nu-Vista 800's balanced inputs.

For vinyl, Antony Michaelson was okay with running my darTZeel NHB-18NS preamp into one of the Nu-Vista

MEASUREMENTS

I performed a full set of measurements on the Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 800 using my Audio Precision SYS2722 system (see the January 2008 "As We See It," www.stereophile.com/content/measurements-maps-precision). As the amplifier is specified as having a maximum power output of 330Wpc into 8 ohms, I preconditioned it before the measurements by running it at one-third that power into 8 ohms for an hour. Following that period, the top panel was warm, at 99.5°F (37.5°C), and the

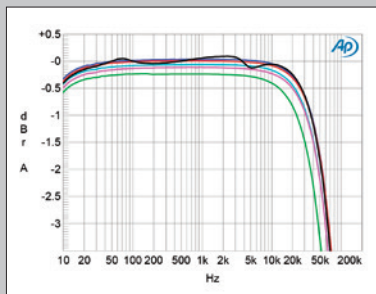


Fig.1 Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 800, balanced frequency response at 2.83V into: simulated loudspeaker load (gray), 8 ohms (left channel blue, right red), 4 ohms (left cyan, right magenta), 2 ohms (green) (0.5dB/vertical div.).

heatsinks hotter, at 121.9°F (49.9°C).

With the Nu-Vista 800's volume control set to "114.5," its maximum voltage gain at 1kHz into 8 ohms was typical for an integrated amplifier, at 42.1dB unbalanced and 42.3dB balanced. The volume control operated in accurate 0.5dB steps, with the error a negligible +0.13dB at a setting of "79.5"; ie, -35dB was actually -34.87dB. The Nu-Vista 800 preserved absolute polarity for both balanced and unbalanced inputs, its XLRs being wired with pin 2 hot. The unbalanced input impedance was 42k ohms at 20Hz and 1kHz, dropping to 17.5k ohms at 20kHz. The balanced

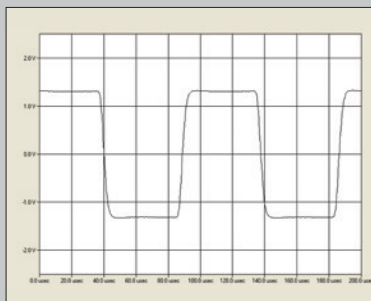


Fig.2 Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 800, small-signal, 10kHz squarewave into 8 ohms.

input impedance was 18k ohms across the audioband.

The output impedance, including 6' of speaker cable, was low in the bass and midrange, at 0.095 ohm, rising to 0.15 ohm at the top of the audioband. Consequently, the modulation of the Nu-Vista 800's frequency response due to the Ohm's law interaction between this impedance and the impedance of our standard simulated loudspeaker was also very low (fig.1, gray trace). The amplifier's response into resistive loads was flat in the audioband, with its output into 8 ohms down by 0.5dB at 20kHz and by 3dB at 70kHz (blue and red traces). This graph was taken with the volume control set to its maximum. Commendably, both the very close channel balance and the overall response were preserved at lower settings of this control. The Nu-Vista 800 performed well with a 10kHz squarewave (fig.2), with no overshoot or ringing.

Channel separation was superb below 1kHz, at >100dB, and still 72B at 20kHz. The wideband, unweighted signal/noise ratio, taken with an unbalanced input shorted but the volume

800's pairs of unbalanced inputs, using a different, single-ended 18' pair of Wireworld Eclipse Platinum 7 interconnects. I used the volume controls of both the darTZeel pre and the Musical Fidelity integrated, both to optimize the vinyl setup and to allow easy, level-matched switching between the direct and preamp-supplemented connections, to assess any sonic differences between them.

Digital listening

Every time a manufacturer visits my listening room to help install his or her product, the same thing happens: The product is inserted in the system. I play some music. The sound pours forth. And the manufacturer utters a self-satisfied "Well! There you go!" And then I'm supposed to then say, "Damn! You're right! This is the best thing since French toast!"

One time, a cable manufacturer added to my system, one by one, various of his cable models. After each successive installation, we listened to the same recording. When several of his cables had been installed, he exclaimed, "Now it's starting to sound like *music!*"

"I've got news for you," I said. "It was sounding like music



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blwfjb wafjb jwfb nklsvj
bnlw vkjb nmcfvd msf.

While nuvistors may seem exotic today, they're hardly rare.

before your cables were installed. Please—I've been doing this for almost 30 years. Save that line for a kid, okay?"

Sure enough, when we first played music through the Nu-Vista 800, Michaelson gave me that old, familiar look of "Well! There you go!" While I always resist capitulating to any such assertion from a manufacturer, especially so early in the reviewing dance (when a manufacturer pushes too hard,

measurements, continued

control set to its maximum, was a little disappointing at 57.2dB left and 52.6dB right, both figures ref. 2.83V into 8 ohms. These figures improved by almost 12dB when the measurement bandwidth was restricted to the audioband, and were also sensitive to the arrangement of the ground connection between the amplifier and the Audio Precision analyzer. Fig.3 reveals that the random components of the noise floor are higher in level than is usually found in integrated amplifiers, and that some odd harmonics of the AC supply frequency are present, perhaps due

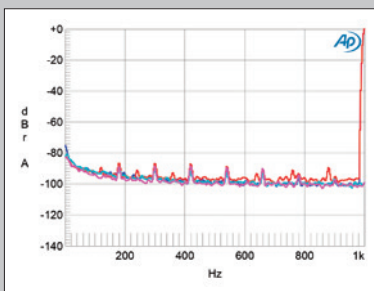


Fig.3 Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 800, spectrum of 1kHz sinewave, DC-1kHz, at 1Wpc into 8 ohms (left channel blue, right red), and with input shorted (left cyan, right magenta) (linear frequency scale).

to magnetic interference from the two large toroidal power transformers.

With this higher-than-usual level of noise, the actual distortion in the THD+noise traces (figs. 4 and 5) doesn't rise above the noise until just below the actual onset of clipping. With continuous drive, the Nu-Vista 800 just failed to meet its specified output power of 330W into 8 ohms (25.2dBW) with both channels driven at our usual definition of clipping: when the THD+N reaches 1%. Fig.4 indicates that the amplifier clips at 310Wpc into 8 ohms, a slight shortfall of 0.3dB, though it's fair to note that I don't hold

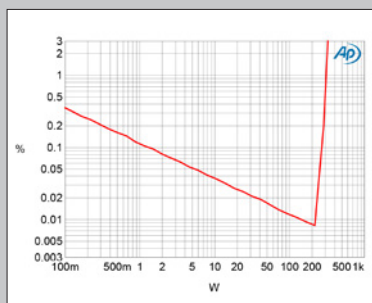


Fig.4 Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 800, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 8 ohms.

the wall voltage constant in my testing. The supply voltage was 122V AC with the amplifier quiescent, but dropped to 119.1V AC when it was clipping into 8 ohms. Into 4 ohms with both channels driven, the Nu-Vista 800 clipped at 500Wpc (24dBW, fig.5). I didn't test its clipping power into 2 ohms, as Musical Fidelity's Antony Michaelson had warned me that although they test power and stability, etc., into 2 ohms, I shouldn't expect to operate the amplifier for a prolonged period at full power into 2 ohms.

I tested how the percentage of THD+N changed with frequency at a

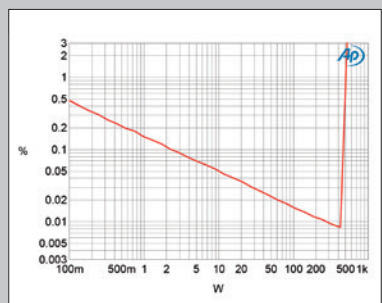
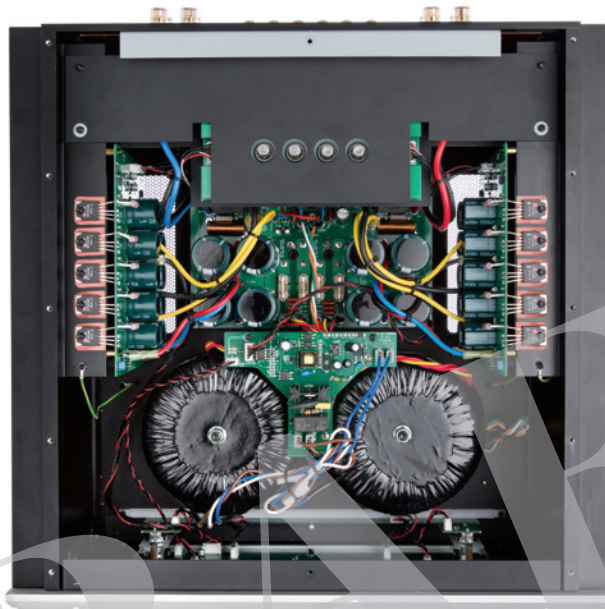


Fig.5 Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 800, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 4 ohms.

it's like your partner stepping on your toes), what I heard from the start in this case forced me to yield.

There's no mistaking the velvety, delicate sound of a nuvistor front end. But unlike other Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista models I've reviewed and/or owned—in which the solid-state output stage acted almost as a dam to impede the smooth flow of tube sound—the Nu-Vista 800's power-amp section seemed to disappear, even as it exerted over the drivers of my Wilson Alexandria XLF speakers the strong control I expect from transistors. That was particularly true in the low end—but not at the expense of top-to-bottom continuity: There was an immediate and obvious sense of sonic “oneness,” and of utter effortlessness and transparency. By *transparency* I don't mean an absence of sonic fingerprint—the



Jlkajdvla jkbv lakjfbv
lsjkb fbj blwfj f lwfj
blwfjfb wafjfb jwfb nklsvj
bnlw vkjb nmc mvfg
hfoaefvd msf.

even if it sounded different from what I'm used to hearing. The sound was more relaxed and suave, but not at all soggy or gauzy. It was more a matter of a shift of emphasis. There was a bit more of Jimmy Cobb's stick on the cymbal, and less sizzle. His snare, too, wasn't quite as crisp (though it was

Nu-Vista 800 sure had one, and it was very different from that of my reference combination of darTZ-eel NHB-18NS preamp and darTZeel NHB 458 monoblocks—but, rather, a wholeness and consistency of sound.

Immediately, the Nu-Vista 800 struck me as the most musically refined Musical Fidelity hybrid model I've ever owned or reviewed—a first impression that lasted throughout my listening for this review.

It was difficult—*impossible*—to find fault with the sound of the most familiar tracks, such as “All Blues,” from Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue* (24-bit/96kHz, Columbia/Legacy/HDtracks),

measurements, continued

level at which I hoped to be able to see the contribution of distortion instead of just noise: 20V (equivalent to 50W into 8 ohms, 100W into 4 ohms, and 200W into 2 ohms). Even so, fig.6 suggests that the THD lies beneath the noise floor below 5kHz or so into higher impedances. Though the distortion into 4 and 8 ohms is very low overall, it does rise into 2 ohms, averaging 0.01% below 1kHz and reaching 0.1% above 10kHz. Just as I finished the 2-ohm measurement, the amplifier lived up to Michaelson's warning and muted its output. I had to wait until it had

cooled down before I could continue the testing.

I haven't shown my usual THD+N waveform, as it was dominated by random noise. However, spectral analysis indicated that the distortion signature was primarily the subjectively innocuous second harmonic in the left channel (fig.7, blue trace), but with an equal amount of third harmonic in the right channel (red). But with each harmonic at -100dB (0.001%) despite the high power level, these should not cause concern for listening to music, especially as intermodulation distor-

tion is also extremely low (fig.8).

I feared for my back when I lifted the 86-lb Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 800 onto my test bench. But when it comes to the measured performance of this handsomely styled integrated amplifier, there is nothing at all to worry about. —John Atkinson

¹ When I began testing Michael Fremer's review sample of the Nu-Vista 800 (serial no. 00119), I broke it by inadvertently short-circuiting the speaker outputs at high power. As fate would have it, the output-stage devices sacrificed themselves to save the power-supply rail fuses. The measurements were therefore performed on a different sample (serial no. 00117).

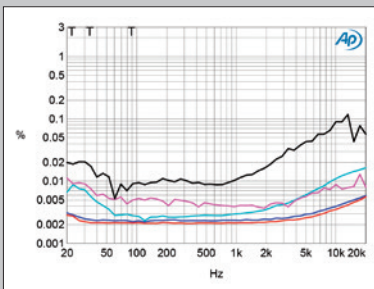


Fig.6 Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 800, THD+N (%) vs frequency at 20V into: 8 ohms (left channel blue, right red), 4 ohms (left cyan, right magenta), 2 ohms (gray).

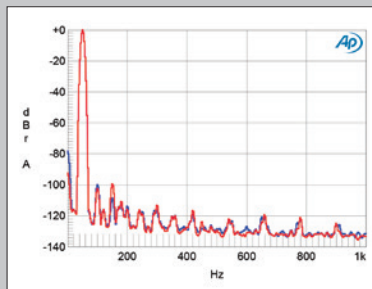


Fig.7 Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 800, spectrum of 50Hz sine wave, DC-1kHz, at 100Wpc into 8 ohms (left channel blue, right red, linear frequency scale).

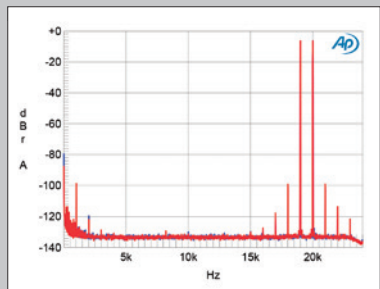


Fig.8 Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 800, HF intermodulation spectrum, DC-24kHz, 19+20kHz at 100Wpc peak into 8 ohms (left channel blue, right red, linear frequency scale).

still sufficiently so)—but Cannonball Adderley's alto sax was oh, so round and juicy! I'm tempted to say that Miles sounded more as if he were playing a flugelhorn than a trumpet, but that would be an exaggeration.

CBS's 30th Street Studio, and the added reverb, produced an expansive and especially deep soundstage, but the overall environment was less airy and expansive than with my usual electronics; the sound of Paul Chambers's double bass favored tonal and textural detail over transients of string plucks. Nonetheless, the sound was 100% consistent from top to bottom: The sonic picture was complete, self-contained, and easy to sink into and thoroughly enjoy. Very analog.

After matching levels between my two different Nu-Vista 800 setups—with a line-level source driving its balanced inputs, and with the outputs of my darTZeel preamp driving its single-ended inputs—switching between them revealed, in the latter, a very slight diminution in bass definition (but not extension), and a barely perceptible softening of high-frequency transients (so slight as to probably not be noticeable to most listeners). While the latter would be beneficial to an overanalytical component that made transients too sharp and defined on top and overdamped on the bottom, they weren't at all what the Nu-Vista 800 needed. Therefore, I did all of my listening to digital recordings through the Nu-Vista 800's balanced input, with the DAC's analog outputs directly feeding the amplifier.

Harsh, bright CDs still sounded harsh and bright, but CDs that only marginally possessed those qualities were more pleasing in every way. If the Nu-Vista 800 added to the sound a bit of depth and spaciousness, that, too, benefited many CDs. And if the Musical Fidelity amp slightly softened high-frequency transients and slightly enriched the midrange, that will also be to the benefit of most CDs.

"S.O.S.," from ABBA's *Gold: Greatest Hits* (CD, Polydor 5170075),¹ remained an ear-bleeder—but Jackson Browne's *Solo Acoustic Vol.1* (CD, Inside 15251) went from a bit hard and brittle through some amps to just right through the Nu-Vista 800. I went through the recordings stored on my Meridian Sooloos server and what I've currently got on Roon, trying to predict which discs would sound better through the Nu-Vista and which couldn't be helped. More often than not, I was right: CDs with a touch of hard edge and brightness were suitably softened and corrected; those that were hopelessly hard and bright remained so.

On the other hand, CDs that I thought were well balanced to begin with—such as *What's It All About*, Pat Metheny's solo album on baritone guitar (Nonesuch 527912)—were a bit too soft on bottom, and transients weren't as sharply expressed as they could and should have been. The slightly more mellow and expressive-sounding two-LP version (Nonesuch 528173) sounded closer to the CD version than it should have.

In some ways, the Nu-Vista 800 reminded me of the far more expensive Siltech SAGA power amplifier (\$75,000, not including preamplifier).² The SAGA is also a tube-transistor hybrid, with separate housings for its tubed, battery-powered voltage amplifier and its solid-state current amplifier, the latter using an LED solar panel to generate and keep



The Nu-Vista 800 was fully expressing the music's essence.

absolutely constant the bias current by removing it from the grid.

Though the SAGA's transient performance and speed of attack were faster—and its transparency

greater—than the Nu-Vista 800's, I wrote in my review of the Siltech that "I didn't 'hear' the tubes as such, but they seemed to provide the cushion that allowed the SAGA's solid-state output to speed along without paying a price in over-analytical sound that was deficient harmonically." In that review's conclusion, I wrote: "the SAGA is not the last word in bass extension and muscularity, or overall speed of transient attack. . . . However, I have never heard digital sources sound as convincingly real, as fully fleshed out, as free of artifacts, or as genuinely *enjoyable* as they did through the Siltech SAGA."

All of which I found equally true of the Nu-Vista 800, except that it could be argued that the Musical Fidelity's sound was more coherent from top to bottom. In fact, I think I've just made that argument. I'm sticking with it.

Analog listening

Recently, my record shelves had become too tightly packed, and I had to move everything stored on the bottom shelves of my rack onto shelves in another room. In the process, I came upon many LPs I'd never played, including *The Blues . . . A Real Summit Meeting* (2 LPs, Buddah BDS-5144-2), which someone at Buddah Records, in New York City, had handed me in 1973. I'm ashamed to admit it: *42 years on the shelf, unplayed*. Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab had reissued the LP, but here was the original, recorded at Philharmonic Hall (soon to be Avery Fisher Hall, now soon to be David Geffen Hall) by Jim Reeves,³ using the Record Plant's remote truck, and mastered at Bell Sound by Sam Feldman.

So I cleaned the two LPs and finally played them, having had no previous experience of their sound. How *did* they sound? First, the recording is *exceptional*, though so closely miked it almost sounds like a studio set. But right

1 Yes, I admit it: I like ABBA, I like the Bee Gees, I have an old-man crush on Taylor Swift—and yes, JA, I like the Smiths, too!

2 See my review in the October 2014 issue: www.stereophile.com/content/siltech-saga-power-amplifier.

3 To see some amazing photos of the goings-on at the 30th Street Studios, visit Reeves's website: www.reevesaudio.com/vintagesessions.html.



in my room, between the speakers, were the midband-rich voices of Big Mama Thornton, Jay McShann, Eddie “Cleanhead” Vinson, Muddy Waters, B.B. King, Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup, and Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown. Through the Nu-Vista, the bass lines were like those on *Kind of Blue*: harmonically and texturally rich, and tuneful. The midrange sounded creamy and full, which gave voices a “there live” believability. The album’s final track is B.B. King performing “Outside Help”—and if you want to hear more harmonic fullness from King’s guitar, Lucille, and the sound and feel of him picking notes on her, you’re asking for too much. At one point, he hits a string hard—the dynamic jump delivered a shot of adrenalin.

I sat through the entire set feeling that the Nu-Vista 800 was fully expressing the music’s essence—if it wasn’t extracting every possible bit of detail, I didn’t care. Audio equipment either draws you in to the music or it pushes you out. I think that, ultimately, after all the analysis of the sound of audio gear, we base our choices of equipment on whether it draws us in or pushes us out. What produces those senses of being drawn in or pushed out is the sound’s overall seamlessness or lack thereof. In terms of tone quality, texture, transient attack, sustain, and decay, the Nu-Vista painted a consistent, coherent picture. It was tonally and texturally on the somewhat rich side, transient attacks were slightly softened, sustains were generous, and its *very* low noise level meant that decays were equally long-lived. In short, the Nu-Vista 800 drew me *in*. That was what mattered.

Conclusion

Charles Mingus was famous for saying, about every album he released, “This is the best album I’ve ever made.” Musical Fidelity’s Antony Michaelson has his own tongue-in-cheek version of the same trait: He tends to say, on the launch of each of his statement products, “This is the best I have ever manufactured.” Of course that can’t always be the case—but this time out, overall, I’d say that it’s true of the Nu-Vista 800.

The Nu-Vista 800 is a powerful, technically capable integrated amplifier that I’m sure will measure well—like all Musical Fidelity products. But instead of an assault on the state of the art designed to wring every last detail from every recording, regardless of the potentially negative consequences, the Nu-Vista 800 is more an easy-to-listen-to product aimed at the music lover. That is neither an audiophile

The sound was 100% consistent from top to bottom.

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Analog Sources Continuum Audio Labs Caliburn turntable, Cobra tonearm, Castellon stand; TechDAS Air Force Two turntable; Graham Engineering Phantom Elite, Kuzma 4Point, Swedish Analog Technologies tonearms; Air-Tight PC-1 Magnum Opus, Fuuga, Lyra Atlas & Etna, Miyajima Labs Zero (mono) & Madake, Ortofon Anna cartridges.

Digital Sources Lynx Hilo A/D-D/A converter; Meridian Sooloos Digital Media System; Simaudio Moon Evolution 650D CD transport-DAC; Pure Vinyl, VinylStudio LP-ripping software.

Preamplification Ypsilon Electronics MC-10L & MC-16L step-up transformers; darTZeel NHB-18NS, Luminous Audio Technology Arion, Ypsilon Electronics VPS-100 preamplifiers.

Power Amplifiers darTZeel NHB 458 monoblocks.

Loudspeakers Wilson Audio Specialties Alexandria XLF.

Cables Interconnect: Snake River Audio Boomslang S/PDIF, Stealth Sakra & Indra, TARA Labs Zero Evolution & Zero, Terosonic Clarison Gold, Wireworld Platinum Eclipse. Speaker: TARA Labs Omega Evolution SP, Wireworld Platinum Eclipse 7. AC: Shunyata Research Alpha Analog HC, Alpha Digital, Zi Tron Alpha Analog.

Accessories Shunyata Research Hydra Triton & Typhon power conditioners (2 sets); Oyaide AC wall box & receptacles; HRS Signature SXR, Stillpoints ESS, Finite Elemente Pagode stands; Symposium Rollerblocks & Ultra platform; ASC Tube Traps; RPG BAD, Skyline, Abffusor panels; Stillpoints Aperture Room panels; Synergistic Research UEF products (various); Audiodharma Cable Cooker; Furutech, Stein Audio demagnetizers; Furutech deStat static-charge remover; Loricraft PRC4 Deluxe, Audiodesksysteme Gläss record-cleaning machines.—Michael Fremer

putdown nor damning with faint praise: After all, it’s possible to be an intense lover of music *and* someone who loves to wring from every recording every last detail, regardless of the consequences. But I suspect Antony Michaelson has had his fill of audiophiles on a quest for the ultimate in detail retrieval: I think he’s more interested in reaching lovers of music by making things that sound *really* good.

Not just things, but *beautiful* things. Over the years, some Musical Fidelity components have fallen short in that department. For instance, the bolts that held together the very expensive Titan monoblocks weren’t made of stainless steel, and they quickly tarnished. But the Nu-Vista 800’s fit’n’finish—down to every last visible bolt, down to everything visible through the ventilation screen—make it by far the most impressive-looking and -feeling Musical Fidelity product ever. The front panel is exquisitely machined, and reflects light “just so.” The closer I looked, the more I liked.

It’s easy to imagine a customer walking into an audio shop, being stopped short by the Nu-Vista 800, and saying, “Let me hear *that*.” It’s even easier to imagine that customer reacting as I did, at first listen and every listen thereafter. At \$12,999, this is not an inexpensive product, but it’s one that will bring a CD collection to new life and, when matched with the right associated analog gear, do the same with LPs. (I’d go solid-state phono amplification, with a lean, fast cartridge.) That imaginary customer could take home a Nu-Vista 800 and confidently say, “I’m done.” ■