



Oracle Temple PH 1000

The final contender in this survey is an import from Canada, the two-box, solid-state Oracle Audio Temple PH1000. This was the mystery guest: the company name is familiar, but I can't say I've heard any of their analog products nor read much about them.

The Temple main chassis is beautiful to look at. Made from hand-brushed, lacquered and air-dried aluminum for a satiny, luxe finish, full functionality is accessible from the front panel via a bank of rotary dials. The separate power supply, on the other hand, is a very ordinary black, folded aluminum box (I guess it was meant to be tucked away in a dark corner, somewhere out of sight). The Temple is the most expensive of the group at \$7500.

First, I tried a Harmonix Studio Master PC, thinking it would nicely complement the Temple's neutral palette. This resulted in frequency integration issues—bass, mid and treble bands were heard separately. Take two, after swapping out the Studio Master for the TARA The One PC, along with The 0.8 IC with ISM Onboard. Ah, now I caught a glimpse of the unit's potential. No more frequency slices missing, no more discontinuity. The Temple is very sensitive to cabling. (And footers. My sample had fixed, soft Sorbothane feet. Until recently, the Temple came with metal feet.)

I had thought the AHT/Walker sounded sinewy, but compared to the Temple, it seems almost delicate. The Temple's presentation is the biggest, most dynamic of the group.

On *The Yeomen of the Guard*, the introductory *forté* is huge. This guy has headroom that inspires confidence, exhibiting massive dynamic range and power reserves. The stage is bigger and more robust, dimensional in all directions, with nothing loose or vague about it (if not quite the solidity of the ASR). Texture and edge information are well represented: the blattiness on the rim of trumpets is nicely conveyed in stable, large images upon a naturalistic soundstage. The Temple didn't spotlight instruments nor give them sharp boundaries. It had a nice way of varying image size to properly match the instrument. Yet, the Temple handled itself in a civil manner, always maintaining composure, similar to the ASR.

This one speaks straightforwardly with few editorial embellishments, a real neutral player with very high purity. Transient treatment is incredibly even-handed and coherent. It is fast and articulate, fleshy and taut. (And this served to confirm there was indeed some added excitement to the ART Vinyl Reference transient.) It gives no clue to its solid-state topology: no grain, edge, or obvious artifacts.

The Temple's tonal balance is darker than the AHT/Walker, and lighter than the three others. Its low-end doesn't have the bass slam of the ASR and the ART, but TARA wires remedied that.

However, after I got used to its exemplary performance on the Hifi stuff, its determined neutrality sometimes held me at a distance: I missed the emotional connection. Because it is warm, but not timbrally rich (string tone is very good to be sure, but without the silken quality of the ART, and to a lesser extent, the ASR), I placed a Harmonix RF-57 alongside the IEC jack on the power supply. Then the Temple became more tube-like. Throwing a Kharma Enigma IC onto its outputs gave it another push in this direction.

With this setup, the Temple achieved an acoustically and harmonically satisfying presentation that bonded purity and audiophile rigor. This unfailingly produced startle reactions at the beginning of every session. The Temple and the Enigma are a great match! (Something else to evince that reaction—the one-meter Enigma cable costs \$7100, fractionally less than the component under review.) The oboe intro on the second movement of the Brahms *Violin Concerto* with Heifetz was

just lovely, without the glow around the instrument of the ART VR. The grand old Iceman himself sounded warm and approachable, but cooler than through the ART.

The Temple does most of the things contemporary audiophiles look for. And for those who rate PRAT highly, this could be the one for you. It has the snappiest pace of the group. Between that and its full, lively and very present midrange, the listener easily succumbs.



I set the impedance at switch position four (200 ohms), which was nearly ideal, just a bit too smooth. At position five (330 ohms and less damped), it was very exciting, but the treble got close to sounding harsh. I needed something in between. That's when I discovered the purpose of the Capacitance dial. I moved it up to three (100 PF) with the impedance at 200 ohms and, lo and behold, textured edges came back. You can use this dial to fine-tune just the amount of crispness you want. FYI, most phono stages don't provide adjustable capacitance and are fixed at 100PF.

The Temple has the most gain of the group by far. To level match with the others, I needed to set it to three out of a possible six, but it sounded better at its higher gain settings, even if this necessitated turning the volume of the line stage way down.

Conclusion

The conclusions are readily drawn: for all-around best performance, the ASR takes the gold. With its freedom from analog based or editorially inserted artifacts, its unmatched purity, and its superior performance on the main audio course, it sets a new standard. The ASR Basis Exclusive is a Panglossian "best of" sound. This is a place where traditional analog is fortified with what digital playback has taught us is possible. (Conversely, digital has lately gleaned more than a few things from traditional analog.) If you insist on SOTA grades on the main scorecard, the guy to go with is not in doubt: the ASR Basis Exclusive.

The Oracle Temple has a similar voice and comes up close behind. It too, is pure and free from artifacts and colorations, just not to the same degree. It is super dynamic and fast as a *bleep-bleep*. In that area, it steals the show. If PRAT, the

toe-tapping thing, is high up on your list, you could easily succumb to the Temple's infectious pulse.

The AHT/Walker falls into line at a distance behind the Temple. And the Lamm LP2... well, I suspect it wasn't happy with my Linn Archiv II cartridge.

On the other hand, if you have fond reminiscences of those earlier days when vinyl sounded like vinyl and digital sounded new and different, you might find your cup of tea in the ART Audio Vinyl Reference. The VR produces a distinctly different sound from the others. Where the solid-state units throw a wall of info at you, the VR is adequate. It doesn't attempt to scale new heights of macro-dynamics, soundstaging, etc. Its expertise lies in timbral hue and color, inner life, musical flow, and sheer listener involvement and enjoyment, and at these, it comes out on top.

The ASR, the Oracle and the ART provided wholly satisfying phono playback at levels well beyond my current reference. While none of the five contenders suffer from solid-state symptoms, the AHT/Walker came closest; the ASR and the Temple are warmish solid-state; the ART VR sounds like traditional tubes; the Lamm LP2 has a cool tube sound.

Raise a glass, please, and let's toast the twenty-fifth (or thereabouts) anniversary of the digital winter. Isn't it odd, though, to find ourselves in the midst of a vinyl renaissance?

A little sidebar on Ultimate Tweaks for the LP12

The very best tweak I can recommend for your Linn LP12 is to situate the Lingo speed control on a set of Harmonix TU-303 EX or TU-66 ZX—very expensive, but the biggest bang to be had. Place all four of these large, round wood discs under the Lingo. Next, place one or two Walker Tuning discs on top. Balance the Lingo so it rests securely and is stable. Next best tweak is a large ERAudio board between the LP12 and whatever shelf/rack you're using. I also like the Harmonix TU-800EX LP Matte in place of the standard felt one. Other than that, leave the table alone: various tuning dots and weights for the arm, the armboard, the headshell, the counterweight, etc, all proved to be left turns.

<http://www.positive-feedback.com/Issue29/phono.htm>

POSITIVE FEEDBACK ONLINE - ISSUE 29



Phono Stage Hoedown - Walker Audio AHT, Lamm LP2 Deluxe, ASR Basis Exclusive, Oracle Temple PH 1000, and the ART Audio Vinyl Reference

by Marshall Nack