Review Metrum Acoustics

Ambre Roon Endpoint Jaap Veenstra

Alpha-Rating

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐

De beste!

Getest door: **Jaap Veenstra**

Construction	████████████████
Operation	██████████████████
Sound quality	██████████████████
Price	██████████████████

Conclusion : Phew ... that was a real surprise !

Purist Roon endpoint for 1200 euro with this reproduction quality ?

We did not see that coming. Particularly via I2S - unprecedented reproduction. Super-pure, no colouration, stable with stereo imaging where many competitors do not come even close. Disadvantage is that you must sacrifice the USB-link. In our case not easy but there is work around.

Without question **Alpha Approved**.

Perhaps already Best Product of the Year. If we had those Awards yet …

Streaming is starting to find a spot in many Hi-Fi and High-End Systems. The reason is the fine combination of access to much music, ease of operation and also very good reproduction. Some of the better products in this area are for example - NAD, Auralic, Aurender or Lumin.

We have followed Metrum Acoustics for quite some time and the question we have regularly asked is - will a streamer come … At last we know the answer : Yes …. Knowledge of Metrum Acoustics developing Ambre.

But it is a small unit. Without much of a display. Silver or Black … Nothing special. Even a bit boring.

Or should we call it discreet? That is better. At the back we see a power-connection, Coaxial, Optical, AES and a pair of network gateways. Above one LAN input and the other : I2S… hey… that is what the associated (Dac) module is for.

We understood we could do this on the spot - by replacing the USB-input. Install firstly and then anticipate.

Simple

If you have ROON running on your network, installing the Metrum Acoustics Ambre is really a piece of cake. Just make sure that you plug the network cable into the correct input and that you connect it before you plug into the ether. Without a network, there is a small chance that the operating system will continue to search for status (time, updates, etc).

That will be fine but it can take a while. If you already have a network, connection is immediate and everything runs smoother.

We open ROON on the desktop PC and switch on the zone. If you want to change the name of the Ambre in your network, you can log in to the Ambre (via the assigned IP address) and change the hostname there. You can also give the streamer a fixed IP address (switch DHCP off). They are small details. In particular, we find the fixed IP address handy. This way we can group everything neatly and possibly arrange things manually at IP level.

Think QOS (quality of service) rules.

Now that we have switched on the zone, we let the Ambre play quietly for a week. Below, we look at what this streamer consists of.

Rasberry ... but on steroids

Under the hood is a Rasberry Pi.

However : that is purely for web services and data connection with the ROON server.

After all, processing is already being undertaken by ROON. The board is completely and optically decoupled from the rest of the Ambre.

Cees Ruijtenberg uses ultra-fast industrial optical decoupling for this. The network connection is also galvanically isolated.
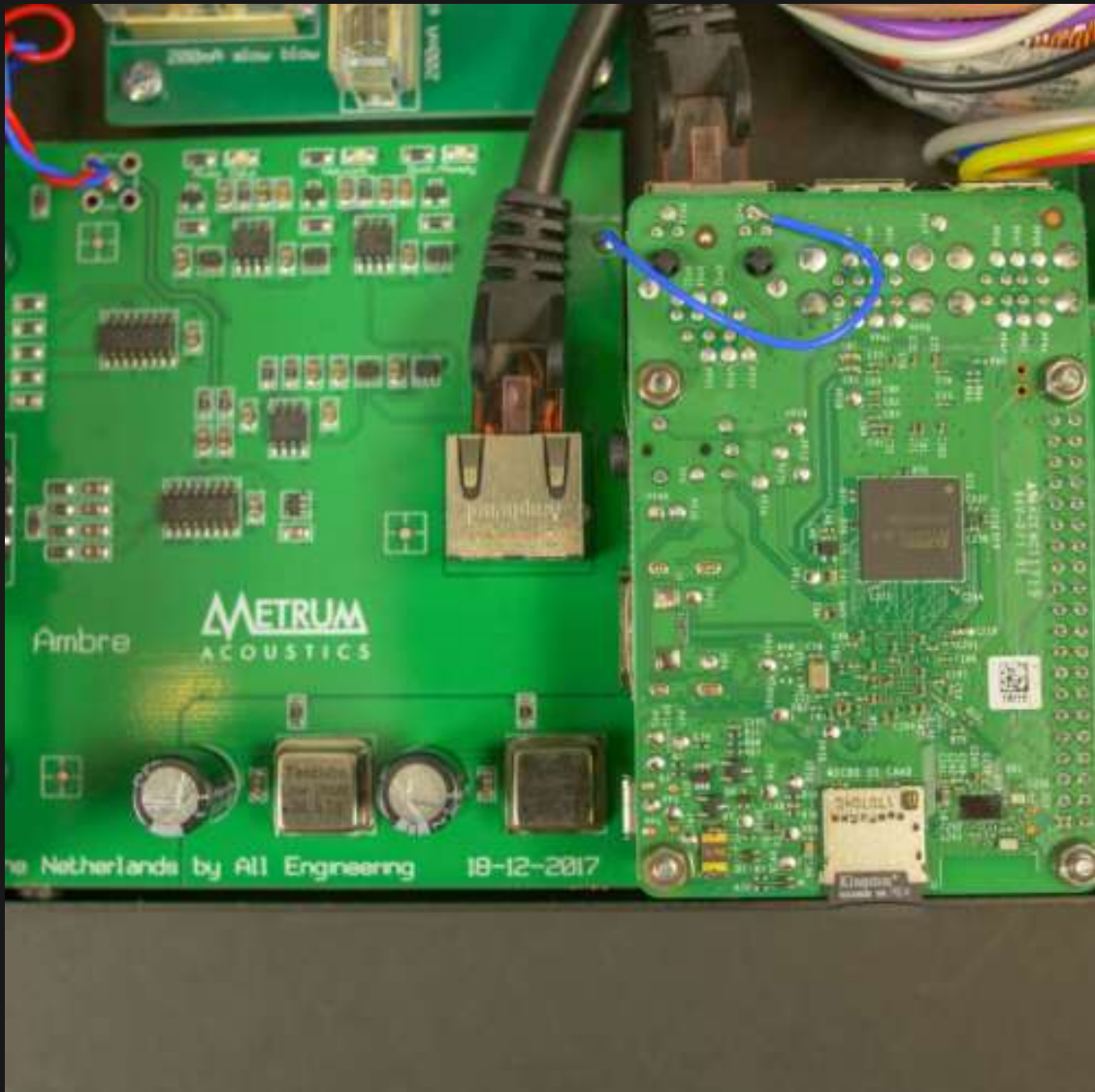
The outputs have been designed to provide strong control for stability.

Think of the I2S connection. Metrum uses a network cable for this. The connection has been tested to over 10 meters. That works flawlessly, although the question is of course whether it is necessary and sensible to use such long connections.

But if necessary - it works. And is icing on the cake : the clocks in the Ambre come from Tentlabs.

There are separate clocks for 44.1 and 48 kHz (and multiples thereof). Of course everything is neatly fed separately.

All in all, the inside looks nicely cared for. But we are now used to Metrum's products.

I2S board pins

We also install the I2S board for this test, which you can optionally purchase for almost all models :

Onyx, Jade, Pavane and Adagio. Installing is easy : take out the USB board and insert the I2S module. Ready ... You will read later that it is very interesting to use this connection.

The difference with AES is also clearly audible.

De set-up

We have played with the Ambre in several locations. Both at home - privately we now also work with the Ambre - and at the office. At home we run via AES because we cannot (yet) lose the USB input in the Adagio. At the office we provided Pavane with the I2S module to complete the test.

The home set consists of a Metrum Adagio with two AVM M30 Monoblocks and a set of DALI Epicon 2 Speakers. Cables come from Audioquest, Grimm (TPM) and Art Speak.

The studio set consists of a Pass Labs XP-12, Metrum Pavane Level 2, Bryston 4B SST3 and a pair of Focal Sopra No1. Cables come from Audioquest, Grimm (TPM), Art Speak and Kemp.

Now to ... the sound

We have taken our time to get an impression of Ambre. And we can be very short :

The Metrum Ambre is a crazy Musical Streamer. Rhythmically everything is simply spot on. Drums, bass kicks and high-hats are fast and tight.Vocals come out extremely smoothly from both our Epicons and the Sopra's. No edges, no hardness and from the onset something we seldom hear. It makes the whole presentation particularly well executed. Especially via AES or I2S.

Finally the soundstage. And here the Ambre excels. Especially if you have the possibility to use the I2S connection. We really hear a room-filling stereo image. So we hear information not only in terms of breadth, but also in depth. And the focusing ? Spot-on. Frightening how three-dimensional voices are projected. We can mainly hear that on our Reference set in the listening room.

Because at home we do not have this I2S connection to make a comparison with AES.

Optical, Coax, AES or I2S

We often talk about AES and I2S in this review. But what about Coax and Optical ? Well ... the Ambre plays nicely through all the outputs. But there is a difference between Optical, Coax, AES and I2S. Spdif via Coaxial or Optical is almost the same. We use an Audioquest Diamond Coax interlink and a Vodka Optical cable. And both sound neat and almost the same. If we take a step towards AES with an Art Speak interlink, we clearly hear tighter layers and a deeper and larger stereo image. More space information is realised and a somewhat neater, better rendition of layering. If you have the choice between Coaxial, Optical or AES, then use AES.

Then the step to I2S. It costs a little but then you also get something special. The Step to I2S brings even more sound-space into the presentation in our case. And an even more focus. All elements in music are given their own place. As if the cast of a film set is placed on their cross-marks even more accurately by the Director. Bizarre.

Sound becomes a fraction purer. As if a very light curtain is washed away. Again, the layering is slightly tighter than via AES and it is subtle (but audible).

So to ... for whom

Whom might the Metrum Acoustics Ambre suit ? Well ... for whom not ? The only threshold to purchasing this device, is that you have to work with ROON. But also again ... why not ? We really like ROON. And it can also be used on a (fast) NAS for example, Synology or Qnap.

Metrum Acoustics shows with the Ambre that excellent sound quality does not have to cost the power of God. For 1200 euros you will receive a beautiful, musical device. Especially in combination with an Onyx, Jade, Pavane or Adagio with I2S module you can play amongst the stars in heaven.

Strongly recommended and so Alpha Approved !