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AUDIO REVIEWS

JULY 2008



SCHEU ANALOG PREMIER II & CANTUS

Reviewer: Paul Candy

Source: Rotel RCD-971 as transport, Audio Zone DAC-1, PS Audio DL III DAC w/ Cullen Circuits Stage Three Mod, Pro-Ject RPM 5 turntable, Pro-Ject Speed Box, Ortofon Rondo Blue cartridge.

Preamp/Integrated: Manley Labs Shrimp, Audio Zone AMP-1, Pro-Ject Tube Box phono stage.

Amp: Manley Labs Mahi monoblocks.

Speakers: Green Mountain Audio Callisto (on sand filled Skyland stands), Hornshoppe Horns, AV123 Strata Minis, 2 x REL Q108 Mk II subwoofers.

Cables: Audience Maestro & Auditorium 23 speaker cables, Audience Maestro, JPS Labs Superconductor+ & Silver Fi interconnects, Stereovox XV2 digital.

Power Cables: Audience 'e' powerChord, Harmonic Technology AC-10 Fantasy, GutWire Power Clef², GutWire C Clef.

Stands: Grand Prix Audio Monaco four-tier rack.

Powerline conditioning: Audience aR1p AC conditioner, BPT Pure Power Center w/Wattgate 381 outlets, Bybee Quantum Purifiers and ERS cloth, GutWire MaxCon.

Sundry accessories: Grand Prix Audio APEX footers, Isoclean fuses, Caig Pro Gold, Auric Illuminator, Audio Magic/Quantum Physics Noise Disruptors, dedicated AC line with Wattgate 381 outlet, Echo Busters acoustic room treatments.

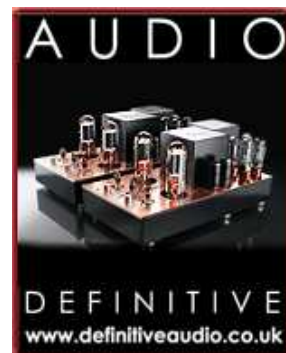
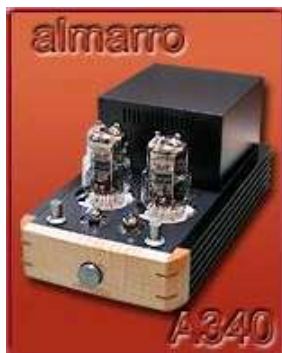
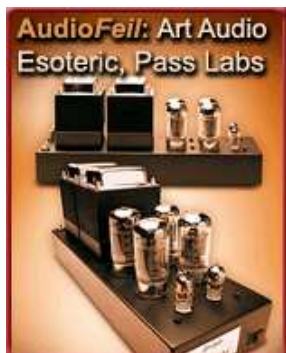
Room size: 11' x 18' x 8', long wall setup, suspended hardwood floors with large area rug, walls are yer standard canuck drywall over Fiberglass insulation.

Review Component Retail (in Canadian currency): \$2,379 for 9" arm & standard 50mm platter, \$449 for 80mm platter, \$1,319 for 9" Cantus tonearm, \$120 for Charisma Audio Solid Record Stabilizer. (Note: due to strength of the Euro plus increased shipping costs, prices will increase in September.)



Of late, I've been reading Stephen Mejias's [blog](#) over at Stereophile with great interest, thoroughly enjoying his comments about his recent introduction to the world of vinyl. I know exactly what he's going through. At last check, it appears he's intent on buying every record he can lay hands on. I'd like to say that common sense will prevail and the buying spree eventually taper off. But it won't. I buy more vinyl now than I ever did. And it's not just me. At the rate my audio bud Jim is growing his vinyl collection, he's gonna require a bigger house. Or an intervention. The naysayers can whine all they want about all the inherent distortions and inaccuracies of vinyl playback and how perfect digital is ad nauseum. Maybe they are right in technical terms. But those of us bitten by the analog bug know that digital will never beat vinyl in terms of emotional involvement. I still enjoy listening to CDs and digital playback has improved greatly over the last 20 years. Yet I just don't get the same high as with vinyl, even with a cheap turntable.

What does occur after the initial rush of vinyl lust is the ever-nagging itch to upgrade. If you are a shameless vinyl hound with a modest turntable like me and are considering an upgrade; then consider Scheu's Premier II table. Granted, there are many decks in the \$2,000-\$5,000 range available. Which one to choose? I hope to sample several tables in that price range over the coming months and share my observations with you. Today's initial foray into mid-priced tables comes from Germany under the Scheu brand, initially offered in North America several years ago in DIY kit form under the Eurolab name. Currently distributed in Canada by Charisma Audio and in the US by Hudson Audio Imports, Scheu tables now ship essentially assembled sans tonearm.



With a background in tool making and experience in materials science, the late Thomas Scheu (pronounced *shoy*) built his first turntable in 1985. His goal was to offer a state-of-the-art turntable at an affordable price. After his death in 2004, his wife Ulla Scheu took over the company reigns and continues to develop her late husband's ideas and vision. The most striking feature of the Premier II is the use of acrylic. In fact, apart from the motor, feet, internal wiring and bearing, the table plus the Cantus tonearm is essentially plastic all the way. However, there is nothing plasticity about the Premier II/Cantus combo's performance as we shall see. Overall, it is an impressive and attractive package with excellent overall build quality.



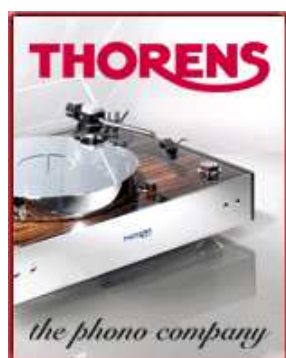
The Premier II turntable deals with speed stability and motor vibration issues with a massive platter driven by an external motor via thin thread belt. The Premier's standard platter is 50mm (2 inches) thick and weighs about 4.5 kilograms. Also available is a thicker 80mm (3.15 inches) platter at about 7.5 kilograms. This was included with my review sample. Arm bases for either a 9" or 12" tonearm are available. The acrylic base of the Premier II ships preloaded with lead shot and the entire assembly sits on three adjustable metal spikes. The total table weight is approximately 17 kilos with the 50mm platter and up to 23 kilos with the 80mm version.



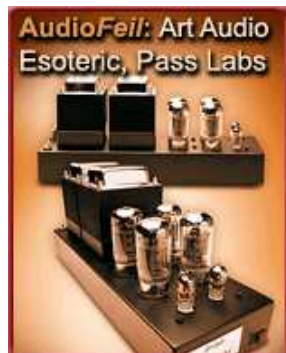
I can't comment on the Premier's ease of assembly as my review sample was delivered and set up by Scheu's Canadian distributor, Bernard Li of Charisma Audio. However, Bernard emailed me pictures showing how the Premier's plinth and bearing assembly ship preassembled in well-protected packaging. While I was not given manuals for the Premier or Cantus, I was emailed copies by review end that indicated detailed instructions and pictures.



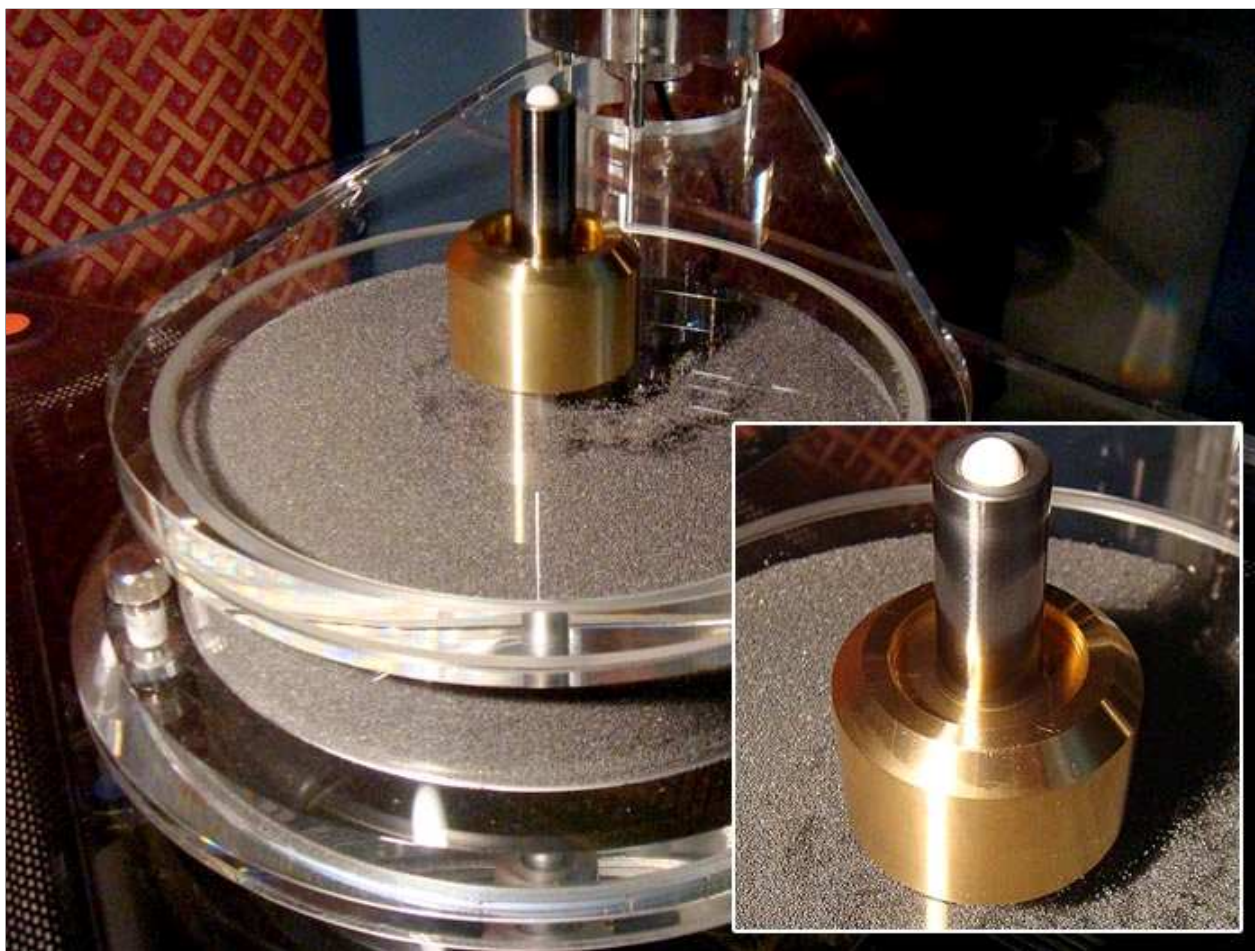
To keep bad vibes and motor noise to a minimum if not outright eliminated, a separate electronically regulated DC motor drives the platter via a thin thread to apparently suffer less resonance than the more common rubber belt. The motor's power supply is a wall-wart unit. There is a rocker switch for toggling between 33 and 45 rpm speeds and a pair of potentiometers for fine adjustments of both settings.



Keen-eyed vinylistas may recognize the Premier's bearing from other far more expensive turntables. Scheu apparently performs a little OEM work for other table firms. The inverted bearing is constructed of pre-tuned, hardened and ground steel. The upper part features an aluminum-oxide ceramic ball with a Teflon mirror. The bearing draws oil up into itself via capillary action and is almost frictionless (a small bottle of oil is included with the table). With a soft push, the platter spun without the belt for several minutes. I gave up trying to time it after five minutes. This bearing is capable of handling a whopping 45 kg load.



While the Premier ships with the necessary tools to set up and adjust cartridges, you'll need Scheu's accessories such as the strobe disc and strobe light to ensure proper speed, a stylus tracking force gauge -- I used the Shure -- and an alignment gauge of your preference.



While you can purchase Scheu's record weight for the Premier II, Bernard gave me his own precision-machined stainless-steel design instead. Many folks swear by record weights but I have mixed feelings. To be honest, I didn't note that much of a difference. Perhaps there was a little more body and solidity to playback but quite often, I simply forgot the weight and wasn't really aware of any performance reduction. One small note: because the Premier's platter has an indentation for the record label, Charisma's weight comes with a washer to prevent the weight from pushing down the inner portion of the LP which would cause the outer edge to curl up.



The bizarre-looking Cantus tonearm is a unipivot design and constructed mostly of clear acrylic. A plastic tonearm! The headshell is an integral part of the arm and not an attachment as with most other arms. From Scheu's website: "This is a tone arm with a unipivot bearing where the arm is not actually a wand but made up of a mechanical framework. This reduces the ubiquitous resonances to an absolute minimum, creating an unbelievably energetic but still 'relaxed' sound. The counterweight is made of tungsten, allowing the tracking weight to be adjusted very easily and reliably. The suspended counterweight design and the breadth of the frame around the bearing make for perfect balancing of the horizontal tracking angle without the need for complex adjustment.



"The Cantus is available in two versions: a 9-inch version with an effective length of 229 mm (pivot-to-spindle separation 212 mm) and a 12-inch model with an effective length of 306 mm (pivot-to-spindle separation 293.5 mm)." My sample of the Premier II was fitted with the 9" Cantus arm. While promising to be flimsy and tricky to operate, the Cantus was nothing of the sort. Granted, if you have never run a unipivot arm, the wide range of motion when cuing up a record can be a bit unnerving at first. The Cantus came fitted with Audio Technica's AT33PTG moving coil cartridge which is curiously unavailable in North America. However you can order it online [here](#) for US \$399. Apparently, the AT33 is quite popular in the Far East and Europe. Charisma Audio's Bernard Li admitted to trying many far more expensive cartridges with the Cantus but thought this one combined with the arm was one of those special synergistic combinations.

The unshielded cartridge wiring runs straight from the cartridge to the phono stage via a carefully aligned clear plastic tube. Terminations are Neutrik RCA plugs. While the tonearm wiring is unshielded, I suffered no hum or noise issues during the review.



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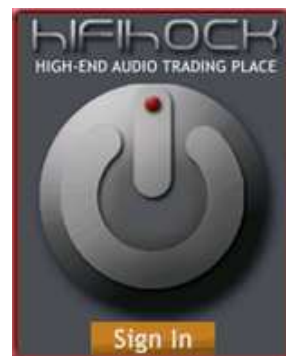
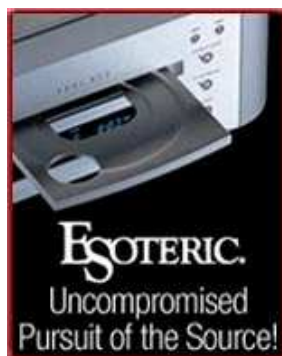
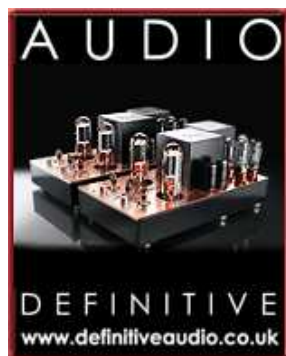
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I expected an overly complicated cartridge setup but it was straightforward and intuitive. However, due to the Cantus's range of motion, azimuth and VTF settings require a steady hand and some patience. The points where you would expect to adjust azimuth, VTA etc are exactly where they are. Even without a manual, your ham-fisted scribe had little difficulty in fitting an Ortofon Rondo Blue cartridge or the included Audio Technica AT-33PTG to the Cantus. For proper VTF and azimuth, loosen the counterweight screw and move it slightly back and forth and side to side. You will also need to check VTF periodically during this process. There is no anti-skating mechanism on the Cantus due to its design.

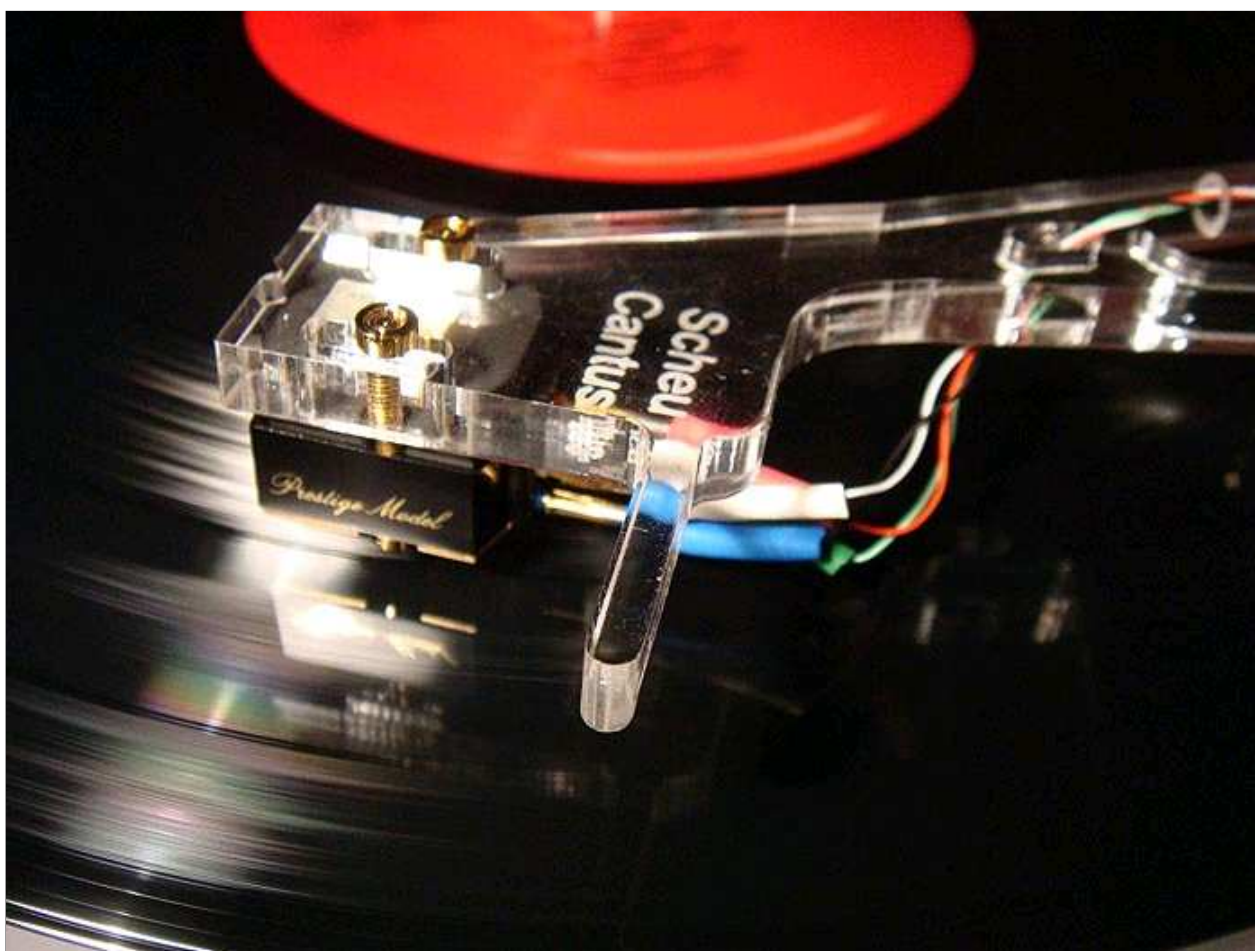


Cuing up records was a snap and essentially quite like using a Rega or Pro-Ject. However, the Cantus lowered considerably slower and smoother than my RPM 5, thus avoiding any loud thumps. Like all turntables, especially non-suspended ones, the Premier benefitted *greatly* from proper vibration isolation. I obtained swell results from Grand Prix Audio's Monaco rack. I tried placing the Premier on a maple board sitting on the floor and my old steel & MDF rack. Simply put, it was pointless to compare. The difference was staggering. With the Premier or any table for that matter, a decent rack or wall-mounted shelf is mandatory.

The Premier does not ship with a mat. The platter is shaped for direct contact with LPs. There is a belief that acrylic and vinyl are close in mechanical impedance, hence direct contact should offer maximum energy transfer from LP to platter to minimize the effects of vibration on playback.



I'm not so sure I believe that because I achieved what I thought were much better results with Herbie's Way Excellent Turntable Mat. Music sounded slightly more natural, fuller, more fleshed out and weighty. It didn't at all go overly dark or mushy. My wife, who quite enjoyed the Scheu, concurred. Thus far, this has been my experience with any platter, whether acrylic or not. That's not to say other mats won't work. I just haven't tried them all. Yet.

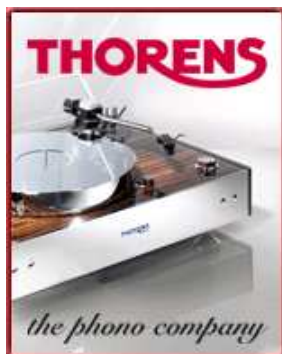


Sidebar I: During the review process, a reader I'll call Bob emailed me inquiring about my upcoming review of the Scheu Premier II. During our exchange, I asked him to describe some of his experiences and observations with the Premier II so that I could share 'em with readers: "If you can, try to get a listen with the Mystic or Boston mat. The Mystic cleared and tightened things up without any ill effects. To me it is almost a must for this table as it took an already great sound even further by a good-sized measure. I currently have the Cartridgeman's Conductor tonearm with his MusicMaker III cartridge (Graham See Reflex phono stage) and recently bought a Denon 103 and a used 47 Labs Shigaraki phono stage..." - [continue](#)

Joseph of Soundscape HiFi in Singapore who unfortunately no longer carries Scheu but maintains one of the best sources of online information on Scheu products, chipped in with his own observations and those of customers: "I can honestly say a Premier Mk2 + 12" classic arm is sonically preferable to something like an SME 20 + SME V or Michell Orbe + SME V etc. Overall, in a neutral system, these are some of the turntables that were traded in for a Scheu here. The Classic arm is also great with the AT33-PTG and many others. It's my all-time favorite arm at its price. One guy even changed the wiring to Kondo. Denons on the other hand were less preferred by our customers, although there are die-hard users. They just don't dig into the grooves as well as the AT33PTG for old used records and end up being noisier. Totally different sound from PTG, though so it's a matter of taste."



After delivering the Premier II and ensuring it was set up optimally, Bernard left me to spin vinyl. What slab of black gold did I drop on the Premier first? Why, Hüsker Dü's 1984 post-punk classic double LP *Zen Arcade* (SST 027) of course. No audiophile records of bird song or vapid female lounge singers around here, just good ol' real music. If a piece of audio gear cannot allow me to enjoy music regardless of recording quality or pressing, it's a bust as far as I'm concerned. While I fully expect to hear the sonic limitations of a recording, I don't want to be beaten over the head with 'em.

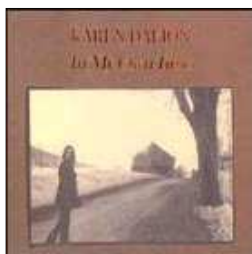


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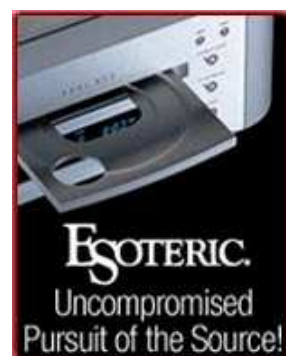
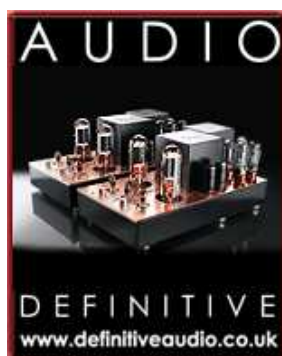
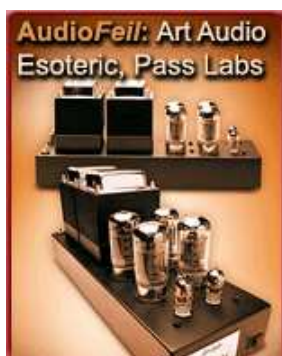
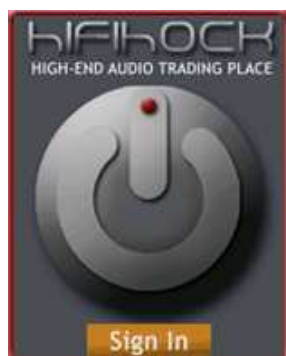


AUDIO REVIEWS

While the Premier certainly revealed *Zen Arcade*'s sonic limitations, it also revealed the power and emotion of the Hüskers at full throttle. I've never heard this album sound so visceral and solid. My eldest son who has a penchant for the likes of Metallica, Linkin Park and a sub genre of Metal accurately titled *Screamo* (I think the name says it all) was shocked. "Who are these guys?" he asked. "Were", I replied. "Hüsker Dü were cranking out tunes while the bands you listen to were still in diapers". As with Velvet Underground or The Replacements, the Dü didn't sell a lot of records but just about everyone who bought 'em formed their own bands.



The Premier II had the hairs on the nape of my neck stand on end with Karen Dalton's eerily beautiful cover of "When a Man Loves a Woman" from her *In My Own Time* LP [LITA 022]. The film-noire vibe of Stan Ridgeway's *The Big Heat* [IRS 5637] was equally well rendered. Other records that saw plenty of spin time included a pair of brilliant re-issues: Lenny's *Shostakovich 5* [Cisco/Columbia MS 6116] and Jim Hall's *Concierto* [CTI 6060] plus a terrific vinyl pressing of the Drive By Truckers' *Blessing and a Curse* [New West 50081] which positively sizzled on the Premier II. The Scheu did not favor one musical genre over another. Whatever I chose to spin was thoroughly enjoyable.

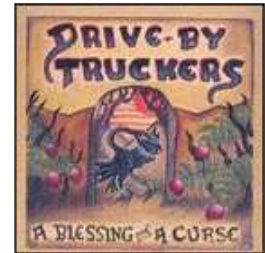


During playback, I was impressed by the Scheu's dead-quiet background and the lack of flutter or wow. It was as though some black hole sucked away all the annoying little noises one normally expects with vinyl playback. The result of this quiet backdrop was greatly improved detail retrieval over my RPM 5. The placement of performers, dimensionality and sheer physical presence all took a giant step forward. Subtleties obscured or masked by my Pro-Ject were now startlingly audible. To one degree or another, playing records involves some noise although it tends to be masked somewhat by the music and is generally easy to ignore. However, with the Premier II, no extracurricular brain activity was required. The only extraneous noise I heard during my time with the Scheu was from the recording itself. In some cases, it was the tape machine or traffic passing in front of the recording venue; or just a particularly bad pressing. Never once did I suspect the Premier II was adding anything.





In comparison, my Project RPM 5 sounded a little rougher, lacking a little in weight and suffering a far higher noise floor. I was constantly aware of low-level motor rumble and noise. The presentation of acoustic music wasn't as airy and dimensional as with the Scheu. It's still a great table that I shall keep but the Scheu surpassed it in *all* areas. Overall, I was impressed with the Scheu's way with the music. Forget the audiophile obsession with sound. The darn thing just played the tunes. I enjoyed the startlingly low noise floor and how instruments and voices emerged seamlessly from a silent noise-free backdrop with all their timbral qualities intact. I truly got more enjoyment from my records over the Scheu. It was neigh impossible to pick apart the Premier II as I couldn't maintain any degree of concentration in that regard. I just got lost in the music, which to me is about the highest compliment I can offer. There was also something endearing about the table particularly in terms of temporal flow and forward propulsion. Call it PRaT or whatever you want but music just sounded more real and *there*.



I cannot tell you how the Premier II compares to other similarly priced tables but if you currently own a modest table such as a P3 or RPM 5 and are looking for an upgrade, the Premier II should knock your socks off. Moreover, while \$4,000 seems steep for a table/tonearm combo, upon audition it comes across as a smashing good value. My only regret was not having a more resolving phono stage on hand. While Pro-Ject's Tube Box SE is a fine inexpensive stage, I certainly felt that I was not hearing the Premier II's full potential. I expect something along the lines of Graham Slee's Era Gold/Elevator combo should be a killer match. In many ways, the Scheu reminded me of my recent experience with Audiomat's Opéra Référence amp. I felt that this was the end of the line. I could settle down and get off the upgrade merry-go-round. Frankly, the Premier II could be the last table I'd ever own. I could simply spend the rest of my record spinning days experimenting with different tonearm/cartridge combinations.



Attractive to the eye and ear, the Scheu Premier II/Cantus was a joy to have in my home. I would call this a true giant killer and one of the best tables out there but frankly, I just do not have the experience yet to make that call. Ask me in a couple of more years. If you are looking to improve upon a decent mid-priced table such as a Rega P3 or Pro-Ject RPM 5, put the Premier on your list. It just might be the ticket to your own vinyl nirvana.

Paul Candy

Quality of packing: Well packed with hard and soft foam in a sturdy cardboard box.

Reusability of packing: Appears to be reusable several times.

Quality of owner's manual: While I did not receive one, emailed photos indicated detailed instructions (including pictures) for table and tonearm.

Condition of component received: Flawless.

Completeness of delivery: Perfect. Plinth and bearing assembly ship pre-assembled and turntable base ships preloaded with lead shot. In addition, table comes with a small bottle of bearing oil, roll of string and a pair of white cotton gloves.

Website comments: Needs attention. Devoid of useful information. Best current source of info including setup is via www.soundscapehifi.com/scheu-analog.htm.

Warranty: 3 years for Premier and Cantus.

Human interactions: Professional, helpful and friendly.

Pricing: Seems quite reasonable

Final comments & suggestions: Scheu needs to update their website. In addition, it might be useful to post manuals online.



Scheu Analog [website](#)
Canadian distributor's [website](#)

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