



Grandinote Shinai

A Ferrari among amplifiers

TEXT AND PHOTOS MICHEL BÉRARD

HERE IS THE GRANDINOTE SHINAI - AN OUTSTANDING COMPONENT FROM AN IMPRESSIVE LINE

I had heard the Shinai several times in Audio Shows in Montreal and Toronto and I knew what it was capable of. Each time, I was surprised by its performance. Relaxed, musical and in absolute control of all the speakers that were associated with it, therefore it was most welcome here.

As recently pointed out by Wojciech Pacuta, the editor of High Fidelity magazine (Poland), the big brother of the Shinai, the mono amplifier Demone received the perfect score of 140 points on 140 points last year from the German magazine Audio. That score has been awarded only three times since the magazine's inception 45 years ago. Shinai is part of this line of products. Doing a Google search on it you will soon find that the entire international audio press is full of praise for Shinai, repeatedly qualifying it as one of the best integrated amplifiers in the world, if not the best.

MAGNETOSOLID TECHNOLOGY - THE SUCCESSFUL FUSION OF TUBE AND TRANSISTOR ... WITHOUT TUBES.

This idea began to emerge in the early 1990s in the mind of the designer Massimiliano (Max) Magri while he was only a 20-year-old electronics student.

It was at this time that he acquired a machine for winding audio transformers for his first tube amplifiers. Even before the creation of the company, he had already come up with the name Grandinote for his components. The official launch of Magnetosolid technology took place in 1996. His first designs were based on tubes because of their sound. The typical topology of a tube amplifier uses output transformers. The Magnetosolid topology replaces

the tubes with semiconductors while maintaining the same output transformers.

This concept was going to be refined over the years. But, already at the time, it was said of Grandinote transistor amplifiers that they sounded like 300B tube amplifiers. That was in 2003. However, Magri found that his devices lacked energy and that the sound was not sufficiently controlled in comparison with the best solid-state amplifiers (transistors) in existence at the time. In 2005, he sought to correct these shortcomings and, after seven years of research and development and several prototypes, he presented the Prestigio in 2007, and Shinai in 2008.

(Note: the Prestigio is a more powerful version of the Shinai presented in two mono casings - this model is available as an alternative for those who need more power, 60W rather than 37W).

More precisely, the Magnetosolid principle comes from the fusion and interaction of semiconductors and devices based on ferromagnetism. This scheme uses output transistors loaded by a transformer with each transistor having a power supply which is totally dedicated to it. This completely eliminates the need for capacitors in the signal path.

The Shinai is a true dual mono device that has two completely separate cards (one for each channel) and requires two power cords to ensure its power. These are really two separate amplifiers in one casing.

The device does not use any feedback at all. The output stages operate in pure class A under 4 and 8 ohms.

The Shinai is equipped with very high voltage transistors operating in push-pull mode, two transistors for each channel, each transistor having its own power supply.

The loudspeaker interface is provided by a transformer produced specifically according to the very precise requi-

rements of the designer. As originally, all Grandinote transistor amplifiers today use output transformers as used in its first tube amplifiers designs.

The uniqueness of the Magnetosolid concept lies above all in the ambition to combine the advantages of tube and transistor technologies. In my opinion, Grandinote is the only manufacturer to have really achieved this «tour de force».

Just as my Polish colleague Wojciech Pacuta mentioned, when someone talks about «tube sound» versus «transistor» sound, I also associate this qualifier with a «coloured» sound.

The Shinai retains all the advantages of tubes and transistors without any of their respective shortcomings. The sound is warm, without any attenuation at either end of the sound spectrum. It does not have the coldness, thinness or roughness often associated with transistors. It has extraordinary dynamics and is able to control any type of speaker without the slightest hint of breathlessness, which is often difficult to achieve with tubes.

TECHNICALITIES

Origin: Italy

Power: 2x 37 watts (8 Ohms and 4 Ohms)

Bandwidth: 2 Hz to 240 kHz

Damping factor: greater than 150

UNPACKING AND INSTALLING

Despite its reasonable size, 318 x 196 x 473 mm, Shinai is the most compact and hefty of the devices I've tested, with its 45kg once unpacked. You have to be very fit to move it. Worth noting, the Shinai bandwidth ranges from 2 Hz to 240 kHz and its damping factor is greater than 150.

All electronic components are in my studio, separated by the wall of my living room which serves as a listening room. So I use four meter speaker cables to connect the speakers to the reference system. The advantage is that the system is totally isolated from the vibrations generated by the speakers and the sound waves.

Hooking up the Shinai may surprise some, starting with the fact that the Shinai, due to its dual mono real design, requires two power cords. Also, the location of the inputs are inverted between channels. That is to say that unlike all preamplifiers, you have to connect input 1 at the top for the right channel and at the bottom for the left channel and so on. Shinai has four sets of inputs, two single ended via RCA plugs and two balanced via XLR connectors.

The Shinai rests on four spherical aluminum feet providing efficient decoupling to minimize vibrations that may interfere with proper operation.

It may be worth mentioning that for my listening, the Shinai, like all my other components was supported by Modulom platforms which were perfectly «tuned» to the vibrations of each to allow them to deliver their full potential. A considerable improvement, so much so that I could not imagine testing a device without it being based on one of these platforms. The looks of the Shinai, like all Grandinote devices, may not appeal to everyone at first

sight, especially those who love the Scandinavian look à la Bang & Olufsen. It may take a while to get used to it. We are rather in the “concrete industrial building” look.

But we get used to it and we forgive it very quickly when it starts to sing.

Form follows function. It is serious and looks almost a little “Mad Max” nasty. Stainless steel, aluminum, imposing graphics.

On the front, there are only push buttons. Two for inputs selection, two for volume adjustment, one button to mute the device, a button for programming and an imposing power button.

There is no rotary control. A red LED display shows current functions, preset settings and sound volume. It is possible to adjust the balance of each channel separately for each of the four inputs or by remote control.

A 20-minute warm-up period is recommended.

LISTENING

Phew. From the first notes, we are immersed in unexplored territory. We are dealing with a completely different sound world on several levels (which I will describe later) after the adjustment that I had to make to allow the Shinai to express itself and to be able to immerse myself in the music.

PHASE 2 – NIRVANA

We're no longer dealing with a sound system, we're dealing with real musicians. We are no longer in a living room, we are in the concert hall or in the recording studio.

CONTROL

Shinai does not seem to have any limits on bandwidth or dynamic range. Looks like an amplifier of several hundred watts. Absolute control of the speakers without the slightest sign of breathlessness. Other high-fidelity writers have even compared it to amplifiers with 6 figure price tags such as the Soudation 710 or even the Naim Statement, Phasemation MA-1000 and the Tenor Audio 175S.

SILENCE

Another element that separates the Grandinote integrated from all other audio devices is its absolute silence. It is so quiet that it leaves room for all the music, all the nuances. Nothing hides the space between the sound layers. No other device I have tested leaves as much room for the subtle extinction of each note. That's why we hear cymbals so well, the space between each musician. Nothing escapes him. He completely extricates everything.

For so many years that I have been listening to Oregon's eponymous album, but I have never heard all the layers of sound so distinctly, as if they were separated into a multitude of slices, each reproduced to perfection and each with its own space. . We hear everything.

This quiet operation also ensures that you never feel the need to increase the volume of the device to hear the details, as subtle as they are. This is the first time I can listen to low volume music for as long and as often without feeling like it's missing.



THE CLEANSER

To better understand this notion of silence, I take the example of Pat Metheny - As Falls Wichita, So Falls Wichita Falls. On several occasions in the recording we hear announcements at an airport. I could always detect the first words of these announcements, but for the first time I could distinguish them very clearly and hear passages I had never heard before. If we add to this the intelligibility of words, it is as if we had cleaned everything around and adjusted the focus with incisive precision.

SMOOTHNESS, COHERENCE, PRECISION

Shinai searches all the details in every nook and cranny without adding any artifice, without aggressiveness and it gives us an analog performance like tube amps without ever exaggerating the medium or truncating the top of the sound spectrum. Thus, while listening to the Quartet No 1 in F Major Opus 18/1 of Beethoven interpreted by the Vegh Quartet, we clearly hear the violinist's fingers press and release the pressure on the strings. And what about the timbres of each wooden instrument, rich, natural. The cello's chest is present, precise, without exaggeration or droning.

I have often spoken of the precise location of instruments in space in several listening tests. However, nothing compares with what the Shinai delivers. It cuts through layers of sound with the precision of a surgeons scalpel to open an unparalleled sonic perspective.

IN THE CONCERT HALL

Paolo Conte's CD «Concerti» is an amalgam of live recordings from concerts held on May 28, 1985 at Teatro alle Vigne in Lodi, on June 20 at the Teatro Morlacchi in Perugia and on March 15 and 16, 1985 at the Theatre de la Ville in Paris. Shinai puts us in the heart of each of these concert halls in a confusing way. You can see the walls and feel all the space. What surprises is the physical representation of the body of the instruments, the piano and the bass, the raucous yet precise timbre of the kazoo and the applause of the spectators being so real.

DISAPPEARING

Absorbed in my listening from the beginning, I did not notice a revealing element of Shinai because it was simply not visible. I realized that from the beginning, the sound did not seem to come from my speakers at all. It's like they were two monoliths standing in front of me like two sculptures that I could very well have removed from the listening room so palpable was the sound between the speakers and all around them.

SNAP

In several recordings, small percussion instruments like claves, the sticks that are struck together for example are precise, well located in space but especially reveal outstanding dynamics.

DETAIL GALORE

Have you ever wanted your speakers to deliver a sound presentation like high-end headphones connected directly to your turntable or digital player? This experience immerses you completely in the music and gives you the smallest details. I say thank you to Shinai for carrying out this tour de force. Everything comes together with disconcerting realism. Everything, the instrument that moves, the breathing of the musicians. And always the space in which it plunges you. Listening to Andreas Vollenweider's *Caverna Magica*, the experience is striking. First of all, we hear a man and a woman entering a cave, we hear the sound of footsteps on the rough rock and the grandiose echo of the cave. We see, with our ears of course, a bird fly and cross from right to left directly in front of us. It's almost as if you have to move to avoid getting hit.

THE POWER OF THE ORCHESTRA IN ALL ITS SPLENDOR

Here Shinai shines brightly and leaves the competition far, far behind.

I listened, among other things, to three versions of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Not to mention realism, the dynamics of the piano and the realistic and imposing chest, I pay attention to the realism and strength of the percussions that spring from the recording. But no matter how, with an absolutely precise definition and a location in staggering space. They are there, far behind but present, imposing and clear. And above all, they do not veil the other instruments in any way. No entanglement. Add to that the ease of presentation. Nothing strident or aggressive even in the most impressive passages. With always a breathtaking dynamic. Shinai never crashes. His energy seems inexhaustible. I attribute this dynamic and ease to its power supply that offers amps to sell. Everything is constantly delivered accurately. The service is also three-dimensional. One is able to identify each musician distributed in his wide and deep space. The rendering goes well beyond the walls of the listening room. By closing my eyes, I find myself no longer in my apartment but in a real concert hall.

DEEP AND DEEPER

One of my favourite recordings in this chapter is Théodore Dubois's *The Seven Words of the Christ* under the label Fidelio. It's a bit of the ultimate test, with the organ going down below 16 Hertz. No other amplifier tested in my listening room has been able to deliver this key passage with as much authority, control and accuracy, and without even forcing. I must mention the impressive passage of the track number two where the mighty choir joins in and fills the room.

CHANNEL SEPARATION

The fact that Shinai has a real dual mono topology largely contributes to its performance in positioning musicians and instruments in space. On Janis Ian's recording *Breaking Silence*, once again everything is rendered with mind boggling precision. The voice of Janis well placed in front centre, the double bass behind and percussion left. We clearly hear the oscillation of the skin of the percussions.

COHERENCE

We can sum up all that has been mentioned before but the most important fact remains that everything is always coherent. All of the inherent qualities of the Shinai add up without being at the expense of each other. Everything, absolutely everything is beautiful. From weak musical passages listened to at low volume all the way to listening to massive orchestras at full blast.

SUMMING UP

Shinai is the best integrated amplifier I have heard. Possibly the best integrated in the world,

It leaves far behind much more expensive devices. Even separate components, amp / preamp. The challenge of combining the advantages of tube amplifiers and transistor amplifier is a total success.

If you want a racing amplifier. Here it is. The Ferrari of amps.

I found my Nirvana.

Bravo Massimiliano (Max) Magri.



Grandinote Shinai: Integrated Amplifier

\$18,000 (CND)

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