

There's Something in the Air

We've been waiting for a long time, but now the final version is here, and we managed to take one sample into the LP readers' custody - the new turntable from one of the industry's most innovative designers: Johnnie Bergmann

The human psyche is something whose importance and influence should never be underestimated while listening. There are many factors that have nothing to do with the actual process of hearing in the first place, but do affect our perceptions. However, this does not rule out the possibility of any exogenous manipulation, but in the case of the Bergmann turntable, I am thinking of something else: It's crucial for me in having to be absolutely sure that everything fits perfectly when listening to a turntable. There should be no "maybe I have to readjust the cartridge again", no "does the turntable stand properly?", or no "is another turntable mat probably better?". All of these things the Bergmann Galder clarifies right from the outset, thus having an extremely positive effect on the preconditions for an entirely relaxed listening.

But first, let me take you on a short excursion: More than ten years have passed, since we reviewed a Bergmann Audio turntable in our magazine. At that time, I did not have it at my fingertips, but I can remember that I found the design extremely attractive – without having heard a single tone. The turntable presented itself wonderfully reduced to a few straight lines, thus acting like the legitimate successor to the line of Braun components created by Dieter Rams, which, because of their attractive simplicity, made it into the Museum of Modern Arts in New York. Whether a Bergmann turntable will ever find its way there, or not – we'll never know, but it probably will not be the new Galder. This model in fact doesn't resemble – and that's somewhat complaining at a high level – that organic appearance of its predecessor. And there, of course, is a reason for that. Unlike the older model, the Galder is not conceived as a self-contained system, but as a turntable capable of taking up to four tonearms. And that's why it just doesn't get along without visible transitions between the turntable itself and the tonearm base. It still looks incredibly straightforward, but somewhat more "technical" than the former integrated turntable system. By implication, this also means that Bergmann now should have a separate tonearm on offer – and that's right, it's one of those wonderful, linear tracking air-bearing tonearms, about which you do not have to worry about those wicked tracking errors – see my above comments. And although I am a fervent advocate of a particular tonearm that simply ignores geometry while tracking the groove – and this, of course, is the ViVLab Rigid Float – I basically endorse being on the side of those people who consider weaknesses of a system as their motivation to eradicate them.

Not a substantially big turntable, but massive, really heavy and yet visually balanced: the Bergmann Galder

For all its compactness: The Galder turntable is a heavy chunk. Incidentally, "Galder" originates from Norse mythology, but is not the name of a deity. It denotes a powerful ritual of evocating those forces of nature that influence fate. And since wind and air play a major role within this thematic field, the product name instantly gets traceable. Because in addition to the electrical wiring – what else could you expect – also various tubes lead in and out of the turntable, being connected to a separate, definitely not undersized box, that is crammed with pumps and air reservoirs.

Apart from that, the box accommodates the motor control unit as well, which uses a correspondingly long cable to power the motor. This is a regulated DC type with tachometer control, propelling the platter by means of a relatively small pulley in combination with a flat belt. The gap between plinth and motorbase already gives you a clue: Although there is a one-piece bottom plate, the motor unit is separated and not firmly connected to the plinth. But this is only relevant in the case of having to move

the Galder, a task you certainly want to avoid given the live weight of 40 kilograms.

The platter though accounts for almost 12 kilograms and presents itself in the same matte black as both plinth and motorbase machined from die-cast aluminum. This contrasts with the matte silver parts, giving the whole a modern feel. The turntable stands on three height-adjustable feet, which are connected to the bottom plate via three ceramic balls inserted on supporting discs – a consequently hard coupling, that the comparatively high mass makes more than understandable. The platter floats on a wafer-thin cushion of air, which relieves its bearing and thus ensures minimal friction. To keep the platter at the correct height, a sophisticated system of pump, buffers, valves and controlled discharge ensures a constant flow of air. To keep the air clean and dry, it is filtered several times downstream of the pump.

These two screws serve for regulating the air feed to the air-bearings of platter and tonearm

Be that as it may, the tricky part is yet to come: In parallel to the pressurized system, there is an additional vacuum line, that aspirates the air beneath the record through the platter bearing and a perforated mat with lateral rubber lips, thus flattening out the record completely – this is design at it's best, making the usual burdensome handling with weights, clamps, or special mats a thing of the past. Ideally, a record should of course be flat by its own - but unfortunately there aren't enough of them. And believe me, it's highly satisfying watching one of your favourite records, which has seen better days in its life, being aspirated with crackling and popping noises onto the platter to quietly and perfectly lying there like new.

The back shows quite well the various feed lines that are needed. The tonearm cable though is still missing.

The vacuum, that holds down the record, is built-up through the platter spindle, but only when using the vacuum clamp the system gets sealed

For a smooth operation, the Odin tonearm is powered with the required pressure by a separate valve and tube, which is led out of the turntable's plinth. Due to the slightly weightier build, the Odin lacks a bit the elegant looks of the Magne tonearm. In return, it can be easily adjusted to all parameters, so that optimal operation is guaranteed at all times. The special spirit level, that Johnnie Bergmann has created for this purpose, is a big help: It simply is placed on the arm tube and thus allows for correct horizontal levelling. During operation, the air pressure is adjusted in such a manner that the sliding pipe of the arm is able to move freely. The actual arm tube is made of carbon fiber, while the headshell is made of aluminum. Three counterweights of different sizes allow the operation of virtually all cartridges - but in the absence of any scale, a stylus gauge is a must.

One point of criticism I would though like to apply here: The tonearm lifter is very functional in its simplicity, being just a rod in full width of the arm, rotated by a knob upwards and thus raising the arm tube. Although, when lowering it I would personally prefer to have the secure feeling of the movement itself taking place in a more controlled manner, thus avoiding the stylus unintentionally falling down on the record. Obviously, knowing about it means living by it, but that's decidedly not very smart.

From a bird's-eye view, it's apparent how simple the linear tracking air-bearing tonearm works

A tachometer-controlled DC motor drives the platter over a small pulley

These ceramic balls support the whole weight of the turntable

Pressurizing the overall system is quite simple and unproblematic: After pushing the respective start button the first time, the pressures required for operation get set – initially this is to be heard close to the turntable, but after that there is silence. But let's now get to the pleasant things: Sonically, the Bergmann just serves sensationally good. It performs in such a controlled manner, with such a clear-cut structure by maintaining at the same time its enchanting and natural character, that your search for the record-spinning all-rounder is no longer an issue.

Various buffer tanks and filters housed in the air pump enclosure ensure a uniform and clean airflow

While the background ablazes in serene tranquility, the bass extends down to abyssal and fundamental lows, and the extremely precise high frequencies enrich the sound with glaze and charisma, so there is really nothing that remains to be desired. In addition, even when depicting large ensembles, this happens with a transparency that is second to none. The fifth Beethoven Symphony with Bruno Walter conducting the Columbia Orchestra thus becomes a first-rate musical experience – and that's literally speaking, because as close to the concert experience as this you will hardly ever get. But even more frugal arrangements, such as those on the ECM recordings of the Danish String Quartet with their interpretation of traditional folk music, appear as real in their immediacy and intimacy as the music on a record can ever be.

Left hand a closer look at the PCB board containing the motor control circuitry, also housed in the enclosure of the air pump – correspondingly, long feed lines allow a remote positioning of the large box

In the foreground, the small drillings are clearly visible, through which the air is pressed for a non-contact airflow

The illusion of a soundstage-like image is just as perfect as the tonality of the instruments, even when outlining small "mistakes", such as the rasping of string bows, or fret and breathing noises of the players – preserved music can't get livelier than this!

Thomas Schmidt

Protagonists

Cartridges

- Miyajima Saboten
- Phasemation PP-500
- Murasakino Sumile

Phono preamps

- EAR 324
- Leema Elements Ultra

Loudspeakers

- Audio Physic Avantera III
- KLANG+TON „Nada“

Antagonists

Turntables

- Technics SL-1000R
- Transrotor Zet 3 mit SME 312

Played music
Danish String Quartet
Last Leaf

Ry Cooder
Bop till You Drop

Ludwig van Beethoven
Sinfonie Nr. 4 und 5

Dire Straits
Communiqué

Gustav Mahler
Sinfonie Nr. 2

Patricia Barber
Café Blue

Bergmann Galder
with Odin tonearm

- Price 15,000 euros (turntable)
 3,275 euros (vacuum hold-down)
 5,300 euros (tonearm)
- Distributor WOD Audio, Nidderau
- Phone +49 6187 900077
- Internet www.wodaudio.de
- W x H x D 480 x 365 x 190 mm
 465 x 225 x 235 mm (air pump)
- Weight approx. 38 kg
 approx. 16 kg (air pump)

On balance ...

» With the perfect combination of Galder and Odin, Johnnie Bergmann has created a turntable, that exploits the extended potential of current technologies to achieve an extremely high level of sonic quality.

