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World Premiere!

Aaron No. 3 Millennium Power Amplifier

A sensational surprise!

Review By Anthony Nicolsia

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Marita and Thomas Hoehne founded the High End Consumer Electronic Sales Company GmbH, producing audio products labeled under the name SOVEREIGN. The first amplifier back in 1986 though was actually named after its developer, Mark Neumann, who was at that time working for the Hoehne family. The company is based in the picturesque village of Elze, Germany, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hoehne, yet all the Aaron products starting in 1989 are produced at the "High End Halls" at Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands.

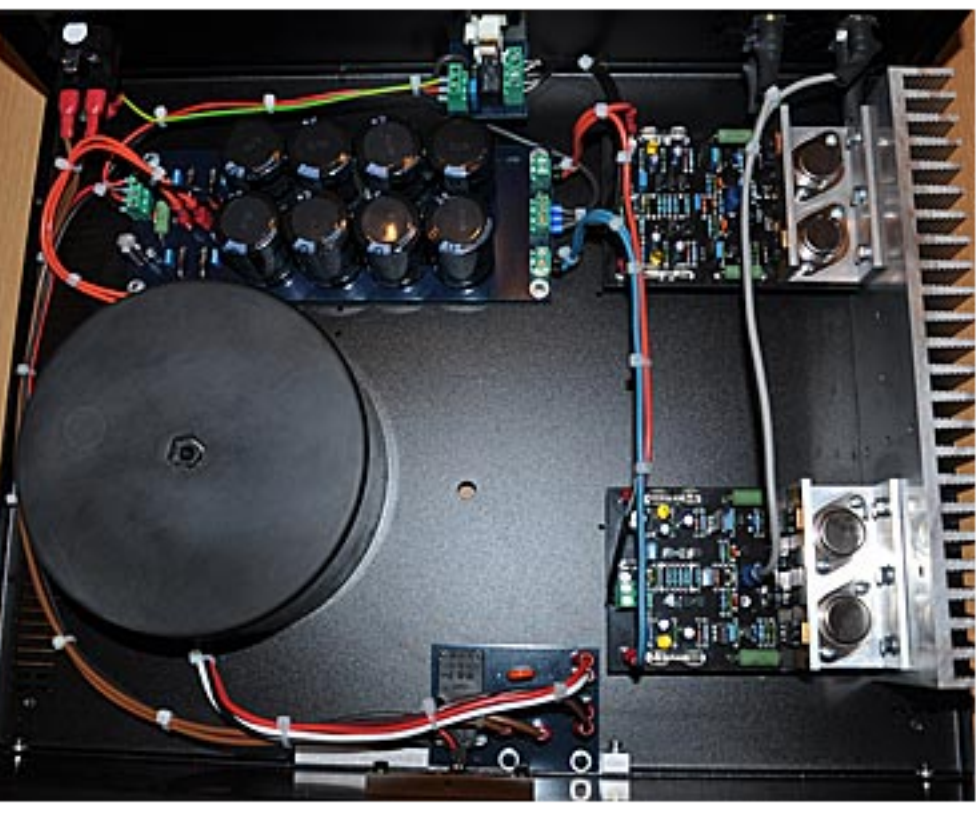
Through my e-mails with Thomas Hoehne he conveyed to me that he considers his products not only German but actually European. Looking at the pictures of the Castle Marienburg where the Hoehnes live one can see how inspiring a place this could be for the development of such quality components. SOVEREIGN still produces audio products of very high caliber while the Aaron lineup was introduced with the goal of striving to satisfy the consumers need for great sound quality at "an unbeatable price-sound ratio." Where SOVEREIGN amplifiers start at 6900 Euros (about \$8482 in US dollars) leading up to a mono block pair for 98,900 Euros (about \$121,577), the Aaron No. 3 Millennium lists for only \$3950 US dollars. By now you might be wondering why it was decided to name this lineup Aaron, being the curious type it certainly sparked my interest. The main website says people have wondered if it could be named after Elvis Presley's middle name or maybe was even taken from the old Testament. But no, for you see Thomas Hoehne felt that it should appear listed alphabetically in the same order as if being classified by sound quality, that is to say in first place. That seems like quite a tall order and given its relatively low price I did not at first take it literally. It seemed to me more appropriate to judge Aaron products comparing them to others within a similar pricing structure, but as you will see that opinion was to change rather quickly. I liked the fact that the manufacturer had the courage to name it as such. It was like a baseball player being nicknamed Homer, he had better live up to it or else face heckling from the fans wherever he would play.



"Handcrafted For The Friends Of Fine Music"

Judging by its outward appearance the Millennium is quite a simple design. On the top cover centered near the middle from left to right and front to back, is a very thick aluminum plate measuring about six inches by six inches. The name Aaron is printed on it along with the phrase "Handcrafted for the friends of fine music". This plate was setup to improve damping and control vibration, all in all a good idea that hopefully more manufacturers will adopt. Two ventilation strips can be found on the left and two more on the right side on the top cover. On the front panel you will find a relatively small cone shaped power on/off button and a blue light indicator. Above the indicator is the Aaron logo and model name printed on the face plate. No gain controls, no large exposed heat sink fins or meters of any kind to adorn this simple structure just a nice elegant design concept.

Looking at the rear of the unit things are also quite basic with an IEC power outlet, two RCA inputs and a set of gold plated speaker terminals. Taking off the cover and peering inside we find a very neat package with lots of room to expand and to maneuver about in. There were two transistors per channel as well as a large 500VA toroidal transformer (covered in a plastic casing) and the total capacitance was 80,000 microfarads (8 capacitors times 10,000 microfarads each). While not readily noticeable from the outside once inside you could see some silver colored cooling fins tucked neatly away and located on the right hand side below the ventilation strips found on the top cover of the unit. As is becoming quite customary in recent times the amplifier came with a nice set of white gloves for use when handling the front ones fingers resting on the nice finish of the amplifier. Feet were nothing out of the ordinary and you may of course decide to use after market isolation platforms or other devices of your own choosing if you like. I would listen to it first in stock form before going that route as it was impressive indeed the way it came straight from the factory (perhaps that engraved heavy plate did the job it was intended to do). It was recommended to me by Brian Ackerman of Audio Imports (Aarons North American Distributor and the person who provided my review sample) that the amplifier be left on for the all time so that was how the Millennium was used during its stay with me. Never once though did it overheat or even get hot to the touch but rather stayed very well mannered within my main listening system.



Magnepan MGIIIA Loudspeakers

And the No. 3 Millennium Rock My Listening Room

For the purposes of this review the Millennium was mated with my own Placette passive preamplifier, a pair of Magnepan Magneplanar MGIIIA loudspeakers, some assorted Cardas Audio cables (loudspeaker and power cables as well as interconnects, along with Monarchy Audio and TEK Line power cords, an Oracle Delphi MK1 turntable and a Vincent CD-S8 Hybrid HDCD CD Player. To link the system together a PS Audio power conditioner and an Audience aR2p-T power conditioner were used. My choice of using the Magnepans was done in an effort to truly test the capabilities of the Aaron No. 3 Millennium power amplifier as these 4ohm loudspeakers can be difficult to drive properly. Having previously used my Monarchy SM-70 Pro mono blocks along with their 120-Watt Class A power, driven into an 4ohm load, I was quite familiar with how they sounded with the MGIIIA's. When more power was needed, which the Magnepans seem to really thrive upon, the Threshold 800A and its 200-Watts of Class A power was brought in. While the Monarchy amplifiers sounded good the Magnepans sounded even better with the more powerful Threshold amplifier. What shocked me most however was that the Millennium with its 180-Watts into 4ohms, when paired with the Magnepans, really rocked my listening room! The music that it produced in conjunction with the Magnepans was incredible.

Let The Music Begin

The music of Buddy Guy always seems to touch my very essence. When you throw in a little bit of Eric Clapton to play alongside him well it really does not get much better than that. Yet when listening to Buddy Guy's CD Skin Deep (Silverbird 31623-2) something seemed to always be missing as it just never quite grabbed me as I felt it should have. Something that was until the Aaron No. 3 Millennium stepped into the equation. With "Too Many Tears" the sound stage lit up with clearly defined individual performances that while heard separately would also blend together sounding coherent and forceful. Here we are treated to Buddy Guy & Susan Tedeschi on vocals, Jerry Jones with sitar, Derek Trucks on slide guitar, Tom Hambridge playing drums and percussion, Willie Weeks with bass, Reese Wynans on keyboards and David Gissom playing guitar. That is a lot of music and sound for the Millennium/Magnepan combination yet they handled it all with the aplomb of true professionals. The singing voices of Buddy Guy and Susan Tedeschi came forth with great emotion giving one a connection to the song on a very personal level. Never was there a blend of musical efforts smearing music together but always that distinctly separate space between each allowing one to enjoy individual efforts within each song. This separation of musicians made for a sound stage that was precise and vast. "Show Me The Money" with Buddy Guy playing a 74 Fender Telecaster, alone was worth the price of admission and when you get down to it this song is just plain fun on all sorts of levels. The Millennium grabbed hold of the performance and took me along for this thoroughly enjoyable wild ride. For me though "Every Time I Sing The Blues" is one of those songs that finds a special place within my collection as it just seems to move me no matter how many times I listen to it. The line.

"I'm just tryin' to tell the truth
Every time I sing the blues."

This s

On the CD from 2L entitled, *The Nordic Sound* (2L-RR-SA80), there is a large variety of various great performances. On track number two is "Mozart Sonata for 2 Pianos in D Major-Allegro" featuring the Dena Piano Duo. Here one is treated to pianists Heide Gortz and Tina Margareta Nilssen. Nilssen is from Norway while Gortz was her former professor at the "Universität der Künste" in Berlin. Their style of play is designed to make two separate pianos sound as one while keeping each individuals musical expression distinctly unique. Placement of the two pianos is side by side and quite close together in physical proximity. The ability of the Aaron No. 3 Millennium to create a large three-dimensional sound stage extending well behind the loudspeakers stunned me. It allowed me to feel the presence of these life size pianos in my listening environment unlike no other amplifier had yet to accomplish. The sense of the pianists fingers pressing lightly on the keys filled my room with music of a large yet delicate nature. The speed of music emanating from each piano with a sense of depth and emotion was so powerful it reminded me of the time when I first heard this performance. When an amplifier can make a familiar CD sound new and wonderful once again then you know something great is occurring, but my joy did not stop there. For also on this CD, found on track five, is the Consortium Vocale performing "Crux Fideles". Here we can hear the voices of the choir revealing the large open spaced setting where it was recorded. A feeling of height and size was captured nicely by the Millennium as it never seemed to run out of power in my room when driving the Magnepan MGIIIA's.

This was not such an easy task as lesser amplifiers have been known to fail when called upon to do so with the Magnepans. The tone of individual voices, rows upon rows of singers and with as well as depth were layered correctly. Moving onto track seven with Kristians and Symfoniorkestret/Solistkoret performing "Islandsdromen: REQUIEM - Confutatis" the feeling produced by the percussion section sounded like a large wave of music crashing down upon my listening seat. This was especially moving when played at very high sound output levels. Both the male and female parts of the choir sang with voices overlapping yet still with each retaining their unique individuality.

My last stop on this CD was with Stigbjørn and Anders Kjellberg Nilsson performing "Plagge: Duels for 2 violins-Vivo". The sound of both violins was quite distinct as each occupied a nice three-dimensional space within the sound stage. Hearing a violin hit those high notes yet doing so without sounding shrill or etched is always a pleasure and the mark of a good amplifier. With this duel of violins the Millennium did not disappoint me as the bow rapidly moved across string and instrument as music poured forth that was both true yet alive with an accurate feeling of presence.

In keeping with a stringed instrument it was now time to move onto a much larger one, the cello. For this a visit with Yo-Yo-Ma & Friends *Songs of Joy & Peace* [Sony Classical 88697-24414-2] seemed in order. Being that this CD was very familiar territory for me changes in sound could be swiftly recognized. Right from the opening song, "Dona Nobis Pacem (Give Us Peace... with counterpoint) it was obvious a change had taken place from the perspective of listening through my own amplifiers. Here large as life was this Cello placed before me with an incredible correctness of timbre occupying a space almost as real as if it was actually playing in front of me. Not only can one feel each movement of the bow upon the strings but as Yo-Yo-Ma presses his fingers on the fingerboard one can hear the pitch changing and feel the vibrations from inside the belly of the instrument. This performance sent chills down my spine and a warm glow to my heart. With "You Couldn't Be Cuter" featuring Diana Krall (Vocals and Piano), John Clayton (Acoustic Bass) and of course Yo-Yo-Ma (Cello) we find a very playful style of song. The Cello sounded so lifelike and full of expression as if it were a human voice singing in a duet with Diana Krall rather than an instrument accompanying her. Piano and acoustic bass both are shown with good presence and vocals were alive and detailed. Before leaving this CD behind a visit to "Invitation al Danzon" featuring Yo-Yo-Ma (cello) PaquitoD'Rivera (clarinet) and Alon Yamaï (piano) was essential. All three instruments came together in a performance that was not only a pleasure to hear but also a challenge to the Millennium. No common as these unique performances are showcased together on one large sound stage with each instrument remaining quite separate. With the Millennium all the small nuances that make up a great performance can be heard in detail, not a small feat for any amplifier to pull off. PRAT (pace, rhythm & Timing) are done right and I wished this song would never end. All in all a beautiful piece upon which to leave this CD behind and to move ahead to some vinyl selections of a different variety.

Spinning Vinyl with "Millennium" Power

Whenever it is time to vicariously experience a Broadway Show out comes my 42nd Street [RCA RED SEAL CBL1-3891] record, an original 1960 Broadway cast recording. Having lived near New York City for many years this record reminds me of the many live performances both on and off Broadway it was my privilege to attend in the years before moving to California. On the opening of "Overture Audition" with horns playing the performance felt exciting and alive. The Millennium offered a good compromise between the clarity and power of solid-state with the texture that comes from a quality tube amplifier. The horns had that fully bodied effect while the tapping of feet from the chorus line was nicely captured as it interacted with the floor giving one an alive presence to it. You could hear the sound of a hollow stage beneath the dancers' feet echoing with each step. Vocals were open and spacious as if performed in front of a large audience within a great theater. Of course what would such a magnificent performance be without proper layering of individual rows within this large cast of dancers. As they tap danced throughout the record the Millennium produced a sound stage both wide and deep that lent a proper portrayal to this original Broadway performance. As for vocals it was with Bonnie Raitts *Nick of Time* [Capitol Records C1-31268] album where it was showcased just how good the Millennium could sound. On "Nick of Time" not only was the inner most intricacies of her powerful voice exhibited but we are also given a very revealing insight into vocal texture as well, while the solid presence of Paulinho Da Costa on Congas and Ricky Fataar on drums/percussion helped to highlight this spectacular song. While not overpowering in its present use this discussion were natural sounding in content and realistic in tone. Finally a short journey to Miles Davis on *Kind Of Blue* [Columbia PC 5163] was in order. "So What" is the opening song and my favorite piece from this vinyl record. Here the Millennium brought out the speed and clarity of the trumpet while giving one a good sense of true timbre from the accompanying piano and bass. A great album and an excellent presentation of it were given with the aid of the Millennium amplifier.

Conclusion

After reading this review it should be obvious what my feelings are towards the Aaron No. 3 Millennium Power Amplifier. It did some very special things within my review system and when placed alongside my other components only made them sound the better for it. My Magnepan loudspeakers seemed to love this pairing and gave an even better three-dimensional presentation than was normal, with music sounding fuller and more true to life. Being 4ohm loudspeakers they place a much heavier demand on power amplifiers then 8ohm loudspeakers yet as difficult to power as they were the Millennium never so much as whimpered. While it is not easy to dig out lower bass notes with the Magnepans I felt the Millennium did an excellent job of giving me almost all of what they were capable of. This was one amplifier that never got hot to the touch (not even warm), gave me no problems and always sounded at its best regardless of the musical experience it was called upon to replicate. This is not a product for audiophiles only but rather for anyone who loves good music. It transformed my CD/vinyl collection into one where I wanted to stay up all night listening to them all over again as if again for the very first time. This was one of those difficult pieces for me to review as sending it back will surely leave me wanting for that special enjoyment it brought to my audio system and into my home. It will be hard to listen to certain songs again knowing how good they should sound given the right associated equipment, namely the Aaron No. 3 Millennium Power Amplifier. If you notice that no where in this review is there a mention of "at this price point". That is because it was that good regardless of its modest cost of \$3950 and could easily be compared with others costing considerably more. If called upon to use only one word to describe my feeling for the Aaron it would have to be "Bravo". This is one of those amplifiers that you buy and hold onto for a very long time while you just sit back and "Enjoy the Music".



The Listening Environment

The review room is eighteen feet eight inches long by thirteen feet wide with loudspeakers and equipment kept on the short wall. The cathedral ceiling starts at eight feet and slopes up-wards to thirteen feet at its peak in the middle spanning across the short length of the room for the full thirteen feet width. The hardwood floor has a nine by six foot oriental rug lying down the long way facing toward the system placed dead center in between, yet not under, the listener and the review equipment. The room has no doors but there are two openings. One opening is in front of the right loudspeaker giving access to the hallway while the other is behind the listening position which opens into a formal dining area. The room is treated with three floor standing acoustical panels whose placement varies depending on which loudspeakers are used and their position within the room. All the audio equipment is located in a Cherry Synergy Twin S30 Salamander audio rack placed about a foot away from and in the middle of the short wall opposite the listening position.

Review Equipment

Placette Passive Preamplifier
Monarchy Audio SM70-PRO CD Solid-State Class A Amplifiers
Threshold 800A power amplifier
Vincent CD-S8 Hybrid HDCD CD Player
Oracle Delphi MK1 Turntable, Grace 707 Tonearm with custom made interconnects
Audio-Technica Prestige AT-SC10 Moving Coil Cartridge
Magnepan Magneplanar MG IIIA's
Audience aR2p-T power conditioner
PS Audio UPC-200 Power Conditioner
PS Audio Power Port Receptacle
Two Blue Circle Audio Mk III Power Line Conditioners
Loudspeaker Cables: Cardas Golden Presence (2 pairs running bi-wired)
Interconnects: Cardas Musician's Reference (2 pairs)
Power Cords: Cardas Cross (1)
Cardas Golden (2)
TEK Line PC-8 Signature (1)
Monarchy Audio AC-1 (1)

Cherry Synergy Twin S30 Salamander audio rack

My Ratings

Please take into consideration that the equipment under review is being measured in my room, with my equipment and heard through my ears. As always you should be the final judge as to what works for you in your environment and measured against what traits you value most. The following was how I rated the equipment based on a rating system that does not take in to consideration the cost of the product, until the very last question, "Value For The Money". Before that all products are rated against others in its category, regardless of financial considerations with a highest rating of 5.

Tonality	★★★★
Sub-bass (10Hz - 60Hz)	★★★★
Mid-bass (80Hz - 200Hz)	★★★★
Midrange (200Hz - 3,000Hz)	★★★★
High Frequencies (3,000Hz On Up)	★★★★
Attack	★★★★
Decay	★★★★
Inner Resolution	★★★★
Soundscape Width Front	★★★★
Soundscape Width Rear	★★★★
Soundscape Depth Behind Speakers	★★★★
Soundscape Extension Into Room	★★★★
Imaging	★★★★
Fit And Finish	★★★★
Self Noise	★★★★
Value For The Money	★★★★

Specifications

Type: Solid-state stereo amplifier
Output Power: 2 x 100 Watt at 8 Ohm (180 wpc 4 Ohm and 320 wpc at 2 Ohm)
Maximum Continuous Current: 6 Amperes
Maximum Pulsed Current: 20A (100ms burst)
Distortion THD: 0.0087% (8 Ohms at 5 Watt)
Distortion THD: 0.014% (8 Ohms at 5 Watt)
Hum And Noise Level: -99.7dB ref. Max. output level
Bandwidth: DC to 160 kHz (-3dB)
Gain: 50x = 34dB 600mV for max output
Input impedance: 47 kOhms
Damping Factor: 600
Slew Rate: 23V/uS
Power Supply: 500VA toroidal transformer and 8 x 10,000uf
Inputs: Two channel via gold plated RCA
Loudspeaker Outputs: two pairs pairs via gold plated binding posts
Dimensions: 440 x 108 x 375 (WxHxD in mm)

No.3 Millennium is available in the following finishes:
Brushed aluminum in night black color
Brushed aluminum in Aaron silver color
Other colors are available for additional charge

Warranty: Two years
Price: \$3950

Company Information

Aaron is a subdivision of German manufacturer Sovereign
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Website: www.hifi.net

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