

Audio Files

Music Hall RDR-1 tabletop radio

By Ken Micallef

Ever since Henry Kloss revealed his Tivoli Audio Model One radio to a hitherto unknowing public, tabletop radios have seen a surge in sales like fine wine to well-heeled city slickers. Kloss's little-box-that-could was a splendid feat of engineering know-how, a tiny cabinet that produced a massive, warm sound. Forget that plasticity, overrated, overpriced radio from Bose (who claim transmission line speaker design as something new), Tivoli provided great sound for not much bucks. After the Tivoli everyone got in on the act, from Boston Acoustics to Cambridge SoundWorks. Add Roy Hall's Music Hall to that equation and you have high-end sonics brought to the table top domain.

Music Hall is renown in serious audio circles for its ability to offer excellent value-for-dollar lines like Epos speakers and Creek amps along with their own brand of high quality turntables and CD players. Music Hall products regularly receive praise and recommended status in audiophile rags like *Stereophile* and *The Absolute Sound*. But even if you can't spend a month's salary on a turntable cartridge, Music Hall's \$199 RDR-1 "Synthesized Tuner" delivers seriously good sound on a budget.

First of all, you may wonder, "why do I need to get rid of my old college boombox?" The old credo "garbage in, garbage out" applies. If you like the treble deficient, bass plodding and the frankly, inhuman sound of a boombox designed more for sporting events and street parties than home listening, by all means, scrape that crud off your ghetto

blaster and let her rip. But if you are a listener for whom the music matters, as well as the need to hear local news, talk shows, jazz and symphonies and even a morning wakeup call delivered as the artist intended, the Music Hall will meet your more, er, refined needs.

Meant for a bedside, kitchen or den setting, the RDR-1 features a very large LCD display, full remote control AM/FM tuning (via a remote no larger than a credit card), clock/alarm, variable bass and treble controls, inputs for iPod or CD player, and myriad station presets, all housed in a handsome 5.5 lb wooden cabinet (which aids the radio's full rich sound)!

Other features include manual tuning for you Luddites, a 3-inch full range speaker with enlarged magnet, a record output jack should you choose to record a program to an external device, and a stereo headphone jack for private late night listening.



I loved the Music Hall's remote. It was so tiny and easy to operate, I found scanning for stations was almost as fun as listening. And with the unit's stepped treble and bass contour controls, ranging from -7 to +7, it was very easy to establish the proper EQ, as it were, for individual styles of music.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about the Music Hall RDR-1, besides its exceptional reception, is its breathtaking bass response. Don't be fooled by its lone 3-inch speaker. And never mind that some of the greatest recordings of all time were originally recorded in mono (from the first five Beatles albums to Phil Spector to some early Blue Notes), the Music Hall's speaker delivers an exceptionally broad frequency range with a tactile, warm, human quality that is extremely engaging. On some tunes featuring walking bass, I had to turn the bass down! The RDR-1 also excelled at delivery clear, silvery treble response, elucidating acoustic piano, guitar, snare drum and cymbals. Listening to New Jersey's WBGO FM (which I can never pick up with any other radio in the house), I reveled in all manner of acoustic jazz via the wholly satisfying RDR-1. Bass could be a bit gluey sounding at times (causing me to simply adjust the level from a maniacal +7 to +5), but even then acoustic bass solos were crisp, pungent, and again, surprisingly full bodied and extended.

Hearing Sammy Davis singing a fantastic "A Woman is a Sometime Thing" (from *Porgy and Bess*) fronting a big band had me reaching to turn up the volume, always a good sign (though I wish it would go louder). Overall, this was a superb presentation of a full bodied recording that left nothing to the imagination.

The RDR-1 picked up a broad range of stations and revealed the sonic differences between them. AM talk radio sounded appropriately noisy, hip-hop and country stations were compressed and dynamically challenged, classic rock was tweaked at the frequency extremes, classical stations presented a balanced tone through the sonic spectrum.

Audio nerds love to talk about the "soundstage," which is the actual height and depth of the image a stereo produces. The bigger the soundstage, the more closely the music will sound like a flesh and blood band

of musicians in your living room. Sitting on my kitchen sink blasting out towards my computer work station, the RDR-1 presented a totally believable soundstage, one that was much bigger, top to bottom, than the radio itself. How do they do it? Old fashioned radio principles like an enlarged magnet and a wooden cabinet aid in bass response and overall projection, while computer synthesis and high quality parts add the finishing touches, no doubt. The Music Hall RDR-1 is an outstanding performer and for barely 200 smackers, an audio bargain.

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