

THE ABSOLUTE SOUND MAGAZINE | 2022



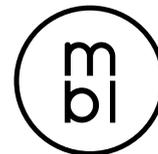
MBL is honored to have received The Absolute Sound's 2022 Editor's Choice Awards for the following twelve products. Many thanks to TAS for the recognition.





Radialstrahler System 101 X-Treme MKII

Comprising two Radialstrahler columns and two outboard, powered subwoofer stacks (with six 12" woofers in each stack), the 101 X-tremes are giants. Expensive giants. But until you find a speaker system that sounds more like the real thing (on every kind of music) for less money... well, you're gonna have to settle for second best. As good as cones-in-a-box speakers have gotten to be, nothing else, dynamic or planar, sounds like these gargantuan Radialstrahlers, because very little else projects its energy from top to bottom throughout a true 360 degrees, like instruments themselves do. As a result, the 101 X-tremes simply own the third dimension. What JV said in his original review of the X-tremes a decade ago still holds true. Listening to every other transducer is like going to a movie of a concert—a two-dimensional medium trying to imitate a three-dimensional one. Listening to the 101 X-tremes is like going to the concert itself. JV, 301 \$317,500



Radialstrahler 101 E MKII

Always the thrill rides of the high-end audio amusement park, with sensational dynamic range, superb transients, high resolution of inner detail, and the most surround-like soundstaging this side of a full-bore home-theater system, the four-way, omnidirectional MBL 101 Es had three weaknesses: Their ported bass was a bit overblown, their upper midrange could be a bit bright, and their imaging at centerstage could be a little vague. The Mk II version of this unique omni loudspeaker ameliorates these problems, without losing the unique Radialstrahler virtues. The result is a genuine improvement in a genuine classic. Though not a word we often use in audio criticism (more's the pity), the MBL 101 E Mk IIs are more plain fun to listen to (on more music) than just about anything else out there, short of their big (and much more expensive) brothers, the MBL X-tremes. JV, 286
\$84,500



Radialstrahler 120

The omnidirectional MBL 120 has been specially engineered for medium-sized rooms— and in such environs it sounds fabulous. The soundstage it throws has never been more holographic or enveloping. More extended across the frequency spectrum and far less colored in the bass than the 121, it is a more refined speaker in every category. The best small MBL yet. NG, 228 \$24,900 (stands, \$1,850)



Radialstrahler 126

Marking MBL's entry level for omnidirectional speakers, the Corona Line Radialstrahler 126 three-way contains much of the DNA of its bigger, upper-tier siblings, but brings the cost of acquiring MBL magic way down. The Radialstrahler designs are painstakingly handcrafted in Deutschland and feature intricately assembled omnidirectional drivers—in the 126 model, the midrange and tweeter—the latter reproducing the sweetest, smoothest upper octaves imaginable with effortless openness, detail, and delicacy, sans beaminess, edginess, or harshness. With a pair of 5-inch push-push woofers inside and a rear port, the 126s also reach deeper into the lower octaves than expected, and overall coherence is exemplary. Rich in reach-out-and-touch resolution and utterly convincing instrumental tones and textures, the 126s work within the room (with proper setup) to create a holographic and immersive listening experience. What's not to love? Forthcoming \$from 12,900 (stands from \$1,350)



Preamplifier 6010 D

This superb solid-state preamp has a noise floor so incredibly low that it consistently resolves fine harmonic and dynamic details that simply aren't audible through other great preamps. At the same time its transient speed and authority are highly realistic. To ice the cake, it is absolutely neutral in tonal balance, with excellent imaging and soundstaging, and superior ambience retrieval. One of JV's references. JV, 164
\$30,000



Mono Power Amplifier 9008 A

The massive, high-current, high-bandwidth, high-power (440W into 8 ohms, 840W into 4 ohms, 1000W into 2 ohms), very-low-distortion, Class AB 9008 A monoblock amplifier sits just behind MBL's even more massive and powerful 9011 monoblock in the company's Reference Line. Both amps were designed by Jürgen Reis, which is tantamount to saying that both amps are bullet-proof technical and sonic marvels. Built using the finest parts, the 9008 A is a beast with a velvet voice. Seemingly inexhaustible speed, power, and plumb-the-depths resolution are here mated to a dark, rich, beautiful tonal palette. The result is something very like what you hear with Soudution's finest amps—a gorgeous bottom-up presentation with the solidity of an ebony pillar. Perfect for any of MBL's own speakers, including the 101s and the X-tremes, and swell with anything else. One of JV's references. Forthcoming \$68,000/pr.



Preamplifier N11

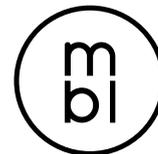
With seven inputs (five RCA, two XLR) and seven outputs (four RCA, three XLR) as well as an optional phono stage, the Noble Line N11 is equipped to handle just about everything in your system. What makes this single-stage preamp stand out is its remarkable “unity gain” volume control, which lowers the amount of boost applied to incoming signals and thereby audibly lowers noise, increases transparency and resolution, and expands dynamic range. A sonically remarkable bit of engineering. JV, 287

\$16,500



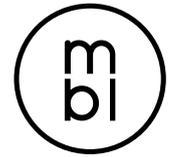
Mono Power Amplifier N15

Class D amplifiers have come a long way since JV reviewed several of the first high-end samples way back when. This latest version, from MBL's engineering genius Jürgen Reis, is not only flat-out powerful (560W/36A into 4 ohms); it is also (unlike first-generation D) relatively load-, level-, and frequency-independent. Sweet on top and a shade bottom-up in balance, the N15 is not the last word in resolution or treble extension (even in the MBL line), but then it doesn't cost what that last word costs. What it is is unfailingly enjoyable, powerful, and musical, fully capable of a realism that raises goosebumps and of a soundfield of head-slapping breadth, width, and depth. JV, 287 \$19,900/pr.



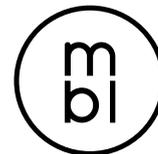
CD-DAC C31

In today's computer-driven marketplace the C31 CD player can just as reasonably be considered a "DAC with transport." Either way, its performance is uncompromising. With Red Book discs the slotdrive transport gets a slight nod for its more intimate and lush perspective; however, with 24-bit/96kHz material the asynchronous USB wins hands down. A jewel of a player. NG, 228 \$9,600



Stereo Power Amplifier C21

Sounding more like a fine linear amp than the hybrid-switching amp it is, the 180Wpc C21 offers much of the sweetness, air, and texture (if not the full measure of swat) of MBL's own Reference line 9011 amps. Its top end, the region where Class D once struggled, is smooth and extended. Its lows are elegantly controlled but not over-torqued; instead, there's a bit of velvety bloom. An amp that can proudly stand next to the best in its class. NG, 228
\$9,600



Preamplifier C11

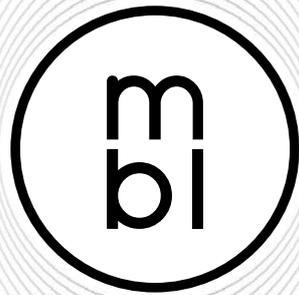
With civilized sonics, both airy and open, dynamics that are lively, and dimensionality and imaging that are exceptional, the C11 is a joy to use in concert with other Corona gear, where control and communication via Ethernet link is glitch-free. It is also equipped with one of the most sonically transparent analog volume controls (via a motorized potentiometer) that we've come across. NG, 228

\$9,200



Integrated Amplifier C51

With its soft, understated lines, svelte controls, versatile connectivity, and jewelry-like finish, it's easy to misjudge the depth, complexity, and sonic excellence of the C51—a 180Wpc, modified Class D tour de force. It has the touch of the classicist in the emphasis it places on the finest inner details; its resolution of acoustic space is almost eerie in specificity. Its top-end is top-notch—airily extended with none of early-era Class D's darkness and constriction. A triumph in its category. NG, 243
\$11,600



This changes everything!