

# Home, Home on LaGrange – living with the Brinkmann LaGrange turntable

by Dave Davies

For years I've owned and treasured a Michell Gyrodek. Modified with the Orbe kit and with a restored and Incognito wired Mission Mechanic and Clearaudio Signature cartridge it has delivered sterling service and proved highly enjoyable with whatever vinyl I challenged it. However, whilst the Michell had remained a constant over the years I have improved other aspects of my system. The old Meridian amps have been replaced with two Michell Stereo Alecto's and an Orca pre-amp (itself recently improved with a Trichord 'Never-Connected' supply). The much-loved Michell ISO has gone and has been replaced with a Trichord Delphini 2 phono stage. My Ruark Paladin speakers have been superseded by Audioplan Kontrast III's, with Audioplan's hose-like but superb LS-16 speaker cables and Super AF interconnects used throughout. My Quadraspire racks have also been retired in favour of a Hutter Racktime system. With literally everything else changing, the dear old Gyrodek was beginning to look a little long in the tooth.

Now I don't think there's ever been a more tempting combination of decks, arms and cartridges on the market but of course for the unwary this can mean an equivalent quantity of pitfalls. I only have to pause and shudder at the mistaken purchases I've made in the past. You know the story: it sounded oh so good in the dealers and the reviews in 'Audio Envy' magazine were so compelling that I just had to have it.

The disappointment usually set in within a week or two of purchase usually accompanied by a large dose of incredulity – it can't possibly be that bad can it? This was invariably followed by a month or so of my proving to myself just what a mistaken purchase it was before the offending hardware hit the 'for sale' columns. I'll name no names but I know that several thousand



unnecessary pounds have left my wallet over the years often much to the Editor's amusement. Well I hope I've learned my lesson now and my first action was to consult the Ed re this challenge. The Brinkmann LaGrange was a front runner among the options we discussed, and spurred on by a re-read of Jason's review (issue 24) I quickly lined up a demo at Walrus Systems.

My immediate impression before even a note of music was played was that if anything Jason's rave review had understated the constructional beauty of the deck – it simply oozes class from the black mirror finish of the glass platter surface to the quality of the (distinctly) Breuer-like 10.5 tonearm to

the overall fit n'finish. 'Wife acceptance factor' also came into play immediately since the Brinkmann, even allowing for the essential stone base, occupies a much smaller footprint than the Gyrodek and pretty as that deck is, the Brinkmann has an understated almost sculptural quality to it that's in another class altogether. It was just as impressive in action and entirely consistent across the wide range of music we played and very soon after this session I had determined that this was the deck for me.

Herr Brinkmann builds to order so there was a delay of several weeks from placing the order. Time to build up a good head of eager anticipation. Finally the wait was over and the deck having been beautifully set-up by Les at Walrus before being carefully disassembled to the minimum

number of pieces for transport and repacked, was ready for collection. Nevertheless it was a fraught time driving home with this precious cargo nestling heavily on the back seat: If I was ever going to get rear-ended, this was bound to be the day. Fortunately I was neither hit by a car nor dropped it on the drive and the various boxes were safely deposited on the listening room floor. Oh and incidentally the quality of build is carried right through to the packaging with, for example, a miniature aluminium flight case for the cartridge and a well-crafted wood case for ▶

the arm and set-up tools. The solid stone support for the deck (which is strongly recommended) is 60 x 40cm's, although I went for a slighter smaller footprint. Brinkmann recommend granite although Les finds slate even better. Given that my local stonemason could only source granite in the available time I took the pragmatic route. A beautifully polished and levelled slab of black granite awaited the deck.

Given that Les had mounted and carefully aligned the cartridge and fully set up the arm, getting started was simplicity itself. The power supply was sited, the sub-chassis and arm placed on the granite base and the heavyweight (16kg of metal

from the off, but after a week or so of running in it was time for a final adjustment. Brinkmann supply a card strobe and an Allan key and it was a very simple matter via two apertures at the rear of the motor base to fine adjust the speeds for 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  and 45rpm. That's it. The deck relies on sheer mass for isolation, a sharp tap with a fingertip on the platter delivers no sound but my squeal of pain, and given that there's no suspension to worry about there's nothing else to do but enjoy the music.

So, what's it like in operation? Well, everything Jason said is

Every aspect of operation has been thoroughly thought through and outstanding engineering applied to realise the design. In short, it's a joy to use. Of course, however slick it is in operation that's all merely a means to an end: so how does it sound?

First up it's refreshingly un 'hi-fi' and almost understated in its performance. What it does do is to calmly wring the best from every disk I threw at it. With the old Gyro I had a number of outstanding disks that would really



composite - aluminium, lead, and copper), platter carefully lowered into place. The freestanding motor unit was then sited a centimetre or so from the platter, power leads connected to the motor and an additional lead to the turntable's base to power the miniature heater that strictly controls bearing tolerance. The thin round section belt was popped on, fitting snugly into the groove around the platter circumference and the motor positioning finely adjusted to ensure a tight but not too tight tension. A pair of Cawsey STC silver cables with locking plugs (also supplied by Walrus) hooked up the deck to the Delphini. Switch on and that was almost it. The deck sounded great

borne out in practice. The clamp spins slickly into place, tightly locking the disk to the platter, the touch-sensitive switches for speed selection and off operate with the merest hint of a fingertip setting the platter in motion. With all that mass to shift it takes a few seconds to get up to speed but in practice this is insignificant. By the time the arm's aligned and lowering commenced the platter is up to speed. Oh, and another testament to the deck's quality is that apart from the light patterns on the disks surface, it's very difficult to tell the platter's spinning so silent, smooth and vibration-free is its operation. For such a costly device, this really is the most user-friendly deck I've owned.

shine with the deck:  
Discs like Rockin' Jimmy and the Brothers of the Night or the Speakers Corner Ella Fitzgerald *Gershwin box set*. Everything sounded at the very least okay but these were among a favoured few demo disks delivering a level above its day-to-day performance. The Brinkmann by contrast, is much more consistent across every disc and type of music. It levels the playing field. Take a less than perfect recording of an incendiary performance like my mono original of Georgie Fame and The Blue Flames *Rhythm and Blues at The Flamingo* (Columbia 33SX 1599 if you can find it). Now this is very far from a great recording: thin, muffled it was nevertheless possible to listen through the dire recording quality and enjoy the music on the Gyro. On the Brinkmann however whilst it won't (and can't) ▶

make a poor recording great it digs so much deeper into the recording. The cymbal work opens out, the drive of the band and Fame's vocals are that much clearer and I feel like I'm in the club with the band rather than sitting next door listening through a cup pressed to the wall.

The Brinkmann performed similar magic with a treasured performance of Stravinsky chamber music (DG 2530 551). This bog-standard pressing contains some lovely work from The Boston Chamber Players, but in keeping with much DG output is a little thin and bright. The Brinkmann manages to play down the negatives here whilst setting the musicians in a more convincing acoustic than the Gyro ever managed.

of the pressing, the Brinkmann delivers a convincing musical performance every time. Sure the very best recordings will sound great, but the Brinkmann delivers much greater musical enjoyment across my entire record collection, which it has effectively delivered to me afresh. When compared with the Gyro (bearing in mind that this is



Most importantly each nuance of their performance and the character of their instruments is much better wrung from this pressing. Result: much greater musical pleasure. And in excellent recordings The Brinkmann is hugely enjoyable whether tackling early music like *Villancicos*, jazz such as The Analogue Productions re-issue of Basie's *Farmers Market Barbeque* or a hard-driving band like the wonderful Diverse Vinyl pressing of Frank Black's *Show Me Your Tears*. Almost regardless

hardly a fair comparison given that it's a suspended deck with a totally different arm and cartridge, and at much less than half the price of the Brinkmann), the LaGrange is more solid and capable across the range. Bass is less obviously there until a deep note comes along and you feel it rather than hear it. It digs much deeper down than the Gyro and much more cleanly. Imaging is more precise, the midrange less emphasised and more naturally part of the mix, timing much improved and the background more silent. Surface noise on all but the worst

'Oxfam rejects' is simply not a serious issue.

Further improvements? At some stage it may be worth my trying Les's recommendation of a slate base for the deck and, being absolutely correct I really ought to consider trying a set of Audioplan Super X wires in replacement for the Cawsey's. The Brinkmann/EMT cartridge could also be replaced with something more exotic and I could also consider the optional Brinkmann tube PSU,

but frankly I'm so content with the superb, unflappable performance of this machine that I just can't be bothered. It looks gorgeous. It does its job, and it does it supremely well time and time again. Sure

there are a few even better decks out there for even more money, but for me and at anything around this price point (and despite a recent price increase), I know of nothing better. I look forward to a very long and very happy relationship with my Brinkmann.



#### Prices:

LaGrange turntable: £5,995.00

Brinkmann 10.5 tonearm: £2,400.00

Brinkmann/EMT cartridge: £1,500.00

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