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# THETA'S PROMETHEUS MONOBLOCK



LARRY GREENHILL

# Theta Digital Prometheus

## MONOBLOCK POWER AMPLIFIER

Several seconds after I began listening to it, I knew that Theta Digital's Prometheus monoblock amplifier (\$12,000/pair) was different from other amplifiers. The violins and brass were more dynamic, and had more pace. The orchestra sounded more three-dimensional, depicted in relief by a degree of hall ambience I hadn't heard when I played the same recording through my reference solid-state stereo amplifier, a Mark Levinson No.334.

I've experienced other such "revelations" on first hearing a new audio component. Sometimes this first impression is accurate, as with the unique transparency of Day Sequerra's Reference FM tuner. Sometimes it's misleading, such as the strong room lock in the bass response with pedal notes of pipe organs I heard through Escalante Design's Fremont loudspeakers—and later discovered was a serious coloration that troubled higher-frequency sources like voices and piano.

My first impression of the Theta was all the more interesting to me because the Prometheus has a class-D output section. In his review of MBL's Corona C15 class-D monoblock, John Atkinson noted that the "unique selling propositions of a class-D amplifier are that it is efficient, lightweight, and inexpensive."<sup>1</sup> In his review of Anthem Statement's M1 class-D monoblock, Kalman Rubinson wrote that "everyone acknowledges the advantages of the [class-D] technology in terms of efficiency and ecological benevolence, but so far, neither has captured the souls of aficionados who demand cutting-edge sound regardless of the cost, whether in dollars or degrees."<sup>2</sup> Although the MBL

Corona C15 (\$24,000/pair) won JA's qualified praise, other class-D monoblocks have not fared so well, including the relatively inexpensive Anthem Statement M1 (\$6998/pair) and the cost-no-object Mark Levinson No.53 (\$50,000/pair).<sup>3</sup>

### Theta Digital & the Hypex Ncore NC1200 amplifier

Because class-D amplifiers generate high levels of ultrasonic and RF energy, such designs typically employ a passive low-pass filter between their output devices and output terminals. This filter needs to be tuned to a single load impedance. Speakers that have a different impedance may cause the amplifier to prematurely roll off the top octave—or, much worse, the filter's maximum effect peaks above the audioband.

To address this problem, in 2001, while working at Philips, Dutch engineer Bruno Putzeys developed a class-D output stage as a cheap drop-in replacement for linear amplifiers. "What Bruno did," Jeff Hipps, marketing director of Theta Digital told me, was to find "a way to include [the] load in the filter circuit." As a result, this amplifier design, which Putzeys dubbed Universal class-D (UcD), was "completely load agnostic [because its] frequency response is load invariant." The UcD, with its six-transistor comparator circuit, served as the basis of the more developed Linear Analog Switching Amplifier (LASA) output-circuit modules found in MBL's Corona C15 amplifier.

Later, while working at Hypex, Putzeys developed a second-generation design, the Ncore, in which the six transistors of the UcD's comparator circuit grew to 10. Putzeys named his new amplifier circuit the NC1200 because its maximum power rating is 1200W into 2 ohms. It is said to achieve 93% efficiency at full power, has a 38A output current capability, comfortably handles 98V rail voltages, and employs extensive, microprocessor-controlled error protection. It is faster and handles smaller signals than

1 *Stereophile*, June 2014; [www.stereophile.com/content/mbl-corona-c15-monoblock-power-amplifier](http://www.stereophile.com/content/mbl-corona-c15-monoblock-power-amplifier).

2 *Stereophile*, December 2012; [www.stereophile.com/content/anthem-statement-m1-monoblock-power-amplifier](http://www.stereophile.com/content/anthem-statement-m1-monoblock-power-amplifier).

3 Reviewed by Michael Fremer in *Stereophile*, December 2012; [www.stereophile.com/content/mark-levinson-no53-reference-monoblock-power-amplifier](http://www.stereophile.com/content/mark-levinson-no53-reference-monoblock-power-amplifier).

## SPECIFICATIONS

**Description** Solid-state monoblock power amplifier. Inputs: single-ended (RCA), balanced (XLR). Outputs: 2 pairs Cardas binding posts. Output power (20Hz-20kHz, 0.01% THD+N): 250W into 8 ohms (24dBW), 500W into 4 ohms (24dBW), 850W into 2 ohms (23.24dBW). Frequency

response: 20Hz-20kHz at 300Wpc, +0/-0.5dB. Input impedance: 47k ohms. Output impedance: 0.05 ohm, 20Hz-20kHz. Damping factor: 2500 (minimum), 20Hz-20kHz. Input sensitivity: 130mV for 2.83V output, 1.825V for full output. Signal/noise: 124dB, A-weighted. Voltage gain: 27.8dB. Power

consumption: 1W at standby, <40W idle, 1200W driven maximum (950W into 2 ohms). **Dimensions** 13.5" (346mm) H by 9" (230mm) W by 19.8" (508mm) D. Weight: 54.5 lbs (24.8kg) net, 64 lbs (29.1kg) shipping. **Finishes** Platinum, Ebony. **Serial numbers of units reviewed** 050085 (L),

050021 (R). **Price** \$6000 each. Approximate number of dealers: 57. Warranty: 5 years, transferrable. **Manufacturer** Theta Digital/ATI, 1749 Chapin Road, Montebello, CA 90640. Tel: (323) 278-0001. Fax: (323) 278-0083. Web: [www.thetadigital.com](http://www.thetadigital.com).



the UcD controller, and uses what Putzeys calls “higher order control loops.”<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the loop gain throughout the audioband never drops below 53dB. The NC1200’s improved comparator circuit matches the output to the input, and a control loop circuit allows more open-loop gain thus a greater amount of feedback. It was designed, Putzeys wrote, to “have essentially frequency-independent distortion with 32dB loop gain from DC to 20kHz.”

Theta Digital combined Putzeys’s Ncore NC1200 class-D module with a linear power supply created by Theta’s David Reich. Much of the weight of each Prometheus monoblock’s 54.5 lbs comes from its 1.44kVA toroidal power transformer. Theta rates the amplifier’s harmonic distortion at less than 0.01% at 500W RMS full-band into a 4 ohm load. Hipps was quick to point out that, at <0.001%, the Prometheus’s total harmonic distortion plus noise (THD+N) at 1W is lower than it is at full power by a factor of 10. The Prometheus’s output impedance is also extremely low, meaning that its damping factor is higher than is usually the case with a conventional class-D design.

### Description

The Theta Prometheus is the shape and size of a small desktop tower computer and measures 13.5" high by 9" wide by 19.8" deep. The curved front panel is of aluminum, with a small built-in handle; the side panels have screened cutouts to dissipate heat. Unlike most monoblocks, the front panel is narrow and the case is deep.

The amplifier is manufactured in mirrored pairs: the handle is on the right side of the faceplate of the left-channel unit, and vice versa. However, there’s no reason not to reverse the amps’ positions in your room.

You press the single button on the front panel to exit Standby mode (in which the Prometheus draws less than 1W from the wall and its Standby LED glows red) and enter operational mode (the LED glows green, then blue).

## The Prometheus is specified as outputting 250W into 8 ohms, 500W into 4 ohms, or 850W into 2 ohms.

A second LED will turn red if the amplifier exceeds its maximum operating temperature.

On the rear panel is a column of connectors. At the top are single-ended RCA and balanced XLR input jacks, separated by a toggle switch for selecting between them. Below these are two

Cardas speaker binding posts, for use in biwiring. There is also a jack for the standby remote trigger. The Prometheus can be turned on remotely with a 5–12VDC signal. Below this, toward the bottom, is the Main Power switch, which connects AC to all circuits. Flipping this on illuminates yellow Standby LED on the front panel. Below that is a fuse bay, and at the bottom is an IEC inlet for the detachable AC power cord.

The Prometheus is specified as outputting 250W into 8 ohms, 500W into 4 ohms, or 850W into 2 ohms.

### Sound

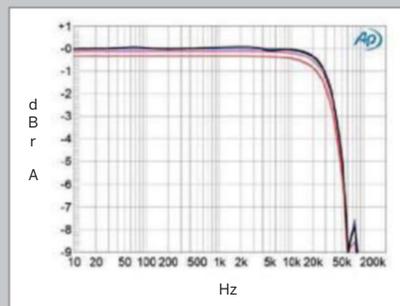
The two Theta Digital Prometheuses were easily unpacked. I attached balanced interconnects to their inputs, and the spade lugs of my PSC speaker cables to their binding posts, then flipped the Main Power switch on. As always, I used *Stereophile’s Test CD 2* to ensure that the channel assignments and phase were correct.

I listened to the Thetas for seven months, alternating them with a Mark Levinson No.334 and a pair of MBL Corona C15s, the latter supplied by JA, who has them on long-term loan. The amplifiers drove my Quad ESL-989

<sup>4</sup> This and subsequent quote: Bruno Putzeys, “Ncore Technology White Paper” (Hypex Electronics: February 2, 2012); [www.hypex.nl/docs/papers/ncore%20wp.pdf](http://www.hypex.nl/docs/papers/ncore%20wp.pdf).

## MEASUREMENTS

I performed a full set of measurements using Audio Precision SYS2722 system (see [www.ap.com](http://www.ap.com) and the January 2008 “As We See It,” [www.stereophile.com/content/measurements-maps-precision](http://www.stereophile.com/content/measurements-maps-precision)). As the Theta Prometheus has a switching output stage that



**Fig.1** Theta Prometheus, frequency response at 2.83V into: simulated loudspeaker load (gray), 8 ohms (blue), 4 ohms (magenta), 2 ohms (red) (1dB/vertical div.).

produces ultrasonic noise that would overload the Audio Precision’s input circuitry, I carried out most of the tests using, ahead of the analyzer, an Audio Precision AUX-0025 passive low-pass filter (see <http://ap.com/products/accessories/aux0100>). Usually, before measuring an amplifier, I run it for an hour at one-third power into 8 ohms—the most thermally stressful condition for a class-B output stage. But as the Prometheus has a class-D output, that preconditioning is irrelevant. Even so, I subjected serial number 050085 to this test to ensure that it had settled into its long-term operating condition. (The chassis was slightly warm at the end of this period.)

The Theta’s voltage gain into 8 ohms was the same, at 27.7dB, for its balanced and unbalanced inputs, and the amplifier preserved absolute polarity for both inputs (ie, was non-inverting);

its XLR jack is wired with pin 2 hot. At 90k ohms, the balanced input impedance was very close to the specification of 94k ohms at low and middle frequencies, though it dropped to 84k ohms at the top of the audioband. The unbalanced input impedance was half these values.

The Prometheus’s output impedance was 0.11 ohm at 20Hz and 1kHz, rising slightly at 20kHz to 0.13 ohm. The modification of the Theta’s frequency response, which results from the interaction between this impedance and the impedance of our standard simulated loudspeaker, was very low (fig.1, gray trace). This graph also shows that the ultrasonic rolloff doesn’t change significantly as the load impedance drops to 2 ohms, with a –3dB point of 40kHz. However, a small peak at 77kHz becomes a little more pronounced into higher impedances. Without

and Revel Ultima Salon2 speakers full range, or were reconfigured to reproduce frequencies above 80Hz when Revel's Rhythm2 subwoofer was in circuit.

Although setting up a pair of monoblocks seldom requires instructions, I enjoyed reading Theta Digital's well-written and detailed manual. It revealed that the small rear-panel switch that controls the AC mains supply must be flipped on before the front-panel switch can be used to cycle the amp from Standby to full on. This year, I've traveled frequently. When away for more than a few days, I turned off the amp completely with the rear-panel switch. Otherwise I left it in Standby, that LED glowing red, to ensure that the Prometheus was always at its best for listening. As recommended by Jeff Hipps, I played music through the Thetas at a low level for one week before doing any serious listening.

The most striking things about the Prometheus's sound were its huge dynamic range and bass impact. This was even evident during that first, burn-in week, when I played the timpani passage from the recording of Stravinsky's *Rite*



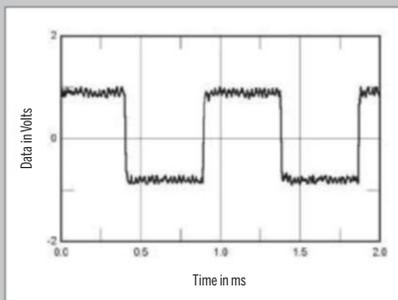
**The Hypex module was designed, Putzeys wrote, to “have essentially frequency-independent distortion with 32dB loop gain from DC to 20kHz.”**

*of Spring* by Eiji Oue and the Minnesota Orchestra (24-bit/176.4kHz DVD, Reference HRX RR-70). Don Dorsey's synthesizer-based “Ascent,” from the *Time Warp* sampler (CD, Telarc CD-80106), erupted with enormous bass pulses through the Theta amps,

followed by a mix of softer pulses, bleeps, whooshes, and high-pitched tones that pan back and forth across the soundstage. The Thetas' high power and dynamics were heard in the stunning synthesizer percussion of struck chimes and thunderous bass drum that tighten the suspense in “Assault on Ryan's House,” from James Horner's score for

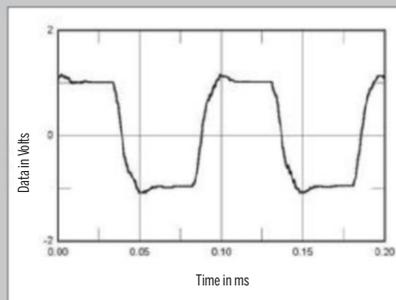
**measurements, continued**

the Audio Precision low-pass filter, the Theta's reproduction of a 1kHz squarewave into 8 ohms is obscured by switching noise (fig.2). With the filter, however, this noise is eliminated, and a 10kHz squarewave can be seen to have a small degree of overshoot that correlates with the slight response peak at 77kHz (fig.3). Commendably, however, no ringing is associated with this overshoot.



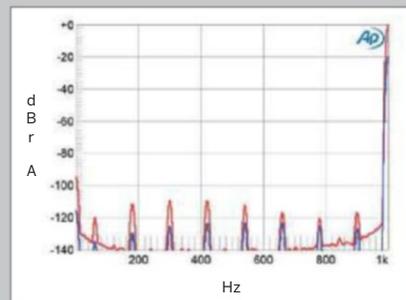
**Fig.2** Theta Prometheus, small-signal 1kHz squarewave into 8 ohms without AP LPF.

Without the Audio Precision low-pass filter, and with the Theta's input short-circuited, there was 321mV of ultrasonic noise present in the amplifier's output, with a center frequency of 453kHz. With the filter, the unweighted, wideband signal/noise ratio, ref. 2.83V into 8 ohms, was 76.3dB, this improving to an excellent 94dB when the measurement bandwidth was restricted to the



**Fig.3** Theta Prometheus, small-signal 10kHz squarewave into 8 ohms with AP LPF.

audioband—and improving even more, to 95.6dB, when the measurement was A-weighted. With the amplifier passing signal, however, there was the noise level depended to some extent on the output power. Fig.4, taken with the auxiliary AP low-pass filter (LPF) (as were all the subsequent graphs), shows low-frequency spectra of the Theta's output while it reproduced a 1kHz tone at 1W (blue trace), then 100W (red), into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).



**Fig.4** Theta Prometheus, spectrum of 1kHz sinewave, DC-1kHz, at 1W (blue) and 100W (red) into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).

*Patriot Games* (RCA 66051-2); and the kickdrum at the end of the sleepy opening of David Bowie’s “Putting Out Fire,” from the *Cat People* soundtrack (CD, MCA MCAD-1498), exploded at a more energetic and urgent level than I’d heard before.

The Prometheuses projected a broad, detailed, involving, three-dimensional soundstage. I heard this clearly playing one of my 2015 Records to Die For: the live recording of Beethoven’s Symphony 9, performed by multiple ensembles and conducted by Leonard Bernstein shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall (CD, Deutsche Grammophon 429 861-2). The separation of instruments, the passion of the soloists and choirs, and the spaciousness of the soundstage make this recording my favorite Beethoven 9th for choral qualities.

Two other (mostly) orchestral works benefited greatly from the Prometheuses’ dynamic range and soundstaging. Pass Labs’ XA60.5 monoblocks<sup>5</sup> had proven their dynamic range with Benjamin Zander and the Philharmonia Orchestra’s performance of Mahler’s Symphony 2 (24/192 FLAC, Linn CKD 452). JA had noted that the “Resurrection” has huge orchestral climaxes contrasted with much softer sections in which a single instrument plays. The Thetas handled both extremely well, reproducing the solo instrumental sections clearly, then easily managing the huge climax 10 minutes into the third movement, *In ruhig fließender Bewegung*. The second orchestral recording was our “Recording of the Month” for October 2014: the performance of Bruckner’s Symphony 9 mentioned at the beginning.<sup>6</sup> In the *Scherzo*, the Thetas reproduced the full, surging power of the violins’ emphatic, fierce fast pattern, coupled with pounding brass and drums. This is one of my favorite movements in the classical repertoire, and the Thetas’ reproduction of it was the best I’ve heard in my

**The most striking things about the Prometheus’s sound were its huge dynamic range and bass impact.**

listening room. The Prometheuses produced excellent imaging and soundstaging with “Breathe,” from Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of the Moon* (SACD/CD, EMI 82136-2). Driving the Revel Salon2s, the Thetas projected the throbbing helicopter rotors, jackhammers, footsteps running across my listening room, dive bombers, and PA announcements on a wide soundstage to cinematic effect. With John Rutter’s *The Lord Is My Light and My Salvation*, from *Requiem*, performed by Timothy Seelig and the Turtle Creek Chorale (CD, Reference RR-57CD), the sounds of the clarinet, organ, and harp were separate and precisely positioned, and each rank of choristers was spread out in a clearly “visible” arc. *A Gaelic Prayer*, also from *Requiem*, had new clarity and balance, with superb pitch definition of the pipe organ’s pedal notes.

The Prometheus’s bass response was outstanding. Driving the Revel Salon2 towers with the Revel Rhythm2 subwoofer turned on, the Thetas produced tuneful, solid, punchy bass with great pace and jump factor. In the *Toccata* of Widor’s Organ Symphony 5, as recorded by JA (24/88.2 AIFF file), the deepest bass notes were reproduced with unexpected power and mass. The 32Hz pipes produced immense weight, solidity, and room lock. The mountainous,

5 Reviewed by John Atkinson in *Stereophile*, January 2014; [www.stereophile.com/content/pass-labs-xa605-monoblock-power-amplifier](http://www.stereophile.com/content/pass-labs-xa605-monoblock-power-amplifier).

6 Reviewed by Richard Lehnert; [www.stereophile.com/content/recording-october-2014-bruckner-symphony-9](http://www.stereophile.com/content/recording-october-2014-bruckner-symphony-9).

**measurements, continued**

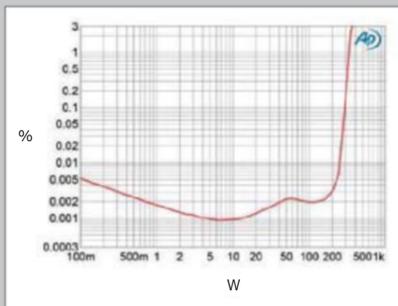
into 8 ohms. Spurious are present at the AC-related frequency of 60Hz and its odd harmonics, which increase with the power level. This behavior usually suggests magnetic interference from the amplifier’s power transformer, but as the spurious are still all at or below -110dB (0.0003%) at the high power, their presence will be of only academic interest.

Fig.5 reveals that the Theta’s distortion starts to rise above the

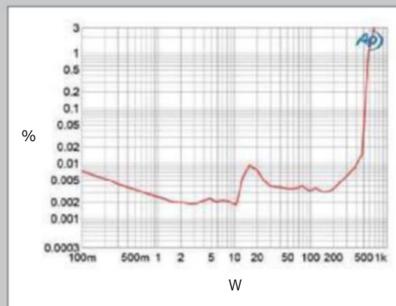
audioband noise floor just below 10W into 8 ohms, but remains below a low 0.003% until the start of actual waveform clipping. Even then, the rise in THD is relatively gradual, and the amplifier doesn’t reach 1% THD until 320W (25.05dBW), just over 1dB higher than the rated 250W into 8 ohms (24dBW). Into 4 ohms (fig.6), the Prometheus delivers 600W (24.8dBW) at 1% THD rather than the specified 500W, though this graph shows that

the amplifier is less linear below clipping into this load. Into 2 ohms (not shown), the Theta still easily exceeded its specified maximum power of 850W, delivering 980W (23.9dBW). (The wall voltage was 123.4V during these tests.)

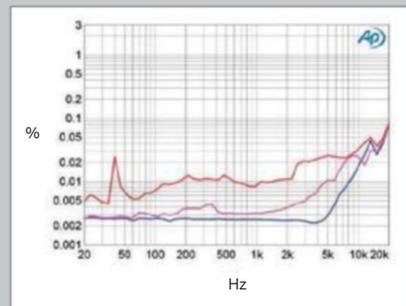
To be sure I was looking at distortion rather than noise, I examined how the percentage of THD+noise changed with frequency at a fairly high level, 20V, equivalent to 50W into 8 ohms. Fig.7 reveals that the Prometheus is



**Fig.5** Theta Prometheus, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 8 ohms.



**Fig.6** Theta Prometheus, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 4 ohms.



**Fig.7** Theta Prometheus, THD+N (%) vs frequency at 20V into: 8 ohms (blue), 4 ohms (magenta), 2 ohms (red).

deep pedal note that ends James Busby's performance of Herbert Howells's *Master Tallis's Testament*, from *Pipes Rhode Island* (CD, Riago 101), produced incredible room lock. I heard and felt the various pedal ranks underpinning *Gnomus*, from Jean Guillou's performance of his own transcription of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* (CD, Dorian DOR-90117).

The midrange response blossomed when my speakers were driven by the Thetas. Whether the volume was low or high, I heard delicate differences in tone and timbre in male voices, piano, and percussion instruments. The light, clear quality of Keith Jarrett's piano in "Heartland," from his *Concerts: Bregenz München* (24/96 AIFF, ECM 1227-29)<sup>7</sup> was not disrupted by his thudding foot stomps. The lilting tenors of the vocal group Cantus in Edie Hill's *A Sound Like This*, from their *While You Are Alive*, recorded by John Atkinson (24/88.2 digital file or CD, Cantus CTS-1208), also exhibited wonderful clarity and timbre.

Similarly, the Prometheus transmitted more of the timbres and harmonics of solo male voices, without tubbiness or midbass emphasis. Chris Martin's plaintive falsetto singing of the simple, intensely romantic words that I find so captivating and urgent in "Yellow," from Coldplay's *Parachutes* (CD, Parlophone 5 40504 2), appeared behind and separated cleanly from the dense mix of guitar, bass, and drums that supports the song's intoxicatingly slow, dark melody. And José Carreras's light, lyrical tenor remained pure during the *Kyrie* of Ariel Ramirez's *Misa Criolla* (CD, Philips 420 955-2).

The Prometheus's reproduction of the upper midrange and treble was especially commendable, especially with cymbals. I heard the harmonic overtones from different areas of single cymbals, as well as from different types of cymbals, in Mark Walker's drum solo in "Nardis," from

## ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

**Analog Sources** Linn Sondek turntable & Lingo power supply & Ittok tonearm, Spectral moving-coil cartridge; Day-Sequerra 25th Anniversary FM Reference tuner.

**Digital Sources** Bryston BCD-1 CD player & BDP-2 media player & BDA-1 DAC.

**Preamplifier** Bryston BP26.

**Power Amplifiers** Mark Levinson No.334 (stereo), MBL Corona C15 (monoblocks).

**Loudspeakers** Quad ESL-989, Revel Ultima Salon2; Revel Ultima Rhythm2 subwoofer.

**Cables** Digital: WireWorld Starlight Coaxial. Interconnect: Mark Levinson Silver, Red Rose Silver One, Totem Acoustic Sinew (single-ended), Pure Silver Cable, Bryston (balanced). Speaker: QED X-Tube 400, Pure Silver Cable R50 biwire double ribbon, Ultralink Excelsior 6N OFHC, Coincident Speaker Technology CST 1. AC: manufacturers' own.

**Accessories** Torus Power AO24-ACB-A1AB Isolation Unit; Studio 6 Pro Mike1 Audio Analyzer. Listening room: 26' L by 13' W by 12' H with semi-cathedral ceiling, moderately furnished with sound-absorbing furniture.—Larry Greenhill

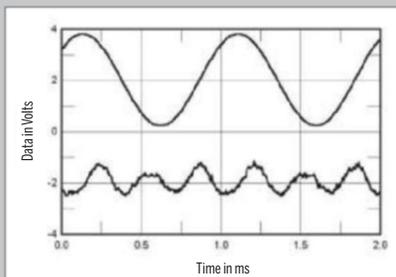
Patricia Barber's *Café Blue* (SACD/CD, Premonition/Blue Note/Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab UDSACD 2002)—and the metallic cymbal sheen that opens "The Mooche," from the Jerome Harris Quintet's *Rendezvous* (CD, Stereophile STPH013-2), was rendered as a shimmering rather than as soft, hissing static.

<sup>7</sup> *Stereophile* "Recording of the Month," March 2014, reviewed by Richard Lehnert; [www.stereophile.com/content/recording-march-2014-icconcerts-bregenz-m252ncheni](http://www.stereophile.com/content/recording-march-2014-icconcerts-bregenz-m252ncheni)

### measurements, continued

still very linear below the mid-treble region at this level, even into 4 ohms (magenta trace). However, the distortion rises considerably into 2 ohms (red), and in the top two octaves into the higher impedances, though it still remains below 0.08%.

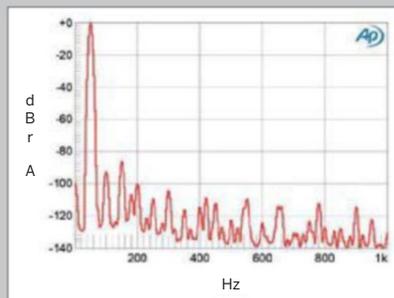
Into 8 ohms at moderately high power, the distortion is predominantly third harmonic (fig.8), though at just 0.0024%, this, again, will be of only



**Fig.8** Theta Prometheus, 1kHz waveform at 60W into 8 ohms, 0.0024% THD+N (top); distortion and noise waveform with fundamental notched out (bottom, not to scale).

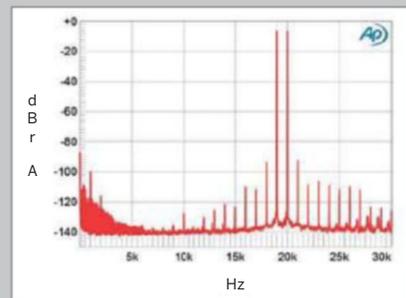
academic interest. As the current increases, the third harmonic is joined by even-order harmonics (fig.9), but these are all at lower levels. Intermodulation distortion is also very low, even at high powers into 4 ohms (fig.10), with the 1kHz difference product associated with tones at 19 and 20kHz lying 100dB below the peak signal level (0.001%).

The measured performance of Theta Digital's Prometheus is superb, even



**Fig.9** Theta Prometheus, spectrum of 50Hz sine wave, DC-1kHz, at 200W into 4 ohms (linear frequency scale).

for an amplifier with a class-D output stage. It's similar to that of the more expensive MBL Corona C15 monoblock, which I reviewed in June 2014 (see [www.stereophile.com/content/mb-corona-c15-monoblock-power-amplifier-measurements](http://www.stereophile.com/content/mb-corona-c15-monoblock-power-amplifier-measurements)), which shouldn't be surprising—the MBL also uses a custom version of the Hypex output module designed by the very talented Bruno Putzeys.—John Atkinson



**Fig.10** Theta Prometheus, HF intermodulation spectrum, DC-30kHz, 19+20kHz at 200W peak into 4 ohms (linear frequency scale).

### Comparisons

While auditioning the Theta Prometheus monoblocks, I also listened to my Mark Levinson No.334 (\$5900 in 1999) and the MBL Corona C15 monoblocks (\$25,000/pair). A single Prometheus or Corona C15 tips the scale at less than half the weight of the No.334. The No.334 has softer-, warmer-sounding bass, and delivers 200W less at clipping into 4 ohms than either class-D amp. This might be a problem with less sensitive speakers and bigger rooms. More important, the Levinson, which I've thoroughly enjoyed for 15 years, seemed compressed, shut down, and dark, with a two-dimensional soundstage. In comparison, both class-D amps were faster, more open, more transparent, and produced a greater sense of three-dimensionality. Compared to the Prometheus, the MBL seemed leaner in the midrange and upper bass when driving the Revel Salon2s. The Prometheus had a much more successful integration with the Revel Rhythm2 subwoofer than the other two amps, being able to produce a full, driving midrange, and to reveal layers of three-dimensional detail. Overall, for me, the Theta Prometheus delivered the most emotionally involving sound.

### Conclusions

The Theta Digital Prometheus's class-D output stage per-



**This is one of my favorite movements in the classical repertoire, and the Thetas' reproduction of it was the best I've heard in my listening room.**

better imaging than any other amplifier I've heard in years. It let the Revel Salon2s sound more alive and more dynamic than ever, with faster, deeper bass response, and made it possible for the combo of Revel Salon2s and Revel Rhythm2 subwoofer to deliver better synergy than I'd heard before. The Theta Prometheus even delivered sweet, open highs and solid bass from my electrostatic Quad ESL-989s.

My last impression of the Prometheus was the same as my first: It's one of the best-sounding amplifiers I've heard in my listening room. Seven months after I began listening to it, its soundstaging, imaging, depiction of detail and speed and slam, and its exciting dynamic contrasts remain totally addictive. I give it my strongest recommendation for inclusion in Class A of *Stereophile's* "Recommended Components." ■

formed as predicted by theory: The monoblocks were still running coolly in my room after hours of full output to Revel's Salon2s, and delivered twice the power of my Mark Levinson No.334 at slightly less than the ML's weight. The Theta's price of \$12,000/pair—though less than half the price of the MBL Coronas—puts it in the high-priced range. But the Prometheuses delivered better midrange and treble definition, greater depth of field, greater jump factor, and