

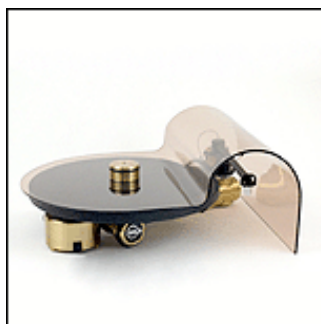


This review page is supported in part by the sponsor whose ad is displayed above

AUDIO REVIEWS

sixmoons.com

OCTOBER 2006



KUZMA
STABI S & STOGI S

Reviewer: Ken Micallef

Digital Source: McIntosh MCD 201 CD/SACD player, Oracle CD 1500 [in for review]

Analog Source: Kuzma Stabi/Stogi turntable/arm combo, Denon DL-103 cartridge, Auditorium 23 Denon step-up transformer [on loan]

Preamp: Shindo Allegro

Amp: Art Audio Diavolo [in for review], Art Audio Symphony II [in for review]

Speakers: DeVore Fidelity Super 8s

Cables: Auditorium A23 speaker cables, Crystal Cable Micro Speak interconnects

Stands: Salamander rack, 2" Mapleshade platforms (8" x 15" x 2"), Blue Circle custom amp stand

Powerline conditioning: JPS Labs Kaptovator, Shunyata Black Mamba and Anaconda Vx Powersnakes, Hydra 4 [on loan]

Accessories: Mapleshade Surefoot and Heavyfoot brass points and IsoBlocks; (8) RPG ProFoam damping panels/ceiling treatment, Mapleshade Ionoclast for static cling

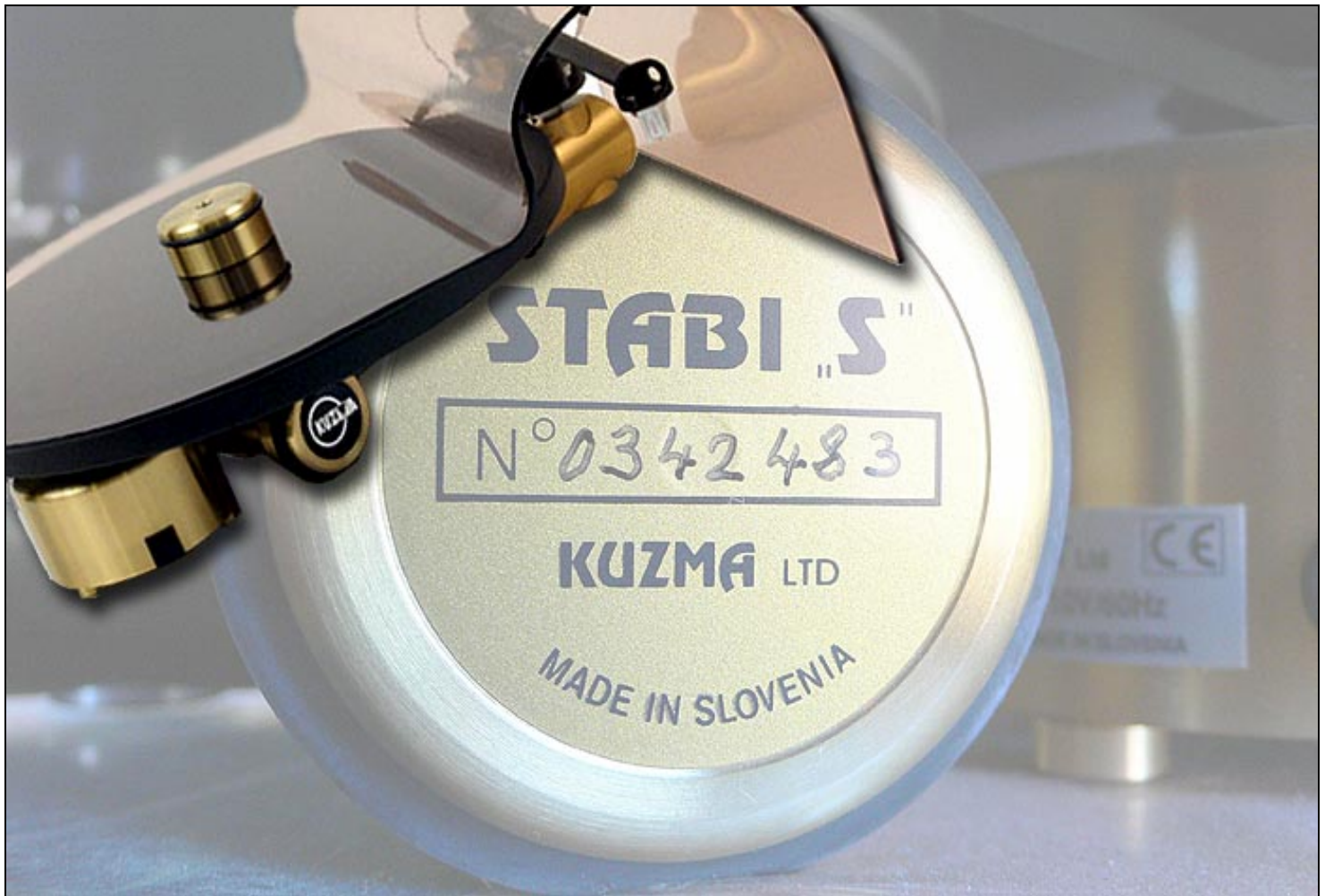
Room size: 24' x 12', short-wall setup

Review component retail price: \$1,750 for table in brass, \$1,000 for arm



Even in today's digitally dominated world, you can find practically a hundred turntable manufacturers in as many far flung lands. And talk about bargain to balderdash prices. \$250 will buy you a pleurably purposeful turntable from Rega or Music Hall; \$1500 gains entry into more significant surroundings from J.A. Michell, Roksan or Thorens; many mad, mad thousands can be spent on super machines from Brinkmann, SME, Walker, Grand Prix Audio and Continuum. Add a cartridge -- say a \$40 Grado Black or a \$10,000 Clearaudio Insider Gold -- and you'll wonder if the fans of this supposedly antiquated technology (who prefer analog any day over CDs, downloads and iPods) have lost their minds, their wallets *and* the children's college money. Or just perhaps, they are onto something?

It only takes a brief listen to a quality turntable, say the Rega P2 outfitted with a Grado Black cartridge, to turn a skeptic into a believer. Not only can used LPs be had for dimes on dollars these days but vinyl holds charms to soothe the savage breast and the digitally aggravated ear. Digital technology has certainly evolved since the late '80s but vinyl still accomplishes something only more expensive CD players and SACD discs can claim. Sure, you don't get the gut-busting, feet-scorching bass reproduction of digital but that is more than accounted for with vinyl's deeply layered, palpable soundstage and exceedingly natural sound. Music just sounds more whole when played back via vinyl and turntable: the ear relaxes, music flows with an exceedingly rightness of feeling (not to mention a larger, more deeply layered soundstage). And some would claim that vinyl-enabled bass is more accurate than the gobsmack-to-the-gulliver of digital. Damn though if we don't get tired of changing LPs. Yet there is undeniable magic in the analog message.



"We at Kuzma Ltd. have been studying the theory and practise of analogue playback since 1975", states the Kuzma website. "[We are] continually extracting more information from what is nowadays called an inferior medium. There is no known limit to the extent of recoverable information compared to the limits of digital playback. This makes analogue replay closer to the human ear and brain."

Slovenia-based Kuzma Ltd. is a respected turntable and tonearm manufacturer, their goods distributed in the US by www.TheMusic.com, which also distributes vinyl from reissue company Classic Records. Kuzma tables run the gamut (three turntables, three tonearms) from the \$18,000 - \$19,500 Kuzma Stabi XL and the \$3,900 Stabi Wood to the unit under review here, the Kuzma Stabi S turntable and its accompanying Stogi S tonearm. (Smell like a cigar? Nah.)

The Kuzma Stabi S turntable looks like no other. There is no conventional plinth or base but instead two interlocking massive solid brass rods connected in T formation which gives the frame high rigidity and resistance to vibration. The motor is housed independently in its own brass biscuit to dampen internal vibrations. The Stogi S tonearm is a unipivot design, its head shell and arm machined from solid aluminum and metal block, respectively. The arm's pivot point is sited in an oil well, which enables extremely low friction and bearing vibration. Silicone damping controls resonance of the cartridge. Internal wiring is in one continuous piece from head shell to RCA phono connectors. Weighing 35 pounds and costing \$2,750 for the combo, this is a very well designed, seriously manufactured turntable that has fans all across Europe. Lack of suspension (similar to VPI tables) demands careful placement though. Brass magnet spindle weight is \$99.

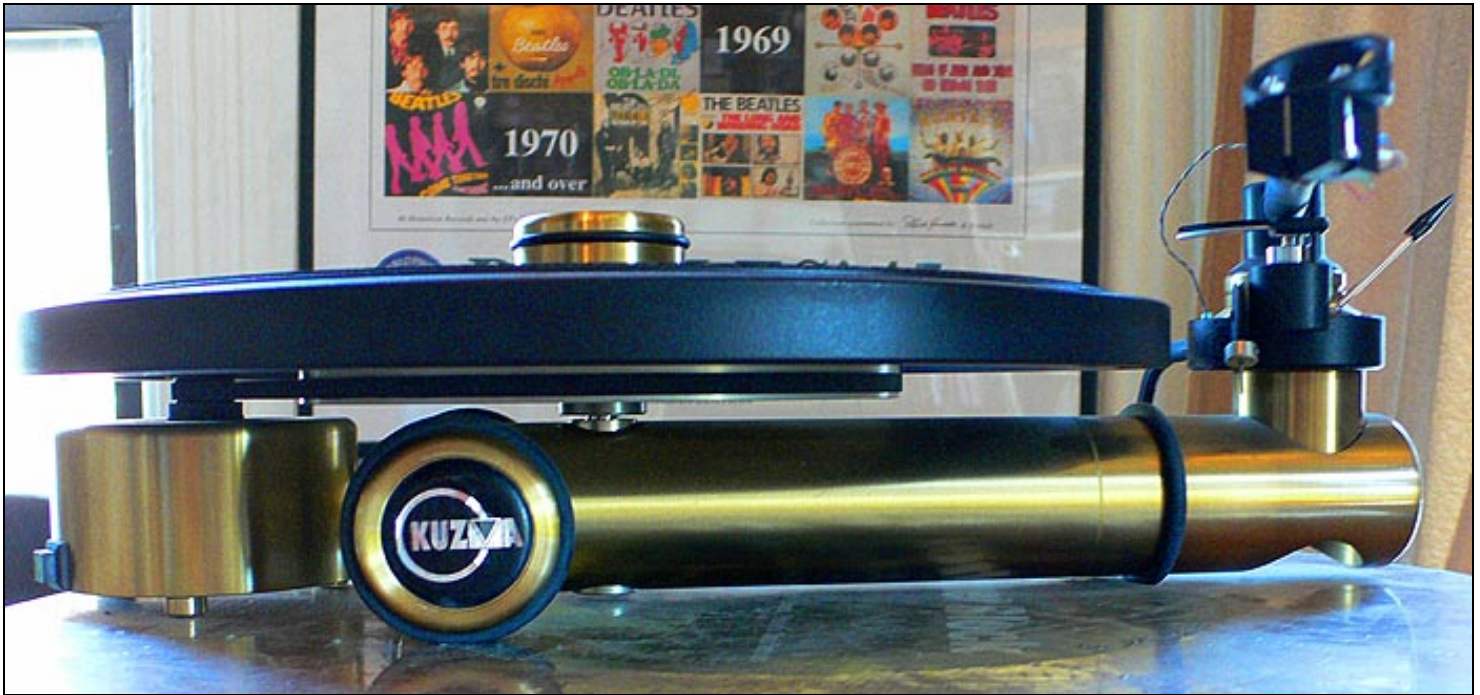
"The Stabi S is our smallest turntable with a design approach normally found only in more expensive models", reports TheMusic.com's Scot Markwell. "Its unique shape and construction of solid brass rods provide an extremely rigid connection to platter, bearing and tonearm support. There is no flat plate to resonate and transmit vibrations, only solid brass rods 50mm in diameter. A second brass rod provides stability and the two are clamped together in a T shape. A ground, flat belt provides drive from the motor pulley to the sub platter.



"The bearing is of highly polished, fine grain carbon steel", he continues, "with a one point contact, while the bearing sleeve is of a resin/textile material which has excellent damping and non-resonant properties. With a mat on top and rubber insert underneath, the platter provides a stable non-resonant platform for records which, in addition, can be clamped."

The Kuzma Stabi/Stogi combo has been in continuous production for over a decade and the design hasn't changed except for improvements to the bearing assembly and the change from round to flat belt. Kuzma tables are manufactured in Slovenia by Franc Kuzma, chief designer and owner. He has a small work force that does the machining, polishing, assembly etc. both on-site and at various vendors in his area.

TheMusic.com also provided a few extra LP review samples, records familiar to anyone who calls himself or herself a jazz lover: Duke Ellington and Johnny Hodges' *Back to Back* [Verve MGVS-6055-200gm] and *Side to Side* [Verve MGVS-6109-200gm], and John Coltrane's *Live at the Half Note One Down, One Up* [Impulse! B000-2380-200gm]. These LPs feature Classic Records' 200gm Quiex SV-P vinyl formulation.



Upon dropping the needle (a Denon DL-103), it was instantly apparent that there is little semblance between the domestic CD releases and the Classic Audio LP reissues. The sound of live performance, of flesh and blood musicians breathing in and out as portrayed on the Kuzma equals and in some cases surpasses anything I have heard on CD or SACD. Granted, we are talking about a posh turntable linked to equally expensive ancillaries (yes, my rig!), but analog sound is not about dollars but a difference in medium, in presentation of texture, of small details that result in superior realism, completeness and faithfulness to the recorded event.

Side by Side is a jam session of sorts, featuring the cream of Ellington's 1950s sidemen including the great rabbit himself, Johnny Hodges. Also jamming are Harry Edison, Jo Jones, Roy Eldridge, Billy Strayhorn, Ben Webster and Wendell Marshall. The mood is relaxed and fun and the band is just in top coasting form. That the Classic reissue sounds great is just icing on the cake. First up is the massive bass sound, which in audiophile terms is probably overkill, but I really dug it. Womp womp womp, just mopping up the joint with bass tonnage. Drums are almost distant, reacting with the large studio space while Hodges and Ellington's instruments are front and center, warm and present. When Jones switches to ride cymbal, you can hear it bouncing off the high ceilings and when the band starts to rock, the sonics can sometimes become a little stressed but this is a classic, wonderful recording.

More cohesive from an audio standpoint is the sister disc *Back to Back*, recorded around the same time (58 to 59) with similar personnel. Drums take a similar highly resonant position throughout and the bass is not quite as overwhelming, but the lead soloists are much better recorded and resolved. There is no hint of strain anywhere here and the music is equally relaxed and delightful. The Kuzma detected every subtlety in each of these LPs and presented a fully cohesive, very dynamic and tonally accurate picture of the music. These are two must have discs for those who love easy swing played by the masters.



Coltrane's *Live at the Half Note/One Down, One Up* is an entirely different beast of analog gaiety. This long rumored to exist 1965 recording features one of Coltrane's most heralded solos in the title track, plus the sound of drummer Elvin Jones keeping time purely on cymbal and snare after his bass drum pedal breaks mid-song. At 27:40, "One Down, One Up" has a flow that recalls *Live At Birdland* yet with more control and less bombast. At one point, Coltrane and Elvin dive into a duet for a full 15 minutes until Elvin's pedal gives out which doesn't deprive the music but only alters its colors. Originally a radio broadcast, the audio can sound small at times but remastering gives full reign to Coltrane and pianist McCoy Tyner, with Elvin's fury barely contained. Still, it's a historical recording which reveals the quintet in a transitional period not long before the departure of Elvin and the full-on, interstellar space jazz immersion of Trane's final period. Again, the Kuzma got to the heart of the music.

The Kuzma Stabi S/Stogi S



The Kuzma Stabi S/Stogi S combination is a hands-down winner, and in my opinion, one of the world's great turntable bargains. It played every piece of vinyl put to it with a welcome wink-wink nod-nod and proceeded to reveal its true nature, good, bad or glorious. It performed flawlessly, ran up to speed quickly and was relatively easy to set up. And I liked its streamlined dust cover the most. Ignore this Slovenian mini miracle at your own peril and be forever doomed to the trash heap of lousy digital. We wouldn't want that for you...

Ken Micallef



Manufacturer's [website](#)

all content and graphics on this site are protected by copyright and may not be used without prior permission from the publisher

SITE CONCEPT & DESIGN BY KUMADESIGN.COM