

VPI Industries Classic 3 Turntable One powerhouse turntable / tonearm combo! Reviewed By Anthony Nicosia

May 2013

VPI Industries Classic 3 Turntable
One powerhouse turntable / tonearm combo!
[Review By Anthony Nicosia](#)



VPI Industries, Inc. started out some thirty-five years ago (1978) with the production of record weights made for other manufacturers turntables. Co-founders, Harry and Sheila Weisfeld first introduced a turntable isolation base in December of that same year but it was not until 1984 before they marketed their very own table, the HW-19. Since then VPI has manufactured a variety of turntables for audiophiles the world over. A look into their web site today reveals a variety of products such as a dedicated turntable stand, record cleaning machines, an assortment of tables with matching tonearms, center weights a periphery ring and an optional motor drive. According to Harry Weisfeld they are now even working on a VPI stereo cartridge, hopefully with a release date soon. [Reviewing VPI's Scout II turntable in the 2009 June/July Superior Audio section of Enjoy the Music.com](#) left me amazed with what they could bring to market at a relatively inexpensive price point. That and having seen the Classic 1 version of this turntable at audio shows and high-end stores led me to today's review of their Classic 3 series. Classic models start at 1 going all the way up to 4 one step at a time (See their website for further details). I actually asked to buy the Classic 3 before hearing or seeing it in person, quite unusual for me. Rather than starting out as a review and ending up in a purchase this review evolving after having lived with it for long enough to know it would be something I wanted to share with others. Sometimes you need to take a leap of faith going with your gut feeling; it makes life so much more interesting that way. For me this purchase turned out to be a good move, one which should reward me with quality sound from my ever growing vinyl collection for many years to come.

The main purpose of my writing reviews has always been to bring happiness to others through a shared love of the joy of great music. Turntables and vinyl recreates musical events overtaking me with emotion to awaken my inner spirit. Great turntables reproducing great music are the pinnacle of the audio experience and the Classic 3 is one such great table. Evaluating a turntables ability to convey the essence of music is not an easy

task, perhaps far more so than any other component in your system. For you see first you have the table itself, along with the tonearm, cartridge, phono cables, phonostage or step up transformer (perhaps even both) as well as the platform the table is resting upon. These individual influences separately and especially together can greatly affect a turntable's performance, making an unbiased opinion of that product so much more difficult. Of course then, as always, you have the other components of your audio system and the room it is placed within (always a big factor) also having an influence on the sound. Still onward I go in a quest to accurately portray my experience with the Classic 3, outside influences and all.

Basic Information And Setup



Before continuing onto the listening portion of this review let us take a brief look at the differences between the most basic of VPI's Classic turntables, the 1 and this reviewed model 3. All their Classic models come with a basic record weight, Shure stylus force gauge, power cord (115V only), a JMW tonearm, JMW-Classical tonearm wand, and a JMW Memorial tonearm alignment jig.

The following items are standard on the 3 but not the 1.

- 1. A large knurled VTA tower and VPI's VTA Base allowing for on-the-fly adjustments of VTA (vertical tracking error).*
- 2. A much heavier designed plinth and an attractive piano black base.*
- 3. Stainless steel outer periphery ring clamp .*
- 4. HR-X Stainless Steel Center Weight .*
- 5. The JMW-10.5i SE tonearm is upgraded with a new Stainless Steel armtube and Valhalla wiring.*
- 6. An upgrade from the 600 to the 300 rpm synchronous motor .*
- 7. Larger New HR-X styled feet were designed for greater stability, better isolation, and a matching look to the larger chassis.*

VPI was asked to supply the 3 with a pre-mounted Lyra Delos Moving Coil cartridge as Harry and his son Matt both said it is an available requested option (even though it is not listed on their website). The fact that the 3 comes with some excellent adjustable feet (upgraded from the Classic 1 model) also negated the necessity to buy aftermarket ones (another possible outside factor we can put aside through the magic and foresight of the team at VPI).

As for the initial setup of table, arm and cartridge, well that was made simple for most everyone, even me. If you opt to install your own cartridge the above mentioned jig, wand and gauge allows for an easy time of it and should take only about an hour. Having the cartridge pre-mounted at the factory meant all that was really needed was to drop in the arm on the tonearm base. You may then set the Anti-Skating if you wish (I did ever so slightly) and adjust the turntable's feet making sure the Classic's platter is as level as possible. Placing their

heavy platter on the table along with installing the turntable belt was a snap, plug in the cord and associated cables and you are ready to go. Thank you VPI for making things so easy for us. The factory supplied record weight and outer periphery ring clamp were always in use by me and greatly appreciated. Yes it took a little more time but was worth it in the end. Being a uni-pivot design the arm will rock back and forth upon initial engagement. For me that never posed a big problem or an accidental landing on the ring clamp, but I had to be careful. Startup always involved lining the arm up over the beginning of a record, when the wobbling stopped (always rather quickly), dropping that arm onto the record making sure it cleared the periphery ring clamp and only then would I start the platter spinning. This was all really quite quick and easy to do. As for the ability to adjust VTA on the fly, it is hard to imagine it being any easier and certainly came in handy with my thicker 180 and 200 gram records. One note of interest before starting was that a Musical Surroundings Nova Phonomena Phono Stage was used in conjunction with the turntable setup. The Nova having a wide range of adjustments (a reviewers dream) made dialing in the cartridge that much more precise.

And Now... The Music!



A good beginning for this review would seem to start with a short trip back into the past when vinyl and turntable were truly King, perhaps to an era of early Beatles music. Here on the Capitol Records, Inc. [C1 0777 7 46439 1 7] *Help* remake album Paul McCartney's' vocals from "Yesterday" were to die for. It took me back to his World Concert Tour of 1989-1990 when he played at the U.C. Berkeley Memorial Stadium where his first song of encores was "Yesterday". The Classic 3 showed off his great tonal ability displaying the warmth of a "live" performance. On "Act Naturally" featuring the vocals of Ringo Star PRAT was spot on for this songs lively fun paced tempo. For those not familiar with this song let me give you a small taste with this quote from the opening few versus.

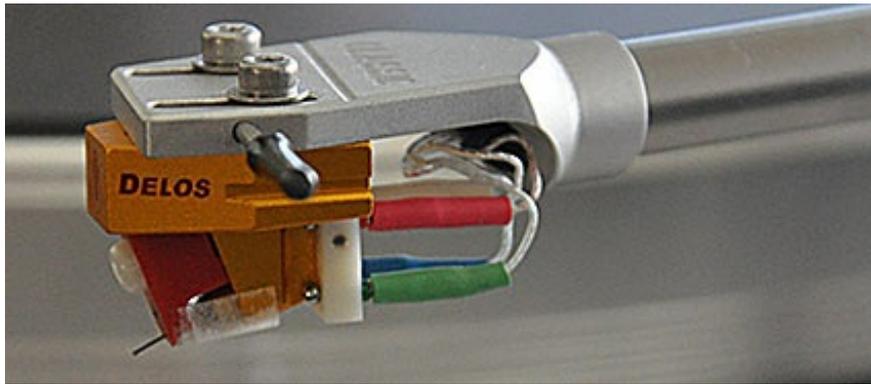
*"Well, I'll bet you I'm gonna be a big star
Might win an Oscar you can never tell
The movies gonna make me a big star
'Cause I can play the part so well*

*Well I hope you come and see me in the movies
Then I'll know that you will plainly see
The biggest fool that ever hit the big time
And all I gotta do is act naturally"*

Now you might be wondering why this review is so playful. To me that is exactly what vinyl playback should be, a whole lot of fun and good times. No just dropping in that CD hitting the play button then walking away to not directly interact with the medium. No way, turntables need care, nurturing and involvement from the audiophile. You must keep that record clean, the stylus too. Periodically check adjustments of tonearm/cartridge setup, replacing belts when necessary. Use your hand to lovingly place the tonearm and cartridge gently down upon that delicate vinyl recording. We need to get you out of your comfort zone and into the game. That is one reason why I tout the merits of having a turntable in one's system, alongside a streamer or CD player of course if you like, nothing wrong at all with that. But vinyl playback is pure fun and sometimes it seems audiophiles get so involved with the technical stuff they seem to forget it is all about enjoying the

music. My wife and I can order out but there is nothing more enjoyable than both of us cooking in the kitchen together, lovingly making food for our family and friends.

Next up was a slightly dusty copy of Jethro Tull's *Thick as a Brick* [Warner Brothers 2072]. Before a critical listen of this LP a good cleansing was in order from VPI's own 16.5 record cleaning machine. This was not a recent purchase but one made by me prior to my product reviewing days began. The 16.5 is a particularly great machine to own and some sort of a record cleaning device is something vinyl lovers should not be without. Clean that record thoroughly; place it on the Classic 3, using the factory Stainless steel outer periphery ring clamp and HR-X Stainless Steel Center Weight, then sit back to let the music take you on a wondrous ride. A ride back in time to when Jethro Tull was one of *the* bands to see in concert. Do not let anyone tell you the Classic 3 cannot reproduce music without the weight to it, as it did just fine in my system. I was able to crank up the volume using my McIntosh MC452 power amplifier to drive a pair of Von Schweikert VR-35 loudspeakers. The 3 delivered good clear music having the ability to dig deep into the record grooves retrieving low and high frequencies plus a whole lot in-between.



Spatially, the soundstage was alive and exciting. It took the music to the furthest reaches of my rooms boundaries left to right (or right to left if you prefer) providing proper depth as well. This turntable/tonearm/cartridge combination exhibited clarity with regard to distinguishing musicians in the band, one from the other with startling realism. Willy Nelson's performing "Stardust" on his *Stardust* [Columbia 35305] album, is a must listen with the Classic 3. Here vocals took on a pleasant three dimensional quality closely resembling an actual person singing inside my room. Shocking good is how I would describe it. "Georgia on my Mind" from the same album nicely placed that powerfully voice front and center adding greatly to correct soundscape imaging. Add that to the band and a harmonica playing in the background and you can experience a nice holographic image from this recording. It was difficult to decide what was more enticing, vocals or images but when they both came together on a song it was to die for. Feel free to take out those old Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, and Johnny Mathis albums because vocals sounded better than ever played back via the Classic 3. Fluctuations in the change of pitch, vibrato, was a pleasure to hear from those great classic performers. One of my favorite Bob Dylan pieces "Blowin' in the Wind" performed by Peter, Paul and Mary on *10 Years Together* [BSK 3105] was another big hit. That trio of voices so precisely pinpointed on the perceived soundscape, remaining clearly differentiated one from each other making the song even more enticing than I had previously remembered. Those who have not listened to Peter Paul and Mary on a high end stereo please go buy one or more of their vinyl recordings. Be warned that when you put those albums on a Classic 3 you should be prepared for something truly special. This combination of song and equipment provided me with many hours of relaxing music ending only when sleep reluctantly overtook my senses.

George Bensons *Weekend in L.A.* album [Warner Brothers 2WB 3139] really rocked the house. The soundscape was "alive" with Phil Upchurch (rhythm guitar), Ronnie Foster (keyboards), Jorge Dalto (acoustic piano/keyboards), Stanley Banks (bass), Harvey Mason (drums), Ralph (percussion), and of course George Benson (lead guitar/vocals). Though there were no vocals on "Weekend in L.A." yet the guitar works of George Benson rang out loud and clear courtesy of this VPI Classic 3 combination. Every time an album was placed on this table it was as if a different and better version, of my previous memory of it was presented anew to me. Retrieval was now on a newer and higher level making me very happy indeed. Though the soundscape was crowded with musicians the distinction of each clearly performing in separate spaces was amazing. When listening to percussions, drums and bass there was certainly nothing lacking in the lower registrar of musical notes as song after song sounded rock solid. It was very difficult for me to leave this record as the rhythm and pace of each song swept me away. *Vienna Holiday* [Columbia CK 706] is a collection of famous pieces conducted/arranged by Michel Legrand and his Orchestra (1955). This is the only vinyl album in my collect stamped "unbreakable" on the record itself, something I decided not to test as the thought of trying to replace it made me wince. The flute on "Vilia" had an audible breathe to the highs adding an airy, graceful texture to each note. Music took on a very pleasant and endearing quality attributed by me to be the work of the Classic

3. Searching hard there really was nothing to complain about. When put into the context of its price point though it was even that much more astonishing.

Conclusion

It would be easy to go on and on about the virtues of this table from VPI but it always came back to the same conclusion. This is one very musical and enjoyable turntable setup worthy of being placed within systems of considerable value. Recordings sounded both precise and alive while covering the range of frequencies from low to high. The purchase of the Classic 3 turntable has left me wanting for little while renewing my interest in procuring even more vinyl to add to my collection of one thousand records and counting. The fact that the VPI Classic 3 is not only beautiful to behold, a pleasure to hear and priced affordably makes me smile from ear to ear with the very thought of it now being a part of my very own review system. If funds are less than what is necessary to attain this particular model you could always start with a Classic 1, adding upgrades as money becomes available. For me the Classic 3 drew



me in as it hit that price point of giving me a lot but not being crazy expensive. Still as overjoyed as I was the thought crossed my mind of how much more could this table blossom with perhaps a Lyra Atlas or maybe even a Koetsu Urushi Red... hmmm? So many cartridges so little time. As for this turntable it will be staying with me for a very long time. Now stop this reading and go have some fun, caring and spinning your own vinyl collection. Better yet head down to your nearest VPI dealer and give the Classic 3 a listen, I would be surprised if you were not as equally impressed as I was with what this table can do. As for me, it is time to run out and buy some more records to come home and spin on my new turntable, thanks Harry and Matt.

The Listening Environment

The review room is 18' 3" long by 13' wide with loudspeakers and equipment kept on the short wall. The cathedral ceiling starts at eight feet on the short wall slopping upwards to reach a height of thirteen feet in the middle than returning to eight feet at the opposite end. The hardwood floor is partially covered by a nine by six foot oriental rug lying down the long ways facing toward the loudspeakers, placed dead center between but not under the listener or the audio rack. The room has no doors but there are two openings. One opening is in front of the right loudspeaker on the long wall giving access to the hallway the other behind the listening position to a formal dining area. There are two large large floor standing acoustical panels one in each corner of the short wall behind the loudspeakers and one behind the listening seat slightly off to the left. Numerous Auralex Studiofoam panels are placed around the room on the walls and two floor standing GIF Tri-traps in each of corner of the rear of the room. All the audio equipment is located in a Synergy Twin S30 Salamander audio rack placed about a foot away from and in the middle of the short wall opposite the listening position.

Review Equipment

Von Schweikert VR-35 Export Deluxe Loudspeakers

Aesthetix Saturn Calypso Preamplifier

Musical Surroundings Nova Phenomena Phono Stage

VPI 16.5 Record Cleaning Machine

Acoustic Revive RPT-4 Ultimate Power Supply Box

APC S15 Power Conditioner (connected to VPI Classic 3 turntable)

Loudspeaker Cables: Kimber Kable 4TC and 4PR (bi-wired to loudspeakers, top and bottom respectfully)

Interconnects:

Monarchy Audio DAB-1 XLR Balanced cables (pre to amp)

Acoustic Revive XLR Balanced cables (CD player to preamplifier)

Kimber Kable Hero RCA Interconnects (turntable to phonostage & phonostage to pre)

Power Cords:

Tek Line PC-8 Signature Power Cords

Monarchy Audio AC-1 Power Cord
Acoustic Revive Power Cords
Cherry Synergy Twin S30 Salamander audio rack

Specifications

Type: Analog turntable for 33.3 and 45 rpm vinyl records
Chassis: Non-resonating laminated one-piece
2.5" thick MDF block with 11 gauge steel with bolts through all the layers
Tonearm: JMW-10.5i SE Tonearm with anti-skate.
Output: RCA jack termination (XLR termination optional for a fee).
Dimensions: 20.5" x 15.5" x 10"
Footprint: 19.25" x 14.25"
Diameter Of Single Foot: 2.25"
Platter Height: 2"
Platter Weight: 20 lbs.
Chassis Weight: 30 lbs.
Total Weight: 65 lbs.
Warranty: Three Years
Price: \$6000

Note: Review sample came equipped with an optional Lyra Delos Moving Coil Cartridge per reviewer's request. It was factory installed at VPI Industries, Inc.

Company Information

VPI Industries, Inc.
77 Cliffwood Ave. #3B
Cliffwood, NJ 07721

Voice: (732) 583-6895
E-mail: vpiindustries@yahoo.com
Website: www.vpiindustries.com
