

VPI Industries Nomad Turntable An excellent, and inexpensive, high-end vinyl LP turntable with phonostage and headphone output. Review By Heather Baird, Cailyn Baird and Steven R. Rochlin

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World Premiere!

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The revitalized growth in sales of vinyl LPs, and record players, over the past few years has been greeted with immense support by those who *truly* care about their music. The likes of high-res digital music downloads and vinyl may not kill off the MP3 format, yet there is no doubt that with each passing day more and more music lovers are realizing the vinyl LP delivers a far more enjoyable experience. My wife Heather and her 13 year young daughter Cailyn both love music. Imagine, if you will, having two 'normal' people visit the home of a music lover filled with wonderful hi-fi gear. Now take it a step further as one of them is my wife, and the other her daughter, who are both avid music enthusiasts. My wife Heather has attended industry events and noticed a wide variety of turntables and vinyl LPs for sale during high-end audio shows. For her, it was curious to see so many people within the industry praising this decades old technology over the more modern MP3. Since Heather may have grown up listening to her parent's vinyl and thus has some preconceived notions such as pops, ticks and 'vinyl noise,' her daughter has no personal experience and thus just goes by what others have said about 'vinyl noise'. As a 13 year old, she is a fresh new 'slate' ready to hear the difference with an open mind and no person experience with certain preconceived notions.

Heather's daughter, Cailyn, is your typical teenager. She is constantly glued to her iTouch and Android phone, plus all she has really known are streaming online music and of course purchased MP3 files from Apple iTunes. With the resurgence of LPs finding their way into stores worldwide, and it being cool (once again) to play vinyl, she was very curious in the advantages of vinyl over her lifelong diet of lossy compressed MP3 and streaming music. As a side note, I recall years ago reading a Unites States Navy research paper concerning human hearing. The military wanted to find who had the best hearing, as they wanted to have the very best people operate submarine SONAR (**SO**und **N**avigation **A**nd **R**anging). The research paper conclusion stated that 13 year old females had the best overall hearing ability. With both Heather, and 13 year old Cailyn, asking all the right questions concerning why vinyl LPs have maintained such a great following, I felt it would be great to have them check out the latest offering from VPI Industries. Can't find that original SONAR study online, yet [here is another one](#) for those who are technically minded and enjoy reading research papers.

About VPI

VPI Industries Inc. is based in New Jersey, USA, and has been manufacturing high-end audio turntables since 1978. Harry Weisfeld, a mechanical engineering and racing car design enthusiast, designed and engineered the company's first major product. VPI's HW-16 record cleaner was the company's first entry into high-end audio and it is still in production today in an improved form. The company's other very early product was a



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record weight in two different sizes, with a turntable isolation base following suit in December of 1978. Eventually VPI's HW-19 turntable become an industry standard for high-end performance at an affordable price.

Over the years VPI produced many models of turntables and tonearms at affordable pricing. "With the introduction of the TNT Turntable came the reality of Harry's promise to produce a state-of-the-art turntable at something less than a state-of-the-staggering price" say their website. Harry's son Jonathan had worked at his parents' factory and was helping his dad design a new tonearm. Sadly, Jonathan was killed in a horrific car accident at the age of 17 and thus the model became the JMW Memorial Tonearm.

As time moved forward, Harry's son Mathew (Mat) grew up with an eye on his family's expanding company yet he became a high school teacher and, like father, enjoyed the study of mechanical engineering. Mat's focus pertained not just to the turntables his family created, it also reached into robotics. As the next generation of family within VPI and a Holmdel High School teacher who completed his Master's Degree in Education in August of 2009, Mat was also an adjunct Professor at Monmouth University in New Jersey. Father Harry wisely realized his son's talents and brought him into the company to continue their efforts. Mat's experience with the younger generation taught him well and in the family tradition has helped create a reasonably priced turntable, yet with some uniquely modern features. Mat also took a leading role at modernizing VPI's website and the overall company in general.

Enter The VPI Nomad

So what makes the VPI Nomad a unique turntable squarely aimed at the new generation of music lovers? The VPI Nomad is the industry's first all-in-one high performance entry-level turntable. Many expensive high-end audio turntables are just the base unit, with the tonearm and cartridge being purchased separately. VPI, a company always keen to offering high value for the money products, decided it was time for something *truly* different. Not only did the turntable include the tonearm and a good quality, and carefully chosen Ortofon 2M Red MM cartridge, it also has a headphone amplifier and phonostage too! The 10" tonearm was designed from the ground up to offer excellent playback ability for reasonable money. The VPI Nomad has standard RCA connections that provide the ability to connect to a standard amplifier and desktop/floorstanding speakers. Thus you can directly hook self-powered speakers and headphones to the VPI Nomad without needing any other piece of equipment as most other turntables require.



VPI's Nomad 10" tonearm uses a stainless steel rod through the bearing to provide both stability and durability for the listener. A gimbaled/yoke bearing ensures smooth operation for many years. Since the VPI Nomad is made for newfound vinyl LP enthusiasts, VPI makes it easy to setup too. Counterweight location and cartridge alignment is precisely measured at the factory and sent to the users with only the weight needing to be attached to the tonearm. The tonearm come pre-mounted with the Ortofon 2M Red MM cartridge, yet that can easily be changed as it wears out. You can also upgrade to any number of other high quality cartridges too. Setup is extremely easy and takes only a few minutes. Using my high-precision weight scale, VPI sent the unit with a tracking force of 1.8 grams and cartridge alignment was spot on perfect. Of course the counterweight can easily be adjusted and mounting a new cartridge is the usual affair. Yet right out of the box it is extremely easy to setup and you're good to go.



The platter is driven by a rubber belt via a smooth operating 24 VAC synchronous AC motor. This combination to drive the platter provides quiet, stable operation and you can move the rubber belt to one of two positions on the motor assembly depending on if you desire 33.3 or 45 rpm platter rotational speed. With modern technology, VPI has ensured the platter has extremely low wow and flutter of 0.06% and 0.04% respectively. At no time during our review did we have any problems with the VPI Nomad as everything worked flawlessly.

During the review we tested the VPI Nomad turntable's RCA output hooked directly to an appropriate setup that included a Marantz SR7008 receiver and again with our Sonos homewide wireless music distribution system. This played through our main stereo with modified 6' high Dunlavy reference speakers. Heather and I used Sennheiser HD600, her 13 year old daughter Cailyn loves her inexpensive Skull Candy headphones and so we kept those as *her* daily reference (plus of course the main speakers). As for myself, the HD600 headphones were joined by my set of custom made JH Audio JH13 Pro and Ultimate Ears 18 Pro in-ear monitors, which were fed by the VPI Nomad's headphone output.

Heather Happily Hones In On VPI's Nomad Turntable

Heather says, "First off I am not a writer or an audiophile; personally I think it is ridiculous to spend thousands upon thousands of dollars on a piece of equipment that might sound *a little better* than what you can get for much less money. Have not played, or even touched a turntable -- I always just called a record player) -- since I was a child going through my parents old albums laughing at Englebert Humperdink's name, listening to Karen Carpenters enchanting voice or the cheerful tunes of "Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head" by BJ Thomas for hours upon hours. Have no idea what my mom had for a turntable, yet can only assume it was a basic one with no special features. It probably sounded horrible, yet to me it was a joyful escape at the time."

"Fast forward 30 years and I have found an amazing man who has a love for high-end audio and everything that goes along with it," says Heather. "I have been privileged enough to attend several high fidelity audio shows and still have much to learn what this industry is all about. Have met some wonderful people along the way. This includes the young man, with a sparkling personality, Mat Weisfeld of VPI Industries. Mat is the new President of this family run business, which makes their products here within the USA. VPI manufactures high-end turntables at a price that ranges from real world, to some reaching tens of thousands of dollars. The newest VPI turntable that caught my eye, the \$995 Nomad, gave my amazing husband a brilliant (terrifying for me) idea; I should write a review from the average listeners (non- audiophile) perspective."



Heather continues by saying, "The day the VPI Nomad turntable arrived I ended up having to ban Steven from the living room; he could not keep his fingers off it even though he claimed he didn't want to help (such a sweetie). The directions were straightforward and easy to follow. I set up the VPI Nomad in no time; Steven just had to help get the proper cords in the proper place. Initially, for good sound quality, the turntable system did need the run time that the user manual suggested in order for it to "break in". Listening to the Nomad has a ceremonious feel to it versus listening to my playlist of music on the smartphone or Sonos system. To me, listening to music on the Nomad is a relaxing Saturday afternoon activity, something special not an everyday event."

Heather's 13 year old daughter also enjoyed the Nomad and she says, "In my opinion the VPI Nomad turntable sounds pretty good. I always thought that record players made weird sounds when they played. I was surprised how clear it sounded! There were no glitchy sounds that I would have thought there would be there. I have an Apple iTouch and Samsung SIII, yet think that the turntable sounds much clearer than the Apple iTouch. I can hear every instrument perfectly and listened to it with my Skull Candy headphones and with Steven's reference modified Dunlavy speakers; with the speakers sounding better than the Skull Candy headphones. Overall, whether I was listening with speakers or headphones, both sounded really great! The vocals within music sound more complete than the same songs on my Apple-sourced iTunes file on the iTouch. With my iTouch, the voices in the music just do not sound complete. With the turntable I hear more intricate sounds I've *never* heard listening to the same song on the iTouch."



Heather goes on to say that "the VPI Nomad is compact and coordinates with most any interior decoration (wives should not have a problem with esthetics). I like listening and moving around the house so having it hooked up to my hubbies big speakers was great, however when I put on Steven's Sennheiser HD600 headphones I was blown away. Nothing could get my attention as I was in another world; *happy girl*. The difference in my opinion was night and day. Compared to my MP3 music, the quality was *so much better*, yet lacking the digital file's convenience. There were quite a few factors that improved the quality of the sound. These factors included cleaning the record (even a brand new one!) with the Spin-Clean vinyl record washer made a huge difference ([see Spin-Clean review here](#)), as well as the quality of the record itself. I had no idea what a *huge* difference the quality of the vinyl itself makes. It was not easy to find new music on vinyl in my small town area, yet online stores offer a wide variety and shipping is usually free too! The cost of new vinyl LPs is higher than MP3 files on iTunes, yet we did find some good used vinyl at a local record store.

Overall Impressions

It is great to see VPI at the forefront of vinyl LP replay with a nod to those who enjoy music through headphones. It was fantastic to hear how my wife Heather and her daughter Cailyn, who have never really had a record player, see what all of us enthusiasts already know. The first thing many people say about vinyl LPs concerns the preconceived notion of playback noise – pops, tics and the like – which is virtually never heard on a modern high quality record playback system. While very early LP playback decades ago did have noise problems, this has been almost entirely removed via modern equipment and is especially true with new record pressings. The VPI Nomad with Ortofon 2M Red cartridge does error a bit on the side of musicality over the utmost in accuracy and resolution, yet keep in mind during my life I have used an \$8000 cartridge with a \$12,000 turntable that has a \$4000 tonearm (\$24,000 total). Dare I mention another setup with a \$5000 Audio Note silver-wired step-up transformer for the lo-2 MC cartridge and mega-buck triode tubed phonostage? Given the \$995 price of the VPI Nomad, one *should* expect some differences for something that costs 1/24th (!) the price of one of the setups here. For it is easy to design a cost-no-object record player, yet start cutting the retail price down to under \$4000 and things get quite interesting. Cut it down to just under \$1000 and some *very challenging* decisions needs to be made.



Imaging with the VPI Nomad was extremely good between the speakers, with hints of some expansiveness into the room and to the sides of the speakers. Image depth was impressive given the price of the Nomad. Time and again I began to wonder just where the laws of diminishing returns are, and here is where VPI does

offer turntable setups that will provide higher performance, yet at a higher price point. What I found truly impressive is how smooth and musical the VPI Nomad sounded through the HD600, JH Audio JH13 Pro and Ultimate Ears 18 Pro custom in-ear monitors. Experienced users know the HD600 are not an easy headphone to drive, as they need high power output to achieve their very best and no normal portable mainstream player such as a smartphone or iPod can achieve a good volume level of output to drive them. The VPI Nomad had no trouble driving the Sennheisers to full output and the sound was indeed captivating, smooth, and immensely musical in nature. With the IEMs, there was an abundance of headphone output to reach near ear-bleeding volume levels. When using my custom made IEMs, they brought forth higher resolution and accuracy than the HD600. What I found quite interesting is how *immensely enjoyable* the music was through the HD600. It delivered a sound that was buttery smooth, clean and colossally enjoyable. It also helped to tame certain lackluster vinyl records with augmented highs such as my vintage pressing of Missing Persons 33.3 rpm mini-LP [DLP-1500].

Moving on to the new release of Justin Timberlake's *The 20/20 Experience* [88765-47850-1] double LP was, for me, the real challenge as the album was recorded in high definition within the studio and I have the high-res digital files here for comparison. As great as the high-rez digital file is, the analog LP had more depth and subtle dynamics over the digital counterpart. In some way the digital file sounded better via the \$2500 [Astell&Kern AK240 portable media player](#), yet I would not say one was overall a better experience than its vinyl counterpart. Both provided an extremely enjoyable experience, with perhaps the nod to the digital file for the last bit of resolution, definition and soundscape. Then again the AK240 is an extremely edge-of-the-art dual mono high-end \$2500 portable media player whereas the \$995 VPI Nomad can be upgraded with a new, higher performance cartridge and that can be a game changer against the over twice as expensive Astell&Kern AK240!

We also enjoyed two superb pressing from [Impex Records](#) that included Earth, Wind & Fire's *That's The Way Of The Word* [IMP6015] and The Jazz Messengers *Hard Bop* [IMP6016]. While this might sound a bit cliché, there is no doubt that vinyl has a great groove and boogie factor that can be lacking in digital playback. Perhaps one of the endearing qualities of vinyl LPs are in how they handle tempo and beat. It makes sense why many leading DJs still use a pair of turntables for their club events. When you listen to MP3 files on the typical iPod and the like, they almost never have the human feeling of what we drummers call 'in the pocket'. What I mean by that is when music, especially funk, is played back on most MP3 players you never get the feeling of the tempo moving you in such a way as to nearly *force* you to tap your toe or, dare we say, dance to it. In fact there are certain vinyl record players can lack this type of tempo/phrasing too! The British sum it up as pace, rhythm and timing (PRaT). There is no doubt vinyl LP is King in this regard over digitized music until you get to some seriously expensive digital playback gear and *true high resolution* music files. Vinyl playback seems to be inherently better at handling groove and microdynamics that sound organic and human.



Impex Records takes great care at remastering and engineering their 180 gram LP releases and it shows nicely here on the VPI Nomad. Once the needle was in the opening outer groove, neither myself or Heather and Cailyn ever heard a pop, tic or other noise. What many people do not realize is that they are paying full price for MP3 files to merely *license the ability to play their lossy compressed MP3 music*, which is usually sourced from a low-end CD versus today's high-resolution music. Notice I said *licensed*, as *you do not own your MP3 files* technically, as you can not sell them on eBay or other sites. Remastered and new vinyl releases are usually sourced from the recording studio analog master tapes or far higher than CD resolution files from the recording studio. With vinyl, you get a better source for the music, beautiful cover art, plus of course *you own the LP* and thus can sell or trade it legally all around the world. MP3 = wasted money *per se* whereas vinyl = investment.



Another album we purchased for this review was Queen's *News Of The World*, which has such popular tunes as "We Will Rock You" and "We Are The Champions". With so much going on within the mix, the Nomad easily unraveled all the voices and instruments as they flowed forth through the speakers and into the room. Like Cailyn said, there is simply more there to enjoy within the music that gets lost via MP3. Those of you who have heard your fave tunes only on MP3 will be in for an immensely enjoyable experience. The combination of remastered music and modern vinyl playback *utterly and completely trounces* your iTunes files on the iPod! Taking my wife Heather vinyl shopping, she chose to get Kid Rock's *Born Free* on double LP for under \$10. Having met him personally and seeing [his performance at Woodstock 1999](#), I realized he has more talent than some of his recordings may let on to. Perhaps it was the radio or low-end MP3, yet on the album the music was far more involving than I recall. Sure it may not be my first choice in music, yet on the other hand this vinyl LP gives the musical artist a better chance at having their talents shine through.

We did pick up some used vinyl, and here is where the newcomer will need to tread *very* carefully. The first problem with used vinyl is that many albums were not made to anything near today's modern standards. Add in the fact that used vinyl is, well, used, and thus it can be dirty and there could be unseen damage within the grooves too. So even if you find a really good or collectable high quality older pressing, you need to take certain steps to ensure top-flight playback. While Heather did mention this, I feel it needs to be stated again that you need to clean vinyl. This is true with new pressings as well! While the CD is made in 'clean rooms', vinyl LPs are more often than not manufactured in less than lab-grade clean rooms to put it kindly. The process of pressing a vinyl record can leave some debris within the grooves no matter if it is a garage sale find or brand new pressing. This is where the Spin-Clean record cleaner comes into play. For less than \$100 you can get a complete record cleaning system that is effective and easy to use. If you're new to vinyl, or even if you have a nice collection that has never been cleaned, you should get a Spin-Clean unit *immediately* and use it on your entire collection!

A VPI Nomad In Every Home

Can you believe there is a newfound resurgence of popularity with vinyl LPs in 2014? Of course there, and the reasons are quite simple. Your music will sound far better than iTunes MP3 or streaming music services. Once you hear the results, you'll never be happy settling for MP3 from your fave musical artists or for any serious listening. Simply put, MP3 is for background noise while the vinyl LP is for enjoying music. The United States Military says that 13 year old girls have the best hearing and Cailyn said it best when she proclaimed that "With the turntable I hear more intricate sounds I've *never* heard listening to the same song on the iTouch". The added benefit of being able to use the VPI Nomad with your current home receiver or direct connection to your headphones makes it that much more a real-world bargain! Music flowed through the Nomad as it delivered hour after hour of enchanting sounds never heard from your low-fi modern MP3 digital music player. In fact many recording engineers hate the MP3 as it cripples their hundreds of hours of hard work to produce music as the artists intended. Sure MP3s are popular, yet so is McDonalds and we all know the quality and nutrition of McD's products. Perhaps think of the MP3 like McDonalds and vinyl LP playback with the VPI Nomad as Five Guys Burgers and Fires. Both will keep you fed and alive, yet we all know Five Guys is a far superior product for just a bit more money.

With the VPI Nomad being extremely easy to setup and use, there is no excuse to join the pack of music lovers who know vinyl is the way to go. Everything about the Nomad is high quality for such an entry-level price and

my wife Heather had it setup in a matter of a few minutes. Your only real concern is what albums you want to buy. You can easily use the Nomad with your Sonos system and send your music homewide into every room... or plug in your headphone for a more intimate listening experience. Made within the USA, quality is assured as VPI has decades of experience delivering high-end turntables for the money. For only \$995, the Nomad is not only an MP3 killer, it will open up a new realm of music for you to discover, or perhaps rediscover what you've been missing with lossy compressed MP3. All those great songs you felt you knew become a new experience filled with sounds you may have not heard before. All that effort from the original musician to recording and mastering engineering comes through.

If you've been wondering what all the 'hype' about vinyl is from your friends, you'll quickly learn for yourself that the hype is for real. If you are on a budget, or perhaps fear the immense technical know-how and tools to get a turntable setup correctly, there is no doubt the VPI Nomad is a top-shelf choice. Headphone lovers will rejoice as the VPI Nomad is a simple plug-n-play affair and the same can be said for the ease of connecting it to your home receiver or Sonos system. Imagine the house party you could have while spinning vinyl... or those quiet moments when you want to put on your headphones and let the world melt around you as your enveloped in mesmerizing musical bliss. When was the last time that you were deeply enthralled with music collection? Heather says, "If you're at home and want to enjoy your music on vinyl LP, the Nomad is the way to go." For only \$995 I know of no better choice. Here is your chance to discover, or perhaps rediscover, all the music you love. Cailyn is at the age for those with the best hearing and she says, "With the turntable I hear more intricate sounds I've *never* heard listening to the same song on the Apple iTouch." It is time for you to discover what we high-end types have known for decades. If you want to be true to your music, you should consider getting a turntable. The VPI Nomad is great for those on a budget and want the utmost in usability to fulfill your musical desires... plus vinyl is cool in a way your friends can admire, and enjoy, too!

As always, in the end what really matters is that you...

Enjoy the Music,

Steven R. Rochlin.

Tonality	
Sub-bass (10Hz - 60Hz)	
Mid-bass (80Hz - 200Hz)	
Midrange (200Hz - 3,000Hz)	
High Frequencies (3,000Hz On Up)	
Attack	
Decay	
Inner Resolution	
Soundscape Width Front	
Soundscape Width Rear	

Soundscape Depth Behind Speakers	
Soundscape Extension Into Room	
Imaging	
Fit And Finish	
Self Noise	
Value For The Money	

Specifications

VPI Nomad

Type: Belt drive manual turntable

Motor: 24 VAC Synchronous AC Motor

Turntable Platter: Machined MDF with a diameter of 11.81"

Turntable Speeds: 33.3 and 45 rpm

Wow and Flutter: 0.06% WOW and 0.04% Flutter

Rumble: <-80dB

Effective Arm Length: 9.9"

Overhang 0.65" Lofgren A

Offset Angle: 21.8°

Arm Mass: 10 grams without cartridge

Stylus Pressure Adjustment Range: 0 to 3 grams (with 4 gram cartridge)

Cartridge: Ortofon 2M Red

Output 5.5 mV @ 1 kHz

Phono Preamplifier Gain: 35dB

Cartridge Loading: 150 pF across 47K Ohms

Frequency Response 20 Hz to 20 kHz

Low Frequency Roll-off: -1.4 dB @ 10 Hz

Output Voltage Via RCA Jacks: 287 mV @ 1 kHz (-10dBV)

Headphone Amplifier Gain: 10 dB

Frequency Response 20 Hz to 20 kHz

Output Level: 395 mW per Channel @ 150 Ohm

165 mW per Channel @ 32 Ohm

Dimensions: 18.5" x 13.5" x 4.3" (WxDxH)

Weight 12.9 lbs.

Price: \$995

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