

## VPI Industries Scout Jr. Turntable by Karl Sigman on August 14, 2015 · 4 comments in Analogue , Star Components

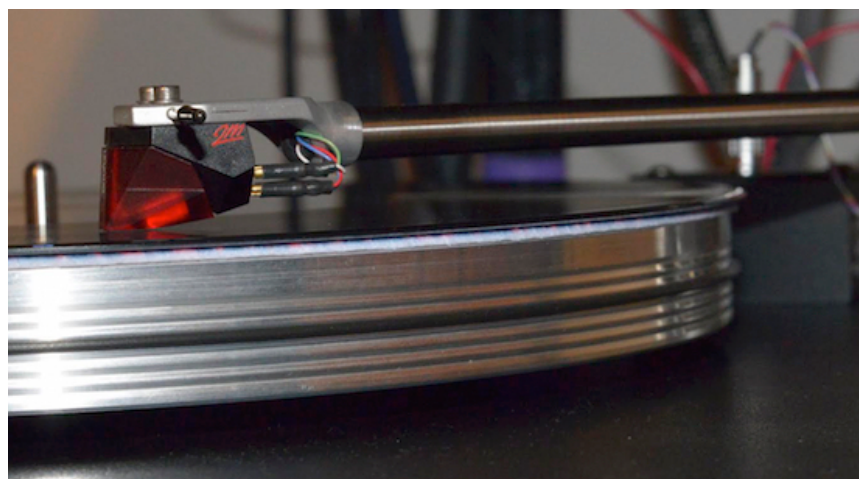
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scoutcover

aluminum platter and a stand-alone motor. It requires no adjusting. It weighs in at 32 pounds, retails for \$1500 and is upgradable in a variety of non-trivial ways.

The Scout Jr. is the second (from lowest to highest) in a 6-model line within VPI's 'Production Tables' series. The next in line is the widely esteemed Scout, at \$2000, which differs in having a higher-end platter and tonearm. It does not come with a cartridge. The Scout Jr. can be upgraded to the same heights as the Scout. The least expensive in line is the Nomad, at \$995, which also is ready-to-use out of the box, and comes with a phono stage, headphone amp and motor built in. The Nomad cannot be upgraded to a Scout level.



scout4

I admit that sometimes one sounds better than the other. I have also heard rubbish from both.

When I moved to New York City in the late 1980s, I already had a very modest stereo audio system including a cassette player, CD player and indeed a turntable. I also had a mishmash collection of records as well as CDs and cassettes. But upon moving into my new small one-bedroom apartment in 1987, I decided to first only set up the cassette player and the CD player; the turntable I thought could wait until a bit later after my apartment was in better order to welcome it.

It never happened. Months later when I tried to take the turntable out of the closet, the high shelf it was

While completing my [review](#) of the Sprout integrated amp by PS Audio in February 2015, I had a friendly chat with Mat Weisfeld, President of VPI, who mentioned that VPI Industries uses the Sprout to test their 'Budget Reference' but high-end entry-level turntable, the Scout Jr.

Weisfeld was kind enough to send me a Scout Jr. on loan for review. It is ready-to-use out of the box, complete with a pre-mounted Ortofon 2M Red cartridge on a 9 inch stainless steel tonearm with gimballed/yoke bearing, a 1" thick

After the Scout, VPI's next three in line are the higher end Classic, Prime, and Classic Signature. I confess right up front — this is the first time in almost 30 years that I have allowed a turntable in my apartment [*Ahem!! -Ed*]. I am currently a 100% digital guy—but with great respect for those who are not; and I am not someone who take sides in the digital versus analog divide. I have heard extraordinary recordings digitally and on vinyl, and

sitting upon broke off the wall and the poor table had a great fall like Humpty Dumpty and cracked—it was completely destroyed.

Instead of buying a new one, I just continued on with CDs, eventually upgrading my system with a new CD player, a separate stereo amp, preamp, and speakers. My small collection of LPs remained in the closet. Years went by, with further upgrades, but only digital sources; I now only use a computer with digital files for play through a DAC. The decision not to get a table was mainly practical. Children. And my father still to this day reminds me of the mischief I wrought upon his vinyl rig when I was a toddler (ripping off the cartridge/arm, placing uncovered records in dresser drawers and even within piano strings—among other atrocities). I also just have a deep ongoing fascination for digital audio and its remarkable march ahead. But prodding from my Editor, together with very positive experiences of listening to vinyl on other audiophiles' home systems and at audio shows led me to take the plunge. The time had come.

## **VPI Industries**

VPI is a premier USA high-end audio manufacturer based in New Jersey that was started in the late 1970s by Weisfeld's parents; a family owned business with Mat now enthusiastically and passionately carrying the torch. Although presently they are best known for their extraordinary line of turntables endowed with superb engineering, value, simple unassuming appearance, and clever upgradability, VPI originally only manufactured analogue accessories such as record weights, isolation bases and record cleaning machines (which they continue to manufacture). VPI products are widely available through dealers.

### **Setting up the Scout Jr.**

When the box arrived, it contained a short and simple instruction manual. Additionally the VPI website includes a video that carefully and quickly shows how to set up the Scout Jr. It took me only 10 minutes to do so.

Upon completion what then sat before me was a minimalist looking and very solid unit of great simplicity, cleverness and elegance. Visually, I thought it would be worthy of consideration just as a piece of modern art, and it went perfectly with the black shelves on my vertical audio cabinet made by Salamander Designs.

The base of the Scout Jr. was a smooth black rectangle with four large adjustable shiny silver colored metal footers already attached, and a sleek silver colored arm with the red Ortofon cartridge already mounted. On its left side was a small rectangular indentation to receive the motor module (a smooth black block) which you just push in after connecting its power cord; it has a power button on its left and 4 small rubber footers for isolation. Then just plop on the platter and attach the drive belt connecting platter with motor—Voila!

Final notes: The connection on the table to a phono preamp is RCA (only) and you must supply your own appropriate cables for the task. VPI does manufacture a cable, however. JMW RCA Phono Cable (about \$299 for 1 meter). The stock power cable that comes with the Scout Jr. can be replaced by your own if you so wish. The table is grounded and you can further attach a grounding wire from your phono preamp (I did so). The drive belt has two basic positions, one for 33 RPM the other for 45 RPM.

Although no adjusting is necessary, you can adjust arm height and azimuth easily. Various upgrades are possible for the Scout Jr. including cartridges, platters, tonearms, and motors; a very impressive and enticing feature.

### **Using the Scout Jr. with the Sprout by PS Audio**

The PS Audio Sprout integrated amp unit was my first choice for testing the turntable since it is a complete solution — among other things, a phono preamp, an analog preamp for volume control, a stereo amp for driving speakers, and a headphone amp. For speakers, I used the small but mighty Alta Audio Solos, for speaker wires the AntiCables Level 3 Reference, for interconnects (RCA) from Scout Jr. to Sprout, Waveform Fidelity GS Mk3, for headphones the Master & Dynamic MH40. Sans the Scout Jr, this was the audiophile quality entry-level system I had put together in my Sprout review; henceforth it finally had an entry-level vinyl component.

It was now time to play some records and review the sound. In the instruction manual under the heading 'Playing Records' were the following two (and only two) bullet point instructions:

- Put the record on your table; grab your preferred choice of enjoyable beverage.
- Press the power button and sit down and enjoy listening to your records!

I was very anxious to follow suit. In preparation, I dutifully uncorked a large bottle of Allagash Tripel Ale.

From my old record collection—the newest record I could find was dated 1985—I chose as my first play a 1966 classical stereo recording: 'Italian Baroque Trumpet Concerti', Manfredi, Vivaldi, Torelli, Albinoni. Turnabout Records, TV 34057S. It appeared to be—and ultimately was confirmed to be—in superb physical condition, only the cover was old and faded, ripped. The sound was delightful; rich and full and natural. It brought back decades of memories, and although I at first was nervous using vinyl after a 30-year lapse, the simplicity of the Scout Jr. made the various methods and technique of doing so come back to me in a flash—like riding a bicycle. For example, at one point, I found myself blowing on the stylus to remove dust; it came naturally.

As my second album I chose Talking Heads, 'Little Creatures' (1985). I chose it because besides being a big fan of Talking Heads, close inspection on the back cover revealed that it had been mastered at Sterling Sound (by Jack Skinner), here in NYC. Coincidentally, days earlier I had been invited by a friend to tour Google Inc, at the Chelsea NYC office, above the Chelsea Market. While strolling through the main market area, before heading upstairs to Google, what did I stumble across? Sterling Sound Recording Studios!

The 'Little Creatures' first cut, 'And She Was', brought back memories of my graduate school days with strong emotion. What a lovely uplifting song. The album was in such good shape that I heard no crackles and pops. The Scout Jr. performed admirably, and the sound quality –tight and crispy–impressed me. I found the back of the album cover fascinating; it showed the four band members standing like robotic mannequins dressed up in exotic colorful clothing (Southeast Asian mixed with 60s pop?), with David Byrne wearing a gorgeous silver cap.

What fun I thought to be able to study an album cover visually while listening to the album. On an impulse I swiftly took the album cover and nailed it to the living room wall, front and center, where it shall stay I forcefully pronounced out loud—unless perhaps, when my wife returned home, she would be displeased by my madness and impromptu attempt at decor. And She Was.

Further LPs I played: the famous 1969 'In The Court Of The Crimson King' by King Crimson. What a cover! But the biggest surprise in my old collection was a gem from my past: The 1964 Tom Lehrer album, 'That Was The Year That Was'. Just seeing the cover brought back a flood of memories because my parents used to play this very same record when I was a young



scout3

take his course, but my academic advisor, while walking across campus with Lehrer one day, spotted me and invited me to join them for lunch. I recall Lehrer being a very modest, relatively shy man with a witty and cutting sense of humor.

boy. I recalled borrowing this exact copy from my parents when I went off to college, and never returning it. Here it was. This hilarious and brilliant live album, containing satirical classics like 'New Math', 'Wernher Von Braun', 'Smut', and 'The Vatican Rag', with Lehrer playing piano while telling stories and singing reminded me that I had actually had lunch once with Tom Lehrer when I was an undergraduate student. He was then on the faculty teaching a course 'The Nature of Mathematics', aimed at non-science majors. (He was no longer performing.) I was a math major hence could not

## Initial Impressions of Using Vinyl Again After so Long a Lapse

Admittedly, at first I was very annoyed that unlike playing digital files, I could not instantaneously switch between artists and tracks, let alone do so even before a track was finished. And having to get up and take the needle off when the side of a record ended drove me nuts. But after a while I got back into the vinyl groove. Simply, listen to the whole side of an album, relax, study the album cover, drink the beer slowly, pay attention, focus, take it all in. In other words, slow down. As with the PS Audio Sprout which has no remote control, one has to physically engage during the process of using vinyl; take a record out of its jacket and place on the table, brush the record to remove dust, move the turntable arm and so on. It had a positive effect on me. I soon felt like I was on vacation.

## Using the Scout Jr. with my reference system

The entry level system with Scout and Sprout was a superb one; but I soon became eager to attach the Scout Jr. to my reference system, the cost of which is more than ten times that of the Sprout based system. This was a task that took some serious thought in advance. I must digress.

The main obstacle was my reference system does not include a stand alone phono preamp, nor a stand alone preamp for volume control because I do not need them: I use a computer music server connected via USB to a DAC which has a built-in volume control. I only use/need 1 set of analog interconnects (and they are XLR); from DAC direct to amps, and all my equipment and interconnects are/use XLR. I had the required pair of RCA interconnects from having just used the Sprout; what to do next?

After further thought and study, a light shone brightly revealing the optimal device I should use given my constraints and given the kind of system I have — the PS Audio NuWave Phono Converter. It can be used as an exemplary stand alone analog phono stage, has RCA inputs to receive the VPI Scout Jr. and has XLR analog outputs. Thus, if I so wished, it could serve as a pure analog path to my amps if I also acquired a preamp. But the NuWave also does some magical and very sophisticated digital other things if used together with my specific DAC (the PS Audio DirectStream): It has a built-in analog to digital converter (ADC) that via I2S can send the digital output directly to the DAC using an HDMI cable. It can do this on the fly when playing vinyl; you can choose PCM up to 24/192 or DSD as standard or double rate as the conversion. And if used in this manner, since the DAC has an internal volume control, I would not need a separate stand alone preamp, nor any extra analog interconnects; just an HDMI cable.

Moreover, you can 'rip' the vinyl recording (into the aforementioned possible digital formats) as it plays by using a USB cable from NuWave to a computer. Using the NuWave was thus a slam dunk given my

situation.1

My friend Mike Levy, CEO and Founder of Alta Audio, happened to own a NuWave and kindly let me borrow it for this review. Since I do have a nice XLR attenuator, I was able to use that for a pure analog as well as the digital path in my listening. (I do not dwell on these differences here in this review; they were not significant.)

### **How did the Scout Jr. sound on my reference system?**

Settings things up I learned about the hassles of 'grounding' and buzz; it took some time to get things right. It appears to be an art. Finally, after several mishaps and confusion, there was silence when there should be. I then started playing albums.

The first observation hit fast and was an unpleasant one. The quality of my LP recordings, while some were good, overall, was embarrassingly poor, as compared to the various audiophile quality digital recordings I possessed. Most of my LPs sounded thin and compressed on my reference system, and the soundstage was small. It was thus imperative that I get my hands on some truly reference/audiophile quality vinyl for an honest review. So I did. I was grandly rewarded soundwise as a result.

I was a lucky man in this endeavor, however. On the one hand, my Editor had conveniently just published an [Audiophilia Top Ten](#) list of outstanding audiophile quality classical LPs reissues for audiophiles new to vinyl, while on the other hand, my NYC Audiophilia colleagues Martin Appel and Henry Wilkenson had various outstanding albums to lend me covering rock and jazz and beyond.

For example, Henry spent hours with me one day listening and helping me reorganize my equipment in its cabinet when he brought me LPs—and allowed me to hold on to them for further study, which of course I did. He also generously answered numerous questions I had about what I thought I was hearing versus what I was used to hearing.

In the end I was very impressed that an entry-level turntable could catch my ear and teach me new things. What started off being an uncomfortable duty became a comfortable and enjoyable journey. I summarize here some of the LPs in question that greatly impressed me in sound quality (and which music-wise I enjoy in any case); this includes some 45RPM versions (in 33 RPM size) of various things in extraordinary in sound quality (I list them in a separate category below):

1. Classical: 'Stravinsky: The Firebird', Antal Dorati (Conductor), London Symphony Orchestra (Mercury Living Presence).
2. Rock: 'The Wall' by Pink Floyd; 'Brothers in Arms' by Dire Straights.
3. Jazz: 'Montreux '77', Dizzy Gillespie Jam, (Pablo Live Deluxe 2308 211).
4. 45RPM: 'Belafonte Sings the Blues', 'Swings The Thing', Illinois Jacquet (Verve Records; Mono, from the 1956 recording).

The 45 RPMs also gave me the chance to try out how the Scout Jr. mechanically allows one to shift from 33 to 45. It is a breeze and very clever. You just move the part of the thin drive belt that attaches to the motor a notch down. When you turn the motor back on, it immediately adjusts the entire belt as the platter turns.

My only criticism of the Scout Jr. was the bass seemed more distant and less articulate at times; and the soundstage was



scout2



Summary

generally smaller and more set back, and often some instruments sounded light and thin. But the Scout Jr. is an entry level turntable costing about 8 times less than my much higher end digital rig (DAC and music player), giving my digital rig an unfair advantage. On a positive front, I sometimes found the vinyl to have a more accurate rendition of the whole (e.g., what it really is like to be at the concert, as opposed to mixing/remastering to make the imaging and such sound nicer to the ear).

What a pleasure to be reacquainted with vinyl after all these years. The Scout Jr. is an exquisite entry-level but audiophile quality turntable that won't intimidate anyone; it will lure one of all ages into a new (old?) world of audio that any audiophile would and should enjoy. Its ease of set up, very high quality of sound right out of the box, and

unassuming simplicity and elegance adds further to its attractiveness. And when you throw in the serious upgrading possibilities, the Scout Jr. becomes a great deal. Most certainly I will choose to keep this turntable—and experiment with its upgrades; its shelf in my cabinet is already used to its presence. I am eyeing a new cartridge as I write. Given the young age of my kids, however, I do not plan to ask my father for advice first.

*[It is with great pleasure that we award [The Audiophilia Star Component Award](#) to the VPI Industries Scout Jr. Turntable Congratulations! - Ed]*

1. [PS Audio is not the only company that mixes analog and digital into one indistinguishable world. Another company, DEQX, in Australia, makes extraordinary devices that utilize a ADC when playing vinyl (conversion to PCM 24/96), and it contains an internal 24/96 DAC too (and very fine speaker/room calibration) so the conversion back and forth is contained in 1 unit. I have heard it many times and it is amazing. But it does not have a phono preamp, and I already have a reference DAC.]↩

## VPI Industries Scout Jr. Turntable

Manufactured by VPI Industries Inc.  
77 Cliffwood Ave, Cliffwood, NJ 07721 USA

[website](#)

[email](#)

Phone (732) 583-6895

## [Specifications](#)

Source: Manufacturer loan

Price: \$1500 (incl. arm and cartridge)

## Associated Reference Equipment

Speakers: Alta Audio Celesta FRM-2, and Solo

Phono Preamp: PS Audio NuWave Phono Converter

Headphones: Master & Dynamic MH40

Amplifiers: Merrill Audio Veritas Monoblock Amplifiers,

PS Audio Sprout (integrated amplifier)

DAC: PS Audio DirectStream

Music Server: Mac Mini (Upgraded by Mojo Audio, with Joule V power supply)

USB Cables: Wireworld Platinum USB cable

Speaker cables: Waveform Fidelity GSIII, AntiCables Level 3 Reference

Interconnect cables (RCA): Waveform Fidelity GS Mk3

Interconnect cables (XLR): Waveform Fidelity GS Mk3, Antipodes Reference

Power cords: Waveform Fidelity

Power generator: PS Audio P3 Power Plant