

VPI Player turntable – a total vinyl solution?

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VPI PLAYER turntable package

+ Highly musical and versatile all-in-one turntable with bundled phono stage, headphone amp, tonearm and cartridge package.

– Not much...but experiment with mat options.

Sound: 9/10

Value: 9.5/10

TRUTH be told, I've admired VPI gear for some time now. The Weisfelds' (founded by Harry and presently under the helm of his son, Mat) attention to detail, sound engineering practices, and robustly built and inherently musical products have never failed to put a smile on my face.

That being said, their "entry-level" integrated turntables, beginning with the Nomad and most recently the Player, have been a bit of an anomaly to me. Think Lamborghini putting out a basic car with scaled-down-but-true-to-form tech and values at almost affordable money, and you've got the picture.

The Player is an integrated vinyl playback platform which provides a one-stop package, incorporating a solid 1.25-inch thick wood based (medium density fibreboard) non-resonant plinth with a built-in phono amplifier and a

headphone amplifier to boot.

The plinth is wrapped in a textured vinyl which comes in either faux walnut or maple options. The tonearm installed on the Player is a new VPI nine-inch damped stainless steel vertical yoke type design with lateral bearing and comes with a factory-fitted Ortofon 2M Red moving magnet cartridge.



SETTING UP

There is hardly any set up required at all with the Player. Pulling out the turntable from its well-padded foam-ensconced box was easy enough, leaving only to plonk the chunky aluminium platter on, plug the power cord in and interconnect cables into the amp.

Switching speeds between 33 1/3 and 45rpm requires a simple adjustment of the rubber belt from one pulley groove to another. Is there anything else? Not much. Just ensure that Player is placed on a stable base or shelf to avoid extraneous vibrations and attach a grounding wire. That's it.

For most vinyl enthusiasts, that would seem absolutely counter-intuitive but really, there isn't much more to it. All the standard procedures normally required to properly set up a turntable (and there are numerous) have been taken care of at the VPI factory back in Cliffwood, New Jersey. A cursory verification of the factory settings and tracking force on the stylus seemed to check out. The Player is indeed the epitome of plug 'n' play.



The Player is built like a proverbial tank, belying its modest inclinations. Tapping the plinth yields a confidence-inspiring thunk. Details like the over-spec'd aluminium platter, finely machined tonearm, and oil bath bearing speak to my inner nerd heart. C'mon, the bearing has a Peek thrust disc, and machined graphite impregnated brass bushings using a Thompson Engineering 60 Rockwell case hardened shaft.

Grouses? As fancy and patriotic as the slip mat is, do consider other mat options. I found a suede leather mat to provide better definition and lower noise characteristics. And do experiment with different record clamps. I found a medium weight wood clamp to provide improvements as well. And there's the headphone amp... more on that later.



LISTENING

For something that is meant to be an entry-level product, the Player punches way above its weight class. In fact, it rocks. The gnarly guitar riffs on *Money For Nothing* (Dire Straits – *Brothers In Arms*) and snappy bass came across with a compelling dynamic energy while allowing for the vocals, Sting's characteristic background vocal lines in particular, to be clearly articulated.

The Player's ability to provide substance on the critical vocal mid-range was clearly demonstrated in the a cappella version of *Tom's Diner* on Suzanne Vega's *Solitude Standing*. Vega's haunting vocal was placed in visceral three dimensionality in an immersive and open soundstage with a near pitch-black background, brought into stark reality given the omission of instrumental accompaniment.

I particularly enjoyed the instrumental timbre and pure musicality on Pablo Casal's performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Suite No. 1 in G major (Suites For Cello Unaccompanied)*. The Player handled this relatively noisy mono recording, originally recorded in the 1930s, clearly displaying Casal's virtuosity. In fact, I spent several evenings losing track of time playing record after record on the Player.



The onboard headphone amp is decent but careful pairing of accompanying headphones is needed. I started with the notoriously power-hungry but transparent Hifiman HE-5 and had to crank the dial all the way up with little joy – the sound was flat with little in the way of dynamics. Things started to perk up some with the Grado SR125 with a well-balanced sonic presentation with detailed mids and highs and rounded bass.

THE LAST WORD

As an all-inclusive playback platform, the Player is pretty compelling as it incorporates a high quality turntable and bundles in a phono preamp, headphone amp and factory-fitted cartridge, all of which would cost a fair bit if purchased separately. However, for that very same reason, the Player will probably not resonate with the more seriously inclined who would rather have the flexibility to select each sub-component separately.

On that count, VPI does offer an upgrade path which includes the HR-X Centre Weight, Scout aluminium feet, HR-X mini feet, JMW 9 Unipivot Tonearm, alternative platters and defeatable phonostage.



If you love your tunes and you've been toying with the idea of checking out vinyl for yourself, you need to give the VPI Player integrated turntable a spin. If you've always been a big fan of vinyl, gone the whole nine yards with a slew of different gear and systems over the years but no longer have the time, patience (or keen eyesight) for

meticulous set up rituals and constant adjustments, the VPI Player may be the perfect player for you.

I'm not sure this turntable checks off on all the boxes for dyed-in-the-wool "turntablephiles" but in my book, the VPI Player registers as the de facto entry-level turntable not only for how it scores as a bundled value proposition but for also its sheer musicality.

Gear

Dell XPSL502X, Chord Mojo, SMSL M8, Thorens TD124 Mk II with Nagaoka MP110, EAR 834P phono / Amplification: Cary CAD-300SEI, Odyssey Audio Stratos Plus, Unison Research Simply Four, NAD 302, N.E.W. P3 pre / Speakers: Sonus Faber Minima Amator, Zu Audio Omen / Headphones: Sennheiser HD580, Grado SR125i, Allesandro MS1i, Hifiman HE500, Stax SR207 / assorted cables

Price: US\$1,499

Malaysian price: RM6,600

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