

D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum Integrated Amplifier Review

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This had been a pretty sleepy summer. I spent more time with my two boys for which I am eternally grateful but I feel I have lost a bit of my edge in the process. Daddy brain they call it. The thought of getting clever and deep in the audio realm seemed a touch out of grasp. Perhaps my review of the [Rogers PA-1A](#) phono preamp took a little out of me. Great product to write about but the summer heat took over and cast a slight pall of laziness around the old Petan household. Perhaps fall would whisk in winds of change and my pilot light would fire up again. One thing was for certain, I was not counting on the D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum Integrated amplifier falling into my lap for a prolonged run around the block.

Arriving in a hearty metal flight case, the packaging is what one should expect at this level. It really could not be any more straightforward getting the Momentum Integrated set up and playing. Simply screw in the cone shaped feet and stack the chassis on top of the power supply, attach the umbilical and power cord, plug it in and off you go. "God this thing is gorgeous;" you will mumble to your self after the brief set up. Gleaming blocks of diamond etched aircraft aluminum and some mad, cool looking copper slabs come together in encasing the watch bezel-like volume meter that looks more horological than audio. The meter mechanism is in full view front and center and really looks like a tourbillon, a device invented by Abraham-Louis Breguet in 1795 in order to deal with the earth's gravitational pull on the mechanics of a watch. Still being mastered today, a tourbillon watch can start at \$200k and head towards a million very easily. You thought high-end audio was expensive! What is really beyond slick is the VOLUME knob that rotates around the bezel of the volume meter. The mechanism is so smooth with just the right amount of knob feed back.

The front panel of the D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum has six buttons named for every type of popular gizmo one may plug into it. And that copper is not just for show. They conduct heat three times more efficiently than steel or aluminum. This efficiency has allowed for the Momentum's sturdy, but compact silhouette. Only providing for six XLR terminated connections, one must get plug converters to accommodate RCA

terminated cables. On the right side of the front panels you find BASS and TREBLE controls. You read that right, BASS and TREBLE controls! The knobs are machined into a complex bolt-like shape. Each adjustment is met with a hearty thud, again great mechanical knob feel.

From the circular remote there is BALANCE control, POLARITY control, TONE control, POWER, MUTE and INPUT. I have not determined how sensitive the finish is, I have been polishing it every couple of days with a dry cloth just enough to remove fingerprints. There is a HT pass through input with unity gain. I only wish it was offered with a phono preamp. I hear one is in the works. The D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum is nearly a Momentum Preamp And Stereo Amp in one chassis. They share a great deal of circuitry and at 200 watts on tap into 8 ohms, 400 into 4 ohms and 800 watts into 2 ohms it sounds every bit as powerful and then some. The separate power supply is machined from a solid block of aluminum, allowing for extreme physical and electro-mechanical integrity. The Momentum Integrated is also available in a stunning Black finish as well. For all the technical info available, please see D'Agostino.com.



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I am very familiar with Dan D'Agostino's work. I date back to the KSA 150 amplifier and then the X32, and a X64 DAC. I also had the KPS 20i, KPS 25 CD players, a FPB 300 and FPB 600 amplifiers. Throw in a few preamps and I guess you could say I have a clear view into Dan's past perspective on audio.

After being in possession of the D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum Integrated amplifier for about two weeks, it dawned on me like a ton of bricks that it was time to start writing about this \$45,000 gem from Dan D'Agostino Master Audio Systems. I typically would live with a component a bit longer before delving into the formal review. In this case the Momentum Integrated makes such an impression, such a compelling case for its singular superiority, I just had to get down to business.

Listening to Rush Moving Pictures, *YYZ* and *Limelight* were enough to get me off my mental couch, clear out the cob webs and let as many of you know as possible, what this magnificent piece of industrial art is capable of on every level.

I'll start with the bottom line right up front. This thing is just killer. There is an absence of any type of distortion tampering with the signal — just pure rich, colorful tone and texture from top to bottom. Starting with the low end, on *Limelight* from Moving Pictures, Geddy Lee's bass has such grip, such well resolved texture without compromising dynamic slam, like sledgehammers pounding you with both brutality and poise. Skrillex's "Coast is Clear" from *Recess* possesses some of the scariest deep bass ever recorded and the D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum remained unflappable. I have rarely heard the Lansche 4.1 speakers sound this rock solid and extended in the bass. "Show Me How to Live" from Audioslave's self titled album just slithers and twists its way to audio nirvana. This track really does make its way to the monkey brain and flat out rocks. The level of composure the Momentum Integrated allows amongst the chaos is superb and offers complete confidence in the presentation.

I tend not to listen to a ton of audiophile recording so most of my impressions spring from recordings I am deeply committed to for the musical content rather than the audiophile parlor tricks. For instance, Black Sabbath's *Heaven and Hell* sprang to life with impact and above all, mid bass clarity, giving the otherwise boxy sounding bass line a sense of texture and focus, clearing away so much of the hollow coloration that normally plagues this recording. Mid-bass notes are not defined through the D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum by any type of euphony, coloration or over-emphasis. Simply tone, texture, transient accuracy and dynamic shading takes over and squeezes out the distortion leaving the easiest-to-follow bass lines I have yet heard.

Moving up the frequency ladder, the lack of distortion is on display with David Ostrika playing Mozart's *Scottish Fantasy* on Classic Records CD via a streamer — you will be hearing a great deal about it soon, the notes despite being a tad shrill never jumped off the stage and slap you in the ear. The lack of distortion allowed the slight shrillness of the recording to simply come and go with little emphasis allowing one to sink deeper into the illusion. Ultimately, great music simply becomes greater through the Momentum Integrated.



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The mid band is both scrubbed clean and highly detailed and blossoms with such ease and resolve. Tube lovers rejoice! The midrange is at once completely neutral — i.e. void of distortion, supple and grain free to the max leaving only the recorded signal and a good dose of magic, which adds up to a mid band that never ceased to impress. *Send In The clowns* with Sarah Vaughn and Count Basie is simply sublime. Her presence is just there, no tricks or gimmicks, just pure tone and vocal modulation helped along by transient purity, tonal resonance and effortless dynamic shading.

The D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum is not just better than all that have come before, both integrated and stereo amps, it is better in ways that make the distance between them seem so great. So low in distortion yet so naturally warm, detailed and dynamically alive, the Momentum renders music in its purist form. In a hobby based around incrementalism, the Momentum shoulders its way in and creates leap step separation from other like devices. Listening to John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman in *Dedicated to you*, the vocals and sax

are so airy so effortless yet not in any way wimpy or wavering. Notes that are held and sustained are so linear, so true and full of texture supple dynamics and organic resonance. This quality is truly mesmerizing.

I like to refer to one aspect that makes up great sonic reproduction as architecture. The [Pass Labs XA200.5](#) monoblocks have it. But the momentum does it with a bit more ease and just a touch more liquidity. The Pass labs XA200.5 present a slightly larger picture with bigger images and a wider soundstage, the hallmark of a well-designed mono amplifier. There is a certainty and confidence that comes with such grounded ness. The bass is a bit bigger as well, though the D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum Integrated does not suffer by comparison. The bass of the Momentum Integrated is more neutral and more clearly defined. You pay your money. You make your choice.

Steve Morse's *Southern Steel* is a disc full of power trio pyrotechnics that can be grating in the treble. When played through the Momentum grating distortions are mostly replaced with clean tones never before heard from what was a below average recording, or so I thought. Transformative is what I would call familiar music through the Momentum Integrated, without the fear of hyperbole.

Joe Satriani's *House full of bullets* shows how far down the road to sonic purity the momentum travels in the treble. For one thing, cymbal crashes are not only textured and cleaner than ever, they simply leap off the stage with effortless dynamics, never being overly forward or shrill. Again, this is far from a reference level recording but it does illustrate a great point. The momentum will make every recording it plays sound better — not a little better like I-just-added-“XYZ” tweak-and-I-think-my-system-sounds-a-little-better kind of better, but holy-S&\$-this-sounds-better!

While listening to Wes Montgomery in *Full House*, you will fall prey to the temptation to crank up the volume higher than you usually would. And let me tell you that is a swell idea. With the D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum Integrated I can get real world jazz club scale in the room with me, all for me! The Momentum Integrated reminds me of the Jeff Rowland amplifiers of yore in a way. My 8TiHC with battery pack had the same clean power on tap. The Momentum is however a radically different animal as it is so profoundly un-colored. The Rowland's were voiced a bit dark and did not have anywhere near the bass control or over all resolution. Having said that, the 8TiHC is the one that got away for me. I miss that amp more than any other audio product I have traded.

Keeping with classic Jazz, Cannon Ball Adderly in *Somethin Else* was tamed with a couple of clicks of the treble control and Voila! What was once a bright glary sound is rendered with air, texture and life-it was there all along just tucked under some unneeded brightness. Goodness, the traded solos between Adderly and Miles Davis are so alive and yet accessible. The scale is remarkable as well. These are no approximations, no scaling down or bloating of the impact or image size. We are talking full-blooded living and breathing instruments flailing about with freedom from any common restrictive distortions. The tone controls are extremely effective in freeing a ton of music from either a hot top end or a lack of bass. Being able to engage the control from the remote is a real plus, though you can only adjust the controls from the front panel.

Not to say it's all bombast and huge dynamics with the D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum Integrated. Listening to Tommy Smith's *Chelsea Bridge*, a real case study in controlled low-level dynamics, Tommy really holds his horn back allowing a beautiful vibrato to finish off notes. The quiet sustain is so seamless, so musically complete even at the very low volume. This is really tough to pull off and pays tribute to the Momentum Integrated's near infinitely low noise floor.

Where so many amplifiers present dimly lit silhouettes against a cloudy sky, the D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum casts a surreal glow upon a mid day sunlit sculpture garden of sonic images. Proximities between images on the stage are rendered so clearly. Here, the inclusion of the outstanding Verestar Grand Illusion speaker cable and interconnects help to clearly define the soundstage much like in live performances. Though it is the bloom and completion of the notes that really keeps our attention, not pinpoint imaging in the audiophile sense of the word. The ability to hear notes fade to completion is something I so enjoy in live music, the Momentum captures those moments perfectly. Just pick a musical thread and follow it for as long as the recording will allow. I'll never understand how the term “pinpoint imaging” became a positive description. Short of

the highest frequency small-scale instruments such as the piccolo or triangle, instruments when captured and rendered accurately should bloom and resonate giving them real dimension and presence.

Ok, off the soapbox. Here is the lowdown. The D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum Integrated Amplifier is the finest amplification I have ever had in house. It has what I like to call musical magic dust sprinkled all over it. Able to strike all the right chords that make up an audiophile's obsession, it is, however, really more than that. It is a component capable of unleashing the music, freeing it from mere "sound". A kind of un-definable musical rightness so few components are able to muster. All that wrapped in some of the most beautifully sculpted case work this side of a Breguet. The pride in ownership quotient is really off the scale.

Having really little in common sonically with Dan's designs of the past, the D'Agostino Master Audio Systems Momentum stands on its own on every level. Despite the steep asking price, I consider this device truly investment quality much like a fine watch or high performance automobile. Built to last and backed by one of the true greats in audio engineering, I do not hesitate for a second in recommending a serious audition.

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