

HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER

M2Tech Marley MKII

When the first version was presented in 2015, the Marley represented a long and big step "beyond" in the history of the Italian M2Tech, a start-up surprise at the time when the ingenious "pen" was created (the D / D converter from USB to SPDIF) and its evolutions. From there to the production of "complete" DAC's, it was a natural and largely motivated evolution, from the inevitable saturation of that segment and from the obsolescence of the "pen" with the arrival of the XMOS devices. The Marley was something more...

It would not be said from its appearance that, although the device has undergone an epochal transformation, it appears very sober and essential and is that of the entire line (today M2Tech offers a complete package with digital hub, pre-phono and final power), with the chassis based on a frame made of a single piece of rectangular section (where the electronic section has a sled base solution) with front panel in plexiglass and backlit LED display. Yet while remaining "in his", the Marley MKII offers increased usability exponentially compared to the previous version, starting from the fact that the connections are now on the front panel and not on the rear one, even that balanced with 4-pole XLR connector. Unlike in the past, however, only a single ended with 6.3 jack is present instead of two, a possibility that could have been an added value in cases, rare but not uncommon, of listening in company with two different headphones. The lack of a second independent output does not constitute a step backwards compared to the leap forward that has made the system also from the point of view of management which now, in addition to the multi-function knob on the front, has remote control and even an app available for IOS and Android: every command is now simple and easy to read both through the front display and via the app. This is one of the most delicate points of the construction of a modern system that must offer the maximum performance but at the same time be protected from the "unusability" due to technological evolution, especially in the offer of usability services and reaching the contents. From this point of view, the choice not to integrate a DAC on board is as excellent as that of not giving in to the temptation to insert an audio streaming since a Blue-tooth communication module was used. Some would call it a senseless choice, others courageous, but without excess of sensationalism it is the only reasonable choice to increase the usability of the product and the possibility of integration with active speakers, devices in the process of evolution which, without making us account, they are reaching impressive levels of quality compared to the past.

In use, there is a perceived immediacy relative mainly to the possibility of adjusting the cross feed and the tone controls, two functions opposed to the hi-fi field but in any case very useful especially in listening to headphones where certain corrections make the user experience more pleasant and pleasant. The ability to quickly and comfortably adjust and enter a setting allows the weighted choice without "philosophical" conditions but only with the appreciation from time to time. Also with regard to the optimization with headphones, if you have systems that are also very different from each other, switching from one configuration to another is immediate and allows you to get the most out of each combination, as it is not it is assumed that in principle the choice of exit impedance or cross feed are foreseeable. Regardless of the optimization and fine-tuning solutions, the sound character of the Marley MKII is well defined and in a certain sense follows the corporate vision it already had in the first versions, identifying the sound reproduction standards to be exalted. This does not mean that it is possible to hazard a prevalent character of the Marley, but according to the headphones that are connected, certain well-defined aspects are enhanced and that do not collide with headphones that are also very different from each other. The approach is very detailed, rhythmic and extensive, with a preference for the medium range that is proposed in evidence but without any sign of abuse. It goes without saying that in combination with two headphones very far apart, such as the Audeze LCD-3 and the Sennheiser HD800S, the results can be opposite and unpredictable; instead the system seems to enhance the qualities of the Audeze in the medium range

but without excess, while the Sennheiser seems to like that extra warmth without altering the other peculiarities of the headset on reconstruction and on extension and detail. It remains a very rhythmic and immersive setting that can hardly be compared in products of this price range and appreciable in all combinations and configurations. The appliance goes immediately "in pairs" without having to wait a long time after switching on, with a necessary but acceptable warm up. Being able to vary the load conditions, the differences, albeit minimal, between the load choices and even between the mode with balanced and single ended outputs, which suggest an evaluation in the field to choose which solution is more suitable, are also appreciable. china to your taste. At the end of the day, being able to also take advantage of the cross feed and tone controls, it is increasingly evident that, once a character of the system has been identified, certain refinements slightly shift some balance on control and extension in low range and fluidity.

The power section has undergone few transformations and adopts a class A work point that is more suitable for the conditions of use and which develops less "demanding" residual heat while the preamplification, input and volume management section has been completely redesigned, as well as the layout and arrangement of the active components. Whether in single ended or balanced mode or in combination with low-efficiency headphones, there is no limitation in terms of power, sound pressure and control. Letting yourself go to the appreciation of which combination you prefer is a nice path, linear and without those compromises where you have to invoke the ancient adage of the short blanket! But the blanket is long, warm people wrap and we can finally wear it at will, even with bare feet, if you feel like it! Even in the case of the MK II version of the Marley, you can perceive the clear improvement with feeding external that from a certain point of view tends to penalize the "stand alone" one, given the very large gap. Clear improvement "with" or unacceptable deterioration "without" ?. For this reason, some doubts still remain slightly open on the concreteness and on the real value of the product because if listening is very exciting, you will not reach the level that does not make you think about comparisons and relationships; so the almost "necessity" to combine an external power supply feeds the doubts in the user and the doubts in hi-fi are never a good thing It is also true that with the Marley it is possible to obtain an analog system versatile and potentially "stainless" that combines listening with headphones and listening in top quality environments with an expense that is all in all high but far below certain standards to which the traditional hi-fi model has accustomed us: with a cost of around 5000 euros you have the heart of the system (pre-main speakers) to combine with the digital and/or analogue source or what it will take to keep up with the times for a very long period long.

TECHNICAL COMMENTS

The frequency response shows a very linear trend but with a slight attenuation in the low range and one at the upper end which starts the effect even if 0.5dB at 20 kHz and reaches -3dB at 60 kHz. A common trend and all the configurations and output settings of the final stage. The trend according to the load shows a damping factor congruent with the choice of the output impedance but the total output level is still very high and at very low distortion rates, demonstrating a high driving capacity.

The harmonic distortion, albeit very low it shows a gradual harmonic decay. The inter-modulation distortion is very limited while there are some symmetric components that increase the amount according to the load. The output level exceeds 9 volts while maintaining a THD + N always around 0.01% with clipping achieved suddenly but without a stepped path. The carpet of noise, detected with the power supply supplied, is expected on very low values and there are no spurious harmonics in and out of band.

PROS & CONS

The manufacturer, for obscure reasons, if on the one hand since the beginning of his career he has been able to identify the deeper aspects in the design and construction of the equipment, on the

other hand he has often lost a bit in the details and some constructive choices that have placed the products in a "somewhat precarious" range not so much as "I would like but I can't" but on the contrary of "I could have been the best but I have not yet understood why something went wrong". As if there was some lack of conviction in being able to face the clash with the market leaders. The overall evaluation of the device in question is however highly positive, also in relation to the improvement of many aspects related to the realization, to a "pro-sophical approach" "Less extreme and more suitable for frequent use (read temperature and bias point ...) and a significantly improved usability thanks to the introduction of a remote control and even a bluetooth control app that underlines the technical heritage of which the company is capable. A big step forward, also taking into account the loss of the management of two independent single ended headphones but with the favor of an increase in the "disruptive" usability compared to the previous version and of an excellent sound compared to a cost increase which is statio-necessary to remove the limits of the previous one version. An appliance capable of fighting at the top of the category which, thanks to the "two-piece" formula, allows the purchase by successive grades: the power supply unit, indispensable for reaching these quality summits, can also arrive later.