



brinkmann

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A detailed close-up photograph of the mechanical assembly of a Brinkmann balance. The image shows a complex arrangement of polished metal parts, including a large cylindrical component on the left, a central pivot mechanism with a knurled adjustment ring, and various smaller gears and bearings. The background is a dark, textured surface. The lighting highlights the metallic textures and the precision engineering of the device.

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balance

Scrambled eggs or “Yesterday”

Helmut Brinkmann didn't have a choice: with the introduction of the better LaGrange turntable his old battleship Balance should have been history. But then requests for the Balance started coming from the US and the designer decided to revise his oldie, fortunately for us.

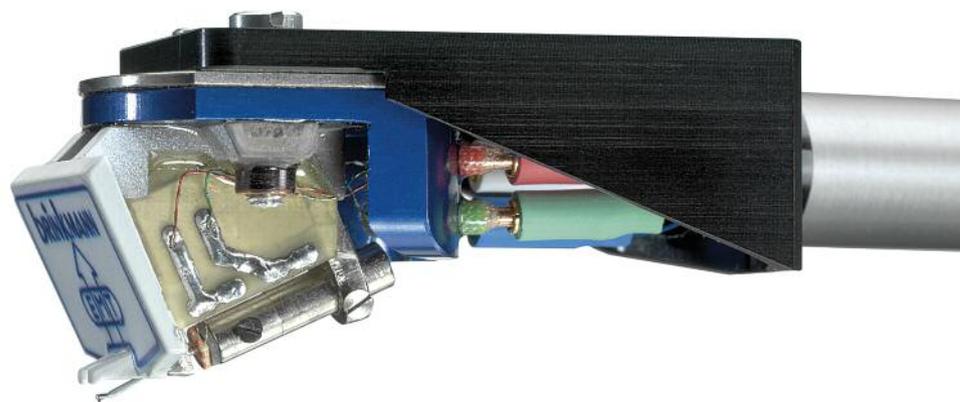
Paul McCartney likes to tell the story of the creation of his song “Yesterday”. Allegedly, he dreamt of the melody in a Parisian hotel, but he thought that it was already a well known tune. So he sang it to several people and since he didn't have lyrics yet, he used the words “Scrambled eggs, my baby, how I love your legs”. If this story holds true, then it took him several weeks before he had written the lyrics for the song and one of the most touching evergreens was born. I would like to shout at our speed-obsessed, fast moving world: Hey, why not design it like Paul McCartney with “Yesterday”, just think a few weeks before you make the next step. Or let things just rest for a while, it might be to your advantage.

Helmut Brinkmann definitely thought things through and gave them enough time to mature. The designer of the legendary Audiolabor Konstant turntable, that was launched 1980, had planned in 2007 to discontinue his Balance table that had been in production since 1984. In essence, it should have been replaced by the follow-up hit, the superior LaGrange. To be honest, I never was a great fan of the Audiolabor Konstant. The rhythmical flow and finer play of musical colours of suspended turntable competitors like Linn, Goldmund or Versa Dynamics were much more to my liking. Similarly, but on a higher level I felt the same about the older version of the Balance turntable. The build quality had always been an



example of exceptional machining quality, but at the same time I found the musical impression a bit lame and too tame for my tastes. Sure, it could exert great force; but to swing, fire instruments with inner dynamics and sensitivity and merge them all together into a flowing ensemble, was never the stronghold of the original Balance. Consequently, my curiosity couldn't have been greater when Brinkmann launched the LaGrange in 2007 to succeed the Balance. I pondered if the LaGrange would show the positives of the Balance, the force and stability, the impression of unquestioned authority whilst at the same time adding those missed elements of agility and free flowing musical colours? To make it short: Yes it did and then some. It unfolded a soundstage in front of you with a dynamic verve and a never before heard colourful force in the lower and lowest frequencies and a jubilantly stable splendour in the higher frequencies. All of this more than fulfilled my expectations. This LaGrange could not only drive adrenalin through my veins, it also made me musically blissful – and still does today.

The then current version of the Brinkmann EMT cartridge played engaging and brilliantly natural, the slightly glutinous sounding character of the original EMT was straightened out, its gripping quality and its musical charm was increased even more. And since the new 12.1 tonearm turned out to be a dynamic wonder with other cartridges as well, this player had to stay in my listening room, no matter the cost. After decades of en-



Blue today and tomorrow again? No, it's only a customized edition

thusiasm for vinyl I had the feeling that the LaGrange would always passionately accompany me through all of my LPs and would even elicit a measure of musical life from the more feeble recordings. Quite naturally,

the player seemed to show even more quality with noticeably more expensive cartridges like the Transfiguration Orpheus L. It also appeared that the optionally available tubed power supply (RöNt) was usually sonically

Associated Equipment

Turntable: Nottingham Deco, Brinkmann LaGrange 2-arm with RöNt tubed power supply **Tonearm:** Nottingham Anna II, Brinkmann 12.1, Thales, Purevox Series VIII **Cartridge:** Kondo IO-M, Transfiguration Orpheus L, London Reference, Brinkmann EMT-ti **Phono Stage:** Kondo KSL-SF-Z **CD Player:** Jadis JD1 Pro Mk II **D/A Converter:** Jadis JS1 Mk III **Tuner:** Marantz 10B **Preamplifier:** Kondo KSL-M 7, Jadis JP 80 MC (2011), Unison Reference **Power Amplifier:** Jadis JA 80 (2010), Gryphon Reference One Mono **Loudspeaker:** Marten Bird (2010) **Cable:** Kondo KSL-Vz, KSL-LP, KSL-SPz, KSL-Spc Signature + KSL-Acc/Furutech E50(R) + KSL-ACz/Furutech E50, Acoustic System Liveline LS + NF, Hovland MG-2, Harmonix Golden Performance, Adagio Audio Digital Reference, Aural Symphonics Magic Gem v2t **Accessories:** Hensler Cablewave NL-7 + NP-1000, Power Distributor Magnan Signature, Vibex, Audioplan Powerstar, Antispikes, Acoustic System Resonators, Shakti Hallograph, Harmonix RFA-78i, RF-999 MT, TU-220 MT, TU-210 ZX, MY-TU-201, Tuning Spike Base RF-900, Shakti Stones, HRS M3X base, Black Forest SoundBoards, SoundBridges, Audio Magic Delta, Salamander Design Shelves, Shun Mook Valve Resonators, Mpingo Discs, L'Art du Son CD Cleaner/Conditioner + Record Cleaning Fluid, Stylast

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superior; however, I preferred the simpler version with the standard transistorized power supply for dynamic, powerful electronic music. Unsurprisingly, this too seemed normal in an audiophile way – there is always a way to make something great still a little bit better. So one day I was captured by the midrange glow of a Nottingham Deco, with sovereignty that wasn't unlike the LaGrange, but

with a more pronounced, palpable suppleness. The turntable is about double the price, but its new 12 inch tonearm harmonizes better with the phenomenal IO-M cartridge from Kondo/Audio Note Japan. This didn't change the trust and feel-good status the LaGrange enjoys here. It's like that rare case of a racehorse whose performance fascinates time and again, yet never shows any sign of we-

akness or susceptibility.

You can therefore imagine my surprise when, in 2009, Brinkmann announced that the production of the Balance would in fact be continued. An unplanned for review in the US was so overwhelmingly positive, that the turntable would stay in production, though limited to 25 pieces as the Anniversary Edition to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the Balance, complete of course with a few additional improvements. From my personal understanding this set of events didn't really fit with the Brinkmann design philosophy as I knew it. Brinkmann had an obviously better player with the LaGrange and had set out to a future that was applauded by many – including myself – with the less expensive Oasis, complete with the new direct drive system. Yet, even with all these accolades, the decision was made to continue the Balance because the US market had asked for it. My impression of Helmut Brinkmann and his design philosophy was always a different one, namely the impression of someone who is dedicated to music and therefore continuously works on improvements resulting in superior performance. A designer who pays attention to every little detail and works out the perfect solution for it. For example if it concerns the pre-compressing of the Teflon ground in the platter bearing that is tested and perfected until it guarantees optimal sonic results and a practically everlasting durability



Further refined: the new ball bearings for the cardanic suspension even improve the sound

despite the 20kg platter weight. Or that the bearing doesn't run in sintered bronze anymore but better manufacturing techniques have made it possible to run the axis directly in a one-piece aluminium bushing. A combination of carefully polishing the bushing and stainless steel axis with 0.5 micrometer diamond paste is said to give better, optimised results. Matching the extremely low tolerances in the bearing of 3/100 millimetres, Brinkmann found synthetic turbine oil that is optimised for helicopter rotors and that provides a stable oil film. I was astonished when Brinkmann sent back my revised LaGrange bearing and not a single drop of oil had escaped the oil pressure bearing during shipping.

Maybe Helmut Brinkmann was in fact capable of getting the Balance to the standard of the LaGrange with a multitude of improvements? In fact he decided to continue the Balance after the 25 pieces of the Anniversary model. And again with several additional changes on the way to a result where "the music dictates the sound, not the turntable" as Brinkmann explains. Now there is a copper washer beneath the set screw of his EMT cartridge, in addition to the titanium screw with just the right diameter that he started using after earlier experiments. This seems to be a sort of material fine tuning that runs through every part of the Balance. It started with the 4mm crystal glass platter matt, inseparably glued to the

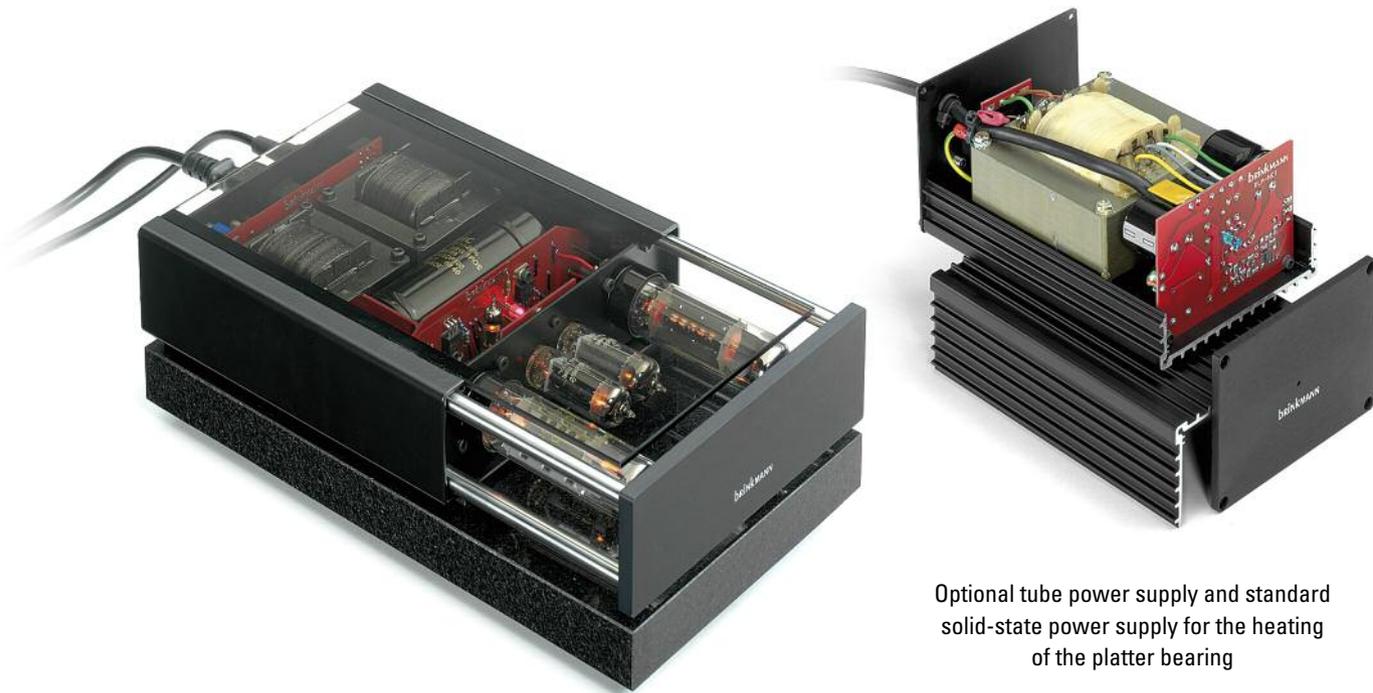
platter, as the surface interface for the LP, which serves as the conductor for sound between the vinyl and the 20kg heavy aluminium-copper compound platter. The crystal glass platter by the way is polished by the same German company that also manufactures optical systems for space rockets. The ebony washer between tonearm and base with a specified thickness and vertical fibre is also

part of this fine tuning like the little wood plug at the end of the tonearm tube. By the way, the wood used here is cocobolo; it's a popular tone wood used in Mexico for guitars. Helmut Brinkmann states that at this place in the arm tube it's much better suited than ebony which would sound too bright and papery. Asking the designer about his turntable monument, it loses in my mind's eye the power-



Beautiful for the eye but a nightmare for the anodizer: the sonic tuning asks for different aluminium alloys - and they all shimmer in the same black colour

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Optional tube power supply and standard solid-state power supply for the heating of the platter bearing

ful, sculptural presence that it usually presents. Instead, it appears like a living being, that has been turned into a more flowing, functioning organism by evolution.

It's unbelievable at how many places this evolutionary process shows itself, for example at the tonearm: the plastic that holds the horizontal bearings and the arm tube has always been a specially manufactured mixture of specified materials; now this connecting part has a new, more compact shape. The headshell also has a new design, it is now calculated according to the golden ratio and the mounting plate for the cartridge is a little thicker. Even the methodology for the adjustment of the four little ball bearings has been changed. They had always been adjusted to a specified play, like it is common, but now there is a refined, more precise me-

thod. In the final adjustment stage the arm gets mechanically stimulated, the bearings being called adjusted correctly only when the sonic feedback has exactly the right sound.

But there is more. Even the motor is now built by Brinkmann, on the constructional base of a capstan motor by Pabst. Naturally, numerous changes abound, with temperature stable hall sensors, a thicker and harder axle that runs in an oil pressure bearing, just like the platter bearing. And with a completely new drive circuit. It doesn't rigidly control the motor anymore, rather increases the rotational force to the correct speed and works without braking. While the question of the costs arises when considering the motor construction (yes, even the coils are specifically wound for it, but that's nothing compared to the 1000 Euro production costs for the platter,

after all, virgin aluminum alloys are very expensive these days) and it becomes obvious that other manufacturers might easily charge double the price for this precision and extravagance – my communication with Helmut Brinkmann has arrived at the principle questions of the motor drive. Starting with the electricity from the wall socket it's important for him that all the components are ideally linked with each other, that the electrical and mechanical energy flows optimally from one medium to the next. So he designed a circuit that helps detect the – minimal – electrical feedback from the played LP to the turntable drive circuitry via an electrostatic headphone. The smallest possible and interference free energy input to the platter was the aim.

After nearly three decades, Helmut Brinkmann's understanding of his

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evolutionary project named Balance has a depth that I have hardly ever seen before. Each point of the conversation can take a turn from the mechanical perfection to philosophical dimensions that might sometimes question our concept of engineering or physics. How would I be able to detect his thinking in the new version of a turntable that I didn't appreciate much in its earlier version? I had the full Balance set up with the "RöNt" tubed power supply where the solid-state power supply is only used for the 15 watt bearing heater, and equipped with the HRS isolation base. The set up was easy, the cartridge was already mounted and perfectly aligned; I have never experienced that with a premounted cartridge. Only the geometrical overhang and the tracking force needed to be adjusted (in the case of the review sample of the Brinkmann EMT cartridge, 1.92 pond proved to be optimal, less than

with the earlier versions) after installing the arm base.

After a warm up I started with an LP that would have caused the old Balance considerable problems: highly energetic electro-acoustic Jazz by the Denison/Kimball Trio, interaction, drive and powerful agility are crucial for this music. The extra bonus of Soul Machine (Skin Graft GR22) is a dimensionally free and open recording, where usually linear tracking tonearms with air bearing or a Kondo IO-M cartridge with its stunning high frequency resolution show great results. At the next moment the electric organ filled my listening room with sounds seemingly coming from outside my living room, big, tangible, unbelievably present. The drums showed a maximum of sonic contrast by playing with every imaginable aspect of a live performance like dimensional richness and echo, the cymbals whirred mercilessly powerful into my room, and the force of the

drum in the midrange had a splendid volume. I know this album really well, or so I thought, but I have never heard the first track "Terminal 2" so utterly convincing sounding. Same thing with the second track "Soul Machine": What a great flow of the electric jazz guitar; the organ rocks beautifully, there is a thrilling drive from the drums and I can feel the close interaction and reaction between the musicians. But most infectious is this feeling of being there, the physical feeling that the musicians start playing right in front of you is so convincing, that it doesn't leave much room for questions. The third track "Ad Infinitum" sounds like a smooth reference recording, with a three-dimensionality and this seemingly complete detachment from the speakers. I have never known in this clarity and palpability the illusion to be in an acoustically completely different space, where the drummer plays relaxed and at the same time every beat



Art of engineering and machining: Chassis with oil pressure bearing and connection for the bearing heating



Dust-free and silent: Slit for the belt and tinted cover for the motor

burns its own firework with fundamental energy. Where does this immense power of the Jadis tubed power amps JA 80 (revised by Audioplan) come from? It's like always, when the source is an improvement: Amplifiers and Speakers suddenly show unexpected qualities.

So then to about the most difficult piece that could be played on a turntable: Andre Previn's interpretation of the Gustav Holst's Planets with the London Symphony Orchestra, the Japanese Angel pressing on 2 LPs (Angel Pro Use Series ALF-99002-3). The wind section and the tense string section still restrained, threatening at the beginning of "Mars, der Überbringer des Krieges", but at the next moment the sudden eruption, rolling over me, ending the first wave with a shattering beat of the kettle drum. Unbelievable, the hurricane of sound that is unleashed thanks to the Balance, a differentiated wall of orchestral power, completely controlled and with the confidence that even more is possible. The ability to deeply savour the dynamical dimensions in quiet and loud passages is incredible. The Balance can alter the idea of how a source should be able to perform quite a bit. When I went back to the other top turntables, Nottingham Deco with Anna-II-arm and Kondo IO-M or Brinkmann LaGrange with 12.1 arm and Transfiguration Orpheus L, I was stunned: At the first moment I always had the impression that there was a definite lack compared to the new Balance. After a short period of time I got accustomed, indeed these are definitely outstanding turntables and a Kondo IO-M is excellent in the high frequencies and incomparably subtle and colourful in showing the

musical suspense, like the Transfiguration convinces with cleanliness, neutrality and absolute balance of sound. But going back to the new Balance, both turntables almost appear to be copying the real sound. Let me put it this way: If you were to judge the three turntables in categories and give points, grades or percentages, they would all be on about the same level, maybe the Brinkmann Balance with the new 12.1 arm and the newest version of the Brinkmann EMT-ti would have a slight advantage with its stunning dynamical stability, but

judging the overall musical quality the Balance plays in a different league! I can't think of another turntable where the three major components, turntable, tonearm and cartridge, are merged together to such perfect unity. Here you can really see that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. With all the immense pleasure that other turntables can give, I never had this feeling that I had here, before. And surely Helmut Brinkmann can improve his new Balance even more; sometimes, for example with Oliver Nelson's The Blues And The



From the US specialist HRS: optional and advisable Brinkmann isolation base

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Abstract Truth (Impulse First Pressing Stereo A-5) the LaGrange seemed to perform slightly faster. But to be honest: I didn't really miss that. How spectacular the Balance can recreate music especially in its dimensional and physical body but also the colourful and dynamical aspects is a class in itself.

Another LP that has a holy grail status for me? This is nearly the fulfilment of a life-long dream, to hear Keith Jarrett's strikes on the first LP of the Sun Bear Concerts almost visibly pierce the room, the vitality and subtlety become so palpable. Incredible, how these nuances in the sound unfold, pieces for a play that repeatedly shows despite the huge hall where the recording took place. This is why

Stravinsky called the piano a percussion instrument. Usually Jarrett's music sounds slightly less spectacular due to the dampening influence of the huge concert hall, but with the new Balance you come closer to the expressional power of this "Jahrhundertpianisten". The fascination is directly tangible. Recordings that usually ask for a special moment or some effort to find an access to music, open up immediately. With the

new Balance, Helmut Brinkmann brought to life what he always expressed to be his own calling: that his awe for music requires him to not destroy it, but to tend to it the expressions of its most inner soul. He definitely achieved this with the Balance. It is in fact his "Yesterday"; a perfect masterpiece that will last.

Author: Uwe Kirbach

Photos: Rolf Winter

Turntable Brinkmann Balance

Description: belt-drive heavy mass turntable

Model: for 9" to 10.5" or for 12" tonearms

Special Features: clamping mechanism for the tonearm base **Speed:** 33 1/3 and 45 rpm

Dimensions: 60/40/18cm **Weight:** 33kg

Warranty: 3 years



Tonearm Brinkmann 12.1

Description: gimbaled-bearing design **Model:** with RCA connectors or SME 5-pole socket

Effective Mass: 14g **Effective Length:** 305,6mm **Warranty:** 3 years

Cartridge Brinkmann EMT-ti

Description: Moving Coil **Output Voltage:** 0,21 mV (1cm/sec) **Stylus:** Van den Hul, 4 micrometer radius **Recommended Load:** 600 Ohm, less with a step-up transformer

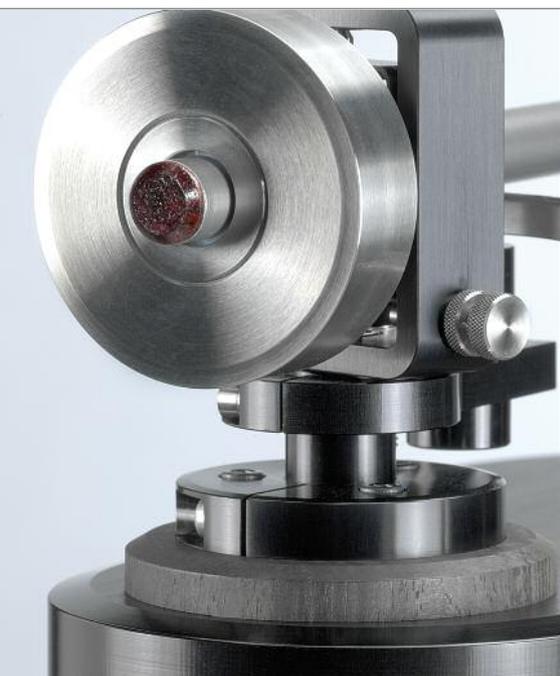
Recommended Tracking Force: 1,8 – 2,0g **Weight:** 11g **Warranty:** 3 years

Tube Power Supply Brinkmann RÖNt

Special Features: with tube rectifiers **Dimensions:** 18/31/9,5cm **Weight:** 12kg incl. granite base **Warranty:** 3 years

Isolation Base Brinkmann HRS

Special Features: broadband noise reduction **Dimensions:** 58/43/7,5cm **Weight:** 24kg **Warranty:** 3 years



Cocobolo – that sounds a bit crazy, but that's actually how the instrument wood of the plug in the tonearm tube is called

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