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Enjoy the Music.com

Finding The "Sweet Spot" In Analog Heaven:
**Acoustic Solid Small Royal
Rega RB250 Tonearm
And
Linn Adikt MM Cartridge**

Review By Steven R. Rochlin
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First, i owe an apology to Norman AV who is the United States distributor of Acoustic Solid. This review should have been finalized for the *Enjoy the Music.com™ Review Magazine's* June edition, yet my personal workload caused one delay after another. The advantage is that an additional two months of listening have allowed me to fully realize this system. The reason i say "system" is because an analog front end is a sum of parts. Specifically, the cartridge, tonearm, and turntable. One could also add the phonostage to this mix, yet have decided to limit it to three 'key' components.

For those of you who hate reading an entire review or skip to the end just for kicks and then try to make heads and tails of it all, allow me to state here and now this system has brought me many hundreds, perhaps thousands of hours in musical bliss. While this three-piece system is not perfect -- and we must remember the relatively moderate price range -- there are many ways to tweak the Rega RB250 that should bring improvements accordingly. Also, Acoustic Solid does offer various upgrade paths as your finances permit.

Part Are Parts

Getting the easiest part of this three-piece system out of the way, the Rega RB250 is a "known good." Look folks, Rega has over 20 years is making tonearms, they sell them with their own branded turntables while other manufacture's, such as Acoustic Solid, purchases them for inclusion within their products.



And for those who feel analog is dead, Rega claims to be employing six people full time to do nothing but maker tonearms! The wire, while looking rather lackluster on the RB250, has been purpose-designed and manufactured for Rega. And with that out of the way...

Linn... and analog. Seems to flow from my brain to my typing fingers like a cool New England mountain stream. Released in 2002, the Adikt MM cartridge has been well received by quite a few reviewers. While i had intended to conduct a dedicated review, once again various personal and business matters have taken my time. For a relatively paltry \$350 (msrp) you get decades of Linn's analog experience. The needle is a replaceable Gyger II type with an aluminum cantilever and copper coil wires. Tracking force is 1.5 to 2 grams; load resistance is 47kohms with a capacitance of around 175pF. This allows for an output of a moderate 6.5mV. All sane, all normal, and all easy to use with nearly every phono stage made in the past few decades.



Now as for the main player -- the Acoustic Solid Small Royal Turntable -- it is a masterpiece in ease of setup and use. Made in Germany, where they know about high precision crafting of metals, comes this aluminum beauty. It comes packaged in three pieces -- the main base, the massive platter, and outboard motor. Acoustic Solid also includes the Rega 250 tonearm in standard form. Setup was simple as after unpacking the bits all i needed to do was place 10 drops of oil in the bearing reservoir and carefully insert the platter. Next came the thin red leather piece, rough

side facing downward, and then the Plexiglas piece on top of that. i did some experimentation and found that if i use the leather, rough side up, as a mat is seemed to bring about the best sound. Of course you can feel free to try different placement order of the leather mat and Plexiglas and make your own final judgment. It's easy... and free.

Finalizing the installation was mounting the Rega RB250 tonearm and positioning the motor 10 to 15cm away from the platter. Then you use the included string (looks like low weight fishing line) around the platter and onto the motor spindle. The motor has two grooved parts. The larger top piece is for 45rpm playback while the smaller lower one is for 33.3rpm. You can make slight speed adjustments by moving the motor closer (slower) or further away (faster) from the platter. During the first ten or so hours i found that the string seems to settle in so expect to make some adjustments during this time.

As you can see in the above photo, in the end i decided to use a pair of my incredibly inert, sand-filled Audio Note loudspeaker stands. This allows for the motor to be placed on a completely different stand, thereby removing virtually all motor noise from reaching the critical needle/vinyl interplay. As for aligning the cartridge on the tonearm, this was perhaps the easiest to accomplish in all my life. Naturally the *Enjoy the Music.com*TM cartridge

alignment tool came in handy (yours for free by [clicking here](#)). Once aligned, you tighten the top screws with the included Hex, then connect the four color-coded wires and you are all set. Once everything was set i was ready to hear ground loop noise. Why, you ask. Because this was just too easy. Do you ever get the feeling that when things are going *too* smoothly you just *know* something will go wrong, and usually at *the worst* possible time. With everything set to go there was no ground loop. Not a buzz or hum to be heard. Bravo! So as you can see, a match made in heaven.



System Approach

We all must admit our high-end audio systems are just that, a system. Each component builds on the previous one and the loudspeakers produce the outcome. With an analog front end, it begins with the cartridge. Linn should be commended for keeping the proverbial light alive. After nearly two decades of the compact disc (CD) and DVD-Audio and SACD fighting it out in the 'high definition' field, here comes Linn to release a budget-beater \$350 MM cartridge... and a very good one at that! Mating to the Rega RB250 seems natural, and here they both appear to shine.

Now some people will say to spend as much as you can on the cartridge, use a good tonearm, and then find some old, used turntable. Personally i feel that there is no substitute for a great turntable. It never ceases to amaze me how taking the same tonearm and cartridge combination to a different turntable yields vastly different sound! So in my humble opinion spend the bucks on the turntable, and if it can be

upgraded as time permits (like the Acoustic Solid) all the better. Ah, but how does this threesome sound you ask.

Waxing Lyrically

One can just hear the various chat board folks leaving now with a section header like that! How dare a reviewer actually take the time to find a great set of matching products and then actually have positive things to say about it. Perish the thought!

After 30 hours of use, that means approximately 80 album sides, she was really coming into her own. The first thing is how well the critical midrange came through. While it did lack the ultimate in definition as compared to my main rig (Voyd turntable, Audio Note top range silver wired tonearm, and Clearaudio Insider Reference wood body cartridge... for a grand total of nearly \$25,000), i was amazed just how little was missing. This generally happened during extremely complex passages. Harmonically, the Acoustic Solid/Rega/Linn combination was a touch on the more romantic side. Call it more forgiving. This is an asset as i enjoyed hour after hour of musical bliss. With well-recorded material this system was never fatiguing, as sometimes experienced with low-priced systems.

The highs were very clean with good clarity. Cymbals shimmered, bells chimed, and flutes fluttered. The tradeoff here in saving many thousands of dollars as compared to my main rig is in the innermost nuances and hall reverberation. Please understand that this ultra-low level information was there, yet not to the same extent or as subtle a decay as found in my \$25,000 system. It is akin to saying the Ferrari 360 is a great car (\$175,000), but is lacking in many ways as compared to the Ferrari Enzo (\$750,000). Like, duh!!! Wake up and smell the espresso. There are trade-offs to be made when you save a few hundred thousand on a car, or over ten thousand dollars (analog) between this relative budget system and my reference rig. While it may not be fair, per se, it allows me to hear the pros and cons and describe them to you.

Getting down and dirty, the bass was very impressive. It was amazing just how low this system could limbo and not get congested. Linn must have some magical formula for their Adikt cartridge as the bass on my techno DJ LPs throw out more deep lows at a blindingly fast pace than should be allowed to be cut on vinyl. Well, perhaps that is too string a statement, yet for those of you who have heard Prodigy *Fat Of The Land* know that there is no shortage fast, very deep bass notes. This trio of cartridge, tonearm, and turntable navigated and played this album without any complaints. Truly amazing as "better" systems have fallen to pieces with such material.

Dynamically, here is also where your budget constraints will show through. It is as though someone added a compressor, as found in nearly every professional recording studio worldwide. With my very best direct to disc vinyl and also test pressings, the dynamics are very good yet fall short of the Clearaudio/Audio Note/Voyd combination. Perhaps one day i will remove the Clearaudio Insider Gold (wood body) from the VOYD to see where it all stands. For now i can happily say there is quite a bit of very good dynamics, just not great (reference level) dynamics.

No matter, still beats the daylights out of commercial compact disc (CD) and certain 'high resolution' digital formats in some ways on certain recordings. Long live vinyl.

Harmonically, the bass is just a small touch on the dry side and the highs do not extend out to the stratosphere. Perhaps more cable experimentation is in order as i am currently using those from Diva and also have tried my favorite Kimber Select 1030. The Diva won out for smoothness and taming some highs while the Kimber was cleaner, but skewed the harmonics a tad too much to brightness.

In any event, it is sins of *slight* (note the italics here) omission versus commission at this point. Thank goodness, as i hate artificial sweeteners and additives. If you are trying to save a few dollars, it is best to leave something out than have something commit a crime. What is enjoyable is the amount of tweaking one can do with an analog rig. The extra few months of having this gear for review to tweak and play has indeed served me (and you the reader) quite well. And as for the midrange...

The Ultimate Compliment

It simply sounds *right*. In fact to such a high degree that this analog system is a keeper. Yes you read that right, a keeper folks! It is *very rare* that i say that so please keep this in mind. My life is far from the "flavor of the month" club and once i buy a unit it generally stays within one of my rigs for *many years* (at times well over a decade) such as my beloved **Wavelength Audio Cardinal amplifiers** (8 years young, factory upgrades to internals accordingly), the heavily modded Assemblage DAC (5 years young), the ever-popular among the DIY folks **Max Rochlin Memorial digital/video cable**, **Kimber Select cables** (6 years), VOYD turntable with Audio Note AN-2/s-V silver wired tonearm (8 years), and one of Furman Sound's excellent **Reference balanced power conditioners** (5 years young, unit later upgraded). As a loudspeaker lover, i feel the need to mention Audio Note's AN-J/SPx (8 years), the ever-amazing Duevel Bella Luna (2 years), the classic KEF 104/2 floorstanders (11 years young), and of course the Reference 3A MM De Capo-i monitors (7 years, upgraded as the model evolved).

For those of you PRAT'ers out there, the pace and feel of the music was very impressive. Much better than the sterile Goldmund Reference from days gone by. You see, usually unsprung turntables (Acoustic Solid, Clearaudio Reference, etc.) may be lacking in rhythmic ability as compared to their sprung counterpart (VOYD, Linn LP12, etc). The Acoustic Solid Small Royal had very good timing/feel, and this is no small compliment as we must remember... i am a classically trained percussionist and timing is everything. Rest assured my dance LPs were well served. This is not something that can be said for other turntables at multiple times the price.

It would be easy to go on and on about the many hundreds, perhaps thousand or so of hours enjoyed listening to music with this setup. It is one of those times when it is so right, i really have no desire to try "upgrades." Sometimes a "better part" *does not* yield better sound. The DIY folks know this to be very true. A more expensive part will not always allow a circuit to produce a more preferred sound. Perhaps in six months i will change my tune and start making small changes to see how it goes. Until then i'll be here, relaxing, spinning the wax and as always...

Enjoy(ing) the Music,

Steven R. Rochlin

Tonality	
Sub-bass (10 Hz - 60 Hz)	
Mid-bass (80 Hz - 200 Hz)	
Midrange (200 Hz - 3,000 Hz)	
High-frequencies (3,000 Hz on up)	
Attack	
Decay	
Inner Resolution	
Soundscape width front	
Soundscape width rear	
Soundscape depth behind speakers	
Soundscape extension into the room	
Imaging	
Fit and Finish	
Self Noise	
Value for the Money	

Specifications

Acoustic Solid Small Royal

Turntable: made from aluminum billet to precise specifications

Platter: 60mm solid aluminum

Motor: separately housed from the platter/base, synchronous type

Drive: string driven platter

Base: 25mm thick aluminum body

Accessories: Plexiglas platter top piece and red leather platter pad

Dimensions: 430mm x 430mm (not including motor unit)

Weight: 25kg.

Price: \$3,000 in aluminum finish, includes Rega RB-250 tonearm