

## AYON S-10 II ENGLISH VER.



### Opinion 1

For a long, long time, from the very beginning of the existence of SoundRebels, we have many times underlined in our reviews the fact, that we thought, think, and hopefully will think in the future, that a given product is best understood knowing the viewpoint of the person behind it. You approach the discussion about the basic aspects of the sound, or even just its aesthetics, when you know that and you can present your (counter)arguments directly to the constructor, not writing an email, which will never be read, or knowing, that the final effect was not the result of actions of a certain person, but rather a group of anonymous accountants, absolutely unknown to us. This is a completely different level of relationship, where the discussion with the creator relates to our own, personal observations, interpretations of what he tried to express. We can have such comfort with people like Anssi Hyvonen (Amphion), Mads Klifoth (Audiovector), Rumen Artarski (Thrax), Timo Engstrom (Engstrom), Chris Feickert (Dr. Feickert), Dr. Roland Gauder (Gauder Akustik), Oliver Gobel (Gobel), Luis Desjardins (Kronos), Franc Kuzma (Kuzma), Hans Ole Vitus (Vitus) and of course Gerhard Hirt (Ayon).

Now today we will be looking closely at a novelty coming from Gerhard's capable hands, although not even two months passed from his last visit to the [Nautilus salon](#) in Warsaw, we can feast our eyes and ears, with the, received a few weeks ago, fully finished, commercially available, streamer Ayon S-10II. We had already a chance to have a first glance in Munich and on Kolejowa street, but it was an exhibition unit, made in the highest version, and, such kind of exhibitions we like to treat as a possibility to have some interpersonal contacts, while listening is only a second , if not, third objective.



The first, and every subsequent, look at the Ayon S-10 II reveals seemingly no changes from its predecessor. But I would like to underline the word “seemingly”, as the devil lies in the details. One cannot deny however, that the chassis remained unchanged from the outside, what should not be surprising, as achieving the level of recognition and portfolio unification Ayon has, it would be really strange, if Ayon would depart from its design. So, we have a massive, almost armored, chassis with brushed aluminium plates, with the front containing only a very readable, and dimmable, 5” QVGA TFT display, with a small field on the left, which contains the IR sensor, USB socket and stand-by button. The company logo is near the left side, while the model number can be found on the far right. According to many years of tradition, the power switch is located on the bottom, near the front left leg, and the only

decorative element are the two-chrome plated ventilation meshes on top. Much more is happening on the back, which can offer almost everything we could desire, at least when we opt for the top version, which includes all the optional components, coming at a premium, but providing some extra functionality. Otherwise some jewel-like terminals will only have a decoration value, what is maybe not that bad, as this looks much better than any kind of temporary covers or empty spaces. But let us look at them one by one. So from the left we have analog outputs, in both RCA and XLR versions, two pairs of RCA inputs and a worked out digital sections, encompassing a set of digital inputs – a coaxial, optical and two USB-B (dedicated to directly connected discs and acting as an USB interface for a computer) and an USB-A for all the other storage (like pendrives), and Ethernet port and two antenna ports.

According to what Gerhard told us during our last meeting, as well as reading materials available on the company web pages, it is clear, that the second version of the Austrian file player underwent a thorough metamorphosis of the insides, where he go a new DAC section, dual-mono AKM 4490, a PCM-DSD converter and a completely new streaming section from StreamUnlimited. It is worth mentioning, that the Ayon S-10 II is the first product on the market, that uses that new platform. Additionally, using the, tested in the previous version, modular setup, the S-10 II can be tailored to your needs, and what is most important for the owners of the previous version, older versions of the S-10 can be upgraded to the actual one (except the server version). And yes, from the autumn, there will be an option available, to upgrade the 10 with an internal server module, designed in cooperation with JRiver. But before this happens, we can already explore all the available files from HRA ([HIGHRESAUDIO](#)), Tidal, or those who registered outside of Poland, Qobuz. The implementation of Spotify, very popular due to very nice price levels, is expected in the winter, similar to the [Primephonic](#), which is esteemed by seasoned music lovers. A very nice touch is a vast manual (31 pages!) accompanying the player, which stipulates the step by step setup instructions, the optimal configuration of the two best software for playing the files (according to Ayon and us too) on the announced BlackBox-Server version as well as using the users computers, so the mentioned JRiver Media Server and Audirvana. Coming back to the technical part, I will just mention, that the output stage utilizes a pair of 6H30 triodes and the power supply is built around a low noise R-Core transformer.



And a few words about the company app – available for iOS and Android – which can easily be regarded as one of the most user friendly and aesthetic on the market. It is also very stable and quick, allowing absolutely hassle-free access to your files even in very worked out local systems and streaming services. Talking half-jokingly, half seriously, either in the server version or with an external hard drive (USB or NAS) the S-10 seems to be a perfect solution for all those who use streaming services, or even internet, sparsely, as the Ayon can even be quite easily managed using the dedicated remote controller, and using a dedicated network

at home, you can utilize the mentioned app and listen for hours to all the files stored on the discs. Because you just need to buy the albums you want, rip and tag them and the library you already own, and the use it in digitalized form without the need to get up from your listening chair.

And what is the influence of the mentioned upgrades on the sound of the Austrian file player, when compared to its predecessor? Being maximally conservative and distrustful, I could say that it was refreshed, what would be the truth, in a way, but it would be also very unfair for the tested device as well as for the previous version of it. Because absolutely everything was improved! Additionally, please have in mind, that we received the basic version for testing, which can be later upgraded to Signature version, what will make another bettering. Yet concentrating on the specifics, I need to confess, that to the density and saturation, known from the previous iteration, we got now much better resolution and precision in pinpointing and defining the virtual sources. The edges are notably thinner and drawn with a steadier hand, although the accent is still put on its proximity and palpability. This is this characteristic saturation and intimate creation of the spectacle for one listener. This does not mean, that the sound lacks swing or dynamics, I did not observe anything like that, but I just turn your attention to it concentrating on the listener. Because usually it is assumed, that this mechanism works only one way, meaning that the listener/viewer needs to engage into the reproduced spectacle, and thus must take the first step and concentrate on it. Yet in this case, it is the Ayon, which initiates the interactions, but not with an ordinary hooking, or desperate attempts of getting attention (a scene between Shrek and the Donkey comes to mind as a kind of visualization of this, when the Donkey shouts "Take me, take me") but only through its tubey euphony. It cannot be denied, that you can hear the tubes hidden inside the S-10, and you can hear them well. And it is very good, that you can, as we get a very mature, saturated, smooth and at the same time resolved sound, what allows for many hours sessions with, not always reference grade, sound material. But please do not misunderstand me, the 10 does not average out anything, what can be confirmed by comparing "[Distance Over Time](#)" Dream Theater, or the equally virtuoso "Psychotic Symphony" Sons of Apollo with "[Keeper of the Seven Keys](#)" Helloween, where the first two albums enchant with their might, as well as three dimensionality, while the Helloween seems two dimensional and flat like a mural in comparison, so you better not pass this thin border, as even the Ayon will not help such mastering abominations. Yet the swing and truly Hollywood-like pageantry clearly indicate, that the new 10 does not have any constraints to hit when it should and crush walls when needed. The attack can be truly apocalyptic, and despite the slight rounding off the extremes nothing flows together into a formless pulp.

However it is much better to listen to sounds, which are not crippled from the start, than to search through your library to find broken recordings like the one I mentioned above, so with pure pleasure I reached for ancient music in the likes of "[Sacrum Mysterium](#)" Apollo's Fire, where you can even hear the dust floating above the floor, where the soloists stamp from time to time. Additionally, this is exactly the repertoire, where the Ayon has the chance to shine, to spread its wings and enchant with its company branded sound with the boosted midrange and shiny, golden treble. Things get noble, but without any trace of artificial stiffening, or losing the emotional load. Absolutely not. I would even say, that in most cases the Ayon tries to intensify and underline this emotional aspect, to extract feelings even from songs like the mentioned above, coming from XIII and XIV century, where those were not really applauded by the church patriarchs.

Equally intriguing was "[Khmer](#)" Nils Petter Molvær, one of our discs on duty, were the natural instruments are supported by truly infrasound computer samples, which gained an analog, almost organic signature, while played through the tubes in the tested streamer. It is worth mentioning, that the newest version of the 10 is not trying to disappear from the sound path, and pretend it is not there. But instead announcing to everyone it is there, the tested file player just takes on the role of a certain kind of anti-depressant, making recordings we know by heart become more attractive and engaging.

The Ayon S-10 II, the second version of the Austrian streamer, present on the market since about three years, is surely more mature, so it is better than its predecessor. Using the newest contemporary technologies, it has everything, what could have been liked in its predecessor by its buyers, but it not only boosts those characteristics, meaning musicality and juiciness spiced with some tube warmth, to a much higher level of refinement, but it adds visibly enhanced resolution on top of that. This does not mean, that the older version is obsolete now, but I warmly recommend to its owners to do a 1:1 comparison in their own system, and if the changes are more than just cosmetic, then the path for upgrading the owned devices to the newest specs is open.

Marcin Olszewski

## Opinion 2

You will probably not believe me, but the birds hiding in the copse around my home is cawing, croaking and chirping loudly, that the audio files maybe did not yet reach the wall called highest sound quality, but are good enough to become the inevitable companion of enjoying music by almost each and every contemporary music lover. And this does not allow me to behave as if I would not be noticing this trend, even if I am not fully convinced to this kind of listening to music in my own listening room. Therefore, trying to be on top of what is happening in the market, when the chance arises, to meet some file playing contraption, I am taking it home to review without deliberating much about that. So, are you interested what reach my hermitage lately? I can assure you, that you know that item, as this time, the Krakow and Warsaw based distributor Nautilus supplied the second version of the Austrian streamer Ayon S-10 II, the player that was the supplement for the [dream system](#) some time ago. Are you surprised with that? I am not, as every device evolves, trying to improve its sound, and after a discussion with the manufacturer I have the idea, that the included changes raise the bar for the sound a lot. So how did this encounter end? To know the answer, I invite you to read on. And in addition, I can tell you, that remembering the sound signature of the predecessor, I could quite easily see in which direction the sound changes went – if there would be any.



Ayon electronics is known for using a uniform external chassis design for all its lineage. Despite usage of vacuum tubes in the electronic circuitry, the chassis is always a rounded off cuboid, sometimes higher, sometimes lower, but always black and made from brushed aluminium. Interestingly this kind of enclosure is not reserved for electronics with the tubes sticking on the outside, because depending on the device, we can find tubes also in its interiors. This, on the other hand, requires the usage of proper ventilation by the manufacturer, but after years of reviewing of audio gear, I can assure any potential sceptics, that Gerhard Hirt is doing it aesthetically enough, that those rectangular meshes could be regarded as a very nice, visual touch to his products. Writing a few words about the tested unit, there is not much to tell about its fascia, as it only carries a centrally placed, very large, and much better

in terms of displayed data, thus also very nicely readable, color display, next to it on the left an USB port, allowing to play from a thumb drive, and a button activating the operation or stand-by mode of the device. Looking from above, in the back of the unit we will only find the silvery meshes used for cooling of the interior. However, a look at the back of the streamer will be very satisfactory for the potential user, as it carries a wealth of inputs and outputs, including analog RCA and XLR ones, a digital output and a whole series of digital inputs including LAN, USB, Optical, SPDIF and finally we have an IEC power socket there. The final information I must give you in this chapter is that the power switch is located on the bottom, near the front left foot.

Comparing to the previous iteration of the S-10, I mentioned above, the new version is much better. Why? For once because the preamplifier section was reworked, also the streamer section is improved as well as the output section and, something very important for many people, also the power supply was bettered. How does this translate into the sound? Defining the change with one word I would say, that the sound is more resolved, and for people who know what I am talking about, this is probably the most important aspect of a new device, often a required one. And what does this mean in terms of the new 10 playing defined kind of music? Only good things, as after the changes in circuitry, the sound, which still offers a kind of tube aftertaste, now gained on vitality. This is still a sound touching the emotions of the listener, concentrated on the midrange, with nicely colored instruments and vocals being there, but the added freedom increases the joy of listening, with the music being much clearer positioned in the ether between the loudspeakers. Importantly, the Ayon, like before, also consistently places the first plane close to the listener, inviting the artists performing into our room. I am aware that this kind of presentation is trying to please the expectations of the music lovers, but I assure you, that in this case, this is not a forceful placing of our idols on our knees, but signalling, that the front man has his rights, and players invited for the recording sessions, seated somewhere in the back of the virtual stage, is to be the background, and not the first violin of the event happening. And when we add good saturation and energy of the midrange and bass to this sound aesthetics of being close to the artists, paired with sweet, but providing full range of information treble, then we get a classy representative of a device, which is a heart breaker for all homo sapiens loving musicality. And there is a large group of them, believe me. Who is part of it? For example, it is me, I love the widely understood Baroque music. I will say this, during listening to this kind of recordings, I never noticed any overheating of the sound. Yes, it was dense, but always readable, what suggests, that the Ayon handled the way my system sounds without any issues. All arias, recitatives and most importantly historic instruments seemed to be thankful for the saturation and smoothness being set as it is by the tested player. Therefore I should not be surprising anyone, when I confess, that each disc played for the sake of the test – which I usually listen to only partially – this time was played from the beginning to the end. After a series of discs, which were also a series of superlatives, I decided to test, how the described dense sound will influence slightly harsher rhythms from Pink Floyd and the cult [“The Wall”](#). This is a rather calm disc and this is why I count this performance as a positive one. There is a lot of vocal and guitar show-offs on it, what the Ayon showed very nicely, with its package of musicality. It was interesting enough to try out something more edgy. In this role I used the disc [“Touch”](#) from the group Yello. And? Easy, easy. I would not describe it as a failure, I have no right to write it like that (about that in a moment), but a reevaluation of the artificially generated sounds in its, tube like, way. Things were more golden and sweeter, but I cannot say it was bad. It was probably different to what the lovers of that kind of music would like, but not bad at all. As a curiosity I may add, that with the mentioned squeaks and all kinds of purposely created distortion, you could maybe complain a bit, if you were malicious, then

with the vocals, especially the female one, was fantastic. So, it will depend on your expectations, how you will perceive the performance of the Ayon in that kind of music. But I tell you, being fair, you cannot complain about a tube-based device to avoid destroying your ears with squeaking music. This would really not be fair. For me, taking into account this aspect, it was good. With a company approach, but good.

Placing the tested player in my system, on one hand I knew what I should expect, based on the opinion of the constructor – Gerhard Hirt, on the other, with my experience, that many of such conversations are just wishful thinking, I was waiting for what would happen, with a tad of tension. It turned out to be a happy end. And what is important, the successor was better than the predecessor. Yes, it still had this manner of sounding with a tube accent, but in a very good style. So, to whom I would recommend the S-10 to try out in their own systems? Everybody, who likes this kind of musical presentation. What does this mean? Nothing special. You just need to like vivid and well saturated kind of reproduced music, and then the products like the one tested today become partners for life. Will this happen in case of your encounter with the Ayon S-10 II? In this case, this is up to you.

Jacek Pazio

Price: 26 900 PLN; + 7 490 PLN S-10 II Signature; + 3 290 PLN S-10 II Preamp

Technical specifications:

- Conversion rate: 764kHz / 32 bit & DSD256
- DAC configuration: Fully symmetrical / Dual mono
- Tube complement: 6H30
- Dynamic range: > 120 dB
- Output impedance RCA/XLR: ~ 700  $\Omega$
- Digital output : 75  $\Omega$  S/PDIF (RCA)
- Digital inputs: 75  $\Omega$  S/PDIF (RCA), USB-PC, TOSLINK, 2 x USB type A
- Network inputs: Ethernet, Wi-Fi
- S/N ratio: > 115 dB
- Frequency response: 20 Hz-20 kHz (+/- 0,3 dB)
- Total harmonic distortion @ 1kHz: < 0,002 %
- Analog line inputs: 2 x RCA
- Analog outputs: RCA, XLR
- Dimension (WxDxH): 480 x 360 x 120 mm
- Weight: 12 kg