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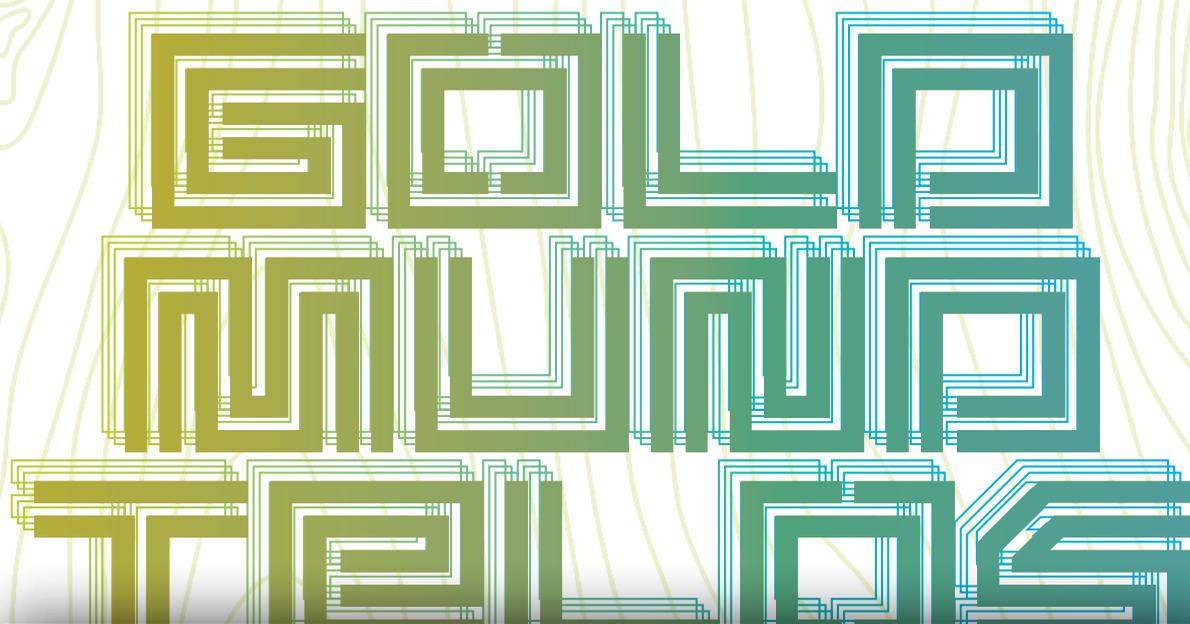
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# SWISS Wunderkind!

**GOLDMUND TELOS 590**

**NEXTGEN II INTEGRATED AMP**



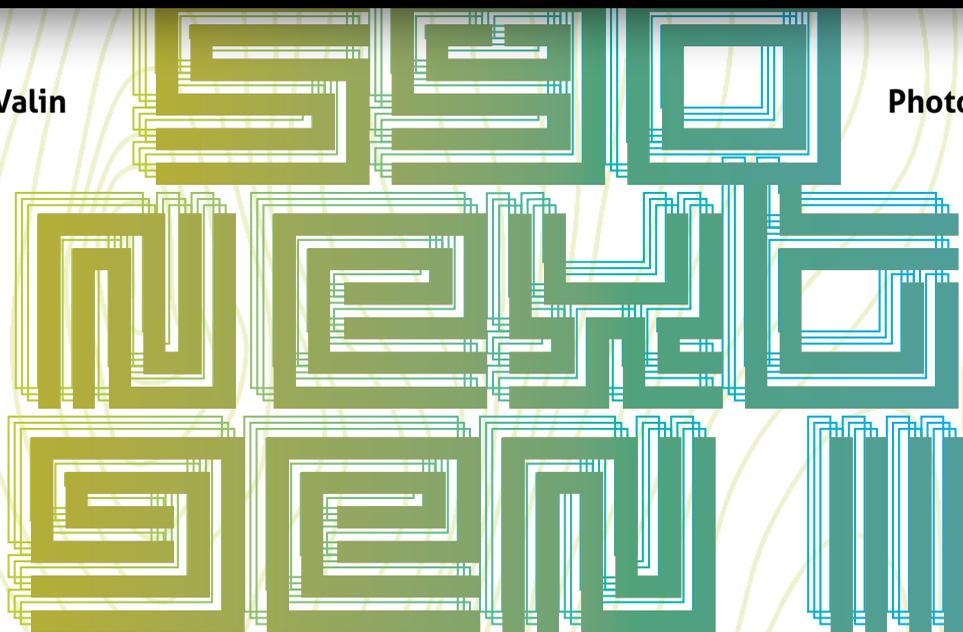
The title 'GOLDMUND TELOS' is rendered in a highly stylized, multi-layered font. Each letter is composed of numerous overlapping, slightly offset outlines, creating a 3D, circuit-like effect. The colors transition from a dark olive green on the left to a bright cyan on the right. The background is a light-colored wood grain pattern with wavy, vertical lines.

# GOLDMUND TELOS

## Goldmund Telos 590 Nextgen II Integrated Amplifier

by Jonathan Valin

Photos by Wrightsteel





### Let me be honest .

Right up until this very review I haven't been much of a fan of integrated amplifiers. Cramming a preamp, a power amp, and, nowadays, a digital source component into a single box just never seemed like the wisest engineering choice to me. Not only does doing so greatly increase the risk of electro-mechanical interactions among the three different circuits; it also makes coping with the vastly different power-supply, shielding, and grounding requirements of each component section a much tougher proposition. There are sound reasons (excuse the pun) why most of the manufacturers who make integrated amplifiers also make large stereo and monoblock amplifiers, preamps with outboard (physically and electronically isolated) power supplies, and stand-alone DACs and phono stages (many of them also with outboard power supplies).

Thus, my review of the Goldmund Telos 590 Nextgen II—a 215Wpc (into 8 ohms) Class A/B integrated with built-in 384k/32-bit DAC (no phono stage, alas)—is something of an experiment. Having read in these pages about the strides made in integrated amplification—and having a genuine curiosity about the sonic merits of today's finest compact components (polar opposites of my sonically incomparable, but also incomparably large, complex, and expensive MBL system)—I decided to take the plunge with a company whose products I'm familiar with and like.

To say that I'm glad I did this would be, perhaps, one of the bigger understatements I've committed to print. As you will see, the Telos 590 Nextgen II is a standard-setter. This isn't to say that I have no reserva-

tions about Goldmund's integrated (I will come to them in due course). What I am saying is that in direct comparison with first-rate separates that, collectively, cost more than *four times* what the \$29,750 Telos 590 Nextgen II costs, the Goldmund unit didn't just hold its own; it excelled, particularly in the bass and power range (but also, in some respects, in the mids and treble). And it did so without

provoking the big reservations about soundstage dimensions, dynamic range and impact, detail retrieval, and noise levels that, in the not-too-distant past, inevitably popped up in reviews of integrated amplifiers.

On the outside, the Telos 590 Nextgen II looks identical to its predecessor, the highly praised Nextgen I—a stout, 45-pound, rectangular aluminum-and-steel box with an LED display in the center of its front panel. The display reads out exactly three metrics: on the left, the number of the input that has been selected (ranging from “1” through “8,” and all stops in between); on the right, the volume level (ranging from “00” to “99”); and dead center, the power status of the unit (a lighted pair of horizontal bars confirms that power is on and the integrated is ready to make music).

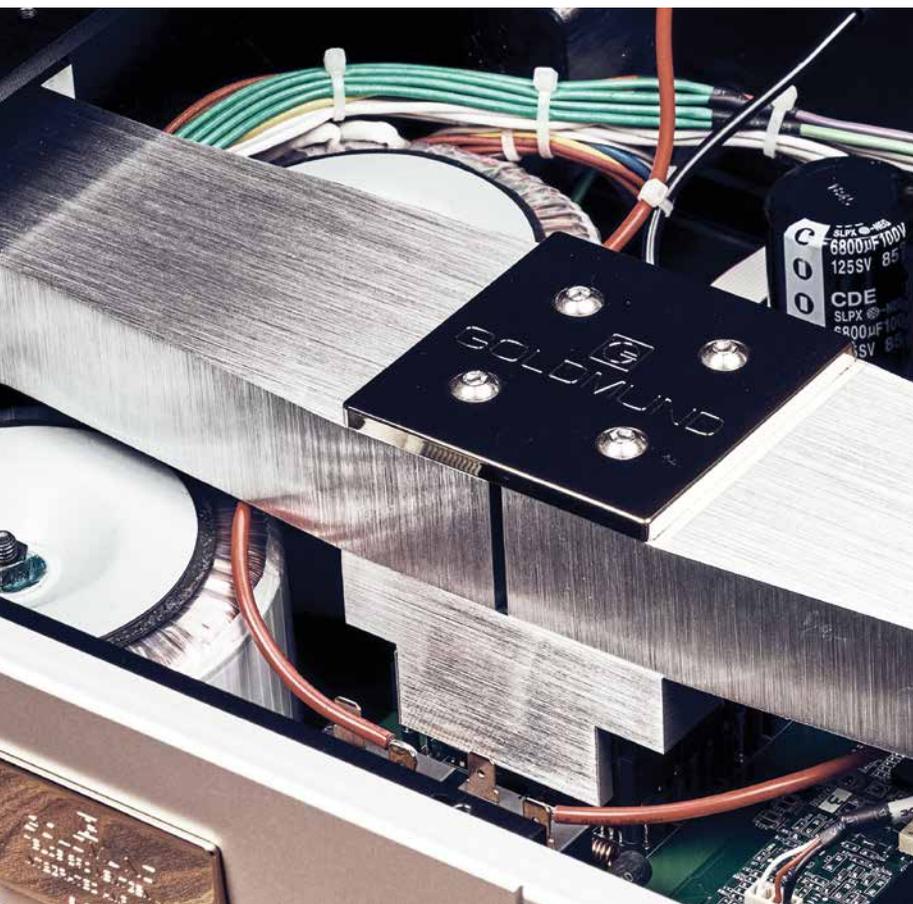
There are metal knobs on either side of the LED display (two total). Rotating the one on the left changes the input; rotating the one on the right changes the volume. The knobs are relatively lightweight for a unit of this price, and show next-to-no resistance when turned.

Though input and volume adjustments can be made directly via the two front-panel controls, Goldmund also includes a small metal remote, which allows you to do these same things (and several others) via pushbuttons. In addition to changing input and volume level, the remote allows you to mute the preamp (which also turns off the volume light on the right side of the LED panel) or to put the unit in standby mode (which also dims the entire display).

On the back of the Telos 590 Nextgen II are eight inputs and exactly one set of output binding posts for the amp's left and right channels. Though these posts are said, by Goldmund, to have been structurally improved, they are the first of my very few reservations about the Nextgen II.

If you are an audiophile who uses a subwoofer, absent some kind of (possibly compromising) workaround, you're going to be Schiit out of luck with the Telos 590 Nextgen II. There is no second set of outputs, either

**In direct comparison with first-rate separates that cost four times more than the Telos 590 Nextgen II, the Goldmund unit did better than hold its own.**





## Goldmund Telos 590 Nextgen II Integrated Amplifier

binding posts or RCAs or XLRs. (In fact, there are no XLRs outputs or inputs at all, Goldmund being a firm believer in the superiority of RCA connectors.) As was the case with the company's sonically superior PH3.8 phonostage, the Telos 590 Nextgen II's ergonomics seem a bit dated here. Not offering a second set of outputs for subwoofers or a second system in a nearby spot just doesn't make a lot of common sense nowadays. However, if you want all that the Telos 590 Nextgen II has to offer sonically (and it offers a great deal), that's the way things are. (The excuse for omitting this seemingly indispensable feature is the same here as it was with the PH3.8—the Telos 590 Nextgen II is a “purist” component intended for a traditional two-channel audio system and a traditional two-channel music lover.)

On the lower left side of the rear panel, there are three digital inputs (to feed the Telos 590 Nextgen II's built-in DAC)—one USB 2.0, one TosLink, and one SPDIF 75-ohm coaxial—and five pairs of RCA analog “ins.” I used two sets of these RCA pairs—one for the Soullution 760 DAC (my benchmark for comparison with Goldmund's built-in DAC) and one for the DS Audio Master1 equalizer (which I used with DS Audio's fabulous new flagship optical cartridge, the Grand Master—see the sidebar). An IEC power inlet, a dial to set line voltage (115V, 230V), and an RS232 connector complete the rear-panel I/Os.

Finned heat sinks occupy the space on either side of the chassis. Happily, they aren't the razor-sharp Krell type of yore, which could (and in my case, did) score legs and arms. They are smooth enough to touch without injury, and in spite of the fact that the Telos 590 Nextgen II is a bit of a powerhouse, they don't get overly warm.

As many of you already know, Goldmund's electronics have long been celebrated for their power, transient speed, and resolution. They have also been knocked for their lean, coolish tonal balance, which sits (a bit too uncomfortably for some) smack dab on the dividing line between analytical and neutral. For listeners looking for the last word in inner detail delivered with lifelike speed and impact, the company's gear has long been competitive with the best; for listeners looking for warm, full, naturally *gemütlich* timbre and three-dimensional imaging, not so much. The original Telos 590 Nextgen integrated from just a few years back, for example, was rightly praised for its very high, very Goldmund-like resolution, but also mildly faulted for its slight, very Goldmund-like timbral



chilliness. The new Nextgen II version of this integrated amplifier is an entirely different critter.

Well...not entirely. The Nextgen II is still a champ when it comes to the retrieval of detail—musical, performance, and engineering. If you're the kind of audiophile who simply can't live without hearing the single reed of a saxophone fluttering breathily at the tail end of a sustained note (as the reed in Branford Marsalis' tenor sax does on Harry Connick Jr.'s great rendition of “A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square” from *We Are in Love* [Sony/Columbia]), or a tuba player's lips buzzing in the mouthpiece of his instrument (like John Sass' embouchure does on the recently remastered version of Hans Theessink's terrific album *Baby Wants To Boogie* [Blue Groove]), then the Telos 590 Nextgen II is definitely going

to be your cup of transistors. What sets it apart from the original Telos 590 (and previous generations of Goldmund amplifiers) is that, in addition to these instrumental and performance details, the Nextgen II will also deliver that sax and that tuba's tone colors (along with their 3-D body and bloom) with near-perfection. As I've written many times before, when you blend extremely high resolution with extremely natural timbre, pitch, intensity, and duration you get what I've called completeness—along with neutrality, one of the two indispensable building blocks of realistic playback. The Telos 590 Nextgen II has this kind of completeness,

**When you blend extremely high resolution with extremely natural timbre, pitch, intensity, and duration you get what I've called completeness.**

*par excellence.*

So, what has Goldmund changed internally from the Telos 590 Nextgen I to the Nextgen II to make for these profound differences in tonality and imaging? I wish I could tell you for sure. Unfortunately, getting Goldmund to talk about its circuitry is a little like trying to prise a bone from the jaws of a bulldog. The company's various technical innovations have so often been “borrowed” by other outfits (particularly by other Swiss outfits) that its top engineering brass just doesn't spill the beans when it comes to internal improvements.

What I know for fact about the innards of the Telos 590 Nextgen II is the little I've been able to glean from Goldmund's U.S. distributor, Gideon Schwarz of Audioarts in NYC. And part of what Gideon shared

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with me was more in the way of a fascinating historical side note than a stop-the-presses scoop.

Those of you familiar with Goldmund componentry will already know that the company pioneered the use of the ultra-high-bandwidth, ultra-high-speed circuits that are found today in virtually every solid-state amp with pretensions to state-of-the-art performance. What you may not know—I didn't, until Gideon told me—is that all Goldmund preamplifiers and amplifiers, including the Telos 590 Nextgen II, derived their high-bandwidth, high-speed, Class A/B circuit from an amp built into a late-1960s Tektronix cathode-ray-tube oscilloscope (where very high bandwidth was essential for the measurement of radio frequencies). Although Goldmund's original Tektronix-derived circuitry has since been refined by nine generations (35 years) of Goldmund engineers, it got its start in a piece of test gear!

Of course, the question then becomes why Goldmund thought that ultra-high bandwidth (near or well into the MHz range) was essential in audio applications. The company's founder Michel Reverchon answered this question back in 2013, in an interview with Brent Butterworth in *Sound & Vision* magazine: "While the magnitude of a typical high-end amplifier's treble roll-off isn't audible, the phase (i.e., timing) effects of the roll-off are. In other words, the filtering effect of an amplifier's treble roll-off shifts the phase of high-frequency signals relative to low-frequency signals." Pushing that inevitable HF roll-off *much* higher in frequency by greatly extending bandwidth, in theory at least, reduces or eliminates the effect such phase shifts (and consequent time delays) have on the audio spectrum.

Though the audibility of phase shifts has been (and continues to be) debated in high-end circles, judging by the number of ultra-high-bandwidth offerings from companies like Soudation, Constellation, CH Precision, MBL, D'Agostino, etc., the consensus seems to be that phase shifts *do* matter. Speaking for myself, most of the amps I've liked (certainly most of the solid-state ones) have boasted ultra-high-speed, ultra-high-bandwidth circuitry. Indeed, the greater linearity and lower distortion conferred by high-bandwidth design appears to make the same sonic differences in every type of electronic component, not just in amplifiers. (For instance, I recently heard the huge improvement that correct phase response made in

a sterling DAC, the Soudation 760, which uses ultra-high bandwidth and an ingenious algorithm to ensure that treble frequencies and bass frequencies arrive at your ears in phase and in time.)

The other thing that seems to accompany phase-and-time-correct signal delivery is greatly improved bottom-octave color and control. Of course, an amp's reproduction of the bass decades is more directly affected by its damping factor than by its phase and time linearity, and yet high-speed, high-bandwidth electronics have consistently evinced markedly improved grip in the lower frequencies, which they deliver with greater definition, richer color, and less ringing than many of the lower-speed, limited-bandwidth solid-state circuits of the past.

### Ancillaries

As I said in the review, the Telos 590 Nextgen II was being helped to reach stunning sonic heights by several ancillary components. Although I'm not going to review any of them here, I am going to mention them, because each, alone and in combination, made improvements in the sound of what was already an astonishingly good-sounding integrated amplifier.

The first ancillary I'm going to mention is the \$1850 CAD (Computer Audio Design) GC1 ground control device—a classic black box intended to reduce high-frequency noise on the signal-ground plane of the component(s) it is connected to. I'm not going to tell you how this passive device works; what I am going to tell you is that it *does* work, markedly reducing background hash, enriching timbre top to bottom, and adding three-dimensionality to voices and instruments.

The second item is DS Audio's new \$15,000 (without twin, dedicated, separately available, \$45,000 EQ boxes) Grand Master optical cartridge. Having just recently reviewed its predecessor, the superb DS Audio Master1, I was not prepared for how far forward the Grand Master was going to take optical playback in such a relatively short period of development time. Once again, I'm not going to review DS Audio's latest flagship here; only say that the few reservations (i.e., upper midrange peakiness, slightly leanish timbre, etc.) I had about the Master1 have been completely eliminated in the Grand Master. This is a truly great transducer—one of the very best I've ever heard in a lifetime of listening to LPs.

The third item, CrystalConnect's new flagship Da Vinci interconnects, speaker cables, and power cords (the prices of which I dursn't mention, as my grandma would've said), are simply phenomenal wires and markedly different than (and superior to) previous Crystal Cable offerings. Once again, I'm not going to review these fabulous things in a sidebar, but what I am going to tell you (and what the Goldmund Telos 590 Nextgen II clearly told me) is that these cables are fuller, sweeter, and more neutral in tone, higher in detail and dimensionality, and lower in grain and noise than Crystal's previous headliners—the Ultimate Dreams. (And if you've heard the Ultimate Dreams, you will know that is saying a mouthful.) Of course, the Da Vincis will only be for the very wealthy and insane, but if you want to hear what today's finest cables are capable of, try to find a way to audition them.

Having said all this, I don't want to leave the impression that you *must* buy these pricey ancillaries to approach the sound I rave about in my review. The Goldmund Telos 590 Nextgen II will do quite nicely, thank you, with any high-quality source or cable. But through the Goldmund integrated you will hear the kind of differences in ancillaries that you can, usually, only hear to their fullest via the priciest and most transparent-to-source components. In other words, I've written this sidebar because the Goldmund integrated told me to write it—it is that sensitive and responsive to what it is being fed.

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You can hear all these advantages in Goldmund's Telos 590 Nextgen II, which, as was the case with Goldmund's PH3.8 phono stage (Issue 312), initially reminded me of Soudation's outstanding preamps and amps—particularly in the bottom octaves, where the 590 II had a power, solidity, and density of timbre that I just didn't think anything but Soudation gear could manage. When you add cherry-cordial sweetness and liquidity in the midrange and treble to this incredibly solid bass and power-range foundation, you get the kind of neutrality that breeds the head-slapping sonic realism and tonal fidelity that every music lover rightly craves.

This amount of solidity, dimensionality, and timbral sweetness is, as I've said, relatively new to Goldmund integrated amps. According to Schwarz it is owed, in no small part, to Goldmund's recent development of a sophisticated heat-dissipation system. "The company created a mechanical link between the power MOSFETs and lateral heatsinks (see the interior photos of the Nextgen II on pages 114 and 115, above) to help dissipate heat more efficiently. This mechanical tweak has contributed to even greater refinement, ease, fluidity, dynamic power delivery, and lightning speed."

Usually, such market-speak doesn't impress me; however, in this case, I have to wonder whether there is more than a little truth to what Gideon says, since the sonic benefits Goldmund is claiming for the Telos 590 Nextgen II's heat-dissipation system are, in fact, the same ones I've been hearing—refinement, ease, fluidity, etc., along with dense color and detail. One wouldn't think that a mechanical device, independent of the actual circuitry, could make such a profound sonic difference. Then again, a large part of Goldmund's rep was initially made with just such a device—its Mechanical Grounding footer, introduced in 1982, which was one of the first successful demonstrations of how a constrained-layer contraption could evacuate vibrations from the speakers and electronics seated upon it.

Of course, Goldmund is also claiming (though not explaining) improvements in the Telos 590 Nextgen II's circuitry proper, including a reduction in intermodulation distortion (particularly important to woofer control), improved linearity in all amplification stages, and considerably decreased time distortion. The key to high-fidelity sound, the company says on its website, is striking the right balance between power and control. Judging by the results, Goldmund certainly seems to have hit its target with the Telos 590 Nextgen II.

**The key to high-fidelity sound, says Goldmund, is striking the right balance between power and control. With the Telos 590 II, the company has certainly hit its target.**

To hear what Goldmund is bragging—and I'm enthusing—about, all you have to do is begin by listening to a record or disc or stream that features a performer you've often heard and loved in live performances, but haven't always enjoyed as much through a stereo system. In my case, let's pick the great blues guitarist B. B. King and the famous album *Live at the Regal* [Geffen/MCA].

I'm not likely to forget the first time I heard B. B. King in concert. The venue, alas, was not the best—dry and echoey and loud as hell, thanks to an overflow crowd. But it didn't keep me from delighting in the showmanship of King's band (all those smartly uniformed brass players twirling their instruments in perfect unison between breaks, like drum majors twirling their batons), or the beautiful tone of King's guitar, Lucille, and the expressive way he played it and sang to it.

Through the vast majority of stereo systems, you seldom get the same tonal beauty, range, and expressiveness on King LPs or CDs that I heard that winter night, decades ago. The rich, round voice of King's Gibson ES-355, with its Varitone switch set to "2" (which sucked out energy at 1.9kHz, giving Lucille its distinctive "scooped out" sound), is typically thinned down, deracinated, made brighter and less richly expressive—flatter, more soprano-like, less bluesy, if you will—in playback. Not so, through the Telos 590 Nextgen II.

Through the Goldmund integrated fed by the Soudation 760 DAC (and augmented, I must note, by CAD's remarkable GC1 ground control device—see sidebar), Lucille was "re-inflated" into three dimensions, her tone was filled out and "deepened" to the baritone I remembered, and the sense of "being there" (again) was magically revived.

And it wasn't just Lucille that benefited from the Nextgen II treatment. So did King's smooth, vaguely Nat Cole-like tenor, which makes such a sweet contrast with his epigrammatic style of guitar playing. (As Adam Gopnik of

*The New Yorker* put it in a 2015 piece honoring the great bluesman's passing, as an instrumentalist B. B. King was "not at all showily virtuosic...but no one made a guitar talk as he did, as an...instrument of human expression more than of the adolescent finger-mania [of all those young British whiz kids].") The Nextgen II not only brought Lucille and King back to life, it also had a similar effect on the sound of his marvelous rhythm section, which, though reduced in size, impact, and presence (due to gain-riding), I could almost see again, playing and twirling in unison from stage left to right.



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Although bringing you closer to the absolute sound may be the best thing it is capable of, the Telos 590 Nextgen II's appeal isn't limited to absolute sound listeners. As the Børreson 05 loudspeakers did with Van Cliburn's performance of the Prokofiev Third Piano Concerto [RCA], this integrated can also teach you things about how music is being played, and how a well-recorded performance can highlight structure and meaning—the kind of presentation that will make it equally appealing to “fidelity-to-source” listeners.

Take, for example, Luigi Nono's mid-twentieth-century composition for flute, clarinet, alto saxophone, piano, and percussion, *Polifonica—Monodia—Ritmica* [Time Records]. As its

As for “as you like it” listeners...well, with color, power, speed, resolution, and sweetness of this order there isn't much you can play that won't raise goosebumps.

title plainly states, this is a three movement work in which serial techniques are first applied polyphonically, then in monody, and then, rather jazzily, to rhythms and dynamics. Like so many mid-century classical compositions it is, at once, an expressive piece of music, an aesthetic argument, and a methodological demonstration.

While I've enjoyed Nono's music in the past, I can't say I understood all he was up to until I heard *Polifonica—Monodia—Ritmica* played back through the Telos 590 Nextgen II via the fantastic DS Audio Grand Master optical cartridge (and the equally fantastic CrystalConnect Art Series Da Vinci cables). Because of the Goldmund's remarkable clarity (and that of the Grand Master and the Da Vincis), I could better hear how the tone rows of the first-movement adagio were

### Specs & Pricing

**Output power** Maximum power (IEC60065), 2x 215Wrms into 8 ohms

**Damping factor** 600 at 1kHz/8 ohms

**Output floor noise** <10µV from 20Hz to 20kHz

**Gain** 35dB

**IMD (SMPTE), unloaded** <0.02%.

**THD+N, unloaded** <0.08% from 20Hz to 20kHz at 30Vrms output

**Rear panel I/Os** Output binding posts (left & right); on/off power switch; voltage input selector; RS232 command connector; USB 2.0 device (no driver required on Mac OS

X as of v.10.6.4 nor on Linux, driver required only for Windows), sample rate up to 384kHz, bit-depth up to 32-bit, DSD64 native, DSD128-over-PCM; TosLink optical; digital SPDIF coaxial RCA 75 ohms; 5x analog RCA (left & right)

**Dynamic range** 100dB

**Dimensions** 44 x 16.5 x 41.5cm

**Weight** 20 kg

**Price** \$29,750

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#### JV's Reference System

**Loudspeakers** MBL 101 X-treme, Magico M3, Børreson Acoustics 05, Voxativ 9.87, Avantgarde Zero 1, MartinLogan CLX, Magnepan 1.7 and 30.7

**Subwoofers** JL Audio Gotham (pair), Magico QSub 15 (pair)

**Linestage preamps** Soudation 725, MBL 6010 D, Constellation Audio Altair II, Siltech SAGA System C1, Air Tight ATE-2001 Reference

**Phonostage preamps** Soudation 755, Goldmund PH3.8 NEXTGEN, Walker Proscenium V, Constellation Audio Perseus, DS Audio Master1 and Grand Master, EMM Labs DS-EQ1

**Power amplifiers** Soudation 711, MBL 9008 A, Constellation Audio Hercules II Stereo, Air Tight 3211, Air Tight ATM-2001, Zanden Audio Systems Model 9600, Siltech SAGA System V1/P1, Odyssey Audio Stratos, Voxativ Integrated 805

**Analog source** Clearaudio Master Innovation, Acoustic Signature Invictus Jr./T-9000, Walker Audio Proscenium Black Diamond Mk V, TW Acoustic Black Knight/TW Raven 10.5, AMG Viella 12

**Tape deck** United Home Audio Ultimate 4 OPS

**Phono cartridges** DS Audio Grandmaster, DS Audio Master1, Clearaudio Goldfinger Statement, Air Tight Opus 1, Ortofon MC Anna, Ortofon MC A90

**Digital source** MSB Reference DAC, Soudation 760, Berkeley Alpha DAC 2

**Cable and interconnect** CrystalConnect Art Series da Vinci, Crystal Cable Ultimate Dream, Synergistic Research Galileo UEF, Ansuz Acoustics Diamond

**Power cords** CrystalConnect Art Series da Vinci, Crystal Cable Ultimate Dream, Synergistic Research Galileo UEF, Ansuz Acoustics Diamond

**Power conditioner** AudioQuest Niagara 5000 (two), Synergistic Research Galileo UEF, Ansuz Acoustics DTC, Technical Brain

**Support systems** Critical Mass Systems MAXXUM and QXK equipment racks and amp stands

**Room Treatments** Stein Music H2 Harmonizer system, Synergistic Research UEF Acoustic Panels/Atmosphere XL4/UEF Acoustic Dot system, Synergistic Research ART system, Shakti Hallographs (6), Zanden Acoustic panels, A/V Room Services Metu acoustic panels and traps, ASC Tube Traps

**Accessories** DS Audio ION-001, SteinMusic Pi Carbon Signature record mat, CAD GC-1 and GC-3 Ground Control, Symposium Isis and Ultra equipment platforms, Symposium Rollerblocks and Fat Padz, Walker Prologue Reference equipment and amp stands, Walker Valid Points and Resonance Control discs, Clearaudio Double Matrix Professional Sonic record cleaner, Synergistic Research RED Quantum fuses, HiFi-Tuning silver/gold fuses

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I think you can tell that I like this amp, though you may have noticed that I haven't yet discussed its built-in (non-MQA) DAC. Don't worry—it's not because I think it's lousy. It is anything but lousy. It's just that in comparison with something like the Soulution 760 (which, all by itself, costs more than twice as much as the Telos 590) or the MSB Reference DAC (ditto, suitably fitted out), it won't resolve quite the same amount of musical detail or deliver quite the same fully dimensional soundstage. (It is also a mite darker in timbre and less dynamic than either of these SOTA units.) I don't hold this against the Telos 590. After all, you're getting a world-class amplifier and preamplifier and what is, by any standard short of the world's best digital sources, an exceptionally accomplished DAC for a few bucks under \$30k. If that isn't a deal (for high-rollers, at least), then

being sounded by the different instruments individually, canonically, and simultaneously. Because of its equally remarkable density of color, I could also better hear (and understand) the *Klangfarbenmelodie* of the second movement, where the continuous iteration of tone rows by instruments of different timbre and register created a monody of varied hue and texture. And on to the final movement where the Goldmund's sensational speed and granitic power filled out the exciting and expressive serial rhythmic patterns, including lightning fast, three-dimensionally solid, densely colored, and impactful drumstrokes, and absolutely exquisite cymbal taps. What had once been an intriguing collection of sounds became a *musical composition* of artful complexity, performed and recorded with expressive skill—and also a little lesson on what the most sophisticated “atonal” composers were doing in 1951.

As for “as you like it” listeners...well, with color, power, speed, resolution, and sweetness of this order there isn't much you can play that won't raise goosebumps. From the terrific blues guitar and vocals on the Hans Theessink album I mentioned earlier (what a pity this superb performer was born in The Netherlands—being a Little Dutch Boy has cost him some of the esteem he is rightly owed) to the equally terrific playing and singing on homegrown blues guitarist Albert Cummings' *Believe* [Provogue] (wait to you hear his rendition of Isaac Hayes' great R&B anthem “Hold On, I'm Comin'”—he may not be Sam & Dave and Steve Cropper here [who was or is?], but he is still pretty damn wonderful), the Goldmund Telos 590 Nextgen II will have you rockin' and rollin' almost as deliriously and unreservedly as those high-ticket big boy monoblocks. Or try one of my new faves, Low Neck Connie's double-album *Private Lives*, where that musical polymath Adam Weiner manages to evoke Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, and Warren Zevon while still coming across as his own supremely gifted self. (I dare you to listen to “Help Me” without tapping your feet—or marveling at the smart, catchy lyrics.)

what is?

I've already mentioned the place where the Telos 590 Nextgen II disappoints. Its ergonomics are old-fashioned, and the absence of a second output could be a deal-breaker for some (although, believe me, they will regret missing out on the sound that the Nextgen II delivers). There is this, as well. In the heart of winter, in a low humidity environment, you can generate static electricity by walking across a carpet (at least, I can). A little spark or charge of same transferred by hand to a DAC or a phono stage connected to the Telos 590 Nextgen II can trigger the protection circuit in the Goldmund unit and shut it down. Even though this is a first in my experience, it's no big deal. It is easily corrected by rebooting the amp (turning it off and then on again). Just be aware that such a momentary shutdown is a possibility—and don't freak out if it happens to you.

The Goldmund Telos 590 Nextgen II took me by surprise. No, it is not the full equal of my reference solid-state amps and preamps from Soulution, Constellation, and MBL. For one thing, it doesn't have all the unlimited power and voltage of these state-of-the-art monsters. Consequently, it is not quite as fast or as hard-hitting or as minutely detailed or as iron-fistedly controlled. On the other

hand, if someone had told me that an amp, preamplifier, and DAC in a single box could come as close to the sonics of these outstanding separates as the Goldmund Telos 590 Nextgen II does, I would've laughed in his face. You won't hear me laughing now. This is a marvelous piece of audio gear that, for me, sets a new eye- and ear-opening standard for integrated amplifiers. Yeah, it costs \$30k, but it's worth every penny. **tas**

**The 590 II not only brought Lucille and B. B. back to life, it also had a similar effect on the sound of King's marvelous rhythm section, which I could almost see again.**