



RETRO REVISITED

High quality brushed metal fronts, rosewood veneer casework, and the magic of tubes: Luxman's new „Classic Series“ creates an aura of timeless elegance and nostalgic charm. But does the sound of D-380/LX-380 deliver what the styling promises?

Some components are simply too good for testing: it's almost a shame to play them off against competitors or to get to the bottom of them with measuring instruments. That's exactly how I felt when I looked at Luxman's D-380 CD player and its LX-380 integrated amplifier partner, with which the Japanese high-end manufacturer – one of the world's oldest hi-fi brands, by the way - is expanding its "Classic Series". Now that series is already off the beaten track when it comes to general awareness, and perhaps only known to the

cognoscenti, so perhaps submitting it to 'normal' test scrutiny is already committing sacrilege.

However, you don't have to be an insider or a Luxman fan to realize something special's going on here, due to the retro look, including the wooden cladding for the sturdy metal chassis which evokes the spirit of long gone days, and the toggle switches and squiggle logo. Amps looked like this 40 years ago, and really only the tiny window for the signal from the infrared remote control indicates there's something modern about this one.

High-tech in vintage clothing

True there were no CD players at that time, but even the D-380 player makes every effort to fit into the frame of solid nostalgia without appearing squeezed in. It impresses with its simple elegance and minimal controls on the elegant shimmering front panel, while the amp retains the wide range of functions usual on older



▲ If you buy both 380s, you also have two remote controls, but the amp's one will control all essential player functions.



▲ Just like in the past, when hi-fi fans wanted to adjust more than just the volume and inputs on their amp, the LX-380 has differentiated tone control with three switchable frequencies for the bass and treble controls.

▲ The D-380's double-triode tube is visible through the window, the digital outputs can be switched off, and the display can be switched to large numerals from the remote control by pressing the „Zoom“ button (above).

Japanese amplifiers and those “retro-styled” – something this Luxman shares with, for example, models from Accuphase.

So the LX-380 has a switchable tone control with three selectable input frequencies for the bass and treble controls, a phono section that can be used with moving magnet or moving coil cartridges, a switchable subsonic filter, tape monitor, loudness control and a headphone output.

Inside, it combines a tried and tested tube power amplifier design, in which three ECC82s control four 6L6GC power tubes, with what's said to be the first lossless volume control: the “Luxman Electric Controlled Ultimate Attenuator”, or LECUA for short.

This sits on its own circuit board and converts the music signal from voltage to current, adjusts the desired gain by combining several stages according to the

TEST-COMPONENTS

TURNTABLE: Transrotor Rondino nero with arms from Jelco and SME

CARTRIDGES: Clearaudio Charisma V2 (MM), Transrotor Figaro (MC)

CD PLAYERS: Lua Appassionato MKII GS, T+A MP3000HV

AMPLIFIERS: Accuphase E-270, Accustic Arts POWER I-MK4

SPEAKER: DALI Epicon 6, Dynaudio Cont. 60, Q Acoustics Concept 500

volume knob, and then performs current/voltage re-conversion. The manufacturer says that as this runs over its entire range without any impedance change, LECUA has no negative influence on the signal-to-noise ratio or the frequency response of the LX-380. All of that is invisible to the user: rather everything simply works perfectly and precisely.

The D-380 CD player's handset offers a choice of modes: you can use the transistor output, or also connect a double triode ECC82 stage? The tube is located behind a small window, kept warm at all times and discreetly illuminated at the rear as soon as the small rocker switch, which is positioned below it, is operated.

It's logical that, despite the vintage flair, the developers used the latest technology for their purebred D-380, which, contrary to today's trend, only plays CDs and offers

▲ The L-68A, which is around 35 years old, was one of the models for the LX-380's design. The transistor amp cost around 2500 marks at that time.

no digital inputs. Texas Instruments' PCM 5102 DAC chip, with jitter reduction and selectable filter characteristics is used, and the dimmable and completely defeatable display can be switched to a large display of tracks and time data, which can then be read from a distance of a few meters.

If you are looking for signs of retro, you will find further refinements in the LX-380's elaborate transformers, but the “fascination of technology”, however sophisticated it may be in detail, kept in the background: upfront is the joy of the styling – and of course the sonic experience.

The amp's the star

The player spoiled us with silky accuracy, sounding anything but mechanical: even in the transistor mode, the details in Eleni Karaindrou's “To Vals Tou Gamou” were woven delicately into the sound picture and created an almost floatingly light grace, but the player also grabbed the heavier sound of the Blues Company in full-blooded manner.

Switching to tubes, it was as if the upper midrange was highlighted more

energetically – although nothing is apparent in the frequency response measurements – with the effect of making voices and strings a little more present and striking, and the strike on guitar strings more prominent. Switch to the time-optimized Filter2 via the remote control and, depending on the quality of the recording, you get a more spatial representation, albeit at the expense of a sometimes somewhat brittle overtone. Which filter setting fits better and which one is more pleasing is a matter of personal taste- they're easily selected from the listening position for quick comparisons.

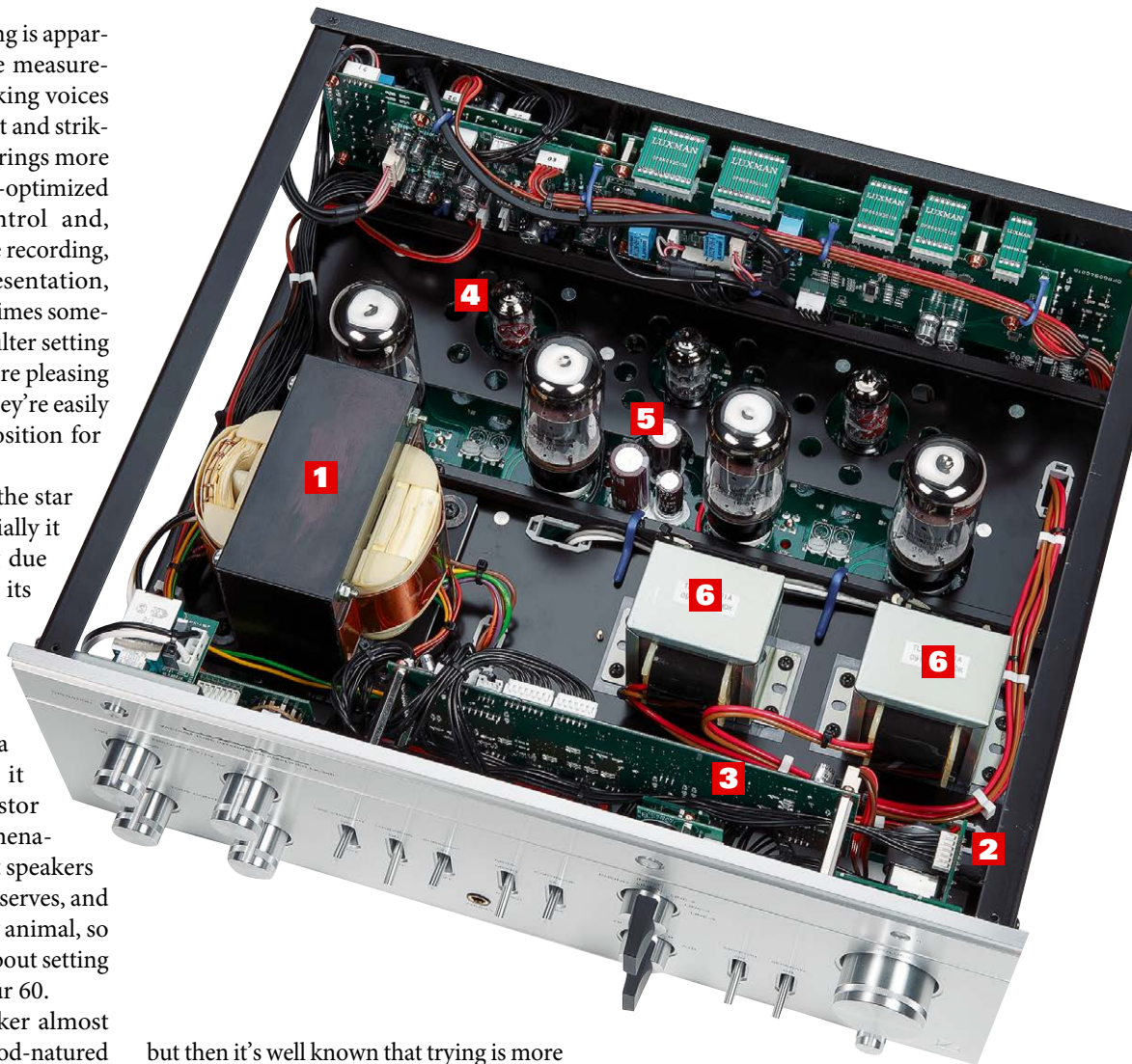
So far, so convincing – but the star of the set is the amplifier. Initially it doesn't sound too promising due to its low power, but it uses its approximately 20 watts per channel so skillfully that it can bring tears of enthusiasm to the.

The choice of speaker plays a more important role than it would with a potent transistor amp, which would be more amenable: the LX-380 needs efficient speakers that won't exhaust its power reserves, and would be unsuitable as a party animal, so we initially had some doubts about setting it up with Dynaudio's Contour 60.

Although the Danish speaker almost 90dB/W/m sensitivity and a good-natured impedance response, it might not be considered a favorite for use with a tube amp,

On the connection side, there are only RCA sockets (including tape loop) as well as outputs and inputs for the preamplifier/power amplifier section. If not assigned, use the short circuit caps on the phono sockets (l.) ▼

but then it's well known that trying is more vital than studying. Even so, it was surprising how easily, confidently and enthusiastically the Luxman partnered with the speakers, raising Maria Pihl's "Malvina" over her deep, colorful and radiant backing. It unraveled the dense web of band and audience on the Red Norvo Quintet's "Saturday Night" with ease, letting the mallets over the succinctly struck



▲ The main transformer **1** supplies the LX-380 with energy. The pulse generator behind the volume knob **2** informs the „LECUA“ circuit **3** of the desired gain. Three small double triodes of the type ECC82 **4** control the four main tubes **5**, two per channel. These transmit their power to the loudspeakers via output transformers **6**.

vibraphone with relish, gave the swing free rein and at the same time conveyed the sense of the audience in the background. A better sense of live atmosphere and instinctive, joyous playing is rare.

Maybe even more exciting was the way the amplifier matched with DALI's Epicon 6. This design is three decibels "quieter" than the Contour, but its impedance is straightforward at the five-ohm mark, which is something amplifiers generally like, tubes in particular.

The Luxman had an easy time with it, let the sparks sparkle and made Ray Brown's acoustic bass on "Exactly Like



You” sound superb. Using this record we checked the phono input, which is well up to the standard of the rest of the amp, with different cartridges, concluding that even top-quality partners are brought to life with a three-dimensional sense of space and tonal color. That’s great – after all, tube fans usually also like vinyl.

Tubes and filters according to taste

Compared to transistor rivals in the same price range, the LX-380 was extremely airy, light-footed and agile, but at the same time less “dense”. Where others paint in opaque oil, the Luxman has more dazzling watercolors in its palette - not untypical for tubes. Nevertheless, it delivers the fat groove of “Homeward Bound” of the Blues Company in full and dominant fashion, belying the myth that tubes are soft, warm and cozy.

Considering how dry, contoured and dynamic is the manner in which the LX-380 delivers the bass, one might start wondering whether it’s best via the highest possible damping factor, to take the speakers woofers under a tight rein, or whether one should let the bass run unbridled. Yes, the Luxman is looks on paper to be a complete failure in terms of damping, but still doesn’t sound mushy or spongy. Rather, the airy and diversified diction of midrange and treble is also prevalent in the low frequency range. Wonderful!

Whether you operate the player with or without tube participation, and which digital filter you choose, is down to taste, and may even vary from track to track. We haven’t reached a definitive judgment on this – to be honest, we’ve been enjoying too much simply listening to the 380s.

The system even worked superbly with the Q Acoustics Concept 500 speakers, in a manner making it easy to forget that there’s only 20 watts per channel on tap. Luxman makes the best of its power, and while these retro components may not be aimed at those who want ultimate level, those who appreciate something really fine are likely to adore them.

Matthias Böde

Contact: Luxman
www.luxman.com

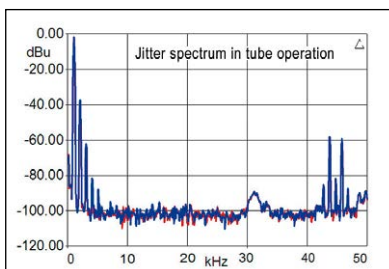
LUXMAN D-380



at € 4790
Dimensions: 44 x 17 x 34 cm (WxHxD)
Warranty: 2 years

For some hi-fi fans, the CD itself is retro. This player gives it a solid platform, and is technically and sonically up to date. The tube option on the output makes it particularly interesting.

MEASUREMENT RESULTS



Signal-to-noise ratio digital 0	103 dB
Quantization S/N ratio (400 Hz/0 dB)	96 dB
Distortion factor (400 Hz/-60 dB, trans./tube) 0.1/0.3 %	
Converter linearity down to -90 dB	0.1 dB
Sampling reliability	very good
Reading time	7 s
Output resistance RCA / at 1 kHz	300 Ω
Output voltage RCA/XLR at 0 dBFS	2.1 V
Channel deviation	0.2 dB
Jitter	7.2 ns
Deviation from sampling frequency	+36 ppm
Power input	
Off Standby Idle	0 - 13 Watt

LAB COMMENTS: All measured values are very good to excellent and meet today’s standards – only the outer appearance of the D-380 is retro. The data for the signal-to-noise ratios and the output resistance apply to the transistor output. However, when the valve stage is activated, the deviations are a maximum of two decibels or ohm and are therefore negligible. That’s why this one is so great!



FEATURES

Pre-adjustable tube in the output stage, dimmable and switchable display, time and track display with large display, two digital filters, digital outputs, remote control

STEREO-TEST

SOUND QUALITY **92%**

PRICE/PERFORMANCE



EXCELLENT

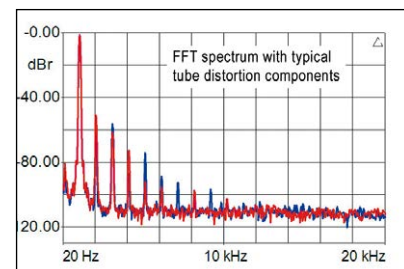
LUXMAN LX-380



at € 6990
Dimensions: 44x20x46 cm (WxHxD)
Warranty: 2 years

In a world of purist, minimalist tube amps, the luxuriously equipped Luxman gives the „full range“. And it combines its tube output stage with a high-tech volume control. First class sound!.

MEASUREMENT RESULTS



Continuous power at 8 4 Ω	18 17 W per channel
Pulse power into 4 Ω	21 W per channel
Distortion factor at 50 mW 5 Watt Pmax -1 dB	0.04 0.4 0.9 %
Intermodulation at 50 mW 5 Watt Pmax -1 dB	0.02 0.4 0.9 %
CD signal-to-noise ratio at 50 mW 5 Watt	68 88 dB
Phono MM (5 mV/1 kohm/5 W)	81 dB
Noise ratio Phono MC (0.5 mV/10Ω/5 W)	65 dB
Channel separation at 10 kHz	63 dB
Damping factor at 4 Ω	1
Upper cut-off frequency (-3 dB, 4 Ω)	70 kHz
Connected load values	practice-oriented
Crosstalk Tuner/CD (10 kHz/5 kHz)	72 dB
Synchronization error Volume control up to -60 dB	0.3 dB
Power input	
Off Standby Idle	0 - 104 Watt

LAB COMMENTS: The low output requires sensitive speakers. Distortions remain low, so do the noise values. Virtually no damping factor, good channel separation.



FEATURES

Four high level inputs plus one phono input (MM/MC), subsonic filter, mono button, tape out, pre-/power stage separable, loudness, remote control

STEREO-TEST

SOUND QUALITY **94%**

PRICE/PERFORMANCE



EXCELLENT