

# Smart Spender's Darling



Many believe that prices are skyrocketing wherever you look. However, not so at Musical Fidelity, who are fighting against this allegation even after the sale to Pro-Ject owner Heinz Lichtenegger.

### *Michael Lang*

**T**he shift of generations is completed: company founder Antony Michaelson handed over the baton at the last High End in Munich and sold his company to the Austrian Heinz Lichtenegger, who is known as the owner of Pro-Ject. Lichtenegger has a very similar philosophy to the Englishman Michaelson: to give as many people as possible access to good, high-quality reproduction by creating affordable products. However, that is only viable with efficient production and correspondingly high quantities. It

is, therefore, only reasonable that production is carried out in the Far East but under European quality standards. The very solid case with a five millimeter thick aluminum front panel demonstrates the thoroughness of Musical Fidelity's production. The amplifier's volume is controlled via a comfortably firm knob of perfect size and shape – a feature that we have repeatedly looked for in vain even with much more expensive amplifiers. The buttons for on/off and input selection are equally made of metal and react

precisely to light pressure. In addition to six high level inputs, one of which is switchable for home cinema operation, there are a pair of sturdy speaker-terminals that also accept banana plugs as well as a preamplifier output for connecting an additional power amplifier on the rear. The amp is therefore prepared for so-called “bi-amping”, i.e. the operation of a loudspeaker with two, preferably identical, power amplifiers.

However, on the other hand there are no connectors for headphones or turntables. For these applications Musical Fidelity offers separate inexpensive high-quality solutions. It is noteworthy that the M2si relies on a traditional voltage supply with powerful electrolytic capacitors and a toroidal transformer underneath its hood. The preamplifier section works in Class A and is clearly segregated. Musical speaks quite confident of a pre/power-amplifier combination dressed as an integrated amplifier in which the technology from larger series is skillfully applied in a slimmed down form. We noticed a very low damping factor in the laboratory which indicates a discreet negative feedback loop – a circuit detail, which is associated between music lovers with a particularly lively and swinging sound image, but which, in reverse, almost always increases sensitivity for speaker selection. Otherwise, the about nine kilo heavy amplifier made an excellent impression in the measurement laboratory.

The simultaneously tested M2scd CD player features just very few controls on the tidy front panel, exactly like its amplifying counterpart.

It is adorned with a bright blue and clearly readable display that even shows the title at the beginning of each track. Instead of a drawer, here the disc disappears into a slot, as in your standard car CD player. The reading time of nine seconds is not what we would call “brisk”, but it is still superior to any SACD player. In comparison to the old CD3 player, which we tested a few years back, the now direct title selection enables immediate playback of specific titles. The detour via the “Play” button is – thankfully – a thing of the past. Anyone hoping for DAC functions to polish other digital sources should have another look at the price tag and realize that budget for features is limited. However, one digital output each in cinch and optical make it possible to connect an external converter. Looking at the measured figures, it was obvious that the English know how to build a proper output stage at a reasonable price: with an output resistance of just around 50 Ohm not even longer cables between player and amplifier should have a significant effect on signal quality. The converter is of the 24-bit type and exclusively takes care of PCM signals. It stood out with its consistently good measurements. For the sake of completeness it should be mentioned that the



**MANY BUTTONS; EASY TO USE**

The remote control operates amp as well as CD player, fits comfortably in the hand and works even at greater distances.



**Musicality has priority over detail here**

The “Musicals” are distinguished by their proper features, including digital outputs on the CD player and pre-out on the amplifier, as well as by the quality of their workmanship.



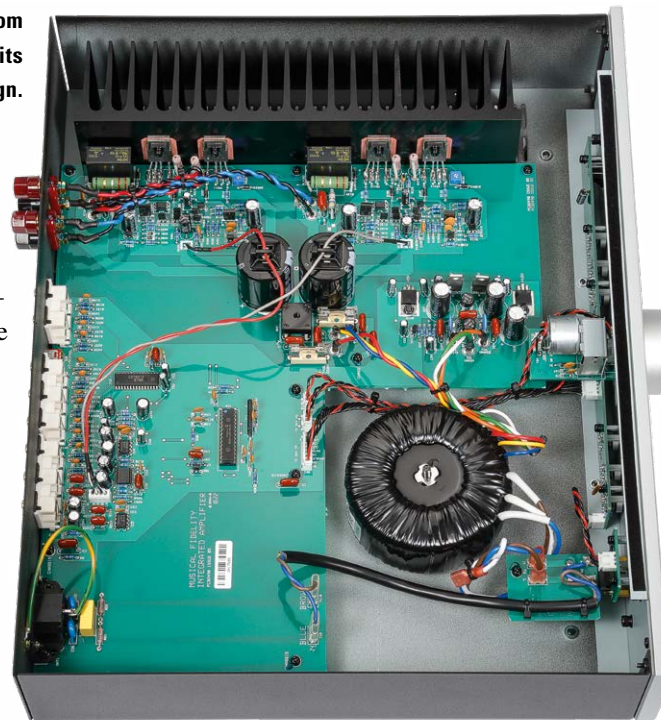
The amplifier would have had room for more, but is distinguished by its clean design.

frequency response showed a deviation of maximum 1.2 dB from the ideal around and above two kilohertz – not perfect, but neither alarming. In the M2scd, too, the power supply is provided by a toroidal transformer, while the individual functional units are connected to each other service-friendly via plug connectors. They are spatially very clearly separated inside the generously dimensioned enclosure. The drive noise is very low. Obviously, money was saved only at the right places.

In order to do justice to this achievement we were also very generous with our listening test and took a lot of time to hear the two devices individually, in connection and in comparison with other components.

To start off we tried it with the Beatles. After all, a cloudy and rainy winters day is much easier to endure with some positive music. We were surprised how uncompressed and sovereign the amplifier worked on the big Live Act 108 loudspeakers, even at levels close to the limit of reason – which we exceeded several times to drive the bad mood out of the listening room. And in fact, after we had properly appreciated "Here Comes The Sun", the mood indeed brightened up. Even more, the sky changed immediately from unpleasant grey to light blue!

The next stop was Grace Jones' "Slave To The Rhythm", which is as old as it is



**TESTED DEVICES**

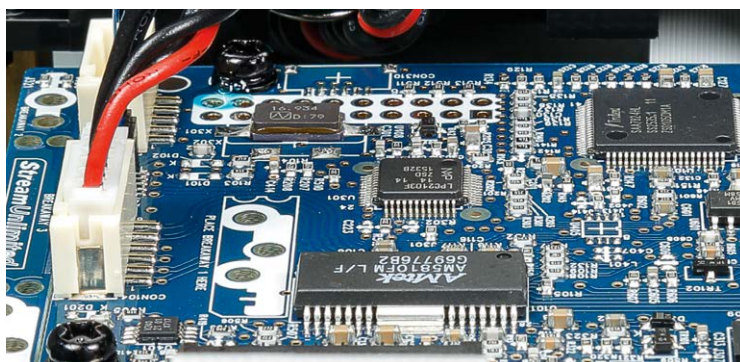
**CD player:**  
Musical Fidelity M3cds

**Integrated amplifier:**  
Musical Fidelity M3si

**Loudspeaker:**  
Live Act Audio 108;  
PMC 5.22

**Cable:**  
Audioquest,  
Cardas, Lua

timeless – in fact a characteristic it shares not only with the Beatles, but ultimately with most great music. The mysterious lady was certainly not an outstanding singer, but her albums are without exception well produced. This shone through even with the small Musical Fidelity combination, which did not have to hide itself even in comparison to the „3“ combi, which costs you 1300 Euros per device. Yes, here and there the little duo was a bit „sloppier“ in the finest details, especially at higher levels or when the loudspeaker was not as easy as the big 108 live act from Southern Germany. What the newcomers really had on their plate was to convey life, energy and joy. An example from classical music should make it clear: Pepe Romero, classical guitarist, recorded the Concierto de Aranjuez with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields under Neville Marriner. I recommend the Musical Fidelity duo to anyone who couldn't yet find their passion for classical music. I'm pretty sure that – with proper loudspeakers – this system will open the door to classical music, because it is able to combine tonal qualities with a sound that tends minimally towards warmth as well as with excellent detail and dynamic qualities. As expected, this is still a long way from perfection, but it conveys all the essentials to enjoy music. ■



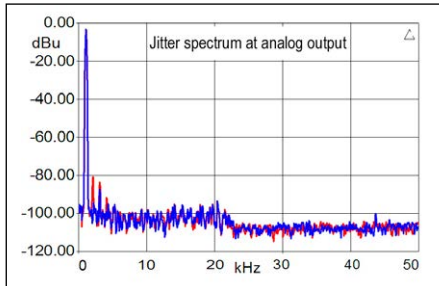
The density of integration in the CD player is not unusual, but still impressive.

## Musical Fidelity M2scd

**Price:** around 800 €  
 (available in silver and black)  
**Dimensions:** 44 x10 x38 cm (WxHxD)  
**Warranty:** 2 years  
**Contact:** Musical Fidelity  
 Tel: +43 1 544 858 0400  
 www.musicalfidelity.com

Simply equipped CD player with slot-in drive. Easy to use, powerful and dynamic with slightly warm sound characteristics. Cleanly finished.

### Measurement results



Signal-to-noise ratio digital zero	112.4 dB
Quantization noise ratio 0 dBFS	96.3 dB
Converter linearity at -90 dB	0.2 dB
Output resistance Cinch	47 Ohm
Output voltage Cinch 0 dBFS	2 V
Distortion factor at -60dBFS	0.4
Rectangle	ok
Pulse	ok
Reading time	9 s
Emphasis recognition (CD)	ok
Disturbances of the information track	0.9 mm
Surface defects	0.9 mm
Power consumption Sby./idle (at)	/7.3 W

### Lab Comment



The lab test was largely inconspicuous sometimes even very good; only the frequency response has a dent of about 1.5 dB between two and ten kilohertz – not ideal, but forgivable.

### Features

Economical features: slot-in drive; title jump, direct title selection; remote control with numeric keypad, cinch outputs; one optical Toslink and one coaxial S/PDIF digital output each

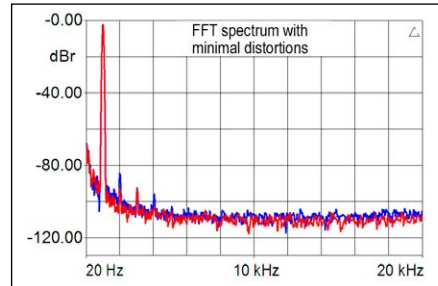
STEREO - TEST	
SOUND QUALITY CD	61%
PRICE/PERFORMANCE	
★★★★☆	
EXCELLENT	

## Musical Fidelity M2si

**Price:** around 800 €  
 (available in silver and black)  
**Dimensions:** 44 x10 x40 cm (WxHxD)  
**Warranty:** 2 years  
**Contact:** Musical Fidelity  
 Tel: +43 1 544 858 0400  
 www.musicalfidelity.com

A powerful but also musically convincing amplifier with a slight tendency towards the warm. Little, but meaningful features and clean workmanship make it a „best buy“.

### Measurement results



Continuous power (8 Ohm / 4 Ohm)	68.7 W/90.4 W
Pulse power 4 Ohm (1kHz)	110.5 W
THD 50mW/5W/1dB Pmax	0.02 %/0.007 %/0.01 %
Intern. 50mW/5W/1dB Pmax	0.004 %/0.02 %/0.3 %
Signal-to-noise ratio at 50mW/ 5W	69.4 dB/90.3 dB
Attenuation at 4 Ohm (63Hz/1kHz/14kHz)	14/17/17
Upper cut-off frequency (-3dB/4Ohm)	>80 kHz
Crosstalk Line 1 > Line 2	73.2 dB
Volume synchronization error at -60dB	0.02 dB
Power consumption Sby./idle (at)	<2 W/17.4 W

### Lab Comment



No abnormalities in the laboratory, only a moderate damping factor.

The channel equality is excellent, as is the crosstalk attenuation. A decent power reserve.

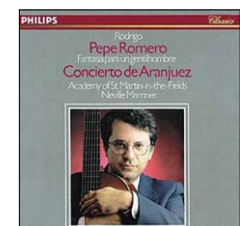
### Features

Six cinch inputs, one of which can be converted to a home cinema option; pre-amplifier output, tape output; remote control; classic power supply with lavish toroidal transformer

STEREO - TEST	
SOUND QUALITY	63%
PRICE/PERFORMANCE	
★★★★★	
OUTSTANDING	

## The M2scd and si really convey musicality and fidelity

### WHAT WE'VE HEARD WITH



### Rodrigo: Concierto de Aranjuez

Guitar and orchestra in perfect harmony. Also soundwise a highlight.