



Thorens TD850

Speed is only one aspect. How well the table maintains the relationships between its various drive/suspension and pickup sub-components, and how rapidly it can recover from disturbances and suppress resonance evenly across a broad frequency spectrum are equally if not more important than how rapidly the information passes beneath the stylus. We do know that an elevated speed could provide a psycho-acoustic effect of being 'uptempo' but does nothing at all to preserve music's architecture and generally harms it."

Moving on, ambience is respectable at this price and the presence of performers is credible, though they tend to linger at the front half of the stage. The rich harmonica and dobro on Dylan's *Oh Mercy* [Columbia] were well delineated on "The Man with the Long Black Coat." The wailing lead guitar on Dire Straits' "Six Blade Knife" [Warner] made a surgical strike through the humid summer air in my listening room...definitely an attention-getter.

What I didn't get was the extended trailing edge (decay) of notes that provides the nuance and related level of emotional connection that I crave. If you're into that kind of detail, or emotional insight, this unit won't be your best choice. But it did engage me, kinetically.

Big, Bold, Pure Thorens TD850

Thorens has been around through the past three centuries. In 1883, it

began building cylinder-and-disc movements; in the early 1900s it made Edelweiss and Helvetia music boxes and other disc mechanisms, and its turntables, including the TD124 and 124II (made from 1957 to 1966) and the TD125 (from 1968 to 1971) are widely renowned.

At the turn of this century, Thorens experienced some challenges and by 2002 had announced a restructuring to begin a step-by-step re-launching of the brand.

The new 800 series begins with the \$1299 TD800, while the \$1999 TD850 is the second in the series. The chassis design—said to improve signal behavior and resonance absorption—is a sandwich made of two pieces of thick high-density wood flexibly bonded to a slightly thinner steel plate. Three polymer-damped adjustable feet support the heavy base. The table features a silent-running bearing made of two sinter bushes with a polished stainless steel axle inside. The tungsten ball at the end runs on a self-lubricating bearing point. An outboard motor controller allows the user to select speed. Like the Roksan, this table also was a bit slow.

The TD850 came mounted with a Thorens TP300 (looks like a Rega to me) with VTA adjustability. Other tonearms up to 10 inches can also be used.

This table did a good job of revealing production values. The title track from Laurie Anderson's *Strange Angels* [Warner] was big and natural with the lead guitar boldly showing the way. It was deep and articulate on the driving bass and keyboards on "Monkey's Paw,"

and this immediately helped me connect kinesthetically. Timing—which is fundamental and manifests itself at all levels of music, including individual notes and subtle shifts and cues—was most respectable.

The biggest, and first draw, for me was the Thorens' tonal purity. Again, on "Monkey's Paw," it was easy to pick out Bobby McFerrin's vocals from the mix of six other supporting characters.

Though I detected some midbass overhang on acoustic bass at high volumes, the purity of tone everywhere else was admirable. Whether on the adamant tempo of "Choctaw Hayride" or the seductive "Let Me Touch You for Awhile" from Alison Krauss' *New Favorites* [Rounder], the 850 delivered pace on par with the Roksan, plus some of the nuance and finer detail that allows me to connect more than physically to the music.

Music emerged from a dark and quiet backdrop. With a bit of the audible groove rush I hear on every table, the Thorens slipped right into the big ambience of Chet Baker's *Chet* [Analogue Productions]. His horn was large, loud, subtle, detailed, and nuanced, with precise imaging. I prefer more organic images (densely saturated with an acoustic bloom as the sound moves toward you), but again, that's the good thing about having choices.

In short, purity of tone, fine attack, and more roundness to notes than the Roksan. It isn't as insistent as the Radius 5, but can do big and bold (and speak in more hues of color).

Balanced, Smooth and Coherent Nottingham Horizon

As if its tables weren't already unusual looking, Nottingham has gone a step further with this most recent—and least expensive—offering. The Horizon's platter (slightly slimmer than the one found on the Space Deck) sits in a well at the center of a plank-of-a-chassis that houses the main bearing. The well holds an Admiralty bronze bearing with soft inner and hardened outer spin-