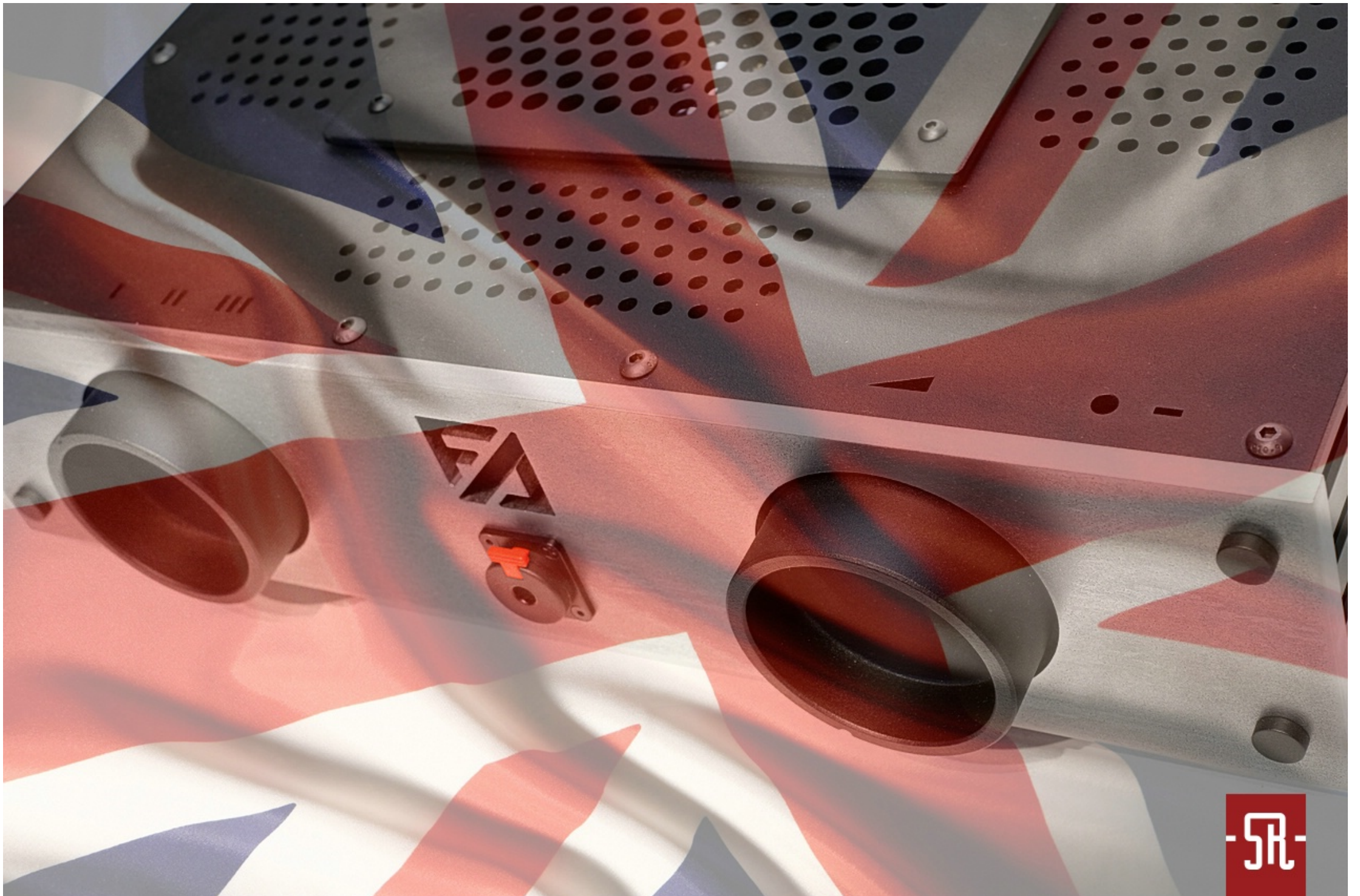




S O U N D R E B E L S

Fulianty Audio ST-18 English ver.



Opinion 1

Unfortunately. Yes, from my point of view, a man who pays attention to the smallest details of every aspect of life, we live in crazy times now. Of course, those are theoretically better now, as we can satisfy almost all of our desires, but looking more closely, from the point of view of an audiophile searching for the ideal sound, it turns out, that the current tendency to equip audio devices with practically all functions – integrated amps can work as DACs or even streamers – this often turns out to be their Achilles heel, as the final product offers mediocre sound quality at best. So what was the spark igniting my delicate frustration with this topic? It was something that restored my hope, that not all is lost, as there are still devices on the market, like the one tested today, that start to conquer the market in a more conservative way, not by appealing to customers by multitasking, but by the quality of the offered sound. So you may wonder, about whom, or what, am I talking now? I would like to introduce you to a newcomer to our market, the Polish brand Fulianty Audio, which decided to take care of those audiophiles first, who, due to their living conditions, are forced to use any of the high quality headphones available on the market, to be able to listen to their beloved music. So is everything clear now? If not, then I am happy to announce, that due to a logistic effort of the manufacturer, we received a product, going some way against the current trends, based on tubes working in pure class “A”, headphone amplifier ST-18, supported by the power cord PC-1 and interconnect IC-18 in the test.





As you can see on the pictures, the constructor of the tested amplifier tried to put the money where it matters, not spending it on the looks, which are least important from the sonic point of view. Looking at the chassis of the 18 headphone amp, we will find no designer extravaganza, but a solid construct, fulfilling the technical requirements for the device and allowing easy upgrade by the potential client. We have here a rigid, tightly bolted carcass. The front panel, made from Corten steel, is mounted to the chassis with four screws, and ports two big knobs (the left one selects inputs, while the right one controls volume). Between those knobs there is the headphone socket with the etched and blackened company logo above it. Due to the tube nature of the amplifier, the designer needed to provide ample cooling, so besides the side walls being hefty heat sinks, the top cover is divided into a few rectangular blocks, which have holes drilled in them. But ventilation is not the only function of this part of the chassis. First of all, near the front, we have etched, yes etched and not printed or milled, as it is common with the competition, descriptions of the function of each of the knobs. Secondly, under a cover located in the middle of the unit, we have access to the vacuum tubes, which have the most impact on the sound of the whole. You just need to untighten four screws and the door to modeling of the sound is open. Interesting? I think, that not only for me, but for most lovers of similar constructions, this is a big YES. Finally, to complete the description, a few words about the back end of the device. As this is a headphone amplifier, the back plate is not very crowded. So what is located there? I might surprise you – to allow more than one source to be used, there are three RCA inputs and one RCA output. There is also a power socket. So you can see, this looks quite modest. However taking into account what is the purpose of the unit, it turns out, to be more than sufficient. The only thing remaining is the description of the cabling, however due to lack of any information about them, I will refrain from doing that. I will just mention, that the whole test was done using those, and from the time perspective, it turned out, that the constructor of the amplifier and the cables absolutely knows, what this game is about.

In the beginning of the part devoted to the quality of sound offered by the tested amplifier, I must note, that the headphones supplied by the manufacturer, and visible on the photos, the Beyerdynamic DT-150, did show a decent performance, but my main observations of the ST-18 are based on combining it with the [Audio-Technica ATH-ADX5000](#) we tested recently. This is a completely different league, which allows me not only the verification the sonic abilities of the 18, as advertised by the manufacturer, but also, if the claims are verified, to see what the amplifier can really do. And? I have to bow for the constructor, as he absolutely did not exaggerate with the claims he made, as the Japanese headphones showed, that the tested device is absolutely able to compete with the best competition. After the hearing accommodated to this new combination, and the two components learned each other, the sound became more resolved, yet remained incredibly juicy. And in this case, juicy does not mean, that the sound resembles a thick lava, but has some ear friendly rounding, while remaining incredibly informative. What is ultimately important, despite the amount of information, the sound was surprisingly smooth, and was able to fulfill all expectations in terms of elongating the decay of natural instruments to the max. Yet it was not done as a kind of mannerism, unifying everything, but this effect was dependent on the played music. Which music? For example my beloved ancient music from the sign of Jordi Savall or ECM jazz by the late Tomasz Stanko. Each and every time it was an abundance of sounds, sparkling in the well configured ether around my head. But what do I mean with “well configured”? Well, this is nothing special, only an interesting balance of putting proper amount of air in the virtual stage, while not over-inflating it too much. Every virtual source was clear, juicy and depending on the needs, it emanated with appropriate energy. There was no averaging with a too overblown size of the world enclosing my head. Everything was delivered to the point, with good timing and appropriate ethereality, or translating this into a more understandable language, with good energy, saturation and great placement of the events in space.

But this is not the end of interesting information. After saturating my needs with the music I love most, time came to try something heavier. Thus came the works of John Zorn with the project Masada and the music from Massive Attack. And the effect? The whole time the sound was following the positive points I mentioned before, it was well weighted and not showing the slightest signs of slowing down. There was energy, there was fantastic saturation, and through the very good resolution of the amplifier, there was very good, very quick, reproduction of information enclosed there. And the best thing is, that the plasticity of the upper registers and the roundness of the midrange did not prevent the reproduction of the shrillness of the squeaks during listening to electronic music or the explicitness of the cymbals in free-jazz. Just everything was more noble. Nothing else. But well, I would not be honest with you, if I would not mention the ability to influence the sound of the amplifier with appropriate tubes. And I must confess, that I decided to have it musical. So I am absolutely certain, that you can change the over-civilized treble in computer generated and young music just by picking appropriate tubes. And what does this mean? It means that those few days I spent, were with a very universal device, which is able to fulfill even the most sophisticated expectations.

Summarizing my opinion, I can boldly confirm the statement from the paragraph, where I described the tested amplifier from the technical point of view, that the money, the constructor had for the project, were spent mostly on the sonic quality of the device. Being a bit malicious, I could say, that the sound is inversely proportional to the looks of the unit; while not being too pretty it can bring the listener in musical places, where only the best can. We get a multicolored, full of beauty, musical spectacle, offering an infinite amount of information and instruments decaying into infinity. Am I bending reality? I must confess, that before I entered this test, I did not think, that I can get so carried away with the emotions. But I assure you, everything I wrote, is only the main package of the offered sonic goods. Why? First of all, I only used the headphones I knew from another test. Secondly, although I do this on a daily basis, and I should be able to capture the smallest nuances, yet while I am usually using big loudspeakers, there are things that can slip my attention, when using headphones. And thirdly, and probably most importantly, my setup is completely different to the targeted client, what allows me to suggest, that potentially interested may hear the most important nuances differently than I do, and they may be much better. So if you are into this kind of listening, then our tested headphone amplifier, Fulianty Audio ST-18, should be a certainty on your “to listen to” list. I assure you, even if there will be no happy end, you will not see the time you spent on listening to it as wasted, and the gained experience might trigger you to revisit it sometime later.

Jacek Pazio

System used in this test:

- CD: CEC TL 0 3.0 + Reimyo DAP – 999 EX Limited TOKU, VIVALDI DAC 2.0
 - Preamplifier: Robert Koda Takumi K-15
 - Power amplifier: Reimyo KAP – 777
 - Loudspeakers: Trenner & Friedl “ISIS”
 - Speaker Cables: Tellurium Q Silver Diamond, Statement
 - IC RCA: Hijri „Milon”,
 - IC XLR: Tellurium Q Silver Diamond
 - Digital IC: Harmonix HS 102
 - Power cables: Harmonix X-DC 350M2R Improved Version, Furutech NanoFlux NCF Furutech DPS-4 + FI-E50 NCF(R)/ FI-50(R), Hijiri Nagomi
 - Table: SOLID BASE VI
 - Accessories: Harmonix TU 505EX MK II, Stillpoints ULTRA SS, Stillpoints ULTRA MINI, antivibration platform by SOLID TECH, Harmonix AC Enacom Improved for 100-240V, Harmonix Room Tuning Mini Disk RFA-80i
 - Power distribution board: POWER BASE HIGH END
 - Acoustic treatments by Artnovion
- Analog stage:
 Drive: SME 30/2
 Arm: SME V
 Cartridge: MIYAJIMA MADAKE
 Phonostage: RCM THERIAA

Opinion 2

Although the weather is inviting, as some say, to outdoor activities, what implies the usage of multiple kinds of mobile devices, which allow us access to our beloved music, and I mean with that the more and more sophisticated DAPs, wired and wireless headphones, Bluetooth speakers, which double in the role of power banks, together with Jacek we decided, albeit a tad perversely, to check out how to drive your already owned, or only planned, headphones. You might already have guessed, that instead of exploring the portable segment, we were more inclined to focus on a fully stationary device. And a tube device at that, a kind of competition for the very refined, and not so long ago tested, [Octave V 16 Single Ended](#) . Are you interested? If you are, then I would like to invite you to a meeting with the headphone amplifier Fulianty Audio ST-18.





Oh wait – does the name Fulianty Audio tell you anything? Maybe you heard, that in Wręczyca Wielka some audiophile gear is being made? Still nothing? Well, it seems not only I am underinformed, or we deal here with extreme, elite underground. Now Mr. Rafał Fulianty approached us with his headphone amplifier, this is the sign, that he is now trying to have broader reach with his fully completed product ST-18, beyond the most intimate circle of his acquaintances. I am mentioning this in the beginning for a reason, as I know, how small manufacturers work, existing on the edge of DIY and the twilight zone, who are tempted to always improve or change something, even when they announce, their product has reached final state. We are the more satisfied to inform, that the constructor himself – the mentioned Rafał Fulianty – dispelled our doubts stating, that “the headphone system Fulianty Audio is a thought through concept. It was developed and tested over many years. There was a number of prototypes, each subsequent having a more modest amplifier circuitry and at the same time a more elaborated power supply. The amplifier ST-18 is not a nostalgic return to the epoch of the tube table radio, this is no fancy stuff with wooden side panels, but a modern powerhouse for driving the best dynamic, high impedance headphones of the world.” But hold your horses – we have a headphone amp here, and he talks about a “system”. Please remain calm, everything is as it should be. It is just that with the tested amplifier ST-18 the lucky buyer receives not only the PC-18 power cord, the interconnect IC-18, but also ... dedicated headphones Beyerdynamic DT-150. And please do not get upset, that at the 4500 Euro price tag you get headphones for 600 zlotys. There could be no headphones in the set, and it would still be OK, most manufacturers do not include headsets in their bundles. Yet here we get a complete set, ready to use, lacking only a sound source. However I would suggest to treat those peripherals as a starting point only, as, anticipating the facts a bit, the ST-18 deserves better, much better. But first things first, before we talk about its sonic abilities, let us have a look at the externals.

Well, while the mentioned [Octave V 16 Single Ended](#) resembled, especially with the grille on, a heavily armed horseman, we could also think about placing the Polish product in the dark middle ages. The design of the chassis is very rough, and looking at it, there is no chance you could think it was created in an R&D department of any of the main players on the market. Absolutely not, this is a thoroughbred underground, which comes with everything we tend to associate with that kind of product. The front panel is a massive slab of Corten steel (besides the silver version we received for testing, there is “rusty” option as well), which looks like the beginning of the creation process, and not the final product. It is not that I am nitpicking, I am not, but placing the ST-18 next to my [Bryston 4B³](#), which has “studio roots” (what means it has to work good and not just look good), I had the impression, that some stages of production were missed. But let us put this aside, and I will just mention, that currently metal processing gives a lot more possibilities, than the result we see on the photographs. But let us return to the point. In the center of the fascia we have the company logo and a brilliant Neutrik headphone socket with a lock. To the left there is a massive knob of the input selector, and to the right, a twin of the left knob, but this time used for volume control. Here a remark about usability – the description of the sources and the volume direction is located on the richly perforated, massive top cover, with an intriguing, bolted cover over the “tube chamber”, which houses three ... tubes. Of course attention is drawn to a tube with a shape resembling the classic 300B, the 6AS7G (6080, 6N13S), the main element of amplification. Next to it, there is a modestly covered with a black jacket, control tube 6N1PEW (6N23PEW, ECC88, ECC85) and a small, French F9031A (XT90A) responsible for the delayed anode current switching. Not a lot? That was the idea, as according to the words of Albert Einstein “Everything should be as simple as possible, but not simpler”. So in the Fulianty Audio the amplified signal meets only four elements on its way, two of them being the tubes visible on the pictures. You can also notice, that there are no output transformers visible (or felt for that matter – the center of gravity is not shifted), what can be a clue to the circuitry used in the unit. Yes, you are right. The ST-18 is an OTL SE circuit (Output Transformerless Single-Ended), without a global feedback loop, mounted Point-to-Point. Regarding the mentioned power supply – it is a quasi dual mono setup, with one “audiophile” power transformer, one choke with very high inductance and separation of the power lead to the tubes using a battery of capacitors.

The back panel looks splendid and causes no controversies. The left part is occupied by an IEC power socket, next to it, we find a nice plaque with the legend for a single output terminal and three input terminals, all RCA.

Moving on to the section devoted to sound I can forgo with clean conscience the part about burning in, as the system arrived after very intensive usage by Jacek, and taking into account, that we can move items between our homes within about a quarter, if it is outside rush hours, then you see, that the ST-18 could not even get really cold. However I did give it some time to warm up, as I think I should call the time I spent with the peripherals supplied with the amplifier, the cables and ... the Beyerdynamic DT-150, like that. Yes, yes. It might look strange, but after a few hours, I was absolutely certain, that what I am hearing is great, but is not the full extension of the capabilities of the tested unit, but only a substitute, something like an iceberg, where the part above the water is just a fraction of the true size of it. Nevertheless even in this startup configuration I must confess, that the dissonance between what you see and what you hear is similar to what inexperienced audio acolytes experience during the first contact with the Japanese electronics Audio Tekne. Additionally the analogy to Japanese products is not far off, as the ST-18 has similar sound aesthetics, combining incredible resolution with smoothness, saturation and transparency. In short when we put on the headphones we are not just listening / hearing, but transferring to the world of sounds. This transition happens in a barely perceptible way, delicately, en passant – this in opposition to the brutal hijacking done by the [Octave](#). The result seems the same, but having both devices side to side, you decide, if you want to move from point A to B using your private Gulfstream G650R or the Bombardier Global 7500, or g-forced into the seat of a MiG-35. The Fulianty Audio does it in passing, very natural, and the last thing you could accuse it of, would be forcefully trying to impress you. No, here we have something completely different. It just does its work and we are either interested or not. Something like doing an afternoon walk and stroll along a small house, where you hear Eric Clapton playing some licks just for his pleasure. Theoretically you can just shake your head and move along, but I would, and I am talking only about myself, I would sit down as close as possible, yet not obtruding, to be able to enjoy the musical absolute as long and as intensive as possible. This is the kind of experience that was provided by the 18. Yet although with the proprietary cabling and DT-150 the whole can be described as great, in terms of resolution as well as creating space and the extension of the reproduced frequency range, changing the cables shows clearly, that the game commences there. Replacing the interconnects with the [Tellurium Q Silver Diamond](#) and the power cord with the [Furutech NanoFlux-NCF](#) was like moving from shoddy CD pressings to master quality files. Seemingly you hear the same thing, but there is more and it is better. Even such obscure recordings like “[Runaljod – Ragnarok](#)” by Wardruna gained breath and swing, and all the “mystically-animal” ornaments were able to chill your back.

It was similar with the headphones. The Beyerdynamic only opened the door to the audiophile eden, as changing them to the slightly more expensive [Meze 99 Classics Gold](#) and [99 Neo](#) gave more insight into what is happening deeper, while the [Audio-Technica ATH-ADX5000](#) used by Jacek, allowed to step in fully. Can it be better? I am sure of it, and I think, that a marriage with the [Focal Utopia](#) could painfully change my vacation plans. True, true. While I am not a fan of modern classical music, delicately speaking, the Meze and Audio-Technica made me not only listen with joy, but truly admire ... “Canticle Of The Sun” (Gideon Kremer / Kamerata Baltica) in [studio session](#) as well as [live version](#), I am afraid what would happen with the French flagships. The Fulianty offers a complete, natural and finished sound, but with a kind of reversionary naturality, reaching generations back, when music was played and not “made”. The difference is maybe small, but more than painful in quality terms. Here is no place for cold analysis or smashing sounds into atoms. The instruments are like live, the stage stars are like from a journal. No, I apologize. With the 18 in the sound path, those stars and not “tuned”, not photoshopped, they are natural, close enough to touch. Pure flesh and blood and additionally playing only for us. And the intensity and palpability? Are you joking? The ST-18 is your own ticket for an exclusive concert of [Amarok](#), [Editors](#) or [Me and that Man](#). And that I am not writing about the placing of virtual sources ... well, when you are going to a gig, played just for you and a few of your friends, are you acting like a speech therapist or ENT specialist? If not, then please stop getting your head around the audiophile tidbits and concentrate on music.

The Fulianty Audio ST-18 is an exceptional device, but at the same time ambiguous and not allowing to be easily classified. It sounds like it should in extreme High-End, but to fully appreciate its sound you must pamper it with appropriate cables and headphones and ... leave it out of our sight. Without being even slightly malicious I do claim, that the ST-18 is the embodiment of a radio presenter with ... "radio beauty", someone who enchants with her voice, bringing people from all sexes to an ecstasy, but only when we are not looking at her.

Marcin Olszewski

System used in this test:

- CD/DAC: Ayon CD-35 (Preamp + Signature)
- Network player: Lumin U1 Mini; Roon Nucleus
- DAC: dCS Vivaldi DAC 2.0
- Digital source selector: Audio Authority 1177
- Turntable: Kuzma Stabi S + Kuzma Stogi + Dynavector DV-10X5
- Phonostage: Tellurium Q Iridium MM/MC Phono Pre Amp
- Power amplifier: Bryston 4B³
- Loudspeakers: Dynaudio Contour 30
- IC RCA: Tellurium Q Silver Diamond
- IC XLR: Organic Audio; Vermöuth Audio Reference
- Digital IC: Fadel art DigiLitz; Harmonic Technology Cyberlink Copper; Apogee Wyde Eye; Monster Cable Interlink LightSpeed 200
- USB cables: Wireworld Starlight; Goldenote Firenze Silver; Audiomica Laboratory Pebble Consequence USB; Fidata HFU2
- Speaker cables: Signal Projects Hydra
- Power cables: Furutech FP-3TS762 / FI-28R / FI-E38R; Organic Audio Power + Furutech CF-080 Damping Ring; Acoustic Zen Gargantua II; Furutech Nanoflux Power NCF
- Power distribution board: Furutech e-TP60ER + Furutech FP-3TS762 / Fi-50 NCF(R) /FI-50M NCF(R)
- Wall power socket: Furutech FT-SWS(R)
- Anti-vibration platform: Franc Audio Accessories Wood Block Slim Platform
- Ethernet cables: Neyton CAT7+; Audiomica Laboratory Anort Consequence
- Table: Rogoz Audio 4SM3

Manufacturer: [Fulianty Audio](#)

Price: 4 500 € (complete set)

Technical specifications

- Input impedance: 100 k Ω
- Power Output: max 250 mW
- Recommended headphones Impedance: 60 – 600 Ω
- Power AC: 230V or 120V
- Power Consumption: 40W @230V
- Dimensions (W x D x H): 420 x 370 x 110 mm

Link do tekstu: [Fulianty Audio ST-18 English ver.](#)