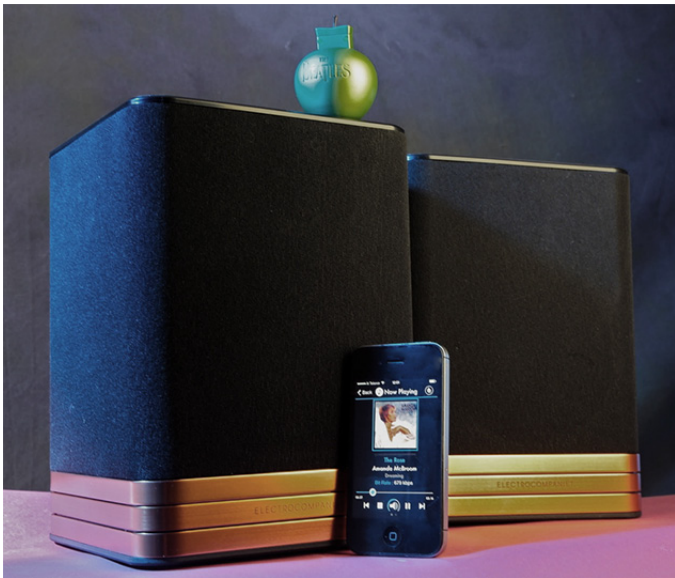


# Electrocompaniet Living: The Electro-empire strikes back!

**An outburst from the listening panel: «This sounds awesome and utterly wonderful! I keep grinning like a fool, loving every second of it all».**



This new «lifestyle» stereo from Electrocompaniet really sounds like it has the Electrocompaniet high-end DNA, despite its modest price and compact size.

We came away so impressed after initial listening that we decided to really put it through its paces, evaluating it like we do the most expensive equipment; In our large listening room with some of Scandinavia's most experienced and critical ears in the listening panel.

These last years, Electrocompaniet of Tau outside Stavanger has spent considerable time refining classic models inherited from founder Per Abrahamsen, like the Nemo and AW 180 amplifiers and the well known top-loading CD-player with its uniquely decoupled drive.

The 2017 version of this classic will be reviewed in the next print issue of Fidelity, by the way.

These days, Mr. Dreggevik and the guys at Tau are busy launching the EC Living system, a totally new design brimming with both smartness and elegance, an in-house developed streamer and app, and an ease of operation making even the editor of this publication able to master the system via said EC Living app, a smartphone or an iPad. That is saying something!

The ability to also stream internet radio makes one think what all the DAB-fuss is all about..

This complete package, with its quite astonishing sound, is a classic and proven two-way system with quality components in an aluminum enclosure. A nice, subdued look and a compact size, still, it contains proven and very good analog 150w amplifiers based on the ECI-3 design. No wimpy class D in sight!

## Astonishing sound

The inherent qualities were obvious to us even with a much less than ideal placement on a shelf, so we wanted to find out how far we could take this by giving this humble system the same treatment as we do the most expensive stuff. So we put the Living System on heavy speaker stands in our big listening room, using the same procedures as we do with systems costing ten or even a hundred times the price of the EC Living system.

We used expensive mains cabling, a reputed digital cable, and even used Electrocompaniet's newest incarnation top-loaded CD-player via the digital input.

To our surprise, we felt that best results were obtained by streaming from Tidal, but even internet radio sounded surprisingly good.

This little system really has the ability to let the quality of the source material shine through. We had no trouble at all distinguishing between the different qualities of the source material used. The sound quality of this little system was such that four distinguished reviewers acted like teenagers, quite astonished by what they heard.

After listening to heavily-compressed radio rock, we concluded that this probably was not this system's favorite material, but then we put on some energy-laden, less compressed stuff, and the system really sang with both dynamics and ability to play loud. Again, it reflected the quality of the source material.

To quote our own Haakon «Mr.Dynamite» Rognlien; «This sounds awesome and utterly wonderful. I keep grinning like a fool, loving every second of it!» Or Mr. Anders Rossnes; «This sounds great, involving. I keep tapping my feet!»

## Further listening

Of course, this little system is not «high end» in absolute terms. But it sounds dramatically better than any of us would have thought, giving the listener a panoramic soundstage and sound of a quality, even with complex

material played loud, that is so close to really expensive equipment that many would deem the difference almost meaningless.

This is actually a listener's system, to be enjoyed like in the good old days, in the «sweet-spot» with a glass of wine. The limits of the Living System is of course in its ability to play deep bass and to play really loud.

But even so, it plays bass with sufficient substance and weight to give realistic body to the relevant instruments. Of course, it lacks the insight and depth of bass of a ten-times-the-price larger system, but even funky disco sounds good, given that you do not expect earthquakes. We listened in a large room, and in all fairness, we tend to play louder than «Joe Public».

In smaller rooms than our largest listening room, the need for both deep bass and sound pressure would naturally be of another nature.

As you might know, small speakers have qualities that you simply do not find to such an extent in larger ones, and that is their ability to convey a really three-dimensional soundstage, placing instruments and musicians in the space between and around the speakers, thereby making them disappear.

Listening to the EC Living system really gives you this illusion of listening to music being played in the room, and its way with three-dimensionality is holographic and captivating. It says a lot about the skill and attention to phase that has been put into these speakers, and the systems outstanding way with acoustics, space and dimensionality is one of the main reason for our enthusiasm.

Another thing is the system's way with tone, color and timbre, witch it renders in a way that you seldom find at this price.

With its inherent limitations in loudness and deepest bass, this system sounded very large, natural and convincing, given sufficient quality of the source. To a degree that is most unheard of in this price range, in fact.

And to make this even more tempting; Mr. Dreggevik of Electrocompaniet let us know that there is a dedicated subwoofer in the works, making this system play even louder, deeper and more lifelike.

## Comments from the listening panel:

### **Haakon Rognlien:**

Our reference track of Leif Ove Andsnes playing in The Grieg Hall can sound a bit dull on some high-end equipment, but here it had good tone color and timbre, even though it tended to sound a bit pressed in the orchestral crescendos. Bloody impressed! This is much, much better than expected!

Rickie Lee Jones on Tidal sounded more dynamic and really good, with great focus on transient speed, strings and the acoustics of the recording venue.

Next up is The Rolling Stones. «All my love» I am loving every second of it!

Turtle Creek Chorale on Reference Recordings sound really good, with a huge soundstage and an ambient

acoustic, but, to be fair, lacking somewhat in its ability to separate each and every voice compared to real high-end stuff.

Our favorite big band recording of «Moten Swing», an extremely dynamic recording not easy to make sense of, comes across swinging, dynamic and engaging as he..! Wow!!

Many different tunes later, this little system keeps on playing better and better. More air, dynamically better, more relaxed and natural. This might well be Electrocompaniet at its very best!

A real budget-class breakthrough. The Electro-empire strikes back!

### **Anders Rossnes:**

There are aspects of the sound that does not approach our reference system, but that should not surprise anyone. What is really astonishing is that both the ability to play loud and with depth is far better than I ever thought possible at this price. And all this with active speakers, a good digital preamp, lots of inputs and simple, hassle-free remote operation from your phone or tablet!

The most important thing is the balance, timbre and surprising degree of resolution that combines with the uncanny ability to convey a huge acoustic space. Some might wish for slightly more airiness, but it all sounds like it draws the listener into the music. We had tracks that sounded so good it could make a man religious!



## **Trond Torgnesskar:**

This sounds quite unmistakably like an Electrocompaniet system. You never doubt that there is considerable know-how, knowledge of music and a serious heritage built into this. It sounds natural, communicative, present and musical.

The soundstage is enormous.

Deep, wide and dimensional.

The tone and timbre is ravishing, and the color and presence of the music is like nothing I have ever heard at a price like this. The way this system liberates the music from the enclosures and makes it live

and breathe in the room, giving a real sense the acoustic of the recording, gave me goosebumps. It really needs to be experienced. The sound has a sense of warmth to it, wit beautiful decay and a silky , expressive midrange.

Electrocompaniet deserves praise for making such a product, putting their know-how and heritage into a system that sounds natural and inspires listening to music, putting a smile on the face of everyone that listens to it, just like it did us in the Fidelity listening panel. We think that anyone exposed to this kind of quality will recognize it, hearing the sensational price/performance ratio of a system that sounds this real and engaging. Bass has a surprising amount of substance that makes me wonder what this system is capable of once you add the subwoofer that is said to be in the pipeline.

The sound has a natural, fluid way about it, present with every kind of material. Wether I played Dylan, Mahler, Bowie or Bill Evans, I just sat there enjoying myself, wanting to play just one more track. The easiness of operation was no drawback either, making it very easy to take my pick amongst the best in the history of recorded music via Tidal.

I honestly can not remember the last time I was this impressed by a set-up at such an unbelievably modest price. Electrocompaniet has really hit the bullseye with this one.

Not only does it sound almost shockingly good, but the visual esthetics, the self-explanatory app that controls it all, and the relatively small monetary outlay needed to take this system home make this the most important product to come from Electrocompaniet since the iconic two-channel amplifier of the late seventies.

Why? Well, because this system has qualities that will make every music-lover smile, and because it will, to a greater extent than almost anything I have listened to these last years, show people that has no relation to the world of hifi and music reproduction, the joys of really good sound.

It is products like this that is needed to make hifi relevant an desirable for the common man once more. Furthermore, it oozes of Scandinavian design traditions, being a lot more subtle than its stablemates in the EC line.

What is not to like?

We are dealing with a future classic here.

*“I honestly can not remember the last time I was this impressed by a set-up at such an unbelievably modest price.”*

Naturally, this new Norwegian system does not rank among the very best we have listened to in absolute terms, but once you take the price into consideration, it certainly does. The price, size and quality makes this a

sensational bargain, and compared with what this kind of money would buy you some years ago, it certainly proves that in some respects, the world really moves forward..

The fact that Electrocompaniet takes on the rest of

the world wit this system, deserves applause.

With its High-end heritage, this system has a real naturalness to it, and creating such quality at this price is no small feat.

We think that most people will recognize the qualities of this system once they hear it, grinning from ear to ear much like the Fidelity listening panel did. Especially when they hear of the relatively diminutive cost!

We think everyone can appreciate really good, engaging sound once they hear it.

This system can even be bought in two steps, starting with one speaker handling a mono signal, upgrading to the second speaker at a later date. As long as you do the correct set-up-routine, making the one speaker behave as in mono, it sounds impressive for what it is, but of course it does not have the panoramic naturalness of the stereo setup.

## **Conclusion:**

The makers of this little super-setup from Electrocompaniet has really mastered their priorities. The uncanny balance of abilities when it comes to sound quality, deep bass, naturalness, resolution and three-dimensional panoramic soundscape is of a quality that most people have not encountered before, unless they are accustomed to a real enthusiast system at many times the price.

*Audio Fidelity*