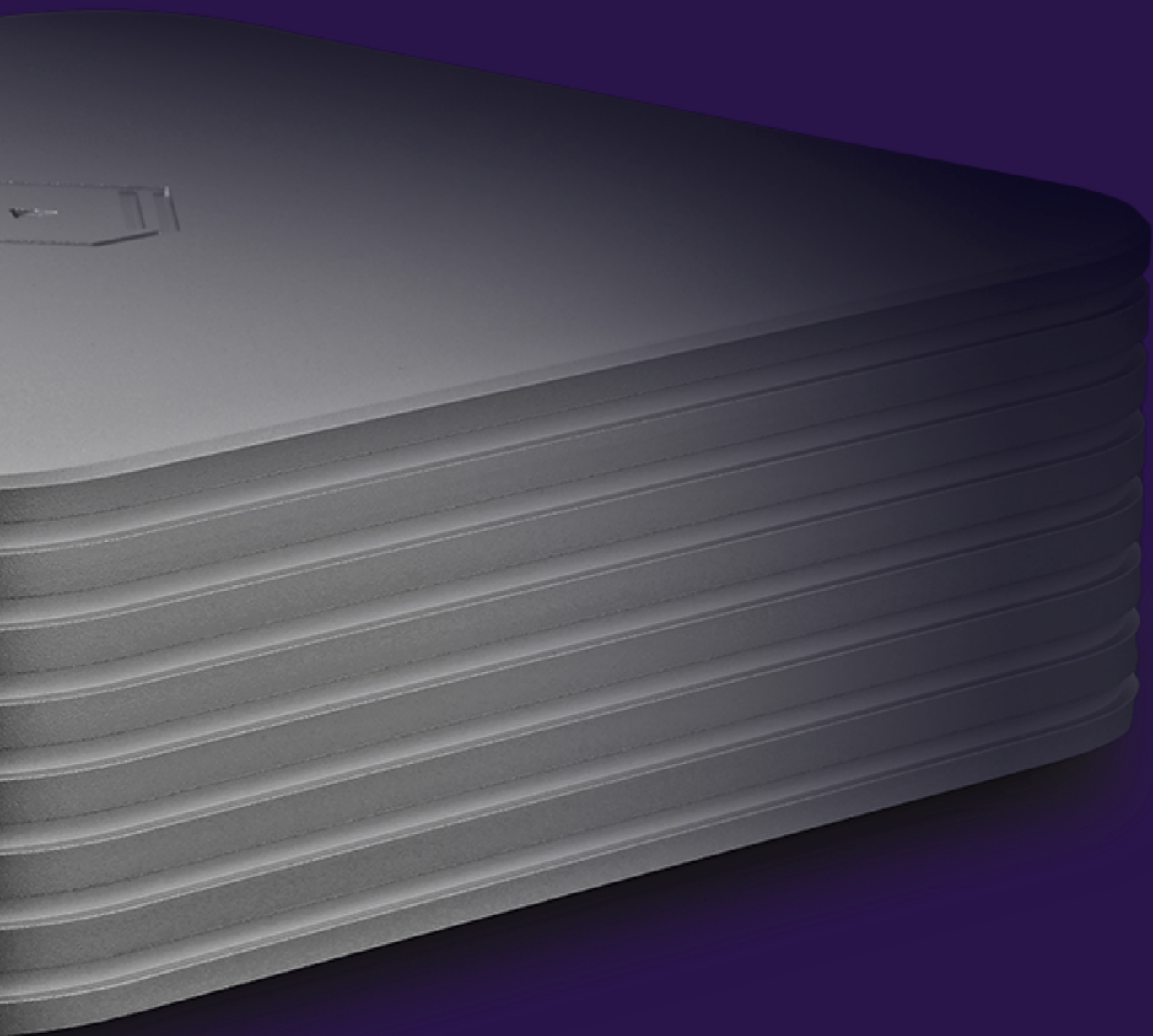




SILENT ANGEL RHEIN Z1 PLUS

By K. E. Heartsong



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I can remember with great ease the first audio system I had as a young adult. It was composed of a Rotel integrated, a Rotel CD player (I don't recall the model numbers), and a pair of floor-standing B&W speakers, the 804 perhaps, of a long-retired model. Of course, the original B&W 801 was always on my wish list, though I would only get as far as the 802. It was a good system that entertained my friends and me for quite some time.

I remember how quickly the technology of the industry began to change. Where once there was only the CD player, now there were transports and DACs, entry level to top-of-the-line, with various gadgets and abilities, and earned bona fides. And if I remember correctly, the various manufacturers had taken the charge to fully identify and deal with that music-sapping scourge—jitter—that would diminish and continue to diminish music to this very day. I would advance along this path and end with the penultimate Mark Levinson Transport and DAC separates, just below their top-of-the-line combo (No. 30.5 DAC, No. 31.5 transport). Though I would always miss the Mark Levinson No. 39 CD for its state-of-the-art design, its liquid smooth movement, its curved metal front edges, and its substantive weight, which conveyed high quality. It really was high

quality.

And I remember my first experience with a Silent Angel (a name I've always admired) streamer—the Rhein Z1—that always played well above its price, challenging players that it had no right to. While I have certainly become acquainted with and own truly exceptional and highly regarded streamers—Grimm Audio MU1, Baetis Revolution X4 (review coming), Mola Mola Tambaqui (as networked streamer)—there is great respect and appreciation for the the various Silent Angel products I have reviewed and their ability to, well, easily transcend their pricing to compete with the top hi-fi priced products time and time again.

This review will be of the latest Silent Angel product, the Rhein Z1 Plus, which represents a further assault on the high-end spectrum of streamers and in the relatively small selfsame though substantive package. You would be much mistaken to judge this “book” by its quite compact aluminum-extruded metal cover.

REFRAIN: Unlike most reviews, this review will be non-sequential, as it will start, below, with how the equipment actually sounds and not the process of physically “undressing” it and/or laying out its various parts, specifications, etc. Think of this review, then, as a non-linear movie—Memento, Kill Bill, Arrival, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless



Claude Monet - Irises



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Mind, The Terminator, In the Shadow of the Moon, The Queen's Gambit, etc.—that likewise starts at the end and winds its way to the beginning.

THE SOUND

I had become accustomed to the Silent Angel signature, which, simply put, represented an incredibly low noise floor, given its pricing that was always competitive with much more expensive streamers. This was coupled with an analog-like signal, replete with daunting transparency, resolution, and an ability to present fine detail with great ease. It became crystal clear when the Rhein Z1 Plus went up against a well-known streamer nearly six times its price. The more expensive streamer seemed opaque in comparison. And this was something I was not even remotely prepared for.

As I mentioned in my review of the Rhein Z1:

“Your computer doesn't stand a chance and the ROON Nucleus Plus doesn't either. That blur that just passed them both by on the high-fidelity road to nirvana, well, it was the Silent Angel Rhein Z1 and Forester F2 combo moving at hypersonic speeds and the combo is miles ahead!”

The Rhein Z1 Plus follows the same script, and its abilities allow it to surpass

streamers at multiples of its price, which was clearly evident time and again. I could give a run-down across discreet frequency segments—bass, midrange, treble—but check the review of the Rhein Z1, with a note that the Plus was quieter still, and you'll have an idea of its relative abilities. Though in short there was that selfsame transparency, air, nuance, and the musicality was just as immersive and beguiling.

The Rhein Z1 Plus paired exceptionally with every DAC in-house, and never was there a letdown in its high-fidelity prowess or its musicality. And when paired with the Forester F2, those well-known high-end streamers became a wee bit more opaque.

The Rhein Z1's Plus volumetric cube is such that it too can take on great width when there are no limiting components in the chain of playback. And as our reference systems are vetted for not limiting any aspect of high fidelity reproduction, there were no issues here. However, when coupled to the Forester F2, the overall volume expanded and allowed for the combo to capture details buried at the depths of a soundstage in a lesser system. This was one of the many ways in which the Silent Angel combo continually rose well above its price category, its competitors, and my expectations. The combo's sound-staging abilities—spacing, layering (front to back positioning)—were

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outstanding. And tone, timbre, refinement, ambiance left me wanting for nothing. Surprise? Yes, and especially at this price point.

The Rhein Z1 Plus and Forester F2 were paired with the Mola Mola Tambaqui, the Bricasti Design M1SE DAC, and the Mojo Audio Mystique X SE DAC. The headphone amps employed were the Aurorasound HEADA, the HeadAmp GS-X MkII, and the Blue Hawaii Special Edition Electrostatic. Headphones used were the Abyss AB1266 Phi TC, the ZMF Atrium, the Meze Empyrean, the STAX SR-009S, and the Dan Clark CORINA. Audience Front Row wires and AntiCable and RSX power cables connected the system. The TORUS RM 20 provided service as the power conditioner.

NOTE: You'll want to pair the combo with very good cabling to get the best out of them, as poor cabling will stifle their abilities and price should not necessarily be a factor. I'm happy to provide recommendations.

DESIGN, LOOK & FEEL

The family resemblance of the external facade, not taking into account its rear panel, is nearly identical. The Rhein Z1 Plus is compact, substantive, clean, and bears a ridged squarish (with round corners) black metal body. Further, it is also CNC'd from

“aerospace industrial-grade aluminum alloy, wherein the entire chassis serves as a fanless CPU heat-sink which reduces thermal noise by 15%.” The Rhein Z1 Plus will fit on any desk and in so doing, will hide its rather impressive abilities as a true high-fidelity streamer.

The Silent Angel Rhein Z1's Plus back panel features, from left to right: a metal push-button on/off switch positioned above a 25MHz word clock input; two ethernet inputs and below, a toggle switch for selecting internal or external clock; a 12V linear power supply input; and a USB-C port beside the power supply input. Further to the right are two USB 3.1 ports and beside it, an HDMI port. And finally, beneath are two USB 2.0 ports for connection to a DAC and one for additional storage.

The Rhein Z1 Plus, in sum, is minimalist, beautifully executed with a solidity and weight that speak to substance, a well-executed design, and decidedly high-fidelity abilities.

FUNCTIONALITY

Silent Angel Rhein Z1 Plus

The Rhein Z1 Plus, like its sibling, is a Roon Core and a Roon Bridge that allows the play of Spotify, AppleAirPlay, Amazon Music, Tidal, and Qobuz. It also plays back internally stored music or music present on memory sticks, etc.



The Rhein Z1 Plus can be enabled by its proprietary VitOS operating software, which allows for its quick enablement and recognition by your system and/or Roon. It took mere minutes to plug in the ethernet cable, the USB cable, and then power it via the Silent Angel Forester F2 LPS 12V power supply. Through the VitOS system, I selected the Roon core as a streaming engine, and the Rhein Z1 Plus became immediately available for streaming.

The differences between the Rhein Z1 Plus and the Rhein Z1 are briefly outlined below. The Rhein Z1 Plus:

- Utilizes the newest Intel Quad-core CPU J6413 Processor
- Comes standard with more RAM 16GB/32GB relative to 8GB/16GB
- Has a more accurate TCXO word clock
- Comes with external port for a 25MHz state-of-the-art clock
- Offers greater overall noise reduction
- Outputs to 10 audio players versus the standard edition's 2 audio players
- DSD playback up to DSD512 versus the standard edition's DSD256

Overall, the Rhein Z1 Plus brings additional noise and jitter reduction (25MHz word clock), increased RAM and memory, the ability to support up to 10 audio players, and it can also handle higher DSD playback formats.

CONCLUSION

The Rhein Z1 Plus (\$3,199), like its non-Plus sibling, brings exceptional high-fidelity streaming to your system, whether it be two-channel or a dedicated headphone system. And again, its value-to-cost ratio is outstanding, as exemplified by two quite well-known streamers, four to six times its price, which were in-house during its review. Well, the Rhein Z1 Plus streamer embarrassed them both. The two much more expensive streamers, which shall go unnamed (we don't throw products under the bus) were returned unceremoniously to their manufacturers. This, of course, speaks to the tremendous value and high-fidelity bonafides inherent in this relatively low-cost streamer.

And in this case, given all the additional goodies—more RAM, more memory, a quieter overall component infrastructure (second-generation USB with audio enhancement), further jitter diminishment via a state-of-the-art 25MHz clock input (we did have the Genesis GX Master Clock on hand for the review!), and you're no longer in \$3k-\$4k territory, you're easily competing in \$20k territory, especially when you're taking down giants left and right.

Given the various improvements, the Silent Angel's ever-evolving and impressive high-fidelity signature, its extraordinary 2 to

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0 victory over, well, giants(!), it's as easy as breathing to award the Rhein Z1 Plus, brimming with consumer-friendly goodies, our DIAMOND AWARD for excellence.

Pros: Exceptional performance and a wealth of audiophile goodies that allow it to compete far, far above its price range, and in every respect.

Cons: None.

SPECIFICATIONS

<https://www.silentangel.com/z1-plus/>

COMPANY

Thunder Data, Co., Ltd.

Silent Angel Rhein Z1 PLUS, \$3,199

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