

Review of the RAALREQUISITE SR1a on Musicalhead

What makes playback via headphones so unique? Is it the intimate engagement with the music? The immediate proximity to artists and instruments? Perhaps a particularly subtle reproduction of our musical treasures also exerts the corresponding fascination?

In addition, such an ear loudspeaker naturally offers the unique opportunity to indulge in the original live concert with a listening level appropriate to this great event, which, enjoyed via a corresponding HIFI system, would inevitably lead to warlike conflicts with the worthy neighbourhood.

In addition, every Knight of the Grail of Sound also defines his musical nirvana very individually, of course. However, even the most dedicated headphone enthusiast sometimes has to admit that the ways to get there are sometimes unfathomable. Cost-intensive anyway.

Especially since the personal focus, which is inevitably shaped by constantly changing listening impressions and the resulting new sonic demands, can gradually shift.

Which sometimes leads to the fact that the knight of the Grail loses sight of his original goal. Whatever this may look like in detail.

As a result, new ear loudspeakers are constantly being developed by thoroughly attentive manufacturers, of course always with the noble claim to sonic absolution. And not infrequently provided with brand-typical unique selling points with regard to the grail-technical orientation.

And at times one or the other manufactory succeeds in making a big success. To create a veritable headphone legend that will be remembered years later.

As will probably be the case with the new RAAL REQUISITE SR1a.

The best headphones in the world?

But even the obligatory introductory text to my current test candidate turns out to be an unexpectedly difficult undertaking. Of course, all written reviews on Musicalhead are preceded by a listening program lasting several weeks, before I put even a single word on paper.

And after words I actually wrestled. How the hell can you put the extraordinary performance of the RAAL REQUISITE SR1a into disdainful sentences?

An avowed knight of the Grail of fine tones brought it to the point only recently after his own acoustic inspection of the new headphones at my home. He was of the opinion that the SR1a test report could possibly become the shortest written distillate on my blog - or the most detailed review ever on Musicalhead.

Because this is one of those reviews where I would like to fall right into the house with the door. Well - why not?

The RAAL REQUISITE SR1a is without any doubt the best ear loudspeaker, which I was allowed to listen to until today. And in some sound criteria even with a not insignificant distance. The mouse does not bite off a thread.

And of course I asked some more experienced Grail Knights for their personal musical evaluation of the SR1a in the last weeks. But which finally all of them reached the same listening result - the long search for the Grail of Sound will in all probability come to an abrupt end with the RAAL REQUISITE SR1a.

However, the almost philosophical question arises whether the seemingly eternal hunt is also a certain attraction of our beautiful hobby?

According to the well-known motto - the way is the goal. And "hunting & collecting" is also unbelievable fun. After all, my wife also owns hundreds of shoes - for only two feet.

So what if a completely unknown Serbian manufacturer obviously dares to create the almost perfect sound transducer? A decisive milestone in the Olympus of ear loudspeakers? I mean - do you really want that? After all, I love my numerous ear warmers precisely because of their different sound orientations.

Especially since the RAAL already presents itself in the preparation phase for this review as an extremely choosy diva with regard to an adequate playing partner. And also demands a pronounced monetary willingness to sacrifice on the part of potential future owners.

But perhaps I should start from the beginning.

The first contact with the SR1a I owe first and foremost to the European RAAL importer Stefan Gürtler of "Headphone Auditions Amsterdam", who provided me with one of the very first SR1a as quickly as possible - and thus made this exclusive German-language review possible in the first place. Thank you, Stefan.

Innovative technology

With the SR1a, the Serbian manufacturer RAAL REQUISITE presents the world's only Earfield™ headphone monitor in "True Ribbon™" technology at all. For the first time, full-range ribbon drivers take over the acoustic transducer work.

RAAL has been producing ribbon tweeters for world-famous brands in the loudspeaker segment since 1993 and began 10 years ago with the development of the first ear loudspeaker with this extraordinary operating principle.

The SR1a, similar to the legendary AKG K1000 or a current LB MYSPHERE, is designed as a completely open headphone and completely dispenses with the otherwise obligatory, but inevitably also sound discolouring ear cushions.

While the latter two use dynamic driver systems for sound conversion, the RAAL REQUISITE founders Danny McKinney and Aleksandar Radisavljevic rely on ultra-fast aluminium ribbon drivers, which, according to their own statements, enable an unparalleled time-accurate impulse response and transient reproduction.

RAAL REQUISITE therefore promises an audiophile sound experience not only with exemplary precision, but also with unparalleled authenticity - naturally without any impairment by the room acoustics.

In addition, the innovative Earfield™ architecture, as with the LB MYSPHERE, will feature an amazingly open and loudspeaker-like sound field.

The full-range ribbons specially developed by RAAL are also capable of reproducing the almost complete frequency spectrum from 30 Hz - 30 kHz and do not require any closed cabinet construction to reproduce even the lowest bass frequencies.

The perfect transducers? Well, not necessarily, because even ribbon systems struggle with a not inconsiderable foot. The impedance of the SR1a's drivers is an insane 0.18 Ohm - which would inevitably disqualify all conventional amplifiers on this planet for interaction with the SR1a.

For this reason, the RAAL REQUISITE ear loudspeaker relies on a corresponding interface in the form of a rather unadorned black box, which lifts the ohmic load via an intelligently switched resistor network to 5.6 ohms, which is friendly to play partners.

But even now the usual suspects don't get a chance. According to the manufacturer, these amplifiers should have a power of at least 100 watts/channel at 4 ohms in order to "accelerate" the SR1a to a distortion-free peak level of 111 dB.

The passive adapter box, which by the way can accommodate 2 x 150 watts, also enables the driving amplifier to maintain a constant load resistance due to the circuit layout developed by RAAL, which of course considerably simplifies the electrical interaction of the two playing partners in particular.

The black box also limits the power output to the two ribbon drivers of the SR1a, which therefore do not exceed 500 mW/channel in gaming mode. Nearly 99% of the excess power "evaporates" in the truest sense of the word in the dark depths of the box.

According to leading engineer and company founder Aleksandar Radisavljevic, however, this is not an unfortunate circumstance, but rather a definite advantage: "Systems approach perfection when their efficiency tends towards zero."

Quod esset demonstrandum.

Packaging & Equipment

The RAAL REQUISITE SR1a is delivered in a black and very robust pelican hardcase made of sturdy plastic, which is lined with soft, but still very stable foam on the inside.

This allows not only the problem-free transport of the Serbian ear loudspeaker, but also offers an optimal protection in the mostly rough recording studio everyday life, for which the SR1a was originally designed.

In addition to the obligatory 2.20 m long connection cable, which makes contact with the headphones via two 3.5 mm plugs and has a 4-pin XLR socket and no plug at the other end to be on the safe side, the new RAAL also features the aforementioned black box in the immediate vicinity, as well as two ready-made cable sets with lamella plug connections for connection to the speaker outputs of the potential playing partner.

However, neither a warranty card nor operating instructions were included with my package. This may be due to the fact that my test sample is one of the first devices in Europe. Anyway.

Workmanship & Wearing comfort

The handmade RAAL REQUISITE SR1a may look more like a prototype than a finished product at first glance.

Which, of course, does not detract from the quality. Because the SR1a convinces in this respect all along the line - both through the selection of high-quality materials and due to its impeccable processing quality.

In any case, you won't find any plastic on the RAAL ear loudspeaker. The SR1a has a completely modular design, which makes it much easier to replace various components such as the headband or temple pads. All spare parts can also be ordered separately from RAAL REQUISITE. That shows class.

Even the ribbon drivers can be easily changed within a few minutes, should they unexpectedly quit their acoustic service. Danny and Alek are also completely convinced of the quality of their product and therefore grant a practical guarantee of full 5 years. Chapeau!

The wearing comfort of the SR1a is also excellent. The leather headband can be easily adapted to the head ergonomics of the wearer in 3 steps via punched holes at the factory, further fixing holes can be added at home if necessary. An additional leather belt nestles around the back of the venerable Knight of the Grail and fixes the RAAL REQUISITE SR1a bombproof on the valuable head.

And as with the LB MYSPHERE, the two lateral "wings" can be individually adjusted to the head and ear size of the wearer by continuously adjusting the angle of attack. The first adjustment of the SR1a, however, requires time and leisure.

Similar to the positioning of classic stereo speakers, the individual "sweet spot" must first be determined. For my personal hearing sensation, an opening of approx. 30-40 degrees has resulted as the ideal angular position. The vertical orientation of the headphones, on the other hand, plays a rather subordinate role IMO.

With a weight of 425 grams, the RAAL ear loudspeaker is also not too heavy, especially as the load is distributed comfortably and without pressure points over the large headband. Thus nothing stands in the way of longer listening sessions.

However, the interested party should take into consideration that the SR1a cannot be used in a lying position due to its design, as this would inevitably

lead to discoloration in the sound image. And also the lack of any noise isolation may not be everyone's cup of tea.

Preparation

The RAAL REQUISITE SR1a comes standard with the interface described above - but of course without an appropriate power amplifier.

Stefan Gürtler from "Headphone Auditions Amsterdam" was able to organize one of the first two prototypes of the manufacturer SCHIIT AUDIO worldwide - and kindly provide it for my review. The "WELTENHEIM" named special amplifier of the American manufacturer works with a new transformer, which makes the small black accompanying box obsolete.

In addition, I was naturally very curious as to which integrated amplifier would actually meet the sound requirements of the SR1a in practice.

Because the amplifier power recommended by RAAL REQUISITE marks a maximum undistorted peak level, but as an avowed quit listener I can thankfully do without volumes > 110 dB. And the vast majority of my knights of the grail-colleagues probably do the same.

What is particularly important, however, is the power supply capability of the respective playing partner, whereby according to Danny, 5 A should not be significantly undercut. Which, in addition to my MUSICAL FIDELITY KW250 (2 x 250 watts at 4 ohms), could possibly also predestine the RIVIERA AIC10 as a playing partner for the RAAL REQUISITE SR1a?

Although the nominal output power of the AIC10 is only 2 x 10 watts at 8 ohms, its oversized power supply and very specific design features, according to developer Luca Chiomenti, enable it to provide exorbitantly high peak currents at its loudspeaker outputs.

I also test the SR1a in combination with the NAIM AUDIO UNITY ATOM (2 x 40 watts at 4 ohms) in order to be able to offer you a somewhat cheaper alternative to the first two amplifier bolides.

The signal source in all cases is an AURALIC ARIES G1 in combination with VEGA G1 DAC from the same manufacturer. The audiophile connection between the individual components is guaranteed by high-quality cable sets of the American brand AUDIOQUEST.

The musical test program is once again made up of well-known examples of classical, jazz, blues, rock and pop music, mainly in HIGH-RES resolution.

Further information about the RAAL REQUISITE SR1a can be found on the homepage of the manufacturer: <https://raalrequisite.com/sr1a-earfield-monitors/> or at: <https://www.headphoneauditions.nl/sr1a-ribbon-earfield-monitors/>

Sound test

The following sonic evaluations refer primarily to the interaction with the RIVIERA AIC10, with which the RAAL REQUISITE SR1a actually interacts musically congenially, and accordingly reaches top form.

At no time do I get the impression that the AIC10 is acoustically overtaxed with the SR1a. Up to very ambitious listening levels, the RIVIERA also convinces dynamically in its function as an official integrated amplifier.

In view of the fact that over 30 years ago small English amplifier bricks from the MISSION CYRUS II with an external PSX power supply were already frightening competitors due to their outstanding power supply capability, the performance of the Italian KHV doesn't surprise me very much today. Because the AIC10 can also handle power.

Often it is mentioned as an immanent advantage of a musical reproduction via headphones compared to the reproduction via loudspeakers that the former is not influenced by the type and size of a listening room. However, this statement is not tenable.

Of course, our ears are also exposed to the corresponding room acoustics in "miniature format" under the ear cushions of the respective headphones.

The inner surfaces of the cushions cause reflections and resonances, and the pressure chamber effect also favours standing waves, which in sum can inevitably lead to more or less significant discoloration in the sound image.

The RAAL REQUISITE SR1a operating in free field is, of course, completely unaware of this phenomenon, as is an LB MYSPHERE, for example. This is what always causes incredulous glances even with battle-hardened Knights of the Grail of fine tones, even at the first contact with the headphones, because of the unusually realistic sound impression.

And if I could describe the sound signature of the SR1a in the above combination with just one word, this would certainly be the term "authentic". Especially with these two musical miracle weapons, voices and instruments simply sound ghostly real. Absolute goose bump factor is guaranteed.

The RAAL not only reproduces any kind of sound preserves without any discoloration or resonance, but above all - devilishly fast. In fact, this is the fastest sound converter I've heard so far. The transient reproduction is therefore perfect.

In addition, the headphones convince with a grandiose stage and room depth. Provided the two driver wings have been carefully adjusted to the wearer's ears, the SR1a delivers a remarkably live listening experience and surpasses even an ABYSS AB1266 PHI TC in this discipline.

In particular, the way the RAAL is spatially presented is very striking.

While the ABYSS generates a very extensive, but also firmly defined and self-contained sound field around the head of the listener, the SR1a focuses individual sound events seemingly detached from each other, but nevertheless firmly outlined in a completely open-looking space, but at the same time coherently assigns them to the musical context.

This listening experience is difficult to describe and is indeed reminiscent of a loudspeaker setup in the near field. In the course of my review I even find it difficult at times to exactly separate the actual musical reproduction from the perception of real ambient sounds.

During the playback of a reference recording, for example, my mobile rang. But since a live concert was being performed in a noisy jazz cellar at that moment, I could not identify the new sound at first and assign it unambiguously.

This simple example is all the more fascinating because such "masking" would have been almost impossible with conventional headphones. Which, of course, speaks first and foremost for the amazing reproduction qualities of the RAAL REQUISITE SR1a.

A few months ago, the LB MYSPHERE succeeded in impressing me with its extraordinary spatial capabilities. At that time, however, the IMO's insufficient level stability in the bass range prevented an even better overall sound rating.

And the RAAL doesn't afford this weakness. Even at higher volumes, the SR1a's woofer is not only free of distortion - the RAAL also plays noticeably more powerfully and also acts faster than the LB MYSPHERE in this frequency range.

Nevertheless, the superbly structured bass of the Serbian ear loudspeaker is rather of a slim nature. Even though the RAAL has a completely sufficient

level in the frequency cellar (30 Hz cut-off frequency), the low-frequency range is felt to have a comparatively smaller volume than a conventional (ortho-) dynamic headphone, for example.

This is where the ABYSS AB1266 PHI TC obviously effortlessly counteracts the SR1a. However - with a clearly perceptible loss of speed.

Which, by the way, applies to all headphones used for comparison. No matter whether a HIFIMAN SUSVARA or the STAX SR009 - none of these top-of-the-range headphones even comes close to the speed of the RAAL in the bass range. The impulse accuracy of the SR1a is almost astounding.

This minimal delay in the reproduction of bass impulses is especially due to the somewhat sluggish transient response of (ortho-) dynamic drivers or electrostatic surface radiators.

Due to the higher mass inertia compared to the full-range ribbons of the SR1a, the listener gets the impression of more substance and fullness, since not only the moving air masses via the pressure chamber effects, but also the actual running time significantly influences the bass quantity.

And the incredibly high speed of the RAAL REQUISITE SR1a runs like a red thread through the entire frequency spectrum.

The timbres of the Serbian headphones are not necessarily painted with a wide brush in the midrange, but rather drawn with a fine pencil. Especially as the RAAL is a bit stingy in the fundamental, due to the light-footed and purified bass, with a generous body and cosy warmth.

Nevertheless, voices and instruments are reproduced sufficiently vividly and not only excellently articulated by the superior transient reproduction, but also expressively and with an almost lifelike acoustic imaging. This is undoubtedly world class.

Every musical network is dissolved in a perfect manner and integrated into the spatial interaction in a finely structured way. The transparency of the SR1a is simply outstanding and surpasses IMO's competitors by several meters.

And the RAAL doesn't burn dynamically either. In particular, the Serbian ear loudspeaker masters fast and minimal volume changes with bravura and captivates every Knight of the Grail of Sound especially in complex musical passages with its exorbitant fine dynamics.

Big headphone cinema.

Now we come to the supposed perfect discipline of the RAAL REQUISITE SR1a - the high frequency range. After all, the manufacturer RAAL has been using ribbons in elite loudspeaker construction for decades for this sound-relevant frequency spectrum. And almost as expected, the SR1a also sets standards here.

The STAX SR009 (S) and the HIFIMAN SHANGRI LA (Jr.) marked my personal benchmark in the past with regard to their excellent resolution. But against the SR1a, both headphones clearly lose out. The RAAL REQUISITE SR1a's excellent tweeter work has not been matched by any acoustic herb today.

The innovative ribbon headphones reveal details that I have never heard before, even on recordings I have known for many years. From the subtle breathing noises of the sound engineers, the whispering of the actors at the beginning of a piece of music, to the artificially added reverb in the recording studio - the RAAL really squeezes everything out of any musical food with almost brutal ruthlessness.

But exactly this merciless harshness doesn't always have to please. Because even the smallest discrepancy in the upstream electronics adds up in the playback chain in the worst case.

And the RAAL REQUISITE SR1a forgives absolutely no errors. It demands the perfect tonal preservation. He insists on a high-precision DAC with optimally adapted analog output stages. And he is satisfied with no less than the best playing partner.

This becomes clear to me at the latest when I connect the new SCHIIT AUDIO prototype with the SR1a. In principle, the WELTENHEIM doesn't have any significant weaknesses on the RAAL - perhaps apart from a low background noise and the somewhat limited maximum level at full modulation.

The real catch is that I connected the SR1a with the RIVIERA shortly before - and played the SR1a with the Serbian diva more smoothly and subtly. The playback via the SCHIIT headphone amplifier seems in direct comparison to the AIC10 much more brittle, especially in the mid-range and on top of that dislikes a slightly aggressive sibilant playback.

My gray MUSICAL FIDELITY KW250 drives the Serbian headphones to deafening volumes with ease in the next test setup due to its exorbitant power amplifier performance.

However, this is always combined with a somewhat more closely staggered stage presentation, a reduced edge sharpness with regard to the focusing of voices and instruments, as well as a limited detail resolution in direct comparison with the Italian reference amplifier.

And also the NAIM AUDIO can't score against the AIC10. Although the UNITY ATOM also trumps with the high musical flow in the mid-range typical for English amplifiers, it can unfortunately not always deny itself digital harshness in the sound image and thus quickly reveals itself to be a slightly harsh representative of the transistor fraction.

Nevertheless, I would certainly prefer the NAIM AUDIO UNITY ATOM to the above mentioned SCHIIT prototype, especially since the small English all-purpose weapon (streamer-DAC-amplifier) with a price of 2,750.- € has an IMO excellent price-performance ratio.

And who listens to the RAAL REQUISITE SR1a for the very first time in combination with the last mentioned playing setup, probably misses nothing at all. It's a well-known fact that hearing problems only arise when the headphones of your choice are amplified to an unequivocally equal level. But - to whom I say this.

Of course there will be other suitable amplifier treasures on this planet which, in combination with the RAAL REQUISITE, could also exceed the sound quality of a RIVIERA AIC10 - even if only in terms of an extended power spectrum.

Unfortunately I can't verify this in my review today. But I will certainly be able to welcome some potential candidates at home in the next weeks and months. And of course inform you immediately on Musicalhead under the category „News“.

Here is a short summary of my sound impressions of the RAAL REQUISITE SR1a in combination with the RIVIERA AIC10.

BASS

Low bass limited to 30 Hz, yet very impressive conversion. Excellent structured midbass with enough pressure and contour. Ultra-fast touch with excellent impulse response.

BASE

Sufficiently plastic basic tone range with optimum bass connection. Very neutral in tone and also extremely free of discolouration.

MIDS

Authentic timbres. Superior clarity and transparency. Superior imaging. Perfect transient reproduction.

TREBLE

Exorbitant resolution and phenomenal detail. Grandiose overtone spectrum with very realistic reverberation flags.

DYNAMICS

Strongly dependent on the respective play partner. Sensational fine dynamic qualities on the AIC10 with completely satisfactory coarse dynamics.

ROOM

Unbelievably open stage reproduction with a coherent spatial interaction. Convincing room depth with meticulous driver adjustment. Overwhelmingly authentic overall impression.

My Conclusion

The innovative RAAL REQUISITE SR1a is undoubtedly another masterpiece in the long history of ear loudspeakers. And it once again takes headphone playback quality to a new musical level. IMO a definitive endgame solution.

However, this is connected with a considerable monetary expenditure, provided that the inclined knight of the Grail of fine tones does not already have a suitable playing partner in the form of an exquisite full or power amplifier.

And the acoustic magnifier from Serbian production also demands top performance in terms of the electronic front end. Even a profane exchange of power or connection cables can be traced at any time.

Thus, the acquisition of the RAAL REQUISITE SR1a at a purchase price of 3,899.00 Euro may add up to a five-figure amount for the electronic equipment and accessories. And the war chest of even the most ambitious Knight of the Grail must first cope with this. Unless the better half pulls out the red card anyway.

The prototype of SCHIIT AUDIO provided to me for this review unfortunately falls quite far behind my personal expectations. The better is always the biggest enemy of the good.

You can argue about the rustic look of the SR1a, but not about the tonal qualities. The SR1a is therefore not only the best headphone I've heard to date, but also the new heir to the throne in my personal olymp.

He replaces the ABYSS AB1266 PHI TC accordingly and from now on of course takes first place in my TOP10 on Musicalhead. And of course this decision wasn't easy for me.

Even though the RAAL points the old king to the right place in almost every sonic discipline, the ABYSS with its extremely powerful and live-present style still manages to inspire me spontaneously and ignite the musical fire.

It is quite possible that some of the Knights of the Grail will even give the sound of the American legend preference over the Serbian newcomer, especially when higher listening levels are preferred. Because Live is often also loud.

My personal decision, however, has been made. Because the RAAL REQUISITE SR1a is not only unique. It actually and comprehensively initiates the intimate confrontation with the music. And he truly creates a ghostly closeness to artists and instruments. In addition, he inspires with such a subtle way of playing, which will fascinate even the most hardened Knight of the Grail. Promised.

Congratulations to Danny McKinney and Aleksandar Radisavljevic. And of course my most explicit recommendation.

Yours Fidelio

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