

the ear

HI-FI MUSIC GEAR

hardware review



Moor Amps Angel 6

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Some men buy Harley Davidsons, some get a carbon fibre road bike others decide that middle age is the time to build their dream audio component. Go to almost any hi-fi show (if you can) and you will find someone who has been making their own speakers for a few years (it's usually speakers) and have finally taken the plunge and brought their creation to market. It's a tough market though and the attrition rate for such new brands is fairly high but sometimes a product comes through which is sufficiently innovative that it gets some traction and begins to build sales. Moor Amps appears to be from this latter camp, it was started by Tim Narramore who spent most of his spare time building and refining amplifiers for 30 years before having a eureka moment, going back to basics and creating the Angel 6.

Tim's original inspiration for making his own amps came from hearing Naim's so called olive series amplifiers from the '90s, it wasn't so much the sonic character of these designs but their musicality or ability to inspire interest and enthusiasm. The only thing that his Angel 6 power amp has in common with those models however is a rather brutal appearance and bipolar output transistors. The rest is quite different, Tim has developed what he calls a three island power supply which consists of a conventional reservoir capacitor stage to absorb pulses of current from the large toroidal mains transformer, followed by two high capacity filtering stages and regulation so that the amplifier sees a very pure DC supply. This requires six large reservoir capacitors for each channel which is more than usual but as you will see below there do seem to be benefits

Tim established that reducing intermodulation distortion (IMD) was equally if not more important than THD or total harmonic distortion, which most manufacturers consider paramount. He is of the opinion that the latter is less critical to sound quality than IMD, the fact that many less than great amps have very low THD would appear to back this up. Another factor is the near absence of capacitors in the signal path, there is one at the input but the rest of the circuit is DC coupled. A DC servo is used to remove offset from the output, or in English, is necessary to maintain sonic transparency. The offset is monitored and the amp will go into standby if an error is detected, something of a necessity with DC coupled designs.

The Angel 6 also has low feedback which is a popular goal with valve amplifiers but doesn't get mentioned often where transistor designs are concerned. Feedback is not intrinsically a bad thing but it has been used in the past to stabilise less than successful circuits so has a bit of a bad rep. But less is probably more. That is not the case on the power output front however, the amp is specified to deliver 150 watts per channel and to double that into a halving of load (4 Ohms), it almost doubles it again into 2 Ohms (580W) which suggests serious reserves of power.

Physically the Angel 6 is something of a brute that weighs 29 kilos and stands nearly 60cm (24 inches) wide. Those familiar with the size of the average equipment rack will realise that this is wider than most, in my system it had to sit on top of the rack. That said it's the sort of amplifier that warrants its own platform between the speakers, perhaps with longer than usual interconnects and shorter speaker cable. The presence of XLR connections alongside the single ended RCA ones mean you can use very long balanced cables without fear of noise pick up. The reason for this wide and shallow casework is its maker's desire to keep signal paths as short as possible which is typical of the dream product, practicality is rarely considered as important as sound quality in such creations. One other area this is apparent is the placement of the power inlet which is rather close to the WBT speaker terminals, my speaker cables hang



over the power plug without touching it but it's a pity that the inlet couldn't have been placed further away. You'll notice an unconventional single handle on the back of the amp, this does aid lifting albeit not with one hand unless you have been working out, a lot.

Sound quality

The Angel 6 was paired with a Townshend Allegri Reference preamplifier and initially used with PMC twenty5.26i loudspeakers, a combination that revealed it to be an extremely transparent and capable amplifier. It's an unusually neutral device with none of the thickness in the bass found with a lot of high power amplifiers, instead it has the same speed and coherence across the full bandwidth. On the one hand this means that the speakers need to be closer to the wall



but on the other you get a degree of nimbleness in the bass that is surprisingly rare, it is not unlike a valve/tube amplifier in this regard, but of course there are significant power reserves available when they are required.

It also delivers the energy found on each recording in such a manner that you can't help but believe its version of events, Van Morrison's Jackie Wilson Said for instance is fast and bright but there is no glare in the brass instruments, just a phenomenal tune that really swings. So much so that I was prompted to sing along, fortunately no one else was in the room. On Keith Jarrett's *Carnegie Hall* recording there is a degree of vivacity that makes the performance come to life before you, with real power in the piano and perfect timing, which makes for a very involving experience. Another jazz album, Don Cherry and Ed Blackwell's *El Corazón*, has a quicksilver fluency that is highly reminiscent of great tube amps. It's unusually smooth and relaxed but also highly detailed and articulate, revealing lyrics and all the quieter sounds that combine to create a greater solidity of sound than can usually be found. All of which made me wonder if it has the same midrange emphasis that you get with tubes, but when bass comes along you know all about it, this happened on the Michael Wolny Trio live album Wartburg which was phenomenally good, with real low end power. I was caught off guard by the bass on some tracks, it's almost as if many amplifiers have a homogenising effect on what they deliver, reducing the tonal and dynamic contrasts. I'm talking about powerful amplifiers too, expensive ones at that.

Moor Amps aren't going for that plush high end sound that some find appealing but which ultimately gets in the way of the music, the Angel 6 is more akin to the nimble and musically remarkable amplifiers from Rega and Naim, where power output is relatively low but communication skills are extremely high.



Moving over to the reference Bowers & Wilkins 802 D3 speakers things got more interesting again, the extra resolving powers of the speakers making it clear that there was more being served up than had previously been apparent. Lyrical comprehension was obviously better, especially with the less than clear diction of artists like Michael Chapman whose *Rainmaker* album gained a propulsion that it didn't previously exhibit, but also some rather obvious compression in the recording. You have to take the good with the bad with revealing audio components and that includes aspects of recording production that are less than desirable. It was ever thus. What also became apparent is that this amp is remarkably relaxed, it seems to make more time for each note, each syllable to be heard which is another quality I associate with great tube amps. In effect it presents everything in such an unhurried fashion that you seem to have longer to appreciate it, which makes it sound slow, it's not slow it just makes other amps sound hurried. There is beauty inside this beast or at least in the way it delivers the inner essence of what it amplifies, it brings out the sublime in any piece of music that contains it and this quality can hide in some unlikely places. Frank Zappa's guitar solo on Zoot Allures and Mingus's *Mysterious Blues (Newport Rebels)* for instance. Deadmau5's Seeya is less strong in this respect but what you get here is punch and bass weight without the excess flab that make this track uncomfortable with many amplifiers. It is lean and toned, delivering power that's fleet of foot and always in control but seemingly devoid of grain.

I found that certain source components worked better with it than others, my preferred phono stage is a Tom Evans Groove SRX but that sounded a little too bright and I started us-

ing a Rega Aria instead, this doesn't match the Groove's speed but has a more even balance that worked well with the Moor Amps. On the digital side I preferred the nimble Stack Link II streamer and ifi Pro iDSD DAC to the Auralic Aries G1 and Vega G2.1 that usually outplays the more affordable alternative. That the more affordable components worked better for both digital and analogue is surprising and requires a bit more investigation, but often in system building it's a case of balancing the different elements and in this instance they worked very well indeed. Vinyl sounds better either way, the Rega P10 turntable and Aphelion 2 cartridge really shone in this system, I have never been so blown away by Led Zeppelin's Gallows Pole, the speed and power of the drums is just extraordinary. It's easy to hear why the band had no future without Bonzo. Gil Scott Heron's I'm New Here surprised me with its recording quality, it's his last recording so not very old but very well done. More surprising is that Kendrick Lamar's King Kunte sounds remarkably good, it's not what you expect of hip hop even of the leftfield variety. Then I put on Arab Strap's New Birds and my jaw dropped, how could a low budget recording sound so visceral and have such enormous dynamic range, it was properly intense. This track



usually starts to sound noisy as the band starts to thrash and I'd always assumed it was a limitation of the recording, it turns out that most amplifiers can't cope with the energy and start to compress. The Angel 6 just lets the level rise so that the full power of the band becomes clear.

By now you will have got the impression that I quite like this amplifier, in fact I like it enough to have worked out a deal with Tim Narramore so that it doesn't have to leave my system. That doesn't happen often. It may not be an established brand but Moor Amps have built a stunning power amp in the Angel 6, I would urge anyone who wants to hear more of their music to give this 'brute' a try, it's infinitely more sophisticated than it looks.

Specifications

Type: stereo power amplifier.

Analogue inputs: RCA, XLR

Analogue outputs: binding posts

Power output: 150W/8 Ohms, 300W/4 Ohms, 580W/2 Ohms

Frequency response: 5Hz – 50kHz (+0/-1dB)

Input sensitivity for max output: 1V (RCA, XLR)

Gain: 31dB

Distortion (with typical loudspeaker): THD 0.01%, IMD 0.01%

Signal to Noise Ratio: not specified

Dimensions (HxWxD): 172 x 575 x 367mm

Weight: 29kg

Warranty: 5 years