

FEATURE

# Simaudio MOON Neo ACE All-In-One Music Player

**Simply Add Speakers**

By Rob Johnson

ACE

FEATURE

At TONEAudio,

we have enjoyed the opportunity to review many Simaudio components over the years, including many of their flagship pieces. Their latest NEO series delivers a lot of that expertise in more compact components for the music lover seeking great sound, but lacking the room for a rack full of big-iron gear.

I had anticipated a behemoth landing on my doorstep, placed there by a forklift. As it turns out, Simaudio packs all the musical magic into a very modestly sized enclosure. Weighing in at only 24 lbs (11Kg) the unpacked ACE measures a shelf-friendly 16.9" wide x 3.5" tall x 14.4" deep. A choice of black or black/silver finish gives a prospective owner a few options to help the ACE blend in with their home décor. The small footprint belies the prowess and breadth of capability ready to be unleashed.

FEATURE

FEATURE



**Sources Galore**

After experiencing the ACE's extensive source input options, the hard part is trying to discover what it cannot accommodate! As one would expect, the ACE features three sets of RCA analog inputs on the back, and a 1/8" input on the front for external devices. It also has an MM phono stage on hand, so ACE is turntable ready. However, the many options for digital input reveal the real aces up the ACE's sleeve.

The ACE relies on the latest AptX Bluetooth codec for the highest streaming quality from a paired phone or another device. A pair of optical inputs are flanked by a set of digital coaxial inputs for further flexibility. For the best possible sound, however, the USB input and the MiND streaming app give this MOON the chance to shine with digital playback. The USB input can feed the internal DAC with high-

resolution PCM files spanning 16-32 bit depth and 44.1-384kHz sampling rates. Those who enjoy DSD files can appreciate the ACE's ability to handle resolution up to DSD 256. With all these input options, and high-resolution capability the ACE comes with a high degree of future-proofing for those who enjoy their digital music, and all the convenience it offers.

Internet ready, the ACE can be set up to receive music files over WiFi. I recommend using an Ethernet cable from your router directly into the ACE. In my network, the bandwidth of an Ethernet connection is much faster than its wireless counterpart, so I would rather give music the biggest pipe available on its journey.

Simaudio's intelligent Network Device (MiND) app deserves special attention.

When connected to the internet, the ACE's app serves a few purposes. First, it can act to control many of the ACE's basic functions including volume, mute, and source selection. Secondly, it offers integration with the music already on your local network. Finally, it makes Tidal and Spotify integration a snap. From the comfort of your favorite listening seat, or from another room, MiND makes it easy to pick any song you long for, and enjoy! Admittedly, I did use the phone app to play some favorite tunes from bed one morning and appreciated the convenience. Using the MiND app is easy once you get used to it. Of course, the app is not a requirement if a user prefers streaming Tidal, Spotify or Roon directly to the ACE from a computer or laptop. *(continued)*



The next classic.



Impressive performance capabilities, highlighted by its detailed high frequency resolution, incredible transparency, powerful dynamics and remarkably deep bass extension make the X18 ideal for small to medium sized rooms and simply one of the finest compact loudspeakers Dynaudio has ever developed.

The new **Excite X18.**

**DYNAUDIO**

FEATURE

#### Horsepower under the hood

At the heart of the ACE, Simaudio includes a Class A/B amplifier, producing 50 watts per channel into eight ohms. While many are moving to Class D amplification for its energy efficiency, I appreciate Sim's use of traditional, analog amplification circuitry. To my ears these something more natural sounding in high-quality Class A and Class A/B designs that increase the level of realism captured in playback. Because these amp designs can generate more heat than a Class D powered component, make sure your ACE has plenty of breathing room wherever it is placed. While it doesn't run hot, like a Class A component, it does get warm to the touch on the top panel.

When not driving stereo speakers with the ACE, headphone enthusiasts will applaud the 1/4" front-facing jack. At night, when the rest of the family is trying to sleep, the headphone option will keep you rocking for a few more songs. Alternatively, maybe you will decide to sleep by the stereo. We will not judge! *(continued)*



FEATURE

FEATURE



**Start your engines**

Following the manual’s suggestions, setup is very easy. However, there are a few nuances worth mentioning. After connecting to the internet, be sure to update the unit’s firmware, and download the latest Simaudio app in order get the most from your system. Once complete, the ACE aces the rest of the setup process. The USB input from my Mac Mini and all other attached sources identified themselves in the source list without additional, fussy configurations.

An OLED screen on the front of

the ACE makes source selection, volume, and other important playback details easy to read. Those wishing to use the ACE as part of a home theater setup also benefit from pass-through capability.

**Super Sonics**

Using the ACE as a standalone preamplifier or headphone amp, I find myself very impressed with the sound produced. Each element transmits a neutral, clean, and engaging sound that remains enjoyable for hours of listening. However, enjoying the ACE as an all-in-one

solution is the most likely owner scenario – and the biggest benefit of this component – so we enjoyed the bulk of our testing using the ACE as the heart of the system.

Out the gate, it is evident that Simaudio made a very conscious effort to ensure the sum of the parts results in an even greater whole. System synergy shines here, and by controlling all the decoding and amplification in a single box, Simaudio takes advantage of the opportunity to deliver stellar sound with a minimum of external devices. Pretty much the only

thing you would need to connect is a turntable!

The ACE catalyzes effortless soundstage width, depth, and height, which transcend the speaker bodies. Especially on high-resolution recordings, the front-to-back layering of instruments and vocals as portrayed maintain distance from one another, furthering the convincing illusion of a real performance. The overall voice of the ACE is very natural. Those seeking a very warm presentation or one that accentuates each detail in a recording as if they were in the

front row, might prefer another solution. I prefer the sonic balance provided by the ACE. Uncomfortable musical artifacts like sibilance, stridency, and glare never enter into the equation.

My reference Gamut RS3i speakers usually receive 250 watts per speaker with a Burmester 911 Mk.3. However, the ACE’s 50 watts do a solid job driving these speakers with authority and musicality. In addition, the ACE is delivers low bass notes tightly and tunefully when mated with efficient speakers. *(continued)*



# DIFFERENT CLASS

★★★★★



**A49** A lifetime of electronics design expertise has led to Arcam's finest ever amplifier; the new A49 integrated amplifier. Its ultra-refined class G topology\* represents the pinnacle of Arcam's engineering heritage and sets new standards of performance. An audition will confirm that power is nothing without control.

## ARCAM

[www.arcam.co.uk](http://www.arcam.co.uk)

**G** Arcam's G class amplification provides the perfect balance of ultra low distortion and enormous power. You can read all about this world class technology by visiting our website.

BRINGING MUSIC AND MOVIES TO LIFE



**THE SOUND ORGANISATION IS THE EXCLUSIVE US DISTRIBUTOR OF**  
Arcam • Chord Company • DALI • Melco •  
ProAc • Quadraspire • Rega • Wilson Benesch

[www.soundorg.com](http://www.soundorg.com)  
[facebook.com/TheSoundOrganisation](https://facebook.com/TheSoundOrganisation)  
972-234-0182  
[info@soundorg.com](mailto:info@soundorg.com)

## FEATURE

Just don't expect ACE to drive large, full range speakers to a level at which they rattle the foundation of your home. It is not engineered to do that – no 50 watt per channel amplifier is. However, using the ACE's line outputs to add a pair of subwoofers can satisfy an owner's lowest-bass craving. And I did just this with a pair of JLAudio subwoofers with excellent result.

Vocals like those from Chris Isaac on *The Baja Sessions* cut into the room with energy and emotion. Similarly, on Sia's *1,000 Forms of Fear*, the ACE accommodates her powerful crescendos without pushing the digital bits toward wince-factor. Never leaning to the side of ear fatigue, the ACE always provides beautiful music. Regardless of genre, an owner can expect the ACE to reproduce it well. While it portrays acoustic tracks with an enjoyable intimacy, it also accommodates the punch and speed of electronic dance tracks. As with many digital components, the ACE does best when fed with high-resolution files, but it does a mighty fine job with CD-quality files, including those streamed from Tidal.

Yes, more expensive single-function components like Simaudio's flagship amps and preamps can offer deeper resolution, greater transparency, and a more refined, overall organic presentation. However, each of those individual components can cost significantly more than the ACE. For a one-box solution with such extensive functionality, at a price point of \$3,500, SimAudio hits a home run with the ACE. With musical enjoyment delivered in spades, compromises are few.





### Additional Listening – by Jeff Dorgay

**W**hile there certainly isn't much I can add to Rob's enthusiasm for the ACE, I have used it with an incredibly wide range of different loudspeakers and concur that there is precious little this integrated solution can't handle. Also worth mentioning is the built in MM phonostage, which is excellent, and that's what makes the ACE an over the top component for me, and why I chose it as one of our Products of the Year for 2016. Much like a Volkswagen GTI, the ACE's strength is that it does everything incredibly well – nothing is an afterthought. If this were just an integrated amp and preamplifier for \$3,400, it would be more than worth every penny, but considering it also offers a DAC, streamer, phonostage and headphone amplifier – it truly is the audio bargain of the century so far. You could spend double or even triple this amount on power cords and interconnects for five components!

Having spent a lot of time with Simaudio's 700 and 800 series components, I'm floored at how much of their design ethos was able to be put on a single chassis at this price, yet that's what being a vertically integrated audio company like Simaudio can bring to the table where many others relying on outsourcing can't. If you look closely, the casework is not as exquisite as their top components, but it is all still tastefully done.

So many friends and readers have asked me for a great way to get into hifi in a meaningful way, yet not one that will require raiding the kids college fund. Find your favorite \$1,000 - \$5,000 pair of speakers, buy a Simaudio ACE and enjoy. There is no better solution for this price. ●

[www.simaudio.com](http://www.simaudio.com)

