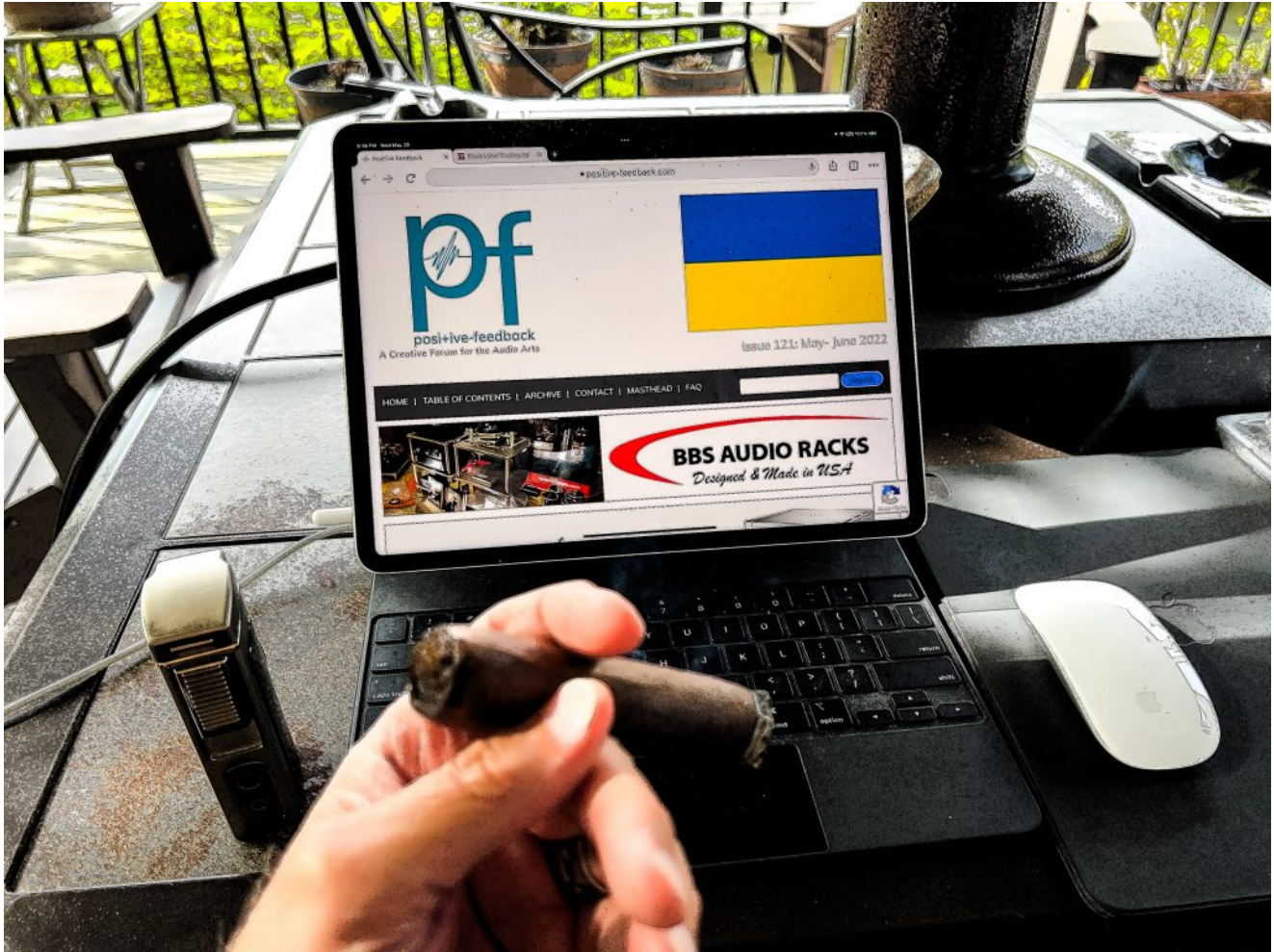


Impressions: My 2023 Brutus Awards

positive-feedback.com/audio-discourse/2022-brutus-awards-part-the-second

By David W. Robinson

February 11, 2023



Time for some real fun!

<i>ayon</i> audio		Awarded "Best of Show"
----------------------	---	---------------------------



Ayon Audio S-10 II Streamer/DAC with RS-9 Music Server



The Ayon Audio S-10II Signature Streamer/DAC and remote (image courtesy of USA Tube Audio)

Charles Harrelson and I have known each other for a number of years now. His company, USA Tube Audio, handles a number of impressive brands from all over. Of particular interest to me have been his various tubed-based products from Ayon Audio. I've caught his rooms whenever we were at the same show, although that hasn't been as frequently as I would like.

As my regular readers know, I have a longstanding interest in state-of-the-art SACD playback. I had checked the USA Tube Audio site a couple of years ago, and noticed the tube-based (2x 6H30, 2x 5687, 1x GZ30) Ayon Audio CD-35 Signature reference SACD/CD/etc. with external Roon Rock RS-9 Music Server. Cowabunga! I was intrigued.

So, I contacted Charlie to see if a review sample of the CD-35 Signature could be arranged. Unfortunately, that did not come together (yet!), but Charlie had another idea. Would I like to try the Ayon Audio S-10II Signature Streamer/DAC with their Roon Rock RS-9 Music Server?

Well...given the quality that I had evaluated earlier with their Ayon Audio HA-3 triode headphone amp, and given one of my Brutus Awards to a few years ago...sure!

It took a while for the S-10II Sig/RS-9 to arrive, and by the time it did, a number of goodly products had jumped into my review queue ahead of it. That's always frustrating, to me and the distributor or manufacturer, but that's the way that things are sourced, shipped, and arrive these days.

When their time came, unpacking was very straightforward. There are two elements and two boxes in the S-10II Signature. One is for the RS-9 Music Server; the other is the solid box for the S-10II Signature.



Roon Rock RS-9 Music Server (vertical and horizontal orientations; image courtesy of USA Tube Audio)



Front view of the S-10II Signature Streamer/DAC (image courtesy of USA Tube Audio)

Unpacking was easy, and cabling with Synergistic Research SRX interconnects, together with Furutech's LAN-8 NCF (CAT8) Ethernet cables, made for superior power and interconnectivity.

The setup was straightforward, and the accompanying instructions were clear. The one place where I had to double-check with USA Tube Audio tech support (which was very knowledgeable and quite helpful) was in making sure that I understood the initialization of the Roon license. No problem; the Roon on my iPad was the solution, and after that all came together.

Note that the S-10II has a number of playback options available, as you'll see [HERE](#). In fact, the extraordinary flexibility of the S-10II/RS-9 makes it one of the best options for those who are looking for maximum scope when exploring different playback systems.

Specifications are sitting over [HERE](#). And they are impressive.

With the S-10II/RS-9, I took the output to brilliant Vinnie Rossi L2i SE Integrated Amp with DAC and SET tubes in play; the isolation system was a Stillpoints 5-shelf ESS Rack with Rail Grids and Ultra II V2 Isolation Feet. From there the signal flowed to a pair of the Focal Sopra One monitors via the exceptional TARA Labs Omega Concerto SP loudspeaker cables, with power cabling by Kubala-Sosna Elation! AC's. This is a high-performance, compact system.

In extended use, the RS-9 was completely silent. No fans, no airflow creakies...nothing. It has its own power supply, simply sat there without drawing attention to itself, and streamed the feed to the S-10II. Pleasantly, that unit is tube based, using glass that I've appreciated over many years now: the 6H30. This tube is quite neutral, with transparent, clear sound, and yet with just a kiss of tubey deliciousness. Ayon Audio showed excellent judgment in going with this tube in a high-resolution Music Server/DAC.

Speaking of which, the S-10II does both DSD out to DSD256, and PCM out to 768kHz. There is an option to convert PCM to either DSD128 or DSD256. Splendid! I chose to convert all PCM to DSD256, which made the listening experience even better.

Cutting to the chase: I put several hundred hours on the S-10II/RS-9, listening to various NAS-based recordings on our LAN, as well as streaming sources via Roon linked to my underlying Qobuz and TIDAL accounts. I listened to a broad range of musical types in different formats, far too many to cite. In every case and every resolution, I was taken by the excellence of the seductive music that the S-10II/RS-9 produced. I especially appreciated the lightest kiss of tubey deliciousness without the compromise of transparency and detail that the 6H30 provided. I've loved this tube from the first time that I heard it in BAT gear, and I heard no reason to fall out of love with the Ayon Audio use of the same tube.

Bring on one of my 2022 Brutus Awards! It's well deserved!

PF Brutus Award, 2022

On behalf of the creative community at Positive Feedback, and in recognition of significant contributions to the audio arts in 2022, this award is hereby presented to

**Ayon Audio for their
S-10 II Vacuum Tube Streamer/DAC**

in order to encourage further excellence in fine audio, to the greater good of all who love it.

December 30, 2022



posi+ive-feedback

David W. Robinson, Editor-in-Chief

Dave Clark, Editor



PF Brutus Award, 2022

On behalf of the creative community at Positive Feedback, and in recognition of significant contributions to the audio arts in 2022, this award is hereby presented to

**Ayon Audio for their
RS-9 Roon-Ready Streamer**

in order to encourage further excellence in fine audio, to the greater good of all who love it.

December 30, 2022



David W. Robinson, Editor-in-Chief

Dave Clark, Editor



Ayon Audio S-10II Signature price: \$10638.00

Roon Rock RS-9 Music Server price: \$2895 – \$3395 (depending on configuration)

And there's more to come...



Alice in Wonderland drawing by Sir John Tenniel, in the public domain.