

## Review of the ABYSS DIANA PHI on Musicalhead



Here I am again. And today I'm reviewing the ABYSS DIANA PHI in the latest version for you by popular request.

Already in May last year the young lady competed against her bigger brother AB1266 PHI on Musicalhead and in some sonic aspects she was even able to put the cutting edge from him.

The ABYSS DIANA impressed not only with its highly musical note - the headphones, made entirely of aluminium, weighed a meager 330 grams and were an absolute lightweight compared to the American manufacturer's debut model.

Unfortunately, however, the small ear loudspeaker was a bit choosy with regard to its future owner - the fit was rather suboptimal and therefore unnecessarily restricted potential buyers.

In the meantime, however, the young lady has developed further and now flirts with a little more generous measurements. The supple leather earpads

now also encloses slightly larger ears without any problems and thus promises an increased compatibility in regard to the happy owner.

In addition, Joe Skubinski and his team slightly modified the fit of the highly flexible headband construction in order to help even more Grail Knights of the fine sounds to a new musical experience.

The ABYSS DIANA PHI has also inherited the superior membrane material of the AB1266 PHI CC and therefore combines the optimized wearing characteristics with an even more sensitive and dynamic sound.

However, this would still have to be proven in the following review.

### **Packaging & Equipment**

In fact, there are no great differences to the basic model in this respect.

The lady is still practicing asceticism and only gives her owner only a small transport bag made of canvas as well as a high-quality connection cable in 1.50 m length, which makes unsymmetrical contact with the respective playing-partner via a 3.5 mm jack plug.

But of course a corresponding adapter for 6.3 mm jack is included. In addition, the potential buyer can also order a symmetrical cable connection with 2.5mm, 4-pin XLR or 4.4mm PentaConn plugs directly from the New Yorkers - IMO a very practical option.

And since the length of the cable can also be adjusted to the individual needs of the future owner (2.0 m, 2.5 m or 3.0 m) when ordering, the possible uses of the ear loudspeaker are extended in a sensible way.

As far as primary packaging is concerned, the DIANA PHI obviously also keeps a reasonable distance from its big brother. But whether the simple cardboard box of this price class really seems appropriate, probably each prospective customer must decide for himself.

For me personally this doesn't play a big role, as we know, because all the outer packaging stuff only disappears in our storeroom anyway.

### **Workmanship & Wearing Comfort**

The boutique headphones don't give themselves the slightest weakness. The ABYSS DIANA PHI's workmanship is simply outstanding and continues to set standards in its segment.

The driver housings are characterized by an ultra-thin yet highly rigid frame construction, which is precisely milled from a full block of aircraft aluminum and finally reduced to just 100 g of material. This is the main reason for the low weight of 350 grams.

In order to ideally integrate the diaphragms, which are 4 mm smaller than the AB1266 PHI CC and now 63 mm in size, into the new housing design, the driver mounts of the DIANA PHI had to be optimized accordingly.

An extremely hard polymer ceramic gives the headphones their characteristic matt appearance. In contrast to the basic version, however, the new DIANA PHI is only available in a titanium grey outfit as standard. Other colors are available on request.

And - there was something else - oh right, the bit tricky thing with regard to wearing comfort. After all, DIANA number 1 didn't make it with everyone. And unfortunately, in the Camelot of fine tones, even the latest version cannot give the all-clear.

Because the latest derivative of the American ear loudspeaker still divides the audiophile community. When DIANA considers its wearer to be worthy and lovingly snuggle to its head shape, it leads its knight into sonic nirvana. If, however, the square skull of the diva's potential candidate is not acceptable, she unmistakably shows him the cold shoulder.

Fortunately, the basic prerequisites for a trustful togetherness have been considerably improved - see above. Especially the adaptation of the headband to the "standard head" was much better made by the ABYSS team than for the first version. The circle of the Knights of the Grail has thus been extended by a few illustrious bearers.

If the DIANA PHI fits the eye like the famous fist, the orthodynamic ear loudspeaker not only spoils with exquisite wearing comfort, but also with an outstanding sound quality.

## **Technique**

As already mentioned, the ABYSS DIANA PHI now also uses the low-mass membrane material of the AB1266 PHI CC. At the same time, the magnetic flux density  $\Phi$  has been adapted and phase distortions minimized, which, according to Joe Skubinski, is particularly noticeable in terms of precision and locating sharpness.

The impedance of the headphones is still 32 Ohm, the sensitivity of 91 dB/mW is theoretically still in the green range. Whether this basically mobile-

friendly data will allow an efficient combination with various DAP in practice seems to me at least doubtful. After all, even the first DIANA is not known as a despiser of cost.

Nevertheless, it was undoubtedly a technical challenge for the New York high-end smithy to maintain the great convincing sound of its big brother and to implement the new PHI drivers perfectly in their new homes.

Because with every ABYSS design, functional reliability and longevity are still essential design features. The high level of manufacturing effort makes a significant contribution to the headphones' resonance-free design and thus enables the precise focusing of all musical events in a spatial context.

The open Fibonacci hole patterns of the orthodynamic headphone have been acoustically matched to the technical properties of the PHI diaphragms and are responsible for a strikingly transparent and open reproduction of the music.

## **Preparation**

Although the compact dimensions of the ABYSS DIANA PHI suggest an exciting liaison especially with digital audio players, I have to disappoint all DAP owners at this point - because these ABYSS headphones are also only suitable to a very limited extent for harmonious interaction with the high-tech dwarves.

At least if the sound potential of the DIANA PHI is to be fully exploited. Nevertheless, the somewhat choosy diva does not completely refuse mobile devices. The prerequisite for this, however, is a suitable pairing with quite powerful playing partners, for example with the new ASTELL&KERN KANN CUBE.

However, for my review I still choose a WOO AUDIO WA11 as a portable solution, as well as the new QUESTYLE CMA TWELVE MASTER for purely stationary use.

Although the KANN CUBE is undoubtedly one of the strongest representatives of its trade, its sound in combination with the DIANA PHI is not quite as good as that of the WOO AUDIO. It is not for nothing that Joe Skubinski prefers the WA11 as a mobile setup for various trade fair events.

And with a performance range of 2 x 1.2 watts/channel (WA11) or 2 x 2.0 watts/channel (CMA TWELVE MASTER), each at 32 ohms, the young lady is already dynamically in top form in symmetrical mode.

In combination with the WOO AUDIO I use an iPad PRO as my signal source, which I connect to the small headphone amplifier via an AUDIOQUEST CINNAMON. In addition to the current AUDIRVANA+ software, my proven iMAC provides the data sets for the integrated DAC of the QUESTYLE. The required connection is made via an AUDIOQUEST CARBON.

Once again, the usual suspects from pop, rock, classical, blues and jazz, predominantly in HIGH-RES resolution, are used for musical purposes. Further information about the ABYSS DIANA PHI can be found at: <https://eu.abyss-headphones.com/pages/diana-abyss>

## **Sound Test**

Of course I was already curious in advance how the DIANA Update 2.0 would sound compared to the basic version. Now - just to fall with the door right into the house - the ABYSS DIANA PHI surpasses the original version in all musical aspects.

In combination with the QUESTYLE CMA TWELVE MASTER's bass achieves a new quality in terms of depth, structuring and impulse response. Furthermore the compact dimensions make it almost unbelievable, what bass pressure this little beast is capable of.

No question - the DIANA PHI plays in this discipline on world class level and undoubtedly at eye level with the ABYSS AB1266 PHI CC or a HIFIMAN SUSVARA. And at no time does the bone-dry, contoured upper bass superimpose the reproduction in the fundamental range.

The small headphones have an excellent tonal balance and are highly committed to neutrality. The tonal colors also appear natural at all times and contribute to a high degree of authenticity - as does the perfect reproduction of the transients.

The transparency in the midrange is almost striking. Due to the significantly smaller distance between the ears and the orthodynamic drivers compared to the AB1266 PHI CC, the transparency of the DIANA PHI almost reaches new dimensions, especially in complex musical passages. Very impressive.

The DIANA PHI only has to admit defeat with regard to the legendary stage image of its bigger brother.

Musical events are precisely contoured at all times and also focused in an immovably stable manner in the spatial context, but the actors move closer

together, felt a little closer than with the big ABYSS, and thus do not quite come close to its incomparable live atmosphere.

Even though the more direct style of the compact ABYSS series is quite inspiring. The comparatively more intimate presentation of the music benefits primarily smaller ensembles, of course, but also individual voices and acoustic instruments are a veritable pleasure through the little seductress.

The exorbitant resolution of the DIANA PHI in the high frequency range is also convincing. A significant increase to the really not bad basic version. And also in this discipline the DIANA PHI is only slightly inferior to a HIFIMAN SUSVARA. All in all great headphone cinema.

However, these world-class headphones are also sometimes at war with data-reduced acoustic costs. Especially in combination with the CMA TWELVE MASTER, inferior music in unfavorable case is brought to the ears quite relentlessly. Therefore adequately recorded source material is the first obligation.

I am understandably curious whether the mobile pairing with the WOO AUDIO WA11 can actually surpass this successful stationary performance. And surprisingly this question is not so easy to answer.

The very first transistor amplifier from WOO AUDIO basically favors a slightly analog style - in the (tube) tradition of the house. Although this is sometimes at the expense of the final resolution of micro details in comparison to the CMA TWELVE MASTER, the music reproduction via the WA11, on the other hand, appears somewhat more organic and in the best sense more relaxed than via the Chinese.

This way, older or worse recordings with the WOO AUDIO lose their horror. And we recommend the WA11 as a more tubey alternative to the more analytical QUESTYLE headphone amplifier.

In terms of performance, by the way, there are no really striking differences between the two partners. Here as there the ABYSS DIANA PHI convinces with outstanding dynamic quality.

And this ear loudspeaker is an acoustic poem, especially when it comes to fine dynamics. With musical material of any kind, even the tiniest shades are differentiated in terms of volume differences and intoned very sensitively. The low-mass membrane material of the DIANA PHI obviously bears fruit here - and in this discipline, too, the original version is unquestionably at a disadvantage in terms of acoustics.

For a better overview, here is a brief summary of the individual sound criteria.

## BASS

Dry, contoured, powerful, punctual on time and with excellent attack. Superior kickbass, especially for this compact design. Excellent illumination of the lowest frequencies. A great bass. Suspecting reference.

## BASE

Very neutral tuning, no overlapping of the bass range detectable. Nevertheless, it is always earthy-substantial and has sufficient fundamental warmth. That's exactly how it has to be.

## MIDS

First-class transparency. Direct and plastic representation of voices and instruments with precise focusing. Natural sound colors combined with excellent transient reproduction. Perfect.

## HIGHS

Completely seamless transition from the midrange. Superior resolution even of tiny musical details. Authentic reproduction of sibilants. Eye-catching scaling with the playing partner. Harmonious frontend is a must have.

## SPACE

Very precisely defined space in width and depth with an extension conforming to the price class. Terrific locatability and coherence of all musical events. With regard to the stage reproduction, however, not quite at the level of its big brother.

## DYNAMICS

Almost explosive dynamics with corresponding range of services on the part of the game partner. Distinctive fine dynamic quality with goose bump factor in musically emotional moments. The absolute experience with live recordings.

## **Conclusion**

The new ABYSS DIANA PHI not only beats the basic version musically all along the line, it also easily plays at eye level with the best headphones in the

world. This is all the more astonishing because one would never have thought it capable of this sound quality because of its structural size.

Not only the general wearing comfort benefits from the somewhat more luxurious dimensions of the young lady, the spatial abilities also reach a new level, although not quite at the outstanding level of the AB1266 PHI CC.

Of course, we can speculate about how much the ear cushions are responsible for. However, this once again underlines their importance as an integral part of the overall concept. Fortunately, the larger cushions are now also available for DIANA number 1.

Dynamically, the ABYSS DIANA PHI is almost a diabolical power. Once the little Klangvamp has found its favorite place on the wearer's head, these exceptional headphones spoil you with unbridled joy of playing and a fantastic musical flow.

The femme fatale among the ear loudspeakers bewitches already in the first minutes with its audiophile charms and understands it like no other acoustic headgear to draw even experienced Knights of the Grail of the fine sound in an almost magical way into its spell.

Unfortunately, these ABYSS headphones are not a special offer either. For the demanded price of 4.395,- Euro the prospective customer gets a music machine par excellence with a comfortable top position in Olympus of sound.

And, of course, my unqualified recommendation. So listen to it for a personal test.

Yours Fidelio