

Origin Live Resolution IV/Illustrious Turntable Review

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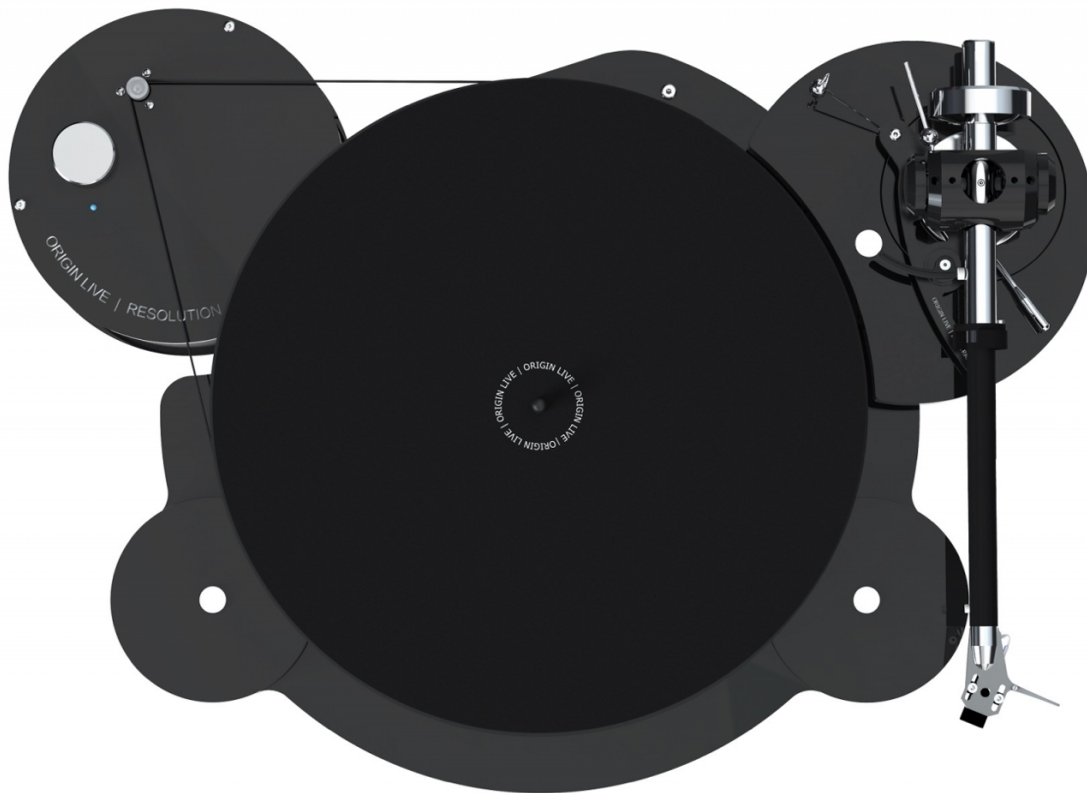


Jimmy Hughes takes an affordable British superdeck for a spin...

Origin Live

Resolution IV Turntable & Illustrious Tonearm

£5,570



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Origin Live was launched in the late nineteen eighties by naval architect **Mark Baker**. The company has since carved out a distinct niche for itself, manufacturing a range of quirky yet highly capable turntables and tonearms. The £3,600 Resolution you see here is at the more affordable end of the Southampton company's five-strong vinyl spinner range and comes tested with the £1,970 Illustrious, one of four tonearms sold by OL. This combination costs £5,570, and I think it is worth every penny.

CLOSE UP

The Resolution IV has some interesting original design innovations – a few are obvious, but most are not, while some of its secrets are hidden in plain sight. The design itself is elegant and efficient. Much thought has gone into the materials chosen and every aspect of fabrication. It features a skeletal metal chassis on a support base. If architects **Norman Foster** ever made a turntable, I imagine it would look something close to this.



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The low friction main bearing runs in an oil bath for smooth results. With the belt removed, the time taken for the platter to stop turning from 33.3rpm was 1 minute, 42 seconds. That's really impressive. By way of comparison, despite its massive 12kg platter, Acoustic Solid's MPX turntable took 1 minute 20 seconds, and my reference Musical Fidelity MF-1 lasted less than 30.



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The 25mm thick platter is made from acrylic and weighs about 1.5kg. The platter is driven from a Swiss-made DC300 DC motor via a flat belt having a textured surface, and the drive is strong and solid. Motor speed is governed electronically, using LED sensors on the motor housing, which check and regulate speed via a foil strip on the underside of the platter. Once the deck is correctly adjusted for height, a blue LED illuminates the platter from below.

Pitch stability seems excellent; the company's specially developed electronics monitor speed, ironing out motor fluctuations for a secure and

constant rate of knots. My platter had Origin Live's Multi Layer update, which adds about £650 to the price and acts as a vertical shock absorber to enhance bass performance. I found it made a significant improvement, bringing a more natural tonal quality and reducing the midrange emphasis that acrylic platters can be prone to.



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The Illustrious tonearm is a 10-inch design featuring a tube made from five different materials to improve energy dispersion. Ultra low friction dual-pivot floating vertical bearings decouple the armtube from the deck to reduce colouration. The higher mass yoke than OL's cheaper Encounter arm – the model below Illustrious – is claimed to give better definition, particularly in the bass. The headshell is made from aerospace alloy and features a very nice high angled finger lift. The bearings feel smooth and silky but are not overly delicate. Two transit bolts are provided to protect them from damage during transportation. The arm has a removable cable terminated in RCA phono plugs.

Although this turntable/tonearm package benefits from care taken over setting-up and alignment, it's not a sensitive pernicky design. Once installed and adjusted, you shouldn't need to keep fettling it, and it should run for several years before needing attention. As with all the turntables I review, to reduce the effects of footfall, I mounted it on a 25mm thick hardwood board supported by five decoupled feet.

THE LISTENING

Sonically, the Resolution/Illustrious offers comparable precision and focus to the big, heavy-go-round behemoths out there. But being lighter and less heavily damped, it reproduces music with superior fluidity and flow, plus greater subtlety and finer tonal gradations than many I have heard. Indeed at its best, it hardly sounds like a turntable at all. Instead, you get the impression you're listening to a master tape, such is its effortless poise and precision. Fast and responsive, it seems able to reproduce a broader range of tonal colours and microdynamics than most.



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The first long-player that I spun up was a Philips recording of **Mozart's** *Adagio and Rondo for Glass Harmonica* – a strange instrument whose sound suggests ghosts and the supernatural. I'd just played it on my Musical Fidelity MF-1 turntable, and it sounded great, or so I thought. Via the Origin Live, the glass harmonica exhibited even more other-worldly depth and shimmer, with slinky subtle halftones. It sounded significantly better than my reference deck. Breathy overtones filled the room; suddenly, bell-like notes could be heard as the glasses were tapped.

Playing **Miles Davis's** *Kind of Blue* and the sheer tactile presence of trumpet and sax was impressive. Yet what really caught my ear were those quiet atmospheric piano chords played by **Bill Evans**, which seemed to cut through the mix with incredible ease. A few days earlier, I'd listened to

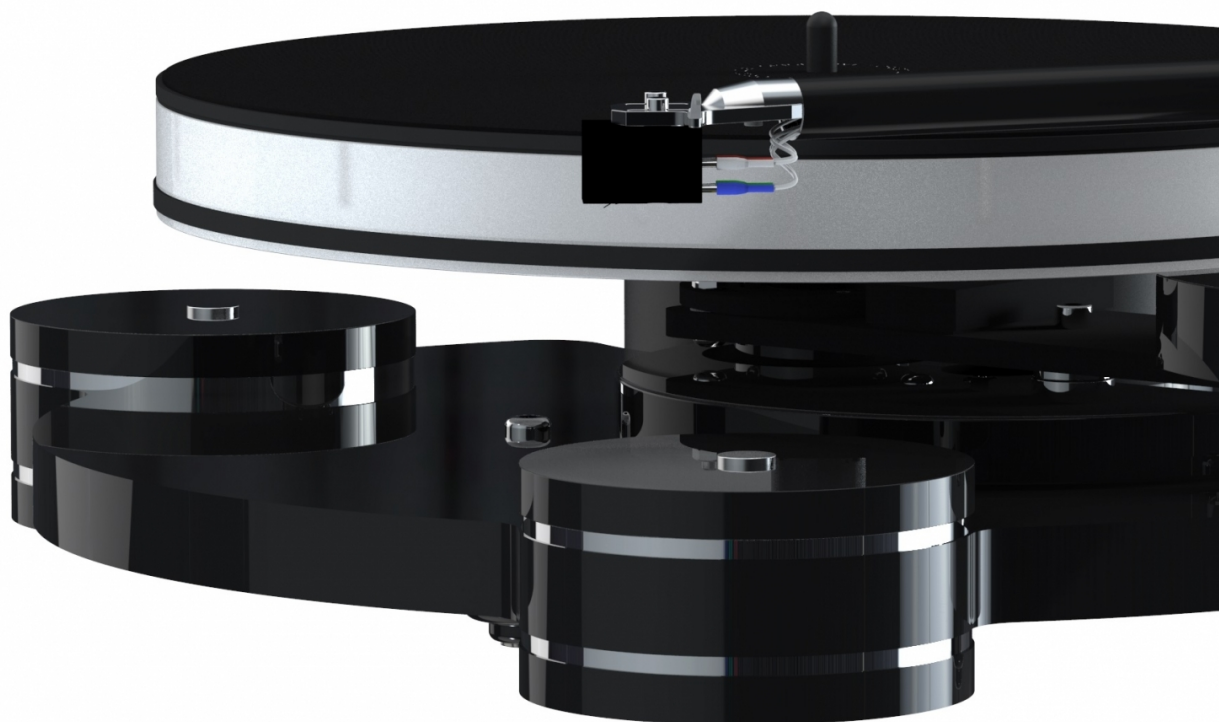
this album on SACD, compared it to the CD and noticed something similar with Evans's piano. SACD focused it more clearly than CD. Vinyl went further, delivering even greater clarity and depth while sounding effortlessly natural and tonally more open.



My Transfiguration Temper W cartridge now sounded a wee bit crisper and sharper in the Origin Live, compared to my Musical Fidelity. The enhanced transient attack made the music more immediate. Bass was deep and full, yet nimble. The decay of quiet notes as they slowly faded was more apparent. Solo voices and instruments did not dominate quieter ones. Everything was reproduced democratically. At the same time, the sound had a nice, flowing, lyrical sort of quality; it was crisp but not hard or coldly abrupt.

JJ Cale's album *Grasshopper* really highlighted this. It's simple music, but each track sounds very individual – it was actually recorded in four different studios/venues, and no fewer than five engineers are credited. The producers didn't aim for a consistent, uniform sound, and the Resolution/Illustrious brought out all the myriad variations. I don't think I'd

ever heard the individual differences between tracks revealed so clearly before. This album is also a good test for pace and timing too.



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On classic music recordings, I liked the way the Resolution/Illustrious revealed the ambience of the hall where the performance took place, maintaining clarity even when things grew loud. Playing **Eugene Ormandy**'s pioneering reading of **Rachmaninov**'s *First Symphony* proved fascinating. This old CBS recording from the early nineteen sixties is somewhat bright and forwardly balanced. Yet because all the low-level detail was reproduced so exquisitely, I really sensed the placement of the orchestra in the hall, regardless of dynamic extremes.

Impressive projection, holographic soundstaging – all this and more on a mediocre recording that previously had always sounded thin, flat, and unrefined! Only intending to sample a few minutes, I ended up listening to the whole LP, thoroughly enjoying the experience. I found the impression of depth and space was really enhanced by the optional multilayer platter. Then, playing a seventies **Beach Boys** compilation LP, I was amazed to

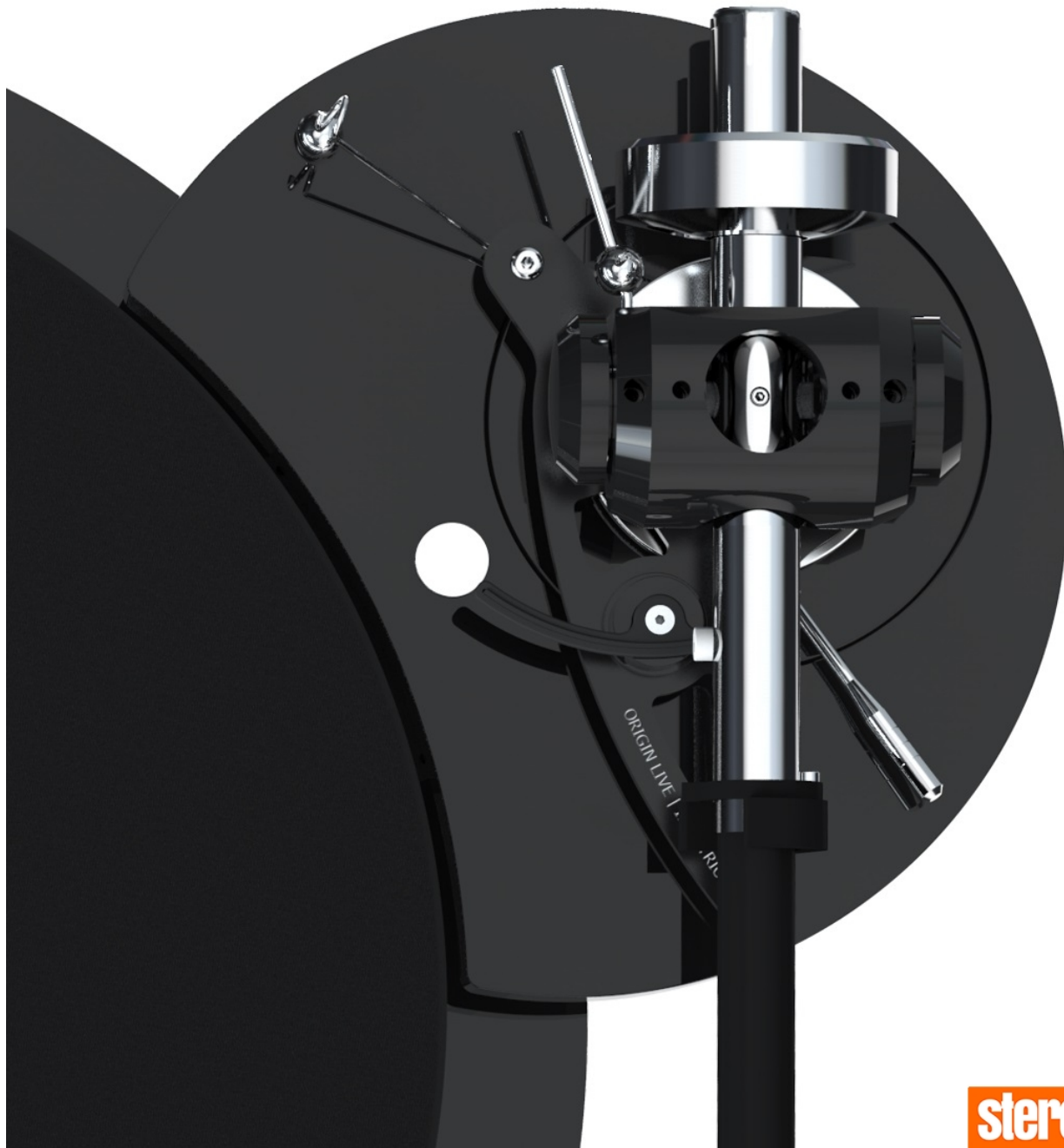
hear holographic reproduction – even on tracks that weren't that well transferred. Indeed some cuts were original mono, reprocessed for fake stereo.



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Despite this, voices and instruments sounded impressively dimensional, more so than they had any right to. It was a convincing demonstration of how good vinyl transcends the limits of average recordings, delivering results that instantly put a smile on your face. Seasoned analogue addicts will know what I mean.

The noise floor of this turntable package proved extremely low, both in terms of rumble and general background mush and/or vinyl roar. On a well-pressed LP, background noise proved to be virtually absent. The Transfiguration cartridge helped here, too, as its stylus profile always seems to find the quiet part of the groove!



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Many of the records I played during the audition period had been cleaned ultrasonically using a Degritter. The surfaces weren't dirty as such, but this type of cleaning ensured that all the precision, clarity and fine detail present on a great LP can be heard when played on a turntable such as this. It made the music sound effortlessly real; for example, *Live in Concert* with **Barbara Thompson's Paraphernalia** really impressed me.

This double album, recorded in 1980, ends with a track called *Aliyah*. It takes the whole of side four and features a standout extended drum solo from the late **Jon Hiseman**. Sonically, it has always pleased, but the Origin Live elevated it from very good to absolutely great. I'd never heard it

sound so vivid and holographic before. Hiseman's solo is a tour de force, and his drums and cymbals were reproduced with scintillating clarity and attack.

THE VERDICT



While I enjoy CDs, SACDs and digital streaming, I am gratified by the way that analogue keeps getting better and better – setting new standards that challenge even the finest digital sources. There's no question about it – on a deck such as this, the LP format sounds very engaging. There's a relaxed freshness with good vinyl that digital still finds hard to emulate. Origin Live's Resolution/Illustrious demonstrates how natural and transparent LPs can sound and is a great combination.