

Branching out

Can a manufacturer of audio equipment also produce high-quality audiophile LPs? **Neville Roberts** sharpens his stylus and has a listen to Pro-Ject's Jazzy Zoetrope

When I heard that turntable manufacturer Pro-Ject had released a double jazz LP, I was very keen to get my hands on the album to try it out. The Austrian company has been in the audio business for nearly 30 years and has a huge range of turntables. Although it also releases a number of audiophile pressings of some great classic recordings, it has now ventured into producing its own recordings.

Occasionally, Pro-Ject invites great musicians to perform in the company's headquarters in Mistelbach, Austria. In the past, it has considered recording sessions using analogue tape with minimal microphoning to capture the live show in true stereo with no compression or editing. One of the problems with this is that very few musicians are prepared to record under such conditions, as it is essentially a live performance where any errors are permanently captured for posterity.

Pro-Ject CEO Heinz Lichtenegger found out that Austrian singer and musician 7Ray is also a keen audiophile. When Lichtenegger approached him with the idea of producing such a recording he was very enthusiastic about the concept. Working together they decided to pull together a double album consisting of both a studio and live recording at the company's HQ. The intention being to enable listeners to make a direct comparison of different environments. As well as 7Ray, the album features

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trumpeter Simon Plötzeneder and the jazz trio Triple Ace – consisting of Oliver Kent on piano, Dusan Novakov on drums

and Uli Langthaler on double bass. The result is a double LP, pressed by Austrovinyll (£35) or two 15IPS CCIR copy-master tapes supplied on ¼-in SM468 tape and wound on two 10.5in NAB metal reels (£445).

The studio recording was made at Studio Baumgarten in Vienna and 7Ray used a Neumann U47 microphone with a specially modified capsule. A further seven microphones were employed and recorded on an eight-track Otari MX-70 analogue tape recorder, then mixed to stereo with Acousta DCA 100E mixing console. The live recording was made at the Pro-Ject's base in Mistelbach. To avoid any potential crosstalk, no monitor speakers were used, but this inevitably required a very polished performance from the musicians. The stereo feed was recorded with a Studer A80VU analogue tape recorder.

So, how does it sound? Starting off with the LP of the studio recording, the first track, *Night And Day*, kicks off



with the drums, which are superbly tight and open. The piano and double bass then join in and are soon followed by 7Ray singing in his relaxed style. When the trumpet comes in, it's positioned quite well back from the other instruments and the vocals with, I suspect, the purpose of achieving a good balance between the instruments.

Flipping over to the classic *My Baby Just Cares for Me*, the vocals are a bit more out in front and it feels like 7Ray is singing live in my room.

7Ray's album is a must for fans of high-quality jazz

Keeping it real

Swapping over to the live recording at Pro-Ject HQ, Mistelbach, *I've Got You Under My Skin* has the same balance between instruments as the studio, but for me the whole performance has more atmosphere, realism and energy. There is a good double bass solo section that commands some subtle applause from the watching audience, which adds to the involvement I have with the music and the sense of being there.

The faster paced *Lady Is A Tramp* flows effortlessly from my speaker and sparkles with energy. The album finishes off with *One For My Baby*, which is sung in a reflective style and is a great choice of closer.

Both LPs offer a refined and elegant jazz style, and the clarity of the production is very evident in the excellent recordings. Personally, I prefer the extra dimension of atmosphere captured by the live performances of the second LP, but I'm sure that some will favour the studio version for its purity, which can only be achieved with the extra control over the recording in such a setting. Whatever your preference, if you're a lover of jazz, this is certainly an album you'll wish to add to your collection ●

