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HEADPHONE OF THE YEAR

Meze Audio Elite

Meze Audio's small but growing range of personal audio products is now topped off with the Elite flagship. This open-backed, over-ear, hybrid isodynamic headphone is not only the pinnacle of Meze Audio's engineering prowess, but a powerful design exercise in its own right. The complex earcup shape, for example, is so hard to engineer that it has a very high rejection rate. Of course, Antonio Meze's uncompromising perfectionism plays a part. Even the headband – often an overlooked aspect of headphone design – uses a unique 'suspension wings' system using carbon fibre and leather. Not only is this a meticulous design, there's a lot of design elements for Meze to be meticulous about.

Of course, the core of the headphone is the driver itself; Meze Audio has worked in close collaboration with Ukraine's Rinaro Isodynamics, developing the MZ3SE 'Isodynamic Hybrid Array' driver. A refinement of the MZ3 driver Rinaro delivered for the Empyrean headphone, the MZ3SE is a three-part driver designed to deliver selective acoustic performance for the different areas of the listener's ear structure.

"The Elite offer an extremely impressive degree of insight, they control and integrate the frequency range with absolute authority," said Simon Lucas, "The level of bite and drive they summon is deeply impressive." He also felt that, "Whatever the intentions of a recording are, it seems, the Elite have no trouble understanding them." Adding that "Some of this is down to the unforced and convincing nature of their tonality – deep, textured and straight-edged low frequencies are complemented by a deftly informative, naturalistic midrange and crisply substantial top end. Some of it concerns the amount of detail the Meze can reveal – 'torrential' isn't too strong a word to describe it. Some of it will be to do with Elite's mastery of dynamic expression – from small embouchure variations to the simple 'loud/quiet/wildly overdriven' dynamics." +

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Reviewed in Issue 201

Meze Audio | mezeaudio.com