

Conquering the Final Frontier

Silent Running Audio's Ohio Class XL+² Equipment Platforms

By Jeff Dorgay

If you haven't fully addressed vibration control in your audio system, that means you still have a final frontier to conquer. And the SRA Ohio Class XL+² platform is a great place to start your quest. I've seen my fair share of DIY attempts: granite slabs, maple boards, sand boxes, and inner tubes to name a few, many piled up like Dr. Seuss contraptions. While any of these alleged solutions will change the sound of your system, I've yet to hear one that consistently reveals more music throughout the frequency range.

Until now. And trust me, I was highly skeptical until the very end. The cable world is renowned for its empty promises, and the field of vibration control is no different. Most of it is hit-and-miss. If you peel back the curtain, precious few anti-vibration vendors have any real credentials to back up their products.

Kevin Tellekamp, the brains behind SRA, is a music lover and audiophile, but he also has an extensive background in math, physics, and acoustics. Oh, and he holds more than 50 worldwide patents on vibration control. His "day job" involves solving vibration-related issues for NASA and the US military (hence, the ship-related product names) along with other very high-profile customers. At the time of this review, Tellekamp was working with a NYC hospital to isolate its CT scanner from intruding vibrations in order to increase its resolution.





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Component Couture

SRA's Ohio Class XL+² equipment platforms are made to order. The company takes a component's weight, profile, and a host of other factors into account when performing the necessary calculations to optimize a platform for a given piece of equipment. The result is perfectly suited to your gear and according to SRA, "future proof."

Each Ohio Class XL+² is also designed and manufactured with a specific component in mind. But should you change or upgrade, as audiophiles have a habit to do, the platform can be recalibrated for the new item for no additional cost to the original owner. In the rare case that this is not possible, an aggressive trade-in allowance will be made provided your platform is still in excellent condition.

SRA currently maintains a database with thousands of different pieces of gear on file. Still, as Tellekamp points out, "If it's not in our database, we'll get the measurements." The company deems this approach Component Specific Design, and even takes into account the exact type of footer used by every equipment manufacturer. Because of SRA's meticulousness, additional cones, balls, and mass loading aren't recommended—such extras will diminish the SRA isolation unit's component-specific design. Applying his physics knowledge, Tellekamp notes that the Earth vibrates somewhere near 3hz, and asks: "What on Earth, weighs more than the Earth? Mass loading is simply not effective."

Another critical aspect of SRA designs involves the fact that they don't employ any material whose performance decreases over time. As anyone who has used Sorbothane-based solutions knows, the material compresses relatively quickly and loses its ability to dampen.

Each Ohio Class XL+² is hand-built, and because of the different parameters involved, can range in price from about \$1,000 each to as much as \$8,000 each. Total time from order to delivery is usually about a month. Keep in mind that Tellekamp and his team consider every part of the design, including the room, and how SRA's products interface with their surroundings. Be it a rack-based or floor-based application, SRA first concentrates on three main problem areas: air-borne energy, floor-based energy, and equipment-born energy. The latter is largely dependent on the first two areas, but also involves residual internal vibrations from power transformers.

The pair of platforms I received for my Burmester 911 mk.3 amplifiers cost \$3,000 each and arrived in massive wood crates. Packaged more carefully than the \$30k Burmester amplifiers they would be supporting, the SRA units' construction quality immediately became evident; workmanship and finish are flawless. My review samples came in high-gloss black, but three standard colors are available, and the platforms can be finished in custom colors for an additional cost.

A Vexing Moment

Even after setup, I remained highly skeptical. With a 12-inch thick concrete floor and a solid-state amplifier, how could I be subject to vibration issues? Tellekamp was quick to correct my presumptions: "Vibration will travel quickly through this floor. Stand at one end in your bare feet and have someone bounce a golf ball at the other end. You will feel it unless there are deep voids or saw cuts separating the solid mass."

Not wanting to risk the sound changing even in the slightest as a result of powering the amplifier on and off, I had a friend slide the SRA platform into place under one of the 911s, already powered on. Now, listening could begin in earnest. Then, in the midst of listening to recent Blue Note remasters, I immediately heard a darker background, with instrument decay having a wider degree of contrast. *(continued)*

Of course, this is where even the most seasoned listener may suspect the mind playing tricks—that new upgrade has to sound better. Moving on to a number of favorite tracks, the change with the SRA platform became almost spooky. Everything I played possessed a more organic, relaxed feel, and didn't come at the expense of any of the dynamic punch my system offers.

Over the next few days, these effects increased, and I felt psyched out by the whole experience. Every time I played something that I've heard many times before, more music came to the fore. It was time to make the switch to the 911 that wasn't supported by the SRA. What a difference. The soundstage collapsed somewhat and there was a level of cloudiness to the presentation that I hadn't noticed before. Everything sounded slightly more electronic and less natural. The effect was akin to unplugging the amplifiers from the RSA Maxim power conditioner and plugging straight into the wall. Think about the impact being similar to the effect of making a substantial upgrade to a component. For example, when listening to the same phono cartridge on my Rega P3 and P9, the tonality is similar. But the P9 retrieves more detail and offers more dynamic contrast.

With a pair of identical amplifiers at my disposal, it was incredibly easy to go back and forth for comparison rather than to have to rely on aural memory. Because at this stage of the game, you want to believe that the shiny new thing makes a difference. And fortunately, the difference is not understated—the SRA platform offers a marked improvement in every way and takes nothing away from the musical performance when in place.



What's in the Box, Doc?

While I've seen some hints and glimmers at what lurks inside the SRA platform, I still don't know exactly what's there. But whether it's some kind of unobtainable goo from Area 51 or a gigantic wad of Hubba Bubba, it works even better than claimed, and like the monolith in *2001*, it's well camouflaged.

After spending considerable time with the SRA platforms, I consider them essential to my system's performance and put the enhancement on par with what I've achieved with careful attention to power line conditioning. If you have a system that's capable of great resolution and dynamic swing, you will notice about 50% of the SRA's improved effect right away and the remainder in about 48 hours. This is not a subtle upgrade.

While I highly endorse placing the Ohio Class XL+2 underneath your amplifier(s), I also suggest first optimizing the rest of your system so that you can take full advantage of what the SRA platform offers. If you have major room and/or set-up issues, the added benefit will not be as evident. Still have a big plasma screen between your speakers or a large area of bare floor? These are bigger bang-for-the-buck improvements that need to be addressed first.

SRA will be sending us one of its GRAZ racks in the near future for evaluation, and we're very anxious to observe the improvement it makes to the rest of the reference system. For now, I give the SRA Ohio Class XL+2 platforms my highest recommendation. If you own a high-performance audio system, I guarantee it will offer a level of performance you didn't know existed. ●



The SRA Ohio Class XL+2 Equipment Platform
MSRP: Equipment dependent

MANUFACTURER

www.silentrunningaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Analog Source AVID Acutus Reference SP w/SME V and Koetsu Urushi

Digital Source dCS Paganini, 4 box stack w/Sooloos Control 15

Preamplifier Burmester 011

Power Amplifier Burmester 911 mk. 3

Speakers GamuT S9

Power Running Springs Dmitri and Maxim, RSA power cords

Cable Shunyata Aurora