

# ELECTROCOMPANIET ECI 6 DX MKII AMP/STREAMER

Hailing from Norway the Electrocompaniet ECI 6 DX MKII is an integrated amplifier and streaming solution costing £5999 (a version without streaming capabilities is available at £4999), Alan McIntosh plugs it into his system for HiFi Pig



Alan McIntosh

Any winter mountaineer will tell you one thing Norway does well (apart from training the hardest of winter soldiers) is ice. Ice for climbing that is – Rjukan in Norway is a mecca for ice climbers. Turns out the Norwegians also do something else well – HiFi. Electrocompaniet is continuing on their 40 odd year journey of audio excellence with the launch of their new ECI 6 MKII amplifier and also the ECI 6 DX MKII which integrates streaming into one solution. I love my digital as much as my other sources so was very keen to hear what the latter could do.

## CONSTRUCTION

Electrocompaniet has a history of nearly 50 years in the HiFi business (47, to be precise) and is renowned for class-leading products from Amplifiers to CD players to speakers. Ex-

ported worldwide but designed and manufactured in Norway the company proclaims “Our products have been designed to bring you the most rewarding musical experience possible in your own home” - not a bad ethos at all.

The ECI 6DX MK1 is the ECI 6 MKii Amplifier (also new to market) with the streamer and DAC added (also available as an add on after purchase) and sits alongside it and the ECI 80D in their Classic line of their product suite which also includes Pre and Power offerings, Phonostage, standalone streamer and CD player.

Unboxing the ECI 6DX MKII is no mean feat. Weighing in a hefty 20.5kg's and being as deep and wide as any amp I've tested - I made sure to warm up first (also make sure your shelves can accommodate it). The solidly built black slab of

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the outer casing is flanked by heat grilles and fronted by a clear, polished plexiglass type fascia covering, with a simple screen, power, volume, and input sections buttons (all resplendent in gold) with a rather sexy Electrocompaniet “e” logo which when powered up is “orbited” by a blue light denoting volume position. Hidden unless active to provide user set up information are 3 very small LED’s, the Electrocompaniet name completing the classic, unfussy but paradoxically slightly ostentatious aesthetic. It’s certainly no shrinking violet in the rack. An Electrompaniet “multi-device” remote is also provided which for me is overly busy - but I am picky about remotes.

When comparing the physical features of the ECI DX6 MKII versus the now replaced ECI 5 MKII we can see it has had a fascia update to streamline it, the input/output layout has been reconsidered well (to accommodate the Digital components) and there is an upgrade to the binding posts, as well as rigidity added to the main chassis. The rear layout and internal architecture redesign mean if you want, you can buy the ECI 6MKII and add the digital/streaming components later as a modular upgrade. Power is delivered from one large 650VA shielded toroidal transformer with 7 secondary coils, 880000uF capacitors and 16 different voltage regulated circuits for the amplifier, and a further 10 regulators for other circuits such as digital, streaming, etc.

While we are round the back we also see we have a plethora of inputs to choose from with both a balanced and 2 unbalanced analogue options, 2 digital Coaxial, 2 Toslink and 1 USB digital, and an RJ45 for setting up network and streaming inputs. This latter can then be disconnected as the 6DX can run wirelessly which is how I predominantly ran it. Even someone like me with multiple analogue as well as digital sources would be hard pushed to run out of inputs – the XLR being particularly useful for running SACD as I do. In addition, there is a Home Theatre input for those that need it, and for anyone wanting to use the 6DX as a pre we even get balanced and unbalanced Pre-outs. To top it off there is a USB for attaching a hard drive or other external storage.

From a digital/streaming perspective, the on-

board DAC (a Cirrus Logic design with Texas instruments sample rate convertors) operates to 24 bit/192khz on all inputs and can handle files up to DSD128. Wi-Fi is a nice robust 802.11ac protocol which, as well as its RJ45 connection handles the very generous 1Gbit/s meaning you won’t be struggling with streaming issues associated with bandwidth – I never once had a dropout or stutter even at 24/192. In terms of streaming services and options, again it’s a laundry list that covers all the bases like Spotify Connect as well as Qobuz (my primary service for every day and for testing), Tidal, Airplay, and Bluetooth, as well as Internet radio. Rendering is by DNLA allowing for easy connection of services and meaning you don’t need a separate streamer. Uncommonly, and a bonus, is that the Electrocompaniet proprietary control/streaming app (EC Play) is available across both iOS and Android – saving all the usual arguments! You can of course connect a pre-existing streamer via one of the digital inputs.

Running in Class A the input stage has zero feedback while the output stage runs with moderate feedback, that Electrocompaniet advises, is there to deliver a good balance of sound from bass to top The 6DX and its Amplifier sibling delivers a respectable if not earth-shattering 125W into 8ohms, 200W into 4 and a listed 370W into 2ohms with a very good -135db noise floor preamp wise. As with all Class A it gets warm so you need to give it air to breathe so don’t be cramming it into a tight unit, there are adequate vents and heat sinks but give it room.

## SOUND QUALITY

After having the 6DX in the rack for a couple of weeks, listening every day either as background while working or with more focus when time allowed, and moving between it and another review amp I have as well as my own reference amp (the Hegel H190) it was time to get down to proper critical listening. As usual, I have some go-to pieces that know really well and some others that just are so well recorded that they really help the listener hear what’s going on under the hood and how it may compare to other offerings.

First up is a collection of master quality record-

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ings by the Dutch reel-to-reel music company STS played back on my recently refurbished Tascam 32. A broad collection of ballads, jazz, and classical, recorded at such high quality that nothing is left behind. When coming to classical pieces such as Gabi Rynvelds wonderful take on Ravel, Debussy, and Handel I was actually so distracted by how wonderful the music was and how “there” everything was that I forgot to really assess what was going on but of course – that was the assessment. Large and rich, well-timed with a smooth but not too glassy, natural reproduction and great imaging, the merest hint of warmth and veneer from bottom to mid, but wonderfully engaging to listen to.

Moving to I, Robot from Alan Parsons (MoFi) on vinyl that same vibrancy and weight of sound paired with a light touch and nimble treble had me tapping fingers and feet and revelling in the music, that super funk bassline and handclap of The Voice almost had me on my feet (almost!). The imaging and full bass really shine through and with the right room you feel very involved in the sound.

Switching gears to stream Trentmøller’s Obverse album (Qobuz 24/44.1) via the EC play app, and we get that pace, rhythm, and solid bass again. No slouch but definably weighty in its playback you’re getting a thumping, powerful drive that Trentmøller deserves, his dark, edgy atmospheric soundscapes catching you off guard as well as making your heart beat a bit faster – all conducted with aplomb by the 6DX. Streaming Bladerunner 2049 OST (16/44.1) from Qobuz via my Aries G1 via coax demonstrates again that the DAC implementation here has been handled very well – that bass is gut hitting and visceral, while the synth stabs, sweeps and piano hits are clear and gripping, although to my ears streaming directly from the Aries G1 does perform a little better than streaming via the 6DX’s DNLA render from the EC Play app - if only marginally so - the G1 streamer is more than double the £1000 price upgrade for the streaming module of the Electrocompaniet.

As I close the session with John Coltrane’s Love Supreme on SACD and its aching, ethereal celebration of his faith that is both challenging at times, but beautiful to listen to - nothing is

taken away here. That strong “fullness” that Electrocompaniet achieve with that minimal by design feedback on Class A design only serves to provide the very deserving bed on which to serve up this Jazz masterpiece. Overall I am left with a very contended and wry grin, a great satisfaction at a day’s musical enjoyment and am forced to give a nod of “well played” to the Norwegians. Moreover, it feels like more time with this amp would only offer up more and more enjoyment of it.

## CONCLUSION

Across a broad spectrum of genres and formats the ECI 6DX MKII really serves up a very enjoyable listen. It drives hard and low when you need it too, with a strong warm and rich bass response but doesn’t sacrifice much at all further up the scale, with smooth, separated and open mid’s as well as good detail in the top sections, without being at all overly bright or jarring. Imaging is superb overall especially with recordings that offer it up well. At times the overall impression can be more fluid than clinical, a sheen more than a microscope on sound but that is no detractor as it’s very hard not to just sit back and get lost in music listening to the 6DX MKII. Speaker matching may well be warranted to ensure you really hit the mark for personal tastes, but that fullness in the bass, natural timbre and natural liveliness just pulls you in. Combining the construction, aesthetics, functionality and sheer sonic competency, Electrocompaniet have produced for me a very powerful package and a well-functioning amplifier/streamer that simply deserves to be listened to at a very reasonable price point. Their aim for a rewarding listening experience has been achieved, and then some.

## AT A GLANCE

**Build Quality:** Solid, well thought, super range of inputs and pre-out including balanced, with stand-out aesthetics, a 22KG box of refined capability.

**Sound Quality:** Wonderful, rich and warm where you need it, strong across the board, detailed yet silky, seekers of clinical reproduction may want to consider careful speaker matching to cool the sound and open the mid’s





and highs further but superbly enjoyable for hours on end.

**Value For Money:** Certainly this isn't a budget offering for many, but Electrocompaniet have the pedigree to justify this price point and the wealth of inputs, high quality DAC/ streaming integration, build quality, power and of course sound quality for me do justify the investment. This is not a "buy now, upgrade later" solution, this is a long term keeper for me and many I would bet.

**Pros:**

Integration of DAC/Digital streaming and amplifier, plethora of inputs (inc Pre and HT), build quality, rich enjoyable sound, the application offered for both iOS and Android.

**Cons:**

Overly busy remote.  
Blue LED readout possibly not for everyone.

**Price:** €5999 RRP, €4999 without the Streaming capabilities. Superb quality DAC and streaming capabilities, class-leading grip and low distortion, clean yet organic, unmuddled sound quality, very high-quality execution of build all round. Ease of setup and control.

