

# STEREO STEREO

MAGAZIN FÜR HIFI • HIGH END • MUSIK

Off-Print from STEREO 8/2008



## THE PEDAL TO THE METAL

Einstein's MC phono preamplifier "The Turntable's Choice" is the only component coming from this famed tube manufacturer which doesn't feature a single tube in its design. Does it work?

by Uwe Kirbach

These days, old and new analog fans alike are all floating on cloud nine it seems. Even the mainstream media is now reporting that good old vinyl has in fact comfortably outlived all other music media. By the way; actual vinyl sales are in fact even higher than reported, since many sales channels aren't even being counted by the reported numbers.

There simply is no question: vinyl is here to stay. Unfortunately, all this excitement over

the comeback of the one format which easily appears to outlive all music format wars has a thorn as well: simply put, too much of the available hardware is non musical sounding crap. There's pretty and ugly turntables with fatal dynamic and rhythmic flaws. Utterly overpriced cartridges, who's international prices

### Components

Drive: Brinkmann LaGrange

TONARME: Thales, Brinkmann 12"

Pickup: 2 x EMT Brinkmann ti, Transfiguration Temper W, AF-1, Benz LP

PHONOPREAMPS: Gryphon Orestes LE, Kondo KSL SF-Z, Nagra VPS

PREAMP: Kondo KSL-M7, Jadis JP 80 MC, Unison Reference

seem to vary by up to 70%. Phono preamplifiers for which I wouldn't pay even half the asking price. Reasons for my stern reaction are simple: dark, rhythmically incapable, fatiguing, harsh and hard are words I use to describe the available choices, which increasingly and all too often appear to fit more and

more higher-end components. A trend for those aspiring to skim off the top?

What a relief then to hear the first sounds coming of "The Turntable's Choice"; made by Bochum's premier high end manufacturer Einstein, playing back Beethoven's famed "Hammerklavier" piano sonata. Brilliant, vital, decisive, yet containing all the dramatic subtleties, with which Mauricio Pollini is playing this acclaimed piece - that's the sound that comes through this black and chrome tube apparatus.

If a phono preamplifier is incapable of delivering these goods from the beginning, then you never will have a chance to truly understand music. Music lives precisely within this relentless power, which contrasts all following lyrical islands and allows the drama to come through with all its tensions. If you are looking to get an even more decisive, roomier and yet more subtle presentation, such as when

said "Hammerkla-

vier" sonata is interpreted by Claudio Arrau, then you should experiment with the placement of "The Turntable's Choice" power supply. Simple woodblocks, or those special Megatone TU-220 MT made by Harmonix worked best, when placed one each on the side of the power cord, two each on the other side.

Portishead's latest album is equally difficult to understand and digest, even without the fantastic sound quality of Beethoven's late piano sonatas. Playing back "Third", The Turntable's Choice clearly shows how it is capable of resolving all the subtleties of the recording's complex musical passages without ever leaving out any of the joy or energy contained in the piece. Amazing how on "Hunter", the room is smoothly filled with all the force coming from behind the drums. Equally, "Nylon Smile" displays the spatial freedom and three dimensionality between all percussive elements and guitars. This outstanding phono preamplifier manages to bring about all the bursts of adrena-



**The supplied impedance plugs allow quick and audiophile adjustments to the impedance of the phono section up to 520 Ohm. For certain cartridges one can specify a higher input impedance at time of ordering**

lin while allowing the listener to closely observe the events from afar.

A comparison to Nagra's phono preamplifier VPS (Stereo 7/08) proved to be an exciting venture. The tube output stage focuses on eliciting colorful tonal qualities and aspects of the recording whilst stressing the homogenized structures of the recording. Beth Gibbon's vocals sounded rather intimate, much as you would expect from a tube based design. By contrast, Einstein's phono preamplifier focuses more on the individual sonic layers, allowing the listener a greater panoramic vision of the performance. I can almost envision the representatives of each school of sonic truth standing before each

**One can clearly see the double mono construction of the design, which is thermally optimized within the tube.**

component claiming that theirs is the one most closely resembling musical reality.

Listening to Kondo's phono combo KSL SF-Z and M7 (Stereo 8/06) quickly shows however that each school of thought is correct, simply choosing to close in on the ideal from two different angles. The fact that Einstein's phono stage has already achieved the ideal in most respects, whilst being priced far below any viable competition, leaves it in a special league far above the masses indeed.

Rolf Weiler, Einstein's technical genius and designer, usually leading level headed arguments centering around his seemingly radical ideas, says he had to "burn the midnight oil" designing this particular model. For "The Turntable's Choice" he used 24 single transistors per channel, mounted in a coupling free design which through use of a parallel stage, minimizes the noise floor to a technical minimum. The output stage is

mounted on a large heat sink which stabilizes the design thermally and eliminates the subsonic problems which plague so many other phono stages. This, along with the passive voltage regulation allows for a completely passive RIAA equalization which through this design choice gives up a bit in overall gain, but realizes a far more linear phase response. The round aluminum tube with its brass end caps completes the brilliant design elements. Together, they serve to keep the temperature inside the unit homogenized and eliminate the effects of microphonics.

Record upon record, one quickly realizes the brilliance and exemplary execution of this design, particularly as it relates to inherently low voltage phono signal. One last such example is Alela Dianas album, "The Pirate's Gospel". Seemingly without any delays, her voice rises dynamically to such highs that you literally feel it in your guts. This effect is markedly lost when played back via different phono stages which don't play as well as Einstein's The Turntable's Choice. If turntables could vote, I'd have a hot tip! Uwe Kirbach

*Uwe Kirbach*

## EINSTEIN THE TURNTABLE'S CHOICE

um €3500 (single ended), balanced  
Version um €6500  
Dimantion: 10x11x25 cm (BxHxT)  
Guarante: 2 Jahre, Vertrieb: Einstein  
Audio Components  
Telefon: 0234 - 9731512  
www.einstein-audio.de

Sensual power, extreme delineation of instrumental details and spatial cues, complete lack of background noise even when using headphones. This phono stage combines so many outstanding virtues that you simply can't let go once you have experienced it.

### TEST

The measurements for this phono preamplifier speak for themselves: 82 db signal to noise ratio at 0,5 millivolts, featuring 67.5db of gain. Hiss is therefore not present even with cartridges featuring very low output voltages. The double mono design yields channel separation of 100db. Very low output resistance of 50 Ohm - top!

STEREO - TEST	
SOUND	100%
PRICE/PERFORMANCE	
★★★★☆	
VERY GOOD	