



TRAVELLER BETWEEN WORLDS

Why should a phono preamplifier have to weigh 28 kilos? I have no idea. Especially since its engineer may have rather wanted to enclose the whole apparatus in a neat little wooden box.

Granted, the bit about the wooden box is conjecture. The thing is, I have a certain idea of what Thorsten Löesch considers right and appropriate, and I would not have thought a fortress the likes of this splendid phono preamplifier would fall into that category. I will admit though, I haven't asked him.

I have come to know Thorsten's signature over quite a number of years in the

international DIY audio community, where he has been active for a very long time. Thorsten was born and raised in the eastern part of our republic and a few years just prior to the reunification of Germany, in the eighties, he 'hopped over' the border and made his way west, to London. If my memory serves me well, whilst employed in the administration department of a large insurance company, he became very involved

in the audio scene and considerably broadened his knowledge base about music, sound in general and related equipment. His contributions in related discussion fora were invariably most interesting. Often, he swam against the tide, steadfast in his own conceptions of how to reach a certain goal. He held his views adamantly against the rest. Everyone familiar with these fora will understand that this can be an exhausting exercise; self-assured outspokenness is bound to provoke antagonism. Thorsten did just that but stayed and fought it out. Because, you see, for everything he stated he had the necessary background knowledge on hand to substantiate his statements – some of which might have been called exotic, but convincingly so. In short, Thorsten was someone who was taken seriously, a hard-earned reputation indeed.

Through those years, he released a substantial number of extremely interesting amplifiers, phono stages, loudspeakers, cables and other kit; to this day, his designs have left people, musically, very satisfied.

And then he left the scene, he actually staged his departure from the DIY community with a real sense of drama. I remember well his thread entitled ‘Goodbye Yellow Brick Road’ after the well-known Elton John song published in the diyaudio.com forum. On 25 July 2006 he announced that he would henceforth, abstain from activity in his individual name. Instead, he would redirect his creative power towards a commercial project.

That particular project saw the light of day some time ago already, the company is called ‘Abbingdon Music Research’ and is based in London. Over there, in his own inimitable way, Thorsten builds gear like no one else does. Vincent Luke is the man who takes care of the commercial side. A large part of the assembly is done in China, without this, the formidable designs would barely be accomplishable at near affordable prices. Notwithstanding, AMR components are not cheap; the PH-77 phono preamplifier, the subject of this review, costs 8.800 Euro over here. For that money, one does not just acquire a huge amount of kilos in the

guise of an excitingly styled aluminium case, but also plenty of technology and a vast array of features. The PH-77 sports three widely configurable inputs and one ‘direct’ input. There is a choice of eight gain settings and 32-step adjustable loads each for MC impedance and MM capacitance matching. Furthermore, the PH-77 is not restricted to the contemporary RIAA standard equalisation curve; no, there are a further 22 additional equalisation curves to select from – 6 thereof starting from the early days of stereophonic playback right through to today and 17 from the mono era. That makes the PH-77 the perfect tool for collectors of historical recordings. All of the above can be easily selected from the listening seat. Indeed, the compact metal infrared remote features just about every control function needed for daily use.

Thorsten never was a ‘dedicated’ follower of any textbook edicts. Instead, he implements whatever he finds produces the best result in any given set up; with a preference for valves – if and where they make sense. Since the latter is not the case at a phono preamplifier’s input, semiconductors are the preferred solution here. Of course, not mass production OpAmps but a ‘bespoke’ discrete design, I do believe I read the

Other components

Turntable

- [Simon Yorke S-10 / Aeroarm](#)
- [Acoustic Solid Machine / SME M2-12](#)
- [Clearaudio Master Reference / Graham Phantom](#)

Pickup Cartridge

- [MFSL C3.5](#)
- [Jan Allaerts MC2](#)
- [Grado Statement I](#)

Preamplifier

- [MalValve preamp three line](#)
- [Accustic Arts Tube Preamp II](#)

Power Amplifier

- [Accustic Arts Amp II](#)
- [SymAsym](#)

Integrated Amplifier

- [Quad II Classic Integrated](#)

Loudspeaker

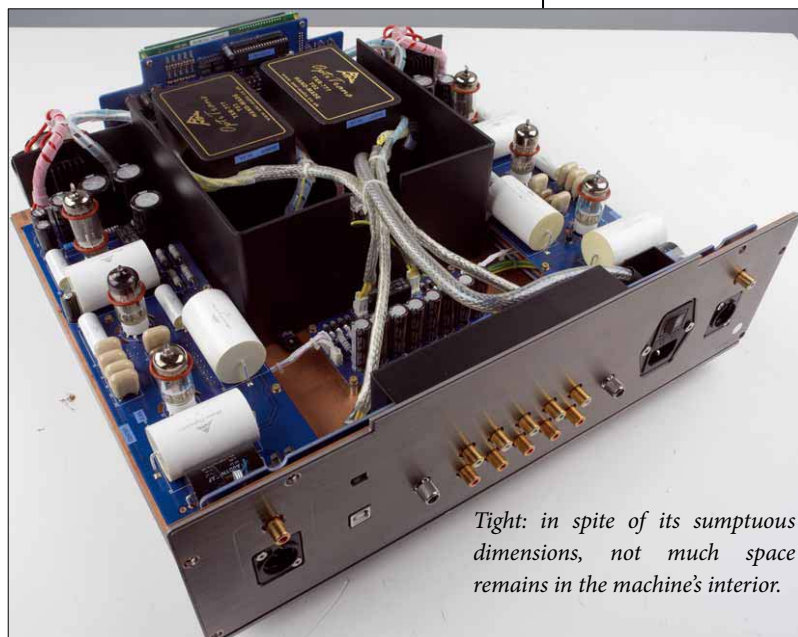
- [Isophon Cassiano](#)
- [“Mini HB“ Klang + Ton design](#)
- [Progressive Audio Diablo](#)

Cables & Accessories

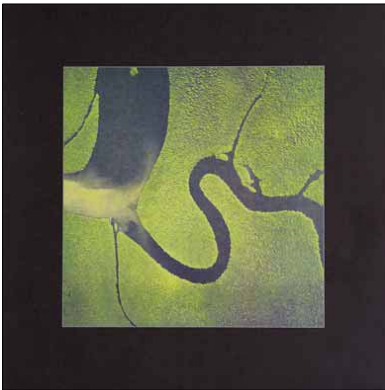
- [PS Audio power conditioner and HMS](#)
- [NF-Kabel von Transparent und van den Hul](#)
- [Phonocable: van den Hul Straight Wire](#)
- [Loudspeaker cable: Transparent](#)

Other Phonostages compared to

- [Malvalve preamp three phono](#)
- [Burmester 100](#)
- [Audio Research PH-6](#)



Tight: in spite of its sumptuous dimensions, not much space remains in the machine's interior.



Music played

Dead Can Dance

[The Serpent's Egg](#)

Ryan Adams

[Heartbreaker](#)

Leonard Cohen

[Songs From The Road](#)

Stanley Clarke

[If This Bass Could Only Talk](#)

John Coltrane Quartet

[Ballads](#)

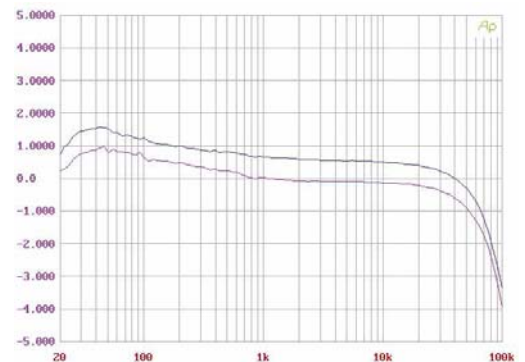
*Three inputs plus one 'direct':
the latter's impedance can
be adjusted.*

word 'Germanium' somewhere. Further on, gain is taken care of by valves; zero negative feedback and single-ended, naturally!

An extremely interesting concept is implemented in the power supply of this machine. This features no less than five transformers but those supplying the audio assembly blocks do so completely without stabilising circuits. The latter will indeed result in degradation of the sound in many cases – one of those things that I was made aware of, indeed, I learned from Thorsten. On the other hand, of course, stable and interference-free power supply is essential for gear of this calibre. That is why an ingenious circuit called 'OptiMains' was devised in order to weed out disturbing DC- and HF-issues from the mains. Moreover, this will also power the machine off, should the incoming mains run unacceptably outside of normal bounds. Where there is no stabilizing feedback, one is dependent on a stable input voltage to keep operating parameters from straying off course. AMR presents quite a number of more or less secretive proprietary features that carry designations commencing with 'Opti', all of which are ideas that originated out of the ordinary. For those interested, the manufacturer's website offers a wealth of information.

The PH-77's passive equalisation is performed in two gain stages. This is also where switching between its numerous filter functions takes place. To that end, premium grade relays and a plethora of custom-made capacitors are deployed.

There is an on-board A/D-converter that delivers a 24bit/96kHz sampled audio signal to a USB connection on the back of the machine –



Measurements

Technical-Comments

The frequency response measured with the classical RIAA equalization shows a peak of almost 1dB around the 40 Hz mark, from there it drops smoothly to the standard value at 1kHz. The frequency range reaches up to almost 100 kHz; which represents an extremely broad bandwidth. Remarkable is the uniform level difference of about 1dB between both channels – not uncommon for zero-feedback circuits such as this one. Where distortion and noise are concerned, things are in best order: we measured 0,11/0,09 % THD in MM-/MC-mode and a signal-to-noise ratio 67/71.8 dB. In terms of power consumption, the PH-77 is no slouch, it consumes a hearty 68 watts.

I've taken notice of this feature but have to admit that I have not tried it.

Aside from its overabundant functionality, the PH-77 is first and foremost an outstanding phono stage. As such, it confidently displays its own distinct sonic footprint: an earthy, warm sonic fundament with a potent, visceral and colourful bass. With ascending frequencies, one becomes more and more aware of the valve contribution to the sound. It is that





Valves primarily take care of the gain in the PH-77, only at the input, semiconductors lend a helping hand.

magical flair that one simply cannot achieve with solid-state. That big breath of air, the awesome transparency, the perfect effortlessness. The higher the AMR climbs the frequency ladder, the more it appears free from every constraint. Voices are rendered with smoothness and substance alike, and then there are the uncannily unrestricted and realistic sounding highs – this is all really *first class*. The soundstage is large, even very large – and that again supports the overwhelming impression of sonic freedom.

All of the above along with the machine's standard parameters; once one starts spinning older records and begins the search for the correct equalisation, one enters an adventure playground, the fascination and lure of which is virtually inescapable. Ultimately, this is an incredibly versatile tone control, and there will be cases, when you will likely find yourself faced with the same question as I: which of the equalisation curves is precisely the right one? in which case I took the one I liked best. Switching between different equalisation curves, I was amazed to find how much the character of a recording changed not merely tonally but also dynamically. Fortunately, the PH-77 offers the finest resolution as well as large dynamical bandwidth, and is able to make such differences audible with ease.

Nice job, Thorsten. Care to put assembly instructions for something comparable on the Net?

Holger Barske



Rectification, amplification and buffering: no lack of cutting-edge components in the AMR, as the SMD rectifying diodes at the front, evidence.



AMR PH-77

· Price	8.800 Euro
· Warranty	2 Years
· Distributor	Fastaudio, Stuttgart
· Tel	0711 4808888
· Website	www.fastaudio.com
· W x H x D	460 x 160 x 470 mm
· Weight	circa. 28 kg

Summing up ...

The AMR PH-77 is a luxury toy of maximum calibre; with its variable equalisation, one is certain to achieve optimum playback conditions for every record at hand. The gear is comfortably operated from the listening chair – one that you will loathe to leave, because of the superbly uninhibited musical performance.



Unfortunately, one still must get up...to turn the record over then, a pity really.



Purist operation with only five buttons and a very informative display: in terms of design, the PH-77 shows it knows a trick or two.