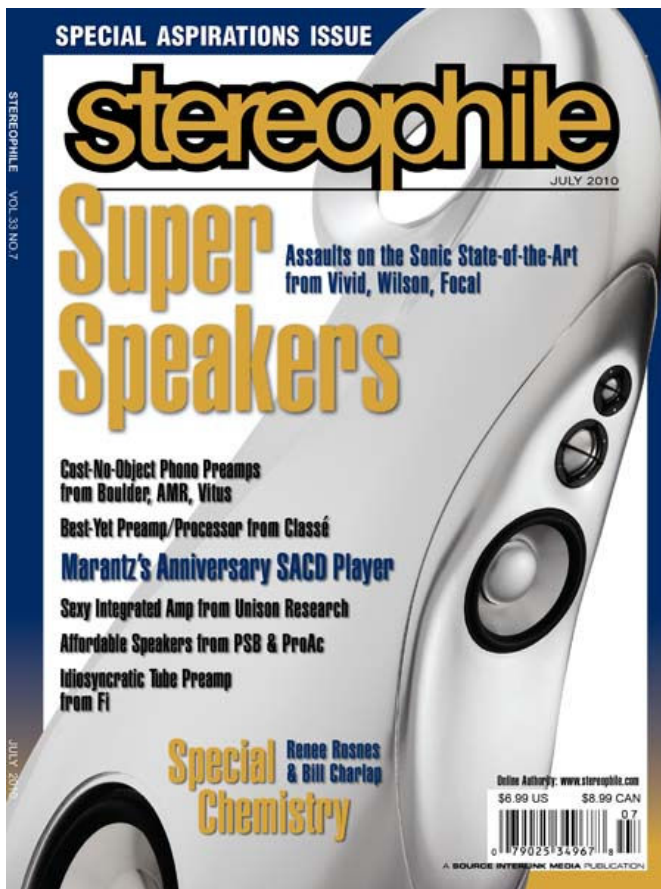




AMR PH-77 Phono Equaliser Review

By Michael Fremer

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“Beneath the gorgeous chassis of Abbingdon Music Research’s tubed PH-77 Reference Class Phono Equaliser (\$11,995) is a true dual-mono phono preamplifier with unprecedented, microprocessor-controlled features.”

“**Sweet Sound!** I can’t vouch for that –147dB noise spec—John Atkinson will be writing a Measurements” follow-up” in a future issue—but I can say that the PH-77 was remarkably quiet, even through its higher gain settings. In fact, it was subjectively just about as quiet as the solid-state phono preamps reviewed here. Quiet musical passages unfolded against dead-black silence. With nothing on the turntable and my ear pressed to a tweeter, I heard only a faint, smooth hiss at my normal volume level.”

“The PH-77 produced the easy musical flow and harmonic richness and delicacy that only tube amplification seems to offer, ramped up a few notches with the addition of tube rectification. Those who relish tubes’ sense of unimpeded musical flow will revel in the PH-77’s liquidity and continuousness. While rich and full, instrumental textures were not too ripe or romanticized. Attacks were reasonably fast and properly sharp, yet supple. Cymbals sizzled nicely, and kick drums had both solid body and convincing physical definition. Acoustic and electric bass lines unfurled with their rhythmic and harmonic structures intact, though the PH-77’s character in the bottom end was more suited to the acoustic instrument. Unlike some tubed phono preamps, the PH-77 completely avoided the combination of rhythmic sluggishness and loss of bottom-end definition with exaggerated image size and lack of control.”

“The AMR’s overall tonality was subjectively linear, and free of the warm lumps on bottom or curtailed highs some listeners associate with tubes. Instrumental harmonic structures were vividly painted with a full palette of colors. Well-recorded massed strings had a realistic golden sheen, with more than enough detail and bite to satisfy, while brass sparkled with metallic intensity instead of descending into velvety romanticism.”

“Were you to have heard through the PH-77 my *ffs* pressing of Falla’s *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* backed with Rodrigo’s *Concierto de Aranjuez*, with Ataulfo Argenta conducting the National Orchestra of Spain (LP, London CS 6046), you’d surely have blurted “I’ll take it!” That’s how richly and delicately drawn, in three dimensions, were the elements of the orchestra, free of electronic artifacts, on a wide, deep soundstage against a black backdrop pierced by Narciso Yepes’s precisely rendered classical guitar. And I could go from those recordings, of great delicacy and beauty, to the new Experience Hendrix/Sony Legacy AAA Jimi Hendrix reissues and not feel seriously shortchanged by the PH-77’s rendering of rock music.”

“The PH-77 is a sweet, tonally well-balanced, quiet performer that produced a large, authoritative sonic picture packed with honest detail. Its weakest suit was its inability to produce full macrodynamic expression.”

“I hope AMR can introduce a less expensive version of the PH-77 with only a single, direct input—I think most serious listeners won’t be using the switchable inputs of this superlative-sounding phono preamp.”