

sional to the sound, with more body and weight, the X-10 "brought the X-Ray's performance up to that of a world-class CD player," said ST. Offers no gain, however, and has no control functions. "Class A for what it is" he sums up (Vol.27 No.12)

#### **Placette Audio Remote Volume Control: \$1000**

A paperback-sized black box with one set of unbalanced inputs and outputs, a toggle switch and remote, a row of LEDs that light up to indicate the relative volume level, and a 125-setp attenuator built entirely with super-pre-Vishay S-102 foil resistors. The Placette centered and locked images into place, improved transparency by removing grunge, and snapped sonic pictures into focus. BD: "The result was stunning." Against the Sonic Euphoria PLC, the Placette was better at resolving fine-scale and inner detail, adding complexity, texture, and volume to notes which providing a larger, deeper soundstage. It lacked the PLC's dynamics and solid, dense images, however. Comes with a 30-day, money-back guarantee. (Vol.27 No. 6, Vol.29 No.1 WWW)

#### **Shindo Masseto: \$11,500**

Like the Aurieges, the Masseto is a full-function preamplifier, but adds a selectable choice between moving-magnet and moving-coil phono inputs. The dual-mono power supply is based on a pair of Philips 6X4 WA rectifier tubes, the phono stage uses one Philips 6189W and one Philips 12AT7 per channel, and its line stage uses a single LCP86 triode/pentode per channel. With a "stunning noise floor," the Masseto consistently conveyed music in a way that allowed Art to become fully immersed in the in the performance. "Time after time," he said, I found myself responding to my hi-fi the way I respond to read music." (Vol.30 Nos.7 & 10 WWW)

#### **Simaudio Moon P-8: \$12,000**

This dual-mono, two-chassis preamp is as imposing and impressive as Sim's W-8 power amp. While the Preamplifier chassis contains all the audio circuitry, the Controller chassis includes a power supply capable of driving the preamplifier and an additional device, such as phono stage or DAC. Setup was simple, and from first power-up, the P8 "performed faultlessly and impressively," KR described it as being "by far, the quietest preamp" he'd ever heard, detecting only a slightly mellow toner character in comparison to other components. JA admired the P-8's excellent linearity and superb channel matching. "A superbly engineered component," he said, and is planning on doing a "Follow-Up". (Vol.29 No. 11 WWW)

#### **Viola Cadenza: \$16,000**

The Cadenza is a solid-state two-channel line-stage with an outboard power-supply and beautiful but understated fit'n' finish. With "in-your-face physicality" and impressive agility, the Cadenza proved "deeply rooted in music as a sensual experience," offering textures and nuances that provoked WP to root through his record collection in search of audiophile epiphanies. JA's measurements determined that the Cadenza should be used with a power amplifier having an input impedance of at least 20k ohms if the bass is not to roll off prematurely. Otherwise, he was very pleased: "It is hard to see how it could add anything adverse to a system's sound quality." Lack or a remote will be an obstacle for some. (Vol.28 No.12 WWW)

#### **VTL TL TL-7.5 Series II Reference: \$16,500**

With both delicacy and power, "the VTL TL-7.5 combined a seemingly molecular level of resolution with an agile, flowing facility at presenting context, meaning, and emotion." The overall sound was entirely grainless and transparent, with true, deep, and tight bass, and incredibly fast, smooth, and open treble. PB: "It is, by no small margin, the finest line stage I have ever heard at length." MF found that the TL-7.5 was a "smooth operator," with a "sumptuous but not excessive midband glow and smooth overall musical flow." It may have sacrificed dynamic expression, but it offered long-term listen ability, tunefulness, and emotion. For JA, the TL-7.5 was "a delight to test"; it displayed "virtually bombproof

measured performance." PB chose the TL-7.5 over the Halcro dm 10, BAT VK-51SE, and Levinson No.32: "[Its] strongest suit remains its complete lack of discernible sonic character.... It's the finest pure line stage I have heard, barely nipping the Halcro by a few thousandths of a second at the finish line of this Grand Prix." "Slightly soft on the bottom," adds MF. One of Stereophile "Joint Amplification Components" for 2003. BD decided that the TL-7.5 removed a slight dulling and veiling of the sound in his system, creating a larger, airier soundstage with improved clarity and transparency. The Series II replaces the original model's 12AX7 tube with a 12AU7, and reconfigures the surrounding circuit to run the tube at a substantially higher current. Sonic benefits included increased speed, openness, and improved dynamics at the frequency extremes. Its slightly cooler tonal balance and forward presentation sometimes bordered on hardness, however. "While the original TL-7.5 didn't sound at all, the Series II sounds better," mused BD. His "Follow-Up" determined that, despite the manufacturer's concerns, the TL-7.5 was only slightly affected by the use and choice of power conditioning, sounding cleanest, fastest, and most detailed with the Audience Adept Response, said BD. Upgrade of Series I TL-7.5 to Series II costs \$4500. (Vol.26 No.10, Vol.27 Nos. 1 & 4, Vol.28 No.12, Vol.30 Nos.5 & 6 WWW)

#### **VTL TL-6.5 Signature: \$9500**

The TL-6.5 uses two 12AU7 tubes and MOSFET output devices. It is derived from the cost-no-object, two-chassis TL-7.5 Reference, but uses only two power transformers rather than the TL-7.5's three, and has smaller output capacitors and a higher output impedance. It offered "battleship reliability, faultless microprocessor control of tube operation, and extraordinary switching control—as well as first-rate sound," said LG. He was bowled over by the VTL's dramatic dynamic contrasts, clear and open midrange and treble, and solid, tuneful bass, but only after two weeks' break-in. JA was similarly impressed by the VTL's "overall excellent measured performance." (Vol.30 No.6 WWW)

#### **B**

#### **Atoll Electronique PR300: \$2000**

The PR300 offers five line inputs and a bypass for a surround-sound processor, Atoll's only concession to home theater and multichannel sound, and uses a gain section based entirely on discrete transistors. In combination with the Atoll CD200 CD player and AM200 amp, the PR300 offered a sound that was "sweet and harmonically rich—never threadbare or hyperanalytical," with a slightly laid-back overall presentation. Otherwise smooth, clear, and quiet, the PR300 sounded a bit congested and hard during heavy-going orchestral passages. But "Very quiet, nicely detailed, hard to name another solid-state preamp at the price which outperforms the Atoll," he sums up. (Vol.29 No.9)

#### **Audio Valve Eclipse: \$4200**

The Eclipse's clear acrylic top plate is machined to include two rounded ventilation slots for its four Electro-Harmonix 12 AU7A tubes. Its neutral tonal balance, clear and forward sound, and wide dynamic range created a musical presentation that matched drama with good senses of size and scale. It lacked, however, the Shindo Masseto's ability to closely follow melodic lines. "A lovely product, and a decent value for the money," concluded AD. BJR agrees, describing the Eclipse as a "liquid, dynamic, and colorless tube preamplifier whose strengths are many and flaws nonexistent. Ruggedly constructed, visually gorgeous, and a superb value." Though he was unimpressed by this preamp's implementation of different input sensitivities JA decided the Eclipse measured "well for a tube design." For best results, the Eclipse should be used with a power amp having an input impedance of at least 30k ohms, he cautioned. (Vol.30 No.8 WWW)

#### **AyreK-5xe:\$295G**

Like all of Ayre's 5-series products, the K-5xe uses the Ayre Conditioner, a built-in RFI filter that works in parallel with the AC line to reduce background noise, grain,

and hash. The K-5xe added nothing to the original signal and had no sonic signature of its own. ST: "It just got out of the way subsequently adding that this "superb solid I state line-stage preamp is everything you could ask for: neutral, detailed, dynamic, exceptionally low noise, fun to use." JA is working on a full review, but feels high Class B is a fair rating. Black finish adds \$250. (Vol.29 No.5)

#### **JuicyMusic BlueBerry Xtreme: \$1895**

Made in the US and designed by industry veteran Mark I Deneen, the BlueBerry is a full-size, all-tube preamp with line and phono sections, balance controls, a mono switch, and an attractive solid-wood cabinet. Used as a line-level preamp with CD players or external phono preamps, the BlueBerry Xtreme provided realistic textures, good rhythmic performance, and chunky, three-dimensional images. The timbral balance of its phono section, however, sounded slightly tipped-down in the upper bass. "A great-sounding, well-engineered preamp with styling that pretends the last 25 years didn't happen," said AD. Cream option adds \$500. (Vol.29 No.10 WWW)

#### **PrimaLuna ProLogue Three: \$1599**

Built by hand with point-to-point wiring, the beautiful ProLogue Three has a fully vented chassis of heavy-gauge steel with five coats of hand-rubbed finish, and a removable metal cage that fits over the tube compartment. "Typically tube like," the Three was smooth, open, transparent, and easy on the ears, but lacked some presence in the upper midrange and treble. Pairing it with the ProLogue Seven power amp, however, provided a more optimal combination of accuracy and musicality. "Outstanding value," said RD. JA advised: "The Three's decreasing linearity at low frequencies means that it should not be used with power amplifiers whose input impedance drops much below 50k ohms." The matching Prologue Seven's 77k ohms will be fine, he notes. (Vol.29 No.12 WWW)

#### **Promitheus Audio TVC: \$680, as reviewed \$\$\$**

Built to order and evincing meticulous craftsmanship and impressive fit, finish, and appearance, the TVC passive preamp is sold direct to customers from the Promitheus factory in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and comes with a 30-day money-back guarantee. It uses only wires, connectors, and two balanced transformers to provide a pure, clean, smooth presentation, "taking the electronic edge off everything without dulling the sound," said ST. In addition, Sam found it "utterly transparent at any volume setting" as it delivered superb detail and dynamics. "Solves the usual problems of a passive preamp via transformers," he sums up. "But will you have enough gain?" he wonders. Prices start at \$320, shipping adds \$60. (Vol.30 No.7)

#### **Shindo Aurieges: \$3895**

The handmade, limited-edition Aurieges is built into a steel enclosure and beautifully finished in metallic-green lacquer. It uses four NOS tubes in the preamp section and a 6X4 rectifier tube in its external power supply. With an extremely low noise floor and excellent sense of momentum and flow, the Aurieges offered a sound that was "wonderful and engaging." Above all, it emphasized "the ideal of making music—and in doing so came closer to re-creating great art than anything else," said AD, though he cautions that its high output impedance mandates care in system matching. Line-only version: \$2995. (Vol.30 No.6 WWW)

#### **Sonic Euphoria PLC: \$1295**

BD was impressed by this autotransformer-based passive line stage's overall presence and excellent dynamics, and by how it produced solid, dimensional images. While BD had no trouble integrating the PLC into his system, JA's measurements indicated that careful consideration should be taken in matching source components and power amp. Otherwise, "a well-engineered piece of kit," JA concluded. AD noted accurate pitch relationships, and excellent musical flow and momentum, with absolutely no dynamic compression or bass attenuation. "Consider the PLC's \$1295 price to be the