

CONSTANTINE SOO'S
dagOGO Review
 A UNIQUE AUDIOPHILE EXPERIENCE

The Italian AUDIA's pre-amplification effort
 per Constantine Soo's ears:
Audia Flight PRE

April, 2006

AUDIA
 FLIGHT



Audia Flight PRE Specifications:

Frequency response: 3 Hz ~ 1 MHz (-3dB)
Gain range: -90 dB / +10 dB
Gain resolution: 0.05 dB
Slew-Rate: > 200 V/μS
THD: < 0.05%
S / N ratio: 105 dB
Inputs: 2 x balanced (XLR), 4 x single-ended (RCA)
Input impedance: 51kΩ / 680 pF single-ended, 300kΩ balanced
Output impedance: 12Ω single-ended, 50Ω balanced
Main voltage: 110-115 / 220-240 Vac, 50-60 Hz
Power Consumption: 60W
Dimensions: 420 X 113 X 380 mm (w x h x d)
Weight: 15 Kg
MSRP: \$6,995

Manufacturer:

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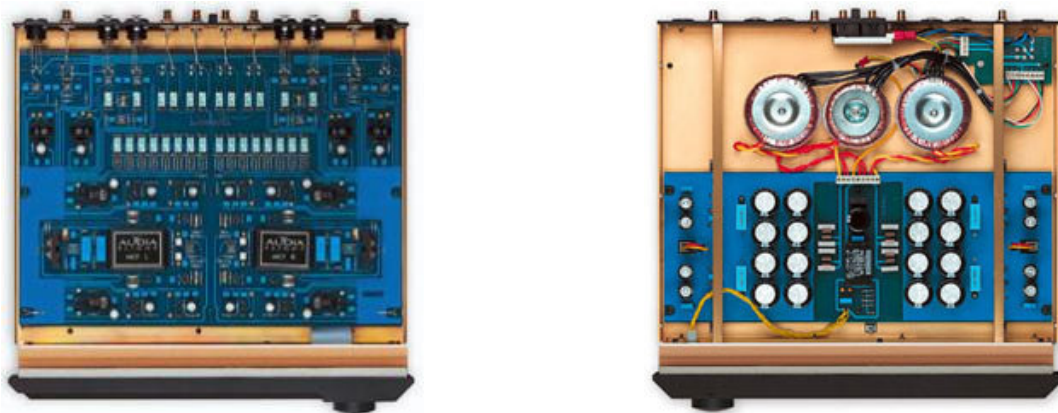
The high-end audio is a hobby of variety and objectivity. In each of the industry's primary product categories, there are polarities in approach and technology – such as the RIAA-based phonograph and

the 16-bit/44.1kHz-based digital playback systems, MOSFET and tube-based amplifications, and finally, cone and planar loudspeaker technologies – that the proponents for each consider indispensable and superior. Yet, there is one component type that everyone has contemplated getting rid of one way or the other, and it is the preamplifier.

Transistor or tube, line preamplifiers have always occupied a bittersweet spot in everyone's heart, considering its property for either making or breaking a system from the level of synergy created. To many audiophiles, brackets of price range represent a safe route for matching components: budget components dominate the sub-\$2,000 range, while high-performance ones reside in the \$9k+; and any higher would be considered exotic by many.

Audiophiles contemplating the purchase of either \$2,000 or \$50,000 line preamplifiers have an easier time than those of us considering a \$7k one, for the polarity in prices provides clarity and guideline in respective buyers' decision-making process, at the same time represent an approximate indicator for system matching; while a \$7,000 line preamplifier falls into a somewhat grayish area.

If one has a \$10,000 power amplifier of commendable performance, then a \$20,000 preamp of competent caliber may continue to compliment the power amplifier's inherent strength. However, a \$7k preamplifier would likely accentuate the relative weakness of a \$3,000 power amplifier that was designed to a budget,



The PRE is one of a kind in being given three 10,000 Gauss toroidal transformers mounted upside down at the lower half of the chassis into the centrally positioned circuit board. Among the toroidals, two are rated at 50VA each for stereophonic reproduction, and one at 30VA for control logics. The upper section is consisted strictly of the main audio board.

To generate a 50V output for each channel, the dual-mono transformers are flanked by four "Ultra Fast Recovery" diodes and eight 3,300 μ F, 63V ROE-EYS series filtering capacitors. In addition, to ensure the integrity of each channel's signal during internal propagation between circuitry sections, four dual discrete stages are provided, amounting to an unheard of total of 18 discrete stages for each channel.

With such vigor, the PRE is then class A-biased and regulated by Audia's current-feedback technique. Contrary to the widely adopted voltage feedback technique, which yields lower levels of input noise and

Contrary to the widely adopted voltage feedback technique, which yields lower levels of input noise and low frequencies distortion, current feedback provides unlimited slew rate and wide bandwidth.

Audia's implementation of the current feedback culminated supposedly in a high-current, low-noise output



The PRE chassis is machined out of aluminum via Numerical Control (NC) units and laser machines. NC

micro millers further crafted the front panel out of a 25mm thick aluminum ingot. Chassis-width damping

plates are inserted under the top cover, as well as between the two boards. To root out possible interference, the logic control circuitry is encased in metal and positioned behind the front panel.

Fully equipped and intended to be used as a reference preamplifier, the PRE is adorned with four RCA and two XLR inputs, along with one RCA Record output, one RCA Main output and one XLR Main

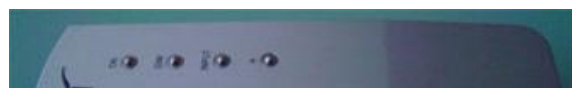


The PRE's front panel sports dainty, tidy lines, with beautifully subtle curves. Embedded into this tastefully crafted front panel are, from left to center right, ON/OFF, INPUT, REC, DIM, BAL and MUTE.

On the right is a large dial for setting of each aforementioned control, in addition to being the attenuator. At upper center left is the large display,

the brightness of which can be trimmed or defeated

An aluminum, milled remote control mimics all functions on the PRE's front panel, except for REC: the record monitor. A SET button on the remote further enables customization of input gains and



input characterization. Despite repeated attempts and examinations on my part, the PRE would not reconfigure its operational mode into the "Single-



Finally, the PRE is to be left in the blinking, standby mode when not in active use, in which the amplification stages remain powered, and the attenuation at minus-117.5db. Once powered on, the attenuation adjusts itself instantly, with the display jumping from -117.5dB to the former level prior to the shutdown.

Input gain can be adjusted plus and minus 6dB to facilitate uniform volume, and each input can be custom named with a maximum of 13 characters. Display brightness can be dimmed through 5 levels, including my favorite one, display off.

THE SOUND

To gauge the finesse of the Audia Flight PRE, DACs from both solid-state and tube camps were mobilized, including my longstanding champion of DACs, the \$30k tubed Audio Note DAC5 Special, and the best solid-state DAC I've heard to date, the \$5,700, 32bit/384kHz Accoustic Arts DAC I Mk3.

Primary amplification was via Audia's own \$11k Flight 100, a 32-IGBT-equipped current-feedback design of superlative finesse, which I reviewed in October, 2005. 47 Lab's PiTracer helmed the tracing of pits from CDs.

The Flight 100's high-power, high-current capacity facilitated auditioning via a variety of loudspeaker, thus the 89dB/4Ω, \$12k GamuT L5, the 95dB/8Ω, \$20k Audio Note AN-E SEC Silver and the 93dB/8Ω, \$26k

Acapella La Campanella were the primary speakers rotated for this review.

Many audiophiles prefer tube preamps for the nonexistent tonal artificiality and graininess that solid-state preamps are known to impart, especially in reproducing vocals. Atop a platform of its companion Flight

100 amplifier and GamuT's L5 loudspeaker, the PRE's manifestation of tenor Toby Spence's "Vallon Sonore" [O echoing vale] from the Berlioz opera *Les Troyens* [The Trojans] (LSO 0010 CD) via the



CDs produced prior to the common high-bit remastering of late, such as my favorites from Deutsche Grammophon and Philips, consistently demonstrated less refined tonal balance with pronounced top-end carelessness via the PRE – a sharp contrast to the absence of such inherent information as rendered by lesser amplification designs. Accordingly, sonics from archaic CDs processed with comparatively primitive standards were consistently found wanting in the presence of the PRE.

Also noteworthy was the PRE's highly revealed the GamuT L5's soundstaging prowess as the most differing from what the Acapella La

revealed the GamuT 2's soundstaging prowess as the most amazing from what the Acapella La Campanella could single-handedly achieve. During a separate session with one Audio Note M8 preamp (\$31,750), the GamuT's soundstage expansiveness and 3-dimensionality was contrasted most explicitly by the Acapella's full-range rendition of instrument tonality. To hear a \$7k solid-state preamp being able to trail in the same direction was most riveting.

On dynamics, the PRE's handling of the signal from the solid-state Accoustic Arts DAC was also to be applauded for its ability to track the scales of dynamics most diligently.

The Italian preamplifier's reenactment of Anne Weerapass singing the Cole Porter classic, "Night & Day" (*Out Of Nowhere*, Jazznote 170702-02-2), delicately preserved the sound engineer's intent in the highly dynamic, resolving and yet well-balanced vocalization amidst the jazz band in the background. Transistor preamplifiers I owned in the past tended to smudge the differentiation between fore- and background.

Per PRE, the Harmonix Reimyo SET was able to display its standard compliment of sonic feat through the \$26k Acapella La Campanella horn speakers, demonstrating a full suite of tonal vibrancy with no sonic detriment that lesser solid-state preamplifiers would have impeded upon. Resultantly, the German horn speakers produced the most effectuating spectral uniformity, with integrated spectral liquidity and tonal lucidity so resplendent as to redefine what today's horn speakers could accomplish.



In comparison to the now-defunct Reference Line's passive preamplifier, the PRE established itself as the first solid-state active preamp in my system conceding to zero percent of loss in resolving power, at the same time summarily eclipsing the Reference Line in dynamic vigor and soundstaging, along with superior consistency in tonal shading at all relevant volumes.

SUMMARY

With the Flight PRE, Audia demonstrated the pinnacle in solid-state preamplification design.

Constructed with attenuation cells and relays for maintaining constant impedance, with the ability to preserve the same frequency response at any attenuation value, the Audia Flight PRE was a precision device of a most spectacular order. It possessed a spectral uniformity of such delicacy as to be highly conducive towards tonal differentiation.

Though of solid-state birthright, the Audia Flight PRE's exceeding resolution and bandwidth propagated a sonic presentation that was the antithesis of yesterday's solid-state preamplifiers. In manifesting powerful showcases of dynamics, delicate texturing and extended spectral reproduction, it traverses alongside the \$10,000 Audio Note M5, complete with a level of resolution I've yet to experience from another solid-state

preamplifier.

In addition, it did not constitute the minutest in sonic contamination or deviation. In fact, as proven by its coupling to the \$24k Harmonix Reimyo PAT-777 300B tube amplifier, the Audia Flight PRE's fundamental lack of coloration and distortion illuminated its brilliance, as to be the one solid-state preamplifier exceedingly conducive in driving the SET amplifier. Then, its regal spectral composure and dynamic prowess, when driving the matching, \$11k Audia Flight 100, was of statutory achievement – amazing and breathtaking in action.

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