



## Conrad Johnson CT5 Stereo Preamplifier Reviewed

[Bookmark](#) 

**By:** Brian Kahn - [Reviewer's System](#)

**Category:** [Audio Reviews](#), [Equipment Reviews](#), [Stereo Preamplifier Reviews](#)

**Resources & Links:** [Balanced Connection \(XLR\)](#) , [Conrad Johnson](#)

*October 13, 2008*

 [Email To a Friend](#) |  [Print Page](#) | [Adjust Font Siz](#)

Conrad Johnson is one of most well-known and respected names in the world of tube audio gear. The CT5 stereo preamplifier reviewed here is the result of trickle-down technology from the company's famous ACT preamplifier, which itself descends from the legendary and far more expensive ART preamplifier. At \$8,500, it is roughly half of the price of the current ACT II preamplifier, which shares its composite triode circuit design. The Conrad Johnson website provides more information on this circuit design.



The CT5 is a beautifully designed and wonderfully built preamplifier. It features Conrad Johnson's signature champ

colored faceplate, divided into three horizontal sections. The left section features a discreet silk screen of "Conrad Johnson" above two metallic buttons, power and source. Adjacent to the source button is a row of five orange LED indicate the selected source. The center section is concave, with horizontal Plexiglas panels that protect the two 6B tubes.

The right side of the unit has a circular display window with orange LED numerals displaying the volume for each channel. Buttons below the circle control volume, mute and engagement of the external processor loop. The external processor loop allows for easy integration with a theater system. The back side of this 31-pound, 15.5-inch-deep, 19-inch-wide five-inch-tall unit features a bevy of high quality single ended inputs and outputs. The CT5 comes with a hefty machined metal remote control.

Turning on the CT5, I was surprised by the long wait for the unit to warm up, during which no control input is accepted. I quickly learned to simply leave the unit on and muted in between a day's listening sessions. Once warmed up, I found the sound quality to be excellent. The CT5 is quite simply one of the best preamplifiers I have heard to date. I have heard twice as expensive ACTII and, while it is better, it isn't even near twice as good. The midrange is extremely smooth and liquid, without smearing details. Likewise, the highs are extended and clear without any harshness, and the lows are solid and detailed, albeit lacking some of the impact of the best solid state amplifiers.

#### High Points

- The CT5 has a magically lush-sounding midrange, with good overall sonic presence. It doesn't sound soft like some preamps often do, yet it is never, ever harsh in the manner of many solid state preamps not at the cutting edge of tube designs.
- The soundstage is large and amazingly detailed compared to other tube amps in the neighborhood of the CJ CT5, as well as some of the better solid state preamps.
- The theater loop makes it easy to integrate the CT5 into a theater system. How other audiophile preamps miss this feature is beyond me. Thank God it's on the Conrad Johnson CT5.
- The solid metal remote control feels appropriately beefy for a component in this price range and it gets the simple functionality of the preamp done with style. No Creston touch panel needed here, unless you want one.

#### Low Points

- The CT5 takes several minutes to warm up, which can seem like an eternity if you are trying to entertain and/or show off the preamp to fellow audiophile guests. Even waiting seven minutes for your background music to play seems excessive.
- The lack of balanced connections will stir up that age-old debate regarding balanced vs. unbalanced connections in an audiophile system. We know where CJ stands, but what about clients who have \$6,000 a pair interconnects going into fully balanced amps? Tell them why they made a bad investment in their systems or simply don't sell them the preamp at this price, consumers should expect it all.
- As magical as tubes can sound, they need to be maintained and replaced on occasion. Tube lovers know this, but it is important to disclose for first-timers who (I guarantee) will be seduced by the Conrad Johnson sound if they go for it.

audition of the products.

### Conclusion

The CT5 is one of the finest-sounding line stage preamps currently available. The tube circuitry used in this component maximizes the benefits offered by tubes, while minimizing the noise and lack of detail that can accompany tube gear. The CT5, with the exception of the lowest octave or so, easily keeps up with the first class solid state gear's ability to reproduce fine details. What makes the CT5 so special is that it also adds the tube's ability to provide a lush, liquid midrange and high end that is full of presence and devoid of grain. It does all of this in a large soundstage where the performers are not only solidly placed, but they also have air and space around them that brings a sense of realism to better recordings. If you enjoy tubes and your budget even comes close to affording the CT5, you owe it to yourself to check it out. You just may need to find a way to increase your budget a bit.

### Keywords

Conrad Johnson preamp, CJ CT5 reviewed, Conrad Johnson CT5 preamp reviewed, line stage, audiophile tube preamp reviewed, Conrad Johnson ART preamp, Conrad Johnson ACT preamp, solid state preamps, Mark Levinson, Krell Evolution, home theater pass through

#### HomeTheaterReview.com

Home  
Newsletter  
Advertising Rate Card  
Advertising Specs

#### HTR News & Reviews

Home Theater Audio Reviews  
Home Theater Video Reviews  
Accessories & Other Reviews  
Home Theater News

#### HTR Community

HTR Reviewers & Staff  
Home Theater Wikis  
Find a Home Theater Dealer  
Privacy Policy