

venster op beeld en geluid

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COVER

ROTEL MICHI P5 EN S5
DE NIEUWE WEG VAN ROTEL

RECENSIE

BOWERS & WILKINS FORMATION IN SURROUND
CHORD ELECTRONICS HUGO TT2 DAC
ELAC DEBUT REF DBR62 LUIDSPREKERS
GRADO GS2000E OVER-EAR
IFI HIP DAC
MEZE RAI PENTA IN-EARS
PRIMALUNA EVO 200 VOOR- EN EINDVERSTERKER
SENNHEISER MOMENTUM TRUE WIRELESS 2 IN-EARS
VOLUMIO PRIMO STREAMING DAC

CD BESPREKING

TODOS LOS FUEGOS EL FUEGO
VAN MAXIM SHALYGIN

WINKELBEZOEK

GRIMM MU1 STREAMER BIJ HIFI SOLUTIONS

OVER DE TOP

BACKGAMMON OP NIVEAU



TUBES RULE!

For those who do not (yet) know the brand: PrimaLuna Audio tube amps are products of Dutch origin. The word 'tubes' is often associated by audiophiles with 'unaffordable', but that is certainly not the case with PrimaLuna. We tested the EVO 200-p preamplifier and the EVO 200-a power amplifier, and it was all about top quality at our fingertips and a dynamic opulence of beneficial warmth.

In our country, PrimaLuna distribution has recently switched to More Music, but the history of the brand goes back much further. PrimaLuna was introduced in 2003 by Herman van den Dungen, an energetic, colorful figure in high-end audio. The design of the products is a Dutch affair. Manufacturing takes place in China under European supervision, and customer service is again in Dutch hands.

PrimaLuna has a varied range of products with one common denominator: the vacuum tube. Also notable is how the company just has not scrimped on the components in the products. While this story mentions some technical aspects in passing, visit www.moremusic.nl for an extensive overview of the PrimaLuna line. Even at a passing amateur glance though, it's clear that PrimaLuna places the highest demands on construction and components. The fact that the retail price nevertheless remains reasonable, has everything to do with the company's aim to make and maintain the range of products available to the broadest possible audience.

PrimaLuna's 'Evo' line includes a D/A converter, integrated amplifiers, and separate pre- and output stages, all with the glow of tubes as the warm and radiant centre of attention. The amplifiers are available in four different model lines, the 100, 200, 300, and 400. My review samples came from Olaf van Wijk of More Music, who, at the height of the coronavirus crisis ("Hey John, can finally park at your door, where are all those tourists?"), brought me the EVO 200-p preamp and the EVO 200-a power amplifier.

The EL34

This story has two sides. On the one hand, connoisseurs and fans of tube technology in hi-fi will be curious about specific technical aspects of both the pre and power amp and their effect on the sound. On the other hand, there will be hi-fi aficionados who don't know the vacuum-tube phenomenon at all and wonder what all this hassle is good for, especially in the current era of new switching technologies and the fact that affordable Class D leads to ever-better results. See for yourself; our magazine HVT is full of it.

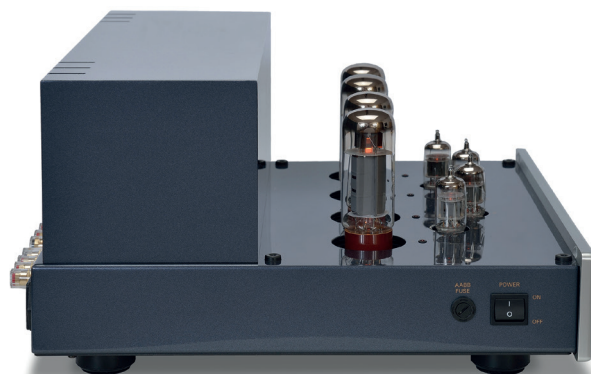


I belong to both categories. I have experience - albeit limited - with tubes in hi-fi but grew up with tubes in preamps for microphones, compressors, equalisers, and guitar amps. No ‘amp’ is taken seriously by guitarists when it doesn’t use tubes.

The same goes for the digitised versions; Kemper, DigiDesign and Fractal Audio are just three brands that seek to emulate the sound of tube amps. And so they philosophise about 6L6 power tubes, EL34, EL84, or KT88, 120, or 150. Preamp tubes names such as ECC83 and 12AX7 dance off the tongue, as well as terms such ‘point to point’, ‘rectified’, ‘matched’ and many more. Enthusiasts should know that ‘point to point’ wiring applies to both EVOs. The signal through these amps is not undone by printed circuit boards with copper traces “so thin you can hardly see them”, according to one manual. In the EVO 200-a, four EL34 power tubes are used, matched as a match can be. The output stage is also compatible with KT150.

Bias

PrimaLuna’s output stage design is unique in that the bias current automatically adjusts as the tubes age.



When a power tube gives up, the amplifier goes into ‘protection mode’ to avoid damaging parts. A red LED in front of the tube indicates when the end is here, and it needs replacement. Simply plug in another tube and listen. No guesswork. No smoking amp. Both the output and power transformers are top-notch, as well as the strictly analogue potentiometers (no chips; that’s “swearing” in the tube church!).

Testing

For the test this time, I did not swap out pre or power amps, but kept the combination intact, playing the





same track for days to accurately report on this tube phenomenon and the progression of the sound. Olaf also lent me Shunyata Venom power cables, interlinks, and speaker cables, which I also did not swap out. The sound source was a Primare CD35. Because the EVO200-p is strictly analogue, I used the conversion of this great CD player, so did not bring my Mytek Manhattan II DAC into play. I used the analytical properties of the wonder monitors, the Yamaha NS5000, to listen to these amps.

Spring wind

Tube amps, even ones that have bedded in like a well-aged wine, must be warmed up with every use to flourish. During the lockdown, I had lots of time for experimentation and lots of household chores. Directly opposite the speakers is an old brick wall that's over seven meters long, and almost three meters high, that needed restoration. It took four full days, in which I exposed both my ears and the wall to that tube magic. For those unfamiliar with the phenomenon, what is the effect and why do so many people swear by it? The dynamics may not be faster than any other amplifier;

in fact, you might even question the low-frequency reproduction, wishing for more "punch". But then you relax and experience everything in a warmer, more natural way. The high frequencies caress like velvet: warm yet transparent and dynamic, like rustling leaves in the spring wind. And to keep the presentation as Jip & Janneke as possible, the combination of tubes with those output transformers results in a pleasing ratio between the overtones, resulting in harmonics with much less intermodulation distortion. If the ear could applaud, it would undoubtedly do so.

Rioja

This beautiful image was confirmed throughout the session. After the last day of grouting that wall, I could finally settle down in the listening chair and enjoy the result, both auditorily and visually. Nestled in with a glass of Rioja, I noticed that the transparency in the high / mid-high had increased while maintaining the velvet touch. Dynamics had also clearly gained in strength: more punch, more clarity. While I am, because of my background, of a more analytical nature, I was utterly overwhelmed by the irresistible



temptation of these two Prima-donnas, pardon, PrimaLunas. What a fantastic sound picture. While the EVO 300 and 400 are more luxurious (and more expensive!), this set I have under my care is already fantastic. The 200-p and 200-a each cost € 2,875. That's still respectable. But given the

sumptuous execution and the equally impressive result, you can safely buy the 200 and still say, "How beautiful!"

You find more information on the website of the distributor www.moremusic.nl.

Specifications EVO 200-a preamplifier

Inputs:	4x Stereo RCA, Stereo HT Bypass
Outputs:	2x Stereo RCA, Stereo RCA Tape Out
Gain:	10dB
Freq. Response:	28Hz-43kHz +/- 1dB, 14Hz-92kHz +/- 3dB
THD:	< 0.5% @ 2V
S/N Ratio:	93dB, 100dBA
Input sensitivity:	620mV
Input impedance:	220kOhm
Output impedance:	28000hm
Consumption:	51 Watt
Standard tube assignment:	4 - 12AU7, 2 - 5AR4
Dimensions (WxHxD):	35.5 x 20.3 x 38cm
Front color:	Silver or black
Weight:	18 kilos
Price:	€ 2.875

Specifications EVO 200-p power amplifier

Power:	Stereo (8 Ohm, 1% THD): 44 watts x 2 (EL34)
Power:	Mono (8 Ohm, 1% THD): 88 watts (EL34)
Entrances:	Stereo RCA
Outputs:	4, 8, & 16 Ohm (stereo), 2, 4, & 8 Ohm (mono)
THD:	0.1% @ 1W < 2%
Freq. Response:	10Hz-65kHz +/- 1dB, 7Hz-95kHz +/- 3dB
S/N Ratio:	92dB (stereo), 93dB (mono)
Input sensitivity:	870mV (stereo), 880mV (mono)
Input impedance:	100kOhm
Consumption:	280 Watt
Standard tube assignment:	4 - 12AU7, 4 - EL34
Dimensions (WxHxD):	35.5 x 20.3 x 38cm
Front color:	Silver or black
Weight:	23 kilos
Price:	€ 2.875