



PARASOUND

Parasound

JC 3+ 唱頭放大器

經典大師傳承之作

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PARASOUND HALO JC 3+ PHONO PREAMPLIFIER

A CLASSIC MASTERPIECE!

Talking about the brand Parasound reminds me of when I started my audiophile journey more than 30 years ago, I was using all entry-level hifi equipment in my system. The easiest way to upgrade the source for me at that time was to add a DAC to my system, and I chose a Parasound DAC its because its specifications included the most highly regarded DACs. Looking at the inside the chassis I saw that it was filled with high quality component parts. Even if you tried to build a DIY DAC, it would not have been much cheaper, so the Parasound was truly a great value for the money.

Survival of the Fittest

Parasound was established in 1981 with headquarters in California, USA, by the founder & CEO, Richard Schram, who worked for Pacific Stereo owned by CBS in the '70s, and was responsible for the sourcing and developing of their house-brand products. By virtue of the CBS-Sony joint venture, he was able to cultivate great relationships with Japanese companies. He left Pacific Stereo in December 1980 and established a consulting company. He helped his late friend Chuck Kittelson launch Proton in the U.S. I did remember this brand name and it was also imported into HK at that time. However, Richard also wanted to make his own products and Parasound's first model came to market in September 1981. The earliest Parasound models were also built in Japan but as a small audio manufacturer, he couldn't compete as the yen soared. Thus, he chose to build his products in Taiwan because there were several high quality factories owned by audio enthusiasts who welcomed Parasound as a small customer. He has sourced from one contract manufacturer continuously for 33 years, working closely with them together to overcome many difficult obstacles. In 1988,

Richard Schram engaged John Curl to assist Parasound in creating flagship products. John Curl is one of the most respected circuit designers of all time and he was responsible for the audio design and engineering of the tape recorders for Mobile Fidelity SuperMaster and David Wilson (Wilson Audio) UltraMaster. John left a trail of landmark hardware across the industry as he only pursued perfect audio design without compromise. Before he worked with Parasound, he had his own company, Vendetta Research, producing his own hand-built product. The SCP-2 Phono Amplifier was his legendary masterpiece.

There are four different product series at Parasound, including Halo, ZoneMaster, Z-Custom and NewClassic. These products are mostly stereo and monoblock amplifiers, preamplifiers, integrated amplifiers, multi-channel amplifiers, phono amplifiers & DACs. As there are many different models, any interested audiophiles should visit their website, parasound.com for the details.



Well-Designed

The product under this review is the JC-3+ phono amplifier in the Halo Series, which is Parasound's premium product line. The circuit design is of course done by the audio master, John Curl, and you can easily tell

by its model number with the letters J and C which are his initials. The front panel design of the JC-3+ is very clean with the On/Off button at the bottom left, a Mono button at the bottom right, and both buttons “float” in a recess, quite neat and symmetrical. There are two switches at the back; one is to switch on/off the LED on the front logo and the other one selects turn on options to select either manual turn on or auto turn on with a 12V trigger input. Below is the IEC power inlet, and there is also a rarely found AC polarity reverse switch that can reduce hum in many systems. The JC 3+ is a true dual mono design, and there are separate left & right channel adjustments for the cartridge select and impedance select: MM47k ohm, MC47k ohm and variable MC load adjust independent for each channel from 50-550 ohm. RCA Input and Output one of each for each channel using Vampire brand 24k gold plated RCA jacks. Balanced Output for each channel using Neutrik brand premium XLR jacks.



The Key to Success

In comparison with the old model JC-3, the JC-3+ has added a variable MC load adjust feature by popular request. This improvement includes dual-gang potentiometers specially made for Parasound by Vishay. In addition, John Curl collaborated with his old partner, Carl Thompson, to tweak the circuits to further reduce background noise. Also, the traces

on the phono module boards are 24k gold plated for the utmost conductivity and maximum transparency and musical detail. As you can see from its specifications, the MC Signal to Noise Ratio is improved from >75dB A-weighted to >87dB A-weighted. The Total MM Gain is increased from 47dB to 48dB while the Total MC Gain is decreased from 68dB to 64dB, to avoid overload when using high output MC cartridges. The power supply of the JC-3+ is also significantly upgraded with 47% larger low ESD power supply filter caps (total capacity of 40,000uF vs 27,000uF) offering greater reserve for head-snapping dynamics. The new power transformer is larger by 82% (1A vs 0.55A) to offer better control in the low frequency reproduction

Well Organized

Removing the top cover of the JC 3+, most eye-catching are the two aluminum sealed boxes, which contain the left and right channel Gain/EQ modules, with precision Vishay-Dale resistors in the audio path. RIAA accuracy is within 0.2dB. Two low-carbon mild steel partitions isolate the power supplies and AC wires; this triple shielding and a built-in AC line conditioner prevent AC noise from polluting the circuits.



Monitor System

The system I used for this review includes Dr. Feickert Analogue Volare Turntable, SME M2-9 Tonearm with a Sumiko Blue Point Special EVO III Low Output MC cartridge with output voltage of 0.5mV. For the connection cables, I am using vdH MC D501 Silver Hybrid RCA cables for connection from the turntable to the phono amplifier, and the Incredable Terra -4 RCA cable connecting the Phono Amplifier to the Preamp. An Artemis Labs LX-1 and SP-1 Vacuum Tube Preamp are connected with the CC Acoustic Pure Silver RCA Cable. The preamp and power amplifier interconnect cable are RCA Grotto and Bryce AC power cords. The phono amplifier is plugged into the Transparent Reference Powerlink MM2X Power Supply. Speaker Cable is Tellurium Q Silver Diamond connecting with Verity Audio Parsifal Ovation floor-standing loudspeakers. There are also 2 pcs. Incredable G3 grounding cable connecting from the XLR output of the Phono Amplifier, to reduce the background noise, with a bigger 3D soundstage, and the low level details become clearer, and it is really an indispensable accessory for phono amplifiers.

Blockbuster

The Parasound JC-3+ phono amplifier was a brand-new unit, but immediately after set-up, it already sounded very impressive with excellent and stable imaging, great ambience and a quiet background, as well as an undercurrent of low frequencies. After warming up, the performance will surely skyrocket. During the warming up period, I tried to set it at different impedances, with the variable impedance adjusting knob which is smooth and quite practical. At the end, I set each to 300 ohms for the smoothest music. After playing it over 50 hours, the sound

performance has become increasingly stable. I have played more than 10 LPs, although not every single LP is a good recording, playback with the JC 3+ can still give you the analog feel, and I finally picked a few representative LPs to share my audition experience. Listening to the most familiar vocal, so called “vocal subwoofer”, the Greatest Basso Super ADMS album by Zhao Peng, the vocal is stands out, the mouth shape is focused, the musical instrument positioning is three-dimensional and transparent, the rhyme is melodious, the ambience filled the sound field, the vocal is very articulate and deep, which is exactly his signature voice, it is so vivid, as if it was a live performance. To playback DR Classics’ DR 10th Anniversary Best Recording Gala, the 45 rpm Limited Edition LP, Percussion Imagination, from Drum Twist, which I mostly used to test for the equipment’s transient response. It is not just “bang bang,” as the contrast between loud and quiet sound is enormous. You can clearly hear details at low levels because the background noise is very low. The drum sound is strong and taut under high pressure, and the imaging is clear and precise. The rapid sound of musical instruments excites me as if my blood were boiling. Most rare is to get the music picture of the sound imaging without leaning forward, an indication of abundant power supply reserves. Later, I played Rodrigo y Gabriela “Live in Japan,” a live recording which is energetic and infectious, with the audience cheering and applauding non-stop, demonstrating the depth and width of the soundstage, and then I listened to tapping on a guitar with the sense of speed and non-stop power. If the transient response of a phono amplifier is a bit slow, it would not work. The JC 3+ reproduces strong rhythm easily, making it very pleasant to listen to.

Conclusion

Parasound JC 3+ Phono Amplifier is a masterpiece and its two creators, John Curl and Carl Thompson, have indeed lived up to expectations and it really deserves its model designation. These two spared no expense in assuring that sound quality and performance would be its fullest, especially when it comes to playing dynamic and powerful music passages, the imaging is as steady as a rock, and to me is really impeccable. As long as you are not biased to its country of origin and give it a careful listening you may be surprised just as I was skeptical before performing the test, and I turned out to be overjoyed.

