

## SW1X LPU II PHONO PRE-AMPLIFIER

Firstly let me state, I am not an Audiophile and know little about the gubbins inside audio components. I do however know a fair bit about music and Vinyl in particular having collected for the best part of 40 years. I can tell you what a piece of music does for me and how it connects. The components that make that happen in the Audio chain matter of course, every little thing matters in that chain but at the end of the day, they are there to deliver music to the ear and soul. I don't like bling and over fussy components.

It amuses me when one reads of digital Audio components sounding 'more analogue like' or indeed Analogue replay equipment sounding 'almost CD/ Digital like. I will try not to use, such descriptions. Forgive me if my writing is a little amateurish, as I'm no Journo or reviewer.

I take my music seriously as most of us with the passion/ illness do. I have amassed a fair few thousand vinyl recordings of mostly Jazz, a splattering of other genres, but 90% Devil's music. Both stereo and Mono records frequent my Turntable of different generations, different groove widths with very variable results in play back. This point I think is important. not all records sound good, some sound poor, some Incredible. But what we do require is a Phono stage that delivers an emotional connection to the records being played. The equipment can't just amaze and impress, it has to move you inside, it has to connect.

Im not a one cartridge fits all grooves collector. It makes a huge difference matching record cut to correct stylus profile. Play a Mono cut with a stereo cartridge and the Mono button used on the phono amp / pre amp you will literally get half the picture out of focus. Don't ask me why, but when one plays a Mono cut with a dedicated Mono cartridge...Bing!... focus, width, depth and just more presence.... Mono is not narrow! I digress!

So onto the SW1x Phono II..

I first became aware of Dr. Slawa after reading an incredibly positive published review of SW1x's DAC 1 signature. As i was in the market for a NOS, unfussy, quality High End DAC I duly contacted him and auditioned the DAC. Needless to say, I too was incredibly impressed and purchased the DAC without too much hesitation.

Slawa Roschkow's mission of producing equipment from his rural Essex based company, SW1x is admirable. On meeting him I was taken by his passion for not following the crowd and producing top quality Audio components using tubes and other quality sourced ingredients AND delivering this approach at a realistic price point. As my listening habits are 90% Vinyl based and 10% Digital, a demo of the SW1x Phono II was logical.

The phono amp:

The SW1x Phono II, is a large boxed stand alone MM Phono pre amp, utilising a classic RIAA circuit, a two gain stage design, 2 x E80F/EF86 pentode valves on the input and 2 x EL84 pentode (triode connected) on the output, The power supply is CLCLC, EZ81 double diode valve rectified and 2 x chokes filtered.

The SW1x Phono II is pure Silver wired in parts, that helps produce the air, detail and transparency, I understand this is an option and can also be voiced with a copper option to offer a slightly different presentation flavor..

All ok so far? Pay Attention at the back of the class!

When I say it's large, I mean it is LARGE. A substantial rack will be required to house such a case. Although for it's size, it sits quite unassuming, no knobs or switches (the power switch is situated at the back, not really convenient but neither inconvenient if you know what I mean, & knowing Slawa, this is for a reason relating to SQ) A nicely dimmed red light sits beneath the stylish SW1X Logo.

The back of the SW1x Phono II is also pretty unassuming, 1 x output and 1 x pair of phono inputs and an earth post. No additional switches on the back at all, as this is not a Moving Coil phono stage and will require an additional suitable Step Up Transformer (SUT) if a MC cartridge is to be used.

Personally, I would have liked to have seen another phono input for greater flexibility, as I have 2 arms on my Turn Table and possibly a Mono button. But thats just my own requirement and I'm told by the good Dr. these preferences can be added as flexible options when ordering. More on that later.

I have lived with the SW1x Phono II for a good few weeks now swapping in and out and driving myself round the bend with plugging and unplugging cables, you know the score.

I first used the SW1x Phono II, in conjunction with my valve Line level pre amp and a MM cartridge, actually a Moving Iron cartridge, The Cartridge Man Music Master. Using this cartridge removes the need for further amplification of the delicate phono signal in the shape of a Step Up Transformer.

I have MC cartridges and Step Up Transformers but opted to hear the SW1x Phono II in it's purist form using the MM cartridge straight.

The record I use for testing out cartridges and general tinkering is ECM's *Pat Metheny* lp, *Offramp* and generally my go to track is *Au lait*. I only mention this as it is my go to and I am very familiar with what this record has inside the grooves, of course I have listened to many records on this Phono Amp, but this LP was my reference. It has a magical flow to this tune that keeps unfolding and reveals layers of subtle nuances and is also rooted with exceptional low bass. The picture this tune can develop in a good analogue HiFi system is an utter joy.

After a Tube warm up of 20 minutes or so, First impressions on the initial needle drop were immediate and clear.

The first thing that struck me was the thunderous bass the SW1x Phono II possesses. It is quite incredible. I say thunderous for lack of another word, it had texture and depth aplenty but seemed to go much lower than I am used to, it had grunt. The low end was very well controlled and not flabby in the slightest. The roundness that can be associated with some valve phonos and bass was not present at all. This was clean whilst also retaining the wholeness, timbre and layered texture.

The mid band is sweet and lush, maybe not as unctious as my normal phono pre amp, *The AD Audio Satchmo*, but it has a yumminess in abundance. The comparison to my *AD Audio Satchmo*'s unctious midband, maybe slightly distorted, as the SW1x Phono II is very dynamic and initial listening may lead the ear away from that middle area and to the frequency extremes. Over time though, my ear homogenized the presentation, dynamics settled and the picture came together more cohesively. The leading edges although clear and detailed come together smoothly.

The top end shimmers with precision, digging previously veiled detail from the grooves, it pushed this information forward in the presentation. Dare I say it, this SW1x Phono II, has a sparkle to it. Lets not do the companions to Solid State, but this Phono amp has dynamics in spades. Presence, sound stage both width and depth just fill every inch of the room. The instruments placed accurately and the picture is very clear. If i can make a senseless comparison, for me, it's the sort of quality i would expect a High End CD presentation to sound like, but they never quite hit the spot like this liquid analogue vividness. The layers of detail are clear and the transparent feel to the air is very good. When the stylus sits in the dead areas of the record the it's silent.

Switching back and forth between my own Phono stage, the Piano can appear slightly lean on the SW1x Phono II, my AD Audio Satchmo Phono fleshes out the Piano more but at the expense of dynamics and transparency. I also miss that controlled growl of the low end the SW1x Phono II delivers when switching back. Let me say, the AD Audio Satchmo Phono is no slouch and a special Valve Pre & Phono Amplifier.

When Vinyl replay is presented in a way the SW1x Phono II helps deliver, it has a real addictive quality. This amplifier really demands & holds the listeners attention.

Over the period i have had the SW1x Phono II in the system, I have had a few good hifi friends spin by with phono stages and pre amps. Not intentionally to shoot out, it's just to get together and bring some different gear to the equation. Gear that has passed by, from the absolutely superb, swiss army knife of high end pre / phono amplification, the EAR 912, the Thoress Mk. 2 Phono Enhancer (sporting no less than 6 x phono inputs!), a well regarded custom built Audio Note M8 Clone, just recently the Aurorasound VIDA LCR phono stage and of course my own AD Audio Satchmo. That's a regal list of high performers in analogue replay equipment.

Whilst they all had their obvious qualities and strengths, I will not be so nonsensical to compare each!!, What's very apparent is that phono stage flavors, like most things hifi, have real personal preference. Synergy is extremely important with the rest of the system and of course listening preferences. All who passed by acknowledged the virtues of all the phono stages. The SW1x Phono II held it's corner in such esteemed company and delivered it's own unique presentation.

I can only say that if you take your Vinyl replay seriously and have other quality hifi equipment to accompany, I would take advantage of SW1x Audio's home demo scheme.

## Conclusion:

The SW1x Phono II, presents music in an organic way, with smoothness across the range. The dynamic presentation is simply quite incredible.

Some may find it too dynamic for their tastes but make no doubt about it, when I switch back to my house Phono stage, I slightly miss the SW1x Phono II delivery. The SW1x Phono II, serves the musical vitamins with gusto, a fair amount of forwardness but it retains the juiciness we want and expect from a Valve Phono stage with oodles of loveliness in the midband.

The information this stage extracts from the groove is great, the cliché of not having heard things before in the recording apply here, it simply reveals more. Transparency of the picture is a joy and the layers of textures are very interesting. The emotional connection with the music was always apparent.

As I previously mentioned, I believe designer, Slawa, can slightly adjust the voicing of the SW1x Phono II, to suit requirements. So if Silver wired components don't hit your spot then copper or a combination are available. For practicality, I would have liked to see at least another phono input for users with more than one arm on their decks, Possibly a Mono button option for those that have Mono records. (Although strictly speaking if you have enough Mono records, go buy a dedicated Mono Cartridge of proper quality and preferably a Mono SUT). These and other personal requirements are all possible in the build should you want them, just talk to the man himself about possibilities.

No switches in the circuit and things are kept simple and as pure as possible to deliver undiluted musical goodness. A classy, High End performer..

I wish it was staying with me longer.

## System used

**Vinyl:** Garrard 401 *modified* / Tonearms SME-3012 & audio-technica ATP-12T - *modified*  
Ortofon Royal N / Cartridge Man Music Master / SAEC C3 mc MONO: Miyajima Zero B 0.7

**Amplification:** Radford STA25 mk3 / AD Audio Satchmo Pre Phono / Hashimoto HM-7 SUT / Miyajima ETR-Mono SUT

**Speakers:** Tannoy 12" Monitor Gold RFC custom Cabinets with RFC custom crossovers

**Cables:** Duelund DCA16GA / Kimber 12TC / Duelund DCA20GA

**Other:** Mains Power Conditioner / Box Furniture / Audiodesk Systeme Vinyl Cleaner

