



TRENDS PHONE AMP

This Hong Kong company, Itok Media, specializes in neatly-made inexpensive audio components. The Trends PA-10 is a headphone amplifier, with just the basics. It has input jacks at the rear, a single phone jack at the front, and of course a volume control. The power supply is a 24 volt DC wall wart.

Of course you could hardly help noticing the vacuum tube sticking out of a hole in the top of the box. Yes, the PA-10 is a single-ended tube amplifier. It could almost be called an *integrated* amplifier, because it has two inputs, marked “CD” and “phono,” with a selector switch at the rear. The latter label is for indicative purposes — there is no inboard phono preamp.

There are, however, a pair of output jacks, so that you can actually connect the PA-10 to a power amplifier, using it as a two-input preamp. Trends bills it that way, in fact, right on the front panel.

If you have experience with tubes, you might look at the blue glow in the 6DJ8 tube and conclude that it’s “gassy,” that its vacuum bottle has sprung a leak. In fact the blue comes from a diode

strategically placed under the tube. It’s common to use a light-emitting diode as a part of a circuit, but it also functions as a pilot light.

If you enjoy tweaking audio gear and not only listening to it, you’ll be pleased to discover that the PA-10 can accommodate several different tube types. Set the internal jumpers to suit, and with a multimeter you can also adjust the bias. We would warn only that, despite the 24 volt rating of the wall wart, there are much higher voltages lurking about inside the box.

We set up the PA-10 alongside our own Audio Alchemy v1.0 headphone amplifier, and connected each of them in turn to the “record out” jacks of our Moon P-8 preamplifier. We did our listening with our long-time reference headphones, the Koss Pro/4AAA — the originals, not the more recent ones with nearly the same model name. We then listened to two SACDs played on our Linn Unidisk player, one classical, the other popular.

The classical selection is Benjamin Britten’s *The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra*, a wonderful set of variations

on a theme (RR-120SACD).

It would have been impossible not to notice that the orchestra sounded different when we changed amplifiers. Our initial impression was that the PA-10 was delivering less bottom end, with diminished impact on the tympani, of which Britten made liberal use. But we listened again and got a different impression. There wasn’t less bass, there was more midrange.

Was that good? Possibly it was. The woodwinds seemed to move forward, and we could spot the individual instruments better. The bass (which these headphones can deliver!) was still very much present, with solid percussion and rich cellos and double basses. There was a good feeling of space, too.

The pop song was a blast from the past. Thérèse Juel’s *Tiden Bara Går* was famous for its presence on the original Opus 3 sampler (which was of course an LP), and it’s back in SACD form on Opus 3’s *Test-records 1, 2&3* (CD19520).

Once again we noticed the more prominent midrange, which lent Thérèse Juel’s voice extra warmth and intimacy. Having heard the recording so many times on some of the world’s best loud-speaker systems, we can guess that this is the way her voice should sound.

The song is notable for its plentiful fast transients, from the guitar, the plucked bass and even the bongos. They seemed a little smoothed over with the PA-10, but they were by no means blunted. The effect is pleasant, and one could get used to this.

The PA-10 is small enough to be unobtrusive next to your music system, and you may even choose to run a long interconnect so that it can be close to your favorite chair. You will, however, want to shut it off when it’s not in use, because it runs *very* hot (so does our Audio Alchemy amp). On the other hand you’ll want to warm it up thoroughly before sitting down to serious listening. Trends suggests five minutes, but we’d recommend more.

The list price of the PA-10 is \$225. It’s also available with a 12AU7 tube for slightly more. There are other little boxes from the company, including a preamplifier, a phono stage, and even a digital-to-analog converter.