



Per Abraham Grennæs: Audio Valve tube amplifier:

100 per cent natural



Hooked on regular amplifiers? Try the Audio Valve tube amplifier. It's like going from canned food to mother's home made.

Okaj, I have to admit that I'm a tabloid journalist and exaggerate a bit. But changing from an integrated transistor amp to a tube preamp and a regular poweramp gave me something I didn't know I missed.

As a bachelor, you don't think about in your daily life. Stew in a can tastes splendid until you come home and taste your mother's stew made out of a recipe from 1903.

Then you know the difference.

Never tubes!

I have listened to tube amplifiers a couple of times at various dealers'. But I never got impres-

sed. The only thing that has impressed me was a Krell specimen costing far more than 100.000 euro. Sound is always best at home.

No wonder I detest tubes, because I hate having to change them occasionally (once a year?) and rumours about poor operational quality and security has kept me away from them. But I haven't managed to stay away from German cars, now I have the fourth in line and the three previous ones made my hair turn grey because of pointless trouble.

But the driving experience, the comfort and the joy have knocked out the Japanese completely. This is why I have let my feelings be in control of my common sense. Now I have done the

same in my living-room. But it shouldn't really have been like that.

Askeladden – the fairy tale hero

I had a Krell KAV300i – a splendid amplifier. And when I reinstalled the parts, everything turned out the way I wanted. The sound was really rocking my foot without any sharp s-es or any other disturbing elements. All the parts combined produced choice quality music, just like the fairy tale hero who could play the fiddle so well that when he played, everybody wanted to dance.

Was that Askeladden – the fairy tale hero? Anyway I quit testing when I sang louder



than the music every time I started a CD. The idyll was perfect until I got the new loudspeaker cables and had to return the test pair to the dealer. The (musical) sound quality seemed inferior, I stopped singing because the sound became thinner and sharper. The explanation was simple: One loudspeaker terminal couldn't connect properly with the cable. Krell has probably hardly spent more than a penny on either of the terminals, so I had only two choices:

A – change the terminal, or B – sell and buy a new amplifier.

Since the box dated back to 1999, replacing it was a bit tempting. And when I got the Audio Valve/AVI (poweramp), I was almost in heaven.

But the price and rumours of bad tubes made me hesitate. I wanted a regular amplifier.

Parasound = Krell

I went around to get three different sets. First I started with Parasound Halos smallest one/ones, the pre P3 and the poweramplifier A23. This set was just like hearing my old Krell, but the price was approximately £ 1000 cheaper minus the expenses for one extra cable.

In an A- and B-test I'm not so sure that I would have heard the difference. The problem is that when you are going to replace your old set with a new one, you want to upgrade what you already have. Thus you are another step on your way to the heaven of sounds.

Next out was the Norwegian Hegel H200, several times declared a test winner in Norwegian magazines. It was cheaper than Parasound, but didn't look that good though. However everything-in-a-box is very appealing. In addition, so were also all the test results. I simply had to try it out. I kept it for 24 hours before I went back to the shop to hand it back. The manager just shook his head when he heard my comment:

"The sound was poor, weak, small and sharp and it didn't make me want to sing.

The best

A colleague of mine has insisted that I try Accuphase. I brought the previous version of 308 home, the 306, at a good price offer. I also took with me the new and smaller one, the 213, at about the same price. The small one was quickly ruled out because of unbalanced and bad cables at my place. The big one, on the contrary, was hard to give back. It sounded better than Krell, but I didn't get the same swinging feeling from it. Unfortunately there were too many sharp s-es. Probably my JM lab 926 Electra was the problem, but I ONLY had in mind to buy a new amplifier and not new loudspeakers as well. Sad, disappointed and with an even better offer I left the store empty-handed.

The amplifier didn't only sound great, it looked gorgeous too!

I simply had to let it go. I bought tubes, but only for the preamplifier though.

"This is the best product I have", said Hallvar Rostad in Norsk Hi-Fi Center about the Audio Valve preamplifier. Equipped with a regular poweramplifier from AVI and a long cabling process, I ended up having the best sound I have ever heard.

How it sounds?

The music is rich in tone, there is a fullness in everything that no regular amplifier can beat. It's like comparing Mom's most delicious and homemade stew with a tasteless and too thin one.

The instruments sound more real than ever, I can almost play as loudly as I want without having pain in my ears and the sound quality changed.

The sound of the bass is totally different. There is also a completely different harmony and quietness in the sound picture. Voices are approximately like before, but they weren't bad then either. It just sounds great and best of all. Even the loudest sounding CD seems great. I have taken two new steps on the path to the heaven of sounds.

Audio Valve pre amplifier with tubes

Price: 28900 NOK in black

Importer: Norsk Hi-Fi Center, Drammen

www.norskhificenter.no

tlf. 32 87 35 96 / 92 89 57 73

Used equipment:

Loudspeakers: JM lab 926 Electra

CD-player: Copland CD822

Amplifiers: Krell KAV300i,

Parasound Halo P3/A23,

Hegel H200, Accuphase 306, Audio Valve pre-amplifier/AVI poweramplifier

Cables: MIT AVT-1 (loudspeakers), MIT Shotgun 3 and Kimber etc.

Your hearing is superb!

I am no expert of sound. However I have learnt a couple of things during the last 20 years as an enthusiast:

Trust your own hearing. Don't bother about all the analysis of transients etc. Use tests as a small indication of something that roughly points in the direction you should be moving. Other people's opinions give by no means the accuracy of a compass to guide you on your way to the heaven of sounds. I don't know what transients are. Nor am I able to tell if there is a blurred sound in the upper middle tone and something else in the present area. Then we are no longer talking about music, but rather analysis.

My preferences are the follows:

- I am allergic to sharp s-es.
- If my foot rocks, that's a good sign.
- It is even better if I am singing more loudly than the music are playing. Then you simply have to dash off and buy. Music is supposed to give pleasure, and what is better than singing at the top of your voice (that is if you are alone and don't have neighbours).

Is there any point in believing what I write? I am no expert, but who is? Only you are the expert. Nobody can tell you what to feel, like etc. You are the only one with superb hearing, nobody else. But I have learnt a little and I do believe there is a solution to the problem: Cable matching means everything and may change the sound beyond recognition.