

By Lothar Brandt

The clock display is one of the few things that still function here at the moment. It shows, alphanumerically correctly, exactly 3.07, the early hours of the morning. The computer centre in the brain registers that in the case of cleanly maintained 33 rpm the record player is turning for about the 7000th time. Because for about three and a half hours the Clearaudio Anniversary has been discharging its obligation of turning LPs evenly under various kinds of pickups.

It took some time for the amplifier phalanx to be put into position. The heavyweight Vor-End-Trio, which was made available to me by Octave to test in *AUDIophile* and for the sake of completion equipped with the Phonomodul to be a dream chain for vinyl loving tube fans. Above all, however, it was about the most recent issue of the Jubilee combination of high-level pre-amplifier plus two gigantic monoblocks, at a total 78,000 Euros.

# Jubilee concert

The valve loaded bullets have been under construction by hand for about ten years in understandably small quantities. Because I like to use the trio from earlier tests as one of the best tube combinations of the hi-fi world, I was naturally extremely curious about the reworked Jubilee.

And that meant – after the provisional installation for function control – only in the night shift. After Andreas Hofmann, the company boss, and his team had dragged the approx. three cwt. amplifier into the listening room, done a detailed check and left with ‚Have fun‘ (meant quite seriously), it was a matter of cleaning up the immediate surroundings of these massive stars on the amplifier sky. For example, with the best connections. For several weeks previously I had been enjoying a shockingly expensive cable set (see p. 106) from Audioquest – incidentally also with my ‚standard‘ listening room amplifiers, which answer to the names Octave HP 500 SE and MRE 120. >



The Jubilee amplifiers of Octave, generally overhauled, pass their concert test – with distinction.

So it was still, so to speak, in the family, when I, already pretty excited by the first audio impressions, was now able to connect the big brothers. With as few crossed wires as possible and never parallel between the numerous line and mains cables until I finally found the combined CD/DAC Accuphase DP 800 / DC 801 and the Phonomodule and Phono-Pres Pass XP-15, EAR 834 and Linn Linto connection to the line-ins. I managed to lay the awkward loudspeaker cables as straight as possible at one of the two parallel switched outputs of the monos as well as the connections of the hybrid electrostatic Martin Logan Summit X. Mechanically the arrangement in or on sound bases of Copulare ensured a respectable environment. The monos, each one 65 kg, remained on the ground – with my back problem lifting them was out of the question.

Maybe you will smile over my admittedly time and money intensive scrupulousness. I can take it. Because in my opinion the Octave amps are in another

league, where the greatest possible dedication is required. This became clear on that evening at 11 p.m., when the accuphase team began to supply the high-level input CD of the pre. As test models of their creator the amps had been well played in at home and the warm-up phase had finished in the early evening.

But what was it exactly that was warming up? In the case of the Jubilee pre-amp an unimaginably elaborate hybrid. The output voltage of the supposedly pure-bred tube amps are taken care of by semi-conductors. Andreas Hofmann wanted an output amp that, quite unimpressed by lengths of cable on every power amp, reproduces the maximum sound quality. And electrically powerful transistors are necessary for this. But the preliminary work necessary to increase the voltage for these is done by selected double triodes. Another example of the pragmatic ideology-free approach of Hofmanns when it comes to optimal sound. This can be totally uncompromi-

sing because the pre-amp for example has to avoid potential sound-damaging effects of an over-all negative feedback. This type of control switching can – by means of constant comparison between input and output signals and possibly corrected interventions – linearize the frequency response and minimize distortions, but possibly potentiate errors or cannibalize swing-out processes.

No relatively functional amp switching mechanism is without at least local negative feedback, but avoiding the overall loop requires from the individual components very precise and reliable values. Which is not cheap. But, according to Hoffmann, the more a system is occupied by what it does rather than what it is, the more detail you hear. A few politicians and company bosses could profit from this piece of wisdom. In any case, the AUDIophile register entry for 2007 is marked by an altered switching mechanism for the tubes and modified heating system, which in the lab yielded improved values for signal to noise ratio. >



## The pre-amplifier

### Jubilee Line Pre

The four tubes right in the piece from the ECC82 family serve to increase the voltage. The output stage responsible only for electricity works with solid state technology.

## The power amplifier

### Jubilee Mono

The gigantic mains adapter of the monoblock with main transformer and huge sieve capacitors is in the bottom part. The octet of end tubes in the upper part is controlled by the circuit board with three ECC 82s behind the cooling units on the back.



Hofmann also goes his own way when setting the volume. In the series edition the Jubilee is really one of the very few pre-amps on the market that do not have remote control. The normally constructed large black potentiometer of Alps or the ultimate 41 pole step switch (see photo) priced 2,000 € do not accept commands from external sources. Comfort fans can also order an infra-red remote control for 1,500 €. Inconsistent? Hoffman however quite consistently supplies pre-amps with a gigantic separate mains adapter with sufficient reserves to meet all eventualities. With a total of 100,000 microfarady storage capacity in the back the output levels even under the most strenuous dynamic requirements never reach the limit area. He consistently separates supply and signal currents. Which in turn presupposes strict separation of the cables connected to ground. What this means in terms of brain power required in switching mechanism layout is understandable to every developer.

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Andreas Hofmann, owner

In the case of tube amplifiers clinging to the classical concepts is retrograde. We can achieve sound results these days that ten or twenty years ago were almost impossible.

Equally large quantities of brain power go into the power amps - over 70 cm (27.6 inches) high, true monuments of amplifier construction skill. Each block crowned by an output octet: 8 pentodes of type 6550 C. Those who prefer to drive the KT 88 - which will fit as well - have to

fork out 600 € for a set selected by Octave, and those who like to experiment can use the less expensive EL 34s. If a replacement set 6550 should be necessary, the more moderate version at 1,300 € for 2 x 8 tubes is available. The operating instructions describe exactly how the sleep modus is to be set. Like tools, warranty card, gloves and – exemplarily – 2 x 4 replacement tubes in a large aluminium case, which is given to the customer as part of the service.

I doubt if replacements will really be needed in the first three to five years. The large Jubilees are, as far as I know, the best protected power in the tubes realm. Comprehensive switching mechanisms, relays, delays, and a clever display keep the valves from all sorts of mishaps. And not least they prevent the enormous appetite for energy of the mains transformers (for example) when switching on from blowing your fuses. No, the large bodies spring into action carefully and, now and again, stutteringly – about 3 to

## Octave

### Jubilee Mono

List price: 52,000 € (pair)

Guarantee period: 3 years

Dimensions WxHxD (cm): 22 x 71 x 49 [8½" x 28" x 19"]

Weight: 65 kg (1 piece)

Casing design: black, silver

Connections:

1 x cinch, 1 x XLR, 2 x loudspeaker

### Jubilee Line

List price: 26,000 €

Guarantee period: 3 years

Dimensions WxHxD (cm): 435 x 17 x 48 cm/

22 x 17 x 48 (mains adapter)

Weight: 17.2 kg (1 piece)

Connections: Inputs 6 x cinch, 2 x XLR; Outputs 2 x cinch, 2 x XLR, 2 x Tape; ; FB optional

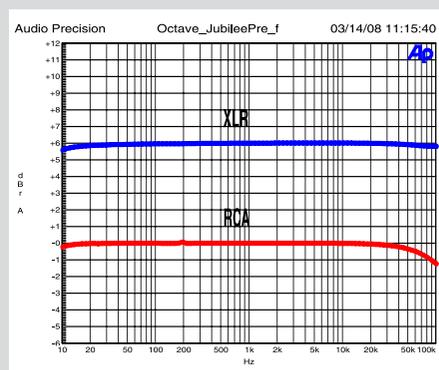
Distribution:

Octave

Industriestraße 13, D-76307 Karlsbad; Tel.: 0049 (0)7248 / 3278

Internet: [www.octave.de](http://www.octave.de)

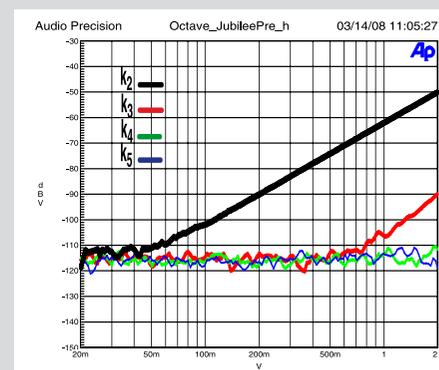
## Frequency response pre-amplifier:



## Broadband, low noise

The pre-amplifier shows itself, via the cinch path, to be very broadband, and the frequency response, almost up to 150 kHz is ideal, is almost ideally linear. The internally non-symmetrically wired line amplifier even fades, via XLR, by 4 dB at 200 kHz. The noise intervals are regular: 85 dB cinch, 81 dB XLR. The output resistance is exemplarily low at 63 Ohm.

## THD pre-amplifier:



## Excellent tuning

The very low distortion pre-amplifier, despite above-all reciprocal coupling, reveals itself to be exemplary even with the dynamic distortion course. With increasing output voltage K2 (black curve) show a nice regular upward movement and clearly above the then very low components of higher order. This is due to lively, clean and full sound.

5 minutes after switching on (a hard mains adapter switch at the back of the equipment, a standby above on the console) until music can be heard.

And, according to its creator, it should be attached as fresh and untouched as possible to the diaphragms of the speakers. No load – and each crossover and each driver is a complex load – should disturb the concentrated power even in the softest signals. Sloppy basses are torture to the Octave founder, gently moribund trebles a nuisance. Which is why lifeless wattage dwarves, such as the so-called Single Ended Triodes often are, are not even considered. No, we need performance. Clean and reliable. Released in the Jubilee by a clever redesign of the classic pentodes-switching mechanism, its own second voltage supply of the necessary auxiliary voltage.

Without any help the voltage curve continues upward from the beginning. I listened to the first tunes from a large pile of new gold CDs, and the review will

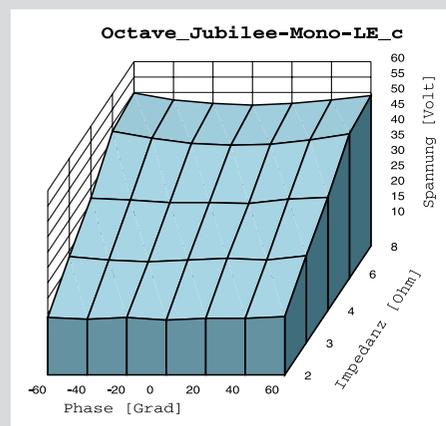


The boss: Andreas Hofmann in Octave owned lab. Next to him is Matthias Knam transporting the amplifiers to me. Right, in the listening room at AUDIOphile, for checking, before (below) the Jubilee is integrated into the unit.

appear in the next magazine issue, more out of duty than inclination. But what a pleasant duty. The voice of Jennifer Warnes is beautifully modelled by an extremely tender sculpture, i.e. the Octave duo for its part vigorously takes up the colours and forms and repro- >



## Stability power amplifier: Tube-like, but strong



While the maximum voltage drops to low impedances – the power supply capacity of tubes is limited – the output remains, with 231 Watt / 8 Ohm bzw. 250 Watt / 4 Ohm, strong enough. The Signal to noise ratio ist excellent: 111/109 dB (cinch/XLR).





Switching and controlling: impedance adjustment in the Phonomodul. Operating switch and display above on the power amplifier, in which a small flip switch at the back regulates, via the hard mains switch, between cinch and XLR.

duces them in perfectly ready form in the panel of Martin Logan's hybrid electrostats. Their switching amplifiers for the bass, optimally adjusted to the dynamic driver, sometimes seem to suffer compared with the unimaginable speed and

precision with which the Octave's midrange and treble impulses fire off.

I am very enthusiastic, but it is late. 11.30 p.m. A last check with a record. Tomorrow is another day. I sit there as if there was no tomorrow. Wrong. I also have to stand up constantly. The LP collection is in the next room. It really doesn't happen all that often that I take the major treasures out of it. But after so long it's about time to get the MFSL edition of Sgt. Pepper. I put the whole record on. Wonderful. The Octaves give the strings in 'She's Leaving Home' a brilliance that George Martin would have heard only when he was recording it. I am gradually coming to the conclusion that no transistor amp with a dynamic speaker would manage this.

As A Day In the Life, with its countless, for me literally resurrected details, fades out, my listening day is not over by a long way. Every drop of adrenalin I can muster is surging away in harmony with the grandiosely whirring violins in the

## The complement

### The appropriate phono pre-amp

With its extremely versatile, almost configuration-free Phonomodul Octave has an almost perfect phono amplifier for analog fans up its sleeve. Thanks to remote control, volume control and, if desired, high level inputs, it can also function as independent pre-amp. Of course it cannot as such compete with the Jubilee pre-amp, but nevertheless it produces more immediate voices, more pulsating and powerful basses as well as minimally silky brilliant trebles. But as phono amp the Modul is surely one of the best in the world. It can be set

perfectly to most and at the same the best pickups in the galaxy. And then gets down to business with dynamic precision, so that you are almost ripped out of your seat. The energetic brushwork of a solo violin, such as is celebrated by Nathan Milstein in Bach's solo sonatas, the spotless bass riffs of Stanley Clarke's School Days, the crispy drums in Join Together from the Who – with irreproachable transparency and conviction the Modul is the ideal complement to the Jubilee.



## Octave

### Phonomodul

**List price:** from 4,400 €

**Guarantee period:** 3 years

**Dimensions WxHxD (cm):**  
43.7 x 8 x 39 [17" x 3" x 15"]  
(plus mains adapter)

**Weight:** 12 + 4kg (mains adapter)

**Casing design:** black, silver

**Connections:**

Phono MM / MC (optional) up to 2 high level inputs cinch / XLR (optional); outputs cinch / XLR fixed/adjustable

**Equipment:** loudspeaker regulator, impedance-adjustment MC, low cut filter, remote control

Construction kit: the various input modules are in front of the tubes in the Phonomodul.

finale of Sibelius' Fifth Symphony. The legendary tutti passage under Sir John Barbirolli (EMI) is not, as far as I know, available on CD. But anyone who has vinyl doesn't need it. And can hear it, as I'm doing, with the very large phono-, pre- and final amplifier of Octave. From the background the grandiose 'Swan Theme' moves slowly but majestically forward – what a glorious sound from these horns. The tubes seem to draw deeply from the Baden air before they balance the six distinctive final chords into the listening room, in the Swabian. No preamble. Just a wonderfully natural dying echo. With the full the colour grandeur of the Finnish late romantic.

I let myself be only too gladly be captivated by Genesis' 'Musical Box', at the end of which Peter Gabriel asks desperately 'Why Don't You Touch Me?'. I was captivated, the fascinatingly arranged instrumental pincers of Tony Banks', rolling keyboards and Steve Hackett's grinding guitar held me enthralled. More

than ever I am convinced that it is this state of being gripped, this flowing in the musical current, that distinguishes from the great high end of faithful basses, midrange and trebles of reproducing High Fidelity.

But, à propos basses: many days and records (including CDs) later I drag the really very good dynamic Canton R2 DCs into the listening room, about as old as the first series of the Jubilee Monos. And fuelled by their new version the Cantons really do not look so old. If, dear AUDIOphile readers, a smart aleck tries to tell you that tube amps are not capable of granite-hard, remorselessly precise bass, then play him – it doesn't have to be half three in the morning – Verdi's Requiem conducted by Georg Solti (Decca). With the Octave-Jubilees. The great drum passage in the Dies Irae, if nothing else, will teach him something. From one of the best amplifier sets in the world.

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## The Author

Lothar Brandt

Started with AUDIO 25 years ago and is now Editor in Chief. Also jury member on two record prizes committees. Can use his private record collection professionally. Learned to play violin and drums a long time ago. Devoted to the Beatles, Rock and Classical in equal measure.



## AUDIOphile Profile

### The strengths

Maximum dynamics



Full, firm bass



Lots of detail at every level



Strict neutrality



Gripping emotionality



Great feel-good factor



Breezily effortless nuances



Great flexibility



Modest footprint

