

# STEREO

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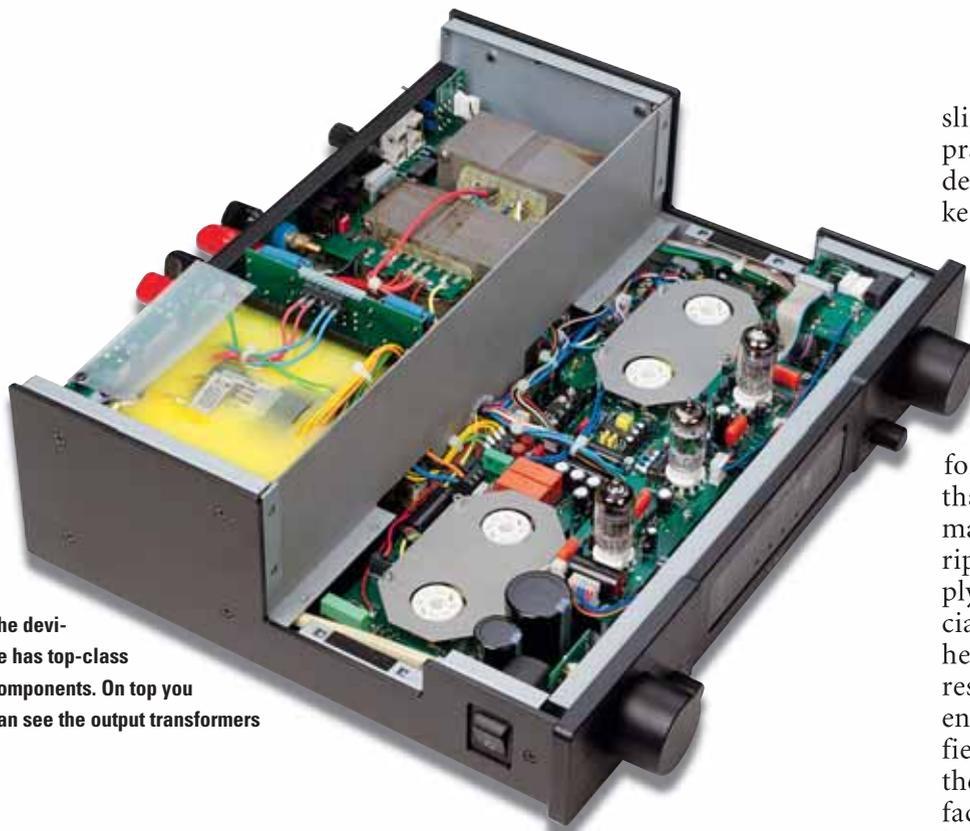
MAGAZIN FÜR HIFI • HIGH END • MUSIK

## The Dark Knight

The V80 is the latest flagship of the German tube specialist Octave –  
and the prototype of a modern tube amplifier



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The device has top-class components. On top you can see the output transformers

by Tom Frantzen

In silk black armament, with red glowing tubes behind the visor, the new top-amp looks like a noble knight. However, this does not imply the slightest touch of anachronism. It is possibly one of the most modern tube amplifiers ever. Tubes as such may be aged, but in connection with hybrid technology à la Octave they go through their second adolescence. The fact that furthermore Octave's devices do not correspond to the usual stereotype of soft and warm sound brings up the question why Andreas Hofmann favours the bulbs. Keeping faith with the tube and considering it predominant is a conviction he lives.

Would you drink beer if as a wine connoisseur to crown it all you also inherited a vineyard in Provence? In Andreas Hofmann's case it was not the Provence but Karlsbad in Baden and instead of the vineyard it was a transformer factory, but it left its mark nonetheless: "From a tonal point of view, in my opinion tube devices are still topical. I maintain that with an optimized tube concept, nowadays a device is possible which, as far as sound and naturalness are concerned, is su-

perior to modern semiconductor devices in real authenticity and dynamics."

### An Octave is "original"

Indeed, an Octave amplifier was and is always an original, like a Hasselblad camera, an Apple computer or a Porsche. The danger of a copy that is more than

slightly similar is close to zero. The pragmatist does not believe in tuning devices like oil condensers and the like. He prefers long term stability and procurability of the parts that for him are important, but second to the actual basic development.

The V80 was inspired by the more recent Octave output stages MRE 130 and Jubilee. Therefore, it differs more from the V70 than expected. According to Hofmann, degenerative feedback and peripheral components like power supply and grounding guide were especially fine-tuned, resulting in a higher signal purity and better detail resolution, which "interestingly enough" further stabilized the amplifier. When giving such statements, there is a slight smile on Hofmann's face. No doubt about it, this man knows exactly what he does, but does not give away everything. Hofmann sees the V80 as an alternative to large combinations of preamp and power amp, only limited by the maximum output of 70 Watt per channel which he takes for "absolutely sufficient".



The tubes of the V80: 1. 12AU7 (ECC82) for phase conversion, 2. KT88 C SED, power or output tube, 3. JAN-6072A, input amplifier tube for output stage



The included intelligent remote control is an eyecatcher

### KT88 preferred

The V80 is a push-pull amplifier in pentode mode. It allows safe use of different output tube sets and is according to Hofmann more stable than the ultralinear mode. Serial standard are four output tubes 6550, but Hofmann himself prefers the KT88 C SED as output tubes which sound “more complete” and are delivered for an extra charge of 90 Euro. Pre-amplification for both channels is done by a duotriode 6072, a counterpart to the more common ECC81, while the two driver tubes 12AU7 (ECC83) take on the phase reversion needed for push-pull mode. Moreover, the owner itself can check the bias finetuning of the tubes by means of LEDs and adjust them in an extre-



The “Ecomode” is a kind of hibernation mode and reduces power consumption to 20 Watt

### TEST-CDs



#### BONNIE RAITT: LUCK OF THE DRAW

The American artist's album was showered with Grammys and shines with sensitive music, a superb voice and good sound.



#### MANFRED MANN: WATCH

Who did not love this album with “Davy's on the Road Again”? Not only for nostalgic listeners, but still simply good (and also well recorded) music. Some of the actual chartbreakers might learn from this doyen.

### COMPONENTS OF THE TEST DEVICE

DISC PLAYER: Music Hall MMF 9.1

(SA)CD-PLAYER: Lua Appassionato Mk III, Yamaha CD-S2000

POWER AMP: Accuphase E-550, Denon PMA-SA1

LOUDSPEAKERS: Canton Reference 9.2, Neat Acoustics Elite SX, Triangle Magellan Cello

WIRES: Cardas, Goldkabel, PS Audio

mely exact way (to 0.3%). For the KT88 “green-red” is correct.

On the other hand, in the actual device generation, Hofmann obviously dispensed with the practical illuminated display of the mains phase. But these are “peanuts”. New and more important is the possibility of integrating the V80

into a home theater through an input with fixed amplification and the separability of preamp and power amp. Or the so-called “Ecomode” which is no real Standby, but keeps at least the

(pre)amp by means of 20 Watt in a slightly “annealing” state of stand-by without draining dry the account and threatening security at home. Only in case of prolonged absence we would not recommend its use.

There is no need to say much about the quality of the source and mains transformers with special core metal sheets from Switzerland. What would you expect from a company with access to its own transformer winding shop? Right! The operating reliability of Octave amps is legendary. We would not dare to send other tube amps into idling without charge. In this case, no problem. Nor is short circuit. The operating points remain stable with mains voltages between 210 and 250 Volt which is not self-evident in tube amplifiers.

### Tube-unlike sound

Who up to now had only little to do with Octave amps might now expect a cosy tube performance, increased by frequent prejudice, as was indeed produced by many former, classical bulb representatives. Hofmann's ideal however is not at all the nebulously transfigured, glossing tube magic of ancient times, but aims at a musically and technically perfect reproduction. And this can be heard immediately. Octave amps get started as if there was no tomorrow – and the V80 is no exception, but as Karlsbad's new flagship rather the spearhead: It sounds unexpectedly tight as a Hungarian cavalry bow, with a precise spring and as swift as an arrow, at the same time charismatic, large and fluid like only few other amplifiers, whether semiconductor or tube. Not plush and cosily warm and neither

The V80 is no “typical” tube amp. It is idling safe, resistant to short circuit and does not show any tapping for different impedances





The German food industry did not want it, Octave has it: the traffic-light-system (here for bias adjustment)

analytical, but neutral to the last soldering lugs. The tube charm can still be discerned as a blaze of colour, but it is not used as a softener.

### Audiophile steam hammer

In comparison with Denon PMA-SA1 which is said to have a certain tube character disregarding its pure semiconductor interior and the soft power of which could indeed correspond to this stereotype, the Octave is more temperamental, seems more lively, but undoubtedly belongs to the same, very high class of amplifiers. The affinity of the lavish sound pattern against the background of the different technical approaches is astonishing.

Surprisingly, in the tournament of the noble amps, it was also similar to the slightly darker (!) Class-A-Accuphase E-550 which is another representative of the pure semiconductor doctrine and costs about 8450 Euro. It did not really sound more powerful, but even more colourful and "larger". No big difference, but at least a difference. However, the Octave could add-on with the "Super Black Box" (see box), an energy bar for even more drive.

And concerning three-dimensional-

ty, vividness and sovereignty, in this combination it was even in front by a tiny spearhead. Congratulations, black knight!!

### SUPER BLACK BOX



Traditionally, Octave amps can be upgraded by connecting them through the socket on the back panel to an external device, and the amp flagship V80 is no exception to this. In the first place, the "Super Black Box" (about 2350 Euro) adds filtering capacity by a battery of electrolyte condensers that are to make the energy supply more accurate and more stable as well as provide additional reserves for short impulse peaks. This makes reproduction even more three-dimensional and sovereign and gives more solidity to the foundation. Also resolution and the "perceived" speed increase. And so does the test result: 95 sound percentage.

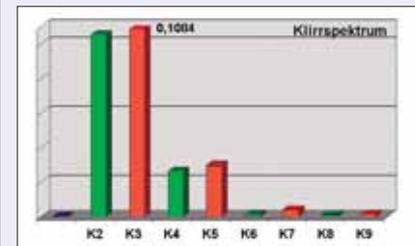
### OCTAVE V80



From 6800 -  
 Dimensions : 45x16x39 cm (WxHxD)  
 Warranty : 2 years  
 Sales : Octave, tel.: 0049 7248 3278  
 www.octave.de

With the V80, Octave succeeds in even out-doing the V70. For this, more than finishing touch was required. "Modern", fast, catchy and perfectly organized sound pattern. The evaluation below refers to the configuration without, the evaluation in the box on the left with "Super Black Box".

#### MEASUREMENT RESULTS \*



Continuous power output at 8 | 4 Ohm 53 | 56 Watt per channel  
 Impulse power output at 4 Ohm 63 Watt per channel

<b>Distortion at</b> 50 mW   5 Watt   Pmax -1 dB	0,02   0,4   0,93 %
<b>Intermodulation at</b> 50 mW   5 Watt   Pmax -1 dB	0,02   1,18   3,8 %
<b>Signal-to-noise ration</b> CD at 50 mW   5 Watt	72   90 dB
<b>Channel separation</b> at 10 kHz	40 dB
<b>Attenuation factor</b> at 4 Ohm	-
<b>Upper cutoff frequency</b> (-3 dB, 4 Ω)	75 kHz
<b>Connected load</b>	practice-oriented
<b>Channel balance</b> Volume control up to -60 dB	1,0 dB
<b>Power consumption</b> Off   Standby   Idling	0   -   145 Watt

**LAB-COMMENTS:** Stable performance level. With higher values, distortions increase moderately, intermodulation perceptibly which is not unusual in tube amplifiers. Interestingly enough, K2 and K3 are close to each other. Channel separation is only reasonable, frequency range large.



#### EQUIPMENT

Intelligent system remote control, semiautomatic bias adjustment, softstart, optional phono MM or MC, Ecomode (20 Watt), headphone amplifier, preamp / power amp separable.

#### STEREO-TEST

**SOUND LEVEL** 90%  
**PRICE / PERFORMANCE**  
 ★ ★ ★ ★ ☆  
**EXCELLENT**

\* Additional measurement values and diagrams for subscribers to the STEREO-Club under www.stereo.de