Krell’s New Evolution Amp & Preamp

EXTRAORDINARY DYNAMIC RANGE
WITHIN A VELVET GLOVE

US SCOOP:
REGA’S MOVING-COIL PHONO CARTRIDGE

CD REISSUE ROUNDUP
NEW AUDIOPHILE RECORDING FROM Stereophile & Cantus

THE REFERENCE 3:
Audio Research’s best preamp ever

HEADPHONE POWER TO GO
from Ray Samuels Audio

AFFORDABLE TUBE POWER
from PrimaLuna
Pathos Acoustics takes the unorthodox approach,” Paolo Andi- 
olo told me when I visited the company in Vicenza, Italy, sev- 
eral years ago.

Walking the streets of Vicenza, we were too preoccupied for Sam to scrib- 
ble notes. You can’t vroom through Vicenza: the entire city center is an 
archnitectural museum. This was the home town of Palladio, great archi- 
tect of Renaissance Italy. Palladio virtually 
reinvented—and reinvigorated—the 
archnitecture of the West by returning to 
its classical roots in ancient Greek 
and Rome. (Thomas Jefferson was 
inspired by Palladio.)

I think Paolo and his team at Pathos 
Acoustics would like to do something 
similar for audio: remove the clutter, 
return it to its roots—or at least rethink 
conventional assumptions. And it’s true: 
so much hi-fi is the same old same-old. 
When you buy a Pathos product, the 
promise is that it will be unorthodox, 
unconventional, and original.

Pathos was founded by three 
unconventional personalities. Paolo 
Andiolo takes care of industrial design 
and marketing, Gianni Borinato, an 
electrical engineer by profession, is 
the engineering guru. Gaetano Zanni- 
ni, a former hi-fi dealer, handles the 
day-to-day business of running the 
firm. Their very different personal- 
ities seem to complement one 
another: Paolo is intellectual, intense, 
austere; Gianni is outgoing, easy, 
always ready with a joke or another 
beer; and the quiet, serious Gaetano 
loves family, food, music, and a glass 
of grappa after dinner.

**Pathos Acoustics Classic One**

**Mk.III integrated amplifier**

The Classic One, Pathos’s entry-level 
integrated amplifier ($2750), is rated to 
deliver 70Wpc into 8 ohms or 
130Wpc into 4 ohms. That’s in stereo. 
Would you like more power? A pair of 
Classic Ones can be bridged to provide 
a fully balanced 270Wpc into 8 ohms.

The Classic One uses two Sovtek 
6922 tubes in its fully balanced preamp 
stage, and two pairs of MOSFET tran- 
sistors in its power-amp output stage. 
The tubed preamp stage is described as 
a “real balanced network that works in 
pure class-A.” In stereo, the output stage is 
unbalanced, like me. When you 
bridge amps, things get interesting. 
Paolo explained: “The balanced signals 
(+ and −) come from the vacuum-tube 
preamplifier stage to the right-channel 
power amp (+) and the left-channel 
power amp (−). The load, which is to 
say the speaker, is then connected 
between the + output of the right-channel 
power amp and the − output of the 
left-channel power amp...In bridged 
mode, the whole machine works in real 
balanced mode from the input to the 
output, including the speaker.” 

Paolo does not encourage customers to 
buy two Mk.IIIIs “if they need to 
drive huge speakers at loud volume in 
a large theater. In the end,” he wrote, 
“the machine has been designed and 
dimensioned for being a domestic inte- 
rated amp, so that high power in 
twin tubes are protected by two Palladi- 
an tube cages. The amp runs just slightly 
warm and needs open-air ventilation. 
Who would hide an amplifier this beau- 
tiful inside a cabinet?

There are no frills: just four line- 
level inputs (one of them is balanced) 
and a tape loop. There’s no balance 
control, nor is there a line-level out for 
a powered subwoofer. No headphone 
jack. The matching remote is made of 
wood and has just four buttons: vol- 
ume up and down, mute, and unmute. The 
Classic One is absolutely free of 
annoying complexity and clutter. It is...Palladian. Minimalist. The parts 
quality looks to be very high: pure sil- 
ver internal wiring, gold-plated RCA 
terminals, etc.

But despite the care taken with the 
power supplies (separate supplies for 
the pre and power sections), the Classic 
One is still a small, modestly powered 
ampifier. If you require gut-wrench- 
ing, lease-breaking bass from very large 
speakers, if you have a large room and 
like your music very loud, this is not the 
amp for you.

The Classic One would be 
perfect for an apartment in 
Manhattan—or in Boston or 
Chicago—or for an office. It’s the 
ideal product for the burned-out ‘phile who wants 
to quit the audiophile rat 
race in style. In this regard, 
the Classic One is an entry- 
and an exit-level product.

There have been some 
circuit and parts refinements since the Mk.II. Paolo filled 
me in:

- New “high-quality” op- 
amps to drive the MOSFET 
power amplifier: one per 
channel between the pre- 
amp stage and the power- 
amp section. Yup, op-amps. Integrated 
circuits (ICs). Op-amps aren’t sup- 
possed to sound good, and often they 
don’t. Here? No problem. There’s 
unconventional wisdom for you. Paolo 
said that the new op-amp is “ultra low 
noise with high linearity and very low 
distortion.” The result, according to 
him: “higher definition.” I agree.
DESPITE THE CARE TAKEN WITH THE POWER SUPPLIES, THE CLASSIC ONE IS STILL A SMALL, MODESTLY POWERED AMPLIFIER.

speaker connectors, along with new speaker connectors that do more to avoid a short circuit in the first place.

A Classic One Mk.II can't be upgraded to a Mk.III "because we made so many changes, in the power supply, for instance, and we had to change the entire circuit board." If I owned a Mk.II, I wouldn't be too tempted to sell and switch. The improvements are incremental, not dramatic.

It's been three years since I heard the Mk.II. Memory can play tricks, and since then many things have changed in my systems. Still, I'll hazard a guess that not much about the Classic One's sound has changed. It might be cleaner, cleaner, faster—a tad more detailed than its predecessor, and more controlled in the bass. It's definitely more dynamic. *Questo amplificatore ha le palle.* This amplifier has balls. *Ha ancora più palle de prima.* Has more balls than before. I've been studying my Italian.

Nothing of the Mk.II's transparency and sweetness has been lost. This is an amplifier to make your speakers sing. What else did you expect from Italy? It is not, however, overly warm and romantic. There's something slightly austere about the sound, as there was about the Mk.II's. Call it Palladian. Call it Polo. Or may just call it truthful.

I keep thinking that one reason the Classic One sounds the way it does is that it uses a single pair of output transistors per channel. It's when you try to match multiple pairs that you often lose something: definition, detail, immediacy, timbral timing (harmonics in register).

I had on hand a new Cary CDP 1 CD player with balanced outputs. The Pathos Acoustics Classic One Mk.III did seem to perform better in balanced mode—something to keep in mind when choosing a CD player to pair with it.

I tried the Classic One with several different speakers, and both in our living room and my listening room (where I got no argument from my wife, Marina). This amp is clean, clear, quick—to be glib, Palladian. Clear away that clutter. It mated beautifully, sonically and aesthetically, with the Triangle Comete Anniversaire loudspeakers, which I reviewed in the October issue. This was a spectacular combination with whatever I played: classical, jazz, popular music of the 1920s and '30s.

Next up were the Klipsch La Scala II speakers. With a sensitivity rating of 105dB, the La Scala can scare up good sound from as little as 3W. Still, even this highly sensitive speaker responded to the Classic One with superior bass control. The La Scala II has no deep bass, but its mid- and upper bass tightened up. Talk about playing loud: the La Scala II responded to the Classic One as if the latter were a behemoth muscle amp putting out 500-1000W. Maximum Mahler. Thunderous Tchaikovsky.

I took the Classic One upstairs to the listening room for a date with the Quad ESL-2805 electrostatic speakers and the latest version of the Opera Quinta, just arrived. I got excellent results on the Quads, although the Ayre V-5xe power amp (used with a complete Ayre system) provided better bass control. No surprise—the Ayre is much more powerful.

The Opera Quinta speakers had not yet been fully run in. Even so, the combination clicked right from the start. Mamma mia, the Quads have excellent bass: tight, tuneful, controlled. They and the Classic One seemed to get along quite nicely with one another, like good *paesanos,* even if their manufacturers may not. (Italian hi-fi is rife with rivalries. I love it!) An all-Italian system, anyone?

**Triangle Comete Anniversaire loudspeaker**

Remember the Triangle Comete Anniversaire speaker, which I reviewed in October? (In the photo accompanying that review, I wore one of these speakers' yellow chamois bags over my head.) The speakers didn't sound bad straight out of the box, but I gave them 100 hours or so of break-in. If I'd waited longer, I'd have missed a deadline—and a scoop.

But the Comete Anniversaire sounded even better after 500 hours: faster, smoother, sweeter; tighter, more