Pathos Logos integrated amplifier

Discover the word from this distinctive valve hybrid

Italy’s Pathos is doing for metal what their neighbours at Sonus Faber have been doing for wood. Each amp they produce boasts some new layout unseen elsewhere, they marry wooden trim with the shiniest of chrome — they’re redefining ergonomic sensibility. They’re so Italian that it hurts.

Looks may not be everything, but you can sympathise with distributor Nick Green, who was raving about an unusual visual effect he noted at the recent hi-fi show at Heathrow: the chrome-caged valves on the Logos are positioned in a ‘cove’ formed by the angled, mirror-finish sheets which intersect behind them. Look at the valves at eye level, and they seem to go on into infinity, reflected into the hundreds.

Such is the concern for every visible part of the Logos that the visual thrills never end. There are contrasting metal finishes of chrome and matte, polished and cast, grey and black. No detail is too small to enhance: the venting in the top plate consists of seven circular holes, each filled with fine wire mesh. There’s the slim rosewood remote control, with a mere four buttons for Source Select, Level Up/Down, and Mute. The company fitted a chunky rosewood block to surround and protect the massive Volume control.

Even the Volume control is novel. It doesn’t rotate; you just flick it left or right for up or down because it’s a digital, 100-step volume control system, 100% resistive thanks to an integrated network of high precision, laser-trimmed resistors chosen because they guarantee perfect inter-channel balance. So you never see it move, and the arc through which it can be flicked is small. Lo and behold, there’s a red numerical display to tell you the level from 0-99.

To the left of the knob is a Pathos logo; to the right, an On/Off press button and another button which scrolls through its inputs. Simple, elegant and minimalist yet in no way self-abnegating.

This piece of sculpture measures 430 x 400 x 172mm (wdh) including any protruding bits. It’s a line-level integrated amplifier rated at a seriously useful 110W/ch into 8 ohm, doubling into four. As the literature states: ‘The electric network has been laid out in a feedback-free “natural” way according to the fundamental principles of the Pathos philosophy.

The pre-amplification stage is all-valve, fully-balanced, fed by a dedicated, stabilised power supply. Its large, complementary pair MOSFET output stage is true dual-mono and equipped with oversized transformers and power supplies, so current should never be an issue, regardless of load.

Just as the Volume control is a bit ‘trick’, so too is its only other control. The Input selector operates through ‘high-tech miniaturised relays’, originally developed for very high frequency telecommunication applications. Operating this is a joy, especially as the remote provides its own tactile thrills. You gotta admit solid rosewood beats the hell out of injection-moulded plastics.

No clutter upsets the back panel either. Inputs 1 and 2 are fully-balanced, through XLRs. Above them are phono sockets for five line inputs, plus a tape output. In the lower left-hand corner is an AC mains input; the speaker terminals — stout, multi-way posts — flank the inputs. That’s all there is, bar the user-replaceable AC fuse.

Pathos doesn’t believe in revealing too much,
so specs are limited to the aforementioned power output figures and frequency response of 2Hz-20kHz ±0.5dB, an input impedance of 100k ohm, total harmonic distortion of <0.05 and an s/n ratio >90dB. Unlike the bigger, dearer and heavier Pathos models, this unit doesn’t employ INPOL technology; instead, its circuitry is derived from the more, er, classic Classic One.

Reticent with specs or not, I kinda figured that nothing in my arsenal bar perhaps Apogee Scintillas would cause any problems. As it turned out, the Logos loved the Wilson WATT Puppy System 6, but it positively adored the Sonus Faber Guarneri. Could it have anything to do with the two companies breathing the same oxygen?

It was one of those blissful moments that makes a reviewer’s life so easy, one of the natural, if not blatantly obvious, pairings I wrote about a few months back with the Pathos slotted in between the Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 3D CD player and the Guarneris, with lots of vinyl via SME Series V on the SME 10 deck, the Transfiguration feeding the Musical Fidelity X-LP. There was an overall warmth which belied the system’s hybrid nature, and I simply didn’t expect it. After all, I was coming off of a run of all-valve pairings — McIntosh and Audio Research — and it’s rare when a hybrid manages to fool invertebrate tube crazies. At least, it has been since the Radford TT100...

What the Pathos does, and which is reminiscent of the TT (formerly the Twin Towers), is produce a satiny sheen, a smoothness of so little grain that one can only be reminded of those hoary old analogies likening the lack of texture or granulation to the effect of cleaning a lens. What’s so pleasant about this trait being the dominating sonic fingerprint is that this is of-a-whole consistency defies the mix of technologies which are valves and MOSFETS. I realise that it’s not the same level of incongruity as one would find when, say, bi-amping with a tube amp above and solid-state below, but the lack of texture is something I associate almost exclusively with valves. Rare solid state exceptions include the Halcros and INPOL technology; instead, its circuitry is derived from the more, er, classic Classic One.

With my current fave demo track to hand, ‘Down To The River To Pray’ off of the soundtrack CD to O, Brother Where Art Thou?, I was able to kick back and wallow in sound splayed out in front of me in a massive arc. It’s all-embracing, devoid of any inconsistencies or gaps which would diminish the ability to convince. The sound is slippery, sexy. Above all, it appears to do this effortlessly, despite being a ‘compact’ compared to some of the integrates I’ve played with this past year.

Which brings us to its place in the KK Super Integrated Amp Bake-Off. While I’m still hooked on the McIntosh 6900 for cost-no-object, and consider the Unison Research Unico at the other end to be one of the World’s True Bargains, the Pathos has upset the applecart. If you heard it even in the most elevated company without being told the price, you’d think it one of the top three. When I tell you that it retails for £2495, then you have to accept that the goal posts have moved in favour of affordability. No question: the Pathos Logos does for the £2000-3000 sector what the Unico does below £1000. I’ll take that a stage further: if you’re considering an integrated amp up to £4000, listen to the Logos after everything else. Then spend the £1500 you saved on a decent wristwatch worthy of a Logos owner.

**Auditions**

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