

**World's Best Amplifier?**  
ASR's Revolutionary Emitter II



STEREO • MULTICHANNEL AUDIO • MUSIC

# the absolute sound<sup>®</sup>

**CROWN JEWEL**  
B&W's New Diamond Speaker

**Stunning Tube Bargain**  
From PrimaLuna

**Ayre's Universal Player**  
End of the Format War?

Speakers from Quad, Triangle, and Audio Physic • Recording the St. Petersburg Symphony  
Electronics from Arcam, BAT, Plinius, and Vincent • Top speaker designers discuss their craft  
Analog from Clearaudio, Redpoint, and Tri-Planar • 19 pages of new music reviews  
Affordable multichannel from Yamaha and Sony • Headphone survey

[www.theabsolutesound.com](http://www.theabsolutesound.com)



## PrimaLuna ProLogue Three Preamplifier and ProLogue Five Power Amplifier

Sallie Reynolds

**Inexpensive gear for the tube lover, and maybe the non-tube lover as well.**



**T**he PrimaLuna ProLogue Three preamp and Five power amp are at the top of my list for good sound, good value, and simplicity. They are also good fun, if you like playing with tubes (they are built to accept many types, including the EL-34), but you don't *need* to play with tubes. You can be a complete tube neophyte and enjoy these units. They fill the room with exquisite sound, from the whisper

of a stroked cymbal or muted violin to the thunder of a great organ. That's the key: The ProLogues make music; they make it simply; they make it well.

And they are tough, something I don't expect in tubes. These '80s-looking units, with their metal cages housing small, fierce-eyed beasts, were delivered in good shape by UPS, along with some other boxes, and placed in a stack at my gate. Before I could get to them, a jackass, about whom no more shall be

said, had knocked the top box nearly four feet to the ground, and had eaten the cardboard.

So well-packed and sturdy are these units, that not only was no damage done to the inside box or outside of the unit, but when I hooked the ProLogues up to check for internal damage, I had, instead, music in under five minutes. And what music! While recently in an outdoor market, I heard a group of three astonishing young musicians calling themselves Sneakin' Out. I am a devotee of local musicians. They play for the moment and from the heart; they play for their souls and for ours. Their music reflects what is in front of them and inside us, with an immediacy of emotion and sound that I never get from polished, distant stars, no matter how complex the composition and playing skills. David Gerow, the mandolinist, and D. Louis-

Henson Blankenship, percussionist, are among the best players I've ever heard in jazz and pop. I sat on the grass enchanted, while folks around me gorged on berries and tickled dogs and babies.

Sneakin' Out has a CD, *Train Wreck* [no label; search [sneakinout.com](http://sneakinout.com) to find it] that features, as does its live music, a mix of jazz, pop, and folk, much of it written by the group, and all of it interestingly and wonderfully played. My favorite is a take on Jagger and Richards'



"Paint It Black." Gerow plays with subtlety and extraordinary speed, and yet with great feeling, his mandolin driving the song. Occasionally, Blankenship will pick up a line and then sweep into tinkling transformations on his electrified

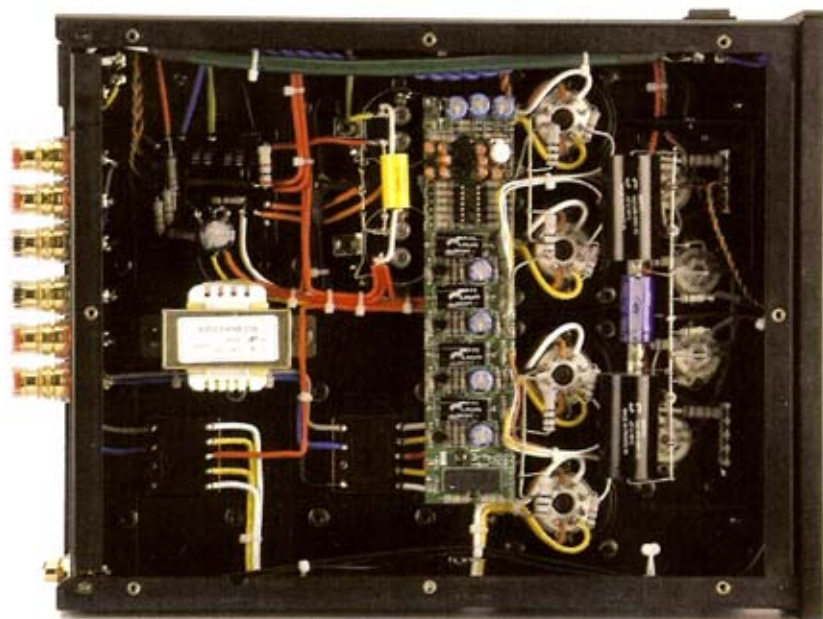
xylophone. He will make you gasp.

Through the ProLogues, this music was as clear and immediate as it was on the grass—maybe more so, sans crowd. But that feeling, of real people playing for real people, is the draw. Buy this CD. And play it on the ProLogues, which you really should hear before you buy a preamp and amp.

Why? Reason one: If you like organ music, and don't believe any 36Wpc amp not in the price range of a trip to far galaxies can impart the whole body-shaking experience, you need to hear

this pair. *The Great Organ at St. Mary's Cathedral* [Reference Recordings] is one of my toughest tests for equipment. The only amplifier I've had here that can reproduce its sensations and range, from the sweet ringing "Carillon of Westminster" to the pedal note of Clarke's "Trumpet Voluntary," is Musical Fidelity's big, \$7000 kW500 integrated (also a hybrid tube/transistor unit, but one whose tubes are discreetly concealed—the tubes are not up on display in their own little go-go cage). The ProLogues, at \$1295 each, give the Musical Fidelity a pretty good run. They not only produce the notes, but like the kW500, let the melodies develop, rich and warm, in the swelling storm of the full organ. The kW500 gets the whole organ more fully and richly, but since it is about ten times more powerful, it can and should drive power-hungry loads





beyond the capacities of the ProLogues. But the ProLogues are surprisingly good with this music. Eugene Gigout's "Scherzo" is a beautiful, intense, and surely difficult piece. It's almost enough just to do it, to misquote an old horse chestnut, but to do it well surpasses expectation. Here it is quite lovely and moving. I was hearing details in the layers of certain ranks of pipes in ways I hadn't before. And again, the immediacy was magical. My flesh trembled with the waves of air. The room filled to reverberation.

Reason two: If you like tubes, you'll find the ProLogues' warm, rich sound most wonderful. And there is bass—true, clean, deep, tight bass. I didn't use a subwoofer on the Spondors in this review and didn't need one.

The high frequencies are sweet and smooth, and completely without sugar coating. They, too, are clear and true. Indeed, this is the clearest treble I've heard. The transients of cymbals and bells are so shimmering, so swift in onset and decay, I found myself looking around to be sure the tuned wind chimes by the window were tied down.

The midrange, where the main body of music lies, is rich, powerful, and diamond pure. If I have one tiny itch about these units, it is that the upper regions of this range may be—to a small degree—emphasized. This could be a

feature of recording technique, unnoticed even on beloved recordings till now. I note, especially on another great local-musician CD, *Sweet Sunny North* [Shanachie], that it seems to be the featured player (hardanger fiddle, jaw harp, or singer on the disc) who is a touch forward, rather than a slice of frequencies.


The ProLogues' soundstage is grand, in all senses of the word. In just two days of break-in, it reached satisfying proportions, and has such good height I didn't think about it till it suddenly occurred to me that the players I heard through the ProLogues sounded as tall as real humans do.

Reason three: If you think you don't like tubes, if you have found them rubby, too sweet, too "comfy," you'll find in these the precision of the best solid-state units, plus—like vinyl—an added musical soupçon that no one has satisfactorily explained to me. Because of inherent potentials for distortion, neither vinyl nor tubes should sound as much "like music" as they do. (Incidentally, though the Three does not come with a phono stage, a ProLogue PhonoBoard—moving magnet—is available for \$159 and can be installed in the unit.)

Reason four: If you've been afraid that tubes were frail, hard to set up, hard to keep biased, forever going on the blink—rest easy. The PrimaLuna designer,

Herman van den Dungen, has done what good designers everywhere should do. He created excellent sound with top-grade parts and design at a reasonable price, in units that are reliable, easy to use, and seemingly indestructible.

Finally, if you have always wanted to be a reviewer, but never dared, you can live out your dream. PrimaLuna invites you to "send us a review of your experience with the amplifier."

So—wear yourself out. 

#### SPECIFICATIONS

*ProLogue Three vacuum tube stereo preamplifier*

Number and type of inputs: Four stereo pairs, line level (via RCA jacks)

Type of outputs: Three stereo pairs, line

level (two mains, one tape, via RCA jacks)

Dimensions: 11" x 7.5" x 15.5" inches

Weight: 23.5 lbs.

*ProLogue Five vacuum tube stereo power amplifier*

Power output: 36Wpc

Frequency Response: 20Hz – 85kHz  $\pm$  0.2 at rated power (4Hz -0.110kHz -3dB @1W)

Input impedance: 100kOhms

Outputs: 4 & 80hm taps

Tubes: 4 x KT-88; 2 x 12AX7; 2 x 12AU7

Number and type of inputs: One stereo pair, line level (RCA)

Dimensions: 11" x 7.5" x 15.5"

Weight: 37.5 lbs.

#### ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Musical Fidelity A5 CD player and kW500 amplifier; Spondor S8e loudspeaker; Nordost Blue Heaven speaker cables and interconnects; Monster 3500 line conditioner

#### DISTRIBUTOR INFORMATION

##### UPSCALE AUDIO

2504 Spring Terrace  
Upland, California 91784  
(909) 931-9686  
primaluna.nl  
upscaleaudio.com  
Prices: \$1295 each