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Reprint



Audionet PAM G2:

The Phono Bombshell



The Phono Bombshell

People who love music and appreciate sound quality, have some bit of experience with reproduction chains and won't be deterred or even intimidated by fashion trends, will still favour results that can only be achieved with a turntable at the chain front. In this context the love of the analogue listeners often goes so far that de facto existing drawbacks of the medium are turned into positive qualities. Would you like to have some examples?

A record player has no comfortable skip function, »track zapping« is therefore not possible. The good thing about it: that way you will be able to experience the artist's work in the order as it was supposed to be heard. Then there are also the crackling and hissing noises. Those disturbing sounds are important to the followers of analogue culture, for they give the LPs a character and render certain tracks unique. After all, we humans do grow older, too, and our lives consist of phases. Who wants to look always the same?

Let's not talk about the emotional fascination of a turntable versus a digital source here. Nowadays this kind of musical reproduction, this way of listening is something for ambitious connoisseurs who also love to spend a pretty penny on this hobby. Apart from the combination of drive, tonearm and pick-up system, which has a tremendous influence on the sound, it's first and foremost the part of the phono preamp that matters. Whereas formerly it used to be built into every pre or integrated amplifier, today those devices mostly hit the market without such a dedicated input. And if, contrary to expectation, the input is indeed present, its sonic quality rarely exceeds the verdict »sufficient«.

The golden bridge

This makes a phono preamplifier an essential and sound-wise decisive connecting link between record player and pre or integrated amplifier. As a consequence quite a few manufacturers are also active in this market sector today: some are taking their chances with simple standard circuits, others

have nice packaging boxes, and then there is still the third group of truly respectable manufacturers who take this topic very seriously. To the last-mentioned representatives belongs the Audionet R&D team whose PAM V2 phono preamp has been an indispensable and absolutely reliable implement for the i-fidelity.net editorial team until now.

With the PAM G2 Audionet is now presenting the latest version which has seen a subtle optical facelift and profound technical changes. Here again, a consistent feature is the integration of Audionet's four-button design, as they call it, and

With the Audionet PAM G2 a reference phono preamplifier has come into the world that is supposed to charm the very last secrets out of record grooves. And what no seasoned analogue disciple would ever expect: it succeeds in doing so offhand. Is this phono pre maybe a new revelation?

which can already be found on the new SAM G2 and ART G3. The PAM G2's predecessor had a rotary knob on the front panel to select from different gain factors – now there's an on/off switch plus input selector. Yes, you've got it right, optionally the new PAM G2 offers two inputs. Thus different tonearm/pickup combinations may be directly compared to each other or permanently used side by side.

The adjustment possibilities in sum

For each input the gain factor, resistance and capacitance may be adjusted separately. The values comply with the usual standard and are absolutely practical. However, owners of exotic pickup systems can plug in the required terminations



via slots wired in parallel to the input sockets. For this purpose one should know the specifications of the respective system and then adjust the values accordingly. And those who'd rather be on the safe side will resort to Audionet's easy on-line help where you simply type in the values and get reliable setting recommendations.

For making contact with the amplifier the user may choose between balanced (Neutrik XLR) and unbalanced (WBT phono sockets). A classic Audionet feature is the »dual« mains connection: besides the standard IEC mains socket there is also an extra socket for the EPS, an external power supply which, as you know, produces a better imaging stability, greater dynamics and enhanced spatial impression. But apart from the EPS, Audionet has still another great option in petto for PAM G2: the EPC.

By using this external unit as support, the PAM G2 becomes remote-controllable. All settings (capacitance, resistance, gain factor) can then be adjusted from the listening spot during operation. The best possible reproduction quality can hardly be achieved in a more comfortable and safer way. But despite the fascinating upgrade options with the two external power supplies we should note that even solo the PAM G2 can already live up to highest demands.

At the IEC mains socket of the Audionet PAM G2 the »phase« has been marked to facilitate the setup. The feature list of this phono preamplifier leaves nothing to be desired.

Technology aplenty

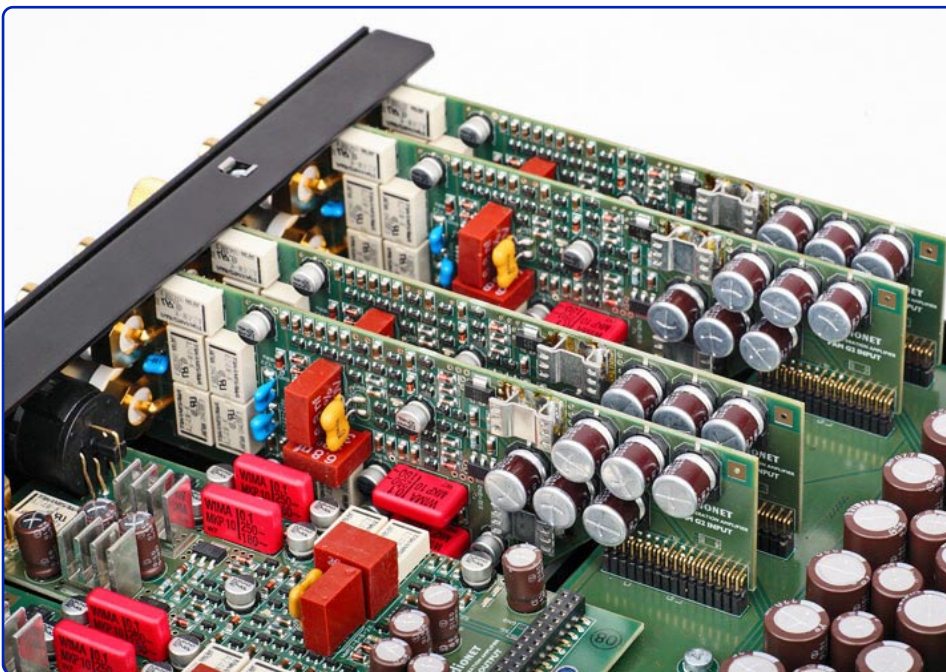
Audionet is a hightech company. So don't be surprised that PAM's inside view reminds less of a typical phono stage, but rather an audiophile preamplifier. The first unusual feature is the 100 VA transformer; for other manufacturers one third of its wattage is already sufficient at that point. Flanked by four large electrolytic caps, we see more than 60 smaller ones, sitting neatly in rank and file on the circuit board. Only a closer look will also reveal the large number of SMD components. Here things have been done in a really big way – an Audionet trademark.

The secret of those tiny components is their reduced susceptibility to HF interference. Furthermore the Audionet R&D team is convinced of their 40,000_V phalanx of electrolytic caps, as they can provide energy a lot faster on demand – and by this I mean dynamic peaks in the music. 12 mosfet

controllers which serve to regulate and smooth the supply voltage are sitting enthroned on an aluminium rail to ensure an identical operating temperature for all of them. As we can see, an optimal climate does not only bring well-being to us humans.

Brevity is the soul of wit

Although the PAM G2 is branched inside over long paths, the signal routing is really quick: on the shortest possible track the inputs are connected to the outputs. The input modules, the parallel matching units and the two outputs are each located on



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Its interior view reminds rather of an audiophile amplifier, but its job is merely the soulful amplification of delicate pickup currents.

individual boards. This is costly, but has apparently proven successful soundwise. Furthermore, a closer investigation of the technical construction shows that we're talking about finest German art of engineering. The PAM G2 is superb technology.

Experiencing records in another dimension

It is inevitable that the daily test routine will eventually lead to a certain and mostly uniform course. From this one must free themselves by physical exercise or other activities. However, on very rare occasions even veteran editors are vaulted out of beat by a review device the way the Audionet PAM G2 did in an utterly unexpected manner. For the new PAM has nothing in common any more with its predecessor's definitely above-average sonic performance. The G2 version is an almost unbelievable step forward.

Where the forerunner was able to create punch with electronic music, the new guy puts a massive fortress into the room which simply leaves us speechless during the first few minutes. With utter precision it screens the musical performance, breathing authentic life into it. With tracks by Trentemøller or Kraftwerk, this phono stage is not the driven one, but the driving force. There are no instabilities whatsoever in the sub-low range, and this makes it exceptional. The Audionet is a perfect role model for how things can sound truly musical and emotional. This has not been audible so clearly via our reference chain until now.

Separating the chaff from the wheat ...

The Audionet PAM G2 can also transfer oeuvres by Bach upward by several classes. Suddenly piano touches reverberate with a colour and energy that remind the author of a live concert performance with Keith Jarrett. The comparison with the equally superb, yet lower priced Lehmannaudio Silver Cube shows that the latter treats the music more cautiously. Sure, it carves out all the details, and with the hammer touching the strings there is also nothing to cavil about. Until that very moment when the PAM G2 gets in on the act again, for it simply defines new standards in thrilling reproduction. Don't let me be misunderstood: acoustic details are not imaged bigger or just reproduced with undue massiveness; it's rather the markedly improved audibility of even the most subtle structures.

... with some serious music

With Oleta Adams' »Get Here« the new PAM showcases the next highlight. Suddenly this track



seems to be fuller orchestrated, the percussive elements, which otherwise can only be heard in the background, really come alive. Not just because they sound much more realistic, but especially because they exhibit a distinctly enhanced spatial image. The equally excellent Primare R32 focuses the scenery more towards the centre between the loudspeakers. But it's truly sublime how Oleta Adams' voice emerges between the loudspeakers – a voice with an unrestricted lightness that goes under your skin and has a liveliness which still seems to be limited to this analogue medium. Just gorgeous!

The PAM G2 has no musical preferences, it turns everything into an impressive experience. Using one of the two external power supplies EPS or EPC or by checking out different power cords one can certainly achieve further improvements, but already the basic version is perfect. The addictive sound potential of the PAM G2 is world-class.



Interview with Thomas Gessler, Audionet's managing director.

Mr. Gessler, do you still consider it opportune to launch such a high-quality phono preamplifier like the Audionet PAM G2?

It's beyond debate that the record has still a great many friends. But for Audionet the PAM G2 is not a commercial project in the first place. Instead we were asking ourselves how far we could get with the good old record if we systematically put our state-of-the-art technology and know-how in the balance for this. Apart from the remote controllability via EPC, I'm sure that we will bring quite a few record lovers a soundful aha experience and a great pleasure.

You still stand by Bochum as your production location. Is your idealism still that strong or can't you (don't you want to) have it any other way?

Our ambition is to generate ultimate quality. This can only be realised in cooperation with a team of highly qualified and motivated partners. I'd like to give you an example: we have the aluminium for our front panels custom-made for us by a small company – according to our own formula and in consistently optimal quality. The blanks are then processed in Bochum by precision mechanics using CNC drilling and milling machines. For surface treatment they use grinding machines which were custom-made for us. The front panels are then lavishly anodised in Witten by means of special-designed titan exposures and finally accurately printed at a small printers' shop. Each work step was outlined by proficient experts and is carefully carried out with utmost technical competence. Not only for our front panels do we make such great efforts, but of course all the more for the development and construction of our electronics and devices. This can only be done here, hand in hand. Furthermore, each of us also lives and works in a certain tradition and mentality. Here in the Ruhr district things were never done by halves

and they will never be. What counts here is honest work, authenticity and the ambition to create big things. So for Audionet an alternate production site is beyond debate; we are and we will stay »Made in Germany«!

It's obviously part of the zeitgeist that we are more and more often concerned with superficial distractions like Facebook or Twitter. How can one, or more precisely, how can you still create a time window these days where you can peacefully listen to music?

To me, music is both relaxing and inspiring at the same time and this to a considerable extent. I simply take a timeout for such experiences. It's all a matter of priorities. People who can't turn off their smartphones any more or who need several dozens of Traverse channels for entertainment, will hardly reach that inner rest which is undoubtedly needed to grasp music in its full emotional scope. By the way, Facebook or Twitter are great for cultivating friendships, for instance. As always in life it's a matter of proportionality.

Audionet is known for perfect digital sources like the ART G3 and VIP G3. In which context does an analogue phono stage appear in your product range then? Or in other words: will the people not rather expect network products from a hightech company like Audionet?

We at Audionet have been dealing with high-carat record reproduction from the very beginning. Already in the forerunners PAM und PAM V2, which

Interview



Intellectual oddball, Audionet fan and endowed with common sense: Thomas Gessler.

were also rated as exceptional phono stages, we had implemented new designs and technologies. However, this really intense part of our work was outshined by successes in the home cinema sector and therefore – as opposed to abroad – not fully appreciated by our German stereo prospects.

After years of abstinence you're announcing Audionet as exhibitor for the High End 2011 in Munich. Can you tell i-fidelity.net something about your idea behind it?

This year is simply right for us, because the visitors can look forward to meeting new and exciting Audionet components. Of course, we're planning to go clear at the top of the ever increasing number of performances which, to put it mildly, could qualify as mediocre. During the past few months we have received numerous European and international awards, and I would

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like to comment on this quite presumptuously that, in addition to the test wins, it's particularly the »reference titles« which fill our hearts with pride. Therefore we feel obliged to give the Munich audience top-class demonstrations. *ifn*



In connection with the external power supply EPC, the PAM G2 becomes remote-controllable. (Picture credit: Audionet)

Features

Inputs: 4 x WBT phono sockets, 4 x WBT phono sockets for individual input impedance matching, 1 x EPS or EPC connection, 1 x IEC mains socket

Outputs: 2 x WBT phono sockets, 2 x Neutrik XLR sockets

Input impedance values: 100 Ω , 150 Ω , 470 Ω , 1 k Ω , 23 k Ω , 47 k Ω , 69 k Ω

Input capacitance values: 100 pF, 200 pF, 320 pF, 420 pF

Model versions front panel:

Brushed aluminium, black anodised, light grey overprint; brushed aluminium, silver anodised, black overprint

LEDs: blue or red

Top lids: Aluminium, black anodised

Chassis: Sheet steel, black anodised

Dimensions (W x H x D): 43 x 7 x 32 cm (16.9 x 2.7 x 12.6 in.)

Weight: 9 kg (19.8 lbs)

Warranty: 2 years, With component registration: 3 years

Contact

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Summary

The new Audionet PAM G2 is a massive surprise in terms of sound. In all essential single aspects of the overall sound image this phono preamplifier knows how to fully convince already without EPS and EPC. For instance, the solidity of its spatial reproduction is impressive, the style of its tonal resolution presumably no more enhanceable and the harmonic energy distribution across all octaves simply sensational. With great authority and clearance to the competition the Audionet PAM G2 takes its seat on the i-fidelity.net reference throne. This is not the first title Audionet could claim, but probably one of the most important. After all the market for phono pres is not exactly that large, and the PAM G2's performance is far beyond what otherwise may well be called a decent result. People who are capable of treasuring the sound of records should get to know the Audionet PAM G2 bombshell! *Olaf Sturm ifn*

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Reference

Sound quality

outstanding

Features

superb

Workmanship

very good

Overall score

outstanding

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Audionet PAM G 2

Test verdict: superb