Stage craft

Debuting AVID HIFI's range of phono stages, the Pellar phono preamp is put through its paces by ***Neville Roberts***

Positioned as the entry-level phono stage from the UK's AVID HIFI, Pellar is directly related to the more expensive Pulsus and has a common optimised internal circuit design intended to minimise hum and noise while maximising signal headroom.

It supports both moving-magnet and coil cartridges with different output levels, and has a black painted metal case. The front sports a mains on/off switch, while the rear has an IEC mains socket for the power, earth binding post and six RCA phono sockets – two for output, two for in and two for applying load impedance for MC carts. The appropriate gain is selected via a group of four on/off switches situated on the underside. The switches are arranged in two sections corresponding to left and right channels, and both sections should be set the same. The options are for MM, MC low gain and MC high gain. As a rule, the MC low gain is for high-output MC carts and MC high gain is for low-output moving coils.

For MM cartridges, the load impedance is the standard 47Kohm. The lower load impedance required by MC cartridges is cleverly applied through loading plugs situated above the input RCA sockets on the back of the unit. Two phono plugs are supplied with a 500ohm resistor inside each to provide a loading that should suit a wide range of carts. However, any load value can be applied by choosing a suitable 0.25W resistor.

Sound quality

I connect the Pellar output to an unused input on my valve preamp and the input to a Vertere SG tonearm fitted with a Vertere XtraX MC cart (*HFC* 512). I set the gain switches to the MC high gain setting as the cartridge output is rated at 0.45mV. The recommended loading is 850-1.5Kohm, so I make up a couple of loading plugs, which I fit with 1Kohm resistors connected across the internal connections.

I start off by spinning Vivaldi's *Op.7* played by I Musici because it has a good range of solo instruments as well as a full orchestra. The sound is superb and I'm struck by the open, delicate and effortless strings, which never interfere with the lower registers of the double basses. There is a real fullness to the sound across the whole audio spectrum and the music comes across as very refined throughout.

The deep and extended drum roll during the opening sequence of a Telarc LP of Stravinsky's *The Firebird Suite* is very impressive, subtle and powerful. You only become aware of this very deep rumbling when it stops for a few bars before starting again, which is a great testament to the low-end performance of the phono stage. When the strings enter, the twittering sound has great clarity and focus. The players come across as a collection of individual performers, rather than merging together. The crescendos are commanding and expansive, and the Pellar has no problem handling the huge dynamics.

Simon and Garfunkel's *The Boxer* is a rather bright recording, and so is great for checking for any harshness or edginess to the vocals. The Pellar performs admirably with Garfunkel's voice coming though as bright and open. The guitar is clear and tuneful, and when the rhythmic patting of drums begins the sound is musical – not just a dull thump.

The Dave Brubeck Quartet's *The Trolley Song* has a great sense of reality and presence, the moving alto sax intro leading into a fast-paced section and the rhythmic tapping of the hi-hats on the far left of the soundstage coming across crystal clear.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
AVID HIFI Pellar

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
MM/MC phono stage

WEIGHT
1.6kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
310 x 110 x 230mm

FEATURES
- Gain: 48dB; 60dB; 70dB
- Resistive load: 47kohm for MM, custom via loading plugs for MC
- Capacitive load: 100pF

DISTRIBUTOR
AVID HIFI

WEBSITE
avidhifi.com

Conclusion

The Pellar delivers a very refined sound and is extremely good value for money. The build quality is excellent, and the simple way that you can match it to most MC carts makes it easy to use to get the best from your cartridge of choice ●

Hi-Fi Choice OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★½

LIKE: Realistic and refined performance

DISLIKE: Nothing at the price

WE SAY: It delivers very elegant performances and is great value for money

OVERALL ★★★★★