

## PureAudio Pure Vinyl Phono Preamplifier

PureAudio is the new venture from veterans of the New Zealand audio scene, Gary Morrison and Ross Stevens.

As well as designer of the excellent Craft amplifiers, Gary was head designer at Plinius (1987-2005) and responsible for nearly two decades of some of the finest New Zealand amplifiers, from the high value 8150/8200 integrations, the Class A SA-series, the superb Class A beating SB-300, to the first truly great sounding multi-channel amplifier, the Odeon. Ross designed the innovative, much admired (and copied) curved fascia and asymmetrical casework.

Reunited at PureAudio, their goal is to produce simple, innovative products that promise more music, less technology.

The initial offerings include a stereo preamplifier, a monoblock power amplifier and a stereo phono preamplifier. These products look like no other.

The Vinyl preamp is a rather large, shoebox of a beast featuring bodywork and chassis laser cut from 5mm aluminium. Mechanical origami folds the cut pieces to form a rigid, non-magnetic, non-resonant whole. Large cut-outs provide plenty of ventilation, stainless steel mesh provides protection and a gauzed window view of the top one of paired tidy circuit boards and a hefty power supply worthy of a small power amplifier.

The fine attention to detail extends to an area many manufacturers neglect, recycling of waste materials. Off-cuts from the casework production are reused to make the heat sinks for the power amps. Consideration is also given to the feet supporting the preamp. The design aesthetic of the Vinyl is not sullied by the nondescript rubber bungs most makers use; instead it sits on a tripod of bespoke feet, beautifully machined from an acoustically inert material.

Set-up is plug and play. There are no front panel switches to fiddle with. The rear carries two sets of mini-switches, one for each channel; one toggle

sets capacitance, the others are for cartridge loading – six sensible settings from 47 ohms to 47k ohms. Gain is set at 62dB, enough for most moving coil cartridges. For purists, custom gain and load settings can be hardwired, removing any switching from the delicate signal pathway for even better sound quality. Connection is by single ended RCA only, keeping the signal path simple and avoiding unnecessary complexity and cost.

The only concession to style is the front panel power pilot light that automatically switches off when music is playing. The instructions say by internally moving a jumper you can keep the light on but there is no mention of keeping the light off.

The Vinyl was auditioned with Well Tempered original, Amadeus, Technics turntables; Shelter, Dynavector, Ortofon cartridges; Krell, Naim, Rotel, NAD amplification; Image, Energy, AR loudspeakers and XLO, MIT, Naim, QED wiring.

Pure Audio is what it says on the label and pure audio is what you get. Many phono stages (especially tubed ones) give themselves away even before the stylus contacts the record



groove by producing audible artefacts like noise or a tangible blackness instead of nothing. Listening through the Vinyl is like sitting on a Wellington hillside on a fine day, looking across the harbour and seeing the wonderful waterfront spread out before you.

Everything just sounds right, without omission or exaggeration. From a silent background comes a life sized sound field, full of the colour and dynamics of real music. The musicians and their instruments have excellent focus and dimensionality, performing on a well defined soundstage free of the physical boundaries presented by the speakers.

The darkish, troubled highs of the old Plinius phono preamps have been banished. The Vinyl's highs are sweet and extended, full of fine nuance but never obtrusive, the midrange lucid and full bodied, the bass deep and articulate. Together they give the Vinyl a cut-from-one cloth tonal coherence.

Dynamics are graceful but authoritative. Rhythmically the Vinyl is lively but well controlled, toe tappingly good in the best Linn tradition. Breathtaking transparency allows you to hear deep into the recording without ultra-analytical dissection. Individual musical threads are allowed to develop and coalesce into an organic whole. The over-riding impression is one of ease, forgiving but not obscuring.

For many years now the long out-of-production Plinius Jarrah has been my phono stage of choice. This was a modestly priced unit capable of very good performance, whilst far from perfect, it got straight to the heart of the music. The dilemma I (and many Jarrah owners) faced was where to go forward from the Jarrah without taking out a second or third mortgage. The big brother M14 was the obvious choice until it also went out of production, the replacement Koru was a rather anodyne, antiseptic sounding device. The Vinyl proves to be a worthy successor to the Plinius legacy.

The Vinyl squarely hits all its design targets and in my experience is the finest phono stage ever made in New Zealand (and given the directions taken by other local manufacturers, is likely to hold the top spot for a long time to come). Nothing short of the best imported super high end models come close to the sonic purity and musicality of the Vinyl, with none offering the same sheer value for money. This is a little piece of magic that I would gladly call my own.—*Michael Wong*