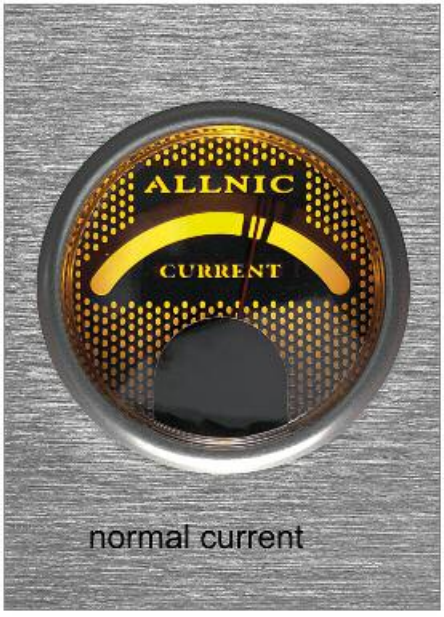
The end of sanctity

So-called "game changers" rarely cross my path. Most recently, it was Sven Boenicke's loudspeakers that fundamentally changed the way I listen to music. Now the H-7000V phono stage from Allnic is about to send my phono preamp – a real authority among phono preamplifiers – into retirement (although unfortunately only in my dreams for the time being).

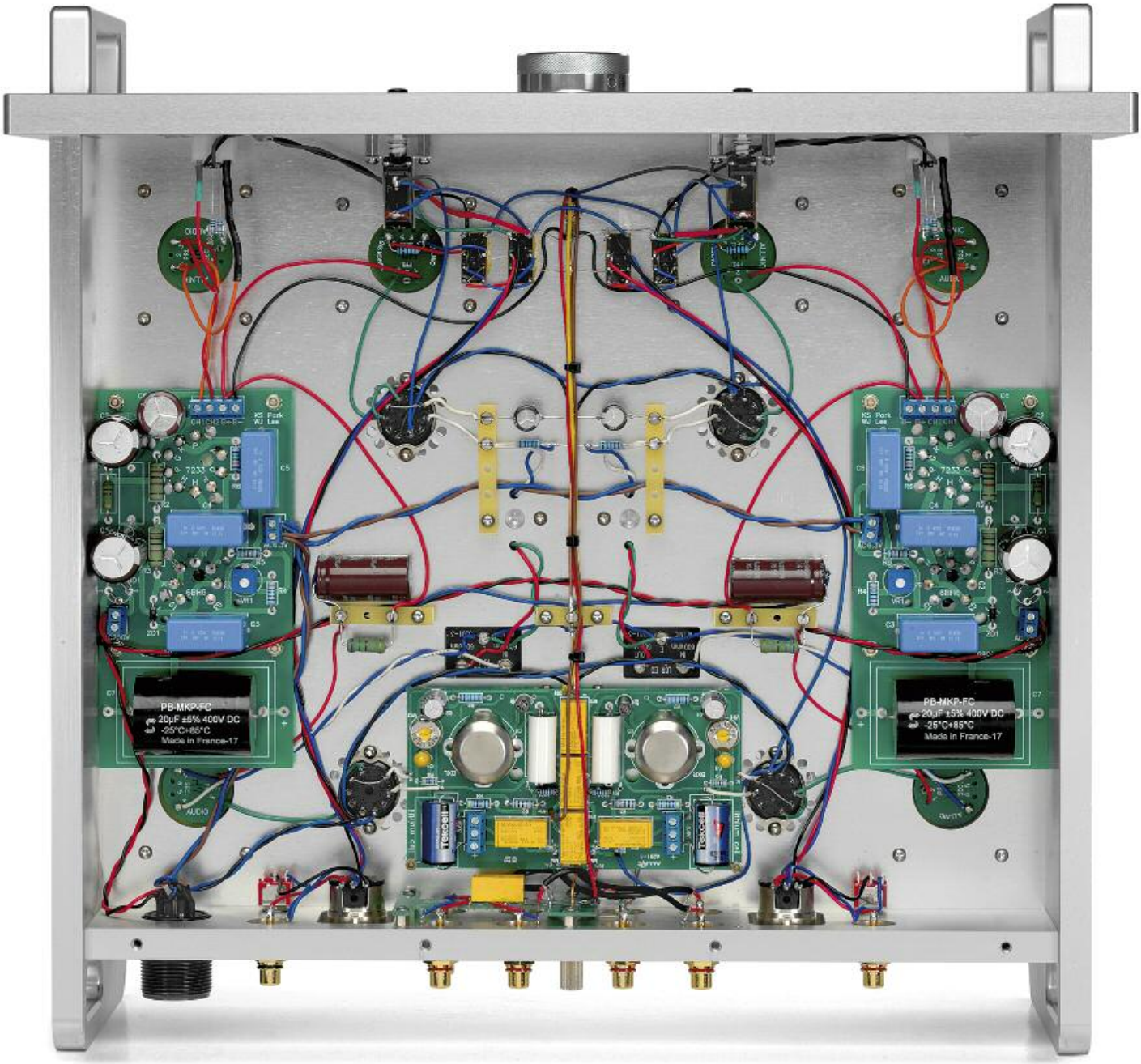


It's time for the inside story: quite a few manufacturers who visited me in my listening room were amazed when they listened to my phono amplifier. The TubeMann WV2 Phono RIAA, a phono amplifier by Hungarian developer Tubeguru, which was manufactured for me based on a Neumann circuit, outshone many competitors in a comparative test. This transformer-coupled phono stage, designed with external (battery) power supply and tube rectification, four MC inputs and one MM input, offers an extraordinarily airy, high-resolution, colourful, wonderfully musical sound image. In the meantime "Mr. Tubeguru" has apparently retired, and many of his unique specimens are now changing hands on the second-hand market for considerable sums. These "underground developers", who build components at home in their back rooms, are countless. Such an "exotic" product has its charm, but as we all know, it's a double-edged sword: if the developer is not around (any longer) when a problem occurs, any joy in the device can quickly turn to frustration. Nowadays, I would give top priority to the criterion of professional service when considering a purchase. If this cannot be guaranteed, I prefer to do without the device – regardless of how good the sound quality may be. Apart from a trace of nervousness and the occasional slight hint of strain in the high frequency range, which I noticed on certain recordings with the Lyra Kleos MC cartridge, the Tubeguru performs so convincingly that until recently I saw no reason to replace it with anything from more well-known manufacturers. In terms of appearance and feel, however, it has never won a beauty contest – its "underground DNA" is unmistakable, it just can't compare with the noble design and flawless manufacturing quality of the H-7000V phono preamplifier which Peter Schmitz, Managing Director of Allnic Audio's German sales division, placed in my listening room with a mischievous smile, probably knowing exactly what he was doing to me.

With its massive, elegant brushed Duralumin housing and its impressive weight of around 22 kilograms, the new phono stage by South Korean developer Kang Su Park promises a first-class listening experience on the basis of its outward appearance

alone. The external circuit-based power supply alone weighs 6 kilograms, in which a 5AR4 octal tube from Russian military stock acts as a rectifier and an oversized mains transformer with choke coil is responsible for the power supply. The fact that Kang Su Park uses no less than five different types of screws made of either PVC, bronze, aluminium, stainless steel or iron for sound quality reasons shows the South Korean's attention to detail. Hardly surprising, when you consider the reason he ultimately left the legendary high-end manufacturer Silvaweld, where he had earned his reputation as an exceptional designer, to found Allnic Audio in 2005: he simply didn't want to make any budget-related compromises anymore and wanted to realize his very own vision of modern tube amplification. He never gives in to the temptation of resting on his laurels, or awards from the international trade press. Each circuit topology is constantly questioned anew, and further potential for improvement consistently sounded out. For five years he worked meticulously to replace the extremely well-known 20-year-old phono stage H-3000V with the H-7000V. He devoted a large part of this time to the development of a new active step-up (more on this later) and new inter-stage transformers with fingernail-sized coils, to which he attaches great importance for playback quality. In combination with its advanced "full engagement transformers" with nickel cores and iron-cored choke, the best possible values for signal-to-noise ratio and harmonic distortion are achieved while output impedance is kept as low as possible, independent of frequency.

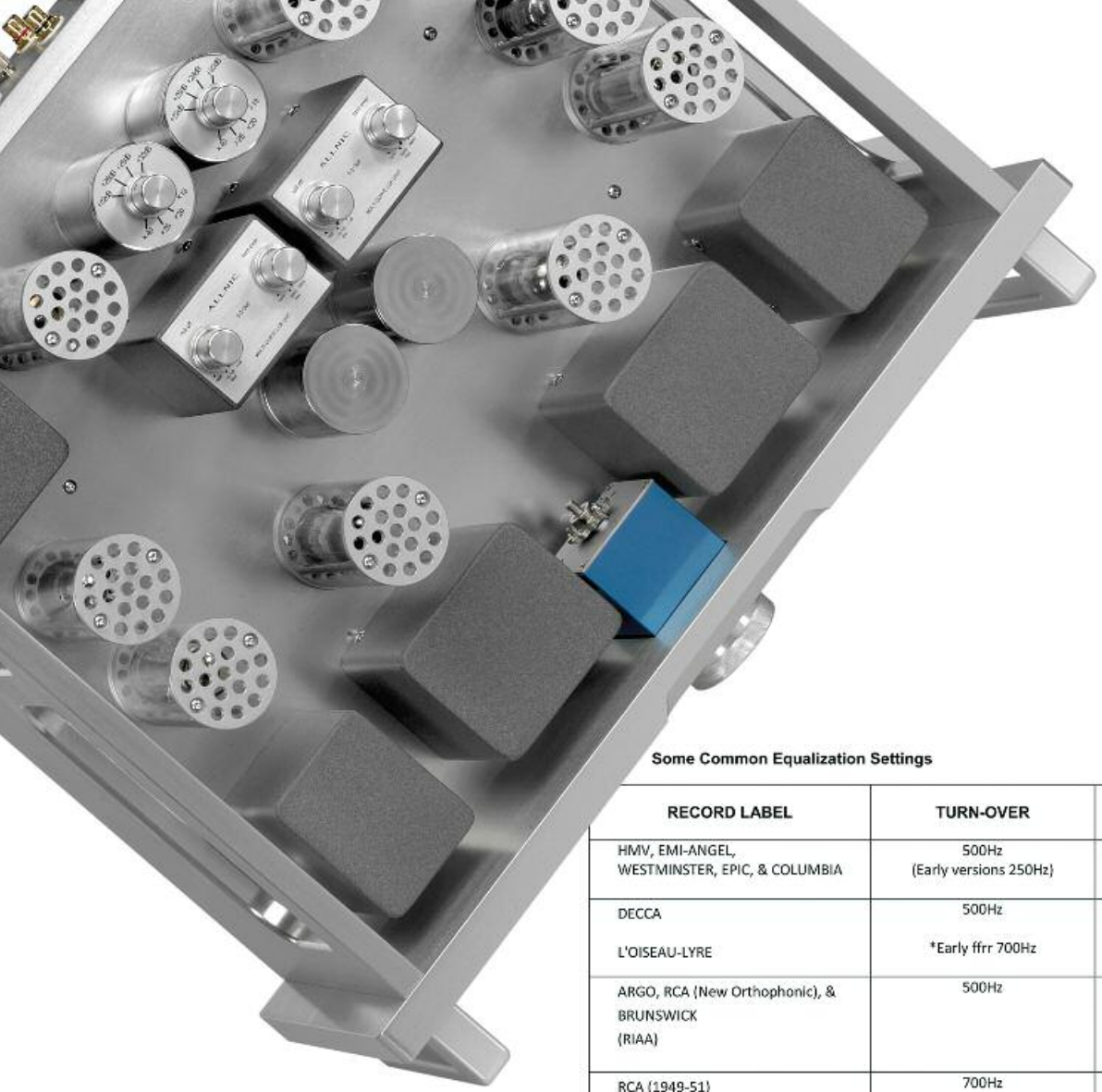
The H-7000V operates strictly dual-mono in Class A and without signal-influencing feedback. Two pairs of E810F tubes operating in triode



With the completely transformer-coupled H-7000V, Kang Su Park has developed a phono stage that amplifies the signal with the highest possible power. In contrast to the usual concepts in which the focus is exclusively on voltage amplification, it focuses on the electrical power (voltage x current). This approach prohibits the use of capacitors in the signal path, as the latter would lead to a reduction in current. According to the manufacturer, this is the only way to achieve a sound image of holographic three-dimensionality

mode, also from "new old stock" (NOS), provide the two-stage amplification, a pair of 7233 tubes is responsible for voltage regulation, a pair of 5654s for the power supply. In contrast to the power supply with its small circuit boards, the signal path of the H-7000V is wired point-to-point. Various conductor materials – pure copper, coated copper and silver – are used. Where Kang Su Park uses which conductor remains a trade secret, as does the nature of the three materials that make up the three-layer transformer and transformer shielding.

The features of the H-7000V leave nothing to be desired: two MC and two MM inputs allow four pickups to be connected simultaneously – a feast for owners of multiple tonearms. The source selector switch developed by Allnic Audio is equipped with large silver contacts – according to Kang Su Park, these have a service life of at least 100 years. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the CNC-milled housing, which is characterised by very good resonance-reducing properties, high rigidity and corrosion resistance, is also manufactured by the manufacturer himself. Both MM inputs have an input impedance of 47 kiloohms and needless to say – in the unlikely instance that two MC inputs are not enough – allow the use of external step-up transformers. Although I was mainly interested in the MC inputs, I could not resist connecting a Nagaoka MP 10 to one of the two moving magnet inputs. Finally, Pear Audio's Little John turntable, which I discussed in issue 5/2018, was mounted on my rack and the MP 10 was quickly set up on the Cornet 1 tonearm. Admittedly, there was something a bit daring about this experiment: who would pair a 50 Euro pickup with a phono stage that costs a whopping 14900 Euro?! But ultimately, the Nagaoka is a price-performance sensation with fine, homogeneous and three-dimensional reproduction – an entry-level cartridge that does a lot right and nothing really wrong. To my surprise, the H-7000V teased virtues out of it that I hadn't expected: with Éric Demarsan's title "Avenue Paul-Doumer" on the album Le Cercle Rouge (We Release Whatever The Fuck We Want Records/We Release Jazz, WRJ003LTD, Switzerland, 2018 (1972), LP), a big band fusion jazz soundtrack with the typical French Easy Listening charm of the Seventies, the Nagaoka showed me the selectivity and spatial depth with which it is able to act: bass, xylophone, the cleanly played guitar, the sweep of the brush – everything was clearly arranged in its place, with a considerable soundstage extension in all directions. The tendency towards dryness in the sound of the Nagaoka was accompanied by an unexpected

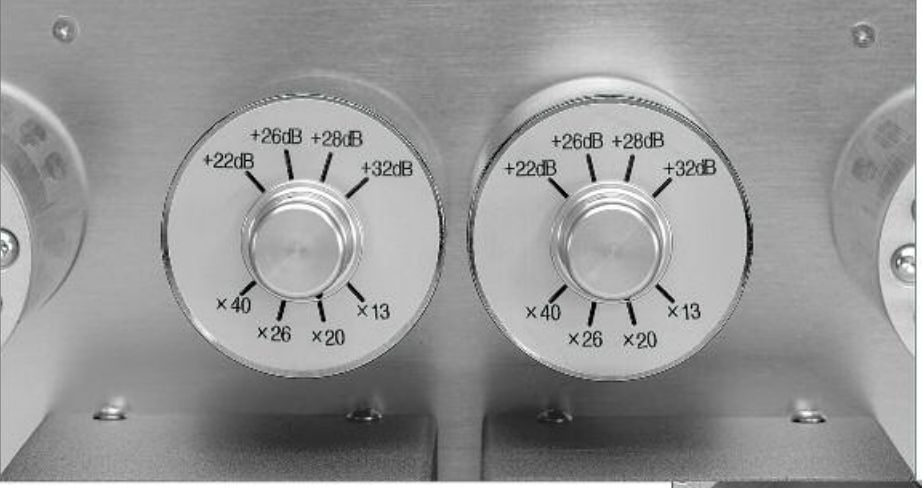


Above: All transformers in the signal path have an 80 percent nickel core to ensure high permeability. Kang Su Park dedicated a large part of the five-year development period to optimizing the inter-stage transformers. In contrast to many other concepts, the tiny coils are intended to improve the quality of both high-frequency and bass reproduction

Some Common Equalization Settings

RECORD LABEL	TURN-OVER	ROLL-OFF
HMV, EMI-ANGEL, WESTMINSTER, EPIC, & COLUMBIA	500Hz (Early versions 250Hz)	-16dB (Sometimes -13.7dB) (Early versions 0dB)
DECCA	500Hz	-11dB
L'OISEAU-LYRE	*Early ffrr 700Hz	-11dB
ARGO, RCA (New Orthophonic), & BRUNSWICK (RIAA)	500Hz	-13.7dB
RCA (1949-51)	700Hz	-13.7dB
RCA (1951-52)	500Hz	-13.7dB
TELEFUNKEN & (German) DECCA	400Hz	-5dB
PHILIPS	400Hz	-5dB
MERCURY	400Hz	-11dB
MELODIYA, DG & ETERNA	500Hz (Sometimes 250Hz)	-13.7dB (Sometimes -11dB or -16dB)
NARTB	500Hz	-16dB
CAPITOL (1942)	400Hz	-11dB

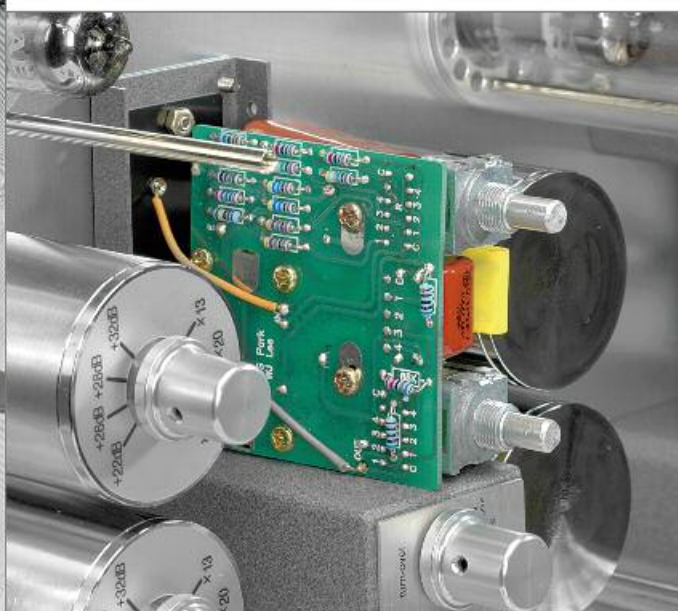
* *This Table of Common Equalization Settings has been assembled thanks to kind guidance of MR. SUNGJUN PARK, the well-known Korean conductor.*



Left and below: The primary winding of the transformers is tapped directly above the triple shielded transformers. In this way, the transmission ratio is adjusted. The two Multi-Curve LCR units are also easily accessible from above

Table (left): Oh LP lover's heart, what more do you want?! For the MC and MM inputs, Kang Su Park developed the so-called "Multi-Curve LCR Units". These each offer four channel-separated adjustment options for turn-over (cut-off frequency for increasing the bass range) and roll-off (level reduction in the treble range, specified in decibels). Settings for the most common equalization curves can be found in the detailed instruction manual

Left and below: The passive RIAA equalization is achieved via an LCR network (L = inductance of the coil/C = capacitance of the capacitor/R = resistance) and has a special feature: the capacitor is not located in the signal path, but is connected in parallel. Kang Su Park's circuit designs always involve very careful component selection



Two MM inputs, one MC input with electrical step-up, one MC input with "classic" transformer as well as an asymmetrical cinch and one fully balanced XLR output make the H-7000V a super-flexible contact point for pickups and downstream amplifier electronics. Kang Su Park doesn't think much of the usual plugs and sockets found in the high-end sector and prefers to rely on military specification Cinch and XLR plugs

tightness and a midrange presentation that turned out so captivatingly beautiful that I could hardly wait to unleash my Lyra Kleos and Grado Statement Statement 2, which were already eagerly awaiting their use on the Fuchs and Origin Live tonearms of the Nottingham Analogue Dais, on the Allnic phono stage. Since the H-7000V is fully balanced and the Nagaoka had demonstrated only minimal advantage of the XLR output over the phono plug output in terms of fine dynamics and spatial representation, I decided to connect the phono stage to the extremely musical, "juicy" Perreaux Eloquence 250i integrated amplifier via XLR.

This brings us to the H-7000V's two MC inputs. As with the MM inputs, passive equalization is achieved via an LCR network with four channel-separated adjustment options each for the cutoff frequency to boost the low-frequency range and the high-frequency roll-off (level reduction). This allows a total of 16 different equalization curves to be set, covering the most common industrial equalization curves of earlier years from Decca to RCA, Mercury and Telefunken. For anyone with no experience of the sonic effects of "matching" equalization curves, the Allnic H-7000V will make them wonder how they ever managed without a fine adjustment option for various equalizations. The fact that Kang Su Park insists on such a complex additional circuit cannot be credited highly enough. He starts where the music really is: the equalization dog lies buried in the more or less independent cutting characteristics of record companies such as Deutsche Grammophon, RCA or Columbia, which, as far as the characteristics are concerned, were

many and varied well into the 1960s. If cartridges are to sample releases from this label era correctly and equalized for the first time, the surprised listener will throw his "what I don't know I don't worry about" attitude overboard and quickly become aware of the tonal inferiority of an RIAA reproduction (before it became the standard for all labels). Thus with my Tubeguru (and therefore without individual equalization) Beethoven's "Pastorale" – Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68 by the Columbia Symphony Orchestra (Columbia Masterworks, MS 6012, Canada, 1958, LP) under the baton of Bruno Walter, sounds strangely "flat" and "grey". Any judgement of good recording quality, based on a lack of better knowledge, is quickly corrected with the H-7000V: following Kang Su Park's recommended equalization for Columbia records – "Turnover" and "Roll-off" of the two Allnic "Multi-Curve LCR Units" set channel-separated at 500 Hz and -16 dB –, in particular the strings and woodwinds gained noticeably in tonal colour and thus in authenticity. The spatial representation also clearly benefitted from the Columbia equalization: the instrumental grouping of the orchestra now seemed more believable and in a more "correct" relationship to each other – a benefit that considerably improved the whole musical flow. Setting the "high frequency roll-off" to 13.7 dB, which Kang Su Park also indicates for Columbia equalization, proved to be a small stroke of luck for the recording, as detailed information was now articulated more freely and even more organically. The 13.7 dB setting is mentioned in the H-7000V user's manual in the equalization curves chapter – in the form of a "(Sometimes)" in brackets for Columbia equalization. This inconspicuous "(Sometimes)" has an appreciable effect on the sound and shows how valuable a finely adjustable equalization circuit can be. I don't want to be without this any more – no matter how high-quality the pickup gliding through the grooves may be.

In addition to the specially developed MC input already mentioned, which is used to electrically amplify connected pickups, the H-7000V also offers an MC input with a "traditional" step-up transformer. However, the manufacturer explicitly points out that such a "classic" step-up transformer generates distortion that increases proportionally with gain. In addition, part of the signal – about 10 percent even with "good" transformers – is lost for physical reasons. This explanation gives the impression that the electrically amplifying MC1 input is to be preferred. In practice, however, the two inputs ultimately present the vinyl lover with an extremely luxurious agony of choice: Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings in C Major (Phaja/Sarastro, SAR 7813, Japan, (1978) 2012, LP) with the Grado on the "classical" step-up invites you to revel in a surge

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Tonearms: Robert Fuchs 12", Origin Live Encounter Mk2, Pear Audio Cornet 1 **Cartridges:** Grado Epoch, Grado Statement Statement 2, Lyra Kleos, Nagaoka MP 10 **Headshells:** Acoustical Systems Arché 5D, Oyaide HS-TF Carbon **Phonostages:** Tubeguru TubeMann WV2 Phono RIAA, Perreaux Audiant VP3 **CD-Players:** Lector CDP-707 with PSU-7T power supply, Ayon Audio CD-35 Signature, Oppo BDP-103 **Preamplifiers:** New Audio Frontiers Performance MZ Special Edition, NAD M12 **Power amplifiers:** monoblocks Sombetzki S509, NAD M22 **Integrated amplifiers:** New Audio Frontiers Supreme 300B, Perreaux éloquence 250i **Speakers:** Boenicke Audio W11 SE+ **Cable:** levin design Gold Silver Direct interconnects and speaker cables, NF, LS8 and LS9 cables Biophotone, Acoustic System Liveline interconnects and speaker cables **Accessories:** SteinMusic Pi Perfect Interface turntable support, Audiophil Schumann generator, TAOC racks, SteinMusic Harmonizer and Blue Suns, Acoustic Revive RL-30 Vinyl Record Demagnetizer, audio desk systems Gläss Vinyl Cleaner PRO and Sound Improver, audio Exklusiv d.C.d. Base and Silentplugs, FPH acoustic vibration dampers, Herbie's Audio Lab Tenderfoot, baffle Audio Laboratory LittleFoots/BigFoots, Duende-Criatura damping rings, fastaudio absorbers, acoustic system resonators, MFE mains strip, AMR, Furutech and AHP fine fuses, Biophotone Magic Akasha Quantum Power Plugs, Acoustical Systems SMARTractor and HELOX plate clamp, all tubes from BTB Elektronik

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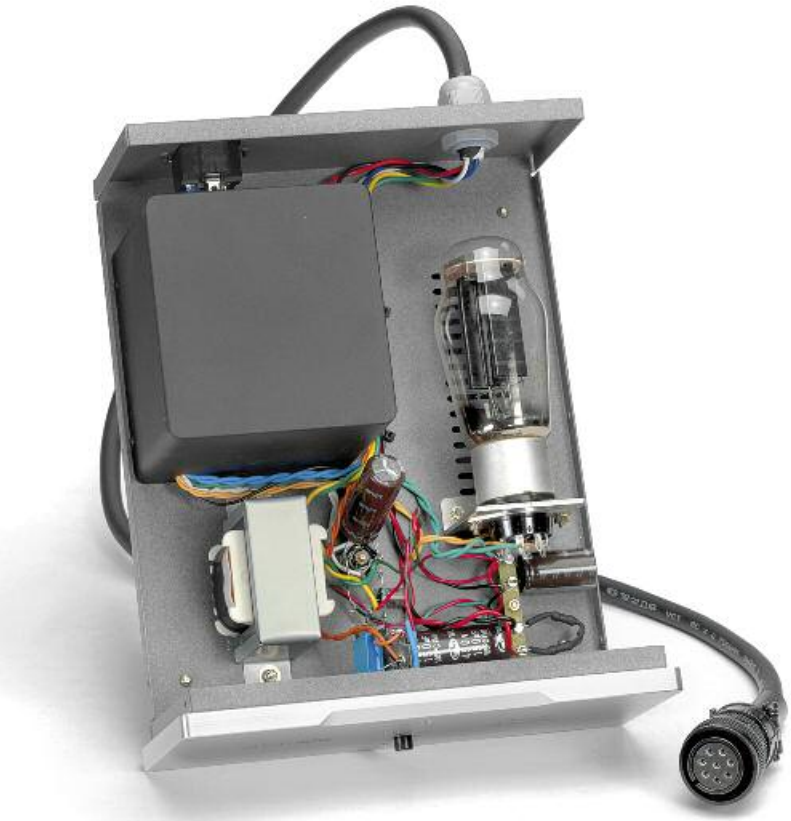

Tube rectification in the external power supply is performed by a powerful Russian military stock 5AR4 tube. The physical separation of electronics and power supply allows the use of a particularly powerful transformer. The influence of magnetism or vibrations can thus be practically ruled out. Partnering equipment:Turntables: Nottingham Analogue Dais including Sperling Audio NRM-1/S motor housing, Pear Audio Blue Little John

of rich string timbre with the finest dynamic shades and spatial presentation, which the small orchestra under the Czech conductor Otokar Stejskal unleash in barnstorming proportions. In terms of depth and timbre, the Grado is equally spectacular via the electrical input, but loses the extra dose of melodiousness that the other, extremely broadband step-up path is capable of conveying, and brings a nuance of more energy and an even finer resolution into play. Overtones seem to decay even more naturally, the entire presentation seems a touch more "right". Considering the fact that the Grado actually requires a load of 47 kiloohm, the performance is all the more amazing.

Even if neither Kang Su Park nor I see a compelling necessity for it, if desired, the electrically amplifying step-up can be adjusted with miniature resistors – owners of pickups with exotic impedance values are kindly requested to contact the German distributor or dealer. The tonal tendencies detected with the Grado through both inputs were confirmed with the Lyra pickup – of course with the neutral orientation typical of the Kleos and its "infatuation" with overview, transparency and fine resolution. To my great joy there was nothing more to be heard of the aforementioned nervousness and increased high-frequency presence of this cartridge, which sometimes occurs with my Tubeguru phono stage – on the contrary: the Allnic H-7000V seemed to persuade the pickup to confidently rely on its own strengths. In Johann Sebastian Bach's chorale "Komm, o Tod, du Schlafes Bruder", interpreted by the Tord Gustavsen Trio on The Other Side (ECM Records/Universal Music, ECM 2608, Germany, 2018, LP), the Kleos shows the elegant brilliance with which it is able to bring the unmistakable ECM sound aesthetic into the room. Using Sigurd Hole's double bass playing, I was able to observe the articulation of the bass range at both MC inputs very closely: with almost identical basic tonal substance, the voltage amplifying input showed a bit more sharpness and precision in the lowest registers, while the "classic" transformer came along with a more rounded, somewhat springy bass. I've never taken a champagne bath before – but the picture describes the differences between the two step-up concepts quite well: with the "classic" the tub seems to bubble a bit more, with the electric one the grape fragrance rises more directly and distinctly into the nose.

I had to feed both pickups with different musical material and switch back and forth between the two input concepts umpteen times in order to arrive at a purely subjective preference. From then on the Lyra played on the electric step-up, the Grado on the "classical" step-up. The latter strengthened my penchant for indulgence, the former my joy in fin-

ding the truth. But regardless of personal hearing taste, the H-7000V brings with it attributes of superlatives across all inputs: it's the quietest tube phono stage I've ever heard. It is this very special kind of calm that allows the famous background to reveal its innermost blackness and allows every tone, every sound to flow freely and unhindered into the world of great sound. I find in the H-7000V what so many high-end journalists before me found fascinating about the H-3000V: the legendary transparent soundstage of immense proportions.

Where I was once too lazy to dig out a record from my rack, now I can't seem to find my way to the on-off switch for my digital gear. The H-7000V has rekindled my passion for big orchestral and minimal music, even if classical music has taken a back seat over the past few months. Still: if you were to listen together with me to "You Break My Heart" from the album All The Things That I Did And All The Things That I Didn't Do (Anti-/Indigo Records, 7516-1, Europa, 2018, 2-LP), the third LP by the Milk Carton Kids, and the touching sweetness of the steel strings of the western guitar, the languishing intensity of the pedal-steel, the tenderness of the brush stroke, the convincingly springy attack of the bass drum and last but not least the goosebump-producing plea in Kenneth Pattengale's falsetto… you would understand why it breaks my heart to soon have to part with the H-7000V again. It's in a totally different league to my old phono stage.

What the hell, here's the straight dope: the H-7000V is the best phono amplifier I've ever heard. But 14900 Euros? Even though I consider this more than reasonable for so much performance, quality and equipment, I don't see myself being in a position to splash so much cash any time soon. I can only urge all those with pockets of the required depth to take a closer look at this dream of a phono amplifier. If it doesn't get your ears ringing, there's something wrong with your system.

My goodness me, Mr. Park! What you have laid before us is absolutely world class! ▢

Phono amplifier Allnic Audio H-7000V

Principle: Transformer-coupled moving magnet and moving coil tube phono amplifier with variable phono equalization **Tube configuration:** 4 x E810F pentodes (NOS) in triode mode, 2 x 7233, 2 x 5654 (amplifier); 1 x 5AR4 (NOS from Russian military stock, power supply) **Inputs:** 2 x MM, MC1 (electrical step-up), MC2 ("classic" transformer) **Outputs:** 1 x Cinch (phono plug), 1 x XLR (switchable) **Input sensitivity:** 0.1 mV **Frequency range:** 20 Hz – 20 kHz **Input impedance:** 200 Ohm (variable adjustable via miniature resistors, MC1), 29 Ohm – 278 Ohm (MC2), 47 kOhm (MM1 and MM2) **Output impedance:** 200 Ohm **Output voltage:** 15 V (maximum) **Power consumption:** 80 W **Special features:** Duralumin chassis, Allnic audio multi-curve LCR equalizer with level reduction control (-5 dB, -11 dB, -13.7 dB, -16 dB) and frequency control (250 Hz, 400 Hz, 500 Hz, 700 Hz), step-up ratios +22 dB, +26 dB, +28 dB, + 32 dB, channel-separated voltage regulation, two VU meters for tube control **Colours:** Black or silver **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 43/18/40 cm (amplifier), 21/12/27 cm (power supply) **Weight:** 15.7 kg (amplifier), 6 kg (power supply) **Warranty:** 2 years; 6 months on tubes **Price:** 14900 Euro

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