



PERREAUX





▼ VOLUME ▲

DUAL CHANNEL PRE-AMPLIFIER  
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# Perreaux SM6 MkII and Prisma 350

Prices: 3600 and 5200 Euro

by Michael Vrzal, Photos: Rolf Winter

Clocks reset by 12 hours: We look at the other end of the world, at New Zealand, where quite amazing high-end-electronic is constructed.

Kiwis, sheep, Sir Edmund Hillary. Forgotten anything? Oh yes, the most uninhibited Oktoberfest visitors also come from New Zealand. In this regard we share common bonds. The island country, as seen through European eyes, is from a different planet. Far away from German culture, with lovely nature (The Lord Of The Rings), a temperate maritime climate, and a nuclear weapons free zone... surely New Zealand would have to be the ideal country to emigrate to?

German computer scientist, Claudia Ott thinks so, she can attribute her appearance in this

review due to her decision in 2004 to move to New Zealand. Importantly, she fell in love with the southern part of the South Island of New Zealand, and more precisely Dunedin, a town of 120 000 inhabitants – where she discovered a passion for photography. Shortly afterwards coming into contact with the high-end manufacturer Perreaux Industries, which is also located in Dunedin.

You can admire her results on the homepage of [Perreaux](#) a tasteful illustrated tour through the company, past soldering stations, test & measurement stations, all the way through to the finished

products. What do the photos portray, apart from the obvious messages of a devoted, finest high-end producing manufacturer? ...a comfortable not industrial atmosphere, a friendly professionalism that arouses sympathy for the products on first impressions.

Perreaux – are they not those with the amplifiers with those expressive curves and rounded edges? Correct! Years ago Perreaux amplifiers provoked sensation with a truly unique approach in this country. They entrusted the front panel design and configuration to the designer Ross Stevens, who had already worked for Philippe Starck and Hi Fi firms such as B&W and Linn. Stevens gave the black electronics boxes a unique design, creating “excitingly” curved front panels made of polished aluminium. Too bad that there does not exist any longer this unique housing design – seldom high-end was so sensual. The current design is clearly less extravagant. Recognition is provided by an elliptical opening, respectively centrally milled into the thick aluminium front, that offers room for on/off indication (350 power amplifier) and volume levels (SM6 MkII preamplifier).

In contrast to their minimalist front panel design – Perreaux have focused on operator convenience







Where is the lead brick hidden? The IR remote is ergonomic, but heavy.

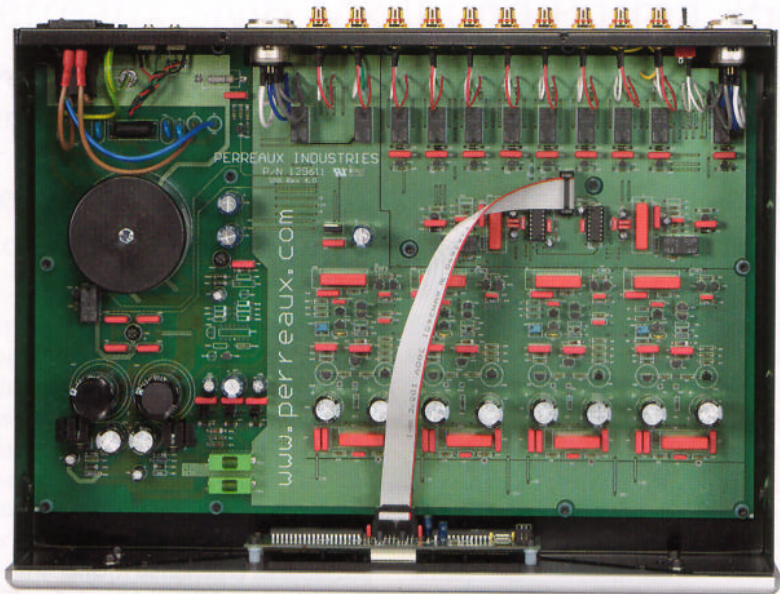
and comfort via their remote control. The rear panels of the test pieces have really something to offer. The SM6 MkII preamplifier offers six high level inputs, two outputs for tape loops, two preamplifier outputs as well as two 3.5mm low voltage mini plug sockets to remotely switch on and off power amplifiers. On the remote controller... Six inputs: 2 for tapes and two for pre, as well as 2 mini plug sockets to switch on by remote control any power amplifiers connected adorn the pre SM6 II: – is there anyone who needs more? One fully balanced input and output connection is alternatively selectable.

The Prisma 350 stereo power amplifier offers the expected cinch and XLR inputs, also dual binding posts for loudspeakers as well as a ground-lift switch to isolate the signal earth if required against noise. Careful with its use: if the disturbing noises don't turn out to be from an earth loop, but from defective cabling connections contact in some place of the NF cabling, this could easily snuff out the life of this 600 Watts “tank“, you could say that its capability to supply/conduct energy

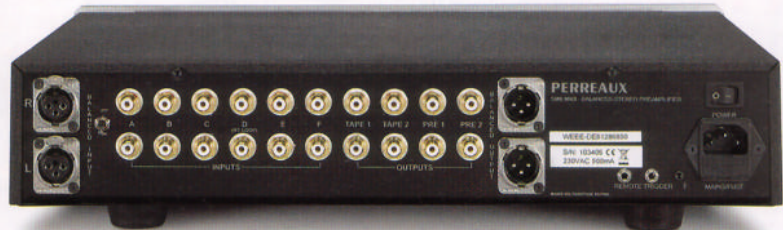
“Stromlieferfähigkeit”.

The antipodean amplifier combination is technically very solid, but at the same time unspectacular in appearance, indicates mostly the origin from the field of professional amplifier. Indeed looking into the roots of Perreux they used to make very heavy rock band PA amplifiers.

Even today it makes the Perreux purist proud that you can (metaphorically speaking) burn free the auditorial canal (acoustic meatus) with their products... but the wild times are long gone. Today rigid audiophile constraints are applied, and these are the following: authentic permanent continuous symmetry circuits, as much Class-A



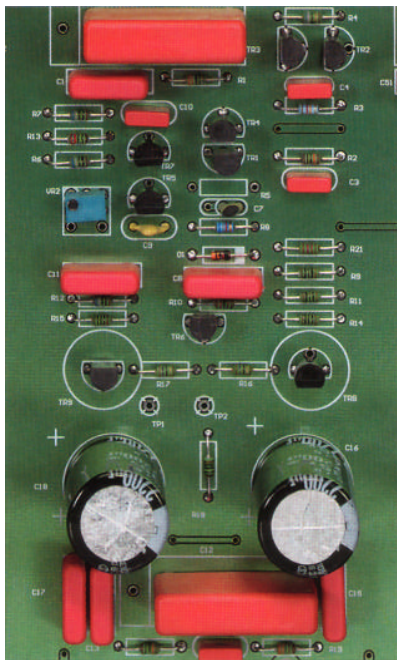
Funny: the PCB as an advertising platform. Components are electrically isolated as far as possible to avoid interspersion and to increase channel separation.



And why not 2 balanced inputs? Besides that, the equipment left nothing else to wish for with the exception of a phono preamplifier.

biasing as possible, power MOSFETs for the power amplifier, a technically perfect output, which however is geared to the sound ideal of the tubes /valves.

The advantages of fully symmetrical circuits in combination with the same signal transport are well-known: in-phase distortions disappear, when the music signal and its composure turned each phase by 180 degrees fuse together at the exit. For that reason, all signal conducting circuits in the amplifiers are quadripartite – one for the left, one for the right and the corresponding inverted arms. Consequently also the volume control, a digitally-controlled resistance network in chip form, exists in double edition.



Exclusively discrete devices are used in abundance throughout the SM6 MkII pre. The transistors get very warm.

To avoid any possibility of distortions arising, the SM6 MkII uses separately located network parts. For this reason in the SM6 MkII there are no fewer than six separate regulated power supplies: one for the digital logic, input and output relays, a pair for inverted and non-inverted output stages and, two pieces particularly – hard to believe – for the two volume controls. Real paranoia against disturbance...!!

Within the SM6 MkII, Class-A is Perreaux' body and stomach operation mode. In order to drive transistors out the transmission distortions, the prescription is: quiescent current high and keep it permanently active. The price for spotlessly clean Class-A, a rise of current consumption and operating temperature, is not worthy to mention on small signal levels, that is why the preamplifier runs completely in this mode – more expensive and hotter – it contrasts in the output stage particularly in watts dissipated, where the 350 Prisma operates.

For that reason, the technical designers devised for the 350 Prisma a so-called Class-A/AB operational status. Genuine Class-A according to usual definition takes place only up to 10 Watts, above this level the peculiarities of the MOSFET design come in useful, which results in virtually non-existing distortions even with highest requirements.

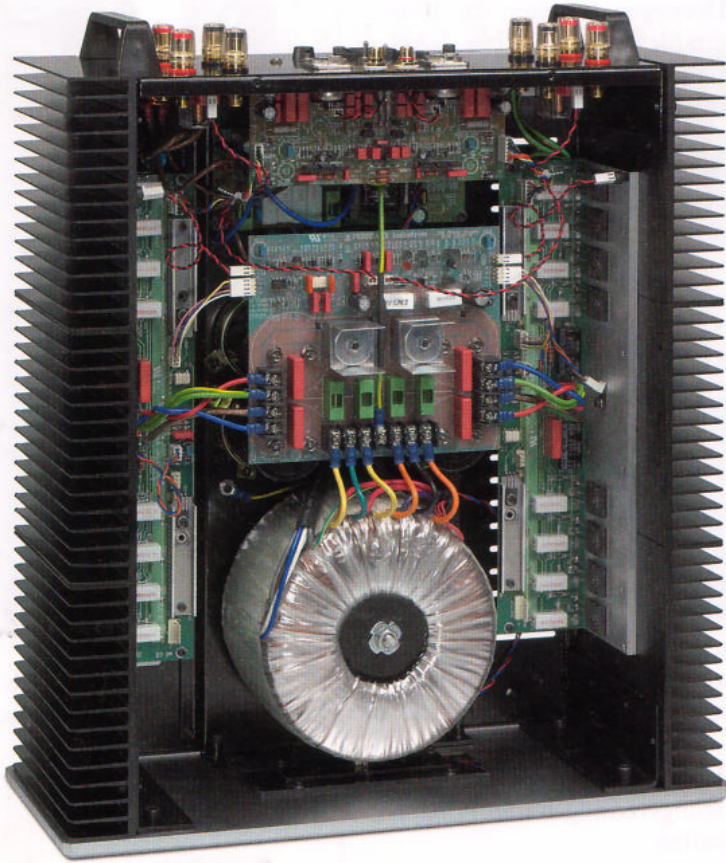
What more can the owner expect from Perreaux? Full power bandwidth / frequency range for example. It seems that also some comparisons with the megahertz amplifiers of Spectral have come to the ears of the German sales and distribution representative in the shape of Expolinear boss Jörg

Henning-Reinelt. But nevertheless the New Zealander does not drive it then to completely such extremes that they would use waveguides as connectors. Nevertheless the Perreaux technical designer Clinton Jensen confirms a wide-band operation without considerable drop in level. That let hope for exquisites accelerating power and finest dissolution.

We are privileged at the opportunity to come in discussion with the most ingenious high-end technical designers of this world glosses/illuminates our daily test work. Until now I was completely content, as how much amounted to my grammar school English knowledge in contact with Englishmen, Americans, even Scots. Clinton was my first New Zealander. We preferred talking together rather than by email. What would seriously interest me: how many Hi Fi fans do really wish themselves the much quoted “amplifying wire” as the ideal Amp? So often, is this term is used, the offer at amplifiers must have been countable at one hand and the word “sound” is eliminated from the audiophiles' encyclopaedia.

Why then are so many audiophiles mad about valves? Because of the technical indisputableness – or because of the sound? Why does Perreaux publicise spotlessness, swears on strong inverse coupling and on a distortion factor of scarcely four digits, if then nevertheless the valve is then called again as sound reference by the detour of the technical similarity to the power MOSFET? Because – as we would say in our best German, in the end it's the great sound, that sets up the neck hairs. Here indeed Perreaux





Such a potent power amplifier can be dangerous. Perreaux counts on protective circuits placed far away from the signal path, for the sake of pure sound.



No shortage of jacks. The loudspeaker terminals are connected in parallel, easing bi-wiring. Convenient: Remote on by trigger.

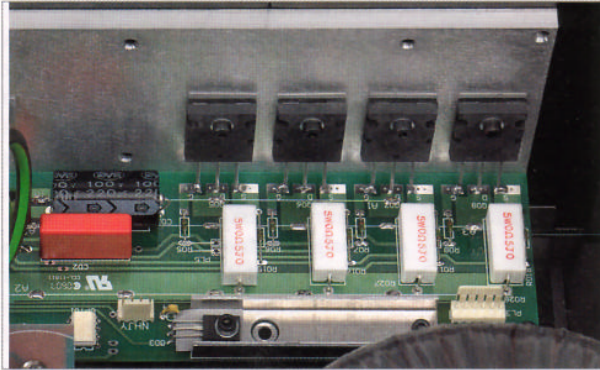
can still try to confuse us with so many enclosed measuring diagrams – already with the first tones the New Zealanders prove that nothing is stranger to them than cold perfection. That is also well like that. Normally this amplifier combination could not score at all well with me. At present my equipment plays on a level, as I did not experience it yet. After almost the bringing-in time of the Ayon Seagulls may be considered finished. At the same time, while working on the hi-fittunes cable book, some exceptional signal carriers grade up the performance of my hi fi chain. Briefly: I have never been luckier with my Naim amps than today.

And now, this idyllic situation is disturbed by these New Zealanders.

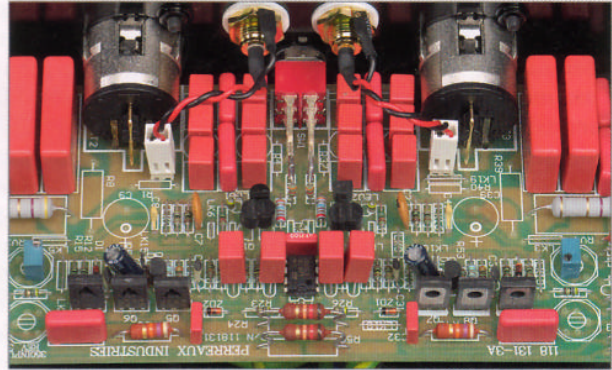
This Perreaux combination is playing in a different league, one has to respect without any envy.

One of my current favourites, while working or just enjoying, is *Oscar in Paris*. This is a live recording of Oscar Peterson with the quartet Salle Pleyel (Telarc 2CD-83414). There is this delicately woven ballade “She Has Gone” with which I could gain so much knowledge and experience about my cables.

Amplified by the New Zealand amps, there is no system in my experience, which can produce more detail – and for sure: with music – this is apparent. On the virtual stage the four actors gain in plasticity to an almost spectacular extent. The definition of finest ambient sound is beyond doubt; coughs are not taken as amorphous interferences or distortions, but signs of life, perfectly to assign due to patient’s sex and age. Fine descant tones of the piano sound from the area around the loudspeaker on the right



A negative temperature coefficient predestines power MOSFETs for higher Class-A operation.



The transistors of the input stages are matched. Capacitors block direct currents (DC).

hand side, however without being over-analytical. In the bass frequencies, the negative feedback factor does not make itself notable in a control freak manner; rather we will find simply announced swing.

The general impression is the one of a homogeneous, liquid and highly musical reproduction and no coldness or academic perfectionism at all. Oh: great music and recording quality by the way. The pre/power combination needed a few days in order to get really going, although it was already some hours old. Particularly the three-dimensionality, the acoustic relief did still noticeably better. Thanks to the moderately raised quiescent current the output stage does not become excessively warm, but however the need of 80 watts in idle mode sums up nevertheless to a not insignificant size – where we want to switch off confidently in between. In contrast the preamplifier can remain connected at the net – we allow us willingly the 50 watt.

Intermediate result Class-A delights vs. CO<sub>2</sub> balance: 1:0.

Whoever dealt with big

amplifiers, knows the hardly describable phenomenon of the audible sovereignty: it is the fractions of a second before the first tone, when the device seems to switch on the light in the virtual room and informs about height, width, depth.

Beginningless “taking place” of sounds, which stand firmly embodied between the boxes, as if they would have always been already there and would have only waited for being waked up.

I had already fabricates in my chain, currying favour with these qualities almost penetrantly with the listener, praised themselves with each note: “I am the very best one”. For that the Perreaux are too nice. It seemed to have been rubbed off on them, which is subsumed on the manufacturer’s homepage with “NZ way of life”: “...relaxed lifestyle, beautiful scenery and friendly genuine people...”

Two classical records: the proven Gidon Kremer interpretation of Cesar Francks violin sonata (Praga PR 250,024) and Murray Perahia with Mendelssohn (CBS

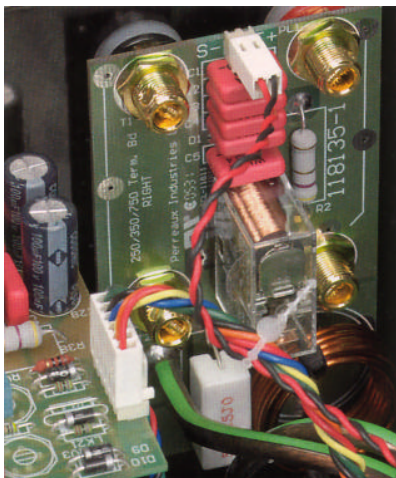
SPADES 37838). Both albums are with suction effect, produced by the acoustic virtual insight into the recording studios. Particularly Perahia production pulls oneself properly into the depth between the loudspeakers, and immersing turns out the more intensively, the better is the device (plant). The beginning of Mendelssohn’s *rondo capriccioso* goes off any unrest, which is still subliminally noticeable over my Naims. Perhaps I should nevertheless a Hicap... then the high-end moment: traffic noises in the background. Exactly, I am with Perahia in the studio, realize (sense / perceive) the not deadbeat acoustic, feel the rumbling of the truck with diesel on the road, admire the concentration of the pianist. None of my piano recordings reacts to changes in the device like these – again and again in the past years I thought (it seemed to me), certain passages were evenly more matt noted than others. Over the Perreaux the energy flow breaks never off. Greatly also the stoic rendition from passages in fortissimo, those sound after hard striking piano strings



instead of after stressed out electronics. Hey, how well nevertheless my old Meridian Player is!

Gidon Kremer's violin: also such a touch-stone (criterion, benchmark?). The Perreaux combination reproduces it overall and universally. You hear it, see the violinist in front of your internal eye on the right side behind the left loudspeaker stands and know, that is its clay/tone, its instrument. No doubts, none if and however – the New Zealanders convincing. Who has studied a little bit the Perreaux product range and their development during the last years, I will note that “maturing” seems to be a central term in Dunedin. Yes, head of the company, Martin van Rooyen, confirms: they have their kind of doing things and pull them through consistently. Whereby of course for refinements there is always place for refinements.

And which, please-beautifully, has it with the full amplifier on itself, which is provided in the



A Zobel network (resistor + capacitor in line) stabilizes the output.

German product list with the attribute “State of the Art” and a price tag nevertheless respectable. And then is there still the dwarf, pardon, micro series named “Silhouette”, with a three-digit price and visually really attractive... Can it be that Perreaux has just started through powerfully? Perhaps one should afford matured amplifier combination now still fast in such a way for the life. Because who knows, what happens with the prices, if the label Perreaux will finally abandon its everlasting status/image of being an exotic and an insider tip and get established, where it belongs to: under the best one of the transistor guild.

**What appeals:**

The ultra massive remote – something to hold on and jack up.

**What's missing:**

A remote control “light” for everyday use.

**What surprises:**

They removed the chic designer front panels.

**What to do:**

Measure the rack depth first – at my place the power amp just fit in by a hair...

**Associated Equipment:**

- Turntable: DPG 2
- Tone-arm: Naim Aro
- Cartridge: Dynavector 17D2 MkII
- Phono: Lehmann Black
- Preamp: Cube SE 2006
- CD player: Meridian 508/24
- Speakers: Ayon Seagull/C
- Cables: Stereovox, Nordost, Sun Audio

- Accessories: HiFi-Produkte “Das Regal”, Finite Elemente Master Reference Wall and Ceraballs, Satin Wood Ceramique equipment feet, Stillpoints



**Preamplifier Perreaux SM6 MkII**

- Input: 6 x Line (RCA)  
1 x Line (XLR, option)
- Output: 2 x Rec Out (RCA)  
2 x Pre Out (RCA)  
1 x Pre Out (XLR)
- Features: fully metal remote control, 2 trigger-outputs:
- Design: Satin Chrome or Satin Black electroplate
- Size (W/H/D): 48/9/32 cm
- Weight: 8 kg
- Price: 3600 Euro

**Power Amplifier Prisma 350**

- Power (80): 2 x 360 Watt
- Input: 1 x Line (RCA)  
1 x Line (XLR)
- Output: 2 x Loudspeaker
- Features: Trigger-input, Ground-lift switch
- Design: Satin Chrome or Satin Black electroplate
- Size (W/H/D): 48/19/46 cm
- Weight: 30 kg
- Price: 5200 Euro
- Warranty: 2 years

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