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Perreaux Audiant VP3 Phono Preamplifier

Perreaux sounds French but is actually a New Zealand based company founded in 1974 by Peter Perreaux. I first came across the brand when in retail in the early 1980's and was impressed by their reputation even then as a young company. They disappeared from these shores but years later the brand has re emerged in the UK with new distributors Audio Emotion and I am glad they have pursued this brand's promotion here in the UK. They never went away as a brand but probably fell foul of the fickle UK audio market and dramatic change in trends over the last 20 years or so.

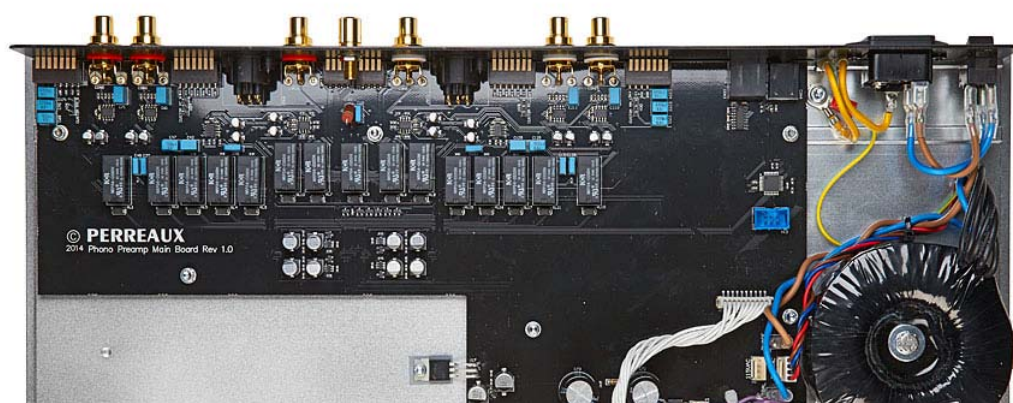


Quality high end audio has never been more competitive but there is still a market for it here in the UK and elsewhere if done properly. Perreaux' philosophy has been a simple one , research your products and market thoroughly, use top quality components only if justified for sound quality and reliability, keep things as simple as possible and solid build. I know they spend a long time testing new designs and will not release a new product until it has been

perfected and they are happy with it. Value for money is important in a price conscious market these days but quality is not compromised and corners aren't cut.

Newly released the Perreaux Audiant VP3 vinyl phono pre amp is an exciting addition to the companies product line up. At £1950 it isn't cheap and a few years ago a phono stage at this price level would have been deemed expensive and over the top. Now of course vinyl is on the rise and has overtaken CD in sales and popularity. It never died, it just had a hiatus whilst the digital formats slugged it out for supremacy. Analogue for me is still a supreme music format and is in my DNA.

The VP3 is beautifully built and has an understated quality and air about itself because of the simple design and its layout. The pictures don't do it justice and it was only when it arrived and I eagerly took it out of its excellent packaging that I was truly impressed by its looks and build. The owner manual is superb coming in a ring binder format with very clear simple illustrations and instruction on correct use and operation. It even has its own laboratory tested performance graphs for both the MM and MC inputs showing actual measured THD , frequency response and spectrum analysis results with the serial number of each unit and the date of testing signed by the technician. Now not many companies go to that trouble and detail, very impressive.





The case consists of a very solid machined aluminium monocoque top panel with the Perreaux logo laser cut or cnc machined on the top and turned 90 degrees to form the slim front panel, half covered by a slick touch sensitive control section on the bottom half. The stand by , MM, MC and mono selection are the only controls on the front panel operated by touch capacitance like your smart mobile telephones these days. All other controls and connections are on the very comprehensively designed rear panel .Here the main power switch is located on the back right corner followed by the mains IEC input socket, trigger inputs for remote switching , RS232 port , loading switches, RCA single ended inputs for both MM and MC cartridges, balanced outputs on XLR, RCA unbalanced outputs, gain /RIAA adjustment switches, phono earth terminal. Phew, pretty impressive.

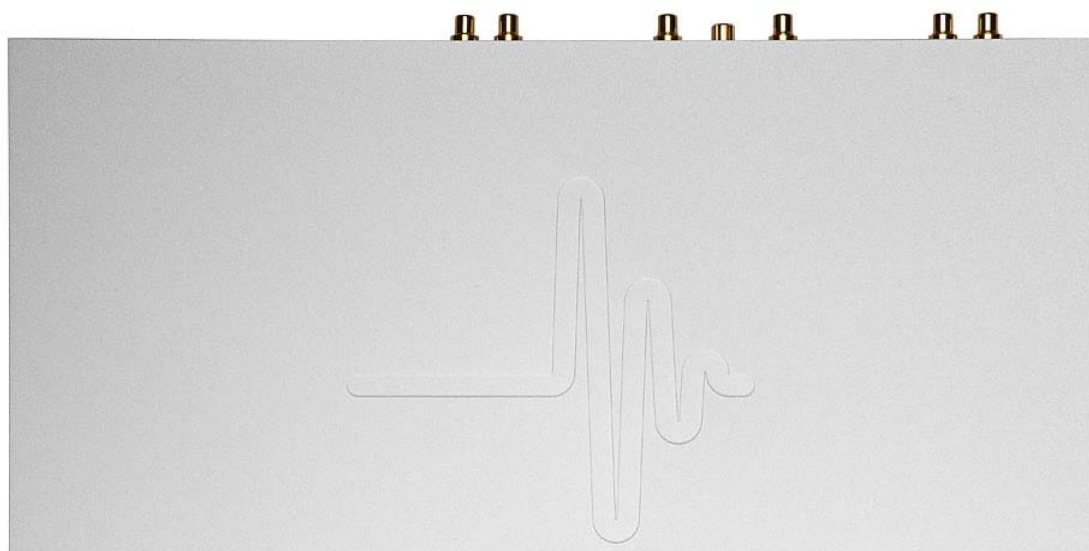
Customisation is very flexible to suit a wide range of MM and MC cartridges. There are seven different loading switches , three gain switches , mono selection and the ability to switch between a normal or IEC RIAA equalisation curve on each input. There are six different sets of dip switches on the rear to allow for maximum customisation and isolation of each input and channel. There is comprehensive loading for MM and MC inputs and variable gain for the output to suit your own cartridge or cartridges should you be so lucky to have either two or more turntables, or a turntable with two or more arms. The instruction manual really is excellent in

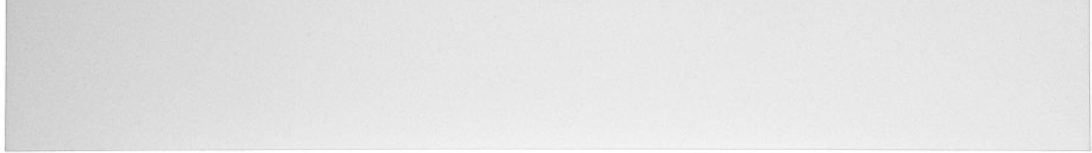
explaining everything simply, I wish all manufactures were this good. It's obvious Perreaux take great pride in their product and customer service.

Inside the VP3 is equally impressive in its build and component quality. All the circuitry, sockets and power supply are mounted on the solid aluminium top plate which acts as a solid foundation and effective heat sink. The toroidal power transformer is large and would do justice to many a decent hi-fi separate. All the switches and sockets are first rate and gold plated as expected in this price sector. The socketry is widely spaced and divided into left and right channel sides of the chassis so make sure your phono cables can split apart by several inches.

THE SOUND

I let the VP3 warm up for several days before serious listening commenced, but couldn't resist initial sessions of seeing what it was like even though the unit was brand new and had never been run in. Like all new units a few hours after switch on yielded improvements as the sound stage increased in width, depth and detail. The ability to leave the unit in stand by is essential as it cuts down warm up periods, especially once the unit is run in fully.





I listened to the VP3 with both a Clearaudio Performance DC turntable and Virtuoso V2 moving magnet cartridge and my own Project Extension 9 with Ortofon Quintet black moving coil. It was therefore possible to test the full capabilities of the VP3. I set the loading and gain for each cartridge as recommended and didn't feel the need to experiment further. From the outset I was impressed how quiet the VP3 was with either turntable and had no hum issues or glitches.

I happily put album after album on and simply enjoyed the listening experience. An old friend came round one evening and we spent several hours just revelling in the sound of the music we love , pretty well dumbfounded at how good it was. We both love modern jazz such as Bob James, David Sanborn, The Crusaders, Joe Sample, Grover Washington, John Klemmer etc.. What was so impressive was the depth of sound stage and sheer realism of the instruments and artists playing. A lot is talked about pace, rhythm and timing, my friend calls it the boogie factor, I say musicality. The VP3 had it in bucket loads and we both said it was the best phono stage we have ever heard.

Now I certainly haven't heard all the phono stages out there and there are many superb models I am certain of that and far more expensive than the VP3, but in my opinion the sound of the VP3 is pretty sublime in its price sector. Perreaux state their aim is to make as good a product as they can with value for money factored in. Well I think they have achieved this admirably. I wont bore you the

reader with all the different types of music I listened to, (it was wide and varied) as you will probably like totally different styles to me, my wife certainly does.



One album my wife and I did listen to was Fleetwood Mac's Rumours , an absolute classic loved by millions which has sold over 30 million copies worldwide now. We love all the tracks on the album but 'The Chain ' BBC's theme music for Formula one's Grand Prix programme has everything we love about a great track. The build up, the bass line and drumming is superb. When Mick Fleetwood hits the bass drum with the foot pedal you hear the skin on the drum and it really sounds as if the band are in your room. The bass line reverberates menacingly around the room in front of you and then the track builds up to its climax like a race and leaves you thrilled and emotional as if you were part of it. Now that is what good music and hi-fi is all about.

CONCLUSION

I think Perreaux have made a great product in the VP3. Yes £1950 is not cheap, but if you are serious about your precious vinyl collection and have a good turntable, amp and speakers it is a cracking buy. I know it's clichéd in reviewer speak but I will be very sorry when the VP3 goes back. My Whest Two is very good for its price £800 , but at less than half the VP3's price can't compare with its versatility due to cost constraints or sound staging capabilities. That's why Whest make several other models themselves above the Whest Two, the MC Ref mk 4 being an eye watering £10000.

As I said at the beginning of my review vinyl has never been so popular for many years now but it's renaissance has spurred many companies to push their research and passion into producing some brilliant bits of kit now. Enjoy.



Build Quality: 8.75/10

Sound Quality: 9.0/10

Value For Money: 8.5/10

Overall: 8.75/10

Ian Ringstead