



€ 19,80

# Audio phile

THE HIGH END MAGAZINE 1/2012

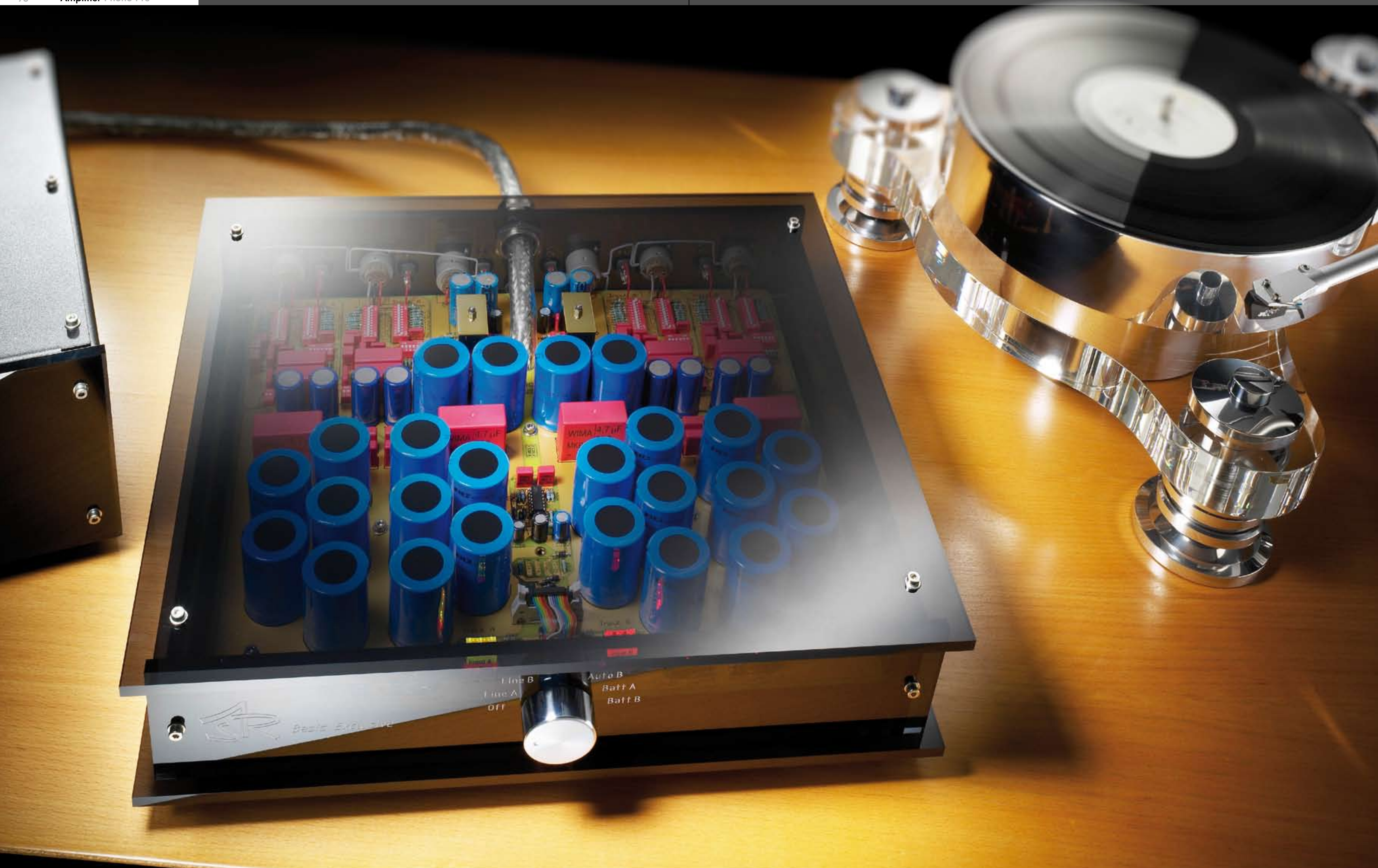
## PERFECT FORM

Sonus Faber Aida: The elegant sculpture with acoustical room adaption

## THE WORLD OF TUBES

- Tube rolling: Measurably better sound
- T+A: Triodes with solid state power
- OTL-Principle: Strong without transformer





ER  
Beats EXC. 210

Line B  
Line A  
OFF  
Auto B  
Batt A  
Batt B

# Sound-Blaster

„Your vinyl just produces sound“ is the usual prejudice of digital fans about LPs. Bottom thick and top round, with no real dynamic. The Basis Exclusive of ASR quite simply blows all these prejudices away.

By: Bernhard Rietschel

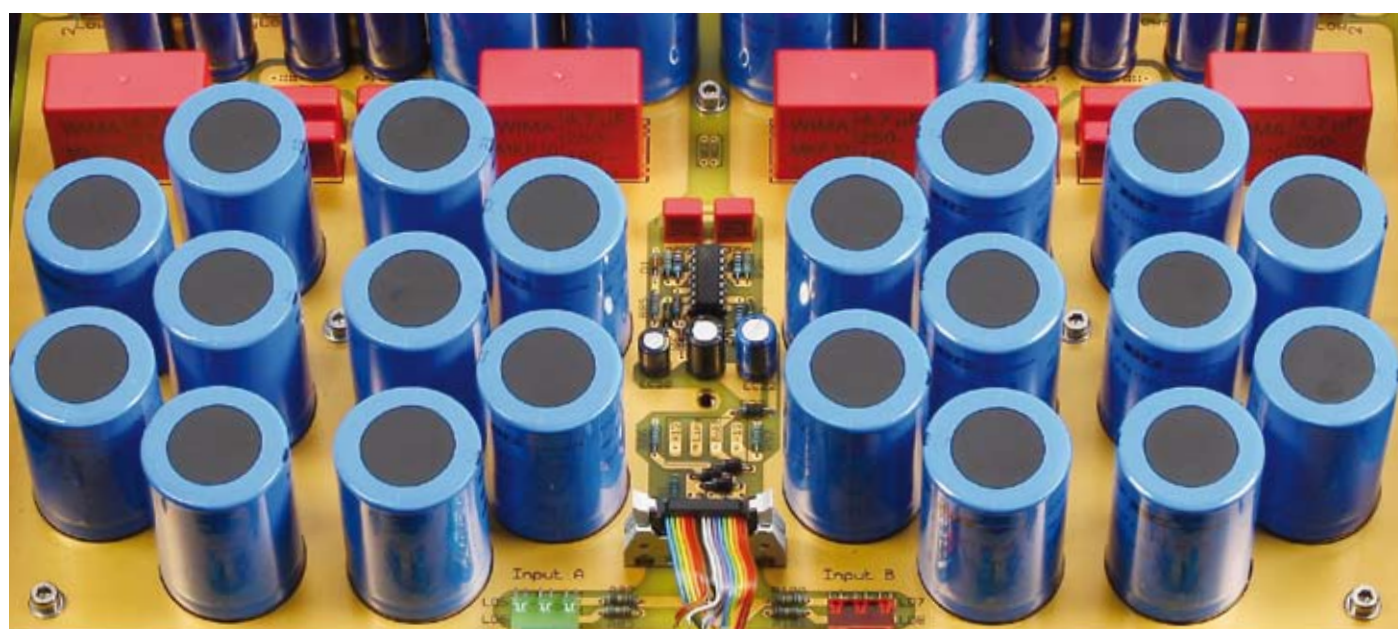
Hifi fans are inclined to dignify each function of their system, sooner or later, with its own piece of equipment. This specialization has the greatest effect where it always tends to be overlooked: In systems with vinyl priority a separate phono equalizer is not a ‚can‘ but a ‚must‘.

It is a widespread misunderstanding that phono-preamp has only an auxiliary function. Didn't all amplifiers have a little circuit board built in by the factory, about which no-one said very much? Look at

the gain factor, which is needed in order to allow a typical MC system to draw level with a CD player in terms of voltage, and you begin to get an idea that the task is not at all trivial. Amplification by a factor of at least 1000 is necessary in the first instance. And because the music, for technical reasons, is not linear but engraved on the disc with strong treble increase and bass reduction, the phono amplifier has to do what gives it its name of ‚equalizer‘, that is, it has to bring back precisely into line this exactly predefined distortion. Input signals in the microvolt range, high amplification, drastic equalizing, and all at once – a job that tolerates

no compromises. The alternative is a harvest of distortion, noise, hum, frequency response errors or quite simply dynamically poor slack sound.

If you have an expensive analog work of art standing at home, possibly with a super-expensive MC system, that can generate operating costs of several Euros an hour, you should not stint yourself in the case of the phono equalizer, and then and only then start economizing. The ASR Basis Exclusive does not therefore have to be attached to the end of a pre-power combination with a five-figure price tag in order to recoup the cost of it. Apart from phono stages, the construc-



The only thing that sounds better than a large power supply unit is ... an enormous power supply unit. On the main board there is almost 1 farad reservoir capacity. The Elkos (expensive from Beyschlag-Centralab) are supplied from rechargeable batteries.

Marial: a 1 kg cast metal angle plug connects the rechargeable battery box and main equipment.

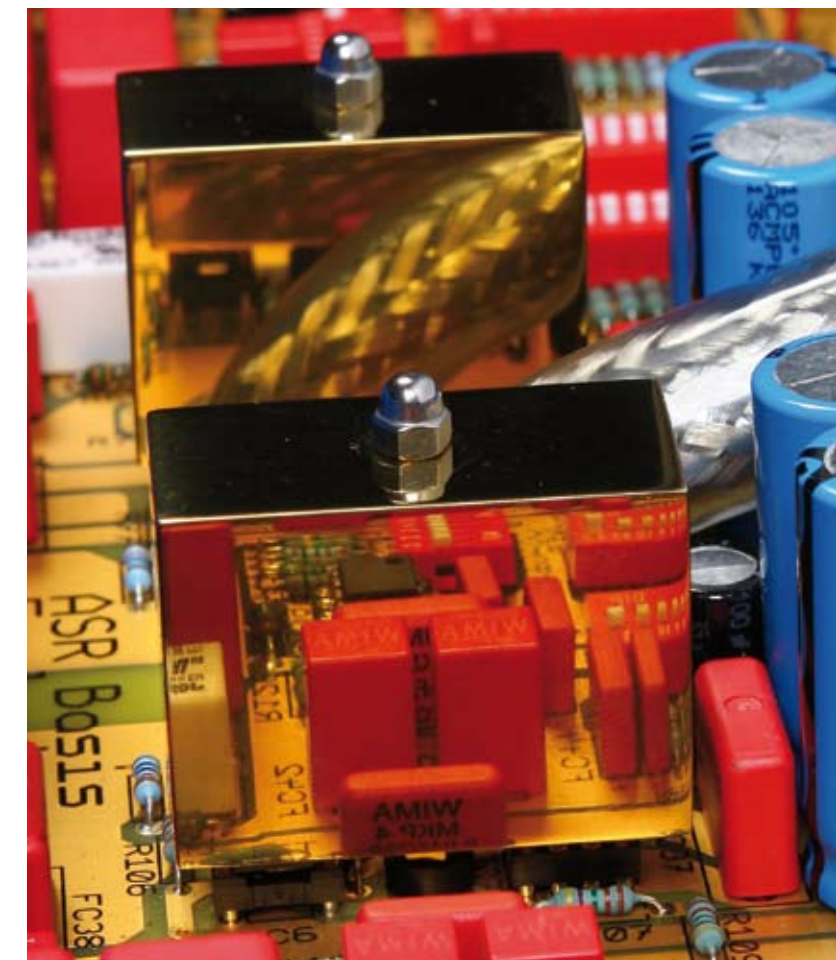


tor Friedrich Schäfer is currently building only integrated amplifiers anyway.

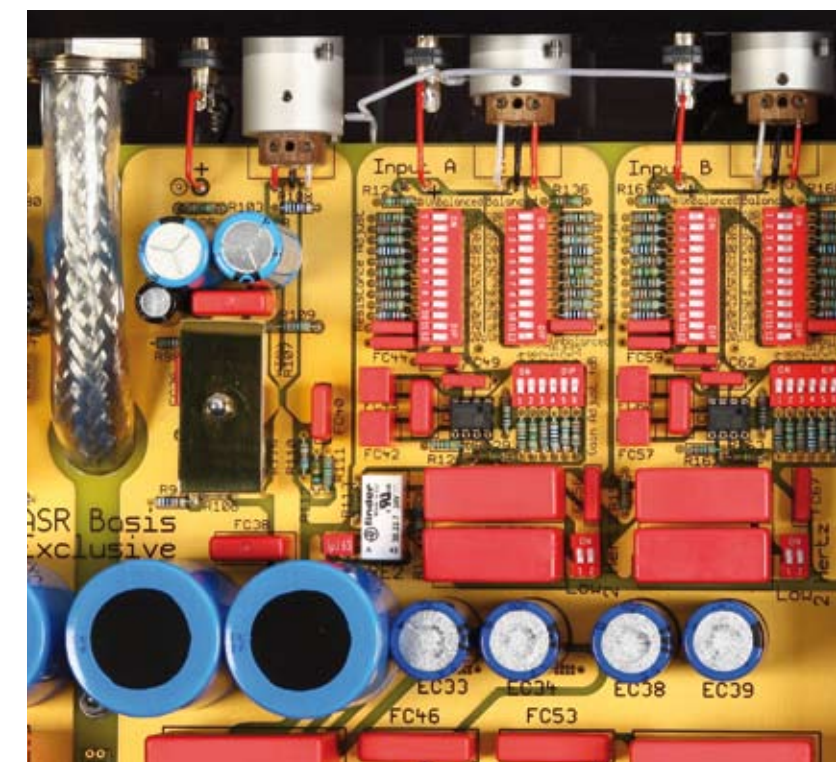
The Exclusive is a universally adaptable, MM and MC compatible, fully balanced monster, with two complete, identical sets of inputs. Owners of more than one record player (or a deck with more than one arm) can connect two cartridges simultaneously, configure them individually and switch from one to the other as the mood dictates. The fact that the cleanly latching ELMA rotary switch offers not just two but seven positions (including ‚off‘) has to do with the power supply, which consists of an array of lead batteries which resides along with its charging electronics in a separate box: ‚Line‘ means a sort of standby operation with reduced voltage, bypassing the lead gel rechargeable batteries. ‚Auto‘ switches, depending on the signal, from the mains to the batteries and then back again. ‚Batt‘ finally connects the preamp straight to the battery pack – which is anyhow still automatically recharged. Real fundamentalists could detach the 25 kg structure from the power supply completely and still indulge their passion uninterrupted for up to 60 hours – in terms of sound, however, this last step revealed no additional advantages in the listening tests.

Like its cheaper brothers, the Exclusive delegates the actual amplification

Double Fun: For each channel there is the first amplification stage including impedance and gain adjustment twice.



Optimal climate: Once the thick brass blocks are at the right temperature, nothing further can disturb the thermal balance of the amplifier chips sitting below them.





**Easy to see through: Multi-coloured light blocks on the board behind the smoked acrylic front provide information about the operating status and input selected.**

completely to ICs, albeit very noble ones: For input amplification there's one THAT1510 per channel, a very low-noise instrumentation amplifier produced mainly for studio applications such as microphone preamps, followed by two more chips from analog devices and Burr-Brown, which Schäfer conceals under a solid brass block for perfect thermal equilibrium. The THAT receives the MC input signals symmetrically, which corresponds perfectly to their electrical nature and really delivers the best sound. For MM and non-symmetrically wired players there are of course also a couple of RCA sockets for each input – WBT NextGen, of course, which are overshadowed in terms of top quality and audiophile ambition only by the XLR-couplers, which look as if a watchmaker had made them individually by hand out of wood, brass, aluminium, silver, and gold.

Craftsmanship can also be seen in the housing of the Basis Exclusive made from

smoke-coloured acrylic plates. It is magnetically totally inert, protects against dust but not electrical fields. In order to avoid the slightest humming, the Basis should therefore not stand directly above another piece of equipment. This is a recommendation that can really be made for every preamp, but this one in particular, if only because the defining characteristic of this preamp is possibly its total and complete silence.

This silence is not merely the absence of hiss and other kinds of noise. It also lends something majestic, absolute to the sounds that grow out of it, it is the basic condition on which very large vinyl sound can blossom. Broadly speaking, it also always means that one will continue to be surprised by one's own records, no matter how often one has heard them.

So tarted up audio-porn pressings are not necessary. On the contrary. For 'Come On In', from R. L. Burnside, the bad old blues singer, who must have been about seventy when he recorded it in 1998, joined forces with young hippie indies. The delicate combination of Delta blues, studio technology and electronic beats works here as seldom before (maybe also because recording and pressing are ruthlessly dynamic) and presents us with raw primeval moments, such as the title song, and astonishing transitions like the one between 'Don't Stop Honey' and 'It's Bad You Know': With the volume control turned right up the recording follows the last remaining sounds in a stately fashion down into the sound of the grooves, then to practically steamroll the listener with the beats of the following piece. The ASR made this contrast so gigantic that the author in the listening room had to laugh out loud – which of course, in the deafening noise created



It is decisive what comes in at the back: 'Thick cable' would be an insult to the electric hose to the rechargeable power supply.

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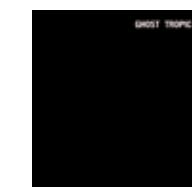
Top phono preamps: For analog fan Rietschel as important as the turntable itself

„Enormous sound spectrum, endless dynamics and irreproachable cleanliness: The best record players need a preamp like the ASR to show how good they really are.“

by the supremely relaxed and neutral ATC monitors of page 48, nobody could hear.

Dynamics such as you experience with the ASR is not a matter of course, even in the world of super-expensive preamps. Another thing: the Basis Exclusive produces this dynamic without the slightest hint of distortion or artificial warmth. This makes it into something you have to get used to, because it does not fit the cliché of the warm soft analog sound. With every new record played by the ASR, that always shimmers, radiates and changes a little differently from the previous one,

it becomes clear that this cliché is not the sound that is on the disc. But a lot more: more individuality, more intensity. The word 'less' only applies to the disturbances which in the whole spectrum from groove hiss to crackles and pops recede into the background in the face of the music. This gives ill-advised pressings new hope. It has not been possible to enjoy a song like the fantastic 'Ghost Tropic' from 'Songs:Ohia' in such a concentrated, relaxed way as with ASR. So there is still a lot to discover, on my shelves in the thousands, and out there - in the millions. <



### Test-LP

Songs:Ohia – Ghost Tropic (Secretly Canadian)

Jason Molina's songs are almost always quiet, but this is one of his most meditative and strongest albums. A shrine full of atmosphere and space, in spite of the slow tempo very dynamic and exciting.



### The author

Bernhard Rietschel

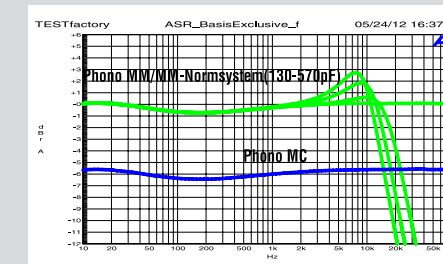
listens at home to analogs mostly on his old LP12, on a much older Loricraft-restored Garrard 401 or the relatively new SME 10, via an old 'green' Naim chain. Is thinking about a new phono preamp.

## ASR Basis Exclusive

List price: from €4500 €  
Options: Second Input 300€, WBT Nextgen RCA 375€, Argento Audio Silver/Wood XLR 1125€, PADIS Rhodium Fuses €60 each  
Warranty period: 3 years  
Weight: 10kg, Power supply 26kg  
Dimensions (W x H x D): Amp 43 x 10 x 37cm, Power supply unit 46 x 15 x 33cm  
Surfaces: Acrylic glass brown, others on request

Sales:  
ASR Audio Systeme  
D-35745 Herborn, Germany  
Phone: +49 (0) 27 72 / 4 29 05  
Internet: www.asraudio.de

## Laboratory

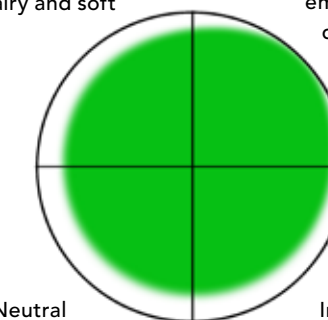


With the exception of a tiny frequency response wave (above) the Basis Exclusive is of spotless quality. Distortion is almost entirely absent, the s/n ratio with MC very good (76dB), with MM somewhat less good – the input IC harmonizes better with low impedance MCs. Extremely low output impedance (1,1Ω).

## AUDIophile Character

Effortlessly airy and soft

Grippingly emotional dynamic



## AUDIophile Potential



## AUDIophile recommendation

Extremely clean and dynamic, tonally conspicuously inconspicuous, because completely neutral phono preamp. Built to perfection in Germany – a partner for life.