

Audio Valve Baldur 300 plus Valve Power Amplifier Equipment Review /Ming Cheng, Liu Spotlight 2009

The most fascinating resolution power and amazing layer undulation effect of its triode, coupled with its multi-pipe parallel push-pull functionality and its huge power that enables loud sound without distortion, make it a nearly perfect power amplifier with pristine sound quality and suitable for both dynamic and serene scenarios.

The Use of Indirectly Heated Triodes for Amplification

Baldur comes from the name of a Germanic God who is specifically in charge of light. Baldur 100 first appeared in 1985, and later evolved into Baldur 200. Until 2004 CES, it did not evolve into the latest Baldur 300 or the Baldur 70 that has the same design but a smaller power. The power amplifier of each Audio Valve series has its own special features in design and uses different amplification approaches to accomplish breakthrough in sound. Baldur 300 can be regarded as their flagship, which adopts a parallel push-pull design concept. Parallel push-pull is not quite unusual, but Baldur 300 uses triodes at its power level, which makes it very exceptional! Its power tube is the indirectly heated single-ended triode 6AS7G. For each audio channel ten triodes are used, meaning a total of twenty 6AS7G triodes are equipped.

Auto Bias Regulator

In addition, Baldur 300 employs the proprietary R&D work of Audio Valve - Auto Bias Regulator (ABR) circuit. Through careful observation you can find the power tubes of Baldur 300 are always surrounded by many small components, including ICs and a variety of active and passive component circuits, which are separate regulator and bias circuits responsible for each power tube. Don't ordinary valve equipments have such circuits? The answer is maybe no. But, do they have a set of fully identical circuit for each power tube? If then, there is only one manufacturer doing so (All power amplifiers of Audio Valve are equipped with ABR circuits in their power tubes). The designer of Audio Valve must be a perfectionist to the extreme, therefore he/she considered to employ a set of ABR circuit nearby each power tube and uses a total of 20 sets for a pair of power amplifiers.

What's the benefit of an ABR circuit? It enforces extremely strict controls over the power tube output, so it can ensure the tube to work normally even if the tube is aging. Audio Valve claims that you can wait to replace it until the end of its life, without affecting the sound of Baldur 300 at all. It's safe to say ABR exercises a kind of strict and indiscriminate equality. Even when using an inferior valve, you also do not have to worry about any trouble of the equipment or the speakers - isn't this very fascinating? The designer Hulmet Becker even believes that it is really incredible that none of the typical valve equipments on the market has ABR circuits.

So how do you know when to replace the valves? Next to each power tube there are several pieces of LEDs, which will light in the bypass mode and be turned off when the equipment is playing at startup. With large power output, the ABR circuits will be active too (so that the power tube can work more stably), and the LEDs will start flashing. If the LEDs light even at boot-up or when there is nothing to play, it is time to replace the valve.

As for the inputs and driver stages, Baldur 300 uses in its circuits four valves, three of which are dual triodes and conduct multi-stage amplification, and finally it uses 6N6P to drive the power tubes. Audio Valve added that the input drive level is actually the integrated amplifier circuits of the Assistant 20s (25W per channel) recommended by our chief editor.

Pursuit of Excellent Linear Design

It takes so much effort to manufacture the equipment of super power, and then why have triodes, generally recognized as a "dynamic-limited type", been used as power tubes? The reason is quite simple: the triode has a better linear performance than an average pentode power tube. If we can not only overcome the instability of triodes that have excellent linear performance, but also achieve precise multiple-tube parallel push-pull (Please note that it must be 'precise', or the push-pull will still produce crossover distortion), then isn't it the most perfect thing in the world? That is exactly the idea of Hulmet Becker. Our technical editor LU Yi-chang, at his first sight of the crazy circuits of Baldur 300, made his first review as follows: "It is definitely a work from the idea of the designer who challenges himself, because to finish this 'highly difficult' product the sense of

accomplishment of the designer must be extraordinary. Like other Audio Valve equipments, Baldur 300 also has the extreme cleanness of the circuit board and the first-class handcraft.

Now we have finished the part of review on the accomplishment in design, and it's time to move next to the sound performance. The pre-amp used is Eclipse produced by the same factory and praised highly of by our magazine, while the speaker is Dynavox 3.1 coming from the same agent, which is an uncommon and excellent speaker of horn design, with extremely high efficiency, and quite a lot of details. Cables used are mostly PAD Cable.

Great Satisfaction in Large Dynamics

The first thing I am concerning is whether Baldur 300 is able to give out loud music without distortion but with vivid dynamics? I discover that the performance of Baldur 300 in the dynamic aspect cannot be simply measured by the general triodes, but should be comparable with the high-power valve amplifier of high quality. It can represent the magnificent scene without any fear, and can also reproduce the extremely low and abundant low-frequency section.

Baldur 300's performance in the extremely low frequency amazes me the most: it's known the damping factor of valve power amp is not high, which means its control over the speaker is not strong enough, and therefore the low frequency quality of the valve amplifier has never been our emphasis. However, the low frequency performance of Baldur 300 surprises me not only for the quality but also the quantity. For example, the meticulous and steady bass segments of the pipe organ charms the listener with the feeling of limp and numb; not to mention the sound of the double bass which is of clear lines and also excellent bounding texture. As for Baldur 300, I can't agree more with these opinions.

Undulating Layers and Appealing Delicacy

All right, the tests on dynamics and low frequency have been passed. Next it's the audition process. I just purely enjoy the beautiful sound of Baldur 300. Why Baldur 300 is beautiful? I have to say it makes all my CDs like SACD. The sense of layer and the delicate undulation exceeds my previous experience about CD. The many small and broken sounds of the cymbal among the Jazz drum hear like full of beautiful metallic shine. I can still hear the delicate undulation from the rustling sound, making me moved as if listening to SACD at home. Baldur 300 makes me suddenly realize that CDs actually have so great potential. Just due to the lack of the excellent amplifiers like Baldur 300, we have made a mistake for a long time by saying their acoustic performance is monotonous and lack of details. I have no idea what it would be if using Baldur 300 to listen to LP or SACD.

Why Baldur 300 is beautiful? I have to say its resolution power is amazingly extraordinary, which is not only displayed in the medium and high frequency, but also in the medium and low frequency. The pedal sound of piano performance is very low and deep, so it has always been the segment for me to use when testing the sound effect. However, through Baldur 300, it's the first time for me to find these pedal sounds are in the first place abundant in various changes, not just the monotonous sound I've felt in my previous experience. No matter what kind of software is used, Baldur 300 can all the time surprise me with its superior resolution power. It's really a breath-taking amplifier.

Why Baldur 300 is beautiful? I have to say its hierarchical undulation is of the highest level. Singing voice even in the weakest segment is also filled with undulation and turn, making people deeply impressed by the solid singing skills and the abundant emotions of the singer.

Natural realness and delicate texture

Why Baldur 300 is beautiful? I have to say it is like a stunning beauty who, even without make up, can still "launch a thousand ships" and look pretty in any way. The sound purity of Baldur 300 is very high, enabling people to feel the delicate and pure sound no matter when it produces the sound of the piano or that of the violin, guitar or voice. Many valve amplifiers can reproduce a smooth sound that has no any jangle, but I think the sound, just like a skin covered by a thick layer of make-up powder, gives me no sense of its original texture other than the smoothness. The sound of Baldur 300 feels like a girl's delicate skin without any make-up powder. She is pure and soft, with fine hair clearly visible to your closer look, making you feel her brimming youthfulness.

Well, if I continue saying like this, the space of the page will become insufficient and I will also lie

under the suspicion of tout for the manufacturer. Baldur 300 has the top rated and most fascinating performance. Certainly, other accompanying equipments absolutely have first-class quality too, so as to bring out the so amazing beauty of Baldur 300. Nevertheless, I have had chances to know more or less about these accompanying equipments on various occasions, but this time it's my first time to regret not to hear it earlier, which shows how charming Baldur 300 is.

One of the highest contemporary achievements

What if you like Baldur 300 but cannot afford it? Baldur 70 of the same series looks like a good alternative. Baldur 70 employs the same design concept of Baldur 300 but its power and price are less than half of the latter, seemingly an excellent option for you. It is worth mentioning that the equipments imported by local agents are Taiwan special edition. In addition to the augmented capacity of capacitors and transformers, the power transformers are also specially tailored to meet the local 110v voltage, rather than the general 100V or 120V transformer, so its performance in Taiwan will definitely not suffer from "land and water incompatibility".

Baldur 300 is absolutely one of the topmost power amplifiers I have heard in the world. Here, the words "one of" mean that there are some other amplifiers in the world outperforming Baldur 300 in dynamics and control force, so from the point of view of an impartial reviewer, these two words cannot be omitted. However, as far as my preference is concerned, the sound of Baldur 300 makes my heart beat fast and the words "one of" can be safely removed. If you are fortunate to have this amount of budget to purchase an amplifier, since the amplifiers within this price range are in any case not above five, I strongly recommend you to make the decision after listening to Baldur 300.