



PRE/POWER AMPLIFIER

Pre & power amplifier. Rated at 200W/8ohm (mono)
Made by: Valve Amplification Company, Inc., Florida, USA
Supplied by: Signature Audio Systems, UK
Telephone: 07738 007776
Web: www.vac-amps.com; www.signaturesystems.co.uk
Prices: £28,000 (pre +£12,000 phono)/£14,500 (power each)

AUDIO
FILE

VAC Master Preamplifier/ Signature 200iQ

Steeped in valve lore, this iconic tube brand extends the 'voicing' of its products right down to the choice of passive components and hand-wiring. We test a stack of VAC!
Review: **Ken Kessler & Paul Miller Lab: Paul Miller**

With the Valve Amplification Company, *aka* VAC, now 30 years old, it qualifies as a stalwart of the 'third wave'. The first was, of course, the original golden age generation of Marantz, Quad, McIntosh and others of the 1940s and 1950s, while the second wave hit in the early 1970s with Audio Research, EAR and other tube revivalists. VAC arrived at the point when tubes were demonstrably here to stay, Kevin Hayes founding the company with his father in 1990. He was, and remains, resolutely focused on the high-end, as this pairing's £69,000 cost attests.

That, it must be noted, includes the addition of the optional MM/MC phono stage at £12,000 on top of the Master Preamplifier's £28,000 base cost. Here we are using a brace of Signature 200iQ amps at £14,500 apiece, in monoblock guise, while VAC also offers the dearer Statement line should you have, say, a Russian oligarch's disposable income.

POWER TRIO

These are not products to install without close study of the owner's manuals. The power amplifier(s) feature a host of speaker terminals, feeding off separate output transformer secondaries and I suggest you turn to editor PM's deeper discussion of the implications [see boxout, p42].

Also on the back of the Signature 200iQ is a toggle switch to choose between stereo and mono operation, the amplifier rated at 100W/ch or 200W in mono mode. The stereo/mono toggle is located between balanced XLR and single-ended RCA inputs, with the selector for these connections parked between the valves on top [just

visible on our overhead shot, p42]. Ah, but back to the speaker terminals!

The company provides three ranges of impedance, with only one set of inputs and speaker outputs used in monoblock mode. As I tried these with three wildly differing speaker types, including LS3/5As [HFN Dec '18], Wilson Sasha DAWs [HFN Mar '19] and Magnepan LRS (Little Ribbon Speaker), I adhered to PM's recommendations. It will take only a swift listen for users with one pair of speakers, noting especially the treble behaviour. I also detected minor changes at the extreme bottom end, but the giveaway will be the upper registers. The other aspect of set-up to mention here

is that each 457x222x439mm (whd) amp weighs some 100lb. And I have back issues.

MASTER COMMANDER

This amplifier comes with four 6SN7s and four KT88s, but the latter can be replaced with KT120s or KT150s if so desired (the big tubes may need the cage removed due to their height). This is abetted by the amp's complex auto-bias system – the 'iQ' in the model name – which monitors and maintains the correct bias, but which adds a couple of other confidence-inspiring features. One is monitoring tube condition and the other is protection of the amplifier.

'This sound
proclaimed
freedom from
constraint'



RIGHT: Preamp features a (very costly) ALPS HQ PRO volume pot [top left] with a 6922EH tube line stage [centre] and transformer-coupled outputs [bottom]. There are six 12AX7B triodes on the optional phono board [green, far right]

