

AUDIO
FILE

Headphone preamp/USB DAC
 Made by: International Audio Group, China
 Supplied by: IAG Ltd, Cambs
 Telephone: 01480 447700
 Web: www.quad-hifi.co.uk; www.internationalaudiogroup.com
 Price: £1199



Quad PA-One

If you wanted something 'funky', it doesn't get much funkier than this mix of vintage valve sound and archaic styling, but with a full complement of digital inputs.

The PA-One is the best sort of retro, if that's your thing. By virtue

'The Wonders' jangling guitars enjoyed sparkle, clarity and attack'

of its 'elder Quad' looks alone, like the Quad Vena [HFN Jan '15] it will charm even the most jaded audiophile. And Quad is addressing the most powerful trend in home audio: headphones. 'Most high quality headphones never realise their full potential, because they are normally connected to poorly matched amplification', it says.

Quad's 180mm-wide PA-One is truly comprehensive. Although

it features balanced inputs but not balanced headphone outputs, it accommodates a wide array of digital and analogue sources, including single-ended line-level inputs, along with line-level outputs via RCA phono sockets. For digital, the unit accepts Toslink optical, coaxial and USB.

The valve complement comprises two 6SL7s, two 6SN7s and one EZ81, sufficient for a rated headphone output power of 500mW. Specified across 32-300ohm, there are alternative settings of 'High' for 'phones above 100ohms and 'Low' for below.

The fascia is dominated by a rotary volume control, with Quad's traditional balance slider under it (useful, with 'phones). To the left are two ¼in headphone sockets, a toggle for impedance settings, while three pushbuttons choose the balanced or single-ended

LEFT: Beside the (manual only) volume control are selection toggles for RCA and balanced line ins and Toslink, coaxial and USB digital ins. High and low impedance 'phones are accommodated. Rear RCA outs turn the retro-styled Quad PA-One into a DAC/preamp

line inputs, and 'Digital In' scrolls between digital sources. Tiny LEDs light up for USB, coaxial or optical – the PA-One's USB DAC supports files up to 192kHz/24-bit resolution.

VALVE-Y BASS

None of a range of headphones misbehaved with the PA-One whose bass was deep – truly well-extended – and as tuneful as all those pace/rhythm/timing types worship, but it was also 'valve-y.' We don't have an issue with that, and it certainly didn't undermine the walking sounds on The Four Seasons' 'Walk Like A Man' [Rhino]. More to the point, it didn't affect the weight of the majestic percussion of the Kodo Drummers [Sheffield Lab].

With both Badfinger's *Timeless... The Musical Legacy* [Apple] and other tracks from The Four Seasons, it was interesting to hear how the PA-One separated harmonies in what is the confined space of one's skull. On 'Big Girls Don't Cry', the contrasts between Valli's falsettos and the bass vocals of Nick Massi were emphasised by a slight bloom to the latter that, if possibly artificial, was beneficial.

Turning to the more raucous pop of The Wonders' 'That Thing You Do' [Play-Tone Records], its jangling/soaring guitars enjoyed sparkle and clarity with the requisite attack, while the kick-drum opening from The Band's 'Up On Cripple Creek' [Mobile Fidelity], possessed exactly the dryness we hear off the vinyl.

VERDICT

The PA-One is a pugnacious spud of a component, it's chunky and well-made and handsome, and delivers terrific sound: incredible value and eminent usability in a teensy box. ☺

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Maximum output (re. 1% THD into 47kohm)	13.5V (high imp. mode)
Max. power output (re. 1% THD into 25ohm)	133mW (low imp. mode)
Output Impedance (20Hz-20kHz: low/high)	18.8ohm / 70ohm
Maximum gain (low/high)	+21.3dB / +27.6dB
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBV)	87.1dB
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz/25ohm)	-0.45dB to -0.40dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, re. 40mW)	0.51-1.1%
Power consumption	38W
Dimensions (WHD)	180x164x285mm