

QUAD II CLASSIC INTEGRATED

A true classic, reinvented for modern times

Quad's first valve-powered integrated amplifier is smooth, refined and delicious, says Andrew Everard

Among collectors of classic British hi-fi, the Quad MkII amplifier is highly prized. This, after all, is the product responsible for its manufacturer's current name: it was founded as SP Fidelity Sound Systems back in the 1930s, became the Acoustical Manufacturing Company, and launched its first domestic amplifier, the QA12, in 1948. The original QUAD I (Quality Unit – Amplifier Domestic) followed a couple of years later but it took another 35 years for the company to become Quad Electroacoustics Ltd! The MkII

amplifier appeared in the early 1950s, remained in production for two decades – well into the stereo era – and sold getting on for 150,000 units during its production run. Many of those originals are still in use, either lovingly restored or modified for modern requirements, and pristine early examples can still command very serious money.

More recently Quad has revisited this design: in the mid-1990s the company, then in the Verity stable along with Wharfedale and Mission, launched a covetable, if slightly glitzy, “Anniversary” limited edition, gold-plated



THE TEST CD

'Regeneration'
Stephen Lyman (gtr)

Kimber Kable/Isomike 5598

Recorded for Ray Kimber's

IsoMike project, this disc has a wonderfully intimate view of the playing.



Suitably retro: the Quad II Classic Integrated boasts understated looks

and selling for £6000 a pair. There followed a more conventional II-40 version, with the power upped from the original's 12W to 40W, and this model remains in the catalogue. Most recently, and with Quad now firmly part of the IAG group, came the Quad II Classic amplifier, its roots: grey paint, same complement of valves, 15W output. It's around £2400 a pair.

All of which merely scratches the surface of some of the history behind the product we have here: Quad's first stereo integrated valve amplifier, the £4500 Quad II Classic Integrated. Packed into one relatively compact footprint, around 31cm wide and 38cm deep, are a pre-amplifier, phono pre-amp and stereo power amplifier, all drawing on separate components in Quad's current “Classic Series”.

The main controls echo the QC-twentyfour valve pre-amp, albeit with a novel slider switch to select between the four inputs, complete with a suitably retro display, and a tape button. The valves are on display, protected by a black-finished safety cage which can be removed to reveal the glowing “bottles” more obviously, but the subtle sand-gold finish gives it an understated look.

Apart from the fact that it's quite tall, at around 20cm, and needs a good deal more space around it for heat dissipation, the Quad is no harder to set up and use than any other amplifier. In fact the only precaution is to ensure the amp is not too close to your speakers: valves are, after all, inherently microphonic, as the manual points out.

Beyond the controls already mentioned, there's only a small on/off button on the front



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panel and a rear-panel mm/mc selector for the phono output. Also on the rear panel is the legend "Design by Tim de Paravicini", Quad having turned to this celebrated valve amp designer for work on its "Classic" series.

Known for his own EAR (originally Esoteric Audio Research) designs, not to mention having been chief amplifier designer for Japanese company Lux back in the 1970s, de Paravicini says the idea here was that the amplifier had to be "more powerful, and compact and user-friendly enough to attract new customers. The output valves are run more conservatively, yet it goes loud without going to pieces. The HT is increased but the voltage-to-screen grid is lowered to enhance reliability."

PERFORMANCE

The bottom line is that this is simply a gorgeous-sounding amplifier. It can drive sensible speakers to more than sensible levels in a manner suggesting that the quoted output figure of 25W per channel is more than a little conservative, seems completely bomb proof in operation and has a totally unflappable sonic ability. You can forget the valve-amp stereotypes of warm, lush and lazy; instead this is an amplifier as sweet as anyone could want, yet still able to deliver power, dynamics and drama.

Play a disc such as the intimate, IsoMike-recorded "Regeneration" recital by guitarist

QUAD II CLASSIC INTEGRATED

Type Stereo integrated amplifier **Price** £4500

Inputs Four line, moving coil/moving magnet phono

Outputs One pair of speakers, tape out

Power 25W per channel into 8 ohms

Tone controls No

Headphone socket No

Remote control No

Dimensions (WxHxD) 31x20x38cm

Made by Quad Electroacoustics Ltd, IAG House, Sovereign Court, Ermine Business Park, Huntingdon, Cambs PE29 6XU

Tel +44 (0)1480 447700 www.quad-hifi.co.uk

'You can forget valve amp stereotypes of warm, lush and lazy'

Stephen Lyman and the sheer presence of the instrument is quite enchanting, as is the close-up view of the guitarist's technique afforded by the Quad, fed from a high-end Sony SACD player and powering PMC's big OB1 floorstanders in a manner quite unbecoming of a valve amplifier delivering "only" 25W.

Change to an orchestral recording and the Quad almost elicits cartoonish double-takes, so well does it control the speakers and use its finesse and power to deliver all the weight of the performance. Meanwhile, at the same time it allows instrumental timbres, the finest detail of the performance and scoring, and the recorded ambience to sing through. Frankly, I've heard these speakers driven by everything from modest budget amplifiers to fire-breathing monoblocs capable of delivering several hundred watts and rarely have I experienced a sound as captivating as that presented with the Quad in the driving seat. There's nothing lean, mean or abrasive about the sound here – well, not unless you load up a really hard-edged recording – and even the phono stage is remarkably good for an integrated amplifier and would merit being used with a high-quality turntable.

True, the market for valve integrated amplifiers is very small – and that for £4500 examples of the breed even more so – but the Quad has more than enough appeal to introduce newcomers to the breed, and to valve amplifiers in general. Respect is due to manufacturer and designer for not making this a slightly self-indulgent exercise in retro hi-fi. Rather they've drawn on the brand's heritage, added thoroughly modern thinking and come up with something not only practical but also truly magical. 

SUPER AUDIO CORNER

A closer look at, and listen to, some recent high-definition recordings

STRAUSS

Elne Alpensinfonie

LSO / Bernard Haitink

LSO Live  LSO0689



Another of those superb LSO Live recordings, captured at the Barbican in June 2008 by the engineering team of Jonathan Stokes and Neil

Hutchinson and producer James Mallinson in gloriously atmospheric 5.1-channel DSD sound. The finest detail, colour and texture is apparent among the massed forces, without any recourse to unnatural "spotlighting", and the big, rich bass is just as thrilling as the scintillating resolution in the upper frequencies. The brass, in particular, sounds quite amazing.

At a bargain price and with so fine a performance and recording, this is a must-have demonstration-quality disc.

VERDI Un ballo in maschera

Sols incl Alvarez & Urmana;

Teatro Real, Madrid / Jesús López-Cobos

Opus Arte  OABD7048D



Recorded live at the Teatro Real in September 2008, this Blu-ray release benefits enormously from a crisp 1080i picture and free-breathing 5.1-channel PCM sound. The depiction of the 19th-century American setting is a little odd, the chorus having echoes of *Gangs of New York*, but the video is free from shimmer or other nasties and the sound strikes a good balance between the onstage action and the band in the pit, making the work fluid and easy to watch.

Though not a stand-out opera Blu-ray, perhaps, this disc does a workmanlike job of capturing some excellent performances.



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