



Tony Bolton tries out a thoroughly modern take on the traditional tube amplifier, in the sensuous shape of Quad's new II Classic integrated...

Classical Music

Some names seem to have been around since the dawn of audio time. Quad is just such a company, tracing its roots back to 1936 when Peter Walker started his business. In 1953 he launched the Quad II amplifier which has gone on to be regarded as a classic design, combining excellent sound quality with robust electronics. The number still in use, some forty three years after production ceased and the solid state Quad 303 power amplifier took over, stands as testament to this.

In recent years, the company, under the aegis of the International Audio Group have reintroduced the design in updated form as the Quad II Classic, combining the principles of the circuit design with new thinking to produce more power to handle the requirements of modern loudspeakers.

The range has now expanded to include this integrated unit, combining the pre and power amps, along with a phono stage in one box. Measuring just 200x210x380mm (h x w x d) this new model successfully updates the period looks of the

original design's preamplifier. The curved edges of the fascia, with the large volume control situated on the right hand side are reminiscent of the 1950s, further enhanced by the input selector on the left, which slides through an arc, with a pointer above it advising the choice of source. The transformer casing, bearing the Quad logo, dominates the top, with the four KT66 output valves neatly aligned on either side. These are protected from prying fingers by black cages.

Whereas the original design produced about 11 Watts, which was satisfactory in the days when most

speakers had a sensitivity of 95dB or more, the new version has been engineered by Tim de Paravicini (one of the UK's most respected and experienced designers) to output a respectable 25W, which allows it to drive modern speakers (mostly between 85 and 90 dB sensitivity) to reasonably high volume levels. Connections for these are grouped together on right hand side of the back panel, sitting alongside the phono stage inputs, earthing post and the selector switch for either moving magnet or moving coil cartridges. Alongside these are a row of phono sockets for the CD, Tuner, Aux and the tape loop. The latter is activated by the button on the front beside the input selector display.

SOUND QUALITY

Everything about this machine exudes quality, from the smoothness of the operation of the controls, to the solidity of the build. So I must admit to having high expectations of the sound when I plugged it in. I'm pleased to say that I was not disappointed. The sound that flowed from my Kelly KT3s was most definitely from the Quad school, being effortlessly smooth and detailed.

I started off my listening with Neville Mariner conducting the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields playing a selection of baroque classics on the LP 'The World of the Academy'. The Quad was in its element, displaying the differing tonal characteristics of the instruments with a luxurious, velvety texture which I found quite beguiling. The orchestra sounded natural, without the cloying warmth than can afflict some valve designs, which I find can tend to slow the perceived presentation of the music. Instead, the cheery bounce of the rhythm of the opening track, 'The Entrance of the Queen of Sheba' skipped along, causing an immediate sympathetic response from my feet.

The position of the musicians on the soundstage was precise, with a perception of space between the performers, so that in a small grouping like this, it was easy to follow individual instruments. The spread of sound was good, with the lateral extremes reaching well beyond the speaker edges, and extending a couple of feet into the room. The back of the soundstage was well recessed, though not quite as deep as some amps that I have heard, so that the musicians seemed grouped in a semi-circle in a realistic way.

The central image was

particularly strong as I discovered when playing an LP called 'The Indispensable Benny Goodman'. This showcase for the 'King of Swing's' late nineteen thirties output was, of course recorded in mono, so I expected the sound to be focused towards the centre, but I was pleasantly surprised to find the performers didn't seem to be all cramped together. Instead, the perception was of a grouping spread across about half the area previously occupied by a stereo image, but with far greater depth. Even though there is no mono switch, there was little in the way of extraneous pops and crackles, which can occur when playing mono records in stereo, the phono stage appearing to be quite forgiving and tolerant of less than perfect recordings. Swing jazz is

"a premium-priced piece of pure luxury, for those wanting the joy of valves without the perils..."

of course primarily driven by the rhythm section of the orchestra, and again the Quad seemed to revel in displaying this, resulting in a great deal of foot and hand tapping in time with the music.

Coming more up to date in both musical style and recording techniques, I found the first Lemon Jelly LP suited this amp's style of presentation, but was slightly surprised at the lack of weight to some of the deep bass. Although this music is modern electronica, it is of a very gentle and relaxing nature without any pounding beats, but with some very deep, and flowing basslines. Although I could not fault the speed and agility of the bass, I felt that it lacked a little of the 'hewn from stone' character that often accompanies valve driven bass. Both the pairs



of speakers that I customarily use, the Kelly KT3s and the Chario Ursa Majors are a nominal 6 Ohm impedance, so wondering if there was a slight mismatch between the amp's requirements and the speaker electronics I dug a pair of early nineteen sixties Leak Sandwich Bookshelf speakers out of the loft. I found the 15 Ohm impedance

of these units was a very good match with the Quad, giving a fuller shape to the sound of the lower registers. Bearing this in mind I would recommend pairing this amp with examples from Spondor's classic range (8 Ohm) or with Quad's own electrostatic units of all generations.

Having said that, I am used to quite floor shaking bass from my systems when the volume is turned up, so although this amp, when paired with most modern speakers won't do that, it is in no way inadequate in the bass area, and the lack of earthquake potential may well help in maintaining neighbourly relations.

Having explored the capabilities of the phono stage I turned my attention to the CD input with a disc called 'Arabica III'. This album combines real instruments and vocals with sampled and synthetic sounds,



TUBE TALK

David Price speaks to Tim de Paravicini about the Quad II Classic Integrated...

DP: How did you approach the challenge of this new valve amplifier?

TdP: This is not a TdP product; I've designed the new Quad to maintain Peter Walker's philosophies, using his classic output transformer configuration with cathode loading. I spent years getting into his psychological mindset, he liked pentodes and used EF86s.

DP: What's the essence of the product?

TdP: I wanted to make a 'plug and play' integrated, to use computer parlance. It's like an Apple Mac; you buy a premium product and you don't then open it up and start fiddling with it. I'm not terribly interested in the tweaky people; let them get on with it! This is something you just buy and use.

DP: What were your main priorities?

TdP: I had to have a high input gain (300mV) to cope with modern sources. The input goes through the selector switch, then the volume control, then to the power amp, so I needed an extra gain stage here. The output is configured for 8 Ohm speakers for general run of the mill speakers. It will drive speakers around this but the average buyer of the Quad isn't going to be

driving things with crazily low impedances. Real world speakers and reliability were the main considerations; I tried a range of tubes and used the best of what I could find that wouldn't fail.

DP: Are there any special components inside?

TdP: I'm not a believer in many of these; they're more about marketing than anything else. I used bespoke UK made transformers, because I couldn't get anything I wanted elsewhere. The phono stage is a transistor design with reasonable gain, for cost reasons, but it is carefully done and isolated inside to keep noise to a minimum. It still sounds good - very valve-like! Solid-state rectification is used because it's reliable; tube rectification is very often more about marketing than sound, and can be unreliable. I intended it to be a reliable product, to give a minimum of two to three years before maintenance. That's why there are many conservative things on it. It's always been a fetish of mine to make as good as product as can be, reliable.

DP: Is there anything else you're particularly proud of?

TdP: I wanted to keep its profile slimmed down; many of those huge valve amplifiers are just ridiculous. I worked hard to get the switchgear right, to make it look and feel like a Quad. It was my drawing as well as my circuitry. I even designed the printed circuit boards myself. I'm proud to put my name on it.

VERDICT

A thoroughly modern music maker with classic style and unique pedigree, the Quad Classic positively sings with gentle, fluid music.

QUAD II CLASSIC

INTEGRATED £4,500

Quad

☎ +44(0)1480 447700

www.quad-hifi.co.uk

FOR

- sweet, lucid sound
- fine phonostage
- style, build, finish
- pedigree

AGAINST

- lack of absolute power



timing this amp displayed. Imaging was detailed, while tonality and texturing were good, albeit edging towards the romantic. All in all, a well thought out and persuasive piece of equipment to listen to, which should delight the sort of customer it's aimed at.

of pure luxury, for those wanting the joy of valves without the perils, and that's this integrated down to a tee.

and as the name suggests, takes a lot of its musical influences from the Middle East. The rhythms and style of sounds transport the listener to North Africa, whilst adding a little western influence in the harmonies and some of the instrumentation. It is a very relaxing listen and again proved ideally suited to the Quad's gentle and friendly nature.

Those are the words that I would use to sum up this unit. It isn't really suited to heavy rock or harsh and aggressive noises. It will relay them, but with a certain element of stoicism in the presentation. If, instead, you play classical, jazz, folk, or anything where melody and timing are to the fore, then it will revel in portraying a rich, slightly lush sound that made me a very happy listener. Using higher impedance speakers seemed to get better results in the lower bass region, without doing anything to upset the exemplary

CONCLUSION

This amplifier makes a fine introduction to the delights of the thermionic audio world and deserves to win many friends. The standard of build and finish are everything you would expect of a product from a company with Quad's heritage and reputation to maintain. It is not the answer to everyone's audio desires, but provided it is matched with a suitably sympathetic set of speakers should give many hours of highly musical enjoyment. Think of it as a premium priced piece

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Quad II Classic integrated produced 28 Watts into 8 Ohms under measurement, falling to 17 Watts into 4 Ohms, so it works best with 8 Ohm loudspeakers and, quoted as delivering 25 Watts, appears to be optimised for the higher load value (there is no 4/8 Ohm output option). As most loudspeakers use 4 Ohm bass units and measure out at around 6 Ohms impedance, the Classic II is best seen as a 20 Watt amplifier at best, so it needs to be used with sensitive loudspeakers.

Distortion figures were remarkably low, even at bass frequencies, into 8 or 4 Ohms, so this amplifier should sound very clean. With an unusually high damping factor of 17, similar to Naim amplifiers, bass should be tight and punchy.

Frequency response was flat to 22kHz (-1dB) through all inputs. The phono stage was accurately equalised, but has no warp filter, so has full gain down to 10Hz. This allows 5Hz warps signals to saturate the output transformer cores, something that happened at around 1 Watt (3V) output. Some LF limiting is needed. Otherwise the phono stage is sensitive and fine for MM cartridges, if a bit hissy with MCs.

The Quad II Classic integrated measures well and is remarkable in some areas, but it also has a few

weak points, needing to better match 4 Ohm loudspeakers and have less gain below 20Hz to avoid transformer core saturation. NKs

Power	28 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	7Hz-22kHz
Separation	60dB
Noise	-91dB
Distortion	0.06%
Sensitivity	300mV
Damping factor	17

Disc (MM/MC)	
Frequency response	10Hz-22kHz
Separation	56/52dB
Noise	-71/-51dB
Distortion	0.1%
Sensitivity	2 / 0.2mV
Overload	40 / 4mV

DISTORTION

