



PrimaLuna
MICHEL BÉRARD

{ Integrated ProLogue One }
{ CD-Player ProLogue Eight }

Natural 3D Music



When I received the ProLogue One, I really did not take it seriously; a tube integrated amplifier with a price inferior to any of the cables in my system. Hmm... I even got worried about testing it with my Parsifal speakers. I thought that it did not really make any sense to associate such a low price tube integrated amplifier to speakers costing many times more its price. With their 89db efficiency, they will never allow this 35 watt integrated amplifier to highlight its qualities. I even thought to find more suitable speakers among my friends for this test. However, for lack of time, I resigned myself to the exercise. I never imagined I would be so pleasantly surprised. I was going to receive a lesson in humility.

PROLOGUE ONE

Immediately upon unpacking the product, I had to start to admit its seriousness. Oversized double cartons, foam cut very precisely, cotton gloves to handle the tubes. Impeccable. Then, with its 36 pounds of equipment, the seriousness settles even more. In addition, it is not only for showing off. The generous front plate in aluminum houses a quality Alps potentiometer and an input selector with 4 positions.

The transformers designed in Holland are assembled in China and they are meticulously coiled. The tube protection cage has an ingeniously uses banana plugs, which makes removal very easily. No tool needed. On the back of the massive hand-polished metal chassis are the gold-plated RCA jacks and the speakers taps for either 4 or 8 ohm speakers.

Inside the wiring is fully aerial and with point-to-point soldered. The internal wiring uses high definition and

shielded wires for the modulation cables. All elements are firmly anchored with

nuts. The tube bases and the terminals are of high quality ceramics.

A dual-triode 12AX7A tube assumes the preamplification of the each channel. Then we find a 12AU7 linked to a pair of EL34 functioning into a so-called "improved" A/B class ultralinear, rather than a triode or pentode mode. This allows the amplifier to deliver more power, and paradoxically, more softness.

The ProLogue One is designed for a simple and carefree use. It has an ingenious autobias system which adjusts automatically to a multitude of situations: Dynamics differences, temperature changes and input signal changes. To avoid any interference with the music, this circuit is located outside the signal path. This very practical device also increases the reliability and the performance of the product.

ORIGIN AND DESIGN

With such an affordable price for such a product, it is clear that this product is assembled somewhere in China. However, I still wanted to know more about its origin and its design. The ProLogue One is designed in the Netherlands. Its designer Herman van den Dungen, in collaboration with Marcel Croese (from the Goldmund team), has designed the transformers of the ProLogue One. While surfing on PrimaLuna website, I was amazed by the number of awards given to PrimaLuna by the specialized press. Once again, my humility was hit. Therefore, I was ready to prepare my listening sessions.



SETTING UP

Exceptionally for this product, I created 2 different setups. Firstly, I replaced my Mimetism integrated with the ProLogue One on my Symposium platform using all my reference cables. That way I should have a direct comparison with my integrated amplifier.

For the second listening phase, I set up the ProLogue One on a Ikea Lack table and used its own AC cord interconnects and speaker cables.

LISTENING - PHASE 1

Third lesson in humility. Right away, the ProLogue One displayed its colors. An opening and a three-dimensional presentation, which characterizes so well, tube amplifiers of high quality. I did my listening in reverse. In other words, I started to seek the limits of the integrated amplifier before investigating its qualities, so I will know the truth and will be able to concentrate on its strong points. I concentrate my first listening to the reproduction of the low registers and extreme low registers and to the listening of mass orchestras.

Mahler, *The Third*, interpreted by the symphonic orchestra of Chicago. Even if the ProLogue One was not able to provide the full amplitude and the strength of the orchestra, it was surprising with 35 watts. It lost this challenge with "success". I mean that the performance was without any confusion. Nothing was lost in the melodic line. The full orchestra was limited in width and length into the space and the rendering was much more dynamic than what I expected. At normal volume, the amplifier never went breathless.

Host, *The Planets* on Fidelio. Arrangement for a string quintet and organ. Even if the ProLogue One did not succeed to fully reproduce the entire power of the two bottom octaves, the rest was delivered very naturally. No

excessive brilliance of the brass instruments. Above all a subtle reproduction of everything that an organ can offer. The capacity of this integrated to take you to the location, the atmosphere, the sound of the organ bellows inside the silences.

Les Sept Paroles du Christ, again on Fidelio: A classic test for the low register. One more time, the ProLogue was going to surprise me. It was not going to shake the walls of my listening room excessively, but the low registers were deeper than what I thought could be possible and this until 20 Hz. However, the beauty was the voice of Monique Pagé -clear, organic and well positioned. It was possible to limit each row of the chorus in the space and without any confusion. For an integrated amplifier at this cost it is almost inexplicable / puzzling.

As the quality of this amplifier far surpassed my preconceptions, I went on with my test "space". *Santiago de Murcia - Codex*. Happiness without effort. It was easy to mark out precisely each instrument but without feeling them wrapped by an electronic signature, even the percussion was located a few meters in the background. Everything in the performance is coherent.

Ella Fitzgerald - *Sings the Cole Porter Songbook*. What a naturalness once again. From the first to the last track, you listen to the record in a very intimate way. Even more than well located into the space, Ella Fitzgerald is there. We are transported. What the tube brings at its best: softness and warmth, but not in the sense of diminished frequencies.

LISTENING - PHASE 2

I brought the necessary changes to place the product into a context more appropriate to the ProLogue One price. Generally, the results were quite predictable. A bit more of hardness in the voices, of stridence in the strings and the



winds and an image slightly blurred. All that, in fact, confirms the sensibility and the discernment of the ProLogue One. The contrary would have been worrying.

But the good news is that into a configuration more conforming to the product, the ProLogue One still let you discover its huge qualities. A peaceful and comforting listening, which always holds the road, does not crack up in dense and complicated tracks. Besides, the three-dimensional is still present. In fact, I should have been normally tempted to put back the product back into the listening conditions of Phase 1, but I have to admit that it was not the case. Even in those conditions, the ProLogue One was extremely pleasant.

In addition, in spite of analyzing, I spent the rest of my time listening with a lot of pleasure. I would have liked to test the ProLogue One with other speakers. But as I already mentioned, using the results obtained with my speakers we can predict that this little integrated can behave very well with numerous speakers.

TO CONCLUDE

The PrimaLuna ProLogue One's price/performance ratio is so high, making it one of the most surprising products that I have happened to test. This little integrated, designed among others, for the audiophiles hoping to initiate themselves to tube amplifiers at an affordable price, set the standard very high. Moreover, I do not know any product at this price, which can compete with it.

Its coherence, its capacity to reproduce the music in a three dimensional way. Its dynamics and its power, which in spite of its 35 watts, keep the entire structure of the musical message with ease, with no clipping and without collapsing at normal volume. Its capacity to reproduce the voice and to express very clearly the diction of the performer. The capacity to transport us to the recording place. And so simple to use. Plug in and that is it. Let's listen to the music. No adjustment, no worries. So, henceforth the PrimaLuna ProLogue One is part of my musical arsenal.

PRIMALUNA PROLOGUE EIGHT CD PLAYER

This lesson of humility given by the ProLogue One integrated amplifier obliges me to approach the ProLogue Eight CD Player with -needless to say, a totally different state of mind.

Its design and appearance harmonize with all the products of the PrimaLuna ProLogue range. Same size, same proportion, same manufacturing signature. Excellent! It is the first tube cd player that I have ever tested. At the output stage, we can find a 12AU7 and a 12AX7 tube per channel. The power supply is driven by 2 5AR4 tubes. The conversion stage uses NE5532 amplifiers. Its sampling Burr Brown SR4192 24 bit/192 kHz is completed by a PCM1792 converter from the same supplier.

One of the features of the ProLogue Eight is to use a SuperTubeClock; it is a mini triode which replaces the digital clock, normally found in most cd players. According to the manufacturer, the use of a tube considerably reduces the noise and the jitter enabling more details and offers an increased musicality. You also have

to add the presence of isolating transformers, which separate the analogue section from the digital section. The power supply has 11 autonomous and separated regulation circuits. The transport is a Sony KSS213Q and the connectivity is nicely simple: two digital outputs, optical TOS-Link and coaxial SP/DIF and a stereo output.

INSTALLATION

For the tests, I placed the ProLogue Eight on the Symposium platform, located on a Rack of Silence Solid Tech furniture. Therefore, the product is very isolated from the rest of the system. I connected it to the Mimetism with modulation and coaxial Actinote cables, I use the same brand for the AC power cable.

LISTENING

The personality of the ProLogue Eight appeared from the very first listening sessions: a lot of amplitude, power and a sound being more analog than digital.

A nice example is Patricia Barber's *Café Blue*. Patricia's voice seems more natural and present. You feel more space around it. The contrabass is heavier, more round. In addition, the piano has a nature that is more real. I went on with *Idyla* of the instrumental group Appassionata. The violins were silkier and the full performance had more power, still without getting confusing. Really a more analogue sound. I was curious, after this listening, to hear the difference while using the coaxial output and using only the transport section of the cd player and to compare with my external digital/analogue converter (DAC). The reply did not take long to be given. With the external DAC, the music, still well defined, lost a part of its roundness and of its warmth. Probably, it is due to the SuperTubeClock of the ProLogue Eight CD Player, which plays here its magic. Very quickly I put back the cd player in normal mode for my other listening.

TO CONCLUDE

If you like lp's, among others, I recommend a listening of the PrimaLuna ProLogue Eight CD Player. As for the ProLogue One integrated amplifier, the quality/performance ratio of this cd player is very high. In this price class, it is a unique product. Available entirely in black or in black with a silver front plate, those two products have a 2-year warranty on the spare parts and labour and of 6 months on the tubes.

Michel Berard reviewer for Son & Image Magazine

www.son-et-image.com

Integrated ProLogue One: \$1,850
Prima Luna CD-Player ProLogue Eight: \$3,375

Distributor: AudioScape Canada Inc
905-726-2272 - www.audioscapecanada.ca