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# Opinion 1

Almost at the end of the holidays, at that time when parents of young children start, in a state of panic, to prepare school supplies and hurriedly buy the missing textbooks, provided that the list has been provided to them in advance, we decided not only to not take a break but to intensify our activities and focus on a type of behavioral analysis that encompasses the area of design and human creativity that interests us, namely, the Hi-Fi / High-End Audio market. It is no secret that this market is marked by an eternal, albeit somewhat illusory, conflict between the relentless pursuit of perfection, fueled by an obsessive neurosis of most designers, and conservative pragmatism based on the logic that the best is the enemy of the good. So, if something works, works well, and, most importantly, finds new buyers, the product's life cycle should be maintained as long as possible with care and common sense.

However, it turns out that it is possible to combine both behavioral patterns, merging them into a coherent entity and satisfying the desires of followers of both sides, operating at the intersection of yin and yang. All it takes is to replace revolution with evolution in the creative process and, instead of a policy of drastic changes or throwing the baby out with the bathwater, opt for a methodology of small steps. And it is precisely on this clinical case that we will reflect in our review today. To prevent these considerations from being a purely theoretical/technical and academic dissertation, we allow ourselves a small retrospection and refer to previously collected comparative material.

We are talking about the XP5 preamplifier / XP-A1500 power amp set, which stands out for its striking orange-colored cases, which were tested a year and a half ago. In the meantime, the manufacturer has subjected its components to a slight facelift, as evidenced by the addition of the MKII designation to their names. Therefore, still recalling some of our previous impressions and having extensive documentation in the form of our prior and utterly subjective observations, together with the brand distributor in Chelmsza – Quality Audio, we considered it appropriate to investigate what novelties there are in the Dutch landscape (what a funny expression!) and how these observations fit into the narrative of combining fire with water. Thus, the Extraudio XP5 MKII & XP-A1500 MKII duo, still smelling of the factory, came to our desk.



Regarding the visual aspects, apart from the obvious change from the striking design color of orange to satin silver, nickel, and copper, we can safely say that absolutely nothing has changed. An attentive eye will also notice that the manufacturer has not highlighted much the appearance of the new version of the devices since even the inscriptions visible on the upper edges of the solid aluminum fronts have remained unchanged since the first versions. In short, everything remains the same. At least at first glance.

In the preamplifier, the perfect order and simplicity of its minimalist form stand out, based on two pure silver chrome knobs located on the sides: the one on the left serves as an input selector, and the one on the right controls the volume. In addition, it features a characteristic “biscuit/part of the brand logo” button surrounded by an illuminated halo and six small LEDs indicating the selected source. The rear part is more of the same. We have four pairs of gold-plated RCA inputs, a ground terminal (useful for the optional MM/MC phono module), a pair of XLR inputs, inputs for an external audio and video processor in RCA and XLR format, and an identical set of outputs. The list is completed with a pass-through connector for the 12V trigger and a three-pin IEC plug. The whole set rests on four conical rubber isolation feet and comes with a handy remote control.

On the other hand, the XP-A1500 MKII stereo power amplifier features on its almost immaculate front only the “biscuit/part of the brand logo” button surrounded by light and the manufacturer’s signature. I already mentioned that the product model is on the upper edge, and looking at the amplifier from the front (vertically positioned and not from above), it is not noticeable. The rear is almost as minimalist as the front, with only the line inputs in the form of RCA and XLR connectors, a trigger bus, WBT Next-Gen™ speaker terminals, and a power plug.

As for the technical aspects, compared to its predecessor, the XP5 MKII boasts 21 improvements, including better input impedance, optimized circuit topology, increased filtering capacity in the power supply, shorter signal paths, increased volume adjustment steps from 63 to 128, and, thanks to software changes, extended remote control battery life from two to nine months. Of course, the key and fundamental features embedded in the preamplifier’s DNA remain unchanged: we still have inputs connected by dedicated relays to a single tube amplification stage (with a 6922 triode per channel) operating in pure Class A.



As for the XP-A1500 MKII, it is based on two completely separate 1500W (8Ω) monophonic power modules – EPAM modules with a maximum current of up to 90A, balanced inputs, and BJT transistor input buffers operating in Class A.

Well, since the predecessors of the titular duo already sounded, quoting myself, “surprisingly smooth, calm, and dense – without any sign of latent nervousness or an unnecessary tendency to flex muscles and Hollywood-style spectacle, precisely in moments where the artists chose to play... in silence,” I wondered in what direction the creators had taken the MKII models. Toward even greater smoothness and plasticity, or perhaps toward higher resolution and precision? And? Literally, after a few rough bars of “Down the Rabbit Hole” by Citizen Soldier, it became clear that... both. How is that possible? I will answer paradoxically: normally and logically. Even if it is a paraconsistent logic, but logic nonetheless. Separating the duo into individual components, the preamplifier can boast even better precision, resolution, and, above all, an impressive shine in the crystal-clear upper registers, while the power amp has enhanced the aspect of smoothness and captivating sweetness, without becoming cloying. The result? As I summarized above quite concisely, the new versions of Extraudio not only provide more nuances but also present everything in a more enthusiastic and attractive way. Does this mean they beautify the sound, showing the world not only in pastel colors but also serving subtly Prozac-infused cocktails? Not quite. They simply emphasize melody, the art of arrangement, and the latent emotions in each piece, without limiting themselves to a cold, analytical analysis devoid of humanity of each sound. Therefore, they represent a more exciting and melomaniac approach than an audiophile one, and although the subject is the same in both cases, its perception depends on the perspective from which we look at it.

For example, “Forever Damned” is dense, dark, almost suffocating, but this somber atmosphere carries a powerful charge of energy and a surprising richness of details. Here, nothing blends, nothing hides behind others, and it is up to the listener to decide how deep they want to dive into these unsettling abysses. On the other hand, in the contemplative and minimalist “Le premier cri” by Armand Amar, the Dutch duo builds a surprisingly ethereal scene with so much air that it seems there were tubes not only in the preamplifier but also in the power amplifier, which, instead of offering an impressive 1.5 kW, played with just a few watts, not coming from Class D modules, but from a refined triode in the style of 2A3 or 300B. Magic? Not necessarily, but rather a conscious and skillful application of technologies that are not an end in themselves but a means to achieve that end.





Pay attention to Sinéad O'Connor's voice in "A New Born Child" or Sandrine Piau's in "Le premier cri," where diametrically different singing and articulation techniques are employed, not to mention the timbre and texture. Nevertheless, despite the evident differences, you can also perceive the logic of their proximity and thematic coherence.

Overall, I perceived the Dutch set as an invitation to reflection and contemplation, so I was not surprised to find myself resorting more to material that, although perhaps not structurally concise, like the classic "In The Court Of The Crimson King" by King Crimson with its magical and hair-raising "Epitaph," is in some way romantic, rather than operating in the daily extremes for me (see "Sweet Evil Sun" by Candlemass or "Call The Devil" by Mushroomhead). However, this does not mean an inability or difficulty in conveying the destructive potential of threatening roars, infernal riffs, and ecstatic blasts, but rather the presence of a certain signature that made these sulfurous airs, to my amazement, too attractive. Of course, if I had to live with this sound daily, I would not mind at all. However, being accustomed to greater roughness and harshness, I preferred to spend the time with the Extraudio duo on less ear- and nerve-destroying forms of artistic expression. Just that, and no less.

Who would I recommend the Extraudio XP5 MKII & XP-A1500 MKII to in the first place? Well, the truth is that it would be easier for me to point out those who, from the outset, could be excluded, that is, lovers of excessive analyticalness or morgue-like coldness, since even the preamplifier alone, connected to active speakers or power amps with a cold presentation, might seem too clean and smooth to them. Therefore, instead of theoretically speculating, if you have about 200,000 PLN (with a small surplus) and are tempted to change your current amplification, I highly recommend trying these Dutch delights in the comfort of

your home. I do not know if they will fit your tastes, but I am sure of one thing: you should not complain about a lack of refinement and discreetly delivered but practically unlimited power.

## System used during the test:

- CD/DAC: Vitus Audio SCD-025 Mk.II
- File player: Lumin U2 Mini + Farad Super3 + Farad DC Level 2 copper cable + Omicron Magic Dream Classic; I-O Data Soundgenic HDL-RA4TB
- Turntable: Denon DP-3000NE + Denon DL-103R
- Phono preamplifier: Tellurium Q Iridium MM/MC Phono Pre Amp
- Digital source selector: Audio Authority 1177
- Integrated amplifier: Vitus Audio RI-101 MkII + Quantum Science Audio (QSA) Violet fuse
- Speakers: Dynaudio Contour 30 + Acoustic Revive SPU-8 supports + Base Audio quartz platforms
- IC RCA cables: Furutech FA-13S; phono NEO d+ RCA Class B Stereo + Ground (1m)
- IC XLR cables: Vermöuth Audio Reference; Furutech DAS-4.1
- Digital IC cables: Fadel art DigiLitz; Harmonic Technology Cyberlink Copper; Apogee Wyde Eye; Monster Cable Interlink LightSpeed 200
- USB cables: Wireworld Starlight; Vermöuth Audio Reference USB; ZenSati Zorro
- Speaker cables: Signal Projects Hydra + SHUBI Custom Acoustic Stands MMS-1
- Power cables: Esprit Audio Alpha; Furutech FP-3TS762 / FI-28R / FI-E38R; Organic Audio Power + Furutech CF-080 Damping Ring; Acoustic Zen Gargantua II; Furutech Nanoflux Power NCF
- Power strip: Furutech e-TP60ER + Furutech FP-3TS762 / Fi-50 NCF(R) /FI-50M NCF(R)
- Wall socket: Furutech FT-SWS-D (R) NCF
- Switch: Silent Angel Bonn N8 + Silent Angel S28 feet + Farad Super3 power supply + Farad DC Level 2 copper cable
- Ethernet cables: In-akustik CAT6 Premium II; Audiomica Laboratory Anort Consequence, Artoc Ultra Reference, Arago Excellence; Furutech LAN-8 NCF; Next Level Tech NxLT Lan Flame
- Anti-vibration platform: Franc Audio Accessories Wood Block Slim Platform
- Table: Solid Tech Radius Duo 3
- Acoustic panels: Vicoustic Flat Panel VMT



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Models:  
Preamplifier Extraudio XP5 MKII  
Power Amplifier Extraudio XP-A1500 MKII