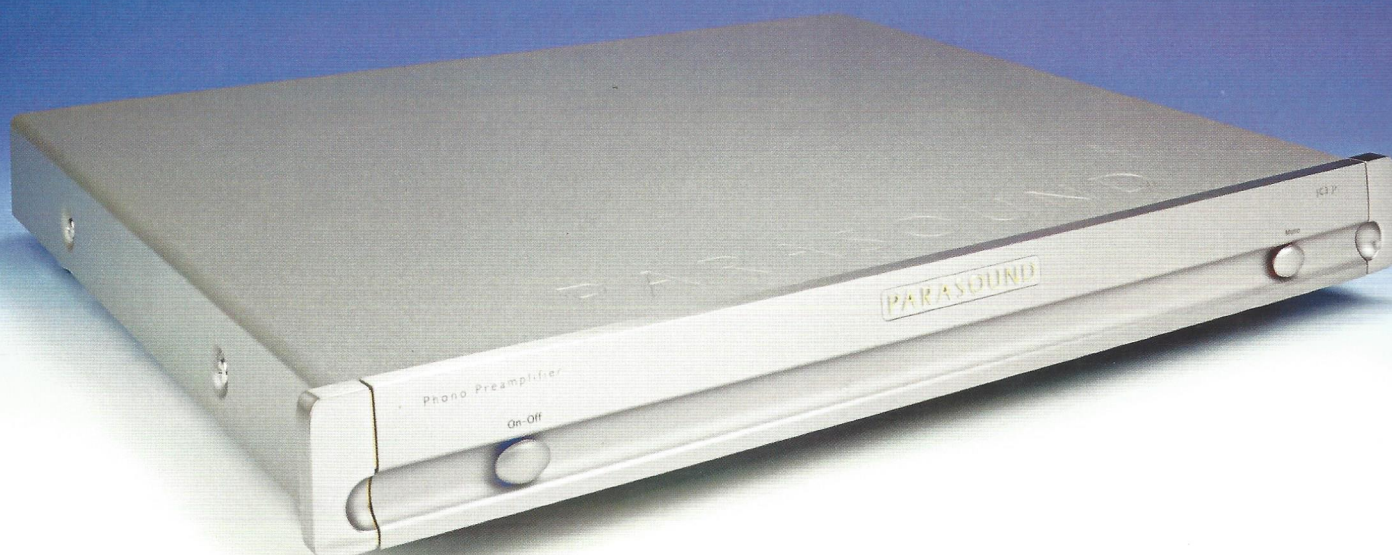


Paratrooper

The new Parasound JC3 Jr phono stage from renowned designer John Curl is free of frills – but makes up for it with a crisp, dynamic sound, says Noel Keywood.



The Parasound JC3 Jr is one big phono stage – yet this is the Junior for which you pay £2200. It's been designed to fit a Pro 19in rack more than a convenient available space around the hi-fi, but those with racks whose shelves can be adjusted to its low height of 45mm (1.75in) might like the visual fit. You could conceivably place a turntable on top, it is so big – to avoid hum the sort that runs from an external d.c. power supply preferably.

However, the Parasound pitches at being a semi-pro device, designed by renowned John Curl from the USA, so perhaps my idea of putting a turntable on top isn't such a good one; I must get more serious. At the price you can expect it to handle both moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC) cartridges, which it does.

Parasound use the simplest arrangement of a single amplifier with switchable gain and input impedances so on the rear panel there is one RCA phono socket input pair catering for one turntable, not the separate MM and MC inputs

of many phono stages. There are two outputs though: normal RCA phono sockets (unbalanced) and XLR sockets (balanced), the XLRs offering double the gain and output voltage as is common. They are best used, especially for long connecting cables if the Parasound is distant from an amplifier.

Also on the rear panel are two small toggle switches, one to set gain for MM and MC and the other to choose between them. The MM position sets input impedance at 47k, the MC position makes input impedance variable from 50 Ohms up to 550 Ohms, the usual value being 100 Ohms. Some MCs (e.g. Clearaudio) need 300 Ohms so this stage will match them or MM can be used (47k) since MC gain is available with MM selected.

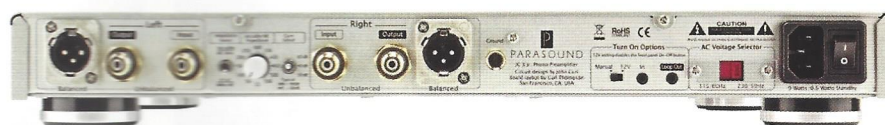
The solid, extruded aluminium front panel carries an on/off switch at left and a mono button at right, both having an illuminated bevel to show status. There is no remote

control and no output level control, so the JC3 Jr needs a preamplifier or an integrated amplifier; it cannot drive power amplifiers direct. The unit can optionally be switched on by an external 12V trigger from an amplifier.

The front panel of this phono stage is lavishly built with solid alloyed machined end pieces, firm short-action push buttons having a solid feel, and subtle bevel lighting around the buttons. The switches actuate small-signal sealed relays; there are no switching thumps or noises even with volume turned up, relays allowing short time delays for circuit settling (good ones also having a very long life).

SOUND QUALITY

I connected the JC3 Jr to our Icon Audio Stereo 30SE single-ended valve amplifier driving Martin Logan ESL-X loudspeakers – a very sympathetic combination for LP – where it replaced our Icon Audio PS3 valve



The rear panel carries XLR balanced outputs alongside Phono socket unbalanced. Mini toggle switches change gain and MM/MC state, MC input Z being adjustable.