

phono stage. Feeding it was our Timestep Evo upgraded Technics SL-1210 Mk2 turntable with SME309 arm. Cartridges used were an Ortofon 2M Black and three Audio Technica VM-700 MM cartridges (740ML, 750SH, 760SLC), as well as Ortofon Cadenza Bronze and MC A95 MC cartridges.

In this system the JC3 Jr didn't disappoint me. In fact it had the lucidity of our PS3, with little sign of haze, fuzz or muddle, sounding wonderfully clear and transmissive. There was a great sense of listening through an open window, the Parasound putting little on the way between betwixt cartridge and amplifier.

A crisp quality with well-resolved highs brought solid bite to Mark Knopfler's guitar strings in 'Madame Geneva's' from the LP Kill to get Crimson (180gm), whilst the sense of smoothness and depth to this superbly mastered LP was conveyed with little degradation.

As I expected there wasn't the stage depth of the PS3 but there was a sharper outline to images across a broad and well-lit soundstage. A strong grip on tempo propelled the metronomic synth backing to Billy Ocean's 'Get Out Of My Dreams And Into My Car' (12in, 45rpm), the powerful bass line of this 1980s disco number (get yer flares on!) coming across as tight and forceful, with a sense of fulsome power. It was propulsive and exciting.

I did most of my listening with the Ortofon Cadenza Bronze MC, but changing to the MMs showed up differences well, including differences between them. This isn't a phono stage that softens the sound. Quite the reverse, making Audio Technica's VM740ML a good match, rather than the brighter VM760SLC. Our Cadenza Bronze also better suited than the more technical A95, where the two both suit the Icon Audio PS3, so the JC3 Jr is quite specific – and will pep up warm sounding MMs in particular.

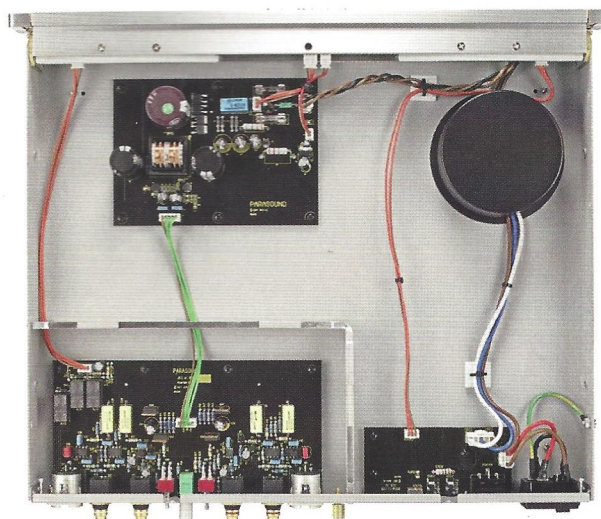
Classical music highlighted the clear, open nature of this phono stage but also its analysis. The strings on Marian Thorsen playing Mozart's 'Violin Concerto No4' from a 2L (Norway) LP recorded in DXD and cut to 180gm quiet vinyl sounding shimmeringly clear and richly detailed, yet without any harshness. Wonderful how analogue can do this without the screech of digital. This thought came to me likely because

the Parasound has digital-like composure and presence – no warmth or cuddliness – but without 'digitalness'.

On the matter of hiss and hum, there was no hum in our system and only slight hiss with volume at maximum and my ear against the X-Stat panels.

CONCLUSION

I'm very sensitive to phono stages: they can make or break the sound of my LPs. And because they are easy to knock up, many are simple, unfettered and lacklustre designs that place a flattening veil over the sound. Parasound's JC3 Jr was the opposite: crisp, clear, pacy and dynamic – no veils here.



Most phono stages come in small cases so there's space to spare in the Parasound's big chassis, but this lessens hum induction, as does the screened mains transformer of the linear power supply.

As a package it is large and free of frills at the price, but Parasound get the basics right – meaning sound quality – and that makes it well worth auditioning.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of the JC3 Jr, shown in our analysis, was identical at all gain settings; it didn't run out of LF gain at the highest setting (60dB), as some can. Equalisation was accurate across the audio band with just a slight lift (+0.5dB) around 40Hz likely introduced by a gentle warp filter that rolls off gain below 12Hz (-1dB) to produce a mild but

useful -8dB attenuation at 5Hz (warps) to lessen cone flap from ported reflex loudspeakers.

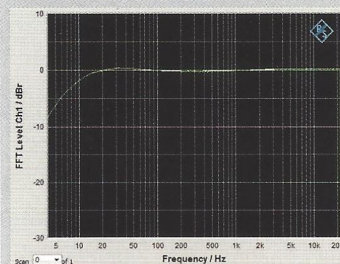
Gain was as stated, measuring a normal x100 for MM cartridges, with x340 as an option for low output types, since overload was an acceptable 20mV. Moving coil cartridges have x1000 gain available (60dB) which is enough for high-ish output types but not for very low output MCs. Also, noise (hiss) was low but not very low, measuring 0.2µV in (equivalent input noise) where half this (6dB less hiss) is possible.

The XLR outputs double the gain and overload margins but since many XLR amplifier inputs have equivalently less sensitivity this may not alter anything. As balanced audio is handled by dedicated ICs nowadays there isn't necessarily a fixed 2:1 relationship to unbalanced.

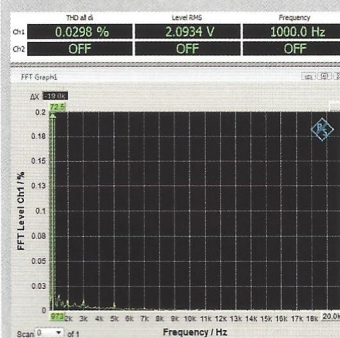
The Parasound JC3 Jr measures well all round but it does not excel with moving coil, best suiting high output budget types if slight hiss is to be avoided. **NK**

Frequency response 12Hz- 20kHz
Gain x110, x340, x1000
Overload (MM,MC) 63, 20, 7mV in / 7V out
Separation 67dB
Noise 0.22µV e.i.n.

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION



PARASOUND JC3 JR £2,200



EXCELLENT - extremely capable.

VERDICT

Fine sounding phono stage, if awkwardly large.

FOR

- snappy and clear
- good bass
- MC matching

AGAINST

- size
- no level control
- fixed warp filter

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