

Pure classic

Let me start with the logo of the manufacturer. Senior readers as well as the Hifi infected author will be reminded of the “Fine Arts by Grundig” series of the traditional German manufacturer. This High-end series, introduced two years before the death of the company founder Max Grundig included a still well appreciated receiver ‘T-9000’ and the later model ‘T-9009. This series was initiated at the time by Dr. Burkhardt Schwaebe and this is how the loop is closed as he is the head behind ‘Eternal Arts’. This project is his continuation of the thinking first leading to the realization of an OTL power amp based on the design of Julius Futterman. The base principle of this circuit first released in 1954 was the realization of a transformerless amplifiers that is only offered by a very few manufacturers nowadays. Background being that a transformer can deteriorate the sound quality. Of course one can be of a different opinion – a first class transformer was however at the time not very easy to get hold of nor were they very affordable (still valid today!). Back to Eternal Arts; a Preamplifier, the ‘FTP’ is now on offer as well. The ‘FTP’ stands for Full Valve Preamplifier’ and not for File Transfer Protocol. This is a different technology camp not at all applicable here. As the name implies, the amplification relies 100% on tubes. One does however do without wired circuits and instead uses circuit boards with 70 micron goldplating. Special attention was given to the phono inputs. Yes correct plural, the “phono inputs”. The FTP has two and to please the vinyl specialists it does not simply have one MM and one MC input. Both inputs can be switched between both and in the MC mode one can choose between MC1 and MC 2. MC1 uses a step up transformer from the renown manufacturer Picatron. MC2 works on the contrary without step up as pure tube. The RIAA synch is active, a passive solution was regarded as being inadequate. As if this was not sufficient, filters (low cut and high cut) have been incorporated into the dual mono preamplifier. Presence of a tape loop for tape fanatics shows that the specification of this preamplifier is simply ultimate. Nothing was to be omitted. A well functioning remote as well as input signal indicating EM 80 valves (the already famous green magic eyes). Amplification is managed by a PC88, a PCF80 and two PCC per channel. The regulated power supply is equipped with a GZ34, (5AR4), 6EM7 and a 6D3A. All the valves are newly located inventory from manufactures as Valvo, Philips, and Telefunken – i.e NOS (New Old Stock). Humming should not be desired so MU metal shields were used. (These are typically manufactured in special ovens: 3-4 tightly wound coils are glowing in a protective atmosphere – pure hydrogen and then cooled. The glowing process takes up to 30 hours, the cooling 18 hours.). The amplifier is then packaged in a housing that reminds me of a railway station with its typical dome shaped construction. This somehow fits: A railway station allocates the trains to different lines. The FTP does similar with the audio signals. This is done via excellent cinch plugs. That there are a balanced input and balanced output probably does not surprise anymore. To the front panel: On the black gold front panel (yes it is a 24 k gold plating) (*also polished nickel available*) there are three knobs for the source, volume (also via remote controllable as well as mute setting) and balance control. (The latter with a noticeable central setting- very pleasant). There are also 4 flip switches for High- and low-pass filter, Mono and Monitor. Oh yes, not to forget the two green magic eyes that light up as soon as the amplifier is switched on. It seems that the whole amplifier is somehow brought to life as soon as the eyes start shining. Lively is perhaps the right description for the character of this amplifier.

Music

I felt like a musically fascinating, albeit, non-audiophile start to my listening session. I could not imagine anything better than one of the numerous best hit compilations of Jonny Cash. The record 'Classic Cash' (1988, Phonogram 834 526-1) unifies hits such as 'Get Rythm', 'Tennessee Flat Top Box', 'Blue train', 'I Walk The Line' and of course 'Ring of Fire'. The sound quality is obviously not the best as, as so often with these hit collections, one has crammed a lot of music into one LP. All this, however, does not prevent the voice of that great man of American country music who has left a mark on more musicians than anybody else, to sound very authentic. Even the relatively thin sonics do not upset me. It sounds so engaging that even non Country fans do not want to leave the involving voice and charisma of the 'Man in Black'. You call that simply "Super". We continue relaxed with Bruce Thornsby and the Range with the track 'The Way It Is' from the same named album (1986, RCA records, RCLP 20386). This was a great success and was played continuously in the radio. The same applies to 'Every Little Kiss' and 'Mandolin Rain'. In the meantime, I tremendously enjoy the soft poetic music of the band again and the reproduction via the Eternal Arts does not reduce my enthusiasm. To the contrary, the colourful reproduction is best enjoyed via the set up transformer phono option. This offers me more quietness and authenticity – other listeners will prefer the pure tube option with its more magical warmth. Pure matter of taste. It's time for more power – one of my few Maxis is suitable: Madness 'Our House' (Teldec/Stiff records 6.20177) was at the time (1983) quite a big hit. And even nowadays the strange Ska sound can impress. The brass slamming are very enjoyable as in the previous hit 'One Step Beyond', the pure enjoyment of the music and rhythm dominate. Mr. Graham Mc Pherson and his associates impressed in the UK and not just there....

The 'Opeth' double LP 'Ghost Reveries' (2005, Roadrunner Records 8123-1) offers totally different sounds. Dark, melancholic and simultaneously quiet is not only the first record that does not originate from the 80s of the twentieth century but also a trip into one's own spiritual world. Not always very harmonious but realistic in its approach. I find these works on the whole very inspiritively fascinating. Similar is nightwish's 'Wish I Had An Angel' (Maxi, 2004, Nuclear Blast NB 1336-1). This is harder but not less intensive. The well trained voice of the front lady Taarja Tuurunen in combination with the hard guitar and the raw voice of Tuomas, head of the band results in a lovely mix of modern rock music. Pure Energy evolves through the listening room, the bass pumps all second thoughts away and I do not wish for the song to finish. To end was also my shore exposure to the phono section of the Eternal Arts preamplifier, but first I want to mention the Chopin Recital of Ivo Pogorelich (1981, Deutsche Grammophon DG 2531-346), recorded by recording engineer Wolfgang Mitlehner. The impulsive playing of the creative pianist hits dead on the compositions that lie in the pure emotional life of the Frederic Chopin. A very emotional mixture that I must recommend.

The first 'CD' music I listened was Pop: 'The Sprit of the Hawk' from the Rednex disc 'farm out' (2000, Tomba Reciors/ JIVE 9220592). This was a great hit from the Swedish band. A real gem that requires a few more db than normal. In other words, you need to listen to this track loud. And it's fun, even if the recording is very American: ie the middle and lower bass are very over emphasized. This is clearly noticeable via the Eternal Arts preamplifier. Despite this, the music is so lively and free that the performance of the recording engineer does not disturb.

For the end result it is pretty well indifferent what sort of music is playing, whether it being the Bloodhound Gang with their tough Rock Rap 'Hooray for Boobies' (Geffen 490 455-2, 1990) or be it Hubert von Goisern together with his European and Asian (more exact Tibetan) musicians on 'InExil Tibet' (1988, BMG Ariola Austria 74321 57012) with the absolutely incredibly high density of sound that produces a unique style of word music – a sound collage that invites to linger in strange sounds.

The Eternal Arts shows exactly the musical essence of the music that so many other technically perfect preamplifiers miss out on. Faults in records are purely transmitted allowing a musical analytical listening approach, but this is not required.

In summary:

The Eternal Arts FTP presents a classical concept, perfectly built with modern technology, faultlessly realized and built without any compromises. The fact that the silhouette with its protective hoods reminds one of a railway station may be coincidental. Certainly not coincidental is the sound of this supreme preamplifier. An excellent preamplifier at a somewhat steep price (euro 13,500, full gold version - Sheik model euro 18,500). Based on classical concepts with intelligent usage of modern options, the FTP offers connoisseurs as it is or in combination with the matching Eternal Arts poweramp music a la carte. For those who can afford it, a listening trial is a must.