

## PHONOSTAGES

Under \$2000

## Parasound Zphono

\$150

parasound.com

The mm/mc Zphono is excellently built and makes very nice sounds: large soundstage, excellent layering and bloom with remarkably good balance, dynamic range, and detail. To be sure, a little veiled, a little lacking in ultimate definition, with a vague sense of things being held somewhat at arm's length. But at \$150, you really can't complain.

Reviewed by PS, Issue 172



## Gram Amp 2 SE

\$399

ellexatelier.com

This stripped-down little bugger has a sweet, mellow sound, and very low noise and perceived distortion. It's strictly for moving magnets and high-output moving coils. The sound is a little veiled (though remarkably grain-free), and, while not the last word in wide dynamics, has astonishing composure and musical integrity.

Reviewed by PS, Issue 134

## Grado PH-1

\$500

gradolabs.com

The wood-bodied PH-1 is a versatile unit that works equally well with high- and low-output cartridges. Though it is susceptible to environmental noise, the sound is open and easy, with an expansive soundstage, natural highs, and bass that has texture, tonal refinement, and power.

Reviewed by WG, Issue 141

## Phomena/Phomena Nova

\$600/\$999

musicalsurrroundings.com

An Apollonian grace, poise, low noise, and neutrality characterize this excellent unit, which includes options for fine-tuning the loading and gain of both moving coils and moving magnets. Add the external power supply for even lower noise and distortion, and greater transparency. Some listeners may want more dynamic "punch" and personality, but this is hard to beat



for low coloration. Add \$600 for BPS power supply (supplied in the Nova version).

Reviewed by PS, Issues 133 and 172

## Marchand Electronics LN-112-AA

\$995

marchandelec.com

A sweet, open, and very natural sounding tube phonostage, the LN-112, which can also be ordered either as a kit (\$595), partially (\$795) or fully assembled (\$995), surely ranks among audio's great values. Its 47k impedance and low output make it best for mm and high-output mc's.

Reviewed by WG in this Issue

## JR Transrotor Phono II

\$1800

axissaudio.com

Splendidly machined from a chunk of aluminum with enough heat-sinking for a reactor, the Phono II has yet to meet a cartridge it can't convincingly handle. Fully adjustable for mm and mc, it may well be the last phonostage you'll ever want. Sonically on the cooler and clinical side of the spectrum—but only slightly so.

Reviewed by NG, Issue 172

\$3000 - \$6000

## Sutherland PhD

\$3000

acousticsounds.com

Ron Sutherland's battery-powered PhD is so quiet that it takes awhile to get used to its sound. Once you've adjusted, expect to hear "into" your records in a way unlike before. Beyond its silence, the PhD has a tube-like liquidity, terrific detail, wonderful dynamic nuance, and remarkable transparency.

Reviewed by WG, Issue 144

## Artemis Labs PL-1

\$3520

aydn.com

Like its companion lineage, the PL-1 is a tube-driven phonostage delivering exquisitely musical and lifelike sound. Record after record left our editor with that "as if hearing it for the first time" feeling. Beautifully balanced, with low noise and a great range of tone colors, the PL-1 is also dynamically explosive and very transparent.

Reviewed by WG, Issue 155



## Aesthetix Rhea

\$4000

musicalsurrroundings.com

With three inputs, variable cartridge loading—adjustable at the listening chair via remote



control—and front-panel display of gain loading, the Rhea is the Swiss Army Knife of phonostages. Although it has tons of gain, its noise level is relatively low, making it compatible with a wide range of cartridge outputs. The Rhea's family resemblance to the Calyx lineage is unmistakable: transient quickness and speed without etch, a feeling of effortlessness on crescendos, and a deep, layered soundstage. Tube choice affects noise level.

Reviewed by RH, Issue 151

## Audio Research PH7

\$5995

audioresearch.com

Meet the new boss. If you can imagine a remote-controllable phonostage with the air, color, and bloom of the Aesthetix Io and the dynamic and soundstaging of the Lamm LP2 Deluxe, then you've got an idea of what ARC's all-in-one PH7 phonostage sounds like. That said, you really have to hear this one for yourself to get a true sense of its transparency and the way it images. ARC hasn't been on such a high since the heady days of the SP10 and D791.

Reviewed by JV, Issue 172

\$6000 &amp; above

## Aesthetix Io MKII and MKII Signature

\$6500 without volume control;

\$9000 with volume control; \$9000

for Signature without volume

control, \$11,500 for Signature with

volume control

musicalsurrroundings.com

Phono fanatics with both space and cash will want to audition this 24-tube, two (large) channel beauty. Yes, it eats shelf space; yes, it throws a lot of heat; and yes, it is as good as it gets. Exquisite dynamic contrasts, an easy, relaxed presentation, headroom to spare, a glorious midrange, excellent bottom octave, and a rendition of instrumental body. Highs are airy or extended as some, but they are natural and non-fatiguing.

Reviewed by Don Saltzman, Issue 121 and by JV, Issue 143

## Lamm LP2 Deluxe

\$6990

lammindustries.com

With a superb built-in coupling transformer to handle lower-output moving coils, the tube Lamm LP2 phonostage has the irrefutable advantage of being dead quiet, which makes it ideal for folks, like JV, who live in the Valley. Though not as "alive" or blooming as the Aesthetix Io or ARC PH7 on large

