

Review: YBA Genesis PH1 Phono Stage

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YBA has a range of great-looking products, but it was the Genesis PH1 battery-powered phono stage that sparked my curiosity first so I got one in for review.



YBA

Genesis PH1

Battery-Powered Phono Pre-Amplifier

£1,800

The Genesis range is YBA's second-tier series with the Heritage below and the Passion and flagship Signature series above.

Following the French brand's 2012 relaunch YBA products are still designed in France but are now manufactured in China. It is the way for many brands, and I am not sniffy about this as long as quality control is taken care of correctly. As founder and designer **Yves Bernard André** still checks and signs off on each of the Signature products, I see no reason to doubt that YBA takes quality control seriously.



The YBA PH1 is the company's mid-range phono pre-amplifier (the Signature series doesn't have one), and the reason why it piqued my interest is that it utilises rechargeable cells that are periodically topped up by the mains as well as sporting some other exciting audiophile-grade features.

YBA Genesis PH1 Review

The black aluminium and acrylic design of the 215 x 115 x 335mm (WxHxD) PH1 looks modern as well as classy with the swooping border between the two materials echoing the lines of the brand's other product lines. Also in common with YBA's other offerings, the PH1 sits on three feet.

Keeping you informed of all that is important is an OLED display. As well as the range and model number, you get a battery level indicator similar to what you'd expect on your phone or tablet and notification of which cartridge source mode the pre-amp is in, Moving Magnet (MM) or Moving Coil (MC).

Front controls are up and down toggle switches for Source (MM/MC) and Power (on/off). There is also a master power switch under the unit on the left-hand side.



The heart of the PH-1 is the op-amp based moving-magnet section, which works alongside a moving-coil transformer. As well as the expected brace of options you also get the additional choice of flicking a switch around the back of the unit to cater for high output MC cartridges. There is an auto-sensing system to further adjust for the type of moving coil cart being used, as long as you have selected the correct setting (high or low).

Company founder **Yves-Bernard André** is the brains behind the transformer. The uniquely designed moving coil transformer is housed in a mu-metal shield, and YBA claims it can dish out 26dB of gain.

Finally, you get a choice of balanced XLR and unbalanced RCA outputs, giving the YBA PH1 even broader appeal and flexibility.

As the PH1 we had on loan was a demo unit, the rechargeable batteries were already fully charged. However, should you have one from new, it is worth remembering to fully charge the batteries before you switch on and use the PH1. I know that it's tricky to be patient when you get new gear, but if you only partially charge the cells, they could develop a charing memory that limits their life. The Genesis PH1 can be recharged up to 10,000 times. Also, you get eight hours of listening per full charge. You can leave the unit plugged in and, as the phono stage is being used, it will sip from the batteries and then top-up from the mains as you go.



If, for whatever reason, you don't use the PH1 for more than a couple of weeks, you should switch it on and let the batteries cycle, according to YBA's site.

Furnished with all that knowledge the battery system is easy to live with and pretty much ignore. Flipping the PH1 over you can see the hatch to replace the batteries, should that be required in the future.

I do very much like the dimensions, look and overall finish of the YBA PH1. So, plugging in the VPI Prime to the PH1 and out to the Musical Fidelity M6si first and then the YBA Genesis IA3 integrated it was time to spend a few weeks listening to it. The speakers being used during this review are the Marten Duke 2 standmounts. I had been listening to these speakers for a couple of weeks in my system before adding the YBA components. Reviews will follow soon for both the Marten speakers and Genesis integrated.

YBA Genesis PH1 Sound Quality

I started my listening session with the **Bowie** classic, *Ziggy Stardust*. As I was getting settled my other-half breezed through en-route to the kitchen only to stop in her tracks. On the spot she exclaimed that this was the best she has ever heard this song. I have to agree though; the playback is transparent, open and musical.

Turning to the recent remastering of **Kate Bush**'s *Running up That Hill (A Deal With God)*, the clarity of the layered vocals and placement of the various instruments in the

soundstage is masterful. There is a beautiful depth and space that, on some other stages, is lacking on this particular track. As Ms Bush builds up her vocals, they are fittingly given centre stage with the instrumentation and supporting voices slightly behind.

I am starting to doubt that I have been given the correct pricing for this phono stage.



Eat the Elephant by **A Perfect Circle** starts next with the opening bars of piano and drums. Expansive, authoritative; smooth and organic. When **Meynard**'s vocals join in, it sounds totally live and natural.

That naturalness can be attributed to the Genesis PH1's neutrality. You are not getting any nasty additives and so no overblown bass or sickly sweet highs.

As the harmonics fade in signifying the start of *Red Barchetta* by **Rush**, there is no evidence of smoothing here. The spiky stabs of **Geddy**'s overdriven bass are clearly fuzzilicious as his distinctive vocals take us on a trip through the Canadian countryside in a red turbo-charged two-seater. Bass has good weight, and the timing from the Prime/Cartridge Man combo through the YBA pre and integrated and out of the Marten Duke 2 drives me on to more from the rockier end of my collection.

As it is the 31st birthday of one of my favourite albums from my teenage years, **Queensryche**'s *Operation Mindcrime*, it was time to immerse myself in this concept album from the Washington-based prog metal band.



As you would expect from a 'prog' anything band, there are returning themes, changes in tempo and feel; not to mention multi-layered instrumentation. *Operation Mindcrime* even sees **Queensryche** dipping its collective feet into rock opera territory. I have played this album many, many times since purchasing it back in '88 and consider myself well-versed in all the intricacies pressed into the plastic. Truth be told, even if I weren't spinning the LP, I'd be watching *Video Mindcrime* (the VHS recording of the accompanying music video story) back in the day. I also had a cassette taping of the album for when I was out-and-about. However, the PH1 unmasked the overall presentation of the LP. The songs not only have more clarity but also more focus, emotion and urgency to what I have previously heard.

In fact, clarity and focus seemed to be a recurring theme throughout my listening notes. Looking at the construction of the Genesis PH1 in comparison to similar op-amp phono stages my only conclusion for this neutral, clear, organic and focused performance is the removal of direct mains power thanks to the battery stage.

YBA Genesis PH1 Review Conclusion

The YBA Genesis PH1 phono pre-amplifier has given me cause to investigate battery-powered phonos a little bit more. I genuinely believe it is that battery operation that provides the Genesis PH1 with its special powers. There is a clarity, openness and focus from the PH1 that I thought was only possible from phono stages at the £3k+ mark. Given that the PH1 retails at £1,800 its pricing could essentially make it a bargain.

For anyone considering taking the step into 'high-end' phono stages with a budget of £2-3,000, I would highly suggest that you do not overlook the Genesis PH1. It caters for both MM and MC, and that switch for high output MC makes it even more flexible than most. Additionally, the battery system removes any possible noise coming from your AC power supply.

I have quickly fallen in love with this phono stage so it only feels right to give it one of ***StereoNET***'s coveted Applause Awards.

For more information, go to [YBA](#).