Allnic Audio L-7000 Preamplifier

AUGUST 30, 2019 ANTHONY KERSHAW

David Beetles of Hammertone Audio, the North American distributor for Allnic Audio electronics, gave me a nod that an L-7000 Preamplifier was available for review. The new linestage is the **$16,500** replacement of the L-3000 ($13,900). After my continuing musical experiences of the most passionate and intense kind with Allnic's similarly priced H-7000 Phono Stage, how could I pass up the opportunity to hear Allnic's linestage equivalent?

The L-7000 is not your grandpappy's 300B tube linestage preamp. It is a single gain stage unit and is transformer coupled. But, to shake things up completely, designer Kang Su Park uses the much-loved DHT 300B tube, not in the audio chain, but in the power supply chain as a voltage regulator.

Why?

As Park says:

The 300B has justly won the reputation for being a superb output tube in single-ended amplifiers. But it will take some rethinking to imagine this great tube in a non-audio role. The benefit the 300B brings to as a voltage *regulator is its ability to pass a fair amount of current at low cathode-to-plate voltages.*

I recently finished a review of a superb $16,995 linestage, the Vinnie Rossi L2 Signature Preamplifier—a component that projects music to the heavens via two 300Bs, both, most definitely, in the audio chain.

The L-7000 audition should be interesting. I'm not sure if any major designer has reversed the roles for such a superstar tube.

Size and setup

The actual machine is a beast. Weighing in at 18 kg with dimensions of 430mm (W) 410mm (D) 173mm (H).

Unboxing is easy but should really be a two person job. Lift with your knees and watch your backs. Good solid handles on the chassis and handles cut into the shipping box help with lifting.

An Allen key is provided to remove the tops of the tube chimneys to take out the protective shipping materials and to remove the back plate of the remote control to insert 2 AAA batteries (not supplied).

Shipped tubes include: E810F × 2 (gain stage, left and right channels—Mullard NOS); 300B × 2 (Voltage Regulator); 5654 (similar to EF95, 6AK5) × 2 (Voltage Error Detector). All tubes are carefully matched NOS.

The power socket is on the left side of the unit. Not ideal for my aesthetic (a real estate decision, according to Beetles), but Allnic provides a right angle IEC power cord which lessens the visual impact. Allnic Audio's manual suggests upgrading the cable commensurate with the price and quality of the L-7000. Hanging a beefy Allnic Audio ZL-3000 Power Cable ($1400/metre) off the side garnered positive audio results while making a visual statement.

My use

After about fifty hours of burn in, I began serious auditioning. Repertoire was divided almost equally between digital files/streaming and vinyl. The fifty hours cleared things up a little from an already wonderful out-of-the-box experience, but an additional 25 hours took the L-7000's performance into dreamtime.

Standard operating procedure chez nous: turn on all tube and turntable components after breakfast and turn off last thing at night. My Jeff Rowland amplifier is on full time as are my Mytek HiFi Manhattan DAC II and Antipodes Audio CORE Music Server. As such, the system was hot and heavy and ready to go for my standard weekday afternoon review listening sessions.

The L-7000 atop the Jeff Rowland Continuum S2 Integrated Amplifier. Both tube health metres with correct readings and glowing beautifully. The L-7000 is available in silver or black.

As with the Vinnie Rossi L2 Signature Preamplifier, I used an Allnic Audio MU-7R RCA Cable to 'Bypass' the preamp section of the Jeff Rowland Continuum S2 Integrated Amplifier. This worked flawlessly for the L-7000, too.

Included is a solid metal remote control, with power, volume, and channel settings. It worked perfectly.

I always used the remote for power on/off, etc. The manual directs the owner to turn on the L-7000 before the power amplifier. The power rocker switch on my Jeff Rowland is difficult to access, especially with a massive Allnic Audio ZL-5000 Power Cable ($2000/metre) adjacent. Anyway, I prefer to leave my solid state components turned on. That meant the slightest 'click' through my Alta Audio Celesta FRM-2 Loudspeakers when the L-7000's brief tube warm up cycle finished. It never bothered me.

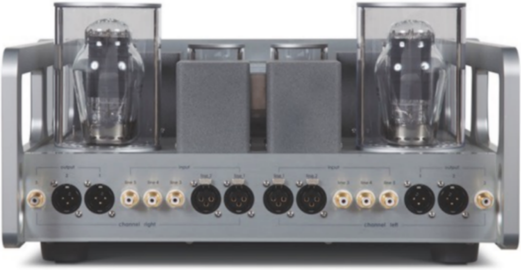
1
2
3
4
5
MUTE
CH
VOL
VOL
CH
ALLNIC

I used Allnic's superb cabling throughout the system save for a few wonderful AntiCables Level 3 Reference Power Cords ($330/metre) on digital equipment. Remember, no phono stage is included with the L-7000. I used Channel 1 for digital and Channel 2 for vinyl (connected to the Allnic Audio H-7000 Phono Stage). Connectivity is quick and uneventful.

Once powered up, left and right channel metres on the front of the chassis give you tube health, with front buttons for power, channels 1 through 5 and the 'Operate' button, Kang Su talk for 'Mute' (light on, operate, light off, mute).

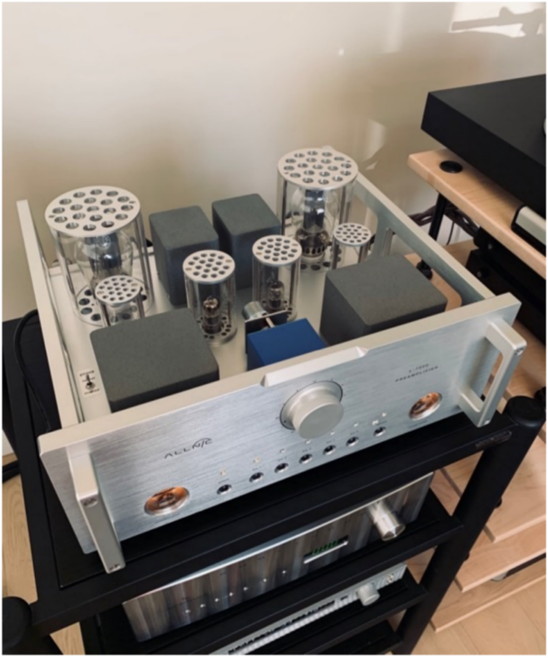
On the top of the chassis is a phase control switch and the rear panel has 3 RCA/2 XLR inputs and 1 RCA/2 XLR outputs. I used RCAs for the phono stage connection and XLRs to the DAC.

phase
normal
inverted
RATING
AC 110/120V 60Hz 2 A
AC 220/230V 50/60Hz 1 A

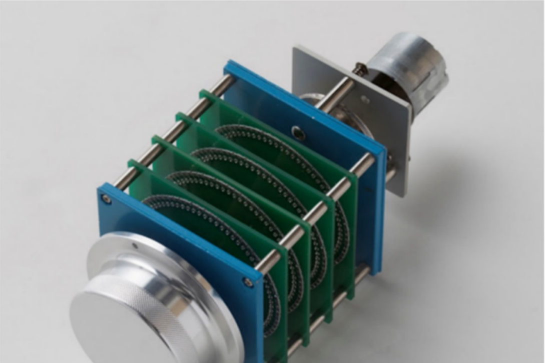


Allnic Audio L-7000 Preamplifier rear panel.

The L-7000 took top billing on my Target stand, giving the tubes plenty of required ventilation.



Top view with Allnic's proprietary Permalloy transformers and tubes in their chimneys.



The potentiometer is a first. A proprietary, precision, 61-step, single contact, oil-clutched, motorized attenuator volume control. Phew! Say that ten times fast. Taken from Allnic's top of the line L-10000 OTL/OCL Preamplifier ($30,000). The attenuator features constant impedance making very high resolution constant at any level. It also minimizes phase shifts.

Other features of the Allnic Audio L-7000

- True Dual-Mono design (the two channels operate completely independently of each other. Only the chassis, attenuator control and the AC power connection are shared)
- Constant and low (150 OHM) output impedance at all frequencies
- Zero negative feedback
- Ultra high speed, automatic, vacuum tube voltage regulation
- Pure Class A operation
- Full balanced output circuit

Specifications

- Input Impedance: Unbalanced 10kΩ; Balanced 10kΩ
- Frequency Range: 20Hz ~ 20kHz (FLAT); 16Hz ~ 50kHz (-3dB)
- Voltage Gain: +20dB
- THD (1kHz): Output 0.3V, 0.06% Output 1.0V, 0.15%
- S/N Ratio: -90dB (CCIR, 1kHz)
- Maximum Output: 15V RMS (Non-clipping)
- Output Impedance: 150Ω Constant
- Power Consumption: 30W at 110/120V / 60 Hz

Sound

Serious listening after break-in garnered serious results. The L-7000 is an ultra musical device that works flawlessly—Allnic's tube gear I've reviewed works as effortlessly as my top class solid state kit.

The look is industrial and solid, with beautiful casework and those sexy tube chimneys. But the sound is far above that mundane visual description. It's a very sophisticated unit that sprinkles life, musicality and the most incredible dynamics on everything it touches. Once again, an expensive, beautifully designed tube preamp, much like the Vinnie Rossi L2 Signature, honours my LPs and makes my outstanding digital sound like vinyl. So much presence, so much air, so much vibrancy. Even very good digital recordings can sound two dimensional after a while. You admire the dynamics, the purity of the sound, the 'accuracy', but musical essence and presence is often missing. The L-7000 recaptures much of it for you. You'll love your digital.

The transparency the L-7000 creates is beguiling and projects the most wonderful, tactile feeling—from the 'reach out and touch it' variety. Many friends who heard my system just before this review's publication said they have never heard it sound so good, so musical, and, especially, so transparent.

While listening to *Chet Baker with Strings*, a gem of a mono reissue, the great Bud Shank acts as flute/alto sax sideman. Several times, Shank ducks behind Baker's gorgeous lead trumpet sound matching vibrato in the same octave—and the one below—in perfect unison for colour and interest on the melody reprise. Shank, a famous West Coast virtuoso, is almost too good. His subtle playing is almost unnoticeable. With the very good preamplifier section of my Jeff Rowland Continuum S2 (basically, a $5700 Jeff Rowland Capri S2 Preamplifier elegantly squeezed in), Shank is there, but with the L-7000, he's heard more clearly, but specifically in his role as an accompanist, twisting and inflecting as a musical identical twin to Baker. Very impressive. I didn't use this track in my review of the Vinnie Rossi L2. I'd love to hear how the L2 deciphers the two musical lines.

The L-7000, together with the H-7000, create a magical combination of very musical conversations. Do you know the feeling when listening to vinyl and your inner monologue is in deep discussion how your digital music 'sounds as good as this'? Sure, great digital can fool you for a while. Then, while listening to a record, you hear a bow drawing on a stringed instrument or the placement of a voice in a rock solid event space, and immediately you are living the event. Oh yes, vinyl. I forgot for a moment. I'm not promising you'll feel exactly that with your FLAC files, but the L-7000 will get your quality digital gear a lot closer to your superior vinyl setup.

For a digital scoop of lovely, try Haitink's Beethoven *Symphony No. 7* on LSO Live. It's on Qobuz in HiRes and Tidal MQA. That inhibited, cramped feeling you're experiencing is the bone dry, pretty sad acoustics of the Barbican, fixed in the mix (or, at least attempted) by the engineers. However, the LSO's glorious performance and the players' innate musicality come through. I think you'll really enjoy it and return many times. The L-7000 cannot work miracles with dodgy files, but what musicianship is there will be heard. And, more importantly, felt.

One of the reasons for the unit's excellence is the delivery of dynamics. On vinyl, this can be overwhelming. An easy feat on good LPs shackled to a fine phono stage, where, let's say, during a big crescendo, the underlying energy of the musicians can be felt as well as the increase in volume and sound pressure levels. The poor old FLAC file has a difficult time with the underlying energy. Much of the time it's scrubbed out. The L-7000's dynamic delivery regains some of this lost human kinetic energy. It can be truly thrilling.

An
AUDIOPHILIA
STAR
Component

RETURN TO HOME

If you want to experience Allnic Audio’s products,

please contact your local authorized dealers or

Audio Mentors, which is Allnic Audio’s design & marketing company.

AUDIO MENTORS

DISTRIBUTERS