

CONSEQUENT



You are looking for: A phono stage. Capable of handling MM and MC signals. With switchable input capacities and impedances. With adjustable gain levels. With symmetrical and asymmetrical outputs. Of course with outstanding measurements while using vacuum tube technology, too. There's no such thing?

Well, I'd happen to have one right here.

It's almost unbelievable, but it is true: The ModWright PH150 is a phono stage that is based on a quite conservative tube RIAA, but that leaves nothing to be desired in terms of features. We're actually quite proud to be able to test and review the currently only existing specimen – which also means that we have to give account that the forthcoming standard version will sport some few cosmetic changes. For example, the position of the sockets on the back will be subject to minor changes, as well as the illumination of the logo on the

front. And of course Dan Wright will insist on personally carrying out the final sound fine tuning before market launch – whereas I think there's no need for action in this department anymore. By the way, I'd expressly like to thank Dan for his support and swift and comprehensive answers to my technical questions.

But now let's have a look at the company itself, which hasn't been around for that long yet. It was founded in the year 2000, and the name is reminiscent of its original



business field: Dan Wright used to perform sound tuning on popular digital sources like CD players. In his opinion, too much potential for good sound was squandered there, especially in the analog output section. His alterations were already based on tube technology and consequently lead to the next step: In 2003, the company's first amplifier was introduced, and in the following years, a whole range of amps came into existence. There's also been a "small" phono preamplifier for quite a while, but for the company's masterstroke in terms of



The external power supply with transformer, choke coil and rectifier circuit

phono preamplification, ModWright took its time for the design and development. And I can say that the results are absolutely worth the wait.

The Modwright PH150 has two cabinets – in this price class (we're aiming at an MSRP of around 9.000 Euros), that is a must. One of the cabinets houses a big transformer and the rest of the power supply. It is attached to the amplifier cabinet via a long cable, so there's really no risk of interspersing interferences to the amplifier circuits itself. However, not all of the power supply resides in the power supply unit. The amplifier cabinet also contains a board with semiconductors that are supposed to stabilize the high-voltage.

One realization manifests itself immediately after having had a first glance at the front panel with its many operating elements: Somebody has tried to design a true jack-of-all-trades here. Of course one can switch from MM to MC. The triple-stage gain level adjustment is a less ordinary feature already, and it should allow the user to accommodate about every possible pickup on the market, especially considering the huge range of possible input impedances

System

Turntables:

- Linn LP12 „Akurate“
- Transrotor Fat Bob S mit SME IV

Amplifiers:

- AEC pre- and power amplifiers
- DIY 2A3

Loudspeakers:

- Progressive Audio Extreme 1
- Audio Physic Avantera

Accessories:

- Power strips by PS Audio, Silent Wire
- Cables by van den Hul, Silent Wire,
- Bases by Liedtke Metalldesign, Thixar and Accurion

Contestants

Phono preamplifier:

- Quad Twentyfour P
- EAT Glo

The division of the complex input section will be further optimized in the series production





Records

Harry Belafonte

The Many Moods of Belafonte

Antonio Vivaldi

The Four Seasons

Helène Grimaud

Reflection

Gustav Mahler

*Symphonie Nr. 1
Wiener Symphoniker,
Fabio Luisi*

Antonin Dvorák

*Cellokonzert H-Moll,
Mstislav Rostropowitsch,
Berliner Philharmoniker,
Herbert von Karajan*

Ludwig van Beethoven

*Sämtliche Sinfonien,
Gewandhausorchester Leipzig,
Franz Konwitschny*

Gerry Mulligan

Live at the Village Vanguard

For a pure phono preamplifier, the ModWright is blessed with plenty of controls



and capacities. The latter are implemented directly on the phono board via long axles behind the rotary knobs, while gain and mono/stereo are controlled via relays.

In order to keep the signal path as short and free from interferences as possible, Dan Wright has mounted the first amplifier stage directly behind the input sockets on the rear panel of the PH150. A Lundahl step-up transformer amplifies the MC signal before the first hybrid gain stage boosts it to a level required for the single stage RIAA equalization. After the passive RIAA stage, another gain stage follows before the signal is led out through a vacuum tube buffer amplifier with output transformers. In everyday use it proves that the PH150's intuitive manageability is far superior to hidden DIP switches or inaccessible buttons and must be highly appreciated.

I know this combination will not be found in real life, but during my listening tests, the possibility to select the gain level and the capacity proved very useful especially with affordable MM cartridges, even if, in the end, I used only one setting for almost all cartridges I tested. I assume that in practice it will be like this with more expensive pickups, too. However, it's a good feeling to know that you are able to influence the sound in some way, despite having found the best setting for your cartridge.

The PH150 is astonishingly quiet considering that it uses vacuum tubes. Even with gain and volume set to the max, background noise is almost inaudible. In terms of sound it is absolutely neutral. It doesn't take anything away from and it doesn't add anything to the sound. However, in the

uppermost treble region it sounds slightly more open and airy than most other phono stages that use a step-up transformer.

Spatial reproduction is simply spectacular. The width and depth of the virtual stage are breathtaking, and the music doesn't stick to anything but disperses freely in the room. Especially with very good recordings like AudioNautes' "Four Seasons" or the Impex recording "Belafonte Sings The Blues", the ModWright phono stage sets new standards in terms of openness, verve and fine dynamics. This is an extraordinary achievement – but it's also huge fun to



ModWright PH150

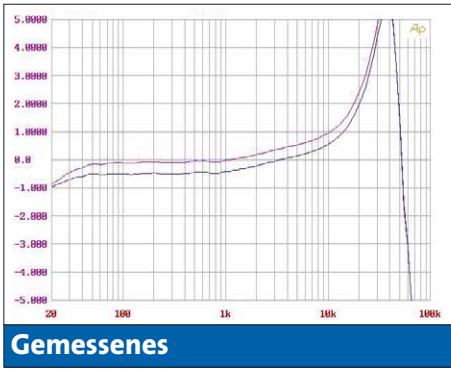
• Price:	around 9.000 Euro
• Distributor:	IBEX Audio
• Phone:	+49 7321 25490
• Internet:	www.ibex-audio.de
• H x W x D:	12 x 43 x 33.5 cm
• Weight:	15 kg
• Guarantee:	5 years

In brief ...

» Of course – for 9,000 Euro one can expect quite a lot. But with the ModWright PH150 you get a lot more: A universally adaptable and adjustable phono stage with excellent sound capabilities.



The special sockets prevent incorrect connection of the power supply



Measurement comment:

The overshoot located above the audible range is not relevant. Otherwise, the frequency response is extremely balanced and channel symmetry is extremely good for a non-degenerative feedback device with this type of circuitry splurge. The signal-to-noise-ratio is very good (-57,6 dB in MC- and -76,4 dB in MM mode), channel separation is only slightly lower in both operation modes. Overall distortion is at a noncritical .17%. The manufacturer's specifications for the amplification are met exactly.

listen to less well-produced records with such an exceptional device. The PH150 manages to extract an abundance of fine detail and timbre even from those discs! Her only veto comes when served with limp, overly bright sounding material; in this case, miracles are not to be expected. But if the record on the turntable is halfway decent sounding, the ModWright PH150's lucky owner can look forward to an unforeseen, exciting musical journey of discovery.

Thomas Schmidt



Situated right in device, there is another power supply board for voltage regulation; behind it is a whole bank of relays to switch the gain stages

Long axles allow the user to switch impedance and resistance directly on the input board - Lundahl parts can be found on every corner.