



## Prima Luna Dialogue **Three** Preamplifier

## Prima Luna Dialogue **Seven** Amplifiers

### Pure nirvana

MICHEL BÉRARD

Certain readers may remember my review of the Prologue One integrated amplifier. My time spent with this unit was a humbling experience; its performance-to-cost ratio far exceeding anything I have ever tested as an audio reviewer. And now Prima Luna has done it again with the Dialogue Three preamplifier and Dialogue Seven power amplifier.

Generally when I start a review, I search to see what has already been written about the equipment, to get a sense of what I'm dealing with. In this case, all listening was done without having read any other reviews. My impressions are thus devoid of any outside influence apart from the experience of the Prologue One.

#### TECHNICAL

##### **DIALOGUE SEVEN MONO AMPLIFIERS**

The amplifier offers two modes of power output: 70 watts per channel in ultra-linear mode or 40 watts in triode mode. Frequency response is specified from 10 Hz to 100 kHz. The unit has a single RCA input, impedance 100 kOhm. On the output side, speakers can be connected to 2, 4 or 8 ohm terminals. The amplifier uses two 12AX7 tubes, two 12AU7 tubes and four KT88 tubes. And pay attention to your back, each unit weighs 63.8 kg pounds (29 kilos). External dimensions are 15.9" x 15.2" x 8.3" (40,5 x 38.5 x 22 cm).

##### **DIALOGUE THREE PREAMPLIFIER**

The preamplifier is equipped with six stereo inputs, a loop for a home theatre processor, a pair of tape outputs and two RCA outputs. Four 12UA7 tubes and two 5AR4 tubes provide a gain of 12 dB. Of identical dimensions to the amplifier, and weighing 48.5 lbs (22 kg) the pre-amp is hefty. Frequency response is specified from 10 Hz to 30 kHz. The unit is shipped with a very well-designed remote control of impeccable craftsmanship.

##### **SET-UP**

Since these devices are capable of very high resolution, I chose Actinote cables for the mains and interconnect. I placed the pre-amplifier on a thin Symposium platform and the amplifiers on separate stands. Being brand new, I left the equipment on and running for a few days before moving on to serious listening.

##### **LISTENING**

"Blown away", as they would say in the US. From the first track, the Prima Lunas were a revelation. My system has never delivered so much music. All the music. Its what I've been seeking for so long. Gone are the frustrations and shortcomings. Do you often listen to a record and feel instinctively that the information is there, but it is not rea-



ching you? That the bass is not all there, that there are holes, imbalances, that space and depth should be larger, musical timbres more accurate!

Once again, Prima Luna has capsized my boat. I completely forgot technique and just listened to music. From record to record, I discovered everything I had missed for so many years. For the first time, I did not feel the need to adjust or improve anything. The sense of balance - though

I dare not say perfect, because there is always room for improvement - in this case is hard to beat, within the limits of my speakers and my listening room anyway.

It was the second time that my Verity Parsifals have delivered their full potential and their wonderful qualities. No amplification system tested at home apart from the Audiomat Recital has been able to make them sing with as much ease and naturalness. They are power-hungry, but the Dialogue Sevens have watts to spare and never ran out breath during the listening sessions.

The problem of the Prima Lunas is that they have the ability to nail you to your listening seat, not for hours but for days. For the first week I didn't even take notes, I was so captivated by the music. I went through all my favourite records one after the other and the Prima Lunas never once let me down. They seemed almost to challenge me, saying, "Come on, try again!" with their cool and relaxed air, almost arrogant!

### ON THE MENU

But I should explain my story a little more fully. I started the listening sessions with the Codex # 4 by Santiago de Murcia, performed by the Kapsberger Ensemble (Auvidis Naïve E 8661). Generally it is a murky, dense work, but with the Prima Luna, the multiple layers of bass are clear, precisely drawn with no overlap. One can clearly distinguish each instrument's place in space. And add to that the veracity of the instrumental timbre. The triangle, the strings, the percussion: natural. The image is sharp in all three dimensions. Transients are completely maintained.

For those who know me, no listening session is complete without Les Sept Paroles du Christ by Theodore Dubois



(Fidelio FACD008). With the substantial power of the Dialogue, I wondered if they would not exaggerate the sub-bass. I needn't have worried. The Dialogues just did what they had to do: reproduce clearly and with authority, but without exaggeration. I was relieved. Still sceptical, I pulled out Cape Town Revisited, a live recording of the Abullah Ibrahim Trio made at the Spier Estate, Cape Town, South Africa December 13, 1993 (Justin Time JTR 8483-2). The drum is closely-miked and this will often lead to the bass drum sounding fuzzy and exaggerated, encroaching on the rest of the instruments. Not in this case. The Dialogue is extremely fast and leaves no room for softness. But the best part is the real sense of being at the show. You close your eyes and, as I mentioned in another article, you wait for the bartender to come and serve you.

Before the Dialogue we guessed at their presence. With the Prologue One integrated, we can start to sense it and with the Dialogue, there is no need to guess. Even very low you can hear them very clearly.

When the orchestra plays to its full extent, the music grips the road with ease. Everything is open. The different layers of sound are sharp, defined. We can easily "see" the successive rows of the orchestra. The sound-stage extends far beyond the width of the speakers.

Turning now to the piano with *Études Symphoniques* op.13 by Robert Schumann, performed by Mikhail Pletnev. Already repeatedly impressed by this recording, the Prima Luna would raise it yet another notch in its realism. The amplifiers add body and presence, the piano as if it is in the living room. I know it sounds corny, but this is so true that it is quite disconcerting. This led me to a session of



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This test being successful, we move on to massed orchestras. Mahler's third symphony performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO Resound). One thing to note, at the beginning the timpani can be heard very faintly at the back of the orchestra. Almost imperceptible.

vinyl-spinning with The Michel Petruciani Trio: Pianism. The track "The Prayer": total happiness. Always the same impressive sense of presence, the force of the piano finally materialized in the room. Then came Tracy Chapman's Fast Car. The beauty of the deep bass on offer further increased my admiration of the Prima Lunas.

A key characteristic of the Dialogue Sevens is their extreme power coupled with speed and control; the only ones I have heard in my system that combine these three attributes. Many electronics have the power, but not the control, providing deep bass, but without definition, while others offer definition without power.

Like many of you, I have often been frustrated to hear so much more detail, space and well-defined bass when listening through headphones, as compared to listening through loudspeakers. This is particularly true for *The Garden* by Andreas Vollenweider. For me, the Prima Lunas solve this frustration once and for all with even more presence and naturalness, allowing the music to connect at a visceral level and not just with the head.

Moving on to more subtlety. Scott Ross on the harpsichord. Rameau. Every note is clear, surrounded by its halo of light. The harpsichord has body, weight and resonates. One feels it physically present, not just a series of ethereal notes.

The other outstanding quality of the Prima Lunas is their ability to preserve the realism and beauty of recordings. They have all the advantages of tube amplification without the sonic compromises.

"But wait, there's more: Buy a Dialogue Seven amplifier system and receive a second one free!" Two amplifiers for the price of one? Absolutely, as you have the choice of ultralinear or triode mode. Triode mode is generally recommended for small string ensembles or chamber music, for example. But I concur with other colleagues that this is not a hard and fast rule. It depends on your tastes and on the recordings. This possibility definitely allows you to fit the mode to the music in many cases. In triode mode the power is reduced but delicacy and detail are improved. It also depends on the speakers used. To switch from one mode to another, simply press the button on the remote and voila. You can do this while listening, so the comparison is instantaneous. On the maintenance side, no worries. With its automatic self-bias system, no adjustment is required. The listener can concentrate on the music without worrying about the technology.

## CONCLUSION

And the price. Four times less expensive than one might think, without any compromise. The value of Prima Luna equipment is in my opinion difficult to match. I know of no other device on the audio market that offers so much for such a reasonable price.

I had great difficulty writing about the Prima Lunas. I just wanted to listen. In my system and my listening room, it is the amplifier that has brought me closest to the original musical performance. It offers everything: power, control, truthfulness, timbral accuracy, space and emotion. It simply disappears, leaving you with pure music.

*Translated by Jan-Erik Nordoen, reviewer for Son & Image Magazine.*



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