

"Tweakers Paradise"

Follow up: The Master Sound 845 mono amplifier

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Marshall Nack

Specifications:

Class of Operation: Parallel Single Ended Class A
Tube Complement: two 845, two 6SN7 per amp
Load Impedance: 4 – 8 ohm
Negative Feedback: zero
Bandwidth: 15Hz – 35kHz
Output Power: 40 watts
Dimensions (WxDxH): 16.1 x 20 x 9.4 in
Weight: 75 lbs each
Serial #: N.16A/N.16B
Price: \$10,500

Address:

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It's been awhile since I reviewed the Master Sound 845 mono amplifiers. They hold court as my reference in the areas of vocals, string tone, presence and palpability—all the areas that SET amps are known to excel in. Every amp that comes in is compared to the 845s and they have performed without a hiccup, excepting some tube rush noise in the right channel.



How well balanced it is across the frequency spectrum! The upper mids and especially the treble are sweet and full-bodied. The low-end may not be as tight as that from good solid-state, but it's excellent for a tube amp. Tonal balance is a bit darker than most of the amps that come in, but I like this 'cause it translates into more support for all instruments. Individual notes seem to last longer with lingering reverberation trails that go deeper into the recesses of the room, then transition smoothly to the next note. The 845s present the whole performance in a way that makes musical sense, and they do it with a quality of brilliance, the opposite of dull and lifeless sound. If you're mostly interested in picking apart individual sounds, you can certainly get more detail with other amps, but if you want to enjoy the gestalt of the performance, I've heard few that do it like the 845s. And I can't complain about dynamics: with my 87dB efficient EgglestonWorks Rosa speakers, I frequently get that "startle factor," as when Roy Hargrove's trumpet jumps out on Parker's Mood [Verve D100393].

Over time, I've used a lot of gear with the 845s. Compatibility has never been an issue. Pre-amps included the solid-state Gryphon Prelude, the hybrid Von Gaylord L-2 and a Zanden prototype. Most every wire I've tried worked. Right now, the 845s are doing their thing with Harmonix wires and the Kharma Ceramique 3.2 speakers.

Since the original review I've found that Combak Harmonix RFS-65 and RFS-66 tuning feet placed under the built-in spikes are a very effective tweak.

I recently had the AC upgraded in my living room. Two dedicated 20-amp circuit breakers and a pair of Furutech duplex outlets now feed the audio in my apartment. There were big gains in purity and dynamics, for sure, and I've got more of that elusive "weight" I've been talking about for so long. What took me by surprise, though, was that the sound is much better when the amps are separated, one per circuit. In retrospect, it seems to me, these current hungry amps were on a starvation diet. Running the amps straight into separate circuits is better than running them together into a power conditioner on one circuit.

The one thing that perplexes me regarding the performance of the 845s concerns the reproduction of string instruments. I recently auditioned the Chateau Uniwave Anoco 2 stereo digital amp. There is much to be impressed with in the Chateau's performance. Directly after listening to the 845s, the Chateau almost assaulted me with the amount of detail it threw at me. Not forward or aggressive, just information available about the instruments, the room, the recording, should I care to focus on it. At first I didn't know what to make of all this data, I classified this wall of information as hyper-reality. It certainly took some getting used to.

Furthermore, there's the treble. I've been listening to Tartini Violin Concertos, featuring Elizabeth Wallfisch [Hyperion CDA67345]. Good music, good performance, but, oh, what a torture test for treble response! It's quite a challenge to keep Ms. Wallfisch's violin from sounding strident, and only the 845s are able to do this. How do they manage to repair the stridency? For one thing, they put more flesh on the treble, and for another, they round it a bit.

OK, so here's the dilemma: There's less detail than with the Chateau. The 845s sound is thicker, more full bodied, and there's some rounding going on. They are also lending a degree of euphony in the form of SET magic, which gives the music burnished warmth, deeply saturated colors and the ability to communicate to the listener. So how come I hear more nuances, better articulation, more telltale signs of the real thing through the 845s? Isn't all this information, too? I'm really guessing, but it seems to me these two amps are emphasizing different things when processing the source data.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, what's really important is that the Master Sound 845 Mono amplifiers present the sweetest, most enjoyable sound around.