

PRIMALUNA PROLOGUE CLASSIC



Suggested retail prices - black or silver finish

with EL34 tubes: Euro 1795 -with KT88 tubes: Euro 2095

Is there such a thing as an integrated tube amplifier costing less than 1800 Euro that is reliable, brings great listening pleasure, works with all kinds of speakers and sources and is endowed with a wide range of features? Well, the answer is "Yes" and you don't have to look too far or move heaven and earth to find such a beast – it is the brand new PrimaLuna Prologue Classic integrated!

The PrimaLuna Prologue Classic builds on the experience acquired with the Prologue One, Two and the big brother Prologue Premium. The improvements on the other models did not burden the price tag either – in fact, quite the opposite! In fact, depending on one's personal preference, it's possible to switch between either EL34 or KT88 power tubes by means of a simple switch (the latter being highly regarded in certain Asian countries) without having to perform tiresome adjustments. By incorporating a special autobias circuit, the amp's performance remains consistent throughout the

tubes' life and without the risk of any imbalance in the output stages. In order to further improve reliability, the "Classic" features PTP (Power Transformer Protection) and OTP (Output Power Protection) circuits, ensuring the protection of the output transformers when they are not properly loaded (e.g. when a speaker is disconnected during playback). To facilitate maintenance, the front LED indicates a possible tube failure by changing from green to red. In addition, the power supply stages have been improved further with the use of ultra-fast diodes.

Both the listening results and the measurements (see the smooth curve of the distortion graph) lead us to conclude that everything has been designed with the greatest respect for the music, from a mere whisper to the greatest dynamic fury.

LISTENING CONDITIONS

We listened to the ProLogue Classic in its EL34 push-pull configuration. It is important to stand it on a stable base or a sturdy piece of furniture to minimise microphonic effects that could translate into an unwanted sonic halo or reverberation. It is, of course, also necessary to leave enough clearance around the tubes to allow for adequate heat dissipation.

The supplied AC cord is of good quality but you can further improve the transparency in the mid and high registers by replacing it with an audiophile quality mains lead, such as the MIT Shotgun Z Trap cable.

With regard to interconnects, it is unnecessary to spend twice the cost of the ProLogue Classic on a set! We have obtained very good results with the white interconnects from Atohm without further burdening the budget and likewise with the speaker cables (which, incidentally, contain no carbon particles that degrade the transparency and openness on transients. Don't laugh – try it for yourself and you will find that cables that sound good contain no black carbon insulation or decorative strands).

The subjective power of a good tube amplifier always appears greater than its measured power or that of a solid state amplifier of similar power output. This is a consequence of, amongst other factors, good impedance matching between the output transformer and the speakers plus crossover load. The Classic, like other PrimaLuna models, is no exception to this rule. With moderately sensitive speakers like the BW Diamond 805s, or with our own custom built high sensitivity reference speaker system, we found in both cases that the 8 ohm output impedance option offered the best match, resulting in an audible "plus" in terms of bass tautness, sonic depth and greater precision in the mids and highs. Incidentally, the amplifiers internal feedback is also taken from this 8 ohm output tap of the output transformer's secondary winding.

LISTENING

While listening to "The Nuit de Mai of Leoncavallo", performed by the Bologna orchestra with tenor Placido Domingo, the ProLogue Classic brings a peaceful and captivating feeling to the sound. The



Bologna Theatre's acoustics work well with this orchestra: the balance between the direct and reflected sounds is absolutely correct. The clarity across all the different instrument groupings is both harmonious and natural with a perfectly balanced timbre overall - the hallmark of an excellent EL34

THE TECHNOLOGY BY IMAGE



Back view

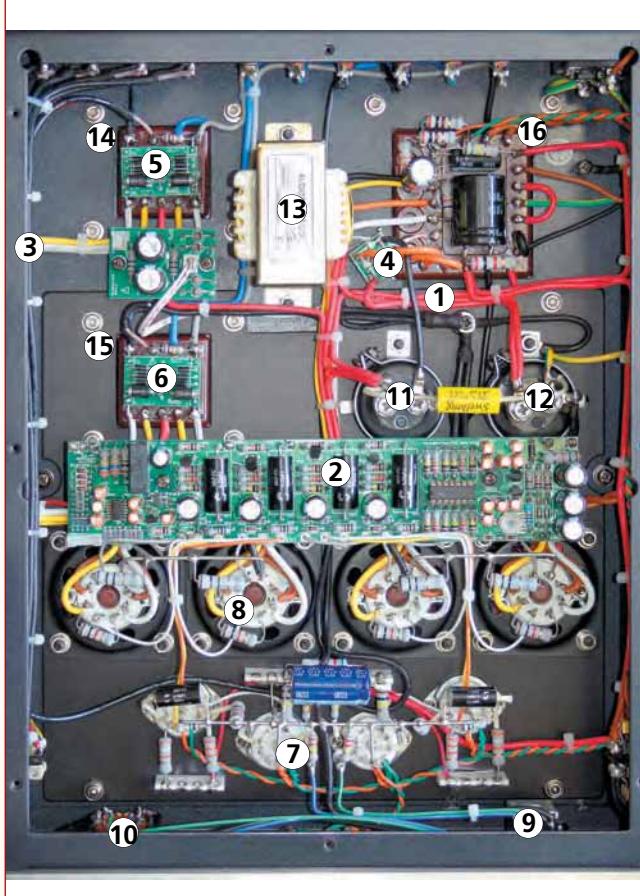
1 - Unbalanced RCA inputs, sensitivity 264 mV, impedance 65KOhms 2 - High quality speakers terminals with low contact resistance and with 4 and 8 ohm impedance options 3 - Grounding terminal 4 - AC connector 5 - Black lacquered case with beautiful surface finishing and enclosed power transformer (protected by a special PTP circuit – Power Transformer Protection). The high quality output transformers with wide bandwidth and low distortion are themselves also protected by a special OTP protection circuit – Output Transformer Protection, which is very useful should the speaker cables be removed by accident while in use. 6 - Strong sturdy chassis, 4 rubber isolation feet



Front view

Shown here with a silver faceplate (a black faceplate is also available) 1 - On/Off switch on the side 2 - Power indicator 3 - Input selector 4 - Volume control 5 - 12AX7 double triode input tubes 6 - 12AU7 double triode tubes (low noise and wide dynamic range) 7 - EL34 output tubes per channel configured for push-pull operation 8 - EL34 / KT88 output tube selector switch on the side

THE TECHNOLOGY BY IMAGE



Inside view

(1) Internal wiring, mostly point to point. (2) Automatic bias circuit, proprietary to PrimaLuna, applying the ideal bias voltage to the grids of the power tubes (EL34 or KT88 depending on the switch position (3) on the side of the chassis. In brief, this circuit checks the voltage on the cathode resistors of the EL34 or KT88 which is then applied to a comparator IC, which also receives a diode stabilised reference voltage. Any unbalance between the push-pull tubes is corrected by the comparator through a series of transistors, which adjust the voltages on the tubes' respective grids to an appropriate value. This circuit does not have a time constant. Notice the push-pull configuration is wired in ultralinear mode by using an appropriate tapping in the primary of the output transformer. Also notice that the small amount of feedback is taken from the secondary winding from the 8 ohm impedance tap (important to bear this in mind in order to get better bass with certain speakers, even if they are not rated at 8 ohm. You should only trust your ears when comparing). (4) Power transformer protection or PTP circuit. (5/6) Output transformer protection circuit or OTP. An excellent initiative. (7) High quality input tube sockets. (8) output tube sockets. (9) Volume control potentiometer. (10) Input selector. (11/12) Filtering caps (each of 330 μ F 1500V). (13) Choke. (14/15) Output transformers. (16) Power transformer.

tube design. This is not an overly defined, razor sharp, sonic effect but rather a well-defined and coherent complete presentation like at a live concert. This feeling is reinforced by the fact that the PrimaLuna Classic seems to open up the speaker systems (the compact ones as well as the more monumental ones, which we have alternated between throughout our listening sessions) in a way that conveys an impression of a fourfold increase of the sound stage. We had already noticed this phenomenon with its big brother the Prologue Premium. Thanks to its very high quality output transformers, the Classic presents an ideal interface to the loudspeakers, which is not only well controlled, but also doesn't detract from the sound by the speakers drawing attention to themselves.

Also with this album, thanks to the Prologue Classic, you will feel immersed in the acoustics of the recording venue, and a sense of depth to the sound with a clearly defined distance between the tenor Placido Domingo and the Bologna Orchestra in the background. You would really have to invest in much more expensive tube electronics to find another amplifier with such a respect of the sonic surroundings that is evident by the spatial accuracy and correct sense of depth. In particular, the Classic has a unique liquidity in the melodic presentation of both the orchestra and Placido Domingo's voice.

In fact, the Classic reproduces the full harmonic richness of the legendary tenor's voice and we can appreciate this performance which fully embraces the challenges of reproducing this type of music. The Classic contributes to the warm character of the performance and also the power of a "mature man" with a good pair of lungs! In contrast with numerous solid state integrated amplifiers, which make the timbre of the tenor sound considerably thinner, the Classic does it full justice with the depth and intonation of the original performance. Overall, everything is remarkably smooth and distinguished and the emotional power is highlighted, rather than veiled.



What we felt during the performance by Rene Fleming of "Vissi d'Arte" in which the soprano voice, throughout the huge dynamic range, was that it faithfully reproduced all her power... the expressive power of the "diva". This concept is difficult to describe with words but it naturally imposes itself on our ears. The real organic density of the vocals up to the highest notes is fully preserved - instead of wanting to jump on the volume control to turn it down during the peaks, you conversely keep the same level, allowing the sound to elevate to summits that only very few other amplifiers can reach. The dynamics express themselves without any trace of compression or hardness (both with our compact as well as with our high efficiency reference systems). The expressive power of the performance gives you Goosebumps - a good sign that the emotion is ever-present. The Classic also faithfully reproduces all the

subtleties of the acoustics of the recording venue. This is especially exciting when, after the final notes the soprano when she stops singing, the natural decay of the reverberation can still be heard.

We all know of the classic designs employing EL34s - push-pull and ultralinear - and we recognise that



these tubes, when coupled with very high quality output transformers, can provide an amazing piano reproduction. The Classic belongs to that glorious tradition. The reproduction and presentation of Claude Debussy's "Clair de Lune"

played by Perrine Lamotte are extremely subtle. The PrimaLuna literally puts the piano into the listening room. The piano's geometrical dimensions are fully preserved and it is firmly positioned on the stage, with an exceptional depth to the notes and harmonies of the left hand and a masterly fluidity of the melody of the right hand. The timing between the notes is accurately reproduced with the subtle decay of one note perfectly timed with the attack of the next one. Only great electronics are able to faithfully reproduce all this information, which is so critical to musicality, without clouding or simplifying it. Also, the deepest resonances naturally fill the room.

This same feeling of spontaneity can be found while listening to the cool duo of Keith Jarett and Charlie Haden's album "Jasmine", especially on the "Body and Soul" track. The ProLogue Classic reproduces



the grand piano and the double bass with a realistic dimensionality while at the same time preserving the correct distance between them. In addition, the double bass never seems to jump like a devil at you out from the piano. We are in the presence of

a real dialogue between two instruments, close to each other, but without any unpleasant interference between them. Through the ProLogue Classic, Keith Jarett's spontaneous playing retains its full dynamic impact. The ProLogue Classic can really teach much more expensive systems a lesson here!

Moreover and in spite of some prejudice regarding the reproduction of low bass with tubes, the fine nuances of the double bass's attacks in the lowest registers remain perfectly clear. The ProLogue Classic reproduces the slightest little detail of plucked strings, every movement of the hand and every slightest vibrato. The ProLogue Classic possesses this magical power of literally letting the double bass "sing" without any violent interruption of the notes' decay. All the details are clear without any tendency to fall into an excessively soft presentation.

We are more than pleased with all this behaviour; all the enchanting aspects of the melodic line, which is often lacking with many amplifiers. The PrimaLuna ProLogue Classic seems to involve you in the happiness of the two performers playing together in perfect symbiosis and its striking expressivity.



We tried to push the Classic to its limits by playing the introduction of "Chant", a track of "The Best of Fourplay" album. The power of the strident timpani blows your mind away (on both the compact and the high efficiency systems). You can hear the impact of the sticks on the bass drum's stretched skin, followed by an explosion of the surging air. This is no way compares to the rubbery effect plaguing many tube amplifiers. The Classic is perfectly balanced; it does not over absorb the bass with a toneless matte characteristic. It does not lapse into laziness, which can sometimes seem pleasant but is in no way true to the music. The "readability" of Lee Ritentour's guitar is exceptional - rarely has the plectrum attack sounded so natural.

The PrimaLuna Classic makes you want to sing along to the melody and to tap your feet while listening to "Believe, Beleft, Below" from "The Very Best of EST". The 3 performers, which are very distinctly placed in the sound stage, play with really perfect timing. The brushing on the snare drum has a silky smoothness that matches the sparkling tonality of the piano with perfectly mastered attacks. At the same time, the double bass remains very articulate and balanced, without sounding artificially inflated in the 80-100 Hz region. The tonal colour and resonance of Dan Berglund's double bass is well reproduced, even in the deepest registers.



SUMMARY

Only PrimaLuna could come up with an EL34 push-pull ultralinear amplifier and price such a musical accomplishment under 1800 euros. With the Classic, the vast experience acquired by this manufacturer is reflected in the rigorous design, in the production quality and in the great reliability. If you think this is too much praise, then listen to this amplifier in a double blind test against other tube or solid states amplifiers in this price range with exactly the same system configuration (including cables). The differences will be immediately apparent. You don't need to be a great expert on comparative listening tests. The overall clarity and the spontaneity of the musical events will impose themselves on you with the ProLogue Classic when compared with other systems, not only in this price category but also with more expensive units. Who would now dare to say that you need to go bust in order to have access to the very essence of musical expressivity?

distortion figures

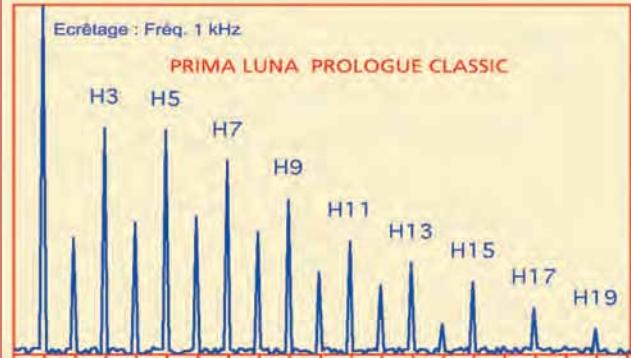


Above: the Prologue Classic integrated amplifier, black finish, beautiful, with tube protection cage. Below: the Prologue Classic fitted with KT88 output tubes. In this case don't forget to put the tube selection switch in the clearly indicated KT88 bias position.

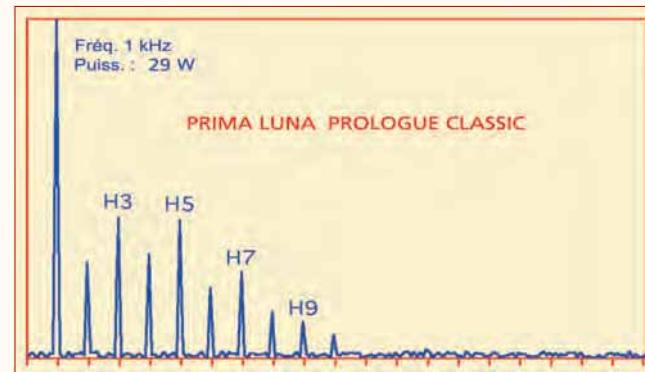


Manufacturer specifications

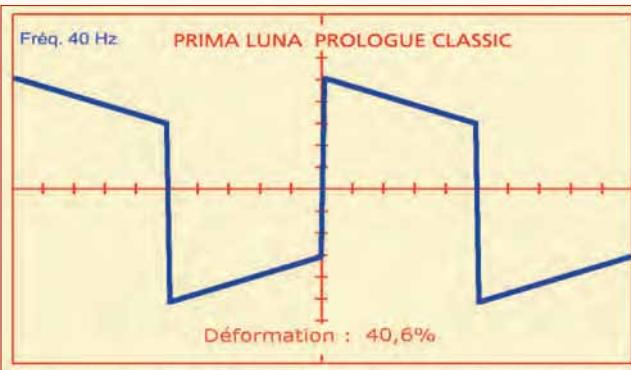
Power: 2 x 35 W 4/8 ohms
Input/impedance sensitivity: 265 mV/65
THD: 0.25%
Signal/noise ratio: 89dB linear
Bandwidth: 10 Hz - 65 kHz \pm 3 dB
Number of inputs and gain: 4 x line / 37 dB
Dimensions: 39.5 x 28 x 19 cm
Weight: 17 kg



Distortion at clipping:
 The harmonic scale shows regular waves:
 very good result



Distortion at -1dB:
 Excellent result: harmonic structure
 unchanged at 29W



Square wave signal at 40 Hz:
 40.6 distortion at 40 Hz and 2% only at 1 kHz.
 No problem in the bass.

Measured performance

Effective power (8Ω) before clipping: 2 x 36 W
 Total harmonic distortion at clipping: 3%
 Peak power (8Ω): 2 x 36 W
 Input sensitivity (Nominal power at output):
 240 mV
 Signal/Noise ratio at nominal power: 86 dB lin
 - 101 dBA (weighted)
 Signal/Noise ratio for 1 W output: 70 dB lin -
 85 dBA (weighted)
 Square wave distortion at 1 kHz: 2%