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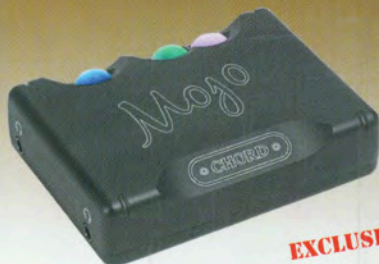
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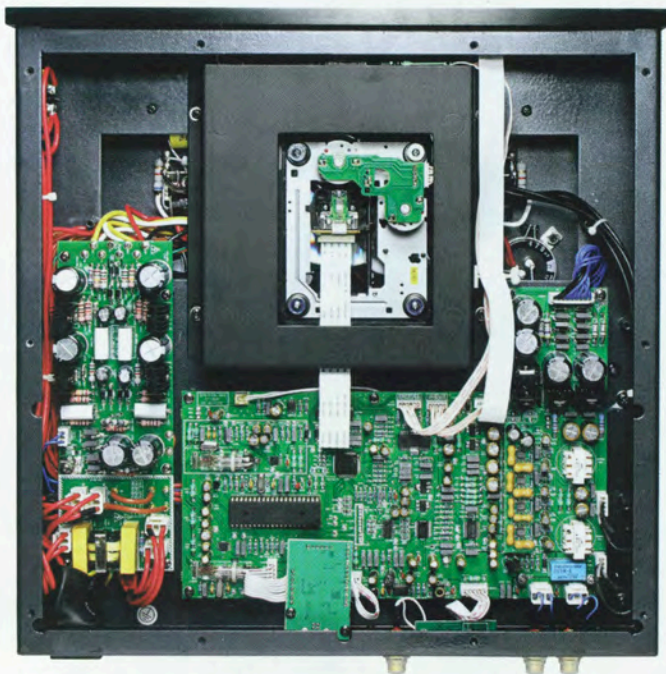




In the latest of our new series on systems to make your heart sing, Jon Myles picks a valve set-up with a very special pair of loudspeakers.

Shining Lights

Our latest recommended system combines the magic of valves with an extremely distinctive sounding standmount loudspeaker. At the heart of this system sits Dutch company PrimaLuna's flagship integrated amplifier – the DiaLogue Premium HP. Priced at £2950, the DiaLogue offers tremendous versatility. As standard it comes supplied with eight EL34 output valves – but buyers can instead opt for KT88s, KT120s or even KT150s if desired, meaning the sound can be tailored to suit your personal preferences.



Inside the PrimaLuna Prologue CD player, with sliding drawer CD loading mechanism at top.

It also features an auto-biasing feature so changing between differing tubes means all you have to do is flick a rocker switch on the side of the chassis. Added to this is the option to run the amplifier in Ultra-Linear or Triode mode – the former offering more power but the latter sounding richer and creamier to my ears.

Partnering this are a pair of Motion 35XT standmount loudspeakers from America's famed Martin Logan and costing £1298. Yes, the company may be best known



Martin Logan's Folded Motion tweeter allied to a 6.5" mid-bass unit give the Motion 35XT 'speakers a distinctively vibrant sonic signature.

"The CD has a sweet midrange and obvious liking for stringed instruments which the amplifier and 'speakers both build upon"

for its hybrid electrostatic models but the Motion range is its attempt to offer a slice of that distinctive sound in a more traditional – and less expensive – 'speaker. Key to this is the use of a proprietary Folded Motion tweeter – a Heil-type ribbon design aimed at giving an extended treble response.

Allied to this is a 6.5" aluminium coned mid/bass unit with a rear-firing reflex port.

The 35XTs are in fact a slightly larger version of the Motion 15s we reviewed and loved two years ago (Hi-Fi World September 2013) – but the extra size adds a handy amount of low-end punch to what was already a refined and articulate

package.

To complete the system I've gone for another rather unusual front-end in the shape of PrimaLuna's Prologue Premium CD player. This is no ordinary silver disc spinner as it relies on the use of valves to give it a signature sound character – and not just by employing a sole tube as a buffer stage. Instead the Prologue utilises a pair of 12AU7 valves per side with 5AR4 rectifiers in a dual-mono circuit.

As such it looks more like an amplifier than a CD player but in my eyes that's no bad thing.

SOUND QUALITY

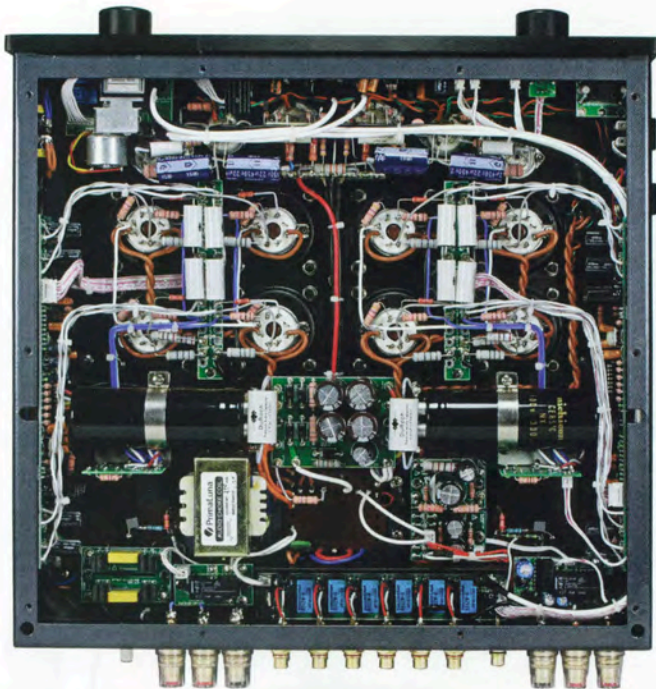
More than the sum of its parts? Absolutely. This is one system that really will appeal to both your heart and your head. One of the keys to it is the relationship between the loudspeakers and amplifier. The PrimaLuna's damping factor is rather low – which can be a problem with

the wrong loudspeaker. But with the Martin Logans it works like a dream.

There's a richness and lovely tonality to the sound that makes music flow with an easy gait. Using KT88 valves in Triode mode, the Neil Cowley Trio's 'Face Of Mount Molehill' CD was vibrant and



The PrimaLuna DiaLogue can use a variety of valves in its output stage. We opted for KT88s mainly because of their midband creaminess, but you could go for EL34s, KT120s or even KT150s.



Internal wiring on the DiaLogue Premium HP is neat and tidy.

rhythmically spot-on, the Motion 35s proving able to push the music along in a vibrant fashion.

In truth, the Martin Logans have a slightly forward nature due to the Folded Motion tweeter but this does make them sound exceptionally detailed for their size. Bass was also rich and rounded in a typical valve-like fashion.

The ProLogue CD player goes about its business in a distinctive manner — with a sweet midrange and an obvious liking for stringed instruments which the amplifier and speakers both build upon.

Yes, there are downsides. Other combinations will pull out more detail and depth in recordings — while those craving absolute bass slam may find the Martin Logans a

little shy in that respect.

But that's not really the point of this particular system. Instead it's one for those who love to really relax into their music and revel in the warmth and emotion of their chosen tracks.

And, of course, there's one added benefit that all hi-fi lovers will really appreciate — the sight of two components with glowing tubes sitting in your living room. Turn down the lights, slot in a CD, open a bottle of wine and relax. You'll be listening long into the evening!

Cost:

- PrimaLuna ProLogue Premium CD player: £2,950

- PrimaLuna DiaLogue Premium HP integrated amplifier: £2,998
- Martin Logan Motion 35XL loudspeakers: £1,298 per pair

ALTERNATIVES

While the PrimaLuna is rich, warm and a thoroughly engaging listen, some may prefer slightly more bite and detail to their CD replay. If so, consider going instead for the excellent Oppo BDP-105D universal player — which will play just about any silver disc you can think of and is also equipped with a



The PrimaLuna system remote is solid and well-built.



The Martin Logan Motion 35XTs feature a rear-firing reflex port and sturdy twin 'speaker binding posts to facilitate bi-wiring if required.



The DiaLogue Premium's rear panel features five line-level inputs as well as 8 Ohm and 4 Ohm 'speaker taps.

variety of digital inputs.

Built around the renowned ESS Sabre DAC, it doesn't have quite the same lush midband of the PrimaLuna but does extract more information and have a tighter sound to it. At £999 it's something of a bargain — and can also be used to stream files over a network if you fancy going down that route.

I've used the Oppo with the PrimaLuna DiaLogue and they make an excellent combination. In the end, though, it really will depend what sort of sound you prefer.