



COMPONENTS

PRIMALUNA EVO 100 DAC
£2,888

Built around a BurrBrown DAC and upsampler partnered with a unique valve oscillator, the Evo 100 combines a useful selection of inputs, comprehensive sample rate support and sturdy build with a unique sonic performance.

PRIMALUNA EVO 300 INTEGRATED AMP
£3,798

The Evo 300 makes use of four EL34 valves in an over-specified circuit that can be run in both triode and ultra linear outputs. It can then also run a huge selection of other output valves and the on-board software will automatically adjust for it.

FRANCO SERBLIN ACCORDO
£7,498

A two way standmount speaker that makes use of the stand as an integral part of the speaker thanks to mounting the crossover outside the cabinet to improve performance. The cabinet itself is made from sections of seasoned timber.



Modern Classical

A partnership between a legendary speaker designer and a company specialising in valves should sound sweet. Yes, but not how you might expect, says **Ed Selley**

Iwould never accuse the readers of HiFi Choice of making their minds up about something before they've read the article but... I know that you think you know how this one is going to go. I mean look at it; a duo of valve-based components and a pair of speakers that would have Da Vinci giving a nod of approval. This is one where I talk about art, tradition and soul, cite some female vocalists and everyone goes on their way rejoicing, yes?

To do that would be to sell this trio rather short. Both PrimaLuna and Franco Serblin observe some traditions in the manner in which their products are designed but they're not defined by them. Indeed, in the case of Franco Serblin, the Accordo exists because he felt there were still areas of development he could not pursue while at Sonus faber; the company he set up in 1983. His unfortunate

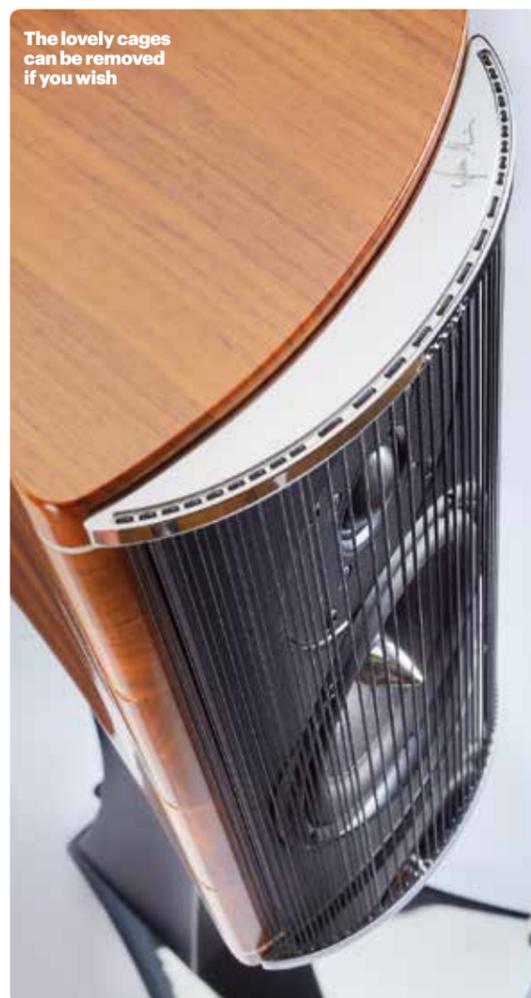




You can spend more and not find anything better made



It looks beautiful even when it's switched off



The lovely cages can be removed if you wish

passing in 2013 means we don't know how far these ideas might have gone but the Accordo is the distillation of his thinking.

Beauty and functionality

This means that the Accordo is at once familiar and rather radical. It's formed from sections of seasoned timber and has a silk dome tweeter and paper mid bass driver. It then goes on to throw some more unusual elements into the mix. That cabinet mixes aluminium and magnesium sections in with the wood to aid rigidity. The stand may look elegant but it's also critical to the operation of the speakers as it contains the crossover so that interference from the drivers on its operation is reduced. In short, this is rather more than a classically attractive box.

The PrimaLuna Evo100 DAC and Evo300 Power amplifier can also be taken at different levels. In the case of the Evo 300 in particular, there's nothing about the basics of the circuit that would have been alarming to my precursors in 1961, as it makes use of a quartet of EL34 valves with a preamp section of six 12AU7s. What PrimaLuna does so effectively is harness the potential of this venerable circuit and make it suitable for life in the 21st century. Carefully designed power supplies and output transformers keep noise levels low and coax the best measurements possible from those tubes.

Then, the really clever stuff starts.

Thanks to auto biasing, the Evo 300 can run a huge variety of valves with the bias correcting automatically. It monitors the health of the valves and can run them in triode or ultralinear mode. The Evo 100 DAC takes this idea and runs with it. It looks archaic with its valve-based oscillator but with 24/192 PCM and DSD128 support, together with a decent spread of inputs, it's no more taxing

The Evo 300 runs a variety of valves with the bias correcting automatically

to live with than any more conventional rival. PrimaLuna is an ongoing project to deliver the benefits of valves with none of the downsides and this duo demonstrates that philosophy perfectly.

It means that this system sits in-room a little differently to how you might envisage it. By rights, the Accordo should 'feel' similar to a Sonus faber but it doesn't. It feels modern and sophisticated in a way something made from wood by artisans probably shouldn't and it wears its beauty as a by-product rather than the focus of its existence. The PrimaLunas, if anything, take this idea and run with it. The Evo 100 and Evo 300 are almost completely free of anything you might describe as adornment. Even their lovely valve

cages serve a useful function (and can be removed if you wish). They have beauty through their functionality rather than because PrimaLuna wanted to make them beautiful. There is no doubting the quality of both brand's work though. This is not a cheap system but you can spend considerably more and not find anything better made than this trio.

However surprising this system might feel, it's but an hors d'oeuvre to what happens when you start listening to it. Engage triode mode, select the beautiful recording of your choice and it will delight in the way you would hope and expect something like this to do. It's tonally superb, combined with such a fluency and fundamental rightness that it can have you listening for hours longer than you intended.

Goes like the clappers

What I've found more interesting, though, is what else it can do. The first clue to this is in the sheer speed and cohesion that the Accordo possesses. When you combine this with the over-specified internals of the Evo 300 and the resolving power of the Evo 100, you have a system that - for want of a better phrase - can go like the clappers when you want it to. This means, you can put away your elegant singer songwriter recordings and instead make a beeline for System Of A Down's *Toxicity* and if the sheer incongruity of how unbelievably good the title track

sounds doesn't make you blurt out a surprised and delighted laugh, I'm not sure what will.

So, why does it work? The main reason is that aforementioned speed. The Accordo on the end of the PrimaLuna duo has the means to handle the sudden changes in tempo in a manner that's completely and utterly effortless. It also hits far harder than you might expect. 42 watts into a 150mm driver mounted in a small slender cabinet doesn't

It's tonally superb with a fluency and fundamental rightness

sound like a recipe for gut-rattling bass but crucially, there's enough to convince. The decision to place the crossover in the stand pays dividends here because all the internal volume can be given over to air management. Neither is this a blunt instrument. This is a system that feels dextrous and detailed even when all hell is breaking loose.

The really clever bit is that the virtues you'd expect this system to have play their role too. With the barely less frenetic *Conqueror* by Aurora, the manner in which it handles the delicate vocals of Aurora Aksnes is a thing of unbridled joy. She is suspended above the electronic fury that underpins her, never



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detached from it but never subsumed by it either. Without ever feeling soft or veiled, the manner in which this trio can create refinement where rivals may find only harshness is something that comes in handy when you want to keep pushing the more ragged boundaries of your collection. In the time this system has been running, Roon solemnly informs me that I have consumed everything from Enya to Cabaret Voltaire and not once have I felt for a second that this system is out of its depth.

In so many ways this is a fitting testament to what drives these two companies to do what they do. It does absolutely everything you would expect of it. It looks beautiful even when it's switched off and not doing anything. It's superbly made and a joy to use thanks to the care that has gone into its design and construction.

But make no mistake, what Franco Serblin and PrimaLuna has done here is more than you might ever anticipate from electronics of this nature. When you're in the mood to get down rather than sit back, it has an effortless ability to change gear and keep delivering that you might never discover if you weren't of a mind to. Without losing any of the traditional hallmarks of greatness, this system goes on to offer more and do so in a way that never feels forced, strained or unnatural. This is a both a nod to tradition and a salute to the desire to keep pushing what you believe to be possible and it is unquestionably magnificent ●