

# TONEAudio

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No.45 April 2012

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Davy Jones: He was  
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## Vitus Audio MP-P201 Infinity Plus One



**PrimaLuna ProLogue  
Premium Integrated Amplifier**

# A Musical Moon Dance

By Lawrence Devoe



Space-conscious listeners love integrated amplifiers because they can route and amplify sound signals from a single box. And while audio purists often devoutly believe that separate preamps and power amps constitute the one true path to great sound, the distance between separates and integrations has audibly narrowed.

Founded by Herman van den Dungen, a CEO with an extensive audio pedigree, PrimaLuna (“First Moon” for non-Italian speakers) entered the tube-gear scene in 2003. It currently merges sophisticated Netherlands design with cost-conscious Chinese production. Now, before you “Chinese audio products suck,” know that van den Dungen and company marketing executive Dominique Chenet demand quality.

## FEATURE

### Prima la Luna, Poi la Musica

The \$2,299 ProLogue Premium integrated amplifier falls between ProLogue and Dialogue integrations. The “heft means quality” principle is operative, as witnessed by the 45-pound snatch-and-grab needed to lift the unit out of the triple-box carton. Fit and finish are superb. From the silver facade (black is also available) to the attractive cage keeping the hot tubes safely away from curious fingers to the automotive-grade paint job on the transformer covers, this baby exudes class.

The front panel sports a volume control, source selector, and operation lights. A power switch resides on the left side panel. On the right sits a tube selector switch for EL-34s, allowing 35 watts per channel (per the review sample) or 40 watts per channel with KT-88 tubes. The rear panel hosts speaker terminals for 4- or 8-ohm operation, four line inputs, one home-theater pass-thru, and a power receptacle/fuse holder. A slender but solid remote handles volume, source selection, muting, and playback for a PrimaLuna CD player.

Considerable coolness resides beneath the warm tube sockets housing four EL-34s and four 12AU7s. The Adaptive AutoBias, or AAB, circuit keeps tubes from misbehaving and protects the output stages. Additionally, there's the BTI, or “bad tube indicator,” that detects tube malfunction, flags the offender, and powers the unit down until said tube gets replaced. A PTP, or “power transformer protection,” stops the party if the output power transformer overheats. This device is coupled with an OTP, an output transformer protection circuit. Given the wing-and-a-prayer security offered by some audiophile equipment, the ProLogue Premium is a component you could surely take into a hurt locker. Plus, for vinyl heads, PL offers an optional easy-to-install moving-magnet phono stage for \$199. *(continued)*





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FEATURE



### Low-Frequency Slam, Dynamics, and More

Plug-and-play equipment is great in concept. Unfortunately, many such high-end adventures resemble trips down the Amazon after the local guide falls overboard and drowns. In this regard, the ProLogue Premium marks a refreshing return to civilization.

After removing the foam surrounds from the tubes, I hooked up my peripherals and speakers, and plugged everything in. Wait. Is that the sound of silence? Not to worry. PrimaLuna subscribes to an aptly named SoftStart feature that powers everything up very safely, but very slowly. Red panel lights give way to green panel lights and, in less than two minutes, it's ready to go.

For the purposes of this review, the ProLogue Premium drove Totem Mani-2 Signatures, fortified with Nordost Frey bi-wire speaker cable. Sound sources included a PS Audio PerfectWave Transport and Mk II

DAC, a Logitech Squeezebox Touch with USB drive, and an Oppo BDP-95 universal player. In my 15' x 10' x 8' room, I settled back in an easy chair about eight feet away from the Totems, which rested on lead-filled Target stands.

After a week of break-in, I popped Mark Levinson's demo *Live Recording from Red Rose SACD* into the Oppo. Enter "In a Sentimental Mood" flowing from Chico Freeman's mellow sax and George Cable's funky piano. Having sat in the same Red Rose show room where these performances were recorded, I assure you that the ProLogue Premium faithfully renders the music's immediacy, right down to the reed movement on Freeman's mouthpiece.

A high-res 96 kHz/24-bit download of Cat Stevens *Tea for the Tillerman* places the visceral guitar from *(continued)*

## FEATURE



“Wild World” right in my face and exposes the slightly veiled character of Stevens’ distinctive voice. Speaking of vocals, Diana Krall’s well-recorded *Live in Paris* contains a very, very good rendition of “A Case of You.” Krall’s sensual huskiness comes across convincingly, thanks again to the ProLogue Premium.

Larger-scale music arrived courtesy of a 176.4k/24-bit Reference Recording of Rachmaninoff’s *Symphonic Dances*, performed by Eiji Oue and the Minnesota Orchestra. The ProLogue Premium conveys the first movement’s low-frequency slam without running out of gas. Moreover, Bach’s *Gigue Fugue*, from the ultra-demanding *Pipes Rhode Island*, more than amply fills my modest-sized room with the dynamic sounds of the English Renaissance organ in St. Paul’s Church in Wickford, RI.

### Is it Moon Glow or Memorex?

When comparing the ProLogue Premium with my reference unit, the Class A Pass INT-30A, the worlds of tubes and transistors seemingly converge. The Pass sounds non-solid-state and the Prologue Premium non-tube-like. The evaluation also shows how power ratings can be misleading, especially given the nominal five-watt output difference between the two amps. In recordings with heavier bass passages, like the Rachmaninoff disc, the Pass brings out more low-end oomph and overall space. In voice reproduction, a critical issue for testing audio gear, the ProLogue Premium behaves well, yielding little, if any, ground in warmth to the Pass.

The ProLogue Premium performs well beyond its real-world price tag. *(continued)*

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FEATURE



A hale and hearty pentode pumper, it's well up to the task of keeping content my Mani-2 Signature speakers. Of course, before opting for such an amplifier rated on the lower side of the power curve, careful consideration must be given to room size, speaker sensitivity, and listening habits. Remember, 35 watts per channel can't do everything.

Still, compared with other similarly priced products, the ProLogue Premium is considerably overbuilt. The on-board protection circuitry gives considerable ease to my concerns about tube equipment. Better yet, none of the proprietary protection circuits entered the picture during my evaluation, which should reassure any prospective owner that the integrated claims the reliability of most solid-state gear. Further reassurance against field failures comes via PrimaLuna's tube selection. On average, the company rejects 40% of manufactured tubes—not due to defects but because they don't meet the company's high standards. The ProLogue Premium definitely meets mine.

\*Paradigm's PBK and PT-2 Wireless Transmitter available as extremely affordable options.





## Additional Comments

Jeff Dorgay

**A**ttention vacuum-tube amplification newbies and all other concerned parties: My first PrimaLuna product, the ProLogue One integrated amplifier, is still going strong after almost nine years of constant play. It's had an interesting trip, going from *TONEAudio*'s headquarters to our first music editor's office (where it was rarely turned off) to my niece's living room, where it still plays eight-to-ten hours a day. Other than a new set of EL-34 output tubes installed in 2010, it has run faithfully without as much as a hiccup.

Where the original ProLogue has a warmer overall sound, the Premium features more extension at both ends of the frequency range and more immediacy—thanks to the updated circuit and larger transformers. Having exchanged the EL-34s for KT88s and 6L6s, I prefer the tonality of the EL-34. In a modest-sized room with a great pair of mini monitors (I used the outstanding Penaudio Cenyas for my listening), this amp is all you need to rock the house. Should your tastes veer more towards Van Halen than Vivaldi, the ProLogue Premium will please you.

Based on my 2004 review for the magazine, the original ProLogue received a Product of the Year Award from *The Absolute Sound*. The new Premium version costs more, but still offers an audio experience unmatched for the price. I'm happy to grant this integrated an Exceptional Value Award for 2012. Like the legendary tube amplifiers from McIntosh and Marantz, it's an amplifier you can hand down to your family members through the years. ●

**PrimaLuna Prologue  
Premium Integrated Amplifier**

**MSRP: \$2,299**

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