



## Mystère

NEW STATEMENT FROM THE DUROB AUDIO DESIGN TEAM

About a year ago, fellow reviewer Jo Mullers and I were just about knocked sideways after hearing the first notes from the PrimaLuna ProLogue tube amplifier during our listening sessions of an integrated amplifier test. "Unbelievable... Madness... How is this possible for this kind of money?" These were some of the exclamations that filled the listening room at that time. So, when I received a request to review a high-end, integrated tube amplifier from the Durob Audio design team, I didn't hesitate for one moment. I gladly jumped at the opportunity to have a (expectedly) better product delivered to my door.

As we were listening to and measuring this, the most expensive of the Mystère amplifiers, (there is one cheaper model by several hundred Euros) the Chinese were busy building the first series of Mystère amps. The model tested here is a pre-production model, which is similar to the models that are available in the stores by now, but with some minor improvements at component level. The improvements are; the input selector switch has been replaced with one of better quality and the loudspeaker binding posts have been upgraded as well. From serial number One, these will be the same loudspeaker connectors we remember from the PrimaLuna ProLogue series (WBT look-a-likes). Finally, the printing on the front has been improved. The lettering that was slightly dancing, is now firmly in line.

### IA21

The name Mystère lends itself perfectly to all kinds of wordplay; but lets not be mysterious about it and just stick to the facts. So, what kind of amplifier is the Mystère exactly? Of course, it's another collaboration between the Dutch duo Herman van den Dungen and Marcel Croese. 'Their' production facility is in China where countless hands are ready to assemble wonderful

electronic products. The design of their products is done here in the Netherlands, while the soldering takes place in China.

### BEAUTIFUL

The first thing that strikes me about the new Mystère amplifier is that it is incredibly beautiful. Yet as an amplifier, it is not much different from the dozens of other tube amplifier brands on the market: tubes in front, under a cover, transformers in the back. But what a cover and what transformers! The finish is far more beautiful still than with the first models of the PrimaLuna ProLogue. Anyone familiar with the finish of luxury furniture such as Pastoe (*a famous Dutch design brand*), you will know what I mean. The piano black lacquer finish is the ultimate statement for high-end audio gear. In spite of its finish, the IA21 is quite understated and distinguishes itself by noble simplicity. The front has a central LED, a volume knob, and a selector switch: that's it. The back isn't that exciting either. Apart from four pairs of RCA inputs, a pair of 4 and 8 ohm loudspeaker binding posts, there is only an ac-input connector with integrated fuse holder. The only distinguishing feature on the face the Mystère are the two knobs on both sides of the chassis.

Placing the IA21 on a narrow audio rack is off limits because you may not be able to switch it on or off. The switch on the other side of the chassis selects between the EL 34 or KT 88 tubes. This is an upgrade from the IA11 which only allowed the use of EL 34 tubes.

#### DETAILS

The bottom chassis is made of a 1 mm thick steel plate with three aluminium spikes fixed to it. Even in its most hidden areas, the amp is manufactured with a keen eye for detail. After removing this bottom plate, the hardwired heart of this tube beauty reveals itself. Again, meticulous work of perfectly symmetrical outlaid internal wiring. What is striking, next to the beautiful sobriety of its internal construction, is the peerlessly beautiful, 24-step volume control, executed with switched, separate resistors. Sound wise this type of volume adjustment is considered to be among the very best. Hobbyists who have replaced their volume pot by a stepper switch themselves, have been rewarded by enormously increased transparency in the presentation: taking away the fictitious 'curtains'. Furthermore, the construction (with exception of the power transformer) can almost be called dual mono, the adaptive autobias boards included. The designers have opted for oversized resistors (longer life span), Solen capacitors and beautiful, silver-plated coax cabling for the internal connections. Bridge rectifiers and power resistors (Dales look-a-likes) are mounted on the bottom side of the chassis, to guarantee sufficient heat dissipation. If we turn the amplifier around again and remove the 'tube cage', we can see four 6SN7 double triodes located in the center. These are driving the KT 88 power tubes, resulting in a healthy 2 x 50 Watts push-pull into an eight-ohm load. The adaptive autobias circuit keeps the tubes in their optimal linear operating range for their entire life, thereby also ensuring a considerable reduction of harmonic distortion.

#### LET'S ROCK!

Though I did not start with this type of music, it does reflect immediately one of the most essential characteristics of the Mystère's sound qualities. This amplifier makes it difficult not to tap your feet. Again I am faced with an unrelentingly musical amplifier. The good thing about the Mystère is that it seemed to be "run in" after approximately half an hour. Still, to be sure, I let the amp burn in with tuner noise for two days before I started serious listening. Once I really sat down to it, it was enjoyment from the first note. You know the routine: you grab an older CD you come across accidentally and think "Oh yes, that one". That's how Beverly Craven's CD of the same name entered the tray first, and with a shock I realised that I had never heard this CD this way before. Wow... Could it be that I had lost my point of reference in this price-range to such an extent that the reproduction by the Mystère sounded that phenomenal to me? This demanded further research and I immediately disconnected the Mystère from my system. To be able to give a truly well-founded opinion about the performance level of the Mystère, I installed a similarly priced integrated amplifier, which fellow

reviewers of the German magazine STEREO have been using as a reference for years: the Symphonic Line RG 14. The piano in 'Promise me' was tight now and quite deep behind the right loudspeaker, while her voice was projected between the speakers quite a bit higher than at normal physical height. The echoes of the loudest notes of her voice were a powerful presence. Less pleasant was the canned sound of the violins; these came out somewhat faint, just like the drum section. Also the bass - and this you don't expect of such a beefy transistor amplifier - was on the weak side, something I noticed again later on Susan Vega's 'Cracking'. What the Symphonic Line RG 14 does well though, is the high frequency range. It is fast, open, and quite dynamic. Several CD's were used in this comparison and armed with this acoustic reference level it became time to reconnect the Mystère.

#### MUSIC MEASTRO, PLEASE

Well, you can leave out the please, as the KT88 version of the Mystère IA21 can't do anything but make music. Within an hour after I had listened to a number of CDs on the RG 14, I played the same discs on the Mystère and was surprised again. How is this possible? Such a difference with an amplifier that enjoys a reference status, certainly with our German neighbours. With the Mystère amplifier the music was much more 'relaxed', at least in my experience, the sound was absolutely clean, and it had a much wider stereo picture. Voices (Beverly Craven) had significantly more warmth, power, and glow. The same goes for Jacintha's album 'Here's to Ben', her phenomenal ode to Ben Webster. This amazingly well-recorded goosebump album reveals every swallowing sound the singer makes and you can hear if the drummer is playing with drawn back or full brush. In short, both the CD and its reproduction through the Mystère are so complete, that you soon abandon analytical listening and blissfully surrender to relaxation. It turns out to be the same drill all over again. As I listened to more CDs that I had already heard on the Symphonic Line, the experience was always the same, the music was more fluent, the timbre absolutely natural, bass full and rich (though a little less powerful and speedy), the highs less prominent, yet more coherent with the rest of the music, simply more organic. Each musical line can be picked and traced effortlessly...

#### CONCLUSION

In tune with the music that marked my parting with the Mystère - the 'Carmina Burana', which takes joy and satisfaction with the little everyday things of life to be the most important principle of existence - I am sure that as to musical enjoyment there is one thing you can definitely strike from your to-do list. Your search for a top level integrated tube amplifier is over. The enjoyment can start.

Mystère IA21: € 2,500