

## PrimaLuna ProLogue Three Preamplifier & ProLogue Five Power Amplifier

Tube gear that blows minds—not budgets.

The PrimaLuna Prologue Three preamp and Five power amp are at the top of my list: good sound, good value, simplicity. They are also good fun, if you like playing with tubes (the power amp is built to accept many types of tubes, including the EL-34), but you don't *need* to play with tubes. You can be a complete tube neophyte and enjoy these units. They fill the room with exquisite sound, from the whisper of a stroked cymbal or muted violin to the foundation thunder of a great organ. That's the key: The ProLogues make music; they make it simply; they make it well.

And they are tough, something I don't expect in tubes. These 1980s-looking units, with their metal cages housing small fierce-eyed beasts, were delivered in good shape by UPS, along with some other boxes, and placed in a stack at my gate. Before I could get to them, a jackass, about whom no more shall be said, had knocked the top box nearly four feet to the ground, and had eaten the cardboard.

So well packed, so sturdy, are these units, though, that not only was no damage done to the inside box or the outside of the unit, but when I hooked the ProLogues up to check for

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internal damage, I had, instead, glorious music in under five minutes. It would have been under three minutes except I was in a quandary about whether to hook up the Sendor S8e speakers to the 4-ohm or 8-ohm out-

puts on the ProLogue Five. The 8-ohm taps won the day, and I haven't touched the units since except to turn them on and play music.

And what music! In an outdoor market recently, I heard a group of three astonishing young musicians,

calling themselves Sneakin' Out. I am a devotee of local musicians; they play for the moment and from the heart; they play for their souls and for ours. Their music reflects what is in front of them and inside us, with an immediacy

of emotion and sound that I never get from polished, distant stars, no matter how complex the composition and playing skills. Dave Daluka, the mandolinist (playing an electrical instrument) and D. Louis-Henson Blankenship, percussionist, are among the best players I have ever heard in jazz and pop. I sat on the grass enchanted, while folks around me gorged on berries and tickled dogs and babies.

Yes, Sneakin' Out has a CD, *Train Wreck* [[www.sneakinout.com](http://www.sneakinout.com)] that features, as does their live music, a mix of jazz, pop, and folk, much of it written by the group, and all of it interesting and wonderfully played. My favorite is a take on Jagger and Richards' "Paint It Black." Daluka plays with subtlety and extraordinary speed, and yet with



ProLogue Five Power Amplifier

great feeling, his mandolin driving the song. Occasionally Blankenship will pick up a line and then sweep into tinkling transformations on his electrified xylophone. He will make you gasp. Through the ProLogues, this music was as clear and immediate as it was on the lawn—maybe more so, sans crowd. But that feeling, of real people playing for real people, is the draw of this kind of music. Buy this CD. And play it on the ProLogues, which you really should hear before you buy a preamp and amp.

Why? Well, reason one: If you like organ music, and don't believe any 36Wpc amp not in the price range of a trip to far galaxies can impart the whole body-shaking experience, you need to hear this pair. *The Great Organ at St. Mary's Cathedral* [Reference Recordings] is one of my toughest tests for any equipment. The only amplifier I've had here that can reproduce its sensations and range, from the sweet ringing "Carillon of Westminster" to the pedal note of Clarke's "Trumpet Voluntary," is Musical Fidelity's big kW500 integrated (which is a hybrid tube/transistor unit, but one whose tubes are discreetly concealed—not up on display in their own little go-go cage), which costs \$7000. The ProLogues, at about \$2600 the pair, give the MF a pretty good run. They not only produce the notes, but like the kW500, let the

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organ melodies develop, rich and warm, in the swelling storm of the organ. The kW500s, of course, get the *whole* organ more fully and richly, but since it is about 10 times more powerful, it can, and it should, drive power-hungry loads beyond the capacities of

the ProLogues. But the ProLogues are surprisingly good with this music. Eugene Gigout's "Scherzo" is a beautiful, intense, and surely difficult piece. It's almost enough just to do it, to misquote an old horse-chestnut, but to do it well surpasses expectation. Here it is

speakers, of course, but I've found that sometimes a sub props up an amp's flagging bass.)

The high frequencies are sweet and smooth, and completely without sugar coating. They too are clear and true. Indeed, this is the clearest treble



ProLogue Three Preamplifier

quite lovely and moving. I was hearing details in certain ranks of pipes in ways I hadn't before. And again, the immediacy was magical.

I have heard. The transients of cymbals and bells are so shimmering, so swift in onset and decay, I found myself looking around to be sure the tuned wind chimes by the window were tied down for the duration.

The midrange, where the main body of music lies, is rich, powerful, and again, *simon pure*. If I have one tiny itch about these units, it is that the upper regions of this range may be—to a small degree—emphasized. This could be a feature of recording technique, unnoticed even on beloved recordings till now. I note, especially in another great "local-musician" CD, *Sweet Sunny North* [Shanachie, recorded throughout Norway], that it seems to be the featured player (hardanger fiddle, jaw harp, or singer on that disc) who is a touch forward, rather than a slice of frequencies.

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Reason two: If you like tubes, you'll find the ProLogues' warm, rich sound most wonderful. And there is bass—true, clean, deep, *tight* bass. I didn't use a subwoofer on the Spendors in this review and didn't need one. (Largely owing to the extension of the

two days of break-in, it reached satisfying proportions, and has such good height I didn't think about it till it suddenly occurred to me that the players I heard through the ProLogues sounded as tall as real human beings do.

Reason three: If you think you don't like tubes, if you dub them tubby, too sweet, too "comfy," you'll find in these the precision of the best of solid-state units, plus—like vinyl—an added musical soupcon that no one has satisfactorily explained to me. Because of inherent potentials for distortion, neither vinyl nor tubes should sound as much "like music" as they do. (Incidentally, though the Three does not come with a phono stage, a ProLogue PhonoBoard—moving magnet—is available for \$159 and can be installed in the unit.)

Reason four: If you've been afraid that tubes were frail, hard to set up, hard to keep biased, forever going on the blink—rest easy. The PrimaLuna designer, Herman van den Dungen, has done what good designers everywhere *should* do. He has created

*ProLogue Three vacuum tube stereo preamplifier and ProLogue Five vacuum tube stereo power amplifier*

**STRENGTHS**

Clarity, power, transient speed, and accuracy across the frequency range—fantastic. Reproduction of instrumental subtleties and soundstaging—addictive. Ease of setup and use, sturdy construction—almost unmatched, and comforting.

**WEAKNESSES**

A possible slight exaggeration in the midrange that may be from other sources, revealed by the ProLogues. I wish I had time to ask the distributor for a set of "upgrade" tubes.

excellent sound with top-grade parts and design at a reasonable price, in units that are reliable, easy to use, and seemingly indestructible.

Finally, if you have always wanted to be a reviewer, but never dared, you can live out your dream. PrimaLuna invites you to "send us a review of your experience with the amplifier."

So—wear yourself out.

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**MANUFACTURER COMMENTS**

On behalf of Herman and me, we would like to say thank-you to Sallie Reynolds for such a wonderful review! With Sallie having so much industry experience and ears to match we are honored.

I should mention the amplifier sounds the way it does due to our proprietary Adaptive AutoBias circuit which will keep the power tubes operating in an optimum range not only as music plays but as they age, and never need biasing.

The preamp breathes life because it is a true dual-mono with two toroidal transformers, tube rectification, and uses the Alps Blue Velvet potentiometer. I can't think of a pre-amp at anywhere near this price that offers these features.

When Sallie mentioned reliable, readers should know both products have a SoftStart circuit to all but eliminate thermal shock to internal components and tubes when units are turned on. This, along with extensive use of point to point wiring and not stressing components means a long life. As of this writing, we have zero failures in the field with hundreds of PrimaLunas sold in North America. We know people are busy and that this is supposed to be the "fun stuff."

Kevin Deal  
Upscale Audio

**MANUFACTURER INFORMATION**

DUROB AUDIO BV  
[www.primaluna.nl](http://www.primaluna.nl)

**DISTRIBUTOR INFORMATION**

UPSCALE AUDIO  
2504 Spring Terrace  
Upland, CA 91784  
(909) 931-9686  
[www.upscaleaudio.com](http://www.upscaleaudio.com)

**SPECIFICATIONS**

*ProLogue Three vacuum tube stereo preamplifier*

Number and type of inputs: Four stereo pairs, line level (via RCA jacks)  
Type of outputs: Three stereo pairs, line level (two mains, one tape, via RCA jacks)  
Dimensions: 15.5" x 11" x 7.5"  
Weight: 23.5 lbs., shipping weight 27.9 lbs.  
Price: \$1295

*ProLogue Five vacuum tube stereo power amplifier*

Number of channels: Two  
Power output: 36Wpc  
Number and type of inputs: One stereo pair, line level (via RCA jacks)  
Dimension: 15.5" x 11" x 7.5"  
Weight: 37.5 lbs., shipping weight 41.9 lbs.  
Price: \$1295

**ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT**

Spendor S8e loudspeakers; Musical Fidelity kW500 amplifier and A5 CD player; Monster 3500 power-line conditioner; Nordost Blue Heaven speaker cables and interconnects.