

audition

equipment review

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Xindak XA8250/ XA8800MNu

Pre/Monoblock Amplifiers

This issue, I was scheduled just to review the recently introduced 130 watt Class A monoblock power amplifiers from Xindak. When they arrived, I noted from the literature that accompanied them, that the company also made a matching preamplifier with balanced inputs and outputs. Well, you try and find a balanced preamplifier

available on the market at any less than silly money; there aren't any. So I rang editor Nic Tatham to see if we could include the preamp in the review and he agreed. A quick email to Melbourne-based Final Link Audio Pty Ltd, the distributors of Xindak, and we had one on the doorstep within a couple of days. Final Link Audio's managing director, Shane Lewis, was also very enthusiastic to inform us that this review would be a 'world first' for this Xindak combination.

Before the preamp arrived, I had a chance to run in the Xindak monoblocks on my reference set-up, consisting a Cayin CDT-17A valve CD player at the time feeding an Audible Illusions Modulus3 valve preamp with the monoblock power amps driving my resident Magneplanar MG-1 loudspeakers.

What was immediately noticeable was that the Xindaks were warm and smooth, almost valve like, which is exactly how the accompanying product information described them and I quote, 'select materials endow this unit with mellow sound.' Well, it certainly got that right. Additionally the literature also describes them as having 'excellent low frequency control, powerful drive, dynamic with extended soundstage, transparent, elegant and vivid with high current driving ability.' Sounds like every

**Chinese
high-end audio
in a small,
perfectly
formed
pre/monoblock
amp system**

By Robert Smith

Vital Statistics

Dimensions:

240 x 148 x 430mm ('8800)

Weight:

36.9kg (combined)

Price:

XA8800MNu \$2,499 per pair

XA8250 \$1,899

System Total: \$4,398

Distributor:

Final Link Audio Pty Ltd

34 Gamelite Drive

Melton, VIC 3337

Telephone:

(03) 9746 0394

Email:

info@finallink.com.au

Website:

www.finallink.com.au

audiophiles dream, so we will just have to see.

The Xindak XA8800MNU monoblocks are made in China, (but you probably already guessed that). They are a very neat and tidy, compact design. The casework features a chunky shotblasted, silver anodised aluminium front fascia with a large illuminated push button power switch. An exposed, black heatsink runs down the right hand side of the enclosure and a rear panel is well fitted out with a gold plated machined RCA unbalanced input, a XLR balanced input, input changeover switch and two sets of shielded gold plated WBT type speaker sockets for biwiring.

Internally, it is equally impressively engineered with fine layout of the internal hardware and good constructional standards. Excellent quality components mounted on



fiberglass PCBs, some 60,000 microfarads of Rubycon reservoir capacitance, Motorola, Toshiba and Sanken audio grade output transistors feature in the design, with a few exotic Black Gate, Xindak and Rubycon capacitors sprinkled about in critical areas of the circuit. The circuit topology is a bit unique, it features a Burr-Brown OPA604 balanced to unbalanced buffer IC with input relay muting, feeding a low distortion, discrete transistor symmetrical differential voltage amplifier which in turn drives a three-stage fully symmetrical current amplifier output stage. There are separate windings on the high current toroidal transformer supplying power to the various stages within the amplifier, together with separate filtering and voltage regulation, keeping interaction between stages and intermodulation products to an absolute minimum. Xindak's designers have certainly done their homework with these amplifiers.

Being a Class A design, means they get hot. I did some measurements and a quick calculation showed that the output stage is dissipating 163 watts at idle with no signal. With the nature of Class A this will remain fairly constant and may even reduce under normal listening conditions, but it showed that the design is not fully Class A for it's total power output, only the power

considered necessary to accommodate, say 100 per cent of what you would be listening to, 95 per cent of the time. This is sensible engineering. The design engineers at Xindak have also incorporated comprehensive protection circuitry covering thermal, over current and DC offset protection to cover the amplifier and your speakers.

With the Xindak preamp now in-situ, let's hear what it has to offer. Again, stylishly simple as with the power amps, three position input selector, illuminated power switch and a volume control supported this time on a thicker 20mm alloy fascia with the width slightly larger at 305mm than on the monos. The rear panel again supports machined gold plated RCA sockets for the two unbalanced line inputs and line outputs as well as two sets of XLR sockets for the balanced connections.

Internally, again there has been careful engineering input to achieve the sound that Xindak wish to accommodate. Separate power transformers with loads of independent filtering and voltage regulation feed the dual mono design, with all the input switching handled by relays located close to the input sockets. Burr-Brown OPA134 buffer ICs are used on the balanced inputs, a discrete transistor gain stage with fet output follows together with a interesting output

Technotalk

Product Type:

Pre/monoblock amplifiers

Inputs:

2 x line level (unbalanced)

1 x XLR (balanced)

Outputs:

2 x line level (unbalanced)

1 x XLR (balanced)

Gain:

17dB

Frequency Response:

10-100kHz (-1dB)

Amplifier Power:

130 watts into 8 ohms

260 watts into 4 ohms

Signal To Noise Ratio:

>100dB

Distortion:

0.025%

Power Consumption:

260 watts

Technotalk specifications and recommended retail prices are supplied by the manufacturer

“So impressive was the sound that was achieved . . . I am having a serious rethink about my reference system, some aspects of it have never sounded better and I was diving deep into my CD library finding new details in the music . . .”

coupling capacitor configuration that I have not seen for a while involving biasing the array to mitigate the effects of having a capacitor in the signal path - nice touch.

So with all of that technicality out of the way, we had better hear what all of this actually sounds like. The Cayin and the monoblocks were connected up with the balanced leads to the preamp and the first few discs into the tray left me a bit amazed to be quite honest. The sound was quite warm and very smooth, which did not surprise me at all because that was a obvious characteristic that I heard the first time I listened to the monoblocks, but what did surprise me was after connecting up the Xindak preamp into my system was the level of detail I was hearing from the Cayin. Familiar recordings sounded different, there was a greater level of transparency, and a lot more low-level detail extracted from the recordings, a lot more space between the players and the soundstage was much deeper.

Thinking back, the diminutive 12 watt Leben CS-300 valve integrated amplifier which I reviewed last year in *Audio & Video Lifestyle* (issue AVL-174) had a very similar characteristic. You were listening to more music and less electronics; veils were lifted, giving you greater insight into the recording, difficult program material was unraveled with less confusion. So I thought I'd better start getting down to the bottom of this and analyse what's doing what.

To start with, I reconnected my familiar ME 1400 power amp back up. The ME has balanced inputs so we are just taking the monoblocks out of the equation. Then I had a good listen. Gone was the warmth of the monos, but also gone was some of the smoothness that I noted that Xindak possessed, I put the monos back in circuit and sure enough the warmth returned, but so did a degree of clarity to the midrange and treble over the ME. I would say that from 150Hz upwards, the Xindak had it over the ME in sound quality, which was surprising! The vocal quality was much better; a more natural timbre as was the clearer, cleaner, delicate treble. The amplifiers seem to be free from any harshness or grain and I found that I could be unconsciously be listening to music at a higher level than I would normally would be with the more powerful ME and it was hard to make them step out line; they did not harden

at high volume but started to compress instead, very much a Class A and valve characteristic. But that's only part of the story and there are other issues at stake.

The next step was to substitute the balanced connections back to unbalanced RCA lead operation and this was done in two stages. Firstly, the CD player to the preamplifier as this was easily achieved by just connecting a RCA lead to a unused input of the preamp and switching from one to the other altering the volume to suit as the balanced connections give you a 6dB lift in level. Instantly the soundstage shrunk more to the centre using the unbalanced connection, switch back to balanced operation and every thing opens up, more space around the performers, greater width, more depth to the soundstage, greater transparency and better dynamics - quite remarkable. The lead swap at the preamplifier output to the amplifiers had a lesser, but similar result, so there was no question about the benefits of going fully balanced; it's the only way to go.

So impressive was the sound that was achieved with these Xindak products I am having a serious rethink about my reference system, some aspects of it have never sounded better and I was diving deep into my CD library finding new details in the music that has been so familiar. The sound was very intimate and so involving that I just could not stop listening. Club jazz, classical and vocal material were sure winners with maybe hardcore material demanding a bit more authority that the ME possesses.

In conclusion, if you have a CD player with balanced outputs, I would definitely recommend that you utilise that facility and the Xindak XA8250 preamp will certainly do the trick of integrating XLRs into your system. It's transparent, detailed and open, it comes with a remote and is extremely good value for money at \$1,899.

The Xindak monoblocks are another gem; they are so detailed and smooth that they put expensive high-end amplifiers to shame, but they are on the warm side. The overall sound was reminiscent of some the highly regarded Pass Labs designs. I could see them working well with a lot of loudspeakers on the market, but if the speaker is already bass heavy, this characteristic might be too overpowering.

As always, the only way is to audition and hear for yourself; a dry, detailed

loudspeaker would be an ideal match. These amplifiers would be perfect for those jazz aficionados, Class A freaks and people who love valve sound, but don't want to muck about with valves; they have all the attributes, without the fragility. At \$2,499 a pair they are a steal, representing great sound for high-end 2-channel or above average high-end home theatre situations. There is also a bigger brother, the XA-8800MNU 200 watt Class A monoblocks available at \$4,499 a pair in the US - I'm drooling at the thought of a listen.

Both of these products offer fantastic value for money and provide unparalleled performance at this price-point. Want a taste of true high-end amplification a beer budget? Definitely check out these babies. **AVL Ancillary Equipment: Cayin CD-T17A CD player, ME 1400 power amplifier, Audible Illusions Modulus3 preamp, Roberts Audio passive preamp, Magneplanar MG-1 Improved panel loudspeakers**

Opinion

The 'Opinion' expressed here is that of the reviewer, summarised in the form of a 5-star rating system, and should be considered as an integral part of the full contents of this Audition Equipment Review. As such, each category should be judged on its own merits and not necessarily used as a comparison with other equipment reviews in this, or other editions of Audio & Video Lifestyle magazine.

- ★ Shocker
- ★★ Average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Perfection

"The Xindak monoblocks are another gem; they are so detailed and smooth that they put expensive high-end amplifiers to shame ..."

Performance

★★★★★

Build Quality

★★★★★

Compatibility

★★★★★

Value For Money

★★★★★

ANY QUESTIONS?

Sure you have! Judging by the huge number of phone calls, emails and posts on our Website Forum that we receive

Buying AV equipment today whether for the joys of listening to good quality hi-fi music or to experience all the excitement of the latest DVD blockbuster movies, takes a great deal of pre-buying thought and careful budgeting. Deciding which components, brands and models that you really need can be a long, drawn-out process. That is unless you are able to get some good, unbiased, trustworthy advice from a friend. And that's what *Audio & Video Lifestyle* magazine is - Australia's monthly consumer advisor.

Your investment (and that's what it is) in the right equipment will provide you with many years of AV enjoyment and entertainment long after the purchase. But get it wrong and you'll back down the High Street quicker than you'd think. So the sensible thing to do is to gather as much pre-buying info as you can, establish a realistic budget and then determine the products that you are most interested in buying.

The simplest and most effective way of achieving this is to let us help and advise you in your AV equipment buying endeavours. This monthly magazine is just one of the ways of securing the best buying advice. Although as much as we try, each monthly edition of *Audio & Video Lifestyle* magazine just can't be all things to all readers. As diverse as our editorial and advertising contents are, it stands to reason that some readers will be searching-out information on products, brands and models that may not be covered in the current issues. Just how can you compare, say, a subwoofer that was reviewed several months ago with one which has been reviewed lately. Even by reading both AVL magazine reviews, a

direct comparison is not possible.

The answer is simple - just ask *Audio & Video Lifestyle* editor and senior reviewer Nic Tatham. But be warned . . . don't always expect to reach Nic by phone because as you would appreciate, being the editor of this country's leading dedicated hi-fi music and home theatre monthly magazine is an immensely time consuming occupation involving constant liaison with manufacturers and distributors, many hours of equipment testing and finally transcribing these test results into our 'Audition' equipment review pages. As much as Nic would welcome the opportunity to take your phone calls it just isn't practical due to the pressures of magazine deadlines.

So whether you need buying advice, guidance on AV troubleshooting or you have some AV set-up woes, AVL's editor will have the answers.

So how can you get an immediate answer to your questions? By far the easiest and quickest way of getting a response from Nic is to visit our Website Forum. Just log-on to www.avlmagazine.com.au then from the Menu click-on the Forum link, then go to the 'Talk To Nic' section. If you're not already an AVL Forum member you'll need to register with a username and password. Nic runs the Forum everyday, Monday to Friday.

Other than using the Forum you can email your questions to Nic at info@avlmagazine.com.au or you can write at letter to PO Box 1456, Dee Why, NSW 2099, or you can fax us on (02) 9971 4990.

Whichever method you choose, *Audio & Video Lifestyle* magazine is here to help you make the right buying decisions first time. Hoping to hear from you soon. **AVL**