



## ICON AUDIO LA4 MKII £799

Leicester based Icon Audio have established a reputation for making affordable valve amplifiers for the past decade. The first LA4 introduced some five years ago was a solidly made all triode circuit design that includes valve rectification, using a Western Electric designed 274B, and the 6SN7 double triode for the amplification. This is the latest incarnation; housed in a robust 250x370x230mm alloy and steel chassis, it boasts an Alps Blue Pot motorised volume control, dual choke power supply, DC heater supply, what are described as 'audiophile' polypropylene audio capacitors (Jensens are available for another £200 over the £799 list price) and high quality 2W metal film and wire wound resistors.

The internal wiring is with silver Teflon coated cable, and the valve holders are ceramic. An optional acrylic valve cover is available for an extra £50. At the back, from left to right there are the gold plated RCA phono sockets for the line inputs, another pair for the tape loop and two pairs of outputs, to allow for bi-amping. The mains IEC input is on the far right.

### SOUND QUALITY

I started again with the 'Arabesque' CD which, this time, felt a bit more lively and was driven along by some very deep and solid bass. It was not that the Creek was lacking in this department, but the LA4 delivered the same sound with considerably greater weight and

drive. The sound of the drums had a sensation of physical impact that was very convincing and that seemed to propel the music along with more energy than I'd heard previously...

Staying rhythmical I next played the Fats Waller LP. Waller was in all senses a larger than life character, and it shows through in the track 'Dinah', where he takes a fairly standard 1920s Foxtrot, swings it, and adds a rolling bass line on the piano to the already driving brass and drums. Through the LA4, the music romped along, capturing the effervescence of a performer who would party for three days, and then turn up at the RCA studios in New York, complete with retinue, and carry on the party whilst he cut records! The direct-to-disc nature of recordings of this

period seemed to carry through, with the sound seeming to be very immediate and accessible.

Staying live, but in a different sense, I next played the Belafonte LP. This is an example of just how good vinyl can actually be, with this preamp describing a spacious auditorium, pinpointing the singer centre stage, with the orchestra spread lower down to the sides and front. The audience response flowed across the room, adding to the feeling of involvement. Overall, the Icon Audio LA4 sounded excellent through all three of my power amps. It majored on musical flow, and attention to detail, creating a very convincing musical panorama. It's not the world's most detailed or transparent, but is great value considering what it can do.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The LA4 MkII has two gain settings: High gives x8 (18dB) gain and Low gives x4 (9dB). The latter is a common gain value for preamps, High being needed when a low output source like an external phono stage (there is no onboard phono stage) with low gain is used. With either gain setting distortion (2V in/1V out) was very low, measuring 0.0003% on Low and 0.004% on High, all second harmonic.

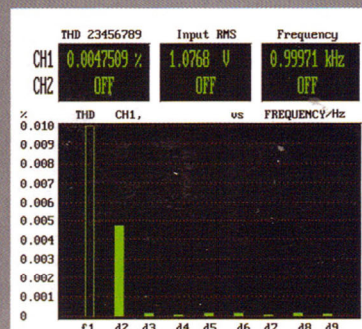
Like any good valve preamp the output swing was vast at 38V, making overload headroom enormous all round. Bandwidth was very wide too, the -1dB frequency response stretching from 2Hz - 200kHz, unaffected by volume control position. Input noise (A weighted) was 2.8µV at High and Low gain settings, or -91dB below a 100mV input signal - very low.

The LA4 MkII is nicely proportioned all round as a valve preamplifier.

It measures well and copes with most situations. NK

Frequency response	2Hz-200kHz
Separation	77dB
Noise	-98dB
Distortion	0.004%
Gain	x8(18dB)
Overload	38V out

### DISTORTION



### VERDICT

Well made, lucid sounding tube preamplifier offering great value for money.

ICON AUDIO LA4 £799

Icon Audio  
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### FOR

- open, musical sound.
- spacious soundstage
- deep bass

### AGAINST

- nothing at the price