



**CONNECTIONS**

- 1 Earth grounding post
- 2 Stereo RCA output (right channel)
- 3 Stereo RCA input (left channel)

**DETAILS**

**PRODUCT**  
Lehmann Audio  
Black Cube SE II

**ORIGIN**  
Germany

**TYPE**  
MM/MC  
phono stage

**WEIGHT**  
600g/1kg (PSU)

**DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD)  
114 x 50 x 124mm  
93 x 45 x 233mm  
(PSU)

**FEATURES**

- MM/MC input
- 16-stage bass filter
- Custom loading slot

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Henley Audio Ltd.

**TELEPHONE**  
01235 511166

**WEBSITE**  
lehmannaudio.com

# Lehmann Audio Black Cube SE II £850

The smallest phono stage has a redoubtable German pedigree and is keenly priced

**T**hough the Black Cube SE II's separate power supply is bigger and heavier than the unit itself, as a package this is still a relatively bijou combo with a modest footprint that's easy to accommodate. Indeed, because of the small form factor, Lehmann Audio recommends the SE II's audio section can be placed next to the turntable, minimising loss due to cable length.

But size is no guide to sophistication and, although the Black Cube in its various forms has been around for a few years now, it packs a lot into its diminutive form, including the option to accommodate custom-specified resistors for ultra-fine system matching, which Lehmann Audio will supply at no extra cost. Out of the box, however, the nine DIP switches per channel on the unit's belly used to set impedance and gain are more than adequate for most common settings. Lehmann Audio says that 16 different filter curves can be realised and recently added to the SE II's skillset is a wholly passive bass filter, which offers further control for tailoring bass frequencies.

Under the lid, plenty of care and craft is obvious. The German company

claims that the input stage components it uses can also be found in top-notch mixing consoles and well-known professional microphone preamps. They include surge-proof and narrow tolerance polypropylene foil capacitors, additional modules for an efficient hum, HF and random voltage suppression and a double-sided circuit board to optimise trace layout for low interference.

The separate power supply has a custom-designed toroidal mains transformer with a static shielding and an XLR connector with gold-plated pins. Like the main unit, it's made from aluminium, completely free from frills in the Teutonic way and crisply finished. Both casings are coated with a special anti-resonance treatment for better suppression of microphonic effects. A smart and understated-looking duo for sure.

**Sound quality**

My listening session with the Black Cube ends up being lengthier than anticipated, but it's for the right reasons. I can't quite believe how good it sounds. If the Leema is the seductive 'analogue magic' scented

candle of phono stages, this is the one wearing Nike Air Presto trainers. It's fast, agile, remarkably light on its feet and wonderfully transparent.

Tonally a little cooler than the Leema, it sounds less romantic and obviously 'analogue'. However, the upsides rush to the fore with Dire Straits' *Private Investigations* from Mobile Fidelity's half-speed mastered 45rpm reissue of *Love Over Gold*. Mark Knopfler's barely whispered jaded PI monologue sits so far back in the mix, it would be easier to hear a pin drop. Yet the Black Cube is a regular Dyson Cyclone when it comes to vacuuming detail dust from the noise floor, so even when Knopfler finally sighs out: "in-vest-i-gat-tion", you don't have to lean as far forward in your chair as you do, say, with the Musical Fidelity. If clarity and resolution are what you crave above all else, the Lehmann is a gift.

But while there are pros there are also some cons. John Coltrane's *Locomotion* moves along with unprecedented pace and pep, Lee Morgan's magnificent, scene-stealing trumpet solo sounding super-spry yet temporally tethered to Jones' industrious drumming and Chambers' subtle bass figures. But no favours are paid to the thin and anaemic sound of Kenny Drew's otherwise dextrous ivory tinkling – always a problem for late fifties recording engineers – and it's here that fatter-sounding phono stage offerings from Primare, Leema and Musical Fidelity are perhaps a bit kinder to the material ●



**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Outstandingly fast, dynamic and detailed sound quality; compact size

**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** A little feature-lite

**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** It might be dinky, but it's as deftly musical as it is dynamic

**FEATURES** ★★★★★

**OVERALL**

